

## *0.vii: litany*

She scared me. The first time - at least, I thought it was the first time. When the clothes fell, when we exposed ourselves - she conjured it, without either of us knowing. I wanted to run away and yet stay, bloody blaring lights screamed to stop while gleaming sylvan verdant lights seductively pleaded to go - conflict. So I instinctively walked her down to a lake, a sparkling little lake, little waves lapping gently against the sandy shore, and under the calming cover of oaks and pines, I felt safer, she kindly fucked me while I swooned, and then she left.

There were two - not just chance that both were blondes, both with snow-white skin. Certainly an innate weakness of mine, which a friend recognized even back then in our formative years. Both were warm, seemingly not caught up in the fucking pecking-order games, both seemingly quite content with a quiet but well-lived life. And both were very approachable for me, to me. One always surprised me by greeting me warmly, excitedly, with joy in her eyes and smile. The other I remember most when on the bus, the dirt-spattered hearse that toted us past fresh and pure snow to that horrible mausoleum of budding misanthropy. My heart fluttered when I saw her boarding that stinking, piss-hued casket, and now, even now, 30 years later, merely the thought of her ascending the walkway steps and then cruising down the aisle towards me, filling ever more of my vision, causes my heart to ripple a little. She smelled of Heaven, she had this ambrosia to her that enchanted me and scared me. Amazing young women - wish I could've not only gotten into their pants, but also their hearts and minds. I bet they had a lot to offer in all three. I, unfortunately, was too scared to offer much of any of what I had in those categories, so we never did.

Rippling cream-colored sundress, long, silky chocolate hair, cute dimples - I took her, of all places, to a fucking McDonald's, my lame attempt at dispensing with elaborate courting ritual. And where did I take her after that? To a lake, of course, but this one bigger, a mysterious one, one not cute but enigmatic, alluring. Took her to a spot I knew intimately, for the smallmouth and green sunnies and occasional bruiser brown trout were common inhabitants, so I was, too. The light fell so golden, it matched her rippling dress so well. Pink happy nipples, a vibrant white body, heat shimmering off us both, candy kisses, and we awkwardly connected, physically if not much emotionally or intellectually, in the falling golden light, and then in a rising silver shimmer from a round, helpful moon. That was the first time with her - and the last.

Over crumbly rock of a cold, braided stream, an unstable stream, by which an old cabin with rusty-brown timbers tottered nearby. Across the stream, a little creek, free-falling from the towering mountains above, and we traced a trail switch-backing up a side canyon to a little falls, little falls in the frozen winter air. We sat by the falls for a while, quiet. She imbibed the same fucked-up art I did while possessing a haunted, phantom beauty; such an unlikely union had me reeling. Her totality had me so wanting but so terrified, and so my behavior - bewildering, even in that disarming setting. A mass of internal conflict, entangled, leaving very little left to extend to her. Hard to decipher anything at that time, all those energies flowing without understanding their source or their destination, and even in that sparkling, pristine winter scene - side by side, thigh against thigh, yet separated by an endless gulf. We left the canyon in silence.

She of glittering eyes, pouting, pouty, full red lips, rouge, big beautiful tits intimated by

the shadowy cleavage that promised such lovely vistas when the sun shone on the shore exposed. She epitomized, exuded sultriness, like Liz Taylor in her prime. Mischievous eyes, brilliant, bold - she frequently shoplifted pocket-rocket bottles of booze from convenience stores when we were in high school, no doubt employing her gifts, her charms, to achieve that booty by mesmerizing the starry-eyed clerks, the young fellars, manning the counters. I bet they thought it was worth it. Bold and cunning and aloof. She once asked me if I had a role model, and I responded with Greg Graffin - Bad Religion's *No Control* was my Bible at the time, with Graffin the Jesus. She sighed, then stated that she wished she admired someone, but she didn't - she had no one. Now I realize why - she didn't need one. She was to lead, not be led.

We only fucked around once, a product of mistaken readings on my part coupled with a fiery lust totally unharnessed to sentiment or love or fidelity or any other emotion. Drunk, big party, she sat on my lap for what seemed like hours, laughing, and the friction kept stoking my lust. But I've little doubt she was sitting on my lap as if she would a brother, a father, a family member, certainly not a lover. Good friends. Anyway, when alone with her later, I tried exposing those luscious lovely rolling Edenic hills of hers, and she stopped me but quick, shocked - and me, totally embarrassed. She handled it afterwards with such class, however - I apologized, and she breezily dismissed it, and our friendship picked up where it left off unabated. Given her sultriness, she was probably used to dealing with untoward advances.

I really did love her as a friend - but only as a friend. Though my mind's weathering has erased the details, I remember candid conversations in her bedroom on the icy north side of the mountain. On an old photo I have of her, she apologized for some slight she caused me. That she knew about the insult means I discussed it with her, suggesting some candor from me to her - probably about my home situation. A sign of good friends. She and I, driving in my battered truck, stereo blaring to its maximum the Pixies' *Doolittle*, both of us screaming in unison to "Wave of Mutilation" and "Here Comes Your Man." A sign of great friends. But nothing more. Aside from that drunken misstep, a smidgen of something more neither occurred between us nor entered my mind. Now as I sit here, thinking of the copious possibilities of those lost years - she just wasn't one of 'em. Too many differences. She - adept at dealing with people, smooth, Machiavellian, assertive, could've been a fine politician. Me - clumsy with people, naive at times. She - clearly some ego, some self-reliance, while I was so frequently - and will be to some extent 'til my life's end - rootless. She was fucking gorgeous, a physically beautiful human, while me back then - not so much; I just wasn't comfortable in my own skin, and I know it showed. She loved chaos in the world around her, while I needed an obsessive external order since my mind was the chaos. While some difference needs to exist between two people to be lovers - need that to grow - much common ground needs to exist, too, and she and I - nowhere near enough. Yet we related in two important ways: we were smart, and, further, our family situations similarly sucked ass. But a big difference - she had herself to fall back on when the family failed, her guile, her beauty, her charms, they could always snag a dude (and I know of two good guys which they did), whereas I had nothing but murk within myself to hold fast, and I certainly had no attributes to attract a lady with which to help stabilize my life, give it some meaning: I hid what I had that was worthy to give, and the dark part of my mind, the stained part of my heart, neither of which I could acknowledge, most women subconsciously perceived. The friends, however, her included, saved me from decaying to complete psychopathy.

I saw her years later after middle age had hit me with beer gut and fat face and sloth and a little self-awareness (though not enough), but she was still gorgeous. Still slim, eyes still glittering with a malevolent glee, still aloof. Yet she did seem more pensive than when we were young. I

never saw her again after that brief encounter - I know she never needed to see me again after that brief encounter.

I thought of her last night. I pause. What a woman. Self-sufficient, smart, sardonic, curvaceous and cute, wild like a wild huntress of the forest and yet somehow in control, like an implacable rock surrounded by a crashing, swirling ocean. She was my date to a friend's wedding, and goddamn did the opal sparkling dress she wore perfectly accentuate her swoops and swales while matching her opal eyes. Uncanny ability to detect bullshit, and intolerant of that bullshit. God, we had such resonance, which even one of her boyfriends noted, but we never reached the logical conclusion - fuckin'. I know why - together, we would've self-destructed. She had a firm foundation within her, and I didn't - I was a pliable sand grain thrown about by that swirling, violent ocean. She was a responsible adult on her own, while I lived with my mommy like a bitch. She could sense that I really didn't know how to take care of myself - renting my own abode, managing my money, basic shit like that - so if we'd hooked up, I'd've threatened to crumble her in a spiraling drunken dive to dissolution and destitution. But Christ, we connected so much in our misanthropy, our sarcasm, and, I think, when I was cookin', had my shit reasonably together - I really made her happy. You can see it in the last shot I have of her.

Years later, and she, through Internet-sleuthing, contacted *me*. She was very open, at least in the beginning, of our relationship's renewal. But when I responded and probed deeper and planned to roll down to her town and visit her - Hell, I even called and left a message - she never responded. Total silence. That was years ago.

The first episode - ecstasy. She fanned the fire of life in me, she of honey hair and ambered skin, so fucking earthy. In her apartment, next door to my buddy's, and we just connected, the conversation just bloomed and ascended, the energy oscillating between us and ever amplifying, the excitement accelerating for us both. It was real. But for some stupid fucking reason I left her for my buddy's apartment, and, as was my wont at the time, proceeded to pour down the booze with a bunch of other boozehounds. Meanwhile, a better-looking, more well-adjusted friend of mine took my relinquished role in her apartment, and he fucked her. A few hours passed, he returned, then spun for us the tale of his adventure.

Second episode - I returned to her apartment, booze sparking the tinder of lust, no doubt primed in part by my friend achieving the golden dream so quickly. But the connection between she and I had been severed, and rather than the sentiment and empathy I channeled earlier, all that I let flow was lust, and her daily allotment of lust had already been burned up. I stubbornly persisted, however, shamefully, trying to seduce, placing empty kisses on unwilling lips, unfeeling hands on unresponsive tits. Finally, she told me - and she had to tell me given I was so insensitive to her body language - that she would've been overjoyed had our conversation earlier expanded and culminated in that golden dream, but now - it was too late. Clearly, I'd been deaf and blind to her initial invitation. So back to my buddy's apartment I stumbled, alone, dejected, and I passed out on his couch, only to wake the next morning and never see that honey-gilded girl again.

Now I know why - I never gave all of me to her. I talked and laughed freely with her about so many shared feelings and views, but I couldn't add lust to that - it just would've been too much of me out, dangling, vulnerable. And with my lust repressed and dormant, her suggestion went unnoticed, unmet. Later, the opposite - the lust flowed fiercely, but I was too scared to let the potential of my loins fuse with that of my heart and mind, and then all of that - all of me - with

her. I was just too fucking scared, too scared to be whole man to her and for her, a pattern that would recur, and one further stained by increasingly donning another face.

Bukowski's dream, a "...filly with 40-inch breasts and a fine big ass and eyes like the sky after a good rain." Midnight eyes, God, yellow hair that flowed forever, like sunbeams arcing across a windswept sapphire sky, lunar curve and sway of tits and ass, and legs, too, streamer-cloud legs that stretched forever, voice a robin's melody. The moment I saw her, I was struck, enchanted. Like me, she was a drunken disaster zone, barely holding it together by busting ass at two lame jobs then drowning the soul-robbing mundane toil in heroic volumes of booze. And she, like me, seemed lost and yet self-aware enough, smart enough, to sense that she was in a haze but just couldn't see her way out of it. Nevertheless, I felt daunted by her to take an honest chance - felt I just wasn't worthy enough for her physical beauty, let alone her mind - dumb she wasn't. I walled myself from her with a false facade, and damn, even now, so many years later - I can feel it, can feel the bland board of plywood I erected to protect and hide a frightened, damaged young man, the thinnest veneer of bullshit, the board adorned with the specter of a guy I thought she'd like, assuming that who I actually was was someone she wouldn't. I remember faking a nonchalant, don't-give-a-fuck act with her once when we were drowning in cheap draft beer and cheaper bottom-shelf gin, her following me down the dark, cold sidewalk, pleading with me to return with her to the dive bar. Of course the truth was opposite - I cared deeply, desired deeply, she filled my eyes with wonder, and certainly our ailing souls resonated to some degree.

But one night - one night. I threw a big bash at my house, where I felt comfortable, where I could be more myself, be more open than usual, let the false face fade. She came, she came in all her sunbeam glory, and amid the laughter and bright, smiling faces of so many young, vibrant people, still with so much potential, the atmosphere was likewise warmer than that chill, shitty night on the sidewalk. With the door of me cracked open, more energy flowed between us, an authentic energy, somehow evolving to only us, upstairs, alone, in shadow, on the landing, talking, her midnight eyes glittering like the galaxy in a new-moon night. We kissed - once, and only once - and it was the best kiss of my life to that point, and, y'know, it remains so even now, over two decades later. It was as if she put everything, all of her heart and soul and mind and body, into that one kiss, overwhelming me, selflessly giving me all of her. She then went downstairs, leaving me alone and mesmerized, and she disappeared - for good.

I wish I would've had the foresight to thank her. I wish I would've had the self-awareness to have learned the lesson when she taught it.

Twinkling twilight eyes she had. Her hair, it draped long, a rich auburn. Voluptuous - perfect curves of hips, of ass, of tits, even her forearms and hands, full ruby lips, and those twilight eyes. She worked her ass off, in jeans, collared shirt, big brown work boots, often the graveyard shift that so many others shunned. She was warm and yet spoke rarely, but when she did speak, the warmth came through in her voice, in her velvet laugh. She lived out in the forest amid the mountains, where I longed to live. A dreaminess enveloped her and emanated from her, like she was brushed with and breathed stardust. She seemed so pure, so good, and I - I wasn't. I was tainted, stained, unwilling to give what I had, tossing out bullshit instead, acting imperious, not magnanimous, seeking to impress, not engage. The key to her heart certainly wasn't a pedantic display of shallow intelligence or superficial wit - it was a gentle touch, an attentiveness to subtle signs, a connection with her twilight eyes that my words could only tarnish. I would've tarnished her.

She clutched a bottle in one hand, can in the other - that's how I first saw her. My kinda girl. Black dress slacks, silky sky-blue halter top, luxuriant, never-ending almond hair, slurred speech and drunk off her ass. REALLY my kinda girl. But that night, we only bullshitted - no hanky-panky, kinda like how it should usually be. The night blackened, blackening by booze, and when I roused in the morning, I had nothing from her - no name, no number, nuthin'.

But a beauty my age on the mountain - that was a precious jewel that I just couldn't let escape, so I asked around about her. Got a name. Then, somehow, a number. I took a deep breath, then rang her up. Nice conversation - I think my humor worked - that resulted in a date. As was typical for that period, I did a banal date thing - fuckin' dinner at a decent, rather renowned eatery. The dinner flowed pleasantly enough - I teased many laughs out of her. I certainly recall watching those hips, that full ass, sway in time with her swinging hair as I walked behind her to the food joint. She kissed me when I dropped her off at her cute little A-frame, in a blue-black mountain-chilled night, and I recall nearly feeling like a stable, middle-class guy - of course, a self-delusion.

A second one. This time, her house - just us two. Another typical date thing, albeit a bit more heartfelt - we planned to cook dinner together, then watch a flick or two I rented - I recall one was that George Clooney country-singin' convict flick, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* She was fucking gorgeous - she'd curled her hair, enhancing her lusty bounce; her face was clean, fresh, rose on each cheek; a tight black glittering shirt revealed the curve and sway of her tits as she dipped and rose from tending the oven. As we baked dinner, I imitated, of all people, Rodney in *Back to School* when he slapped together that giant hoagie out of tedious hors d'oeuvres...fucking ridiculous. Then to her plush couch, below a massive window overlooking the deck, and we popped the movie in, but we didn't get much into it - got into each other instead. She smelled of Heaven. Her shirt came off fairly quick, and then those gorgeous tits - the epitome of form, perfect pink nipples, which she quickly shoved into my mouth. She paused, looked at the big window, and commented that we'd already fogged up the whole damn thing. So far, so good. Then I got everything off of her, and the beauty continued - from the chestnut, bouncy hair, to her dove's neck, to those delectable tits, down to her smooth belly and cute li'l belly button, sine-curve hips and milky thighs leading to milky calves and even the cutest little feet with artfully painted toenails. I dove into her then, but I was still wholly clothed - that deep, and I got scared. I abhorred my body back then, for myriad reasons, and I must've felt that if she saw it, she'd be disgusted, too. Certainly an unusual twist in the actualization of lust, one fully covered and the other fully exposed, one closed and one open, though whatever equivocation she may have felt at that point had little room to expand with my head between her legs. But after she came - it must've, because an ambiguity haunted the rest of the night as we lazed on her soft bed, and it persisted into the next morning. She had to have detected something, that something wasn't quite right about me, even if she did get a euphoric shuddering out of the encounter.

I spoke to her once more on the phone, but I never saw her in the flesh again, like so many others. I've little doubt I scared her, a fear that if I'd just been honest - that I ain't some suave motherfucker, that I ain't some middle-class well-adjusted American, that intimacy scares me because I'm so insecure - would've very likely disappeared. And then I likely would've seen her again.

She was a nurse, which impressed me - that young and already so accomplished. And I believe she owned that cute little A-frame - doubly impressive. But what I remember most about my time with her was that just before I knocked on her door that second night, a fresh, pure powder

snow had fallen, gracing everything with glittering promise, a silver, full moon beaming down and bouncing all around a kaleidoscopic violet hue.

She was dreamy, like mist somehow. She worked at the local grocery store, where I still had some friends. Beautiful caramel skin corralled by a white-collared button-up shirt when at work, poorly concealing her full tits, black little cute bow tie around her smooth neck. Deep green eyes, and caramel-yellow hair, thick, soft, like a bed of feathers. And that otherworldliness, a mysticism, like mist - I don't recall her saying very much, but I've little doubt she communicated elegantly with her eyes, her body, her movements. She was like the tall pines that swish and sway in that mountain wind, her skin kissed gold and made one with the shimmering sun. She promised so much to one who really listened and looked.

I threw a party, and she came. I was pretty aggressive back then, striving to mimic a more suave friend of mine, so I went after her. But while my friend was always so open and attentive, a wonderful listener, just always in tune with the other person, especially women - I only was in the most superficial sense. I could make 'em laugh, and I could imitate enough, but it was a thin veneer, and when that veneer had been penetrated - I recoiled. At least I looked reasonably good and displayed some intelligence. Whatever it was, it was enough: I hooked her that night, no doubt with booze chaperoning. Too, not enough time passed for her to dig deep and scare me - the lust overcame that. But a fuckin' envious buddy, he interrupted us just as we were about to get fully naked, killing the momentum, and then she left with no trace, no phone number, not a thing. A familiar refrain.

But not too long after, I ran into her again. I was washing my truck on a beautiful summer day in Arrowbear at a car wash adjacent to a nursery overflowing with flowers and plants. She was working in the flowers and plants, and I can't recall if she noticed me or me her - I think the latter. Suggests that she worked in the floral department at the grocery store - it would've fit, her being beautiful, the beauty of flowers. Backlit by the cheery mountain sun, she glistened, sparkling. We chatted for a bit in that beautifully serene mountain day, but I neither asked for her number nor a date - just too scared. Somehow, though, as I drove away - probably without all of her in front of me, overwhelming me, which booze certainly abated in our first encounter - I bossed up, called the nursery, spoke to her, and asked her out. She accepted. And then I repeated the lame old imitation of a typical guy thing: took her out to a decent eatery, and I think - no, I know - I tried to be a worldly guy, when I really wasn't. I drank too much during dinner, which, of course, was to calm my fear, my fear of *me*. Nevertheless, still, I guess I still interested her enough because she invited me to her cute little house, to which I brought a whole bunch more beer. We lounged on her deck, under glistening stars, and I poured the booze on, loosening the doors of lust and shutting the doors to *me*. We fucked around, but I could feel, even through my numbness, her interest fading fast. With only my lust flowing and firing my actions with no other emotion, she felt cheap, like she'd been swindled. She had. Ironically, so had I - if I'd opened up and just been the damaged me, at least there would've been some depth and some authenticity to complement the lust. As the night progressed, she started doing household chores, a clear gesture that her interest had vanished despite my attempts at romance. I finally got the hint and then left, drunk, driving wildly back to my home with *The Downward Spiral* raging, some resonance bouncing between the forlorn music and my lonely soul, a lonely soul that had nothing but itself to blame.

I never saw her again.

My apologies.