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Leaving Snow White

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Leaving Snow White | Rachel Burns

Her face was ashen and it worried me. “Get in the car, Jerry,” she whispered. With Zee you didn’t ask why, or how, or anything else. She swept you along in her uproar and you held on as tightly as you could, trying to survive. I knew I had work to do but I fell to her winds anyway.

In the falsely golden light of the overhead car lamp, she was a testament to tragedy and one couldn’t help but be drawn to it. Her large, liquid eyes struck your heart. Eyes that saw down, down, down into the deepest, dimmest, darkest spaces of the soul. They saw everything you had been, everything you were, and everything you could be. Somehow they knew about the lie you told in first grade, the first heart you broke, and still they lighted on you and took in all of you. They did not judge, but suspended censure with calm, becoming distance. The distance in them made you want to build a bridge across that ocean lurking within just to see what was beyond.

Every time I looked at her that was what I saw. So, of course, I got in the car.

Already a terrible driver, her distress made her reckless but the set of her jaw froze any attempt of mine to arrest the wheel from her. “Where are you going?” I asked. I had hoped to distract her from her inner turmoil. Instead, she let out a shaky sigh that threatened tears and whispered, “Anywhere and everywhere and all the world between.”

“Zee, have you been drinking?”

She tucked her hair behind her ear and let out a girlish giggle, eyes still on the road, pleased that someone paid attention to her sin.

I grabbed her wrist and said, “Pull over. Now.”

“Such a man,” she giggled, “so forceful.” But she listened and we found ourselves parked by some road that stopped ten feet in. It was such a pointless piece of work, wasted tax money.

“Now, Zee, what’s wrong? Is it school? A boyfriend? Your family?”

The laughing face she had held onto as she giggled softly lost its strength until her lips trembled and she sank her head onto my shoulder, leaning across the console. In the end, the

words came out fragmented between briny shudders and sighs.

“I feel broken, Jerry. No, not broken—shattered. Shattered, like a window—not a plain kitchen window over the sink, more like a big, grand statement in glass with color and everything. Shattered—like someone chucked a baseball through my very core so that all the beautiful things that made me lovely and wanted in the first place are lying pathetically on the floor while the rest of me dangles, skeletal and empty. My goodness—gone. My worth—gone. But that’s not the bad part. The bad part is that I’m sitting there silent but for the screaming whole of me that is crying out to the missing shards, longing for the resuscitation of my mangled core. No one hears. They just let me sit there, the wind whistling through my emptiness.”

She had rolled up the windows before she had spoken. I wished that she had let them remain down so that her words could leak out into the noisy beyond, out of this world her very presence had made about the two of us. Instead, all her histrionic unhappiness sat stagnant in the air.

“Zee, calm down.”

“I can’t! This is my world! This is how my brain has painted my life and I can see nothing beyond it because there is nothing beyond your own brain.” She massaged the back of her head through her hair. “When you die your world ends. There is nothing but perception, nothing but ideas. And all of mine are bad, Jerry. Bad, bad, bad.”

I stared at this wild thing beside me, the distant street lamps the only source of light. Her nose and lips were red from crying, her hair dark in the night. I wanted to hold her, caress her, take on her pain, and it was very clear that she expected me to do all this—only, I knew that if I did take her in my arms and draw into her inner well of personal insanity I would be filled with that arcane blackness too.

I opened the door, the sudden car light making us both blink. Even with the return of the golden light on her face, I saw the unhinged fear and loneliness in her lovely eyes. I adored those eyes, and so I walked away into the ugly, mundane night.