

Discarded Gold

Eric Wilder

Three old men on a park bench watched as she passed by them. Blonde, bouffant hair, the red ribbon tying it matching her dress, tight and short. Replacing the magazine on the rack, I hurried from the corner drugstore, chasing after her down the street.

"Wait," I called as she was about to get away from me.

Executing a perfect one-eight pirouette, she faced me, curtsyng, smiling. When she blew me a kiss I saw she was no more than eighteen, and maybe younger.

"You dropped this."

"Not mine," she said.

Withdrawing the bogus blue silk scarf, I basked in her green ephemeral eyes, desperate to bite her puffed lower lip.

"Sorry. Would you have a sundae with me?"

"Will you take me home afterward?"

"No car," I said.

"How old are you?"

"Old enough to drive."

"Can you dance?"

We both could. Swirling bodies collided as intersecting cosmic rays beamed from a ceiling strobe. Sweat beaded my brow. Our bodies, moving in time, colliding, touching, caressing, becoming enamored, interacting, made love to the beat. The girl and I kissed. Later, along the beach, hypnotic moonbeams splayed crystal sand. Midnight breakers crashed against the shore, rounding tiny quartz crystals surviving from seamless streams that had never twice touched the same drop of water.

A distant fire.

"I don't even know your name."

"Emil," I said. "And yours?"

"Collette."

"I love your eyes, Collette."

"What else do you love?"

"Water," I said, gazing across the moonlit bay.

Far out across the bay, dolphins broke the rolling waves.

"I'm fifteen," she said, licking lips so red and swollen that they defied gravity.

"You're lying."

She didn't bother denying my accusation.

Behind us, two gulls groused over a dead fish bobbing upside down in the surf.

“Who are we, Emil?”

“Two people,” I said.

“Are we fated?”

“Let’s have our cards read and find out.”

Greasy strands of black hair protruded from the dark woman’s red bandanna. Bulbous nose, puffy face and her high cheeks frowned. Malignant eyes stared at us across scarred and stained oak. Liver-spotted hands nervously fingered frayed tarot cards.

“I can contact the spirits but it will cost you fifty.”

Collette punched me when I asked, “Don’t you know any cut-rate spirits?”

My pointed sarcasm failed to faze Mother Midnight. She took my proffered offering, albeit far short of her request.

“The moon is full,” she said.

I gazed at the ceiling but only broken tiles stared back at me.

“Are we in love, Mother?”

“We are all in love,” she answered.

Mother’s black cat wound through my legs as we exited into the back alley. Overturned cans of trash reeked of spoiled fish. I stole a kiss and grasped Collette’s hand.

“Spirits are weak tonight,” I said.

“And life is fragile,” she said, exciting me further with her own unexpected kiss.

Multicolored rockets exploded in the distance, momentarily startling a starless sky.

Collette and I held hands. High above reality, like multicolored balloons we floated, unpunctured by sharp earthen prods.

“The streets below are dark,” I said.

“But the sky above is light,” she answered, her smile colliding with red and green reflections bounding away from flickering streetlights. “And my heart is full.” Before I could answer, she said, “I left my skates on the street.”

“Leave them,” I said. “Thieves be damned.”

An approaching streetcar with an ancient electrical heart struggled as it climbed the steep hill on its way toward us. Raising a finger, I flagged it, grasped Collette’s hand and pulled her through the door. Above us, the lazy sun split the hazy dawn as Collette’s creamy thighs peeked from beneath her short red skirt.

“I love the dawn,” she said.

“Let’s make love at my place,” I said.

“We’re making love now,” she answered.

“But there’s no music here.

“Then you’re not listening to the breeze.”

Rush hour. Carbon monoxide wafting up from endless vehicles pointing in straight lines toward oblivion. The noise began filling my cavities of desire with mental glue.

“It’s still morning,” she said

“Every twenty-four hours,” I said.

“Must this end?”

“Well, I should go to work.”

“Does your work usurp beauty?” she asked

Encroaching noise drowned my words, but I had no answer anyway.

Revolving doors belched tired humanity from rotating mouths and explosions of

energy surged in the streets. Cancerous mutants died slowly as they hailed streetcars, inhaling life, exhaling death. An old gray dog brushed my leg. When I reached to pat his head, he turned and disappeared behind trash cans lining the nearby alley - probably in search of discarded gold among forgotten scraps of life.

END