

# Brock & Cheryl: Comp

*by Ann Bogle*

COMP

He is about six foot seven; he has brown, medium-length hair (crooked sort of, to the bottom of his ears); he wears a big suit that he probably got at a tall men's store. And the pants and coat match, into pin stripes (not a pin-stripe suit but a navy/gray line pattern). And his briefcase has insurance policies in it because that is what he sells. He got her name from an old boyfriend, but she doesn't know that or which one, and she thinks she needs more insurance, something she thinks of as another thing she must buy. The kind of insurance isn't clear to her — fire, theft, renter's, flood, other acts of God, what does he usually sell? He opens the briefcase.

He remembers someone long forgotten from high school. Everyone called her Tippy, but he always thought of her as Excess — a sublime popularity in his head: someone he took home at night, in his thoughts. Tippy or Excess, so many insurance policies later, was at the heart of his successful salesmanship, the One he never had but substituted in her absence with a readymade fiction of conquest and spooning.

Tippy, his fantasy mistress from high school, had actually gotten married two or three times, he heard later, but in high school, the fantasy was first, that she might be big enough for him — a stroke of luck there — but also he imagined himself married to a little woman who received his seed by caesarian. And Tippy, no one he would really take home, would climb in and out of the tool shed window — how he'd always imagined it. Brock has an insurance policy for this new version of Tippy Excess sitting before him, stupid, clueless, and hungry. Her pink-colored lips stuck in agape.

Let's make it clear that a policy is not a contract. Fantasies

harbored for lifetimes attain a self-imposed rigor, a sentencing to a strict line drawn by the will. He could have slipped Tippy notes, but then there was the chance that Bogus, the football guy and her true possessor, would find him out. So in a makeshift flight of fancy he composed a marriage contract over and over in his head, only to surface later as the fine print of those damned policies.

This Tippy's name was Cheryl — something both of them were so far not committing to paper or saying. Unusual in a salesman, she thought. He is insincere and intends to sell her something. Best would be if he sold her the need for it, but that was beyond his intelligence to do, she decided. Skip need straight to conclusion. She was thinking about the chicken for the broiler pan. Buy insurance; keep up the regular home cooking because the time to prepare to meet a regular guy and settle down had come, again.

“I think of myself as sassy,” she once told a girl who shared a locker next to her. Having said that she was never free to become; the unprompted words were self-determined. Looking in the mirror every hair had its place. Morning required her complete attention to construct herself in an image that The Man of Dreams would be ready to float off on life's raft with. Something was burning in the oven, and a child would be crying with hunger and impatience.

How fast Cheryl — Sassy ol' face, girl-runner-jumper-other, funny light — Cheryl got to the out: As soon as she could think of someone who might be coming to meet her. She would think of the loss, of it becoming a life for someone not Sassy, pale Cheryl, good Cheryl, Cheryl too right for the bank, Cheryl righter than the bank, of the kid, the cooking, the forgetting to look in the mirror, the man — it could be Brock Insurance Salesman — out scouting his next Sassy, but mostly, she thought of staying at home without her next Someone Coming Up, the guy out the corner of her eye, just next to her day, coming up, to unlock Sassy and leave a baby girl crying.

9 a.m.: Brock picks up the phone and leaves a message.

10 a.m.: Cheryl checks her messages, something about an expired “policy.”

11 a.m.: This is the day that the mail is not delivered (a bank holiday), so Cheryl heads for the Post Office.

12:15 p.m.: Cheryl discovers a letter from many years ago crammed into her postal box. Shreds of poems and clippings from a yearbook but no return address. She hastily looks around the mailbox room to be sure that no one is watching and puts the envelope in her purse. Out the door.

12:20 p.m.: Brock is standing in the street kicking a tire in the hopes his car will start up.

The good thing is the blue, bark, back thing never reversed, never reversed. Traversed is Professional Cheryl, not a walker, a lady getting her mail before a date with the too-tall Brock. Brock is thinking of his car. No lady getting her mail can save the car, more important in the scheme of who-he-is-today: Nissan — than who he will be tonight after he smokes her. He can see her yeah/no walk as he kicks the tire one more time, in time for her to see it, squarely, but what if she's got her hand on his too-tall ass the entire mile, an eternity? No, the car is temporarily disabled. He does have time for a hand on the ass, but where does it come from and in the end will his car start? All these questions are the province of the third party ambiguous, someone who claims to be an accomplice to the Author, but not a loyal Reader, or a Scanner. The car was Brock's pride before the wheel wells started rusting out. His buttocks tightened as he swiveled to have a look-see.

It was another Jesus-Short, something in the circuitry between car-man-song, no wise, again (his buttocks itching for the real touch

not about to come from a Jesus reaches from Cheryl past him). He hadn't decided about Jesus, the real Jesus from the morning of his life, about his past, her past, except to look forward to the real touch or face or past means Cheryl's past was (Cheryl no one's wife, he guessed) a streak of indiscretions. Cheryl thinks of his tall ass first, the car second, and of his two secrets last. She can guess at his secrets. There is no hold, no Nissan — she tells him the car will be fixed or he'll get a new one, must be God sending him a message. With this guy she has to take even a minute of her two-minute approach to mention God and cars as if they were synchronously connected. Last time she thought of Jesus she was looking at him, dark Aramaic, long-haired, just her type, and it seemed profane to her. No, she wasn't a churchy girl, but she belonged to the couch of believers who invited the banal to constitute her religiosity, not hail Marys but some man in imitation of a god implanted in her male universe. The men of tomorrow lined up in a row, unchoosable but nonetheless viewable. Brock only knew how to wink in acknowledgement. This was the one. He had her picture in his glove compartment, more than one, the others in the photos darkened.

“Your car,” Cheryl pried.

“Gas,” Brock mentioned. He was more than a bucket nervous.

“1982?” She remembered him. “Stairway to Heaven.” That song played in his car, in his home, at work. “Economics class?” She had never had much of a mind for indecent global numbers.

~mIEKAL aND & Ann Bogle

