

Meaning

by Barry Friesen

His face was creased with sadness the first time in the room
and he danced his tai chi like a young man half his age,
and laughed, like headtrippers do, from the neck up.
I just sat there on the edge of the cliff, holding my hand out.
He didn't take it.
"I'm dead inside," he said. "No joy, no passion, no purpose.
I want to find meaning here."
"Gee," I said, getting up. "I'm all out. You're in the wrong place."
"No, no," he said, "I want to talk."
"Ah," I said, standing. "You want a shrink, then. They love that.
You can talk for years."
"Did that," he said, a tiny smile trying to surface. "For ten years."
"Well then," I said, and shut up.
"I'm still sad."
"Sad? Great. I'm your man for sad." And I sat down again.

He wanted to want to get mad at his mom for throwing him away
but he didn't want to.
"Okay," I said. "Don't then." And he left.

Six months later he came back and wanted meaning.
The cliff was right there in the middle of the room
but he pretended it wasn't.
I looked into his forehead and it said "Jump."
"Jeez, sorry," I said. "Still fresh out. Don't know where to look.
I can help you make some, if you want."
He didn't. He had a book in his hand and held it out to me.
"I think it's in here," he said.
"Could be, could be," I said, not touching the book.
"Maybe we could read it together."
"Fraid not," I said. "Forgotten how.
Wanna have a nice cry or anything?"

He didn't, and left.

He kept coming back every six months for two or three years
so I doubled his fee
but he still kept coming.

Finally I said, "Aren't you getting tired of coming here?"
"I want to feel," he said, sitting on the edge of the cliff.
"Okay," I said, holding out my hand. "Go."

And he did. Over the cliff we went.

He smashed his mother into pieces until the pillow was covered
with sweat.

He cried three toilet rolls worth of snot and tears.

Then he rested. Then he left.

He forgot to pay or I forgot to charge him, I don't remember.

He came back a year later and no longer danced his tai chi.

But his feet never touched the stairs on the way up to the room.

"What do you want?" I said.

"I just wanted you to know," he said, "I'm in university now. I gave
up being a

janitor. Next year I'll be overseas. And you know the best part?"

I wasn't really listening.

I was watching the laugh wrinkles around his mouth and eyes.

I hadn't noticed them before.

"What?" I said.

"I'm in love!"

"Jeez, that's terrific!" I said. "What about meaning?"

"What?" he said, looking puzzled.

"Never Mind," I said.

"Just

Never

Mind."

