

Crescent City, Spring '97

by Brendan Garbee

It takes almost an hour before I drift to sleep on the bus. When I wake up in Crescent City, I'm surprised. Maybe I was going somewhere else in my sleep. Walking out of the station, it feels like a strange place. Somewhere I've never been before. The feeling fades a little as I walk to Stevie's apartment and look at all the old familiar buildings and roads. But it doesn't totally leave me.

Stevie left the key for me in his mail box. I call the aquarium from the apartment. The boss says that he'll open as soon as the tourists start showing up, and that the janitor job is mine again when they do. I set up my bed on the pull-out couch. When Stevie gets off work, we go out for a walk. I ask about the woman he'd been seeing before I left last summer. He smiles and shrugs.

"It was going well for a little while. She wanted to move in together." He shrugs again. "But then... I don't know. Maybe I'm not ready yet. Maybe I'll never be."

I'd been seeing a woman while I was in Pismo Beach, but we split up too. She didn't like it in California. Even though things were going well between us, she decided to go back to Florida. She told me once that she only went home when she was sleeping. I often think about that.

Stevie tells me it rained every day in January. I spent the whole season working at my uncle's liquor store in Pismo. The winter is milder there. I tell him about the fall in Napa, where I'd been harvesting wine grapes. Long hours, but I made good money. The light changes from bright white-yellow to golden and then to red. We go walking down to the beach.

It's the first week of spring and cold, but the beach and the sky are

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pretty. I pull on my hood and light a cigarette. The sun goes down. "Remember that time Luis Menendez took us out on his schooner?" he asks. "I had a dream the other night that my apartment was a little sailboat just like his. Drifting in the middle of the ocean." The black shape of the land stands out against the dark burgundy sea. A little shadow drags along the edge of the water and the sky. A mystery ship, heading somewhere fast.

Does everyone go home in dreams? If I do, I never remember it. That woman I'd been seeing, she said that sleep would take her walking through the hallways of her mother's house. She'd run her hands along the walls and look in all the rooms, smelling all the old scents. And then after waking up, she said that she'd have to lie in bed reminding herself of where she was and how she got so far from where she'd started. I often think about that.

