

# The Thief of Words

*by Calvin Campbell*

That's my memory, kept and clutched as with a sixth sense, that it was a prim Oriental afternoon, with the pink streaks in the sky going God-knows-where down across the park, but very far away. Ghostly, melancholy travellers. Birds met and crashed headlong somewhere up in the trees nearby, breaking branches, and fluttering away, shaken. Now I'm drawing closer to us, where we were sitting. Her eyes, narrowed to slits, alight and, moist and inscrutable, gaze into the ether, as though she is observing fairies. I do not recall how long we have been sitting on this bench, that is at once Autumn-warm and endlessly cold. She does not look at me, though she is always in my sight. She fills my vision. I feel like an infant, knowing nothing else but this face and these beautiful eyes. I watch her lips part again; she has been doing this for as long as I have been watching her, but until now she has not spoken. She gently gasps, and her words reach me before I see her mouth form them. She says the aching words in a soft tone that I could never manage. But that is such a long time ago.

She talks gaily, child-like. She speaks those chosen words just as I pluck them. She has stolen the words from my heart. She is a thief of words. How could she say something so sad with such innocence? Her lyrical voice makes the statement that much more true, that much more brazenly true. For even earthly joys cannot conceal it. Love vanished, and I was left alone with the screaming red sky. The sky above, and the awful clouds knit a rope.

How could she say something like that, this girl whom I have known for how long now? Hours or years? We had travelled on streetcars together, I recall scaling mountains, and was she not with me when I bought my new suit? And somewhere, tucked away and remembered like a lullaby, a summer spent near a decaying lighthouse? She loved that suit. It was this girl, or it could be, though I would never guess it. If not her, then who had I been out with at night, when the air feels so safe and full of promise?

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“There's nothing really wonderful, is there?” That is what she said.

