

That Kind of Body

by Darryl Price

I was thin young. There's a kind of freedom to be found when walking around inside that kind of body, that allows you to have in this world what's known as a presence. People see you eating but they can't make out what for. You're not going to gain an ounce. It's not that they feel sorry for you. You just seem to come with a certain kind of strange unknown magic (about you). It can be felt but not really traced. It's like you have a little secret but everybody knows you do. Some of them want it for themselves, you could see it in their eyes. Yes. They wanted it badly. But I would say most of them simply don't trust it. So what you get is looks all day long. And it's radiating vibes all day long, either of the don't come near me type or the come here boy I want to buy some of that type. I also had fairly long hair then, I suppose, but only because I couldn't be bothered with going somewhere to get it cut. It seemed like an awful waste of what little money I ever had on me. Money was for fun, as much fun as it could be stretched out to buy, so I went to the state fair with my dinky camera and my little money pile to see what I could see there.

The first thing I saw was a woman in a polka-dotted dress sitting on a park bench eating an ice-cream cone. She was making little slurping sounds around and around the cone in her hand, because the ice-cream was dripping like a fountain, like a volcano that had just erupted, like a candle in fast motion, and believe me, she was having trouble keeping up with it all, but that wasn't what was the most interesting part for me. She literally took up the whole park bench by herself-- from one end to the other. I asked her if I could take her picture, and she said, "Why sure, honey." She gave me a very practiced pretty smile and held her ice-cream cone out to the camera, as if to say, "Would you like to share some of this with me?" I thanked her and quickly moved on in the direction of the barker's row.

In those days, if you wanted to get from one side of the state fair to the other rather quickly you went behind and in back of the stadium and walked through the rows upon rows of barkers, some calling out, "See the only still living mermaid around," or "meet the girl of your wildest nightmares—half human and half-gorilla." Stuff like that. I was walking as fast as I could go without making eye contact with anyone, young or old, fairgoer or fair employee. And I'd almost made it—I could see where the real fair stuff started again—the wafting food smells, the rising and falling noises coming from the rides to the throngs of endlessly talking, walking people--when a voice called out to me, "I can see you there boy, don't run away from me, this is something you've just got to see for yourself, if only to tell your grandchildren about it one day, only fifty cents; the head of a beautiful woman and the body of a hideous snake, don't pass up this rare opportunity of a lifetime, take a chance, only fifty cents! "What could I do?

I gave the man in the striped shirt and the funny looking bowler type hat my fifty cents and I went inside a small tented room. What I saw there was a large beat-up looking army colored low mesh cage sitting in the center of the floor and inside it was the most beautiful face of the most beautiful looking woman I had ever seen before, sitting atop the stacked and coiled body of what looked like a giant snake. We looked at each other in utter silence. I couldn't take my eyes off of her. I wanted to kiss her.

Finally I mustered just enough breath to hoarsely mutter , "Hello." She smiled at me through those perfectly beautiful teeth and her really red red lipstick and said, "Hi. What's your name then?" I told her my name and she told me hers, although I immediately forgot it because I couldn't really pronounce it anyway, but it sounded sort of exotic. "What do you do, "she asked. I told her I worked in a bookstore, and she said, "Oh I love books!" After that we had a full on conversation about books and movies and she told me she was getting a degree through the mail and, and she was just

about the nicest, sweetest person I had ever met in my entire life up to that point. She dazzled me in every way. It turns out she was in an automobile accident that had left her paralyzed from the neck down and she and her husband, the barker outside the tent, were just doing this to make a little money, and to have a little fun. To say I liked her would be an understatement. I adored her. Nothing about her made you feel the least bit sorry for her. She just simply wouldn't allow that feeling to come out of you. She required no sympathy. I felt like I had met a real angel. I still wanted to kiss her.

Just then the tent flap flew open and in walked a boy of about ten years old and his two doting parents. All three of them were wearing blue duck-billed caps that looked like they'd also served as maybe rain bonnets somewhere in the last few years or so. The dad was round, the mom was round, the kid was round. They looked like a family of balloons or lost (together) balls. The kid runs right up to the cage then puts his chubby fingers through the mesh and shakes the whole thing and starts screaming, "Oh, God!" I turned and walked out of there and gave the barker husband a kind of backwards wave goodbye. Later on, at home, I realized I hadn't taken a single photograph of her.

Bonus poem:

HOW TO REMEMBER IMPORTANT THINGS by Darryl Price

Save the whales. Save the dolphins.
Save the bored housewives.
Save my hands, so often cupped over the sorrow in
being alive. Save the beautiful
made-up cherries of delight
I feel everywhere in your presence.
Save the sprawling landscapes

of late night cafeterias of the mind.
Save the often forgotten radios of our flying dreams.
Save the hand-printed love
 letters of early morning light. Save the inexhaustible
curiosity of a small interior poem of silence.
Save the naked air.
Save the Spanish tongue of Neruda.
Save the sparkle in
the brushstrokes of a Picasso.
Save storm and the rainbow.
Save the North Sea. Save shadows.
Save all hearts from
beginning to break again.
Save the ripped apart sky from
the rain of so many angry bombs leaking inside.
Save the secret handshake. Save the Pandas.
Save the sea turtles. Save the roses. Save the last dance.
Save the sailing boats and floating planes
of melting romance. Save whatever makes
 no sense. Save this feeling. Save the butterflies
with passionate, provocative kisses.
Save the question of imagination. Save the end
of the poem until you really need it. Save the
world from itself. Save your wild goodbyes.
Save every word.

What I Would Like to Say to You(final version)

Is this the place, where I finally
end up frozen dead in my tracks, found walking alone & with a stick
and a dog, sporting
a cat hat, alone on the tip
top of a hill, no longer

concerned with the wind's
icy fingers scratching down my neck? I'm here
and yet I'm also at home everywhere in this God forsaken place.
I prefer the big rocks, you know, and
the soft and green and thick
moss of mid to late summertime, the

great fluidity of
that enormously beautiful animal we love to see and hear
and call the water,
soaking up the sun, the
burning maidens splash dancing all over
with little white clouds tied

around their fabulous bellies. Ah, who
would ever want this vision to
end, brothers, without starting
to weep uncontrollably? Yet there it
is all perfectly wrapped up
in an otherwise grey

chunk of missing road laid out here long before me. An end. The
end. Every step
or misstep I have taken now leading me
around in circles of sorrow and grief has
finally dropped me off the grid's fingertips without you at my hand
or elbow today.
Whatever rain there was a moment ago now
has pulled itself back out of

the mist shot like a reversed arrow into the past. Perhaps these
angels they love to talk about so much
are only made out of the
things you cannot ever truly see for yourself.

Nobody's coming, not
for me, not even buzzards,

no wolves or snakes unless
they're already here
and I'm just what's left with
a few bones thrown in for
good measure. Did I make
this poem up or did

it make me up into its own private touring bus this morning? Oh well
then perhaps
one more cup of cola will do the trick
for the long night ahead of us. This letter was
never in my pocket
to begin with and shall
not be mailed out to you today.

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