

Myra

by Doug Woodhouse

When Myra first asked me to go on the road with her, I went over to my friend Pete's house to see if I could borrow some of his CDs and mix tapes for the trip. When I got to Pete's house, however, he was sitting on the curb smoking a cigarette, bruised and dirty, with a smoking pile of rubble behind him where his house used to be. I hadn't heard yet, but his ol' girl left him and blew up the house when she left.

I felt silly asking a man surrounded by the rubble of his former life if he wouldn't mind fishing out some CDs for me. I doubt he even knew where his living room was, much less his stereo. I had quit smoking right after I moved out of Myra's house, but it would have been impolite to refuse after he offered me one. He stubbed out his cigarette, glanced over his shoulder, sighed, and lit another. Although the dust was still settling, I could see that Pete had found his bed, and had taken the broken bits of wall and floor and lashed a crude lean-to structure around it to keep him dry while he slept. Pete and I had been in Boy Scouts together, and I was impressed that those skills had found a practical application in his everyday life.

I told him about the last time I fell out of a tree. When I was a kid I used to love the heights. I used to jump from branch to branch, laughing and screaming, but one time I missed the branch and fell hard. I was always cautious after that, until Myra showed me the tree in her yard and showed me how easy it was to climb. She was always two branches above me, urging me higher. Finally I began to loosen up. I remembered what it was like to swing from the branches, and carefully inched my way out to the far end of one of the higher ones, mindful of the way it bent under my weight, enchanted by the clouds I could almost touch.

The next thing I know I'm on the ground again. The whole tree had come down. I was too busy looking at the clouds to notice, but from the top of the tree Myra had spotted another tree she wanted

to climb, so she scurried down and chopped down our tree while I wasn't looking. By the time I was finally able to stand back up, she was already half way up her new tree.

Pete spat on the ground. He said it was fucked up that she hadn't given me a chance to get down first, or even clue me in that she was on her way down. She's probably up there in her new tree now, scanning the horizon for another tree to climb. I took another long drag and nodded. For the longest time I felt the same way, but recently I've started focusing in on what I had done wrong. All trees come down, I said. No tree stands forever. If you're going to climb up to look at the clouds, don't forget to occasionally look at the axe, too. But Pete wasn't paying attention anymore. And I really couldn't blame him. Maybe I'm being too forgiving. Maybe I should be madder at Myra.

I flicked my butt into the road and dusted myself off. Just being around Pete had made me a little dusty. I looked at the mess and started limping back to my car. I wanted to offer to help Pete rebuild his house, but I had my own journey ahead of me.

