

Familiar Things

by Foster Trecost

I made the appointment a month in advance, but not because I was eager. I needed the time to lose it in my daily routines and perhaps it had been lost at points here and there, but today it settled itself in plain sight. After lunch I left my office and trickled along like a slow leak, a notch above meandering; gravity had become a lateral force that pulled me forward.

Mid-day heat collected sweat on my brow that I wiped away with a handkerchief. I longed for childhood, back before perspiration was a concern. I wanted to stop, to peer into a window, see a movie, sit. But gravity never stops.

I sell insurance. I had a secretary who kept my office in order and sometimes we had sex, but that's not why I hired her. In fact, I didn't hire her; my partner did. When he left, she stayed and the affair began. Sometimes we'd go away together and sometimes we'd meet in a hotel after work. It was a strange arrangement, but it worked for me, less so for her. One time we waited for room service to deliver our dinner and she asked why we never ate out. "Because restaurants complicate things."

I could see my destination long before I got there, the building jutting above the others like a pyramid in the desert. A few years back, I sailed to Africa. One morning when I saw land, a thin strip of brown that separated blue water from blue sky, I realized I didn't want to get there, for the journey to be over. No one's ever ready for a journey to end. When I saw the building, I felt this way again. I mulled around until I found the reception. I needed to be on the sixteenth floor. The attendant asked if I had an appointment. "Yes," I said. "I made it a month ago."

Hours later, gravity reversed course and pulled me back towards my office, but this time it let me stop, if stopping was what I wanted, but it wasn't. What I wanted was to sit behind my desk, surrounded by familiar things. I walked in and found my secretary waiting for

me, trying hard to be more than just my secretary. "How'd it go?"

I didn't answer. I walked to my office and shut the door. I stood on the other side until I could hear her cry and then went back to where she sat. I spoke before she could think about why I had returned: "I no longer need you," I said. "Please gather your things. I'll mail your check."

It was the only fair thing to do. I walked back to my office and sat behind my desk, surrounded by familiar things. I stared at a picture on the wall and thought about sailing to Africa.

