

Fernando

by Gary Moshimer

"It's not him," Kelly says.

"I think it might be," says her Mom.

The three of us are sitting on the long sofa facing the wall which is one big window, waiting for sunset. Kelly's father, rich from recording famous people, is Skyping on her laptop from New York. Someone is on there with him, a chubby face, an impersonator on steroids.

"Do that thing, Billy," her father says. "Do that Fernando. You look maa-velous! Do that."

Billy Crystal does it, but it sounds weird, either from the connection or from him being a fake. Even with the grass, as her mother calls it, it's not even a little amusing. It's a bummer. Kelly closes the laptop right in the middle of one of her father's Sweeties. "I fucking hate him," she says. She's still seething from last week, when he said he'd put together a fund-raiser, he could get Sting and maybe Billy. "I'll fucking kill you," she told him.

What pisses her off is that he does everything from afar, instead of coming home to hug her. She's also angry that she needs his money to live. Literally. She just wanted to get through school and get a job with health insurance, but now school would be on hold again.

"Is that out?" Kelly's mom snatches the little pipe from my hand. It's her pipe, a survivor from Woodstock. Her hair has survived as well, still so long. And she keeps it black. It's hard for me not to touch it, especially when Kelly's hair fell out.

Once I suggested Kelly get a long black wig, and she called me a pervert.

I hand her mom the pipe and she puts a little more of Reggie from Maine's dope in the bowl. Reggie is in the vet tech program with us, and was bummed when Kelly's leukemia roared back out of nowhere. He got me some of the special stuff from his greenhouse, because Kelly's mom says it's what makes Kelly less nauseous. Kelly and Reggie and I are like the Three Musketeers at school. All we

want to do is take care of animals, not people. We were not smart enough for regular vet school. Kelly's father got where he is from street smarts and schmooze, and she would rather have nothing than be like that. When all this is over, when she has her new blood, she wants to live in a cabin in the woods with me and Olivia, and maybe her mother, if she gets a divorce.

We pass the pipe, watching the change in the light, the geese dropping from the sky and landing on the lake. Kelly says she's had enough, she's feeling weird, and I tell her, "But you look maa-velous." She kicks me. Her face looks sharp, hungry for blood. In four weeks she'll go to Albany and get the stem cells from a German donor. She wanted them from England. She's an old-fashioned girl who likes the Beatles. In the booklet it says she might take on characteristics of the donor, so she wants that kind of accent, like Paul, not some fucking German guy named Hans. But there's no choice, no Paul or Ringo, no Billy or Sting or any of her father's other supposed friends.

Olivia cries from the other room, and Kelly's mom taps out the pipe. "Well, time to be grownups again."

She fetches our daughter and puts her in the playpen. One side of Olivia's face is scarlet red, and she looks pissed, like a mean wrestler. I wave at her. "Hey, Livvie." She looks livid. She throws herself around, in a cage match with an imaginary opponent. Then she stands, suddenly still, and gives us this big smile. An actress. She'll probably grow up to be special, because as an accident she had perfect timing, born when Kelly had all her platelets. Olivia was a huge baby, the Michelin Man, so a C-section was necessary.

I get her from the pen to sit her on my lap, but she wants to dig her heels into my thighs and launch herself toward the window. She wants to fly. Each time she jumps she grunts like a miniature weightlifter. I take her to the window and she sucks on the glass and slaps the pane. Something falls through the dusk but I can't make it out. I tremble. Olivia squeals with delight.

Soon there's nothing to see outside, and we're forced to look at our reflections. Kelly's head has dropped so far her chin is on her chest.

It's alarming, looks so much worse in the window. We all look different in the window. Kelly looks dead and I look tiny and Olivia looms like a pure white moon and Kelly's mom's hair shimmers like black gold. We look like an aquarium family. I start to feel the air leave me again, and Kelly's mom notices and gives me a solid look. Her face is so perfect from the work he paid for. I start to say, "You look..."

"Don't."

Kelly murmurs in her sleep without moving. "It's not him."

