Sometimes, Death

by Ivan Reyes

Music. He could hear it coming through her door. The cymbals splashed, and words of truth were spoken and the exuberant harmonies pierced his defenses of anger and malice and for a moment he felt as if suspended warmly within a cloud, a cloud made up of memories he had while still in the womb. He made himself a cup of coffee. He drank it down. He poured himself a shot of whiskey. He slammed it down.

He went down into his basement and punched a sandbag, over and over, without wrapping his fists so they began to bruise and bleed. He went back upstairs. Poured himself another shot.

He began to cry because he knew his life was the only one he'd ever get and at the moment it seemed completely and utterly hopeless and irreparable, so he turned on the tv and began watching the infomercials that were on, and he bought himself the watch they were selling. He found it elegant and tasteful, two qualities rarely paired together yet here they existed together on a shoestring budget channel and perhaps Van Gogh is much like this watchmaker. Perhaps not, yet the idea filled him with feelings of youth and vitality. The music played on like sirens calling through the sea of immortality and deception.

He poured himself a glass of water, drank it down, took a shower, opened a window and sat by it watching people walk by his house from his room and he let the chill air fill his room and he put on a robe and finally shut his window. He turned on the tv. The music still played from his lover's bedroom. It seeped into his consciousness and it soothed a sad demon inside of him. The tv droned on and on delivering a message neither soothing or aggravating but all the same imposing in some unclear yet palpable way which was beyond his current ability to understand, define, pin down (it was a benign

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tumor, ugly yet innocuous and so welcome -- perhaps a condition of his decidedly midwestern type rearing).

All of a sudden, the television began sending him messages, sentient transmissions of some advanced intelligence, the television swallowed him.

His lover knocked on the door, "Gary. Gary, are you alright in there? Oh, I'm so sorry for being a bitch, you know how I get. Would you let me in? Let's watch some Scorcese flick, or perhaps a Kurosawa. I don't want to fight with you anymore. I love you. Please, let me in."

But Gary was gone. He was surrounded by bats and stalactites and skeletons greeted him and dead celebrities moaned and neon signs -- props from defunct game shows -- were hung up as far as the eye can see.

Lisa began to wail, "Gary you son of a bitch. You had no right to punch me in my eye. I have to see my mother this weekend -- what am I going to tell her? You have no right. I ought to call the police. I ought to tell my cousin. He'd come down and screw your head on right, alright. You hear me in there you coward, you asshole? Gary?" But Gary didn't answer. He was far away. She couldn't understand it. Where was he, she wondered. Why didn't he answer? Why?

Lisa took a shower but all the hot water was used up. She took their Toyota, Camry, to the grocery store and began gathering the pieces of dinner. She knew she was wrong. She knew by fucking Gary's best friend Wayne she'd only exacerbate an already tenuous situation. She knew Gary would hit her, only, she never suspected it would be with so much explosive force, or even that the hits would be so numerous. She knew she should not have fucked Wayne but he listened to her. He cradled her in his arms while she cried. He was present for her worst meltdown. And his eyes were not judgemental, they only sought to understand her plight. She became overwhelmed

with emotion and now guilt wracked her. Guilt and rage, for Lisa was not a woman to be hit -- however much she felt truly deserving of those blows of her lover, she was a woman to fear. She was a woman who stabbed a man for reaching down her pants at a bar, and as she drove the knife into the man's gut she looked in his eyes and saw them twinkle with abhorrence and she whispered "That's right old man I hope it was worth it." And the old man died. And she cleaned her blade and put in back in to her back pocket. And nobody ever knew. Except the bartender knew, because he knew Lisa. Only he never spoke about it. He respected her.

At the grocery store she bought a bottle of whiskey and drank it in the parking lot. She slammed it down her throat and contemplated her own misery beset by her own self diagnosed filthiness. She drank it all except for a few gulps and was on her way back home, and the car swerved down the boulevard and she pressed the break and shouted "Son of a bitch," at the car and pressed down atomically on the gas and the engine roared and hissed and squeaked and the Camry bounced all the way home and she gripped like a maniac the steering wheel and she strangled the car into their driveway and it exploded when she turned the key and turned it off and steam seeped out of the hood and their driveway formed small green rivulets where the coolant poured out of the poor car. And there it was. The symbol of her life.

A man inside who would not speak to her and a car in the driveway that she drove, quite literally, out of commission. Great.

She took all the groceries inside. She turned on two burners on the stove. The bacon hissed and popped as it cooked nicely. She put down a large pot on the other active burner, filled with water, and filled that large pot up with macaroni. She turned on her crock pot, and threw in some bricks of butter and some bricks of sharp cheddar and white cheddar. She added a little soy sauce, and a little lime: for flavor. The bacon was done and she cooked chicken breasts

in the bacon fat. She added minced garlic and salt and pepper, when it was cooked she added green peppers which she only seared. She made some instant mashed potatoes, because she enjoyed instant better than the "real stuff".

She began to weep. "Where is my boyfriend," she thought to her self. But it was already over. She no longer had a boyfriend. Who knew where he was. In fact, he was in some living nightmare. All of a sudden she saw them on the beach, the waves pounded softly upon an eternal shore which they both shared. They were eternally entwined. Though they would part ways they'd still be tethered and forever he'd feel her sadness when she felt it and vice versa. He was upstairs disintegrating slowly. And, so, so was she downstairs falling to pieces. But off in the distance of possibility there gleamed a small speck of hope somehow someway though she didn't believe in her capacity to grasp at it and utilize it properly. That took a careful hand. And hers were crude and accustomed to violence. It pained her. She thought of her mother, and what she would say about her black eye. She thought of a woman back at the grocery store who stared at her while she gathered her groceries and how she scowled at her and how the woman recoiled and walked away obviously feeling superior but no one was superior to anyone. All men and women were equals. All men and women were kings and queens and peasants and whores. All the same.

She fixed the plates.

She sat at the dinner table and ate all by her self. She wept. Gary spoke to a specter, "Look, son. I know it pains. It hurts. I know. But nothing hurts like being dead. Memories hurt, son. When you're dead. Because you look at love the way a man slowly dying of frostbite looks at a candle. You'll take even a tiny bit, though it won't reverse your condition. Love don't heal a goddamn thing. But it never hurts a thing either."

Gary said, "Yes, it does. It always hurts. All it does is hurt."

The apparition disappeared. Gary was back in his room. The television ceased it's horrid transmission. Gary walked downstairs. There was Lisa. There was a sink full of dishes. Through the glass square upon the front door he could see the car, a piece of shit. He sat at the table.

"You don't hate me?" Lisa wailed.

"Just let me eat," said Gary.

He finished his plate. He looked into Lisa's eyes.