

Where is His Grave

by Ivan Reyes

Monica was a sweet, young girl at one time but now she was older and passive. Upon this morning, she goes into her bathroom to use the toilet, then takes a shower. She sings in the shower, singing along to the music that is coming out of her boombox. She puts on her makeup. She likes to have the tv on as she is preparing for the day. It is playing mindless infomercials. Because it is morning and nobody is home. This is when all the trash plays. These media companies do not bother with quality programming this time of the morning, this time of week. They're selling empty space. She turns off her television before heading out the door. Her makeup is done and she is feeling clean and in top form. She has been going to the gym lately so she feels particularly proud of her body.

She recently turned thirty. She gets into her car, a maroon Volvo. It is a little tank. She loves the way it drives. She makes a left and climbs a hill. Her Volvo peters up the hill as her toes gently press the peddle. At the top of the hill she sees the sun, and on either side of the hill trees line the sidewalks and drop shadows all over the road. She gets to the top of the hill, then reaches a stop sign, she stops. Looks both ways, then peters forward again, crosses the street, and pulls into a grocery store parking lot. Her groceries total to 219 dollars, roughly, but only because she has expensive taste. She is dragging her shopping cart towards her car and she hears a familiar and annoying voice. "Monica!"

She turns and her stomach turns slightly as she sees Huey walking towards her across the parking lot. He is wearing an old, red flannel. He approaches her and they wave at each other. All of her instincts tell her to run.

"How're you doing, Mon?" he asks.

"Fine," she says. "How're you doing?"

"Fine," he says. "Hey, it looks like you're doing fine."

As the conversation is boring her she finds her way out. Their only mutual friend is her ex boyfriend so once she asks about him she will relieve herself and go home. "Say, how's Jimmy?"

"Uhh, he's dead, Mon."

She feels as if she were on a rollercoaster. "How did he die?" She tries to keep her cool. She is only partially successful at it.

"He was at work and he slipped and hit his head and they took him to a doctor. He was in a coma for three months and then he just died one day, Mon," he said. "I'm sorry I figured you woulda known I'm sorry."

He reaches out and tries to place a hand upon her shoulder however she backs away so quickly, he knows she prefers to be untouched.

"It's ok," she says however she is hyperventilating and getting hives and her breathing is becoming more labored. She feels like a dog who might die at any moment and wants to be alone as that canine species is prone to. She runs off towards her car as fast as she can.

He catches up with her and she manages to say, "I'm sorry I have to go now it was good seeing you, Huey." He is standing over her, she is hunched over, breathing laboriously.

"No, Mon," he says, "don't be like that. We can sit and talk about it if you want."

She gets up and staggers forward, he catches up with her and puts his hand on her shoulder again and she falls, splayed upon his arms, and sobs uncontrollably. She stands back up and keeps weeping.

"Look, Mon, I'm sorry. I know you loved him at one time."

"When was his funeral?"

"Two years ago."

Her tears were like none other that he'd ever seen. However, to Huey and probably no one else this was the expected reaction. He knew them both while they dated and they were crazy about each other. No other couple could compare to their inherent charm or compatibility. She collapsed on the parking lot, crying, and her hands splayed out upon the pavement.

"No, no, no, no, no," she screamed. "You bastard! You don't have to do this to me!"

"I'm sorry, Mon."

"Oh, Huey," she said, "why, why, why did he die?"

"It's ok, Mon. I'm so sorry. I thought you knew. We all thought you knew."

He continued, "We figured you must have had your reasons for not coming to the funeral. I know he wasn't a perfect boyfriend, er, I mean fiancé."

"He never really proposed," she said. "Not really."

"Oh?"

"Not really," she said softly to herself. "He wasn't a monster. We had our differences, that was all." She looks with sharp eyes at Huey and her gaze is palpable.

She wrote down Huey's directions into her cell phone's notepad. She took a desolate road as the wind blew. The road wended around a hill. At the top of the hill there was a graveyard. The leaves were strewn everywhere. The sun shone brightly and evenly. There was no one else there. She parked her car at the far end of the parking lot. She parked it under a tree whose limb hung over her windshield. She looked out at all the tombstones. Somehow stones did not seem the appropriate symbol and metaphor for death. It was so industrial. A product of modernity, perhaps. Golden statues, she thought, felt right. The stones simply marked the designated area of death. Their absence says more than their presence. Egyptians died in grand pyramids or in mass graves. Perhaps what struck her as laughable was the disinclination towards unmarked graves. As if the dead remained near to their stones, but they did not. They went where you went. A cemetery is a convenient meeting place. So much specificity was not necessary.

She walked towards his grave. She stood over it.

When she was in high school she met him. She was in the cafeteria with her choir, and he was making his way across the parking lot with both his mother and father. He was wearing sunglasses. Grant High wasn't a terribly big high school, so she knew right away he was new. The next day he was in the same math class as Monica. They sat in different areas of the room. He didn't seem perturbed or distracted, despite being a new kid. It was halfway through the first semester of the 11th grade. He transferred in from up north. It struck Monica how calm he was. He was not nervous. And neither did he exude the typical foreignness of a new student from a different city. In fact, he seemed a bit in charge. He had an immediacy of presence which was not imposing however it was felt

and it made everyone around him feel on duty, but not unpleasantly. One found that they wanted to meet his expectation, to please him. Although he was disarming, in that way, no one would probably call him a charming type of young man. His wit shone through, firstly, and most of all, but not excessively or aggressively. He was bulletproof to bullying and to hazing. Almost immediately he began dating Claire Foster. They were together for about a month before he broke up with her. She eventually got over it and things returned to normal. Then it became clear that this was his modus operandi. He was a talented musician -- he played guitar, bass, and drums -- and worked in a music store. And one day Monica gave him a ride home after school. He was walking home after school, and she saw him as she passed the supermarket, so she pulled in to the parking lot of the supermarket. She honked as she made circles in the parking lot. Then she pulled up right next to him. He leered to see who was driving. She lowered her window and yelled, "Do you need a ride?"

"Yes." He walked up to the car, he got into the car. "Thanks." Jimmy and Monica had very few mutual friends, however she'd gotten the feeling since she had first seen him that he was particularly interested in her, and that he'd love to get to know her better. Only he didn't know how to initiate the process. They were different kinds of people. Luckily, Monica wanted to get to know him better and she was not shy with boys. She followed a hunch, and happened to be right. Jimmy tried to make conversation but was doing lousy at it. He kept fiddling with everything. He touched all the buttons or simply rubbed them with his finger. However, overall he didn't lose his cool. He managed to get out some genuinely funny comments here and there, which made her laugh. He was naturally insightful and decidedly sincere with everyone. Given the circumstances, he did his best. He did ok. They arrived at his house and he invited her in.

"Yes, I'd like to come in," said Monica.

"Thanks for the ride," he said.

He walked over to her side of the car and took her backpack. They walked up some concrete steps which led onto his porch, and he opened the door. Mysteriously, Monica yearned to go inside. The cool air of the a/c met them, and Monica poked her head around instinctively scouting for adults. The house seemed empty. They went downstairs into the basement, "This is where I sleep," he said. There were guitars and basses on the wall, there was a drum kit in the corner. In another part of the basement, Jimmy kept his cabinets. He connected his guitar to a head, and turned it on. He strummed the guitar and played a few licks and the sound was so loud that it shook the objects on his nightstand, it rattled the windows. Then he played a few bass licks. Then some drum fills. It was all equally loud. Then Jimmy offered Monica a glass of water or some chips. She declined, and looked at her watch. She knew her parents would have some questions for her if she stayed gone much longer. She told him she had to leave. She left and got into her car and pulled out of his parking lot. Her entire body felt vulnerable to touch, as if the breeze might shatter her. She noted that Jimmy had mentioned that he taught music lessons, as part of his job at the music store.

She pulled into her driveway and went inside her house. Her mother was watching tv in the living room. Monica met her in the living room. "Mom, would you mind if I signed up for music lessons at the music store. They have a tutor there who could teach me music theory. I think it would help with choir."

"Yea, sure, honey, whatever you say."

Monica then met up with Jimmy every Monday and Wednesday after class and they studied for two and a half hours. Jimmy was a precise teacher. He knew the book backwards and forwards. He'd read it cover to cover at least a hundred times. After the session was over he'd go to his band's practice rehearsal in his basement. Every once

in a while his band would play an actual gig. Eventually Jimmy invited Monica to one of his gigs; she accepted. Jimmy drove them both far away; about two hours away. The venue which had booked him performed underground. They played four songs and the crowd seemed unresponsive but grateful. That night Monica had gotten home at four in the morning. The texts her parents had sent her were blocked by bad reception, and low coverage. She received them all on her way home. There were 29 in all. She refrained from reading them. She pulled into her driveway and went to bed. She went to school the next morning and then came home. Her parents spoke with her that night. They were furious.

However, Monica plead her case. She just gave it to them straight. She explained that she knew they would text her, but she wasn't ready to leave. Eventually they trusted her again. Because of that they took a greater interest in her music theory tutor, and they came to like him and to trust him. They let her go to his rehearsals and gigs. As long as she was home by ten on school nights. On weekends they let her stay out as long as she wanted. All she had to do, was set her own curfew, and abide by it.

"What happened, Jimmy?" she whispered. "I'm sorry I didn't go to your funeral. I didn't really hate you." A warm breeze swept through the entire cemetery. "We hurt each other so much. You hurt me, but I know I hurt you, too. We hurt each other so badly, that I knew we needed to split up for good. The night we split up, I went to your house even though you told me you wanted a night to yourself but you didn't want a night to yourself, you wanted a night away from me, because when I got to your house there must have been twenty to thirty people crammed inside your tiny apartment. You were all smoking weed, and you were wasted. I walked up to you, and didn't know what to say to you. What are you doing here, you said it so mean I knew I was not welcome, and that hurt me. What are you doing here Monica, you repeated."

"You're just getting drunk!" she said.

"Yea, so, so I like getting drunk, so what?" said Jimmy. "And I like getting high," he said and he lifted a small bong to his mouth and took a rip and put it down again. Seeing that bong reminded Monica of when they were younger and Jimmy taught her how to smoke weed. Monica never took to it like Jimmy did. But she still thought it was a fun thing to do, every now and then.

"You lied to me."

"No, I didn't."

"You said you wanted to be alone."

He just stared at her and she could see he pitied her.

"You're such a jerk."

"I'm sorry."

She started to leave and he didn't chase her. He stayed behind, with his friends, slamming down beers and taking shots, and smoking deep inhalations of weed smoke from his water bong. She got into her car and cried for maybe five minutes, and left. Her way home was long. She had to cut through two towns. She took a highway to another highway. Then she got off the highway and took some empty roads up and down the hilly area. Then she took a long and busy road, for about twenty minutes. Then she turned left, and drove into the parking lot of a restaurant. Behind the parking lot was a road which led into her apartment complex. She pulled into it and then into her parking area. She passed her roommate, who had a friend over, and passed her roommate's friend, ignoring them both. Immediately she went into her dark bedroom and didn't turn on the lights, she laid in her bed and cried, she pressed the play button on

a little remote controller resting on her nightstand and that turned on a stereo and the music soothed her and drowned out her moans. Eventually she slept.

Suddenly, she awoke. She looked out the window and it was still night and she realized she could hear voices yelling. She got up. She opened her bedroom door, her roommate was shouting at Jimmy, "Go away, Jimmy. She's asleep, we're all asleep." She walked out of her room and Jimmy stood wobbly in the doorway, dumbly trying to interpret her roommate's emotionally charged nonsense. She urged him to come into her bedroom, pulling on his fleece pullover. Her roommate screamed and Monica asked what's wrong, however she already knew that she always hated Jimmy because she was single and a virgin. "I have to be up early in the morning," said the roommate. "Don't make any more noise," she said and stomped off into her bedroom and slammed the door, and then made more noise inside of her bedroom. "Don't worry, Jimmy, she's a bitch," said Monica. They sat on her bed. Monica turned on the television, to keep their conversation private.

"I love you," he said. His eyes were glazed over, however his enigmatic presence remained undeniably aware. He repeated himself. And took her head into his arm. Monica wept, knowing what all this meant. "I love you too," she said as the tears fell on his jacket sleeve. He pulled her in closer.

"Mon, look you've been getting so mad at me lately, we've been arguing so much."

"I know."

"I know you don't want to be with me anymore."

Monica pulled him in closer, sobbing. He held her gently. "I'm sorry," she said.

"It's ok." Jimmy slept at Monica's and they did not make love. In the morning, he left. She heard his car door open, and close, and his engine fell off into the distance. Monica got up, exhausted, with only four hours of sleep. She made coffee and felt empty and unburdened. Her roommate came out and Monica asked her what it was she had going on in the morning. She only said that something came up and poured herself a large mug of coffee.

She was carrying a purse, and she reached into her purse and pulled out a baseball hat. It was a hat sold at the music store Jimmy used to work at, he had left it among her things long ago and she never got rid of it. She took it with her if she moved. She thought maybe one day he would ask for it, if perhaps they'd randomly ever meet again in a coffee shop or diner. She had been carrying it around in her trunk for about three years now. She placed it upon the land. "I thought you might want that back, Jimmy," she said. She walked away. She felt lighter, she felt better. It was due to she now felt closer to him, a little bit. She'd keep coming back, she knew. She remembered some shoelaces of his which were also among her things, and a little bear he'd bought her one day. She got into her car and drove away. As she drove home the day descended into evening, and the earth became a pale orange landscape. She pulled up to her house, parallel parked and walked up the path and up the stairs into her house. She ate chinese food leftovers and watched an old kung fu movie. She started a bath, and threw a bath bomb into the tub; she lit some candles and played some quiet music; she got out and dried, then got into her pajamas; she turned on the television and began watching reruns of I Love Lucy. This television show warmed her. She reached into her nightstand, under the socks and shirts and under the panties and pulled out a Vogue magazine which she always kept in there, because they had some designs she thought were interesting, and which she might one day want to invest some money into bringing into fruition within her own wardrobe. Within the magazine between it's pages was a bag of old

weed, at least two years old. Maybe three. She poured a small mound of weed onto the magazine which she had placed on her lap and began rolling a joint; she licked the edge of it, then pressed it up against the bulb of her lamp on her nightstand to let the paper dry; lit it up and inhaled; she exhaled and grew numb, only Lucy's love and good humor and jokes and conundrums reached her. She began crying. She took another hit, a bigger one this time. Her thoughts flowed as such:

One night I asked him where he was at through text and he said a party do you want to come. I said sure and asked for the address. When I showed up a guy and a girl were stood out in front, in front of the door. They said who are you. I said I know Jimmy. They let me through. I didn't know where to find him but I figured I would eventually. I wound up in a garage where people were passing a joint around. We finished it then someone lit another. I was very stoned. A boy with long hair and long facial hair spoke to me about sports. I nodded. I wanted to seem polite. He was very sure of himself and impassioned. I didn't know anything about sports. Eventually I walked out of that garage. Then I walked into the kitchen, I saw some kids from highschool and they were so shocked to see me. Then an old, old man stood on a chair and started screaming. He said I want all of you out! He screamed it. Unless, he added, you want to get more fucked up! Then he jumped from the chair and everyone cheered. Jimmy found me and held me by the hand and said come on we're going to a different party now. He pulled me out the door and into a car, then two other girls jumped into the car too. They were passing a bottle of whiskey back and forth in the back. Then we started driving down desolate winding roads and Jimmy took the bottle and took a swig or two then handed it to me. I took a sip then handed it back to the girls in the back. One was thin and one was a little chubby but they were both gorgeous. We arrived at the house and there were so many people there. Maybe 100. I saw another boy I knew from school as we walked up the stairs. He had graduated two years earlier and he was laid out

on the lawn with a bottle of whiskey in his hand screaming at the night and the stars and the moon. We walked into the house, a band was playing. I walked to the back yard, more people were there, there was a keg with a pile of red disposable cups next to it; I made myself a beer; I reunited with Jimmy. Him and the two girls were still working at the bottle of whiskey. It was about half full. I joined them and took a few more sips and drank my beer. Then I grabbed the bottle and it was almost gone, and I drank what was left. The night grew foggy however eventually me and Jimmy left and the two girls went to another party. I went back to his house. He made me cookies and then we went up to the attic where his room was. He laid me down to sleep, then he brought me a glass of water. We had sex that night and in the morning as I was getting my clothes on he said "Do you want to be my girlfriend?" while he was still in his boxers and I had never been so turned on. I said "Yes, that would be nice, Jimmy." He smiled and kissed me.

