

The Waves

by Jake Barnes

I used to sit in a dingy bar near the train tracks waiting for my wife to get home from work. There was a calendar on the wall behind the bar where for a buck you could pick a spot, and if on that day, somebody jumped off the bridge connecting Marin and San Francisco, you won the pot.

I never won, but some years later I heard that an old friend jumped off that bridge to her death.

Those days our house in the Peninsula hills was the party capital of the Western world on Friday nights. Most of our guests were fellow-teachers. Sheila and Marcel were not. Marcel was our dentist, the only black dentist in the area. I'm not black, but I was happy to have Marcel as my dentist. He was damn good. I loved his cheery hygienist, too. Her name was Milly. One of her sons later became a famous football player.

Marcel and Sheila often came to our parties. Sheila wasn't a beauty, but she was lively and very smart. It's a shame what happened. I heard about it after the fact, long after my wife and I sold the house and went our separate ways. I heard that Sheila was despondent, that her husband ran off with a younger, prettier woman.

I continue to think about what happened; her suicide haunts me. I know *why* she was despondent. I figure I know why she chose the bridge, as well. It was nearby and lethal. What I can't imagine is the degree of her resolve and the steely courage it took to step over the rail, to look down at the roiling water far below, to step out into thin air and drop like a stone.

