

A heart that is not broken...

by James Lloyd Davis

He wrote, "To whom it may concern," then laughed at the pause and the jolt of the comma's curly tail.

"Concern? Who will be concerned... or more rightly, who the fuck cares?"

He'd spoken this to the cat, addressed the cat, as he often did, with the half expectant faith that this little furball understood each word and all the nuance in his tone, but the nameless cat just looked upward, sniffed, then laid her head back down, indifferent, but close to him in the little bit of sunlight that covered his desk.

The notepad had a garland of little flowers, printed in pale pastel colors at the top of each page on the right. Sheila could have told him what kind of flowers they were, perhaps did when she brought it back from the store where she always bought his ink cartridges, his reams of paper. That was after he stopped going into town, or anywhere else. It was shortly before she left. The pad was hers... one of many things she forgot to pack the day she moved out, the day the two men came with her.

Two burly men from town.

She'd had every reason to believe he'd be difficult, though he wasn't.

It was the ever-present gun, his dark moods that scared her. He knew that, well understood that the fear was justified. Perhaps she was right, but all he could do was to tell her he wanted to drive into town so he would not have to watch, asking the boy with multiple tattoos on his neck, his arms, to move the pickup truck they'd parked in the drive. Not asked, so much as demanded with a growl, an uncomfortable moment for everyone, but he was beyond rage, hardly the dangerous man she thought he was.

Still, she had every right to imagine the worst.

“So,” he said to the cat, “who, then ... is the concerned party to whom I should write?”

There was one good friend, Jimmy Diego, but Jimmy was missing, gone to Mexico in 1994 with the idea he'd join the Zapatistas, help liberate the native peoples he truly believed were his own. Chances are they weren't really his people. His people came from Texas, not Mexico. Either way, he never came back. His last letter from Oaxaca was vague, but so utterly passionate. His disappearance was not surprising.

He'd likely got caught in the middle of it all. Some said he was dead... and his own damned fault for getting involved.

Still, Jimmy was an American citizen and well known as an educator, a writer. There should have been inquiries beyond those of a few outraged bloggers who pointed to the suspicious circumstances surrounding Jimmy's disappearance. Even those web sites haven't been touched for many years.

People forget.

People move on.

He imagined he could write something for Jimmy.

After all, he was never found. What if he came back? It would be good to explain this to him at least. But then, how would he get it? Who delivers suicide notes to people who are lost and presumed to be dead?

He couldn't write this to her... would not... and finally pulled the unfinished note carefully from the pad, crumpled the paper, placed the ball of it in the palm of his hand, watched it slowly expand, like some miniature universe moving slowly, ever outward.

The gun was on the desk, loaded, waiting.

He'd cleaned it last night.

The smell of the oil still hung in the air.

Lots of ways to do it... muzzle under his chin... muzzle in his mouth and upward tilted... or the classic, to the temple. The bullets waited like messengers in the cylinder, their tips, dull grey and visible in the shadows of their chambers. He'd even practiced earlier, before it was loaded, dry-snapped the hammer as the muzzle

rested against his skull... felt the hammer strike, thought of writing about the physical laws involved that govern the actions, the sensations, the purpose of all things mechanical.

If not a letter, he felt he should write something.

Jimmy would. But this... it would not be Jimmy's way... such a hopeful man who wrote beautiful poems about women... about love, sadness, grief.

He remembered, then, one line Jimmy wrote, the final line of a poem about Don Quixote.

'A heart that is not broken can never be mended.'

But, no, Jimmy would never do something like this.

He missed Jimmy.

He missed Sheila.

He missed the hopefulness of all things forever gone.

Instead of reaching for the gun, he stood, raised the blinds to the top of the window. The sun was still uncovered, warm in a clearing sky. He lifted the cat, held it in his arm and walked to the door. He ran his open hand over the animal's back, pulled back the door, and set the cat down on the porch. He stood and watched as she took tentative steps to the edge, looked right and left, a fat cat showing sudden sinew under her fur as she crouched, then leaped to the ground.

She ran across the narrow lawn to the edge of the woods, stopped for a moment, looked back, seemed to nod to him with an understanding that surprised him, The tall, tense tail of her flicked... once, twice... then she turned and disappeared into the thick briars and the scrub of shadowed brush beneath the elms.

