

Girl Four

by Jamie Grefe

She followed the husband. He headed north on seventy two for twelve miles, turned off at exit eighty seven b, slowed, turned, backed into a spot at a convenience store slash gas station, lights on, engine running. Precisely twenty seven minutes by her count, fingers drumming the dashboard. He then proceeded to the tavern, a popular watering hole for local residents on Old State Road. She drove in the dark behind him.

Tonight, it appeared, the husband was not alone. A bobbing head-like shape slumped against the right front seat window, the passenger side. The woman thought, an oblong object, a guitar or banjo--he had been known to "jam the fiddle"--or, perhaps, a duffel bag--renewed gym membership, she wondered: dirty socks, sweat stains--propped upright, meant to resemble or imitate a human body, an object to trick the woman into believing that the husband wasn't traveling alone on this night, to this particular tavern.

Perhaps, she thought, this was his way of coping with what happened. Or, maybe it was further evidence of his deceptive nature, a nature she still, despite what happened, favored.

He parked in the third row of cars directly in front of the tavern's main door. She let her car coast, continued creeping past the packed lot, pulled into the driveway of a nearby farm house, turned around and drove back to the tavern. She parked right beside the husband's car.

The passenger seat of the husband's car was empty, save a slightly crumpled, chocolate smeared wrapper--a McDougal Crunch chocolate bar, the kind he used to eat when they met for "lunch meetings" in room nine at the Bear Stream Motel out on Anderson before it burned to the ground, an act, she had concluded, set in motion by the husband in order not only to erase their private

history, that history of undulating sheets, but an act meant to murder the woman in what would appear to be an accident.

She hated the taste of chocolate, reached into her pants pocket, felt the handful of discarded wrappers, safe and in love. As far as the husband knew, the woman did in fact perish in that motel fire. The husband would not be aware of the fact that he was being followed and, moreover, followed by the woman. Her daring and somewhat botched escape through the bathroom window, which, due to the multitude of facial lacerations from the broken glass, coupled with the devastating effects of fire to skin--third-degree burns--had, after hours of surgery and grafting, altered her face to the extent that it was most unlikely that the husband would still be able to recognize her. That had been two year ago. Two long years.

Now it was time, the woman had concluded, with the help of her therapist, to confront the husband, to tell him once and for all that she was "moving on" and, with the help of various kinds of medication and treatment involving, but not limited to, "electrical shock treatment" and "role-playing," she would be "letting go" of the husband, was ready to "forgive" him for leaving her there on that day, locked in the burning room as he, the husband, left the premises in a cloud of dust, leaving only a McDougal Crunch wrapper behind.

That wrapper, it is suspected, had become her only memory of the husband, her only memory until the day she found him again, three towns over: new haircut, trimmed mustache, working as a Customer Service Representative for the large corporate department slash grocery store that stole local business, the one that stayed open, the woman had learned, twenty four hours a day, three hundred and sixty five days a year, a most convenient discovery.

It had been relatively easy for the woman, after finding the husband, to keep tabs on his comings and goings. He worked forty hours a week in the electronics department of the "megastore," which, thought the woman, must have been something he had schemed up, along with abandoning her in the motel room, to

make a quick buck, for the husband, it was well known, knew nothing at all about electronics and everything about cheating. This, the woman had proven, when she asked the husband to reprogram the time setting on her video cassette recorder, an act the husband simply could not complete, an act that solidified his stupidity, but preserved his cuteness, a trait highly valued by the woman. She found twenty dollars "borrowed" from her wallet the next morning. Not a cute surprise.

The woman took a table in the back corner of the tavern, ordered a glass of red wine, the same color of wine drank on the afternoon of the blaze, didn't drink it, just held it, fingered the rim and watched the husband at the bar, his smiling face reflected across the mirror, beer in hand, beer to mouth. He was talking to a certain girl, the one the woman referred to as "Girl Four"--another obstacle to the woman's path to happiness, a roadblock to her confronting of the husband.

In the parking lot, the woman used a piece of glass, a special shard from the shattered motel window, a shard the doctor said, "had almost killed her and probably was the sole cause of the brain surgery that left the right side of her body a little different." She called the shard, "little miracle" as per her therapist's request. She loved it like the baby she would have raised, had the husband not tried to torch her.

The shard, inserted into all four tires, made a slight hissing sound reminiscent of gas the husband used to pass when they slept together in thirty minute intervals before concluding their "lunch meetings," one of the many sleeping sounds of the husband that the woman longed to hear again, but wouldn't. She hated Girl Four.

The husband and Girl Four called a tow truck. The woman watched and waited, followed the tow truck to the Sleepy Pines Inn, a staple of the small town, well-known for its rustic charm and atmosphere of "the good old days." She sat in the darkness of her car and observed the husband stagger to door number eleven. Girl Four was vomiting on the walk to the room. He held her hair back.

She was a problem, a problem that needed resolution, thought the woman. They both were.

With curtains spread wide, it was no problem for the woman to study the husband's movements: take off shirt, wipe vomit from lips, slug down another bottle of whiskey, hold Girl Four close, kiss with tongue, throw her to the bed, naked, embrace, undulate on bed, engage in the love act for four minutes and three seconds (the woman counted).

The woman, it should be noted, stood outside the window watching them fornicate. And, at eleven thirty two, the woman proceeded to knock on door number eleven, ready, with the help of three different kinds of prescription pills the doctor and her therapist endorsed, another kind of "little miracle," did the trick of boosting the woman's self-confidence, and carried her to the door hiding the husband. She felt a storm of light inside her.

The woman proceeded to knock slow three times. When the husband didn't come, she increased the knocking and didn't stop until the husband unlatched the chain behind muffled thumps and groans. The husband was speaking something, words of the utmost significance.

What the husband actually said that night, undoing the chain lock, was "this better be fucking good," as reported by Girl Four to the detectives investigating the case, but what the woman heard was something like, "dear, burns heal in stuck fool," a sentence the woman misinterpreted to be a kind of love poem, or, more specifically and with more detail, a farewell poem in which a couple, madly in love, must suddenly end their relationship due to the male partner's confession of infidelity to a more attractive and more voluptuous young lover--Girl Four.

Given the fact that the woman, as far as is known, had never met the husband's real wife, his fifth wife, nor had any idea what she looked like, the wife having met a most unfortunate and unlikely fishing accident just days after the motel room fire, the woman had no choice but to assume that she, the woman, was the sole subject of the poem, the ugly object of deceit, the aging bachelor, dumped and

left behind for the nymph with her siren song. That is, in all probability, the reason for the violent act committed by the woman, reported by Girl Four through written message. Yes, written message. For, it is a pity, Girl Four's mouth had been mangled in such a way, tongue severed in jagged rips, removed, and lips sliced wide, to the extreme point that, as speculated, no, confirmed by the doctors, she may never, will never, speak again. She remains sedated at County.

And, the motel room door flung wide, the woman proceeded to "let go" of the past, of the husband and his trickery, repeating the line of misinterpreted poetry spoken by the husband, jamming the glass shard, her "little miracle," deep into his lower abdomen, ripping back and forth (undulating, one may say), up and into his stomach, watching him stumble back naked and leaking red, yellow, and brown, to the bed where Girl Four, because of her incessant and annoying shrieks for help, had to be silenced, had to know the true intention of the woman who stood in the doorway, no longer seeing--with her eyes--the rustic decor of Sleepy Pines Inn, but instead, stepping back into time, back into the blazing room of the Bear Stream Motel, where in this alternate reality, this fevered memory relived, she proceeded to give a farewell poem of her own to Girl Four, a poem that, although she still remains sedated, as stated above, she will never forget.

It was later reported by the night clerk of Sleepy Pines, on the night of the mutilation, a woman, face obscured not by shadow or darkness, but by the sloppy work of many surgeons--medical students, to be more accurate--danced naked in the parking lot, holding high what appeared to be a long glass shard and a pinkish glob of flesh, detectives would later come to dub, "The Missing or Swallowed Tongue." According to the clerk, she is not a good singer. Not at all.

That same night, a grey sedan, belonging to the woman, rammed into the grocery entrance of the town's only twenty four hour "megastore," ripping through innocent and guilty alike, and reached

its gruesome pinnacle, in a massive explosion emanating from the back wall directly in the vicinity of the electronics department.

The tongue, it is rumored, was most likely either discarded on the way to the “megastore,” probably thrown from the speeding car’s window, or, it could be, I am suggesting here: swallowed by the woman as a kind of souvenir or token of the night’s farewell, for I have heard police are still awaiting the results of the autopsy, the body temporarily misplaced by a drunken coroner. It is evident to this writer, that the actions of the woman, bizarre and deranged as the general population has deemed them, reflect an insanity that, although it is mere conjecture and armchair philosophizing, could be called, no, should be called “the pursuit of true love,” even if it did end in the death of the husband and the woman. Love, as they say, knows no bounds.

