

Wipe Your Feet at the Door of Sex

by Jeremy Cairns

Jackson must have dozed off mid thrust.

The theater was so dark even the exit signs were off. He grabbed the seat in front of him and pulled himself up. The wine bottle on his lap crashed to the floor. The red pungent smell of cheap streamed down toward the theater's basin. That was okay. The floor was sticky anyway.

He stepped out of the theater into a puddle of neon.

Standing on the sidewalk in the rain just a few meters away was a woman in baby doll shoes and white stockings. A red raincoat. Her long damp sticky brown hair clung to her back like a cobweb. She stared up toward the aloof universe looking as if she wasn't sure whether her nose was about to bleed. She didn't blink as the rain drops hit her eyes. He thought to himself, she must be waiting...

She must be waiting for an airplane to come and take her away.

Jackson ran his sweaty hands over his vintage cowboy shirt hoping testosterone would iron it. His hair danced as he shook out the wicked from his head. Breathe calm. His first step was supposed to be a strut but it turned out to be a drunken limp. He pointed his palms to the ground and stopped the world just long enough for him to float up beside her. His whisper raised the temperature of her left earlobe slightly.

"What's that bird that flies by every once in a while?" he asked, "It perches on the side of buildings and looks down on me. It's too high to reach and too pretty to cage."

Daria moved her damp head down slowly and closed her eyes. She used her index finger to rearrange the running makeup on her face into a happiness pattern. When she determined she had painted an adequate amount of joy she turned her head to him and said, "Why baby, that's love."

They walked to the studio where she lived alone, but yet both of their keys worked.

The keys slid easily into the metaphorical locks of the fabled Door of Sex. A door in front of which every man and woman must stand. A door that is worn down in places by the constant knocking. Tap, tap, tap. Pound, pound, pound. Kick. Until it opens up and allows entry into that empty space in the heads of lovers. Don't forget to wipe your shoes on the mat on the way in.

The "Wel" is worn away, but the "come" still remains.

In Daria's refrigerator you will find a varied forest of half-used condiment bottles. They stand like elms on the street of a well lit suburb in between the cookie cutter to-go boxes filled with uneaten dinners she ordered for the empty chair across the restaurant table where she ate alone nightly acting as if she had been stood up.

If only she had it so good.

But that night her back board made bongo beats on the wall in rhythm with the squeaking bed and the moaning choir. It gave a soundtrack to a darkness dance that resembled an ancient Roman puppet fight; naked, limbs flailing. Slapping turned to splashing as she slid down his slick body to the little sliver of space left on the side of the bed where he lay. She was afraid to disrupt the other side of the queen where the black hole swirled nightly absorbing her tears.

Jackson wrapped his arms around her twice.

They'd grown long from pushing people away all his life. But this time he held her tightly and she squeezed back. The two lovers were a messy thread drawer. A box of free kittens. A Siamese incubator. It was a comfort fueled contentment that induced spontaneous happiness. Upon that realization he asked himself, "Is the happiness that I feel right now eclipsed by the happiness that I have when I am away from my lonely little bird?"

Daria sat perched on the window sill looking down on him.

She listened to his heels make wet woody clacks as he walked away. She had written her phone number down in triplicate, quadruplicate, octuplicate, on little pieces of paper that she had

pinned to his shirt in a safety jacket pattern to protect him on his walk home.

Her mind was all made up like a child pageant contestant.

She was no longer going to periodically go out and find Jackson, capture him, and then set him free like she'd done so many times before. No. This time she was going to grow her fingernails long. Long enough to stretch across the city and scratch the itch on him that she had never scratched before. The itch in the middle of his back that he couldn't reach. The itch that taunted him and she knew he wanted scratched so badly.

Jackson had realized a change, when for the first time, Daria stared him straight in the eyes.

The gutter below his feet swirled rubbish like a rat's hot tub. He looked at the little pieces of paper she had pinned to his sleeve and watched as the ink bled away into his blue stained shirt. His direction away from her would have been random if it weren't for her front door and the buildings getting in the way. But yet there he was back in front of the theater, his damp skin glowing from neon as if freshly irradiated.

A bird flew by.

He looked up into the dripping sky. He dared not take his eyes off of the bird as it flew farther and farther away. Was that the direction he was supposed to go? Things had changed and he didn't know why. It was like someone had flipped a wall switch that neither turns on nor off anything, or, it could control all of the power to China, who knows? All he knew was that he was incredibly confused and in need of a drink. His eyes grew cold and began to tear. The bird became blurry, blurrier, and then disappeared. He allowed a blink, but kept his head up, perplexedly dignified. And he said to himself, as he stood there alone in the rain,

"Well, this is gooda place as any to wait for a plane."

