

Falling from Grace

by Jim Harrington

Royce fell from Grace and landed in the fountain surrounding her pedestal. Grace Covington: town founder, town mayor, philanthropist, and according to some, town whore. Royce Jenkins: mediocre football player, community college educated, auto mechanic, and for the past year, town drunk. It wasn't the first time Royce had climbed the statue. It was the first time he'd been sober.

The town folks didn't know Royce and Grace were related. His mother, concerned about Grace's shady past and how that might affect what people thought of her family, had kept it secret. Grace was somebody's sister's mother's great aunt. Even sober, Royce couldn't figure it out. It didn't matter, though. Grace was the only one who listened to him without being judgmental.

Tonight, he chatted with Grace about his mother, who'd passed away a year ago, and his father, who'd run away long before that, and his wife and son, who he feared might leave him, too, and how his mother's death and his anxiety over his wife leaving and taking his son away kept him drinking.

"I should have done better, Grace, made Mama proud." He lay in her arms and shooed a butterfly from her mildewed chin. "But then I think, maybe I'm more like my dad, the kind of man who runs away from anything serious. Maybe that's why I drink so much."

That's when Grace dropped him. "What a twit," Grace said in a granite voice, the same one she had even before being immortalized in stone. "I can't believe I'm related to you. You have no gumption, no fire. Being a mechanic isn't a bad job. It's not glamorous, like being mayor or having your statue in the town square, but it's not bad. Your mother loved you for who you are. Your wife loves you, although maybe not for long, and your son needs a father. So, get over yourself and move on. You have a heritage to represent. And, perhaps—just perhaps—a future as town mayor."

Royce stood, unable to speak, his jaw locked open, and stared at Grace. He couldn't believe his mother thought he was worth

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something, that he mattered. Maybe she'd been too tired after cleaning houses all day and taking care of him and his two younger sisters to say anything. Maybe she assumed he knew, because he helped around the house, sometimes cooking dinner when she was going to be late. Maybe. . .He couldn't think of any more maybes.

Later, Royce would tell his wife what Grace had said and that she had winked at him and smiled, and he would swear he was sober when it happened. He glanced at the six-pack he planned to drink on his way home. Maybe it was because he was sober. Or maybe it was because he was wet and the breeze was cold. He didn't know for sure; but whatever the reason, he stood a little taller and felt less tense.

He blew Grace a kiss, stepped from the fountain, and headed for home, leaving the beer for some loser to find.

