

Deviance

by Joe Bardin

While living in Tel Aviv, I received a call from a girl I'd had a weekend romance with in New York City after college. She invited me to meet her in Hawaii to celebrate her graduation from law school, on her frequent flyer miles. On a lark, I accepted.

The romantic tryst would turn out poorly. After about 24 hours, the conversation simply ran out. She smiled sweetly and didn't seem to mind, which only bothered me more. I obsessed over it for both of us, until my mind bleached completely blank with the effort, and even small talk wouldn't come. Several more days of water-staring silence, heightened by her increasingly sweet not-minding was a prospect I couldn't face. I paid a change fee on my airline ticket and was relieved to leave early.

But something happened on the flight to Hawaii. I flew Tel Aviv to New York, New York to Phoenix, Phoenix to Honolulu. On the last leg of the flight, with layovers in Newark and Phoenix behind me, I struck up a conversation with the passenger seated next to me. I was reading a collection of poems by Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold*. She recognized the author's name and said she'd done some work with him. I asked if she was a writer and after a few hundred air miles of small talk she told me she was a psychic by profession.

Relaxed and bored by my journey, I allowed a few more hundred miles of ocean to pass beneath us before proffering her my right palm for review. In the generous spirit of being stuck on a plane together, my fellow traveler had a look. Then she gave me a look. Then she said nothing.

Something had disturbed her, but I wasn't troubled. I didn't particularly believe in what she was doing anyway.

My ease with the whole matter coaxed it out of her. She asked me: Had I experienced a breakup from my family? I was not close with my parents or any of my three siblings, but I did not consider myself distant either. I was acutely alone, but in my mind, I was alone *with* them, rather than apart from them.

I asked the psychic to show me what she had seen on my palm. She pointed to two lines on my hand, arcing roughly parallel around the ball of my thumb. My lifeline and my family line—they didn't touch. The psychic had been happy to accept my assurances that nothing was amiss and I wouldn't remember the exchange until years later.

In less than a year, my family and I indeed parted ways. I tried to enlighten them. For my trouble, they tried to have me deprogrammed. I condemned their narrowness of mind; they pitied me my naiveté. I ridiculed their religious bourgeois complacency, but they really didn't know what I was talking about. I went my own way, but still found myself in the mirror in the morning arguing with them. How could they be so rigid? How could they? Underlying these questions ran my own doubt: How could such deviance on my part *not* be wrong? After all, they are my *family*.

As a child, I was fascinated by the novel *The Light in the Forest* by Conrad Richter. A four-year-old boy born to white settlers in colonial Pennsylvania is abducted by Lenni Lenape Indians and taken into their tribe. He is given the name True Son and raised among the Lenni Lenape as one of their own. But then at age 15, a peace treaty between the colonial settlers and the Indians requires him to be returned, against his will, to his biological family, who are now entirely foreign to him. He cannot reassimilate into white society nor return to the Lenni Lenape, and is torn between the two worlds.

The book broke my heart more than once, but I'd never had the wherewithal to see myself in it.

But perhaps it's as just simple as this: my lifeline and my family line don't touch.

