

Deep Inside The Light There Are No Dreams

by John Riley

Mack's mind held a chandelier. The chandelier hung from the ceiling of his skull. He felt the gentle shimmer of the dangling crystal prisms when he moved. Sometimes they clicked when he walked and the inside of his head became a song. Others said his head was full of bubbles and air, but Mack knew their blunt natures had robbed them of so much and he had no trouble forgiving them.

It was during an awful winter squall that Mack finally met Stella. Waves rushed over the boat dock. He sat by a window in the Half Moon Cafe and watched the furious gray water. The ocean gets angry sometimes, he thought, and a tiny bulb inside his head flicked on and off in agreement. But Mack had no time for profound thoughts. He'd come for the third day in a row to watch a woman he didn't yet know was named Stella, while she ate her lunch alone. He'd bought a martini each day although he didn't drink alcohol. The expensive glass was shaped like a blooming flower and he thought it gave him a touch of class to have it sitting before him.

Today was the day, Mack knew. He had no choice. Never before had he encountered someone who turned the chandelier off at night. Alone he could not find the dark, the soothing, soft dark, the envelope of black that would wrap around his sleep. He had to talk to her. He hoped she didn't have a braying voice or bad breath. Something to drive her from his mind, that would lift her hand from the chandelier's switch. He had been wrestling, of course, lying in the light, with how to approach her. He had never introduced himself to a woman. Mack lived alone in a small house.

It wasn't until Stella had finished her lunch and primly wiped her

fine lips with one of the nice linen napkins the Half Moon provided that Mack, freed from his mind for a few seconds as the chandelier flickered, stood up, hitched his pants a little higher, and took the ten steps necessary to stand beside her table.

She looked up and smiled and Mack felt the chandelier begin to sway. It swung in a soft, steady rhythm and Mack realized he was going to be okay.

"I saw you three days ago, " he began. "And ever since . . ."

"You've been wondering what to say," Stella said.

"Yes," his voice surprised him with it's strength.

"You know what I'd like to do," she said.

Before Mack could attempt an answer she said, "To get on a horse and gallop away. Do you ever want to bound across three-railed fences and never look back?"

The bright light in Mack's head began to dim in what can only be described as a romantic manner.

"I've never realized it before," he said, "but now I know flying away on a steed has been my dream forever."

"I knew it before you did," Stella said. "That someday soon I'd get to show you how."

That is when she told him her name. "Mine's Mack," he responded. "So much paler than yours in so many ways."

Being a modest man myself, there isn't much more to say. Mack and Stella left the Half Moon together. Mack was able to turn the

chandelier off that very afternoon. He discovered new luminosity in the soft radiance of her skin. He stumbled across a dimming switch he didn't know was there and from then on had the chandelier under control. Stella bought him a new pair of boots with cowboy heels. She preferred the English style for herself. They built sawhorses in their dining room and hung their saddles over soft blankets. They oiled their equipment every Saturday. It's important, they agree, to always be ready to go.

