

Falling In Love Again

by Larry Strattner

“Shit man, that's a real pisser,” the guy with the short hair and horn rimmed glasses next to him said bemusedly.

Lowering the open magazine to his thighs the guy looked away from Marv, out the window the tone of his voice might have made you think he was crying. He was not. A blue teardrop tattooed under the corner of his eye signified he had once killed someone.

Marv didn't respond to rhetorical statements from strangers. Nor did he strike up conversations while waiting for girlfriends to try on dresses. He could see the tear tattoo peeking out beneath the temple of the guy's glasses, near the edge of his right eye.

The tattoo made Marv remember the weight and cold of a nine millimeter in his hand; a coldness gone and not missed; at least not in the same connotation he had purposely missed Lenny's left ear with his most recent shot. Lenny's ear had the good sense to leave town, still attached to Lenny, and never come back.

In a third sense, he literally missed Lenny, consciously and always. Lenny had been his one true friend but there had been no other choice. A man's life occasionally eats up the lives of his friends to keep itself alive.

Marv looked around among the dress racks for Cheryl. Cheryl loved this store. The clothes fit her bean pole frame and made her look Twiggyish, accentuating the fine bones of her face, the length of her legs, the small perfection of her breasts. The clothes from this store infused her with elegance. Marv could see it when she put them on; see it seeping into her, the way she stood, her expression, her aura.

Cheryl came out of the changing room in a black and white dress; stood looking at them on the settee, Marv with his ice cold eyes, the more slightly built stranger reading O magazine. Marv smiled a smile signifying he liked the dress, complimenting her taste, agreeing she should have it.

The other man glanced up from his magazine and smiled a warmer smile. "Nice dress," he said, immediately looking down to his story again, distraction forgotten.

Marv couldn't believe the guy had talked to Cheryl. Spoken right up. So easily. Effortless. Marv had never been able to talk to people. He always felt alone. Unable to connect. Cheryl had talked to him first when they met. Something like, "aren't we the big strong boy?" He had been dressed for golf and admittedly the shirt was a bit tight. They had hit it off.

"Must be quite a story in that magazine," Marv said.

"It is," said the guy, his nose in the pages. "More like a saga. Woman's husband gets killed by the Taliban. She hides out. Cuts somebody's throat. Steals an AK47. Treks all the way out of Afghanistan to Pakistan. Then to the United States. Has to fight it out with terrorists twice. Good shot. Goddamn AKs are beautiful. Never jam. Always there for you."

"You like guns?" Marv asked.

"Yeah. Yeah I do. I like guns." The guy finally looked up from O. Looking at Marv intently.

Marv felt a stirring. Warmth in his gut. "Maybe we should get together," Marv said. "Have a few beers. Talk about guns."

“Yeah,” the guy said, still looking at Marv; into his eyes. “Yeah, maybe we should.”

Marv felt good. He had overcome his shyness. Found a possible new friend. Cheryl would be proud of him.

