

The Pearl

by Larry Strattnner

“Hey,” he calls into the other room “I'm trying to write something short yet complex with enough opacity so people who read it will think I'm saying something profound even if I don't know what I'm saying. Can you give me a hand with that?”

“What?” She comes to the door of his little laundry room office drying off the small frying pan in which he had cooked his egg sandwich.

“You know. Something like Oprah. Something sounding serious and intense even if the heat is just generated by the adjectives instead of the value of the thought itself.”

“Heat?”

“Yeah, you know. The feeling you're hearing really important information about your inner self. Something you deserve to know. Need to know. Something that, in your knowing, might change your life. It heats you up. Warms, or even lights a fire in your soul. Heat.”

“How about starving children in the Third World?”

“No. No. No. Not like that. That's all been overdone. It's themed out. That and sex slavery and multi-layered conspiracies. It has to be something shocking, sudden, bizarre and gripping. Like how's this? I have a few lines of this...”

“An attractive woman is at a ritzy brunch. She's drinking a really outstanding Bloody Mary and decides to try a raw oyster on the half shell. She watches a few people eat the oysters to get in the rhythm and then steps up, squeezes a few drops of lemon on one, picks up the shell in two fingers and slides the oyster into her mouth.

Although she's never eaten an oyster before she doesn't find it unpleasant. Instead of cocktail sauce she takes a little sip of the Bloody Mary, gives the oyster a perfunctory chew and swallows it all down."

"Well. During the chew and swallow, but too quickly to react other than swallowing the oyster, she feels a really large spherical shape in the oyster. Really large."

"Now the heat of all this. The profundity. The barometer of the human condition. The test of your own world view, is generated by the following question. Does she spend the next few days sorting through her own fecal material with a tongue depressor looking for the object which might be, as we can imagine, valuable? Or, does she just go about her business and let some Tilapia eventually suck up whatever the object may be downstream, from the bottom of one of those solid waste tanks where they breed Tilapia for sale to restaurants?"

She stands in the doorway looking at him. Both of her hands have fallen to her sides, the pan in one, towel in the other. Her apron is a bit crooked. A wisp of hair has fallen across her forehead.

"Herman," she says, "you always do this when you have a deadline for one of those stupid technical articles. The rent is due next week along with a car payment. If you call me in here with some dumb shit question like that again they are going to be able to read the Revere Ware logo on your forehead when the ambulance gets here." And she turns and disappears back into the kitchen.

"Damnit." He says under his breath. "Damn. Damn. Damnit."

