

Smashed Idol

by Lucile Barker

He was the kind of man that I would rather have declawed than date, and then leave him on a gurney, helpless and anaesthetized. Cliff Eames had made me feel that way since we were teenagers. He would never be helpless.

"He's perfect!" my girlfriends would squeal. "And free! Like a teen idol. Donny or that guy in Duran Duran."

Good looks never permeated my consciousness. Cliff was all wrong for me. I couldn't look in his eyes; they were transparent and had no depth half the time and the other half they were like a doll's eyes, not quite human. He seemed to watch me, but I ignored him, laughed when he asked me out, pretended it was a joke.

"You're wasting your time on other guys," he said, but I walked off.

I dated the fatty who could sing like an angel, who had buried his talents behind his weight. Or the scrawny kid, not just a slim guy, who looked like he had malnutrition but had a stash of recipes with a caramelized onion base for when he opened his restaurant and floor plans for kitchens on the backs of envelopes.

"What a dog!" my soon to be ex-friends said behind my back about the man I was to marry. "No finesse!"

Word got back to me, my family made sure of that.

"You should have gone out with Cliff," my father said, but I shuddered.

Cliff looked like he checked himself with a dental mirror after every snack. The man was downright shiny, slim and toned. His blue jeans had a crease, ironed. He wore cardigans that reminded me of the cold precise grandfather who never noticed my existence. The grandfather who became his campaign manager and stage handled him every step of his political career. I was in law school to work against that kind of politician, and that kind of cronyism.

“Cliff always has an angle,” the old man chortled at a family party. “Wanted him to come tonight but there were some people he didn't want to see.”

He looked over to where Ricky and I were trying to hide in a corner, planning to eat the good stuff and run. I hadn't seen most of my family since then, too busy working on a chemical spill that had been anything but accidental. Eames Industries hadn't wanted to pay the storage fees. I was fighting to get a fine that would make the storage price look puny.

Ricky and I were out in the rowboat fishing, catching crummy little perch, more guts than flesh. Probably shouldn't eat them, knowing what had been in this river. Ricky thought it would be okay, since we were upstream a bit from the Eames plant. I wasn't sure. The frantic phone call interrupted the closest thing we had had to a fight.

“Grandpa's been arrested!” Malcolm, my perfect older brother, wailed. “He's killed Cliff, shot him.”

Let the old creep rot, I thought.

“He wants you to defend him,” Malcolm said. “You have to get here.”

I don't have to nothing, I thought, but I nodded to Ricky to row us in. I looked at the cold eyes of the fish in the bucket and suddenly knew that if Cliff had been a fish, he would be a shark. I had a vision of him on the marble floor of the courthouse, crumpled and still, or maybe shattered. I wanted to know what Grandpa knew, why I had been right.

