

See No..., Hear No..., Speak No..., *by* Martha Rand

“People are staring at us,” Cat said softly into Marcel's ear. They were walking down Broadway toward Fifth, near the Flatiron building. It was a summery spring afternoon. Cat carried a butter yellow tulip from the flower district set in a green water bulb. Marcel had bought it for her as they'd walked.

“We look like an interesting couple,” Marcel replied. “Of course people want to look at us.”

Cat nibbled on that thought for a while.

New York City is the kind of place where people rarely stare.

Cat lived in an apartment in a neighborhood near where a young woman named Kitty Genovese had screamed for help. That was after being stabbed and raped. Kitty had been coming home from work. Sometimes Cat imagined her screaming as she struggled up the curving, inclined block. Apartment buildings lined either side of the street. In her mind's eye, windows went black and unresponsive that night as Kitty's screams grew weaker. That was 1964. Kitty died.

This was 1972. Marcel and Cat were walking to Washington Square. They planned to eat at the Three Monkey Café on Waverly and see the late show at the Village Gate. Tonight was Miles. Don't ask Miles who.

Marcel had one Nikon slung across his shoulders and a longer lens in his green army shoulder bag. Cat's hand held Marcel's. The

other held the tulip. The tulip was a shade darker than her hair. She wore it short. Cut like the girl in Marcel's favorite Avedon photo — the one of the blonde girl in the beach waves with the little black boy hugging at her leg.

Marcel was right. Marcel had an eye for what was visually hot. He and Cat did look like an interesting couple. They were young and free as a New York breeze tunneling at dusk between towers from one river to the other. Cat was twenty-one, Marcel a few years older. Miles picked them out as they sat in the audience and nodded toward them. Miles approved. Marcel drank his Courvoisier and Cat her white wine spritzer. Marcel sent a note backstage during intermission. He asked if Miles would let him take a photo while he performed. Art D'Lugoff, the proprietor, came out and said no photos were allowed. He took Marcel's card.

Cat saw that as a coup. She'd call Mr. D'Lugoff later that week and bring 'round Marcel's photos of Mingus from the Vanguard. It was easier to shoot Mingus. Mingus' wife managed him and the fact that Marcel's wife repped for him set a parallel chemistry that seemed to appeal to Mrs. Mingus. The fact that both couples were interracial probably added to the positives although the women never mentioned that detail.

Marcel was born in 1946. His Mama came north, at the tail end of the great migration. She was pregnant. She left Marcel's father with the other children: Willie, Wilma, Zora, Coralee, Jason, Yves, and Charles. She took Marcel because he was still a baby and brought Jessie Mae because she was almost grown. His Mama was pregnant by a traveling preacher who was not her husband. Sometimes women have to find a way to leave a bad situation even when it looks like they are putting themselves in something worse. Only they know if it's worse or if it's better, if it's the frying pan or

the fire. There's no way to tell unless a woman has worn those moccasins herself. Or as in Marcel's Mama's case, unless she's walked those many miles between the well and the household along those lousy, dirt worn share crop paths in bare feet her own damn self.

Cat married Marcel on St. Patrick's Day, 1972, just a month before they walked down Broadway on this clear sky blue pink evening. Her parents didn't come. It was not her family's first abandonment. Nor their first betrayal. But her brother did come. The downstairs neighbors came, from whom she'd borrowed a dress. Marcel's sisters Zora and Coralee were late. The minister started on time or pretty close, just waiting a little bit to be accommodating as he was a Unitarian. The sisters arrived as they were all leaving the church and everybody took cabs to Marcel and Cat's apartment. They brought too much potato salad and cole slaw and chicken. It was all good. Marcel and Cat had leftovers. They laughed. And after everybody left they made love and ate some more.

They wore matching wedding rings of wide, pink gold with hammered rubies. Seven rubies in each ring for the pleiades, the muses, the inspiration that they were for each other and for their art, one ring a copy of Marcel's mother's freedom ring. It was the ring she designed when she saved enough money from domestic work after she came north, after leaving Marcel's father. It was her liberation ring.

"Let's make a baby," Marcel whispered every night to Cat.

Cat was torn. She was having trouble finding dance work and acting work. She represented Marcel and got his paintings hung in a hole in the wall cooperative gallery downtown. His photos made it into a magazine. In the meantime Cat wondered was she disappearing? Momentarily? Was it a mama omen? Become a

mama now and an artist later? It was confusing. Hard to know what to do.

She'd taken a full time clerical job in a glass building publishing house. It was boring as hell. As far as she could tell, her paper work was completely redundant and unnecessary. The only reason she could imagine she'd been hired was because the man she was assisting had been there a long time but wasn't quite ready to retire. The company must have been assuaging his ego with a young girl to work for him until he was ready to leave.

At lunch she'd often walk the fashionable two blocks along Fifth Avenue to the lionized entrance of the 42nd street library. Then she brought an armload of books back. She read most of everyday. One day she walked over to the creative department of the publishing house and met with an art director and got some work for Marcel.

One night in the dark, in the warmth of his arms, she whispered back, "Yes."

Cat felt the stars explode. She felt the fireworks as his ejaculate split her globe.

Horripilations and tremors, rushes and rays of light, Cat felt them and Marcel felt the sensations deep inside her. Together they knew the divine spark of another life had been ignited.

A few weeks later she got off the F train at 42nd street and made it up the stairs just in time to vomit into the trash. She continued on to work. Over several days the vomiting intensified. Over the weekend she realized that she had morning sickness. She wasn't happy. Marcel bought a bottle of champagne.

The next week, Marcel quit his job selling cameras. His reasoning was that his child needed to have a successful

photographer/artist as a father. Cat explained to him that they needed the two paychecks. But, he said they could live on hers while he pursued his dreams.

The feelings of abandonment kicked in like she'd never known before. She accused him of planning to let her and the baby live on welfare and leave them like other men had left his sisters with their children. He was wounded and said he'd never do that.

The morning sickness became all day sickness. Even her body was betraying her.

Cat believed that the constant vomiting meant the baby wasn't doing well. She believed that the champagne she drank that one night had damaged the fetus. She worried that perhaps she had betrayed the baby. She was convinced there was something wrong with the pregnancy. She knew it regardless of what the doctor said.

It was 1973. Abortion on demand had just become legal in New York State. Cat told Marcel that she couldn't have the baby. She told him that she had arranged to have a legal abortion in a hospital.

Everything in their lives came to a dead stop.

Cat took the bus to the hospital on a Friday. She brought money for cab fare back to the apartment. She scheduled some vacation days from work to recover.

Marcel left town with his brother. Marcel had never met his father. It was that very weekend his brother Charles offered to take him South to meet his father and show Marcel where they'd all been born.

Saturday afternoon, Cat woke up scratching at her arm.

“Leave that IV alone,” an unfamiliar voice reprimanded.

Cat realized she was in the hospital and the ‘procedure’ was done. When she could stand and pee, the attendant asked her how she was getting home. She told him she was taking a cab. She gave him a business card with the number of a car service. The charge nurse called the cab. She waited at the front door of the hospital's lobby. The rain had washed the leaves of the bare-armed trees. Winter was near.

She was OK at home. She slept. She cried. She listened to music. She slept.

A few nights later the chain was rattling on the door of the apartment like death in the throat of person's final breath. It became an angry rattle. Getting louder, the clatter woke her. The door was banging open and shut, open and shut. Like a fist pounding against sheetrock. The chain broke and the door flapped open. The door slammed shut. Footsteps methodically strode down the hallway to the bedroom.

Cat lay very still. A dark male figure entered the doorway like a shadow backlit from the hall. Something in his hand glinted silver. He undid his belt. She never moved. Each muscle in her body imitated paralysis. Her body set in silence with the tonic immobility of a frightened mouse in the jaws of a predator.

He placed his body besides hers. She recognized the blade and the hand who held it. He laid it on her throat.

She remembered a report she'd heard on the radio. It had commemorated the Kitty Genovese murder.

“Most murders occur between people who know each other. Kitty Genovese's murder was an anomaly. An anonymous, random coupling of two strangers, a murder and a rape...”

The story had gone on.

“Don't move, don't scream,” he whispered his command.

Cat knew who it was. She stayed as still as possible. She made no sound as he penetrated her, as the edge of the cold steel blade lay on the pounding artery of her neck. The phrase, ‘most murders occur between people who know each other,’ coursed through her consciousness.

When he finished she heard him whisper, “If you ever tell anyone this happened, you will never survive.” Then he fell into a drunken, sleeping stupor.

Cat thought about murdering him right there with his own knife and imagined him dying in the pool of his own dark red blood. Then she wondered how long she'd be in prison. She didn't know if it was illegal for a man to rape his wife in the state of New York.

After some time, she got up. She took a shower. She was numb for a long time. Afterwards, in silence she bided her time.

Marcel left in the darkest February Cat had ever known despite the forest of white ice left by a dangerous winter storm. She filed with the courts and waited the year's separation that it took for a no-fault New York divorce.

Cat survived.

