

Some Things You Never Forget

by Michael D. Brown

We were having one of our big arguments. I don't remember now what it was about. We were always arguing about something and usually the root of the disagreement was money or the lack of it. She said, "You'd forget your head if it wasn't attached to your body." I remember that because she said it frequently. No, I don't remember what actually started the argument, but I remember hearing those words. Some things you never forget, especially if they are repeated frequently. I cannot hear her voice saying those words, now, I have forgotten its timber, its pitch, but I remember the words.

I remember the first time I kissed her, or she kissed me. I don't really remember who kissed whom, but I remember the taste on the edge of her tongue. We kissed each other so many times over the years. I don't remember the reason for each kiss. Sometimes it was because we were going out and it was our habit to kiss each other before leaving the apartment. Sometimes we were kissing to make up after one of our arguments. Sometimes it was just one more thing to do while we were having sex, or because we were greeting each other after having been separated for one reason or another. But none of those kisses ever tasted like that first one did. I know because I always expected one to. I remembered that soft minty, herbal taste. Maybe it is because none ever tasted that way again that I don't clearly remember any of the others nor the specific reasons for kissing in those instances. I was searching for a remembered taste.

I remember the last time we said goodbye to each other. We did not kiss nor had we argued. We just mutually came to a decision to end our relationship. I felt a little sad. She appeared to be feeling sad. We had lived together for six and a half years and we had dated two or three times a week for three years before that. She moved

into my apartment, and then when we decided to end the relationship, she chose to move out, though I told her she could stay and I would move, if she wanted it that way. "No, " she said, "You stay. You'll never find another place for the kind of rent you're paying here." I had lived there for eleven years at that point, more than half of those with her. She went to live with her sister for a while, in Philadelphia's Central City, until she could find a place of her own. She said it was like a mini-Manhattan. I wound up moving anyway--too many memories attached to the apartment. I don't remember clearly the day she moved in with me, but I distinctly remember the day she left, and how sad I felt that evening. I drank a bottle and a half of Turning Leaf California Chardonnay and talked to the cat. He had nothing to offer by way of commiseration, only let me know when it was time to feed him. I was so bombed by that point I spilled half of the catfood on the floor beside his dish. I guess he was offended because it was still there in the morning although he had eaten the portion that landed in the dish. Cara sent a friend to pick up her things that weekend to drive them down to Philly. Since she had not come for her things herself, and I figured her friend wouldn't know, I left a sweater she had worn two days before she left up on the shelf in the closet. I told her friend, "I guess that's everything," and helped her take Cara's stuff down in the elevator and out to her Volkswagen. Then I went back up to the apartment and took the sweater out of the closet and held it to my nose to see if it had that herbal, minty smell and it could take me back nine years, but it smelled like clean wool, nothing more.

I remember the last time we spoke over the telephone. I called her sister to wish her a Merry Christmas this past December and I guess I wanted to find out how Cara was doing. I mean, her sister and I were never that close and I had never called her on the holidays before, but I did this time. We exchanged pleasantries. Then I asked, "How's Cara doing?"

"Hold on," she said, "I'll put her on." She was still living there ten months after leaving Manhattan.

There was a moment or two of silence and I could picture her sister holding out the phone to Cara and telling her it was me, and Cara saying in a whisper, "I don't think I want to speak to him," and her sister saying, "Oh, go ahead. He only wants to wish you happy holidays."

Finally, Cara spoke into the phone. "How are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm fine. Merry Christmas, Cara."

"Merry Christmas to you too."

"Still haven't found a place? I didn't expect you'd still be at your sister's"

"Oh, I'll be here for a while, yet," she answered, "Money's a little tight. I'm getting by all right, but I'm not quite ready to go out on my own yet. I'm saving for the day. What about you?"

"I moved. It's a much smaller place, at almost the same rent. It's a little cheaper, but I keep bumping into the furniture. I moved about two months after you went to Philly. The cat wandered off during the move. He never came home again, at least not here, nor to the other place."

"I heard, " she said, "through friends. Well, you take care. And have a happy holiday."

"Cara..." I started to say something else, but she had hung up. I don't remember now what it was I was going to say. I just remember how the conversation seemed truncated. I started to put the receiver down, but brought the earpiece back to my nose. I know. It was a silly thing to do, thinking I might smell the scent I had been searching for. I didn't, but some things you'll never forget.

