

Broken

by Phillis Ideal

I parked, stepped onto the curb and slipped on the wet pavement. My purse went flying, tossing its contents onto the concrete and cracking my powder compact. Shards from the shattered mirror flew everywhere. “*Oh, well,*” I thought. “*Don't sweat the small stuff. This is a day to celebrate.*”

Today I was going to tour Claire's new plant that had been her dream as long as I had known her. She was an avid environmentalist and had patented a process that combined ground plastic with asphalt, which made stronger highways and recycled trash. She said the factory was in full production and wanted to give me some souvenir plastic confetti to experiment adding to my acrylic paint. I was excited.

I rang the doorbell. Claire opened the door, wearing jeans and a T-shirt. I opened my arms to give her a big hug. She stiffened and pulled away. Stunned, my lips parted, but I couldn't think of a single word to say. I swallowed over a sudden lump in my throat and followed her into the building. I expected to see the plant machinery moving, crushing, and transporting mounds of plastic. The building was silent. She took me into a large room that was empty except for a mound of white substance in the center of the room and a smaller pile of color flecked plastic confetti in the far corner. She didn't say a word. She pointed to the small pile, and gave me a child's painted bucket and matching shovel to spoon the plastic into the container.

I turned to ask, “What is going on? Don't you remember me?” But she was gone.

My mind raced and I looked around the room to get my bearings. Twenty feet above me the room was divided into small glass cubicles. In one space, Claire, heavily made-up and, dressed in a very short Women's Army Corp uniform, faced her boyfriend. They each held their champagne glasses high, exchanged toasts, which I couldn't hear, and downed drink after drink. Just when I thought

they were oblivious to my existence, they moved very close to the glass, looked down at me, and broke into raucous sidesplitting laughter. They again turned to each other and performed a stylized jitterbug swing routine with a high kick finale.

Transfixed by this strange scene, I hadn't noticed that the room was gradually filling up with white powder, dumped by a large earthmoving excavator. Some of the airborne powder hit my lip, and I knew I was in a pit of cocaine. A wave of panic rumbled through my body that I would be buried. *"I have to get out of here."* I fumbled in my purse to find my cell phone to call for help. My hand didn't come up with a phone, only my compact with a broken mirror.

I shuffled through the cocaine toward the lit up EXIT sign above the door.

