

The Glass Bowl

by Phillis Ideal

One of the classic signs of spring in New York is the lines get longer outside ice cream shops, and the streets become crowded with people walking, skateboarding, and window shopping. The layers of down jackets, scarves, silk underwear, socks, boots and paraphernalia worn to endure the cold are put aside. The one surviving glove is tossed out. People are closer to their own skin and everyone else's. With all this diversity pumping on the street, the jarring notes of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* should be blasted from a loud speaker.

It was the first beautiful day of spring. And I was also in this parade, wistful that I was walking alone and wishing I was sharing this glorious day with someone special. Walking in front of me on Second Avenue was a black couple, probably in their late teens. Large of perfectly matched size, wearing jeans and T-shirts, they walked in synch, each leading with the same foot. The young man had his baseball hat on backwards, and the young woman wore an identical cap facing forward. Each drank a king sized coke. Other than walking, their only gesture was the rhythmic passing of a potato chip bag. Their full flow of self-absorption held them together in a kind of slow moving cocoon. They were very much in their own world and oblivious to the awakened city all around them.

I caught a fragment of a charged argument as I passed them. The young man said, "Well, I am talking about love." And the young woman with equal volume checkmated with, "Well, I am talking about money." Though their lives were none of my business, this exchange prompted the revisiting of a scene from my own life.

It was a Sunday twenty years ago, a spring day as beautiful as this one, and my boyfriend and I were walking through Greenwich Village after a day at the Twenty Sixth Street flea market. He was very bright and charismatic, able to handle any high level job, and

was often hired in that capacity. But part and parcel of his unique personality was he consistently ran afoul of authority figures. He started with good intentions for the general well being of the company, then sided with the employees against the boss. This never went over well with his employers, who in succession repeated, "This is just not working out." It took him about a year to cycle through a job and start over again in a new position. Though my contributions to our relationship were in no way flawless, our financial foundation was always on shaky ground.

On our way home from the flea market we passed a small flower shop and stopped to admire the window bursting with beautiful blossoms. The centerpiece of the window display was a gorgeous glass bowl filled with floating gardenias. I exclaimed, "Look at that bowl! What a beautiful bowl! I have never seen such a beautiful bowl!" It was made of roughly cast, thick, greenish glass that abstracted reflections and light patterns due to its uneven thickness and wavy surface.

We were drawn into this shop filled with daffodils, narcissus, hyacinths, tulips, lilacs and all sizes of orchids, teamed with grasses and ferns to form colorful and fragrant arrangements. The natural beauty, light and color presented in this small space were intoxicating, and banished any dull mood left from winter.

We left the shop, looking back, not wanting the ease of this vibrant day to end. But it was late, and we both had begun to feel the pressures of getting ready for the new week. Right before parting to do our various errands, my boyfriend said, "Can you lend me \$50? I will have money tomorrow. This record collector is coming in the morning to buy some of my old jazz LPs. I want to pick up some groceries and things for the house." I gave him the money, and we both went our separate ways to meet later at home.

In no time at all I heard his key in the door and his footsteps bounding up the steps to our loft. He was holding a big tissue paper wrapped package, secured with a green bow and a sprig of lavender. It was the glass bowl. With the money I had given him, he had bought the bowl, something I would not have purchased, as we were

barely able to pay the rent. I bowed my head to hide my face and feigned careful attention to unwrapping the gift. I didn't want him to see the shifts from disappointment to anger that were moving across my face. I was trying not to lash out but wanted to scream, "Oh, no, this is the last thing we need! The last thing that I need!" But anger was not going to fix it. Before going into a well-practiced lecture about money that always ended with each of us feeling miserably isolated from one another, I closed my mouth. I felt the warmth of his smiling, shining eyes and simply said, "thank you." His heart was in the right place, and he wanted to give me a memento of a beautiful day spent together. It was a lovely bowl and I graciously accepted it.

Several months later he again had a job, and the glass bowl made another appearance at a celebratory party at our house. It was a festive affair with friends, jazz musicians, and a table spread with beautiful food, the result of several days of shopping and preparation. I had made a delicious warm potato salad, scooped the lavish amount of hot potatoes and spices into the glass bowl, placed it dead center on our linen-draped round oak table, and surrounded it with many bowls and platters of food. It was summer, and we were out on the patio, barbecuing, chatting, laughing, and listening to music. Through these sounds we heard a mysterious crash, a sound that leaped from a crack into a shatter, almost like a gunshot. Those closest to the dining room hurried inside to catch a slow moving landslide of potato salad spreading in all directions, a white lumpy blanket covering the other dishes. Shards of glass were everywhere: on the table, in the food, on the floor and some had flown over to the windowsill. All the food had to be thrown away and new food brought in from a local delicatessen. The glamorous and elegant table arrangement became a mass of food in plastic containers, a meal thrown together in less than an hour. Everyone was initially stunned by the explosion but soon laughed and named the event the "potato poltergeist". The party hardly missed a beat and everyone had a very good time.

We lived together through the summer and fall, but sometime in the winter, we too made momentous shifts and broke apart.

