

Breathing

by sara t.

Later, would come Anger. Later, much later, would come Rage. For now there was quiet. For now there was relief. She slowly turned her back to the flashing ambulance lights outside, the slow blur of red and orange still behind her eyes. She moved her body forward one step in front of the other, slowly, as if there was a delay between her brain and her legs. Her breathing which had been held tightly was released softly, small puffs of vapor forming in the chilled stairwell. Years later this would strike her as more of a feeling than an actual condition of the temperature. It was the end of a New York City summer, the heat and humidity thick all around. But in her body it was an unforgiving winter, the memory of pain always leaving her cold. As she prepared to ascend the staircase leading back to her apartment, images of the last minutes replayed in her mind in slow motion. She shuddered, recalling his eyes on her, unseeing, dead, the honey colored eyes, round topaz, reflecting the light above but nothing else. None of the light and laughter. None of the shame and sadness. The eyes which appraised and approved, denied or dismissed were empty now. She would have preferred anger, fear, contempt, even hate, to this Emptiness, this Stillness. This Stillness which was Death, this Stillness which clenched at her heart, pulling it out of her body, leaving it hovering somewhere Separate, Scared, Desperate. She was aware of a voice, a primal sound, a keening "Live", it cried. "Please live" it pleaded. "Don't die" it begged. Then she realized the sounds were hers. She was beyond reason, beyond sense. She worked on pure animal instinct which told her to pound hard on his chest. With her fists she pounded frantically looking for signs of life. With her love she willed him back to life until his eyes changed and he saw her once more.

The change in his eyes as he came alive would be imperceptible to an outsider. But she wasn't an outsider. She had lost herself in those eyes and seen her reflection in them countless

times. She had lived in those eyes. In the embrace of those eyes, she existed. And so when he saw her once more, she stopped the pounding. The emergency help she called for arrived shortly after and asked him questions. He was incoherent and confused and so they were obliged to take him to hospital.

They must have wondered at her quietness when they arrived, her detachment and seeming calm as if this was an everyday occurrence. It wasn't, but although it had happened before, this time was different. This time, he had died for a moment on her bed. And now he was alive, incoherent but alive. Maybe the calmness was shock, maybe it was awe. Maybe it was because when you lose for a moment the Love of your Life it is too much to bear. And so you shut down. You hear things, you see things, but you don't feel things. You just breathe, In, Out, In, Out. And you make it through the moment.

Now she stood there turning the knob and entering into the light and warmth of her apartment where moments ago, he had walked on the side of Death and somehow came out on the side of Life. For Now. Later, months later, even years later the Rage would come. The Anger would gnaw at her. The tears of despair would cloud her eyes and the images would haunt her nights. But for now, for now he was Alive. And as she climbed into bed where a short while ago his eyes lost her and then found her, she was relieved. Because he was still in the world and therefore she Was.

