

Renewal

by Tiffany R. White

At first he thought it was a cat she was holding, swathed in a white, fleece blanket. She held it tight to her breasts, rocking on each foot, tilting one way and the other, her head repeating the same bend towards the figure you'd do if it was a child. She rubbed the figure against her cheek.

"Lynette. Lynette."

She didn't answer. The figure's foot slipped beneath the blanket. He looked up then down over the bridge they were standing on. She kept rocking.

"Where did you find the child? Where did you get him?"

"I don't know, Malcolm. I don't remember."

It had been months since she had been home. He did not know where she had gone. They met here today, on the covered bridge that crossed a wide stream, about four feet deep. There was a bank leading to the stream beneath the bridge, a maze of weeds, moss, grass, and sand. She had said she wanted to plant a flower by the bridge, new life, start again.

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Since she had been gone he did not turn on the light when he had come home from work. He had a few dry cell batteries laying in the drawer in the kitchen and he'd put them in a wind up weather radio and listen to the forecast. He didn't know where she had gone. She could not be safe. She was a little slow and had few friends.

Back at the old house in Lawrenceville out near Pittsburgh, she took care of him, the house, cooking and cleaning. She'd dance while she did it and he'd watch and smile and grab her around her

tiny waist and they'd make love anywhere where darkness wasn't, hope alive and distilled in their youth.

They moved to Seattle because of his job. He needed a better one, an opportunity to fall short of the American Dream.

So they came and they consecrated their new home by making love in the shower, his body warm against the cool glass of the shower door, her skin caramel and elusive as he tried to grab hold of her. They did this often, as if the new city were not a barrier, the little money they were making not a threat to their happiness. Then, a few weeks after their four month anniversary in the new home, she left.

These are the memories he had when he would wind the radio and listen to where storms were headed to and from. She could not be alright. She had very little money, not enough to find a place to make camp for all the time she had been gone. He remembered the light peeking in the windows of their home in Lawrenceville when they were making love and so he never turned the lights on. She called him almost a year later.

"Malcolm?"

"Lynette?"

"Come right away. By the bridge over near the park."

"Why?"

"I'm sorry."

He didn't say anything.

"I want to plant a flower. A flower is a sign of life. I want to bury the past and start anew. Start by planting this flower where it will grow, the water lapping at it like a little puppy."

"Where did you go? Come home. Where were you?"

"Just come. Come to the bridge."

She hung up. He got out of his chair and went to his desk without turning on the light, fumbled for his car keys and went to the bridge.

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He found her there with the figure in her arms. He did not approach her. He stood looking at her, the sky, the water beating its way to some end, some place he did not know but wished he was.

"Who is this child? Is it mine?"

"It's my flower."

"Let me hold the him."

He started to walk towards her. The baby was still, its foot was tinged blue.

"Lynette. Lynette. Please, let me help you."

She walked off the bridge and down the embankment. There she placed the baby in the maze of weeds and moss and grass.

"Lynette," he said. He reached out to her. Her eyes held no gaze, she looked right past him.

"We can be new again," she said. She walked up the embankment and stood looking out over the bridge.

He started to walk towards the car. He looked back to the bridge where Lynette still stood staring blankly down into the stream, hugging herself tightly.

