

# Two Truths & a Lie

*by* Tim Jones-Yelvington

That night I went for a walk. I walked down a path I had never walked before, a path along the river. This path was composed of wood chips, buttressed on one side by the water and on the other by jutting rocks and stands of saplings. Kayakers paddled past. Ducks waddled along the shore. It was dusk. I examined the ground, the pattern the sun made as it shone through the trees, and thought this must be what was meant by "dappled."

The riverfront seemed to me a strange oasis. I nearly forgot I was still in the city. A curious smell wafted off the river, a smell reminiscent of a wet towel left too long in a backpack after a visit to the beach. This smell was not, as one might expect, entirely unpleasant. Rather, it transported me to another place. I imagined myself in another, poorer country, the sort of country where so polluted a river would provide a vital lifeline for hordes of indigents. Most of the people I passed along the path were Mexicans from the neighborhood to the West or Arabs from the neighborhood to the North, and so it was easy to imagine myself somewhere far away.

I thought about another man, a man who is my physical opposite, a man named Gerry, a friend of a friend. Gerry is broad, stocky and brown where I am lanky and pale. His wide arms are wrapped by artful tattoos. I remembered how decisive his palm felt pressed against my lower back. I thought about everything I'd let him do to me were I ever to see him again.

I rounded a corner, and the path opened onto a wide pool beneath a concrete dam. The water pushed and frothed, producing white foam. Blue jeans hugged the rounded buttocks of Mexican boys with fishing poles.

I imagined how thrilling it would be if, as I traveled back down the

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path toward home, I found Gerry waiting for me around a corner, behind a tree, having followed me. I would press my back against a rock, point my heels heavenward, pull him into me and hum his real name-- "Gerardo, Gerardo, Gerardo..."

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The night before, I had gone to a bar. This was the sort of bar where everyone reminds you of somebody else you already know. I spotted my former English teacher on the dance floor, tatted up in black lace and crimson lipstick, the broad arc of her once-dowdy bangs having transformed into something vulgar. My hairdresser, a Yugoslavian immigrant from the chop shop down the block, occupied a table near the door. I had once suspected him of flirting, when, as he pulled my hair through his fingers, he said, "You been to Albania? I think I see you there once." At the time, it reminded me of an article I'd read as a graduate student, about gay cruising zones in some former Yugoslavian city, where ethnic Albanians upend social hierarchies by claiming insertive positions.

Leaning into the bar, I felt a pair of hands settle on my shoulders and turned to see an unfamiliar woman. She wore a sequined tube top, fishnet stockings and that 1920's hairstyle that has recently been all the rage.

"Would you like to play a game?" she said, placing her mouth against my ear and whispering.

"What kind of a game?" I said.

"This game is called two truths and a lie. You will tell me three things. One of them will be a lie. I will guess which."

I thought for a moment. I said, "I have never kissed a woman. I have never been afraid of sex. I was twelve years old when I lost my

virginity."

The woman pulled her body around and placed herself between me and the bar. She planted her lips against mine and pushed her tongue into my mouth. She pulled away.

"Now you have either told two lies and a truth," she said. "Or nothing has changed."

"That is most certainly true," I said.

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As I walked back home along the path beside the river, I was thrown to the ground by a powerful shove. I lost my balance and struck a rock. I wheezed, shot through with pain. A heavy body settled atop mine and pushed the air from my lungs. I felt hot breath against my neck and heard a zipper unzip. Hands grabbed my pants and yanked them downward, burning my thighs. I felt someone push inside me. He did not take his time. I could not breathe to relax my muscles. They remained rigid and resistant. Each thrust felt like fire. It is likely I bled.

I never saw my assailant. I do not know his color, or the size of his shoes. And after he left me, as I lay upon the rock in a fetal curl, I had no way of knowing whether all I remembered had actually come to pass.

