



## SEE AND BE SEEN

*by Joseph Newfield*

He lies in bed, fighting sleep, eyes fixed on her slack face as she sleeps beside him. He fights giving in to solitude, fights departing alone into his own unconscious. Clinging to her image he finally does slip away, his eyelids dropping shut like shrouds.

They sleep. When she awakes, a glow of blue moonlight fills the room and his face is there, closed and urgent and inches from hers. In a dream she'd been flying, soaring over a quilt of New England rooftops dotting wide rolling stretches of green. Now, a familiar, exhausting sadness forms a grounding weight in her chest. Her head begins to spin slightly and just then his eyes float open. They find hers and a smile curves his mouth. He moves to touch her lips with his and her mind goes blank and her heart lifts. Their eyes, too close to focus, blink slowly. The room is silent for 10, 15 seconds, until the gentle pop of their lips separating. They kiss again, and soft clicks and pops mingle with the blue moonlight. Their bodies press together in an effortless fit that erases all weight from them.

In the morning, lying by herself, she finds she can no longer stand.

The weight in her chest has been growing, lately spreading into her limbs and when she attempts to



swing her feet to the carpeted floor they land like deadweight. She tries to stand but falls forward to her hand and knees, landing with a pained grunt.

“My God, are you okay?” he calls over the sound of his peeing.

She is silent, then says, numbly, “No.”

He finds her beside the bed on all fours, her head drooped.

“Oh, honey,” he says, dropping to the floor beside her. He slides beneath her, wraps his arms up around her and she collapses down against him.

“Are you really there?” she asks, her head in the crook of his neck.

“Yes, yes, I’m right here.”

“I can barely feel you.”

He hugs her more tightly and she feels the weight in her limbs diminish. His head buries into her neck and she feels a steaminess from his tears. Emotion wells in her throat, and she says, “I love you.” He nods against her. She adds, her voice more steady, “You can see that I can no longer do this.” His body becomes tense around her but he is silent. After some time he loosens his arms around her. She stands unsteadily and looks down at him. His face is a twist of longing and helplessness. Their gazes hold for a moment and then she walks from the room.



Five years earlier they stood outside a dance club at midnight. She urged him in, her eyes sparkling with excitement, “Come on.”

Down a narrow flight of stairs they descended into a room alive with spinning lights and whirling people. They began dancing, independent but connected as they moved around open areas of the floor, sharing grinning stares at caged go-go dancers. Hours later they were leaving, pressing through a crowded smoky lounge room toward the exit when he offered his hand back to her. Her hand leapt into his, joining them for the first time, and he felt the two of them rise from the floor. With a smile he looked back at her and she was laughing as they trod on air out into the early Boston morning.

Fifty-one years later he sits beside her on a bench overlooking the Corsiere River in southern France. He places his paints next to hers. Morning sun casts soft shadows on the town of Estaing, across the river, and rising in the hills beyond the town is a medieval castle, the intended subject of their painting today.

They watch the castle as though it were a living thing whose habits they seek to understand. It is



grey and menacing, monstrous by comparison with tiny Estaing in the foreground. Shadows shorten as the morning passes and at last she begins tracing lines in pencil on her canvas. She mixes her acrylics into several shades of gray and begins painting. He watches. She switches to a pale green wash and covers most of the canvas. Then, in a slightly darker green, she adds more lines, joining the gray lines. It looks like nothing in particular and specifically nothing like a castle. She gets up and stretches her legs and he takes her place and begins painting on the same canvas. Using a thin brush he begins adding dark gray patches of varying tone. After some time the shadows on the castle begin to emerge on the canvas. She is standing next to him, hands on her hips, smiling as she watches him work.

“Mom! Are you guys coming back for lunch?” Marielle, their daughter, is walking down the street toward them. She and her husband live in La Corsiere, a hamlet of five ancient stone homes in the hills that rise around Estaing. She has her mother’s buoyant step, though slowed a bit by her round, pregnant belly.

“I think we’re going to stay here. honey. We’ve got some food and we’re just getting started.”

Hours later they take a break from painting and pause to sit next to each other. He produces a set of cards and a look of relish sparkles in her eye.

“Do you want to start over,” she asks, “or pick up where we left off last time?”



“Depends on how badly you want to loose,” he replies. Let’s just pick up from last time.” He consults a scrap of paper, “you were ahead by 40.”

“Okay.” She laughs as she says it.

He begins dealing. They’re playing gin and she wins the first hand with matter-of-fact ease. He wins the next three hands and closes the gap to 17. It’s his turn to deal and as the cards fall to the bench they begin to flutter and twist before they land. He looks at her and she is smiling serenely at him as the two of them rise up above the river and above the town. Holding the remainder of the deck in one hand he joins his free hand with hers. Below them are rolling hills, a mixture of dense green trees and yellow-green pasture. A few stone structures, including Marielle’s home, dot the land. They see Marielle, a speck heading back up hill, the bounce in her step visible even from up there. On a hill beside the house Marielle’s two-year-old son is having lunch with some neighbors.

Floating overhead, the two of them pull each other closer and their bodies fit, as they always have.

Many years earlier, at a time very close to now he calls her, “Can I come get you? I want to show you something.”



Having answered the call with a bright, “hello-o” she now hesitates and then she says, “Okay.”

He picks her up and they drive to Golden Gate Park, wending their way along JFK drive to the buffalo paddock. Several of the huge hairy beasts stand together on the far side of the paddock. He says to her, “Those are real. Isn’t that crazy? What are they doing here? I have no idea, but they’re real.” She resists the tug of a smile.

He leads them up a path over a ridge and down to a field and then stops and produces from his backpack a baseball and two gloves. They begin playing catch. She observes with some bemusement his awkward throws and catches. He's not completely lame, but he clearly has little experience playing baseball. His glove is small and has almost no wear.

“Why do I suck at baseball?” he suddenly calls to her. “My dad was good. But I’m something like the worst baseball player ever. The worst player without an excuse.”

“I think it's just because you haven't played much,” she says, but the grin on her face suggests she agrees: it's astonishing, and hysterical, how awkward he is.

“But here I am,” he continues as he lunges to make a catch. “For all the world to see.”

After about a half hour of tossing the ball he says, “C'mon”, gathers the gloves and ball back into his backpack and leads them west toward Ocean Beach. The weather is clear and not too cold as they



emerge from the park, pass the Beach Chalet and then reach the sand. He produces a towel from his pack, unfurls it atop the sand, and they sit. The bright disk of the afternoon sun hangs over the water.

He faces her and begins in a paced voice, "Much of this sand was once living things. We're here for a flash and then we're gone. There are few things that are so true. So inescapably true.

"I want to tell you about one more thing that I know, one more thing that is inescapably true. Something that cannot change because it's bigger than me or you. It's what's inside my heart. It has been there since I was born and will live on someplace long after I'm gone. It's not easy to see in there, darling, but at last I have, and I want to share it with you, because it is beautiful.

"This is what's in there: I love you. I will always love you. These are the easiest words I've ever said. I want to say them over and over and over. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you."

She sighs, a long, deflating sound, and her eyes glisten.

He continues, "I want only one thing from you. Let me love you."

She hugs him and after five years the weight in both their chests is gone and they feel themselves grow lighter and lighter until they lift from the blanket, their bodies entwined and faces and breath hot against each other. They float up into the sky, and watch as below them in all directions the world extends.