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explain. I don't want to die. There's a

THROUGH THE WALL by Hugh Fox

"I don't want him to die, I really love the guy, but...."

"Love the guy? You're not gay."
"You can love someone without being gay."

"OK, but he's got liver cancer and...."

Sitting on the hill-terrace overlooking the ocean that's maybe a tenth of a mile away beyond the forest. It was best this way. So the waves never got to you even in stormy weather.

"I feel so guilty feeling the way I do about you. At the same time it's the most, I almost said 'spiritual,' part of my life. It's where Korans and Torahs and New Testaments and the Hindu sacred books ought to be...you in the center of my altar."

"And you in the center of mine."

"But what about the flesh, desires, my orchiectomy. I'm postmeno -- accent on the MEN! -- pausal just like you."

"We're like two angels , all wings and haloes."

"All ghosts, you mean."

2

"Dogs do their thing, birds, rats, but they don't build churches."

"Neither do I, but....," he gets up, windy, the sea, something coming in across the pacific, "It's so hard to thousand things I want to hang on for. I walk around in Old Town and I'm in love with the river, the older, I almost said ancient buildings, old restaurants and art galleries and candle stores. I don't know, I was raised to believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. You know, the creator, the whole schmear, God was everywhere, every time we went out into the country, up to the mountains, even in downtown everywhere, and then slowly it drifted away, I was a Buddhist for a while and then that drifted away too,

and then I met you and all

"Stick to the Latin, I can get that. I'm still in the fifteenth century."

mv...waddava call it, transcendentalism

got involved with you. You became life

medieval altar in. Baruch atta Adonai,

after death, the garden of Eden, a

cathedral to walk into and find a

Elohainu Melech haolam....."

"The fiftyith century B.C., Holy Art Thou God, God forever King-Queen of the universe...everything forever sacred."

"We're like two books on theology on the same shelf next to each other."

3.

"I don't really want him to die and I don't really want to leave Solange. If there could just be two of us, you married to him and her married to me, and then ..."

"There are our other selves living eternally in never-ever-land, Eden-Anaku, our walrus-selves, superegos, I don't know what to call them, not Mister/Mz Everyday but our Afterdeaths, our Never-Die-Selves. That's what we'be been from the first, not flesh and seduction but our superselves....do I ever really 'leave' you?"

"Do I ever 'leave' you?"
"You're like my Dream-Me..."
"And you mine."

"Anything else else comes in, canes, walkers, wheelchairs, deaths of any 'others,' and we're still ONE...even our own deaths..."

Sun almost down now, but it never went down inside them, the moon never vanished, they didn't ever have to touch but just sit there now, let what else happened happen, the little sylph girl and Mr. Keyboard their ghost-angel, neo-real selves expanded out into the Eternal everything-to-yetcome NOW.

BEST PRAYERS by Matt Dennison

He could stand it no longer, had almost crushed his one black hat in his hands. Crushed his desire to stand and dissent. Salvation was good and fine, he was all for it, but this was too much. He saw the stiff women gazing straight at the new boy-preacher from Boston, nodding their heads in blessed agreement, their smiles relaxing into masks of final, redemptive victory. Hell, didn't he drive his old buggy a good seven miles to make church? He, a full-grown man with a ranch but—thank God—no wife of his own?

And for what? To hear some wet-eared boy from Back East rail against that which had elevated his thoughts many a time and many times higher than contemplating the next church social with its gaggle of manhungry women?

Why, this boy-preacher was no better than your average woman! Had obviously never spent a long night coaxing life from a suffering mother, to say nothing of partaking of that which he berated as the common cause of all sin.

He slowly unfolded his lanky frame until he towered above the rest of the flock. Heads turned. Women whispered. As the boy-preacher's beady eyes widened behind rimless spectacles, he remembered how these dried-up creatures had run Reverend Hanes out of town as reward for his one moment of fleshly weakness -- as if any man could resist Ada Parkins in her silk nightdress -- looked at the hat in his hands, the brim rolled into a sweatstained mess, and thought of his mare in need of a little matrimonial salvation in regard to the shy stallion in the far field.

He had seen salvation at work, had held it in his hands; had fought for salvation, of man and beast alike. The salvation of life, here, now, in which Eternity played no part, did not matter in the least when the life of a prize bull or a snake-bit man hung in the balance

of your earthly hands.

He studied the stained-glass windows, the flat, white ceiling that he had painted, and thought of the cattle, wild horses and the hard, unforgiving skies of his ranch.

"Brother Simpson, have you something to add?" The Bostonian was speaking to him. Had he something to say? Something that would be understood by the women, backed up by the men? "No," he stammered, looking at his hat. "No," he muttered as he marched up the aisle he would never walk down.

Outside, he saw the great day, full of life, color, and—for a while yet—the clean, wide-open feeling of freedom. He breathed hard, turned and straight-armed the door, oblivious to the faces more fearful than condemning which lifted to his.

"*Why, then*," he thundered,
"*if the Devil be drink, are my best
prayers
drunk!*"

The Shift by Indira Chandrasekhar

The water shifted from grey-brown to slate-black in choppy, circular motion. As Kay moved she recalled the wonder of seaside holidays when she would lose herself in the brilliance that surged underneath. Today's water drew an opaque veil over the world below. Not even Nasir's feet were visible, feet that had floated so tender and loyal alongside hers. He was no longer beside her.

Nasir was not a good floater, couldn't let go as Kay could. She gave herself up to the movement, didn't fight and flail and strain her neck to keep her head above the water as Nasir did. Perhaps that's why it came to her first, the idea, the plan, the call-it-what-you-will. At first Nasir couldn't accept the notion. 'What? Just give up, let go of life so easily?' But when the possibility that they would drift together into eternity penetrated his sensibility, it was as if it was he who had conceived it. She suggested the sea as their passage. 'That's beautiful', he said. 'The sea, we can float to the horizon side by side.'

Now they were in the sea and Nasir wasn't beside her. Kay wasn't worried. The first time she took her clothes off for him as he stood before her, still and shy and compelled, they gave themselves up completely to each other. Like ancient texts, mantras of the past, they repeated, 'I am completed Nasir.', 'As am I. You complete me.'

'I am pregnant Nasir.' Kay imagined herself saying it.

The first time she imagines telling him they are seated at the breakfast table. Light shines on her face, on the tea in glass cups, on drops glistening on his wet hair. Her lips form the words, 'I am pregnant Nasir'. She can see that. But she can't see Nasir's face, doesn't know how he feels.

The second time she imagines it, they are walking through the rain. It is romantic, the soft drizzle, the coolness, the laughter. But the street is filled with trash and the water is tainted with infection. She is simultaneously repelled and joyous. But Nasir, how does he feel? She is about to find out when he grabs her elbow to help her avoid a treacherous puddle.

Kay resolves to look into his eyes when she does tell him.

'I'll never forget the first time I tasted chilli bhajias.'

'What are they?'

'I will prepare it for you. Green chillies dipped in chick-pea batter. Deep fried.'

'Whoa, sounds hot. Did your grandmother make them for you, your Nani?' Kay was pleased to be able say "Nani" as if she too grew up with the word.

'Oh no, Nani would never give the children anything so hot. No, this happened when I was eight. My mother took my sister and myself and returned to her maternal home. But my grandfather told her, "You do not belong here. Return to your husband's family. Do you want to spoil your family name, children's name?" My mother cried all the way back. My sister and I ran up and down the train and she did not once stop us.'

Nasir took a deep breath and ran a hand over his face. 'Only now do I think of her sacrifice. I remembered the trip as a fantastic train ride on which, for the first time, I ate something that was not prepared in the home, something that I purchased myself with a ten rupee note my uncle gave me. I can still taste those bhajias, hot and fried.'

Kay held him close.

'Kay, I mourned them with all my soul, wished I too had gone in the explosion and not been cursed to be studying in America.' Veins stood out on Nasir's fore-arms, on his forehead. He took a breath and stroked her face. 'That was until I met you. You gave me purpose again. And love.' He looked earnestly into her face. 'It must never be spoilt Kay, our love. It must never spoil.'

They stood in the driveway and breathed in the moist, clear air of the woods. 'I don't want this moment to go away', Kay thought, 'this first step into my paradise.'

Kay showed him everything, the paintings, the books, the old creaking stairs up to the attic. She told him the history of the house, how the family shared it now.

'You pay rent for your own house to your own family?' Nasir's voice rose.

'Yeah, you know, my granddad bought this house in the thirties. No one lives here, it's a vacation place.'

Kay didn't want conflict, didn't want to echo the bitter voices of her parents asserting their differences. Taking Nasir's hand she said, 'Come on, come see the boat house, it's gorgeous. That's the first thing my parents would do, whatever the season, go out on the lake and declare their love.'

'I thought your parents were divorced', Nasir said.

'Yeah, they are.'
'But their love?'

'Spoiled. We stopped coming to the lake.'

'Come, follow, swim with me. I'll go real slow, past the rocks. After that we drift, don't push. Just drift.' Nasir nodded. His skin puckered faintly with the cold.

Kay laughed. 'Don't think about it and the cold will go away. Just one more stroke Nasir and you're clear. Just let go now, let go and float.'

'Kay, I am afraid. I hope I will float and not struggle to go back.' 'Remember Nasir, if we let go, we stay complete. Never have to see it spoil. We can just float away.'

'Into eternity together?'

The water seemed to shift, choppy and circular, from grey-brown to a slate-black but Nasir wasn't there beside her anymore.

Kay thought of the minute being floating inside her. 'I am pregnant Nasir,' she said.

Nasir appeared, mouthing words through the salt spray? How did he feel?

Taking Kay's hand, Nasir began to swim back to shore, awkward, yet shining with love.

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Landscape [n3] by J.A. Tyler

River goes to Ocean. Black Ocean red Ocean tan Ocean blue Ocean green Ocean. Ocean echoing. Ocean waves. Sound waves. Waves.

Zzzzzzzzzzzz.

Mountain has River. River is black River is red River is tan River is blue River is green River.

Too tight, this River on a Mountain this River going down a Mountain this River returning up a Mountain this River clinging to a Mountain this River cuddling a Mountain hugging a Mountain charming a Mountain singing to a Mountain and a Mountain range and a set of Mountains that stretch from side to side to side to side:

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZ.

Sky scoops up River and drops it down. Sky scoops up River and shreds it and returns it in pieces where it comes together and forms a River again and goes down a Mountain.

People do not drink from River. River is undrinkable. River is black because it is dying River is red because it is blooded. River is tan and River is green and River is blue because it is oiled and on fire and slicked. River burns. This River. The River that everyone must cross. The River leading to unpromised land. River goes to Land. River climbs down a Mountain. River goes to the Ocean. River moves.

Dip a toe in. Dip a foot in. Dip a mouth in

Choke and the words coming out noise:

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZ,

This is a World in collapse. This the World in collapse. This is the World's collapse. This is the Mountain and the Land and the Ocean and the Sky and the River. The River has joined in with this. The River has become part of this. The River has grown abused by this. The River is bruised by this. The River is bruised by this. The River is. The Boy is. The Girl is. The Land is the Ocean is the Sky is the Mountain is. Enter the River. Let it cover the ears. Drown.

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZ.

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