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A Father's Legacy

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Have you ever been hurt?
I was hurt when my parents separated to ultimately get a divorce. My girlfriend of five years turned to me one day and announced that she had fallen out of love with me and that it would be best for us never to see each other again. That hurt a lot. What had the most impact on me, though, was the death of my father. He died of unnatural causes. I guess you could say he died of an overdose. They said he was traveling at 82 mph when he hit the tree. I promised my mother that I'd never follow in those footsteps. I almost kept that promise.

My name's Bear Greenwood. I've been coming here a lot lately to look out over the ocean and think. Things are starting to get straight again and it's refreshing to be able to think with a clear mind. It got pretty bad there for a while. I'm sure a few people thought I'd never get over her. She was that kind of lady. Once she drew you in, once she took hold of you with her glamour and charm.

Have you ever been in love? I have. I barely made it.
I met her one night after a particularly hard work day. What the hell, days like that happen to the best of us. I think, perhaps, that I was chosen to give "the best of us" a rest. I believe that there are moments in our lives when we are very vulnerable and have no defense against pain or evil. They don't last long—just a fraction of a part of a second—and we are able to skip over them easily enough. Sometimes, however, other factors pry the break in our defenses farther apart, so that badness can slip in. One of these dreadful moments happened to me. It manifested itself as a sliver of time when I was most vulnerable to the seductive attraction of a free-spirited lady. This singular moment was like a frame on a reel of film that lasts for an infinitesimal part of a second and then vanishes. It was the moment into which evil slipped and took hold of my soul with the intention of tearing it to shreds slowly and painfully.

She was right in front of me.
"Go on," Terry had said, "she won't bite."
"No, no. I'm not looking for anything. Her type doesn't sit too well with me anyway."
"Look. You don't even know her."
"No. But I know about her. I'm not interested."
"But she's the best! She's not just the crutch, she's the wheelchair. Go on. Give it a try. You're in control, man."
"If you think so highly of her why don't you give it a try?"

"Because it's your moment and because mine's over there."

Slipping from his stool at the bar, Terry smiled deviously and swaggered over to a neighboring table where there were two females with legs to the ceiling and faces of ship-launching capability. How did he do it? The curiosity welled inside me and I began to wonder if maybe she could help.

She was interesting. She was interested. In fact, we hit it off from the very start. She sent a sensation through me that I'd never felt before. The feeling was ecstasy. As time went by it intensified. The recurring thought that we were made for each other kept swimming in and out of my psyche, making my whole body shiver with anticipation. It seemed strange to be feeling as I did so soon, but there was something about her that drew me in and took hold of me with a velvety, gentle embrace. A fire roared up deep within me and I needed to feel the heat.

I acquainted myself with her briefly, then brought her over to the table where Terry had gone.

"I'd like you to meet my new friend."

Terry leaned to me and whispered in my ear, "Not your type? Ha. Some judge of character you are. She seems to like you, too."

"Yes well. You know how it is with us shy types." My arrogance had surprised me but Terry didn't seem to mind. He just winked and turned to introduce the two pairs of legs. I slept, that night, with thoughts of my new found interest swirling in my mind.

The next day passed with a lumbering slowness that I'd never thought possible. I thought about her every minute and relished the idea of feeling her warm embrace once more. My thoughts engulfed me and they were the only thing that saved me from the chaos of the day. Unfortunately, it was two full days before our paths crossed again. When I saw her, I, in a sense, had to reacquaint myself with her. At first, I thought I'd built her up to be something that she wasn't. But she was a lady with an interesting and diverse disposition. That night I fell completely in love.

The next month was a blur; a whirlwind of outings, meetings and surprises from my significant other. It slipped by swiftly and joyfully. The time we spent together was pure heaven and days together began to outnumber days apart. As January wore on, we grew closer and a joy permeated my soul. She became an essential part of my quest for warmth and comfort. The cold days of middle winter had never treated me well but with
my new love I could drift into thoughts of blue, clear water, white sands and warm, caressing sunshine. She had the power to take me places, to make me dream until I was there.

She moved in seven weeks after that first meeting.

I came to depend on her. She would occasionally visit me at my office or I would meet her for lunch. The office visits increased in number as did the lunches. We couldn’t be without one another. Our lunches were the best, but afterward it was difficult to concentrate on the rest of the afternoon’s business. Often I would take a half day after a particularly long feast. As always, she was waiting for me when I got home and I was thankful that she was in my life. I was feeling a happiness I’d never known before.

Seven months after that first wonderful encounter, my existence began to slip from my hands. Just when I thought everything was in control and perfection had hit a new high, everything would go wrong. She began to coerce me into staying home from work. I would miss days in a row. When I received a warning from personnel, I began to think I wanted to get fired because it would mean more time with her.

Work, however, wasn't the only thing that was being affected. Becoming agitated when I kept telling him I wasn’t able to go out on our usual night each week, Terry finally gave up and stopped asking. I don’t think he realized what he’d started by introducing the two of us, but then I hadn’t realized it either. I tried setting up something with him once a few weeks after his last call but canceled the day before. I hadn’t spoken to my other friends since in February and, at that point, I suppose they really had no need for me anyway. Any casual observer could have predicted what was happening, but love is truly blind and I couldn’t see it. No matter how vehemently one who’s in love denies it, the straight line of what’s right and wrong wrinkles and one can trip himself on the kink and fall. I was undependable. I was deep in love and she had taken control of my life. I was on the way down but I didn’t know it.

Did I still love her? Yes...more than ever before.

I began to realize that she wasn’t the perfect woman that I’d thought her to be. I came to know that there had been others. She was being unfaithful to me, yet I’d given my life to her. I’d given everything I had and she still didn’t care enough to give in return. In the beginning, it seemed she had an endless reservoir of warmth and kindness. I saw all of this in her but what I saw was wrong. What I thought were moments of generosity were actually times of selfish indulgence. She took the respect I gave her and created the illusion that I was getting the same in return; that
she was a part of me. I could not let go because I knew it would hurt. It would have torn a piece out of me that might have been too big.

I lost my job in September. It affected me more than I had thought it would but she helped me get over it. Fast. I turned to her and, as always, she was by my side. I was in bliss for our time together had doubled. No one knew how deep my feelings for her ran except me. Not even she knew and I believe now that she wouldn't have cared.

I began to take time to try and figure out just where I was going. My emotions seethed within me. I'd long since lost myself in a place that was dark and lonely. The fire that had started in the beginning had begun to burn me up long ago and the fuel was close to being exhausted. Wondering where control had gone and at the same time realizing that it had never been present was a stunning, epiphanic moment. The shock sent my world into a power dive and I slept for what must have been two or three days but time had come to mean nothing. That's when I began coming to the cliffs to sit quietly by myself.

I woke up dazed, drained and weary even though I'd had a long sleep. The house felt like a cell and my only relief was to get out. Down the road were cliffs I used to pass every day on my way to work. They had become ordinary and boring to me, now there was no work and when I walked to them that day, they'd seemed to hold a whole new meaning.

Rising behind me, the sun warmed my back while I watched the ocean stretch out infinitely in front of me. I felt as though I were looking into the face of an angel and I stayed there until the magnificent western sun gave way to a twilight sky. That day was the most beautiful I'd seen in all of my 25 years. The first tears since my father had died seared my face.

There had been sudden moments, during times at the cliffs, when I wanted her there with me but I forced myself to resist the temptation. I resisted for my father. There were also moments when I wanted to slip down the rock face into the foaming abyss below. I was scaring myself and this helped me to realize that she was the cause of my shattered life.

Through winter I came to the cliffs. The cold would penetrate my clothes and a few times my thoughts would take me so far away that freezing to death became a very real possibility. Slowly and gently, I had begun to drift away from the one who'd brought me down and discover the human being that had been long locked away within me. I still felt for her. I still wanted her
with me but I knew it could never be.

April came and it felt as if new life had sprung into my world. I had gotten to know a lady who had been passing the cliffs one day in winter and had stopped to offer help.

“No. I'll be fine. I'm waiting for someone.” If you don't mind my asking, who would make you wait in weather like this?”

“I would. I'm waiting for me.”

Two weeks later she came back. I don't really know why she returned but on that third day she brought hot coffee with her and sat right down beside me.

“I want to meet this person you're waiting for,” she said with a bit of candor. “Would you mind if I give you a little company?”

The dark, sinister atmosphere that had been present for those interminable 15 months had been cleansed away by the rains of spring and the intensity of a lady who I'd met by chance. She had reached inside me and had pulled something out. When she'd opened her hand and showed me what she'd found, I saw myself and I knew, with her help, I could regain control of my life. I became a different person, a better person and a learned person. I learned who I am.

The second summer since is now upon me and I sit here gazing, once again, at a sunset to match all others. I feel that I can now be happy. I'm getting married next spring to the lady who understands me and I know she will love me in return. It's been nine months since our first strange encounter and we're still together. We come here every now and then to sit quietly. I've not seen the other since I first started coming here and I haven't tried to find her. I hear she travels everywhere, but if you see her don't tell her I said hello, because I don't. Just remember that she killed my father, and stay away from her love. There's no doubt that you'll recognize her. You may even know her name. It's alcohol.

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