

The Girl Who Disappeared



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This will be a tough story to write, but I figure I have to write it. There was a woman who was much too good for me, and ultimately, I didn't treat her well. I know I didn't. She was the only one that I feel enduring guilt over, and it was so long ago that I can't even remember why it ended. I mean I remember the incident, oh yes I remember that, but not why I was being such an asshole. I suspect, but I really wish I had a journal to know for sure.

Oh yes that's right, the story has no happy ending so if you're looking for one, go elsewhere.

In fact, if you're looking for a story, go elsewhere. I stopped taking notes at about the time this girl moved in with me. I have no idea how many of the stories I will tell are true, complete, or missing altogether.

I keep looking over my old notes and they switch to training notes on Aikido. Something I started just about exactly when I started living with Lorna. Looking in those old notes I see that I mention a lost journal that would have covered the exact time of this relationship.

In any case, it is my hope that I can lay this ghost to rest, like I seem to have laid another, earlier ghost. I know that Lorna went on to a long academic career, and I hope her personal life was as good as it could be. It would be a damned shame if there were nobody who received the love this girl had in her.

Kim Taylor, January 2021



I See Lorna for the First Time

She was smarter than I. There was never a doubt about that, and she was never supposed to be anything but a friend, a teammate. I met her on the volleyball court where she was a hell of a setter. She would come drinking with us after the games, and she was a lot of fun. Not terribly loud, like some of us, but never shy when she felt she had something to say.

Lorna had wavy blond hair and a curvy body. Her folks were from the Midlands in England and she was as close to the

cliche "barmaid" as you could get outside of a bad war movie. She smelled nice, even after a game, even covered in sweat, she smelled nice.

At the time I met her I was in a bad relationship. I knew it was bad going in, and I was right. For one thing, Jasmin didn't play volleyball and had no interest in sports. Me, I was a jock forever. For another, Jasmin was jealous of anyone who kept me away from her, especially women. I was supposed to be faithful to her (that was her idea) and I was, mostly. Lorna wasn't a problem because I wasn't interested in taking her to bed. Not at first.

Jasmin and I had been together for a couple of years, I don't really remember how long, but however long it was, it was too long. I don't think she liked me much, and I liked her about the same. Yet she hated losing, and me leaving would be losing. As for me, I was as uncertain and as insecure as any boy my age was. If I lost Jasmin I'd never have whatever this was (love?) again. Oh shit, if I'm going to be honest, I loved her, I just didn't like her.

For So Many Years

For so many years
I loved her like a comb-over
taking the last few strands
of affection
and carefully laying them down
where once was a full head of hair

~~

At any rate, we had some tremendous fights and some pretty good make-up sex too. Not much else, we were both working on our degrees and she refused several times, to move in with me. This was a clue that even I picked up on. Eventually she became a vet. I suppose that was the beginning of the end, her getting into vet school. I'd lost a couple of girlfriends to that over-aged high school across the road. Jasmin eventually realized that I wasn't the right stuff, and we finally drifted apart. Not that I wanted it, I was, I suppose you could say, conflicted. Eventually Jasmin put me out of my misery by moving away with another vet.

And that was that.

You Can't Be Serious

Often I have wondered
why I screwed
so many relationships

and all I have
is that I could not believe
that anyone was serious
about me

~~

The things I learned while with Jasmin were not good things, not helpful in the years to come. She taught me jealousy, suspicion, and that whatever you say will be used against you some day. I learned silence, mostly, although that had been a part of my life for a very long time. With silence you give nothing that will come back to hurt you.

I bounced around a bit, and as happened every time I lost a girlfriend, I found more women who were interested in me. It's amazing how insecure you can be as a twenty year old, but I've always had trouble believing I was worth anybody's while. I searched around (slept around) for a while, and became a bit fixated on a woman who was far out of my class. Anita was from the upper crust of Toronto and a model. We had some fun together but it was never going to be a relationship. Still, one evening after a game, I walked toward where she was leaning on the bar and had every intention of bedding her. She smiled at me in a kindly way, shook her head like you would at a clumsy puppy and took me by the shoulder. She turned me around and said "what do you see?" I saw the table with our team and I frowned. "There is someone for you at your table" she said, and I looked again.

I saw Lorna looking vaguely panicked as I talked to Anita, and then she looked at me and her eyes went soft. I looked at Anita again and she said "go on back to your table".

That night might have been the first I spent in Lorna's bed. It might not be the first night I had sex with her.

I Sleep with Lorna

I slept with a lot of women, and I didn't have sex with all of them. Around about the third or fourth year of University I realized that what I wanted from women was their company. Sex was fine, but my right hand was good enough for that. No, I wanted a living, breathing, warm woman beside me. Someone

to reach out for during the night. Someone to touch, to hug, to feel skin to skin.

If I had to fuck them to get that, well I would. Don't get me wrong, I loved fucking, but not as much as having someone to sleep beside.

Lorna had a truck she drove, it was the family truck and she was the only child, so she had it a lot. Having a truck gave her a way to become my very best friend. She would drive me places, like to and from the bar.

She had an apartment over a corner store in a funky area of town, and sometimes she would take me there instead of to my place. I guess it was her territory and I must admit I was on my best behaviour there. Just sleeping beside her and then going to school with her in the morning.

I never asked her what she felt about this, but I do remember that having discovered myself in bed with her one morning, I made what I thought of as a rather sleepy and clumsy pass at her. It didn't bother her as much as it did me apparently, she kept taking me to her bed.

Eventually of course I did have sex with her and she was not shy. She enjoyed it as much as I did, which was saying a lot. She was always up for whatever I suggested, and I tried not to push her too far.

Perhaps I didn't push far enough, like to the point where I told her I loved her and that sleeping with her was one of the best, was THE best part of my day.

Walking to work
from her bed
The memory of her arms
I was warm all the way

~~

What she thought of me

While we were at school, in the gym or in the bar, Lorna would keep her eyes and ears open. She would search out those who belittled me, and those of her friends who suggested she was too good for me, and tear into them like a she-bear defending her cubs. More than once I could hear her voice down the hallway, telling someone or other that they had me all wrong, that I was kind, gentle, considerate, and smart.

How the hell do you live up to that? I tried, I changed as fast as I could, trying to be the man she claimed I was. It wasn't true of course, I wasn't kind, considerate or smart, compared to her at least, and I definitely did not deserve her. I could do gentle, and so I did.

She never saw my temper, not for a long time and when she did, I don't think she understood what it was. She really saw me in a golden light.



Lorna Moves in With Me

Breathless

Today I saw
an old photograph
one I took forty years ago
She was naked
hands above her head
sitting on the edge of a chair

It took my breath away
just as it did then
the day I took the photograph
~~

Eventually, Lorna gave up her apartment and moved in with me. In the process she inherited my roommates, a good-hearted, if scruffy lot, but we had our own room with a door that actually closed. She worked her ass off at school while I twiddled about with a job and part time studies. I kept playing volleyball with her and we both started Aikido. Often though, she would go home to study while I would drift to the bar to drink after a class or a game.

I would get stinking drunk and when the bar closed I would use the payphone to call her. It was her number and I've still got it. I still have a lot of her things, she left them with me when it was over, I was that helpless. Her phone became mine, the pots and pans we bought, and a lot else. She was kind, she was looking after me to the very end. At any rate, I would get drunk and when the bar closed, she would get out of bed or stop studying and drive up to get me.

I assumed this as my right, after all she loved me. Her friends were right you know, I was an asshole.

While I'm confessing, I should also say that I looked at other women while being with Lorna. I assumed Lorna didn't care, but after having been with Jasmin, I felt damned guilty about it, and then I would start resenting Lorna, something I figured out at the time, but still, it was there.

On the other hand, I have discovered a memory in a poem that might indicate that Lorna had limits to what she would overlook in me.

I Was Going to Go There

The fall has come again
as it did two years ago
when we had plans
for South America
Are they still plans
or another faded memory

I was going to Cuba
with a girl I barely knew
but somehow it didn't work out
The girl I lived with
had such a hurt look
when I mentioned it

I of course
didn't understand
why she would worry about it
Still, I never went to Cuba
And when I see the news
or a tourist ad
I think "I was going to go there"

~~

Lorna usually cooked, and I sometimes cleaned the dishes, but she did things like make sandwiches for lunch and she would take the wet part of tomato slices out before she put the sandwich together. I asked her what she was doing once and she said it was so the bread didn't get soggy. It's always the simple things that teach you, and I think that was when I realized just how much she loved me.

She Cut the Damp Part Out of the
Tomato Slices

I would stumble up the stairs
and into the apartment
somehow I would get my shoes off
but then would flop onto the bed
fully clothed

In the morning I would wake
naked and covered
She would be up
making breakfast
making lunches

Never saying
how I got undressed

~~

From that apartment we could walk easily to downtown Guelph, and we often went to the Vienna Restaurant for breakfast. That became our place, sausage and eggs, toast and coffee. In the evenings we would go to the Albion Hotel, drink beer and talk late into the evening. It was a place to get away from the roommates for a while. It was a damned nice time.

The Bike Trip

Did I mention I was poor? Yet shortly after Lorna moved in with me she gave me \$300 to finance a bike trip on the East

Coast. A roommate and I were going to bicycle from St Johns NFLD to St John NB.

This we did, with considerable trials and tribulations, not least of which was to end up penniless and foodless about two or three days from our flight back home. We met a wonderful Bahai woman who took us in and fed us. In return we tried to cut up some wood for her but the saw was so dull she told us to stop trying.

During that trip I had a great time for a few days and then fell to thinking about Lorna. So much so that, sitting alone in a church (to get out of the sun) I called her up. I don't mean on the phone, I mean I wanted to be with her so much she appeared on the pew beside me. I didn't dare look directly at her, but I could see her out of the corner of my eye.

I took out my notebook and wrote about her while feeling the warmth of her body on my arm. I could smell her, I could hear her breathing. She said nothing, but I felt much better and was happy to get back on Babe to head toward her.

I sat in an empty church
and listened
as the rafters
of the second oldest Anglican church
in British North America
clicked.
And the roof snapped
as the afternoon sun
glowed through stained glass
the ancient pine

grown dark as oak
surrounded me with stillness
I felt the cool
of the air
as I thought
that I'd like to marry here
and then
but for a few stray pieces
thought no more
lost in the silence
that buzzed in my ears

~~

Sept 2/79

Not the first time I had thought of marrying Lorna, and not the last.

Babe was my bicycle. Lorna had sewn a tool roll for me and written Babe on it. She also sewed a terrycloth seat cover for me. Please understand, we were 24, nobody except my mother had sewn for me ever before. Or cooked. Or washed my clothes.

When I got back from that trip, I was convinced that Lorna was the one for me. Especially after having her drop in on me in that church. When you're longing for someone the mind can play some wonderful tricks on you.

But many men
with many words
have said this thing before
and something repeated

is often
something meaningless
so here I sit
dew falling on my back
hunched under a streetlamp
while behind me
lovers stare at the harbour
and in Charlottown
I sit politely facing the park
looking west I think
Fifteen hundred miles
to where you sit
or sleep
the sun just setting for you
the moon a bit higher
and wonder how to tell you
something you probably know
trying to find some words
that still hold a meaning
while part of my mind
tells me
“she knows
she’s not blind and
can see your eyes”
Still
I sit and write
slowly realizing the poem
isn’t really for you
but, as always
for me
to bring me
in my images

a bit closer to you
to let me think closely
of you
so that when I sleep
maybe I'll dream
that you're beside me

~~

August 26-28, 1979

Our Apartment

When the lease was up on our place with the roommates, we decided to get an apartment for ourselves. We found a place that was perfect, a second floor walk-up with a view of a dry cleaners out the front, and a balcony on a tar roof at the back. That didn't matter, it was ours. The way we found the place was peculiar. We were walking past and Lorna happened to look up at the windows. I swear she faded just a bit before she turned to me and said "that's it". She found the landlord and the place was available.

I negotiated with the landlord and he bought varnish and paint. I sanded the floors, varnished them, and painted all the walls. I ripped out the stinking carpet in the bathroom and cleaned the linoleum underneath.

I had a hand drill, and with it I built shelves, lots of shelves out of pine, put together with pegs. My mother bought us an unfinished table and chairs and I finished them, staining the table dark walnut.

I wallpapered some of the walls, put a reed curtain on another, made it a very Japanese-feeling place. For the bedroom I was using a spare bed from my stepfather's parents. I found a cherry dresser and a cedar chest in an antique store that I could just afford. Lorna had a few pieces as well and we placed them all with care.

From my godfather I inherited a Danish Modern couch and chair, and that chair saw a lot of use, both to sit in, and, the ultimate indulgence, for Lorna and I to have sex in the living room, without fear of roommates walking in. The arms were just the right size and height for her to drape her legs over while I sat back in decadent comfort, watching her bounce up and down.

Eventually, and after some arguments (she couldn't make up her mind) she found some material and my mother re-upholstered the couch for us.

The shelves I built had a space for an oak library desk, and also space for a TV and the stereo equipment. We had all we needed, including ceilings high enough to swing a sword, something we did for our Aikido training, for we were both practising at that time.

I loved that place and would still be there if the management hadn't turned the water off to get me out so they could rebuild it and charge more rent.



Our First Christmas

We were students, with barely enough money to pay the rent and buy food. We were happy in our new apartment, just the two of us. We'd been together for a year, before that we lived with four others in a house, and Lorna set up her bed in the sun-porch.

She was wary of telling her parents we slept together, so when they visited, her mother would go into the sun-room and pat the dust off her bed. Eventually we got our own place and didn't bother with her bed, it sat in pieces in the spare room along with a lot of boxes.

Our first Christmas in the new apartment was special to us. We stayed in Guelph for as long as we could before going home to our parents. I had a Norfolk Island Pine and we carefully hung a few small ornaments to make our tree.

Under the tree she had carefully and beautifully wrapped a box of chocolates for me. I had found the money to buy her a pair of silver earrings and to wrap them, I emptied an egg, cut a square in the shell and stuffed it with cotton batting and the earrings. I put the square back with wax and taped the egg to a branch on the tree. She loved looking at it, guessing what it was.

We had our Christmas just before we left for our homes. It was lovely, we had a bottle of cheap wine and she cooked a wonderful meal of pork chops, steamed vegetables, and applesauce.

I washed up while she played Christmas songs on the stereo. No matter how poor the student, there was always a stereo. That evening we sat together on the couch and talked about the future, feeling very grown up.

The only friction was the usual argument about her telling her folks that we were sleeping together. Six months we had been in the new place, and her parents hadn't visited yet. That argument passed when we opened our presents. She had to break the egg shell, which she didn't want to do. I took a long time unwrapping my colourful present and we both had a chocolate after she put the earrings on.

I had hated Christmas for many years, but that year with just the two of us in our own place, I began to change my mind. That girl changed me in many more ways than she would ever know.

That evening we went to bed early and, as 20 year olds will, we tried to give each other enough sex to last until we saw each other again.

The next day her parents parked and waited, as usual, while she got her coat on and grabbed her bags. I hugged her, clinging just as little as I could, and watched her go down the stairs. I watched her drive off from the window and felt sad she was gone, but excited to know she would come back.

Later that day I went home with my folks. The days couldn't go by fast enough, and I was back in Guelph, back in our place, before her. I cleaned the place while thinking about her, but left

the ornaments up and the eggshell under the tree. We would take that down together.

When she came back I could almost think of it as her coming home, and that was an exciting thought. When she came home, I was surprised to see her parents coming in. Half way up the stairs I could hear her stop, and then continue. She had turned and half way up the stairs had said “you know there’s only one bed”.

Her mother, who had dusted her bed for months simply looked at her. Her father said “and...?”. When they came in her parents both hugged me. Another first for me.

And that was our first Christmas together in our own apartment.

Visits Home

Soon after that Christmas the truck ended up on long-term loan, or it was given to Lorna, it wasn’t mine and I didn’t ask. I didn’t ask about most things. I was so terrified that things would blow up, like they always did, I discussed almost nothing.

We went to the fishing village where my father and grandmother still lived. They loved Lorna, everyone did, and why not? There was a lot to love. While in Port, we drove to the coal docks and made love in that little truck. If you’ve ever tried that, you know it requires quite a lot of skill, flexibility and imagination. We managed it.

We visited my mother's house where she had no hesitation putting us into my old bed. It was a single, but we didn't mind, in fact I was quite happy to have her in my arms for the whole night.

I used to chase that girl all over the bed. One night in our apartment I woke at about 4am to find myself sliding across the bed heading for the floor. I looked and Lorna had her arms and legs on the wall and was pushing me with her back. She'd had enough of me chasing her into that wall.

The Eternal Struggle

Nothing better
than holding her
all night

But she gets hot
and moves away
too far across the bed

I reach for her
and she cuddles a bit
then sighs, rolls over

Now we're at the edge
now she puts hands and feet
on the wall and shoves me

~~

On the way down to Port Stanley one winter day I was driving while Lorna slept. She had been working hard and dropped off

as soon as we began driving. Somewhere around Woodstock, driving on bare road, we drifted around a curve and hit a white wall of snow. I could see nothing and I hit the brakes hard. Once I got through the wall I saw nothing but cars scattered in both ditches and across two lanes of highway. The snow was newly fallen and slick on the ground.

I looked quickly at Lorna and realized she was probably better off sleeping with her seatbelt on. I shifted to first and popped the clutch to stall the engine and lock up the back wheels, then concentrated on pumping the brakes and steering. It was hairy but I managed to stop about twenty feet from the car in front. I sighed and checked Lorna, still relaxed and sleeping, and then the rear view mirror. To my horror I watched as a yellow mustang came at us with the wheels locked, weaving back and forth, with a wide-eyed woman driving. I took the truck out of gear and, thinking about that steel bumper in the back, jammed my head into the headrest and waited until she hit us.

When she did, it wasn't very hard, we scooted forward and Lorna opened her eyes to a rather apocalyptic scene. I told her all was fine and we inched our way past the nonsense and continued on down to the lake.

We visited her family too, mostly on Christmas where I would hear stories of Gwillie the Aikido dog. He was old as the hills and resembled a couch but he defended his property. Younger dogs would challenge him and he would grab a leg and drag them back onto the sidewalk where he'd dump them. From Gwillie I once got a coffee mug with my name on it for Christmas. Still one of my favourite things.

Much later, when we started to have problems, Lorna would go to my mother and ask for advice. My mother remarked to me once that she was supposed to be on my side, and advising Lorna was a bit awkward.

I had no idea that Lorna was with my mother, it must have been when I was out drinking with the boys. Who would guess, it was over an hour to my home and she was always back when I called for that ride.

On one trip home we went to a local bar for a drink. Riley's was the kind of place that had a clock that ran backward, but they had beer.

Sitting at the bar was a fellow who was at my high school. We didn't get along then, and I think he wanted to continue in that fashion. He had nothing good to say about a higher education, he was using his father's equipment to do custom farm services like plowing fields and harvesting corn. He was making a shit-load more money than either of us, but he was still an idiot.

He told Lorna about the one and only fight I had in high school, where I insulted his buddy and his buddy took a swing at me. I covered up and ducked until the guy was pulled off of me.

Eventually I went to the toilet and when I came back, he was gone. I asked Lorna about that and she said that he had made a pass at her which she shot down, and then he had talked about the fight again. At that point Lorna told him that I was pretty damned good at martial arts. That was when he decided to leave.

That girl always had my back, and she would have taken this fat idiot herself, I suspect, had the need arose.

A Long Time Together

Lorna was the solid, dependable type, a natural home-maker, although she had her whimsical side. She used to show up behind me, put her hands on my shoulders and blow in my hair. I had hair then. But the next moment, as I reached for her hand I'd touch my shoulder and then I'd hear her in the kitchen.

Apart from those rather disturbing habits, she made a home for us that was stable, predictable and hard to remember. By that I mean there was rarely any strife, no drama.

As a result, I learned to live in a safe, loving environment which did not encourage me to write a journal or any poetry. If I did write, that journal was lost. It was an absolutely lovely time, and I look back on those years with enormous fondness, if not much memory, one day quietly followed the other.

Still, being young, I know I was looking for trouble and finding it. I got bored easily when I wasn't in emotional turmoil and I suspect I eventually manufactured some.



If I Had Known Then

A vague dissatisfaction
existential angst
if you wish

What is my role
who am I to be
and this woman
kind, loving
not at all dissatisfied

Catches the crap
that spills out of me
Again and again
Me never learning
as if "it's not me,
it's you"

Only an old man
can see
what the boy
should have known

~~

I Take Lorna For Granted

Eventually I did the unforgivable. I took Lorna for granted, I treated her as if she was blood family, rather than chosen family. She wasn't getting much out of me, while I was getting all the benefits of her love. As if I deserved it by way of being born into it.

Remember I said she was smarter than I? I think this may have been gnawing away at my young male ego. She was in grad school and I was working in the fields. Not something I knew how to handle perhaps, hence the “getting even” in my pea-brain. Making her drive me home from the bar, for instance, just to prove, what, that I was the dominant one? I was the important one?

God, the thought of taking advantage of Lorna’s love like that horrifies me now. Every time I think of it I get a little sick deep in my guts.

And what was the result? She wanted some indication that I appreciated her, some indication that I loved her too.

Imbalance

There was an imbalance

She provided daily proof
that she loved me
and I demanded it

She asked for proof
I loved her
and I rarely provided it

Eventually we tipped over

~~

My response was to assume she knew that. If I didn't love her I wouldn't be there right? Right? Wrong. She needed to hear it. She was putting a hell of an effort into the relationship and I was coasting. She wanted something back. And I disappeared, I was silent.

Eventually Lorna realized that I would communicate when we argued. Or at least that's what she thought it was. To me it wasn't communication at all. In fact, the more angry I got, the more Lorna disappeared from my view. I saw nothing, I heard nothing, I stopped looking at her in an attempt to avoid what was building up inside me.

This led to a situation as bad as you might expect. She would goad me into an argument, thinking that any communication was better than none.

What she didn't realize was that by pushing my buttons I realized very quickly that she was pushing my buttons. I could not understand why she was goading me, if she said why, I never heard her. She pushed, I saw her pushing and it was that pushing of my buttons that infuriated me. It was as if I thought "You want to make me mad? I'll show you mad".

It felt like she was trying to get rid of me.

I lost the civilization she had given me. I returned to the angry young boy I was before I met her. Here was someone who had me backed up against a wall, chucking me under the chin, slamming my head back into that wall. All the fury of a ten

year old, clenched teeth and vacant eyes, being accused of something I didn't do, rose up inside me.

And kept rising, as I became more silent, more closed in to try and keep my temper in check. She had no idea and I had no way of telling her. Those words didn't exist in me yet.

She was relentless, she saw me pulling away from her, she saw that I didn't see her. She would push the buttons and I would eventually leave the apartment, trying to get away from the it, from her. She would follow me down onto the street, crying and saying that we had to talk. I would walk.

Would it have killed me
to tell her I loved her
to tell her I needed her
I wanted her always

But no
Barely a man
Mostly a boy
I had to keep it to myself

It drove her crazy
she tried so many times
and I sat silent

And I lost her

~~

During this time I punched a hole in the headboard of our bed, and seriously dented the bedroom wall. I was trying to warn her I think, about what I was capable of. I was no longer a defenceless ten year old. I could break bones.

The day came, eventually.

I was washing dishes and she was standing behind me. She pushed those buttons. I slammed a spatula into the counter-top and it buried itself into the ceiling, nine feet up. I spun around and my hands were around her throat.

Thankfully I thought of a kitten, it will scratch and you might have your hand around its neck before you remember it had no idea what it was doing.

She had no idea what she was doing, or how close I was to squeezing.

I knew she would stay until I squeezed, but I had laid hands on her and that was, and remains, one of my fixed limits. I would never, ever, physically hurt a loved one. The relationship was done.

In the weeks that followed, I struggled to make it clear that it was over, she kept saying we could work it out. She would have stayed with me, I would have hurt her and she would still have stayed.

Eventually I showing her that there was another girl ready to move in. She, in great confusion, disappeared from my life.

Disappeared like she used to do from one room to another in our apartment.

I loved her. I might be with her still, if I had been able to say that to her, but I didn't know how. She taught me how, but much too late. That I didn't grow up fast enough to appreciate what she was to me remains one of the greatest regrets of my life.

That I never, in the forty years since, apologized to her, explained to her, only compounds that regret. I have my doubts that I will ever forgive myself for not having the words to talk with her, for making her so desperate that she pushed me to putting my hands around her throat. She had no idea the anger in me, I had no words. All I needed was words.

I had none, and she disappeared from my life.

Not You Babe

If you came back
through my door
I would smile
but I would know
that you would walk
back out that door

It's not you babe
it's me

~~

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