

Part One: Distant Emotions

Standing atop the cliffs, the river far below looked harmless, a small ribbon of blue winding in the soil of the fertile valley. The hush of the wilderness is barely broken by the distant murmur of the falls and it is easy to forget their incredible, majestic violence. Nestled between the cliffs and river lies a dense forest of white pine, a narrow edge of green. Plunging again into the forest, a few seconds are required to adjust to the darkness within. As you walk an incessant rumbling deepens imperceptibly and suddenly the darkness lifts as you stand breathlessly at the river bank. Within the constraints of the rocky gorge it has eroded, the water runs rampant, dancing the wild dance of freedom. From the savage persistence of the current and the relentless fury of its pounding of the shore, to the cool mist that lightly dampens your clothes, the river excites every emotion, heightens every sense.

The girl loved to come here at night and walk downstream, witnessing the angry beauty of the falls, absorbing the wonderful calm of the pools. Waterfowl tread silently as she passed and willows bowed respectfully to her over the water. She liked coming here as it gave her life a meaning of which she was previously unaware, a perspective from which she derived a security. Humbled by the wild exuberance of the water, by the harsh choruses and sweet crescendos, she walked and pitied those who did not have the chance to experience it.

The old man stroked his scratchy, bewhiskered face and put down his binoculars. Despite the late hour he was not surprised to see the girl again. Every night she took a walk and he would have been more surprised if he hadn't seen her. Wondering who she was, he peered at her again through the binoculars. She looked beautiful standing there, clean-limbed with long hair shining brightly. Smiling ruefully, he felt the slow yearning of emotions long dormant surface, inspired by this mysterious nightly visitor. Weathered nose reflecting the moonlight and watery eyes gleaming, there was a remote possibility that she would have thought him handsome had she seen him.

"Oh well," he thought quickly, "only another week before the whole damn river is blown to kingdom come. And if it means blowing her up with it, well then so be it." He reached for his road hockey stick.

Part Two: The Next Day

Diane awoke without moving, merely opening her eyes before carefully folding down the covers. Jumping out of bed, she leaned on her windowsill and drank in the cool dawn air. The sun was rising and a mist slunk along the ground, congregating in the small valleys and furrows etched by the brooks that fed the mighty river and falls. Happily surveying the waking world, she saw to her surprise an old man walking toward her house, carrying a hockey stick.

George tossed and turned, short frantic screams escaping him until he finally awoke with a start, drenched in sweat, an impression of the bedpost pressed deeply into his forehead. It was not a bad night's sleep and he was thankful for the energy it would provide him with, for he would surely need it. The resolve he possessed last night had crumbled and his plans for the demolition of the river and valley were in confusion. She had permeated his being and he often found himself lost in thought, fondly recalling her radiant presence. He realized he must confront her with his feelings; he must overwhelm her with the rush of emotions that overwhelmed him since her nightly walks began; he must eloquently state the admiration and respect he felt toward her and the deep love that eventually bloomed in the dark recesses of his barren soul.

With that in mind, George took firm hold of his road hockey stick and trod resolutely toward the home of his beloved night angel. Approaching her yard, George saw to his mingled delight and apprehension that the object of his intense desire was standing at a window and had seen him.

Hands trembling in excitement, George carefully placed an apple on a nearby fence and after deliberating, flicked a rock toward it with his road hockey stick, hitting it squarely in the middle and knocking it off. He turned in triumph toward her home and eagerly awaited her response.

After his dexterous demonstration Diane thought the old man talented in an odd sort of way but with any luck would be harmless and would not shoot stones at her cat or poke through her garbage. She waved briefly before making off to the bathroom to have a shower.

George saw her hand rise and wave and was instantly lifted to high exaltation and experienced indescribable joy. "I didn't even have to say anything.", he rejoiced, "She already knew!" Convulsed with euphoria, George bounded and lurched home in a manner not at all reflecting his exuberant state of mind.

Part Three: An End

In the days that passed, George did not leave his house very often. He just lay there, in his bed, shaking his head over and over in blank disbelief and mute excitement. He found it hard to deal with this overwhelming success. At first that is anyway, because with time George did grow to accept his accomplishment. Remembering it vividly, he took to acting it out in front of a mirror at home, then for his cronies down at the diner. His iron determination, his hand closing around the haft of the hockey stick followed by the moment of flawless execution that swept the whole event to the delirious height of lofty achievement; George took a pull from the old bottle to quell the excitement that rose in him whenever he thought of it.

Unfortunately, as he happily remembered that morning he slowly began to focus more and more on his role in the affair (perhaps due to his unexpected success) and less and less on Diane's. As a result, the actual motivation for his unsurpassed heroism and courage was relentlessly driven from his mind by his self-congratulatory remembrances. Although initially he did recall and acknowledge his profound love for Diane and his intention to swear eternal allegiance to her, with time, what exactly he had intended to accomplish that day before his moment of divine inspiration interceded became a mystery. Gradually, he thought perhaps he had intended to shovel her driveway for her. Later, he was sure he had wanted to ask her for any empty pop bottles she had, an income he had grown to rely on. Still later, he swore he had meant to push her car out of the way so he could attempt to retrieve coins that had fallen into the sewer grate it was parked over. And so, the heartfelt devotion for Diane was slowly forgotten, a fading memory badly outshone by the blinding luster of his sterling accomplishment.

Diane too found herself thinking about that morning a great deal. To a degree she could not have predicted or thought herself capable of, her imagination was afire, kindled by the appearance of the strange old vagabond. With time George seemed to her to command a latent ability totally unexpected from his shabby outward appearance; a power completely at odds with his unspectacular mental and physical endowments. He appeared to possess a worldliness, a depth, a grace that belied his overall seediness. He was like a simple-minded Ulysses, clumsily yet decisively vanquishing Penelope's suitors in an unusual yet effective manner. Eventually, she deeply felt that he had surpassed his profound limitations, that he had shrugged off his backward existence, that he had stepped forward to wrest the crown of his manhood from the elements and force it on his misshapen yet deserving head. She also realized that out of everyone in town, George had chosen to reveal his well-hidden majesty to her alone; and for that she deeply flattered and grateful. Indeed, besides gratitude, this gallant gesture extracted from Diane love; love of a strength that she had never felt before.

Tragically, this schism in understanding cut through George and Diane's relationship in its infancy and the charged emotions that burst forth powered an incident still remembered and eagerly retold on its anniversary, every year since it occurred. Following her initial encounter with George, Diane had been desperately searching their small town to pour out her seething heart to him. Failure feasted on her happiness ravenously as George proved a nimble quarry; her journeys were fruitless, her queries unanswered, her quest seemingly thwarted. But one day she ecstatically marked his distinctive figure cut across the main street and lurch into a eatery of questionable hygiene. Upon entering after him, she paused to gaze lovingly at George and to collect her impassioned thoughts that were threatening to rob her of consciousness. It was there, standing in the doorway of that dingy establishment with her heart pounding, that she disbelievingly heard George recount his deed to his, by now, jaded audience and tell them that it had taken place outside Agnes' house and that Agnes herself had witnessed his feat from her window. Agnes, a thick-set country woman and Diane's next door neighbour, had lived in town several years before the townsfolk realized that she was a woman, not a man, and that her name was Agnes, not Amos. The sudden realization that the magnitude of George's indifference toward her was such that he confused her with Agnes was like a slap in the face and Diane, flushed and breathless avenged herself upon the man who toyed with her emotions so shamelessly. George, ignorant of his offence and taken completely unawares, overcame his initial trepidation and fought valiantly that day, displaying a flexibility and athleticism remarkable for a man his age. The dreadful encounter threatened to rage unabated indefinitely when Diane mounted the wall and leapt from the rafters upon George in a calculated attempt to maim. The tremendous impact rendered both combatants unconscious and they lay, ironically, in each other's arms, oblivious to the heated discussion and turmoil their battle spawned.

The bristles of the aproned bartender's broom upon their faces as he swept the floor after closing time roused them and George and Diane disentangled themselves painfully and in confusion. Mercifully, that final decisive maneuver by Diane had left them both with permanent memory loss, their feelings for each other forgotten, their grasp of the past few week's events tenuous at best. Diane did not remember ever seeing George before and George seemed to forget Diane, his fiendish plans to dynamite the river, everything. They resumed their normal activities and late at night a beautiful girl could be seen walking along the mighty river that flanked her property. An old man, as oblivious to her as she was to him, ran through the bush not far away, sporting a wild lopsided leer and gleefully swinging his road hockey stick before him in long erratic arcs.