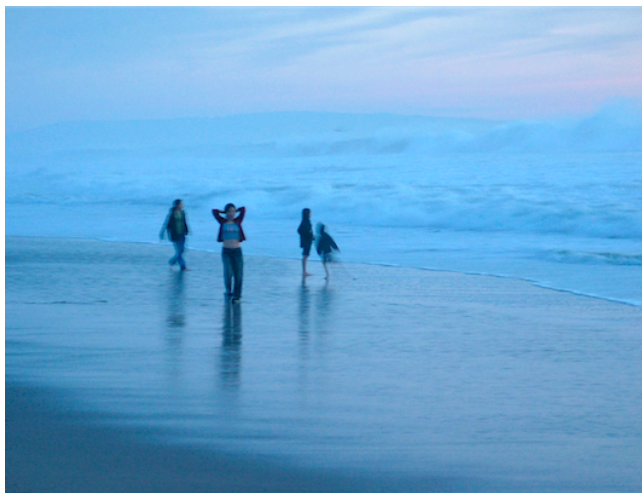


The Envy of Water



by

Doyle Avant

The *Envy of Water* was first performed at Mansion, in Beirut, Lebanon on May 25, 2016 – along with two other short solos: *Right....now*, and *Forty Years of Rain*.

I want to make one thing perfectly clear before I get started.

The story I'm about to tell you is pure fiction.

Do you believe me?

I meet her for the first and last at Jim's Coffee Shop at the corner of Hildebrand and San Pedro. It's 3:33 in the morning and the sober up crowd is starting to give up and head home. She tells me her name is Rachel and that she's from Akron and that her feet hurt because she's just spent the last six hours dancing without her clothes on at a place called *Nice and Easy*.

She gives me no reason whatsoever to doubt any of this.

She glances at my newspaper and asks me what's happening in the world.

“Well,” I say, “it looks like there's another civil war on in the Congo.”

And she stares at me blankly as if I've answered her in some obscure Albanian dialect.

But then – almost absent-mindedly – she murmurs: “I seriously doubt that Mobutu will hold on now that Rwanda has thrown their lot with the rebels.”

Wow. Guess I wasn't expecting *that*.

But hey, at 3:33 in the morning it's a little crazy to expect *anything*.

Then, through a series of conversational segues I couldn't retrace if you put a large gun to my head, she tells me the remarkable story of the events that unfolded on April 13, 1975, when she lost her virginity to Tommy Maddox in a Motel 6 that Tommy's uncle ran outside of Akron.

She still remembers the room number.

203.

In her travels since then, she's gone to great lengths to avoid setting foot in *any other* room 203 – once going so far as to sleep in her car at a truckstop in West Memphis, which it turns out is in Arkansas and not Tennessee like you'd probably expect.

I tell her there are a couple of ways to interpret her steering clear of any and all room 203-s. Either A) what happened back at the Motel 6 was so fairytale perfect that she doesn't even want to *try* to recapture the magic of it – or...

“The correct answer is B,” she assures me.

But somehow I already knew that.

Tommy, she explains, was the proud owner of a beat up Dodge Ram pickup truck and the complete works of Aerosmith – all the stuff before their regrettable late middle-age reunion tour anyway. These and an ice chest full of Anheiser Busch tallboys had figured prominently in the dozen or so dates that she and Tommy had gone out on.

She summed him up like this: "If you're looking for a man whose major life accomplishment is knowing all the lyrics of *Toys in the Attic* – then Tommy is the man for you. But if I could do it all over again..."

And she trails off without finishing the thought.

Because she *can't*.

Do it all over again.

Or can she?

I suppose I could argue it either way.

One thing I *do* know is that in a span of about twenty minutes, this woman drinks five cups of regular caffeinated coffee. Black no sugar. People who do this after 3:33 in the morning have either grown chemically immune to the stuff or they've got a much longer view of the immediate future than I do.

She catches me eyeing her cup, trying to figure out which one *she* is.

And then quickly explains that she needs to stay up all night, as there's been some kind of domestic upheaval back at her house involving her brother's ex-wife and her sister's ex-husband. The sister's second ex and the brother's ex-sister-in law are also somewhere in the mix. There are several in-laws, marriages and divorces involved and the whole thing is a little tough to follow.

But I find myself *needing* to follow and I'm just about to ask her to go back to the beginning when totally of the blue – because even I didn't see this coming – I tell her that she's welcome to...sleep on my couch.

If she has nowhere else to go, that is.

Now I should make it perfectly clear that at this point in the story, I'm not exactly sure what my motives are. She doesn't seem too sure about my motives either because she stares at me for the longest fourteen seconds of my natural life and then finally says....

"Why not?"

When we get to my place, she makes no comment about the prevailing disarray that is in effect there. No observations about how the state of my apartment is quite possibly a crystal clear reflection of the state of my mind. Instead she goes right over to the chaos that is my CD collection, magically plucks out Dinah Washington's Great Hits, puts it on and then turns to me and asks if she can take a bath.

And I say.....*make yourself at home*

She goes straight into the bathroom, lights the candles that I have in there, starts running the bath, and then very gently closes the door. And suddenly I'm struck with the uncanny sensation that she's been here before. Or maybe it's just that *I've* been here before.

Even with Dinah singing, I can hear her undressing in the bathroom, hear the various pieces of her clothing fall lightly to the floor. Hear her slip into the bath, and hear the warm water silently envelope her.

And I just sit there – a room and a world away...thinking about one thing ...or the other. Feeling absolutely nothing – but the envy of water.

(end of excerpt)