

“Groping the Walls”

The phone wakes me up and I turn on the bedside lamp. After it rings a couple more times, my eyes have adjusted enough to see it hanging on the opposite side of the room.

Stumbling to it, I shake off my sleepiness and grab the receiver.

“Hello?” I mumble and clear my throat.

“Good morning! Happy New Year!” the voice on the other end says.

“It's June. What do you want, Emily?” I squint at my clock. One a.m.

“It's been June for ten days already, when's it gonna be December?” she growls.

“What do you want?” I repeat impatiently.

“I have an idea. Come downstairs! I'm parked out front.”

“I just woke up. I'm not even dressed.” She always has some sort of stupid idea and I'm not very eager to indulge her in whatever this one is.

“Dammit, this is more important than your silly, bare-assed embarrassment. Stop bitchin' and get down here!”

“Fine,” I say, against my better judgment, “I'll be right down.” I hang up and sift through the suitcase on the floor for something to wear. Most of it hasn't been washed in weeks and the whole suitcase reeks of oil paint and tequila. I settle for green cargo shorts and a striped polo shirt. My image in the mirror looks like it's modeling for an Old Navy commercial.

I grab my notebook from on top of the dresser and exit the room, letting the door auto-lock behind me. I toss the flimsy plastic key-card under the ice machine so that I won't have to worry about losing it.

After a short elevator ride and a quick trot through the lobby, I'm sitting in Emily's car, a

brand new Honda Civic. “Where'd you get this car?” I ask, tossing the duffle bag in back.

Emily grins sheepishly. “I had to sell some stuff, but I needed it for this particular idea.”

I don't know what she means, and, by her silence, realize that she isn't going to tell me. I open up my notebook and make my hand write, ‘beware of women driving Civics.’

After the short silence during the drive away from the hotel, Emily smiles as though she remembers something. “I put some beer in the glove compartment if you're thirsty,” she says, taking a sharp right turn onto a desolate one a.m. city street. I grab a can of beer and offer one to her, but she says she doesn't want to get arrested for drinking and driving. “Though I suppose we'll have to answer for a lot more than that if the cops come while we're busy.”

I don't like the sound of that, but rather than protesting, my hand writes in my notebook, ‘the long road leads here, and if it weren't so long, we'd go back,’ and sketches a little of picture of a cop drinking beer.

Out of nowhere, Emily chuckles briefly. My hand writes, ‘nothing unexpected can be unwanted.’ I then concentrate on taking sips from my beer, hoping to wash down the nervousness that comes with ignorance. Emily focuses on the road, her face scrunched in thought.

"Hey... do you think I'm meant to be an evil person?"

“What's that supposed to mean?” I mutter and turn to the window.

“I was just thinking about what's gonna happen to us.”

"What us? I don't even know what's going on.” My hand starts writing furiously in the notebook.

"I don't mean if we'll get sent to prison or anything,” she says, oblivious to my protests. “I know how the justice system works. I was just thinking about the universe and fate. You ever

think about fate?”

“All the time,” I lie. My hand keeps writing. I look down to see how it’s doing. ‘love makes even dogs cry for forgiveness.’ I don’t want to interrupt its thought, so I let it keep writing.

“Yeah, well, you know how the universe is constantly running out of energy? Like stars dying and supernovas and shit like that. Hey, what do you think about that guy?” She points out a man walking down the sidewalk, holding a brown paper bag with videos inside.

Not knowing what I’m supposed to say, I venture, "His coat looks like it's dry clean only.”

“Who cares about his coat?”

“He probably does.” I’m about to ask her what this is all about when I notice my hand has started writing swear words. I force it to put the pen down.

“Anyway,” Emily continues, rolling her eyes, “the universe will eventually run out of energy. Or rather all the bits that are flying around will lose the ability to fly away from the center and end up flying back towards the center, eventually all joining together in one big lump.” She slams her fist into the dash, apparently to simulate the weight. My hand writes, ‘thwump.’ “But, because all this matter in one lump is unstable, it all explodes in a second Big Bang.” She mimics the explosion with her hands. I tell her to keep them on the wheel. “And since the fierce gravity of this lump is holding all the matter together as close as it could possibly be, when it explodes, it sends the matter flying out in the exact same way the first Big Bang did. You with me?”

I respond in the affirmative, wondering what all this has to do with us driving around at one in the morning. My hand writes, ‘roses are red, violence explodes.’

“Okay, so now there’s matter flying around for a billion years that eventually comes together and forms Earth at the exact time and in the exact same way that happened before.” The cadence of her speech speeds up. “Soon life appears just like before and evolution starts up just like before, and, to speed things up a bit...” She steps on the gas to emphasize this point. I buckle my seat belt. “The human race evolves and I’m born. Then I’m tormented as a baby by adults saying ‘goo gah,’ I get humiliated in school, grow a pair of these-” she grabs underneath her breasts and pushes them up slightly. I tell her to put her hands back on the wheel. “And,” she continues, “after making all the mistakes I did before, I end up in a car with you talking about this. Who knows, maybe this is even the second time we’re doing this. Or for that matter the fifteenth or hundredth. Maybe the cops have already picked us up and sentenced us to the chair a thousand times over. Oh, it so has to be that guy!”

She pulls the car over and points out a young man wearing a trendy black jacket and black stocking cap. His jeans are pre-faded and stained in various places, and he walks with a bit of a stagger, but is trying hard to not let it show. I nod at her choice and ask her just what she’s intending to do. My hand writes, ‘when the right choices are the wrong decisions, you end up happily where you didn’t want to be.’ I’m beginning to think my hand has opened too many fortune cookies.

"When you think about it," she starts, ignoring me and my hand, "we could very well have already been punished for this many times in the past, but we have no idea that that’s gonna happen. It's like some one has turned off the light at the end of the tunnel and we're just groping the walls, trying to find our way in the dark." She pulls the parking brake and undoes her seatbelt. "Okay, pass me the gas can in back." She gets out of the car and circles around to the trunk.

I turn to the back seat and see the gas can. It tempts me to grab it with shiny orange plastic and warning label. My hand wants to write, 'the ability to destroy makes you beautiful.' Staring at the can, I ask Emily why she wants it.

"All part of the ceremony," she says as she searches the trunk for something. A moment later the trunk is closed and she's running after the drunk man with the carjack in her hand. It doesn't take long for her to catch up to him and bring the jack down across the back of his head. The man slumps to the ground as though he was half-unconscious already, and, were I not paralyzed in fear, my hand would write, 'death is the fate of all who would pay attention.'

"Come on and bring the gas, gas, gasoline can!" Emily sings over to me.

Feeling every bit as unconscious as the man on the ground with blood soaking through his stocking cap, I bring the can over to her. Emily gives me a sheepish grin and dumps the gas onto the poor bastard. She dances around the sidewalk and produces a box of matches from her pants pocket.

Taking out a match, Emily says, "Here's to shedding some light on destiny." Giving me a quick wink, she strikes the match. My hand wants to write, 'I can see the end.'