Daiquiri

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Abstract

“You what?” Her voice lifted a little when she said it, and she snapped it out so that it seemed to grate through the receiver...
climb the bank across the dirt road. A mournful whistle floated from the woods as the covey reformed for the night. Guy walked over to the trunk for Gert.

Timmie quickly plucked a handful of feathers. "I'll have memories now," he thought, stuffing them in the pocket of his hunting coat.

—Tom English, Sci. Sr.

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**DAIQUIRI**

"**YOU** what?" Her voice lifted a little when she said it, and she snapped it out so that it seemed to grate through the receiver.

Al smiled. "Look Jane, I'll shave, shower, shine, and be by for you at 6:30. We'll go down to Virgil's and I'll tell you all about it."

"No," Jane said. "It would save time if I met you. I'll see you at Virgil's at six."

"O. K. Jane. Six then."

Halfway between the phone and the door he heard Vic. "Hey Al, aren't ya gonna stay and have a beer?"

"Can't Vic, I'd better get cleaned up."

Vic shook his head. "What in Hell has come over ya? When ya came back I thought maybe ya lost your head. Now I'm sure. Ya never turned down a beer in your life."

"You can buy me one tomorrow night, I'll see you in the morning, Vic."

At six the street was still hot, but the sun's rays were slanting across and leaving long shadows. The streets weren't crowded at the supper hour, and the people who were out weren't in a hurry. After a warm shower he felt relaxed and unhurried, so he just walked slowly along watching the other people and thinking. He wanted to see Jane, but he didn't hurry. He remembered how it had been in high school with Jane. He couldn't remember when he'd met her—it seemed as if she'd always been around somewhere.
She'd been taking business courses; shorthand, typing and all the rest that went with it, and he'd been getting ready for college. She used to type his reports for him and he did her Algebra. They went to dances and drank beer together on Sundays. Everybody thought Jane was a lot of fun and she'd had dates with a lot of other guys, but she'd always singled Al out from the rest, and he didn't mind. After high school he'd gone into the Navy along with most of his friends, and Jane had taken a good secretarial job and typed long newsy letters to him three times a week. When he came home, he left for college almost right away, but not before he and Jane had made a few plans for the future. Now he was home, and he wanted to see her first.

Virgil's was cool after the warm street, and he felt the coolness on his face when he first walked in. It wasn't dark in the long room, but after the outside brightness it was dim enough so that he had to look hard to see. He saw Jane wave from a booth in the back, so after stopping at the bar for a package of cigarettes he walked back.

He slid into the booth and looked at her. She looked smooth. He could remember when her hair hadn't always been exactly in place and her eyebrows had been thick and a little fuzzy. Now it seemed as if she looked smoother every time he saw her. He didn't know much about women's clothes except that sometimes they looked good and sometimes they didn't, but Jane seemed to know how to wear hers. She was all symmetry. From the lipstick, always the right shade now, to her hair, not too shining nor too dull, not too short nor too long, she was balanced. Her eyebrows were two precise curved lines that arched in unison as she smiled at him. On the table directly in front of her was a small glass half-full of a pale-looking drink. "Hi Jane," he said.

"Al," she said, "What did you do? What happened?"

A man walked over from behind the bar and leaned on the table with both hands. "Hi ya Al—what'll ya have?"

"Hi Ed, bring me a Schlitz."

Ed smiled. "Good," he said, "That I can understand. Jane here ordered some odd one. What'd ya call it?"

"A daiquiri," said Jane.
“Yeah,” said Ed. “We don’t have much call for anything unusual like that, but we keep a book around so we can mix ’em if anybody wants one. How is it?”

“Good,” said Jane.

As Al tilted his glass and poured the beer slowly down the side Jane turned and looked at him. “Tell me—what have you done?”

“I quit school, Jane.”

Jane’s voice was beginning to lose the calm. “Damm it, Al, I know that—you told me on the phone, but why? I know you didn’t flunk out—did you do something and get kicked out?”

“Relax—I just quit. Sunday night, before final exams, I just decided to quit. So I packed my stuff and came home. I saw Vic yesterday and got a job!”

“Vic—you’re not working on the railroad!”

“Yeah—that’s exactly what I’m doing.”

She took his hand and looked up at him with a frown pulling down between her eyes. “Al, what’s come over you? The railroad was fine for a summer job, but you weren’t meant to be a railroad worker. You were doing all right in school—two more years and you would have been through. Then you could have gotten a good job—not something like this—on the railroad.”

He looked at his hands, covering Jane’s, and saw that his fingernails were still dirty. They were quite a contrast to Jane’s rounded, well-kept nails. He moved his hand to his beer glass. “Look Jane—I’ve finally figured out what I want. Sure—I could go on to school and get a degree and spend the rest of my life doing something I didn’t want to do. I could get a little square of paper to put up on the wall to show all the people who didn’t have one of those on the wall that I was smarter than they were. Is that right? They tell you that you should admire an honest man with dirt on his hands, and then they say aren’t you glad you’re getting an education so you won’t have to be that way. They tell you how to think—what to think about—what to learn and where to learn it. They treat you like a child and then expect you to go out and think for yourself like an
adult. You can't fence off a couple of square miles of ground, put up some buildings, fill the place full of books, and say, 'Here it is—all you have to do is do what we tell you for a few years and you'll be ready to face the world.'"

Jane shook her head slowly from side to side. "But Al, what about your mother and father? You know they wanted you to go to college. They planned that from the time you first started to school. Don't they mean anything to you? They gave up a lot to send you to college. They didn't even plan to send Tim or Alice. They could only afford to send one and they picked you."

More people were beginning to come in, and there were a few loud laughs from the bar and a few voices rising and falling in conversation. Al didn't raise his voice. "Damn it, Jane, can't you see. I don't want to hurt mom and the old man. I know what it means to them. Don't you think I thought about them before I decided? I did. But look, Jane, I've got a life of my own to live. I want to learn to live a life—not a lie."

She took a small drink from her glass and looked at her hands, folded in front of her. "What about me?" she said. "You didn't ask me how I felt about your plans. You didn't even let me know until today. Don't I have something to say in what you do?"

Al shrugged his shoulders. "Jane—I just took it for granted that you'd think as I did. Maybe that's wrong, but that's what I thought. Look at it this way—when you're born you're fitted into a groove. You move in that groove for years before you realize what's happened. Eventually you realize that a lot of your life has been laid out for you. What you are isn't so much determined by what you want to be as by what someone else would like you to be. It doesn't take any guts to realize what's happened. That's easy. It's taken for granted that you will. Most of the people I met at college were in that groove—they were going to college because they were expected to. They didn't have any thirst for knowledge—they just never thought of doing anything else. You don't have to regiment people who want to learn. And yet a lot of them actually felt superior to
those who were eager to learn something. They laugh at them. That isn't what I want, and I'm just not going to fool myself."


He opened his pack of cigarettes slowly. "Don't try to humor me, Jane, I know what I'm doing. I've seen guys that were so dependent on college life that they couldn't live outside of it. They were actually afraid to graduate. We had a term for them—'professional college students'."

"I thought you were a pretty smart one, Al. I thought you would really make something of yourself. Now you've had your chance and you threw it away."

"Jane—I've got an IQ. College can't increase it. I've also got eyes. I can read—I can read anything I want to read. I can learn anything I want to learn—and if I don't want to learn it—then maybe I never will get anywhere. I just happen to think that I can learn what I want to learn without having anyone tell me what it should be. Sure—I'm working on the railroad, but I don't have to work on the railroad all my life. But—is it wrong to want to work with my hands?"

She put her hands to her temples and smoothed the already smooth black locks to the back of her head. "Al," she said, "I know what you could do—and I know what your mother and father want you to do—and I think you're wrong. You could have so much, if only you'd take it."

"I'm not asking you to understand." He could feel the anger rising. "I don't think you could. You're not going to college, but you're in a rut, too. Don't you forget it. You've taken the standards that someone else has set up and made yours. You're looking at life as a little segment called success."

"Maybe I was in a rut. There are a lot of things I could have been doing instead of sitting around waiting for you. There are a lot of guys coming out of college every year, and I'm not so bad."

"So—you want a college man. No one else would do."

She looked at him with her face smooth and expressionless. "Yeah. That's what I want."
“Ha! Have a cigarette?”
“No thanks, that isn't my brand.” She took a shiny, flat cigarette case from her purse along with a grey leather-covered lighter. Her fingers were shaking and she couldn't get a spark from the lighter. He lit a match and held it toward her. She broke the cigarette into the ash tray. “Let me out, Al, I think I'll go.”
He looked at her soberly for a moment. Then he forced a grin. “O.K. Jane.”
He watched her as she walked out, stopping by the bar to speak to a well-dressed young man with long, wavy black hair. Sure—she was smooth, but not soft and smooth. She'd find her college man too. She could.
He walked slowly up to the bar. For some reason he felt good. “Give me another Schlitz, Ed.”
“Sure Al. Hey,” said Ed smiling, “what the Hell did you do?”


AUNT BERTHA

My great-aunt Bertha was childish and always a burden. But her worst trait was that she would not die. She was seventy-five when my parents agreed to care for her for the rest of her life, for what she would leave them when she died. She fooled them. When she finally died at ninety-seven, she had used all her own money and was such a burden to my parents that they had to send her to the county hospital.

Sending her away killed her. I think she could have cleared a hundred easily if we had been able to keep her well fed and provide her with lives to torment. It was a kind of mutually agreed murder, that business of sending her away.

My mother's health was failing, mostly because she had spent more than twenty years catering to the whims of this old woman. My father had employment dropped on him by the government and we were eating more then than we ever had before in my memory. My sister was in high school and wanted to go to college, and I myself thought that I must have a new baseball glove. It was a