

*from The Augustine Notebooks · Raymond Carver*

October 11

“NO WAY, sugar,” she said, looking at him steadily. “No way at all. Not on your life.”

He shrugged. He sipped from the glass of lemon-fix without looking at her.

“You must be crazy, it’s true.” She looked around at the other tables. It was ten o’clock in the morning and, at this time of the year, there were not many tourists left on the island. Most of the tables in the courtyard were empty and on some of the tables waiters had stacked chairs.

“Are you crazy? Is it really true, then?”

“Forget it,” he said. “Let it alone.”

A peacock had wandered in from the marketplace which was next to the nearly empty courtyard where they sat at their table drinking the lemon-fixes. The peacock stopped at a spigot near the edge of the courtyard and held its beak under the dripping tap. As it drank, its throat rippled up and down. Then the peacock walked slowly around some empty tables and headed in their direction. Halprin threw a wafer onto the flagstones. The bird picked it to bits there on the flagstones and ate the pieces without once looking up at them.

“You remind me of that peacock,” he said.

She stood up and said, “I think you might just as well stay here. I think you’ve had it anyway. I think you’ve lost your mind. Why don’t you just kill yourself and get it over with?” She waited a minute longer, holding her purse, and then she walked away between the empty tables.

He signaled the waiter, who had watched everything. In a minute the waiter put another bottle of lemon-fix and a clean glass in front of him. After pouring what was left of her drink into his glass, the waiter took away her bottle and glass without saying anything.

Halprin could see the bay and their ship from where he sat. The harbor was too shallow for a ship of its size to enter, so it had anchored a quarter-mile out, behind the breakwater, and they had come ashore that morning on a tender. The entrance to the bay was narrow and had, more than two thousand years ago, given rise to the legend that, in even more ancient days, the Colossus itself had straddled the entrance to the harbor—one mammoth bronze leg on either side of the harbor entrance. Some of the postcards for sale in the marketplace depicted a gigantic cartoon Colossus with boats going and coming between its legs.

In a little while, she came back to the table and sat down as if nothing had happened. Every day that passed, they hurt each other a little more. Every day now they grew more used to wounding each other. At night, with this knowledge, their lovemaking had become vicious and unbridled, their bodies coming together like knives clashing in the dark.

“You weren’t serious, were you?” she said. “You didn’t mean what you said? About staying here, you know, and all the rest?”

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"I don't know. Yes, I said it, didn't I? I'm serious about it."

She continued to look at him.

"How much money do you have?" he asked.

"Not a cent. Nothing. You have everything, sugar. You're carrying it all. I can't believe this has happened to me, but I don't even have enough to buy cigarettes."

"I'm sorry. Well," he said after a minute, "if we just wouldn't look or act or even talk like broken-down Hemingway characters. That's what I'm afraid of," he said.

She laughed. "Jesus, if that's all you're afraid of," she said.

"You have your typewriter," she said.

"That's true, and they must sell paper here, and pens or pencils. Here, here's a pen, for instance. I have a pen right here in my pocket." He scribbled some sharp vertical lines on the paper coaster. "It works." He grinned for the first time.

"How long would it take?" she said and waited.

"I don't have any idea. Maybe six months, maybe longer. I've known people who. Probably longer. I've never done it before, as you know." He drank from his glass and didn't look at her. His breathing had slowed.

"I don't think we can make it," she said. "I don't think you, I don't think we have it in us."

"Frankly, I don't think we do either," he said. "I'm not asking or forcing you to stay. The ship won't leave for another five or six hours, you can make up your mind before that. You don't have to stay. I'll divide up the money, of course. I'm sorry about that. I don't want you to stay unless you're sure you want to stay. But I think I will stay. My life is half over, more than half over. The only, the only really extraordinary thing to happen to me in, I don't know, years, was to fall in love with you. That's the only really extraordinary thing in years. That other life is over now, and there's no going back. I don't believe in gestures, not since I was a kid, before I married Kristina, but this would be a gesture of some sort, I suppose. Call it that, if you want. That is, if I pull it off. But I think I might if I stay. I know it sounds crazy. I don't know though, about us. I'd like you to stay. You know what you mean to me. But you must do what's right for you from now on. In my more lucid moments"—he turned the glass in his hand—"I think it's true, it's over for us. Why, just look at me! My hands are shaking, for Christ's sake." He put his hands out over the table so she could see. He shook his head. "In any case, there's somebody out there waiting for you. If you want to go."

"Just like you were waiting."

"Yes, just like I was waiting, that's true."

"I want to stay," she said after a minute. "If it doesn't work, if it isn't going to work, we'll know, we'll be able to see in a little while, a week or two. I can always go then."

"Any time," he said. "I won't try to hold you."

"You will," she said. "If I decide to go, one way or another you'll try to

hold me. You'll do that."

They watched a flock of pigeons turn with a rush of wings overhead and then wheel toward the ship.

"Let's go for it then" she said and touched the back of his left hand where it held his glass. His right hand was in his lap, clenched.

"You stay, I'll stay, we'll both stay together, okay? Then we'll see. Sugar?"

"Okay," he said. He got up from the table and sat down again. "Okay, then." His breathing was all right once more. "I'll speak to someone about getting our stuff off the ship and applying for a refund for the rest of the trip. Then I'll divide all the money between us. We'll divide the money today. We'll both feel better about that. We'll get a hotel for tonight, divide the money, and then look for a place tomorrow. But you're probably right you know: I am crazy. Sick and crazy." He was serious as he said this.

She began to cry. He stroked her hand and felt tears come to his own eyes. He took her hands. She nodded slowly as the tears continued to run from her eyes.

The waiter turned his back on them abruptly. He moved to the sink and after a minute began to wash and dry some glasses and hold them up to the light.

A thin, moustached man with carefully combed hair—Halprin recognized him from the ship; the man had boarded with them at Piraeus—pulled out a chair and sat down at one of the empty tables. He hung his jacket over the back of one of the chairs, rolled the cuffs of his sleeves back once, and lighted a cigarette. He looked briefly in their direction—Halprin was still holding her hands, she was still crying—and then looked away.

The waiter arranged a small white towel over his arm and went over to the man. At the edge of the courtyard, the peacock turned its head slowly from side to side and regarded them all with cold, brilliant eyes.

October 18

He sipped coffee and remembered beginnings. Imagine, he thought, and the next time he looked it was clearly noon. The house was quiet. He got up from the table and went to the door. Women's voices carried in from the street. Flowers of all kinds grew around the steps—big, puffy flowers, drooping red and yellow flowers mainly, with a few shapely purple ones as well. He shut the door and headed down the street for cigarettes. He didn't whistle, but he let his arms swing as he moved down the steep, cobbled street. The sun fell squarely off the sides of the white buildings and made him squint. *Augustine*. What else? Simple. No diminutive either, ever. He had never called her anything but: Augustine. He kept walking. He nodded at men, women, and horses alike.

He drew aside the bead curtains over the door and went inside. The young barman, Michael, wearing a black armband, was leaning on his elbows on the

bar, a cigarette between his lips talking to George Varos. Varos was a fisherman who had lost his left hand in an accident. He still went out now and then but since he was unable to handle the nets, he said he no longer felt right going out in the boats. He spent his days selling sesame rolls that looked like doughnuts. Two broomsticks stacked with sesame rolls leaned against the counter next to Varos. The men looked at him and nodded.

"Cigarettes and a lemon-fix, please," he said to Michael. He took the cigarettes and his drink to a small table near the window where he could see the bay. Two small boats moved up and down with the motion of the waves. The men in the boats sat staring down into the water without moving or talking, while the boats moved up and down on the waves.

He sipped the drink and smoked and in a little while he took the letter out of his pocket and commenced to read. Now and then he stopped and looked out the window at the boats. The men at the counter went on talking.

"That's a start for sure," she said. She had put her arms around his shoulders, her breasts just grazing his back. She was reading what he had written.

"It's not bad, sugar," she said. "No, it's not bad at all. But where was I when this was taking place? Was this yesterday?"

"What do you mean?" He glanced over the pages. "You mean this, *the house was quiet*? Maybe you were asleep. I don't know. Or out shopping. I don't know. Is it important? All I say is—the house was quiet. I don't need to go into your whereabouts right now."

"I never nap in the morning, or in the middle of the day either, for that matter." She made a face at him.

"I don't think I have to account in this for your whereabouts at every minute. Do you think? What the hell."

"No, I mean, I'm not making anything out of it. I mean, it's just strange, you know, that's what I mean." She waved her hand at the pages. "You know what I mean."

He got up from the table and stretched and looked out the window at the bay.

"Do you want to work some more?" she said. "Lord, we don't have to go to the beach. That was just a suggestion. I'd rather see you work some more, if that's what you want."

She had been eating an orange. He could smell the orange on her breath as she leaned over the table and looked seriously at the pages once more. She grinned and ran her tongue over her lips. "Well," she said. "So. Well, well."

He said, "I want to go to the beach. That's enough for today. That's enough for now, anyway. Maybe tonight I'll do something. I'll fool around with this tonight, maybe. I've started, that's the main thing. I'm the compulsive type; I'll go on now. Maybe it'll work itself out. Let's go to the beach."

She grinned again. "Good," she said. She put her hand on his cock. "Good, good, good. How is our little friend today?" She stroked his cock through his trousers. "I'd hoped you'd start today," she said. "I thought you might today

for some reason, I don't know why. Let's go then. I'm happy today, this minute. I can't tell you. It's as if. I feel happier today than I've felt in a long, long time. Maybe—"

"Let's not think maybe or anything," he said. He reached under the halter and touched her breast, took the nipple between his fingers and rolled it back and forth. "We'll take one day at a time, that's what we decided. One day, then the next day, then the next." The nipple began to stiffen under his fingers.

When we come back from swimming we'll do things to each other," she said. "Unless, of course, you want to put off swimming until later?"

"I'm easy," he said. Then, "No, wait, I'll put my trunks on. When we're at the beach maybe we'll tell each other about what we're going to do to each other when we get back here. Let's go ahead and go to the beach now while the sun's out. It may rain. Let's go ahead and go."

She began to hum something as she put some oranges into a little bag.

Halprin slipped on his trunks. He put the sheets of paper and the ballpoint pen into the cupboard. He stared into the cupboard a minute and then, the humming gone, turned slowly.

She stood in front of the open door in her shorts and halter, the long black hair hanging down over her shoulders from under the white straw sun hat. She held the oranges and the straw-covered water bottle against her breasts. She looked at him a minute, and then she winked: grinned and cocked her hip.

His breath went out of him and his legs felt weak. For a minute he was afraid of another seizure. He saw the wedge of blue sky behind her and the darker blue, shining blue water of the bay, the small waves rising and falling. He closed his eyes and opened them. She was still there, grinning. *What we do matters, brother*, he remembered Miller saying long ago. There came to him an empty tugging in his stomach, then he felt his jaws simply tighten of their own accord until he ground his teeth and felt his face might tell her things he himself didn't yet know. He felt light-headed, but all senses on the alert: he could smell the broken orange in the room, could hear a fly drone and then bump the window near the bed. He heard flowers around the steps, their long stems moving against each other in the warm breeze. Gulls called and waves rose and then fell on the beach. He felt at the edge of something. It was as if things he had never understood before might now suddenly be made clear to him.

"Crazy about you," he said. "Crazy about you, baby. Baby."

She nodded.

"Close the door," he said. His cock began to rise against the swimming trunks.

She put her things on the table and pushed the door shut with her foot. Then she took off her hat and shook her hair.

"Well, well, well," she said and grinned again. "Well, let me say hello to our friend," she said. "Not so little friend." Her eyes shone as she moved toward him and her voice had become languorous.

"Lie down," she said. "And don't move. Just lie down on the bed. And don't move. Don't move, hear."