

## A GUY LIKE KENNY

Cindy was edging towards her forty-sixth birthday, the divorce nearly two years old. Once it was official her struggle, her victory and now her burden was what to do with the vacation cabin she was deeded in the divorce decree and her life beyond. The sale of the house in the city, kept intact until their son, Donny, and daughter, Kendra, were firmly lodged in their university apartments, finally closed, the spoils divided, the furniture stored or packed off to a consignment company, the few things she still valued transported to her once beloved cabin, a three-bedroom log style home with a raised deck that overlooked a wide rushing stream in the mountains.

Free of Donald, "the Fat Frat," the name she had given to her husband in the years after Kendra was born and he literally let himself go, both physically and emotionally, she wanted nothing more than to work out of the cabin and be alone for a while. She had left her career as young teacher in the early 80's to follow and support Donald in his first position in the city's prosecuting attorney's office, then as he moved up the ladder to become a district attorney. She was dutiful until towards the end, practiced the protocols of an attentive wife, mother and perpetual volunteer. Her service as one of the curators and a board member of the city's major art gallery brought her at least a little personal satisfaction and prestige.

A month ago, her former college roommate, Lottie, also divorced, called to invite her to spend some time with her in her San Francisco apartment and possibly join her as a partner in an interior design firm, one that specialized in high end homes and condos. She ruminated over the offer during a late afternoon stroll and felt the tingle of excitement one gets from hearing a new idea. After two years of tying up loose ends, resigning from the boards of non-profits and consulting with her children about their ambitions, she had planned on doing nothing for a while, enjoy the scenery, the mountain streams, hike among the pines, read, hang out with the few friends she had made on her vacation excursions to the mountains. The lunches, the cook outs, the sports parties soon became too practiced and routine. She felt hollow and lonely. The thought of a move and a different living experience especially with a lively and world-wise companion like Lottie got her out of bed early and ready to ride.

Lottie's apartment had three bedrooms, a spacious living area, a uniformed doorman and a balcony where they could sit together in the evenings, talk about the galaxies with a glass of wine and look out over the city.

Even with her vow to give away the trappings of her first life, she had accumulated a number of treasures at the cabin she had at first wanted to keep and store: furniture, China and silver, art work collected over the term of her past life. The more time she spent at the cabin the less she wanted to keep any of it. She had managed so many moves during her marriage as their first apartment gave way to larger and larger homes that an estate sale was no longer an option. She just couldn't bear another one. Donald assumed she would want to handle the details. He was dead wrong. What she no longer needed or wanted at the cabin she would gift to the local chapter of The Salvation Army. With Lottie's offer and her sudden itch to move on, she dedicated an afternoon to the tedious work of going through the remainders in the cabin's small attic.

That's how she found it, going through the mess of boxes she had moved to the loft when she needed more space in their home attic. It was in one of four medium sized cardboard boxes labeled, "College." Two of them were filled with notebooks, papers she had written, copies of articles, yearbooks. Time to throw them out. She no longer had any interest in them and the kids wouldn't give a hoot. Unlike her generation, they didn't seem to treasure memorabilia. Her crowd had invented the disposable life anyway, hadn't they?

The last two boxes held more personal items: letters from friends, her high school and college diplomas, a slim photo album, plaques inscribed with awards, her cheerleader medals. That's where she discovered Kenny's photograph, the one he took of her on the path that surrounded the art gallery before she was married. It was hidden inside a literary magazine that contained her only published short story. She couldn't remember why she had not simply torn it up and hidden the pieces at the bottom of a waste basket. She might have dismissed her single encounter with Kenny as a young woman's lark, a hippy moment.

Or maybe she tossed it aside when she and Donald moved into their first home. They merged the best they had from their separate apartments. It must have been then that she concealed the photograph in the magazine after Donald spotted and criticized it

as a pose. She stuck it inside the magazine and casually tossed the magazine into a cardboard box as a tree tosses off a leaf when it's finished with it.

In times of regret she looked for it again, sometimes ached for it. Especially during those years when the children were small and she didn't feel it was fair to shatter their image of a loving family, the face she manufactured for the outside world. She wanted them to have the same security she had as a child. She thought about her mom and dad and teared up because they were gone and left her feeling abandoned. Especially her mother with her frequent telephone calls. Left her with this clod who only wanted to dominate and control her. Control everything. Sit on her every impulse. Spoil her every creative thought. She had endured her unhappiness for the children's sake and theirs alone. Now they too were gone. As often as she had wanted them to know how she really felt before the divorce, she held back. They were doing well, so why spoil their memories of childhood now. She deserved a gold medal, she thought, for fighting to keep their fantasy in one piece, fought as long as she could until the effort almost landed her in an "asylum," her cynical word for when she felt herself about to blow up and cross the line by simply running away.

She had no idea of what Fat Frat had been telling Donny and Kendra the last few years. No doubt making excuses for this and that, buying them plane tickets, getting them seats at ball games and concerts. Yet, they still called her faithfully to share. She was content with how they were coping. They were surviving so well they seemed not to need her around. She could sense the ennui through the telephone in their quiet sighs. Just mom on the line.

But then suddenly here was Kenny again, invisible to her behind the camera, still standing there one foot in front of the other negotiating for a perfect frame. It was like clicking a link on a website and opening an era, a place and time she thought forever lost. There was Kenny's face, if only in her mind. She had looked out at him with such desire and affection she wanted to sob at the sight of herself, twenty-two or so: Miss Prim, first grade teacher, with some kind of street urchin character, the janitor at the school of her first teaching assignment. She'd have to check the dates. But it was her. The real her. The her before she had traded her life for security and convention. She sweated in humiliation, thinking about what she'd done to herself, to her life. No, she just couldn't

blame Fat Frat alone for that. It was at least half her fault for needing him. And she sincerely believed back then that Fat Frat was the answer, her key to a full and fulfilling life. Back then, she would have panicked if Fat Frat had changed his mind about their engagement. As beautiful as she looked in the photograph Kenny had taken of her, so young and fresh and full of ability, she would have despaired if her marriage to Fat Frat had somehow been derailed. She'd have fiercely fought against any other outcome. How precious a person she was, she thought. And looking into her own face, she couldn't understand why. She saw herself now as Kenny had seen her. Almost whole. Not quite whole but on her way to being whole. A beautiful young woman who had no where to go but down.

How could she even gauge then that what she perceived as Fat Frat's intelligence, his drive, his thrift, were really signs of what she now knew were horribly darker qualities: his greed, selfishness, insecurity, that monstrous conservative phenomenon that served as an excuse for the ignorance and arrogance of part of an entire generation, for hoarding, for being miserly, for being controlling of all feeling and thought that didn't fit the limited confines of his fear. How could she have foreseen that Fat Frat was not, as she thought, the protector of all that was good and decent, but a mere unimaginative, sexless dullard, a wallflower who just didn't catch what was happening in the world, a retrograde, someone who resented that the old boys were being overturned by a new freedom, by imagination, by a willingness to risk, by the so-called level playing field white men could no longer control in their smoky back rooms and closed doors? How could she know he wanted to be known as Mr. Conservative, pontificate with his dry constipated breath about people on welfare, an advocate of putting mentally ill people to death, cheat on his income taxes, go to church only to further his private law practice, stuff money into his portfolio so he could die a rich man, build what he thought could be a legacy hammered onto the stone of a public edifice, never to share his riches with his family or anyone else? How could she know that deep down he believed anyone other than a white high-income male was nothing more than a bum, the children that his wife bore were his legal issue, that despite the feminist revolution he still talked down to her.

And Kenny, how did she know she would always yearn for him, yearn for him in all his commonness, in his lack of education, in his lack of couth?

How many times had she told herself that Kenny was little more than a throwaway, someone she could tease and be kidded by, knowing all the while she had no need to fear him? A janitor was all he was. A janitor, yes, but with a sense of humor and someone she could trust and depend upon. A handsome, competent young man who opened the school every morning and greeted the children with a smile or a grin as he leaned on a wide mop and push broom and jangled a ring of keys, brewed coffee so the teachers could have a quick cup before their first class, cleaned up after meetings, stayed late after band practice, switched off the lights, locked the doors.

Say what she would, Debbie Dawes, the ice queen principal, wasn't the oil that kept the school running. During his time at the school Kenny was.

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The afternoon of the day she planned to say goodbye to Kenny by taking him on what they liked to call their "one and only field trip", she had a serious case of nerves. She thought Kenny might embarrass her in front of her art gallery friends. Even with her limited income she'd invested in a membership, gone often to the art gallery, joined fund raisers and was well known to the docents and guards. What would they think of her bringing a guy like Kenny into their cathedral of art? She thought maybe she could warn them about Kenny in advance. That seemed too condescending.

Kenny had not given the exact reason for leaving his job at the school. Just the date. He had only disclosed his decision to Debbie and to a few teachers a few days before. It seemed so sudden and mysterious.

One moment she looked forward to escorting him around the gallery; the next she didn't think she possibly could go through with it. Just after lunch, she panicked, seeing him in the lunchroom by the doorway leaning on his push broom, dressed in an old shirt, blue jeans and worn sneakers, the only clothes she'd ever seen him in, joking with the children as they stacked up their trays. Maybe, she thought, as she watched him in his gray shirt and jeans, she was going to have to be realistic and bail out. That's all there was to it. How to explain this to Kenny without breaking his heart? Where to begin? On the other hand, he'd be gone tomorrow anyway and she wouldn't have to face him the following day. She could make up a story, an illness in the family, an emergency

meeting suddenly called by the vestry at her church. As she passed him on her way to recess that day, she could only smile and say, "See you there, Kenny."

Rain was forecast throughout the day, a disappointment. Once she had offered to take him on a tour of the art gallery she hoped for a clear evening and a nice dinner to thank him for his help

Standing in the grand foyer of the art gallery in her windbreaker, an umbrella draped over her forearm, she again plotted about how she might undo her invitation. Perhaps a note handed to Kenny by the guard at the front door, excusing her due to a situation that Kenny would never be able to check it out. Maybe her car wouldn't start and had to be towed. Or a nose bleed and a visit to the ER, though knowing Kenny, he'd track down the name of a hospital and be right there. No, she was stuck. She just couldn't put Kenny down. "It's just not in you to say 'no', not even to a stray mutt," Fat Frat often accused her, annoyed by what he thought was her excessive charitable work.

She paced. Kenny was already fifteen minutes late. He might have stayed after classes with Debbie to be sure all the children had been picked up and the school doors locked. The bookstore at the art gallery was getting ready to close and that was another disappointment because she wanted Kenny to choose an inexpensive memento of his visit with a first- grade teacher. The one he said he'd never had.

In vacillating between staying and leaving, she pictured his expression of not finding her there. The image stabbed her. He might find her personal telephone number and ring her apartment until she answered. Like a stalker. After all, what did she actually know about Kenny? Maybe he was some kind of a nutcase. He might not know when to stop. On the other hand, she had extended the invitation and made the commitment and she hated people who broke promises. Like Fat Frat typically did. The phony. The liar. The once physically fit football player and racket ball king who really did grow into her moniker of him, a truly sloppy fraternity brat.

Even with his coarse behavior she genuinely liked Kenny. He was easy to be around and had been the first to welcome her at the beginning of the school year as one of the new first grade teachers. It was always, "Miss Pugh," this, "Miss Pugh," that, not just, "Cindy." He appeared like an apparition with mop and bucket whenever any of the children, "puked," as he indelicately put it, which happened more often than she'd ever

imagined possible before her student teaching days. His grinning face greeting the children and their parents as they arrived at the front door was the shining memory of her first teaching assignment that helped her through the trying but inspirational moments in the days before teachers lost out to the ideologues of their school boards.

Though he might have been some years her senior, Kenny seemed younger than his age and acted her junior. She was twenty-two starting her first real job. He still wore his sandy colored hair parted in the middle and down near his shoulders where it flipped and bobbed when he walked with a cocky bounce. He dressed neatly in his washed-out clothes. She noticed that his fingernails were clear and well-trimmed. He didn't give off an odor. His belts were wide in a western style, the buckles square and plain. He had chains dangling off both sides of his hips, one for the fistful of keys in his front pants pocket, the other for the faded black wallet in the back. Of his faded shirts he was happy to brag, "Got this at the thrift store for a dollar and change." They showed. As did his scuffed up sneakers.

But she couldn't take her eyes off Kenny's face or stop thinking about the allure of his emerald eyes. She blushed sometimes when he looked up from his push broom and smiled at her. His eyes reminded her of a mountain stream, of an unspoiled forest. He was lean, not very tall. By any measure, his features were symmetrical, handsome. She felt a little guilty after sometimes wanting to spontaneously walk up and kiss him full on the lips and have him hug her to the bone. Donald came to mind at such moments and blurred the daydream. Donald had not yet penetrated her but they had undressed together and petted. They were saving the grand moment for their honeymoon. Her mother's churchy thing, a promise she squeezed out of Cindy early on.

On the day she first met him, Kenny had a fresh scar, a gash an inch and a half long, on one side of his nose. She calculated he must have recently had the stitches out because the scar was still pink.

His mouth sometimes got him in trouble with Debbie Dawes. He would talk "rough" — her word — around the children and teachers but looked totally amazed and sheepish when anyone took offense at what he had said. "Not in front of the children," Debbie admonished him under her breath in the cafeteria, smiling, but with a mouth that looked like it had been fed horse manure. "Sorry, maam," Kenny would apologize, "just

not thinkin'. Like you said the other day. Same as you tell the kids. Got to put my thinkin' cap on. Got to think afore I speak."

Debbie wrote in her evaluation that Kenny was "too present" for a custodian but so reliable and so eager, so competent and affordable — a school board and taxpayer thing — she decided to tolerate him for the time being. Kenny had worked at the school three and a half years.

Cindy finished lunch one day and was helping some of the children with their coats as they lined up in the cafeteria for a field trip to the art gallery when her invitation to Kenny simply spurted out of her mouth. The back door of the cafeteria led to the parking lot where the buses waited to take the children on their field trips. Kenny was behind his perpetual push broom, sweeping, moving chairs back and forth, brushing crumbs from tabletops.

"Where you off to, today, Miss Pugh?" he asked Cindy.

"We're going to spend the afternoon at the art gallery," Cindy smiled. "There's a special exhibit of children's art from around the world. Doesn't that sound like fun?"

"What a deal!" Kenny winked and let out a shrill whistle.

"Oh, Kenny," she had said, for that was all she could think to say, she felt so flustered. She loved taking the children to the art gallery and found it thrilling to be there with all those brilliant works of art. To her, it was a holy place, more holy than a church, though Fat Frat berated her when she told him that.

"I ain't never been to a place like that," Kenny had said. "Drove by it. Big ole place. Like a monument. They never took us kids out like that. Guess they thought we'd scribble over things. Or get sick and puke."

"Oh, Kenny."

" 'Course, there again, maybe that's how come we never did know much about ort and such."

He turned to the line of older grade school students Cindy had formed. "You kids is sure a lucky bunch to have a teacher like Miss Pugh. I hope you behave yourselves. Wish I was a gittin' on that bus."

Cindy had blurted out, "You will some day. We'll go together. Just you and me."

"You serious, Miss Pugh?"



"Of course," she had said and instantly regretted it.

"You're on then. I'll hold you to it. Yes, I will."

Since then, either she or Kenny had found some excuse not to settle on a day. Now, they had no choice. Today would be Kenny's last day and then he would be gone, gone he said to another city, another job, but when he was asked why, what or where, he simply smiled and winked.

Cindy decided, if they pushed it, they could catch almost two hours before the art gallery closed. She desperately wanted to keep her word but felt equally certain she didn't want to be caught dead with Kenny at the art gallery. Besides, Donald would have his nose out of joint if he knew she had cavorted off with another male. For one thing, Kenny was so much better looking than Donald who would have been jealous and insisted she call the excursion off. But Kenny, as though he had been saving up psychological coupons to cash in, gave her no room to cancel. He seemed hell bent on having her host him around the art gallery, take him on their own special field trip. Fortunately, Donald had driven to St. Louis with a study group for the bar exam. That bit of luck took her off the hook. She crossed her fingers on the backside of the evening that Donald wouldn't discover by accident or a casual misspoken word that she had spent time with Kenny.

Just as she looked at her watch again, Kenny pulled open the tall heavy door of the art gallery, stuck in his fresh face and grinned. He was wearing a newer looking long sleeved casual blue shirt, a nice pair of blue jeans and a fresh pair of sneakers. She was going to compliment him on his appearance when she spotted his camera. It was slung over his shoulder on a strap. He might not understand about the prohibition against cameras. I hope, she thought, he won't cause a scene.

Before she could say hello and casually ease Kenny into the idea that he wouldn't be able to take any photographs, one of the uniformed guards, a squat, vole looking person who could have been male or female, slipped around one of the marble columns and snapped, "Sir, you'll need to check that camera," as quickly and with as much apparent pleasure as taken by the kind of people who wind themselves up in the back of theatres, ready to pounce on latecomers, fingers at their curled lips, with a loud, "Shhhhh!"

"What?" Kenny snapped back.

"It's a rule," Cindy cut in. "Flashes from cameras can damage the surface of paintings."

"Well, I'll be. I'll just leave off my flash then."

"The rule here, sir, is no cameras," the guard reiterated, folding his/her arms and grimacing.

Kenny paused, considering what to do next.

"It's ok, Kenny," Cindy said. "We can take some pictures outside. There's a sculpture garden and a lovely path to walk."

"Dang. What am I going to do for souvenirs?"

"There's a gift shop. If it's still open, we can buy some postcards," Cindy half pleaded, catching a faint whiff of tension from her underarms.

"I knew there had to be some money-making angle," Kenny said, lifting the camera strap over his head. The guard escorted Kenny to the checkroom while he handed over his camera. "This here is an expensive cam-er," Kenny said. "Treat it as one of your own."

A younger woman inside the checkroom, not smiling but matter-of-factly assuring him, said, "We've had very few problems, sir. Your camera is in good hands."

Kenny eyed the camera carefully as he stuck the receipt she gave him into a back pocket. "Hate to let go of that thing," he grumbled to Cindy as she tugged at his shirtsleeve and pulled him in the direction of the admittance counter.

"You can go on in, ma'am," the attendant smiled. She was a young black girl as Cindy recalled her, possibly a student who seemed not yet to have lost her sense of joy.

"You get in free?" Kenny wondered out loud.

"Not really. I'm a 'friend of...,' meaning I make an annual donation. One of the benefits of this card is that it allows me and one other person to be admitted without additional charge. Except for certain events, that is."

"Oh," Kenny winked. "I guess I must be your special event. One day gonna get me one of them cards. Then, you can be my special event."

Cindy blushed. They passed through the turnstile into the great hall. It was a large domed marble room lined with tall sculptures on ornate pedestals in the classical

style. Arches off the great hall led to galleries that led to more galleries. It was more than one could experience in a few hours. Kenny stood in the middle of the great hall and whistled. His whistle echoed.

"Man, oh, man. This must cost somebody a pretty penny. Like a castle, ain't it? Ain't never been in a castle really. But if I was a king, this'd be my spot."

"Now, Kenny, we will need to use our best quiet voices here," Cindy said as she would to one of her young students. "Sorry, but we have to hurry a bit. The gallery will close in about an hour and a half. This will have to be a quick run through."

Because Kenny had to surrender his camera and because Cindy knew that photography was Kenny's hobby, she led him through the current photography installation first. "Faces of the Mid-West: The Depression," was the title.

"I'd have to spend a whole day in this section alone," Kenny said, after peering closely at the first few photographs, then realizing he wouldn't be able to finish the exhibit by closing time. They strolled through the rest of the exhibit until Kenny stopped in front of a photograph of a prostitute somewhere in Indiana. It was called, "Prostitute, 1931." She was posed, smiling, partly nude, in the doorway of a saloon.

"Dang," Kenny said. "Look at the goods on that gal."

"Kenny!" Cindy shhhd, completely off balance, then found herself giggling, even as she looked around for eyewitnesses. This was the kind of thing she had feared. Yet she and Kenny giggled together, hands over their mouths.

Across the room, a uniformed guard appeared, an older man with glasses, circling the room casually in oversized shoes that squeaked.

Kenny's forthright remarks continued to surprise Cindy. She had become somewhat accustomed to them and actually looked forward to what might be his next faux pas. She rarely had a clue about what would come out of his mouth. He could tease her about her appearance or tell her off color jokes and make her laugh because there was nothing disgusting about his telling of them. Their conversations felt familiar, not invasive. In fact, she felt much more relaxed and fun loving with Kenny than she did with Donald. Donald was very proper outside the dorm and she admired him for being so. His demeanor would be important when he graduated from law school and tried to hack it. His off-color jokes, when he told them, often after sucking the necks of several

bottles of beer, much like, she discovered later, sucking her neck red and raw, sounded, well, downright nasty. In only a few years after their lavish marriage ceremony Fat Frat turned out to be one of those loud mouthed, never in combat, forever flag waving, throwing up in the alley jerks who closed down bars, danced a jig and sang, "hey! hey! ho! ho!" and had to be dumped into bed with half his clothes on.

She knew little about the technical aspects of photography or cameras per se, only what she liked to see in the results. Kenny hadn't been schooled in photography that she knew of but planned to take courses in his new position, whatever that was and wherever it might be. His comments about the exhibit amazed her. He speculated on the type of camera, settings, and how the shot had been taken. He zoned in on just what was unique about a photograph, its composition, light, shadows, contrast. He seemed to know instinctively, she thought, about the essence of a photograph.

"Heck," he said, "I really don't know the first thing about it. I just know when I see something worth a shot, I say to myself, hey, now that there's a pitschure. So, I snap it. Got me a book of photos I'd like to show you some day. I got some as good as any of these," he told her when they moved across the great hall into the Impressionist exhibit. "When I get back, I'm gonna set up my own studio. Have a darkroom. Maybe get into some contests. Have an exhibit of my own."

"When you get back? Are you coming back?" She frowned, confused about his plans.

"Hope to," Kenny said, looking around, saying nothing more.

When he went on to the next photograph, she said, "Bet you'll do well, Kenny."

"Well, my stuff'ud be a damn sight better than some of the shots in that exhibit. 'Course it depends on who's lookin' at it."

Later, Cindy would remember that Kenny liked the Impressionists best. As did she. He especially enjoyed, "Reen-ooo-are," which was how he pronounced, Renoir and Monet.

"I wish I could catch me some light like that in my shots. I seen that kinda light a lot in the late afternoon in the summer and fall. It's got a kinda smoothness to it that falls upon the trees and people's faces. Don't know why, but it makes me sad or something. That light. No, no, not sad, uh, lemme see. Oh, it gives me a longing for something I

cain't have, for something I ain't seen yet. Makes me want to sit by a crick and cry. Makes me hungry for something."

"Maybe you are getting hungry, Kenny."

"No, not quite yet. Are we still gonna have some of them noodles."

This was part of the plan. Since Donald was out of town, her plan was to go to the art gallery, then have dinner at an Italian restaurant she liked. Noodles was what Kenny called pasta. He couldn't get used to calling plain old spaghetti or linguini, pasta. Just couldn't make his mouth get it out, he said.

"I've got a reservation at a sweet little restaurant by the river," Cindy said. "It's run by a family. The Patrones. You'll like them. Even the grandmother helps out. She actually hand makes some of the pasta. Creates some of the salads too."

"Yeah, well," Kenny snapped. "My grammaw used to help out too. Help out beatin' the crud outta me."

Kenny stopped for a long time in front of one of Cezanne's "Bathers." He propped his chin in one hand and supported his elbow with the other.

"Now them's nekid. He did a pretty good job of their behinds."

"Kenny!" Cindy said, putting her index finger over her lips."

"Sorry," Kenny said.

Kenny hurried through the Medieval period. A little flat, he thought and too churchy. By then, he was leading Cindy by the hand. She hardly noticed when he first took it. When she did, her palm began to sweat and her heart pounded. It was a combination of fear (what did she really know about Kenny anyway?), guilt (Donald would die!) and excitement. A tingle down the back of her neck. Kenny's hand was firm and excitingly rugged.

"See what I'm sayin' " Kenny went on. "All them devils and virgins and saints. Good colors, I will say that for them. But the paintings themselves, blah," he said, giving them the strawberries with his tongue. "Gives me the creeps. As when I am in a church."

He was amazed, though, by the carvings and masks in the African section and excited by the scrolls in the Asian collection.

"I'll tell you what," Kenny said about the scrolls. "I seen places like that in North Carolina. Up in the mountains where I come from. Lookin' down at horses, things like that. Again, it's a matter of catching things in the right light."

He looked at his watch and his face dropped. "Runnin' outta time, dang it." Again, he took her hand and began to rush. He stopped to relish a few of the Renaissance paintings.

"They do a nice job on skin, I'll say that for them. I'm not so sure about the eyes though."

"What do you mean, Kenny?"

"Well, I done took a lot pitchures of people and I can tell people's eyes from animal eyes. Those eyes," Kenny said, pointing to one of the paintings, "seem to me to be animal eyes. Now maybe that's just my imagination. I've shot a deer or two and that's what comes to mind. But thens to me is your animal eyes."

Kenny's comments in the contemporary art section ranged from "That's just plain weird," to "You call that ort? Shit, give me a little plaster and glue, a few days in a trash bin, some cans of spray paint and I'll be a rich man."

Cindy had expected as much and decided to keep quiet. It would be over in a few minutes. Even so, she found herself looking around to see if anyone, including the ghosts of the artists themselves, could overhear him. She was starting to feel more stressed than she thought she would and ready to move on.

By the time they had finished their tour, the gift shop had already closed and the guards were locking the doors and dimming the lights. Kenny traded his ticket stub for his camera and checked it over, up, down, and backwards, eyeballing the cloakroom attendant carefully in between. Cindy tried not to watch Kenny but smiled knowingly to the attendant with her lips in a wide thin way.

Kenny looked down hard at the attendant.

"Now, lady, this better be in the same condition as when I brought it in. Elsewise, somebody's gonna pay for it," Kenny mumbled. The attendant raised her eyebrows in surprise as if she'd never heard that before. Cindy felt mortified and wanted to hide.

"Done deal," Kenny finally said. "I sure need me a smoke. "Tromping through an ort gallery can give a person the jitts."

"Sorry about the gift shop," Cindy said. "Let's skip the sculpture garden and walk down the path around the grounds. There are some sculptures there."

"That's good enough. I'll take me a picture or two along the way."

Tom, an older man who'd worked as a guard at the gallery seemingly forever, held open the front door and bowed kindly to them as they exited. Kenny, thinking it might be a custom of some kind, bowed back.

Outside, Kenny asked, "Don't those guys ever say anything?"

"They try to be invisible."

"Ain't that the shits."

At the bottom of the stairs, Kenny stretched, yawned and belched loudly and long.

"Kenny!" Cindy scolded, looking around automatically for witnesses, glad it was a weekday and they stood there alone.

Kenny seemed offended and stepped back, shocked that Cindy would be so upset. Taking a cigarette from its pack and tapping it against one of his knuckles, Kenny turned to the statue of a wood nymph to apologize and said to it, "Scooze me, mademoiselle."

Cindy sighed and sat on one of the stone benches at the bottom of the steps, thinking she could just walk up to her car and drive away. Why not? She'd taken him on their stupid little field trip. The pre-planned dinner was an extra. Still pondering what to do, she watched him while he smoked and scanned the trees that lined the path they were about to enter.

"Ahh, nature," Kenny said, spreading his arms wide, holding his cigarette out between thumb and forefinger like a dandy. He stood to the side of the statue of a gladiator in a helmet. The statue had been cut down the middle by the late sun, half sunshine, half shade. "See how thee sun hath divided thee shade. A wonder of thee world."

"Oh, very good, Kenny," Cindy sniffed, "very observant. I'll give you a D+ for that one." Again, Kenny looked surprised. He turned his head slowly, dramatically, in her direction.

"I can see you don't always appreciate the finer angles on things," he said, wagging his head. "Spend some time behind this here camera and you might begin to see a few things a lot of people miss."

"I'm not even going to get into that, Kenny," she said and found herself snickering in spite of herself. The clod.

Kenny put out his cigarette military style, took Cindy's hand again. "Gosh," she thought, she hadn't even resisted. It felt so natural. He lifted her by the hand from the bench and led her to the opening of the walking path, lined and partially covered by the limbs of the trees in the shape of an arch forming a natural tunnel-like effect with arboretums in between. It was early May and the leaves had just begun to show. The jonquils had come and gone. The tulips about ready to open. The sky was uneven, dimmed and smelling of rain, splintered with streaks of light blue sky and late sun. Did she hear distant thunder? Maybe that was something her memory threw in.

Halfway through the path Kenny spun around directly facing her and said, "I'm sure going to miss all this."

"Spring will come again, Kenny," she said.

" 'Spose so."

Just after that is when he snapped it. She had wandered ahead of him, enjoying the outdoors, the excitement of a coming storm and its cooling effect. She hadn't even seen him open the case and lift out his camera. She stood looking up at the sky through one of the arboretums. In summer, roses and ivy climbed up the columns and thatched the roofs with leaves, thorns and blossoms. At that moment, there was just enough green to give the arboretum the semblance of a primordial grove painted in watercolor from a wish or a dream. She had turned back to look at Kenny.

"Here's to the gods," Kenny shouted from several feet away, waving at her to pose, smiling at her, focusing his camera. Cindy laughed. Kenny waited until she stopped laughing. She looked down at the ground, then up at him. The flash startled her. She suddenly asked, "What made you think about that? About gods?"

"All them little cupids in the paintings."

"Kenny, they're not gods. You've got to bone up on your mythology."

"Well, sorts of gods. Maybe from the same time zone."

"Okay, I'll accept that answer."

Kenny had snapped the photograph in the split second between Cindy's contrived smile and her next unconscious laugh.



"Well, now, you're immortal," Kenny said, looking down at his camera. "You'll be a goddess, yessir. Got you down forever."

Watching Kenny's intensity as he fussed with the settings on his camera before he took a picture made Cindy sad for him, even though it would still be a few hours before she knew Kenny's secret. She could feel the breeze and smell the sweetness of things and knew that Kenny did too, though he continued to busy himself with his camera and pretend he had nothing to worry himself about except the next photograph. Maybe, she thought, that's what some people called dignity.

"That ought to do it," Kenny sniffed proudly, elated by his good work. "I'll mail you a copy."

"Thanks, Kenny," was all she could say. After all.

They hurried down the path, Kenny holding her hand, she feeling both embarrassed and uncomfortably excited, almost put upon, though not quite fearful. Kenny stopped towards the end of the path under a towering sycamore and turned again to face her. Neither of them spoke. She could only feel how close their bodies were. She felt herself sway and hoped that she was not about to faint. She thought Kenny was about to faint too. He looked so pale and rattled.

She remembers reaching out to hold his other hand and they slowly sank in unison to their knees. It was a long sweet kiss, one that allowed them to dissolve into each other. She couldn't remember how long it lasted, only that they said nothing for a long time. She felt somnolent. Kenny looked relieved. Forehead to forehead, they lapsed into a moment of drowsiness with their eyes closed. The word "swoon" came to mind.

Kenny rose first, wobbling backwards as he stood. He lifted her by the hands and she laid her head on his chest. Their hands locked as they walked slowly back to the parking lot. They stood by her car, looking at each other. Finally, Cindy woke.

"I want to drive, Kenny," she said. "I've never ridden with you and I'm a little frightened right now."

"Okay by me," Kenny shrugged as if he understood.

"I'll drop you off back here after we eat."

As she drove, neither of them said anything about their kiss.

"If I open a window, can I smoke? I'm kinda nervous, Cindy," he finally said.

Cindy, for an unknown reason, wanted to cry, wanted to pull over and spend the evening kissing and holding Kenny. She held back her tears and pretended to be calm and in full control.

"Okay, Kenny. But, please blow it out the window." She was thinking of Donald who didn't smoke. He would surely notice.

"Yes, maam," Kenny said softly.

"Kenny, it's ok to call me, Cindy."

"I have had a hard time of it. But I will try."

She drove on to Patrone's in silence. Kenny flicked the dead ashes off his smoke and stuck the filter into his watch pocket. She could have used some nervous talking but simply drove on, holding her anxiety inside.

Shortly before they reached Patrone's Kenny stuttered before he said, "You know, don't you, Cindy, those kids in your school need lots more trips than field trips."

"Like what, Kenny? I'm open to new ideas."

"I don't quite know how to catch it. But there's a whole world outside them walls they won't see until it might be too late."

The school was a wonderful school, Kenny said, a kid's paradise. But not too many children in the world could afford a school like that. Some of them would fall hard, as Kenny said, "like out of one of them pitchures. Yep, it's purty within them walls. Teachers like Miss Pugh. Bluebirds a flyin' out of their books. Sunshine and rainbows ever which way. But then, they ain't never spent much time downtown. I doubt if their moms and dads have neither. Not many of you teachers, I betcha."

Cindy couldn't tell by his words if he was trying to help her or hurt her. She let his words blow by.

Early in the evening as it was, Patrone's was nearly full. Its simple old country signage appeared in a row of shops, art galleries and high-priced boutiques along the riverfront. The evening cooled, no mosquitoes yet this early in the season. The birds gave a sundown concert. Cindy had reserved a table on the deck that overlooked the river, reluctantly admitting to herself she had done so to impress her handsome janitorial friend. Above them hung the thick and budding vines of one of several flowering

artificial plants. The branches swayed in a dusk that was quickly becoming night. A string of all year Christmas lights blinked on.

Cindy could tell that Kenny was trying his best to mimic her every move. She knew he wasn't quite that naïve. Maybe he didn't want to give the impression he didn't know what to do.

Kenny declined any liquor. Ordered a Coke right off. In deference, she declined her usual, a specific Cabernet and asked for ice water. They held their menus close to the kerosene lamp in the middle of the table better to see.

Kenny fidgeted, then asked, "Now, this here's an I-talian restaurant?"

"Can't you tell?"

"Yeah, but I don't see no spaghetti and meatballs."

Before Cindy could speak, the elder Mr. Patrone spoke from over Kenny's shoulder.

"You will want the Bolognese," he said with authority.

"It's the same thing. They make it with fettucine," Cindy said.

"Well, why don't they just say so," Kenny said, wagging his chin and pursing his lips.

He attacked the basket of bread even as it was being set down and quickly asked for more butter. He ordered another Coke and, after a few sips, started to emit a long, low belch from the side of his mouth but caught himself midway, looking side to side to see if anyone noticed.

Cindy was less mortified than with the first of his belches and was heartened to see he had taken note. Even so, she wanted to hunker down, suddenly again wanting the evening to be over soon. Though she was still dazed by the kiss, it was awkward, the whole damn thing. Out to dinner with the school janitor.

It was obvious Kenny wasn't comfortable with her either. She sensed he really didn't enjoy his pasta. It was served in the old Italian style. He had probably anticipated the more familiar American spaghetti version. But he mopped up all the sauce with the last of the bread from the second or third basket — she had lost count— and then the remainder of the oil and vinegar from his salad bowl with the crust. They brought Cokes to him, one after the other, and he slurped the last of these through a straw before he

ordered a coffee and she an expresso, something he had never sampled. After she offered him a taste from her spoon, he said how glad he was he had ordered regular black coffee with sugar and cream.

"Bitter stuff," he smirked. "Stronger than whiskey. Now this here, what I am drinking, is your real live coffee."

God, he is green, Cindy thought. She longed to get back to her apartment and have a hot bath and a nice glass of wine.

"You know, Kenny," she said, "you haven't told me a thing about your new job."

Kenny grabbed his pack of cigarettes. His hands shook so much he had trouble knocking one out of the pack and lighting it. He looked straight at her but didn't speak for an indeterminable amount of time. What he said may have eventually changed her whole life, if not at that moment, then almost thirty later when she again found the photograph he had taken in the garden.

"Cindy, I...I ain't got no new job," he said. "The truth in this here life of mine is that tomorrow at 12 o'clock noon my lawyer is goin' to drive me to the penitentiary at Fort Leavenworth to surrender my sorry ass for a five-year prison term. The truth of it is I'm going to jail for burglary."

Again, Cindy thought she was going to lose it, either tumble over, throw up or scream. The restaurant with its background violin music, the early spring air, waiters shooting back and forth, the smell of garlic everywhere, seemed nightmarish. She felt she was floating above herself looking down at the scene through smoke and candlelight. She could hear Donald scolding her self-righteously, "Out in public, alone with a bona fide felon!"

Once she caught herself, she managed to whisper in a hoarse voice, "Kenny...for godsakes..."

"I'm sorry maam — I mean Cindy — to spring this thing upon you. I just wanted so much to go with you on one of them field trips. I thought if I told you about all this you'd get scared and find some excuse not to go."

"I tried to think of one, Kenny," she heard herself say, "even though I had no idea. It's so complicated. Now, I feel like you've lied by not telling me."

"That may be," Kenny said. "By the same token, knowing you as I know you, you probably lie all the time."

"You don't know that, Kenny."

"I do and I don't," was all he said and cleared his throat. "Back to complicated, you don't know how complicated this whole thing is." For the first time she could see his green eyes tear up. "See, I thought I was burglarizing houses so's I could send money to my mom. That's how I told myself it was okay to do it. Okay, because of the Fat Man. Now, maybe you don't know much about the Fat Man. You'd have to grow up poor to know about him. But me, I was taught it was okay to take from the Fat Man. 'Cuz he takes from everybody else. And see this thing here and now, this isn't my first felony offense. It's my second. That's why I got five years. If I didn't have such a good lawyer, I'd have gotten seven to ten. Even so, I've been thinking a lot. What I been thinking lately is that this burglary business I been doing has a whole lot more to do with me than with my mom or with the Fat Man. Sure, I wanted to send her some moolah. Sure, I wanted to get back at the Fat Man. But the real reason's stranger to me than that. I really don't want to tell it. But I think I should."

"This sounds scary to me, Kenny. I don't think I can hear it."

"If you don't want to hear it, I'll get up and walk right out that door," Kenny said pointing to the Exit sign, his voice rising. "I will understand. Me, I will."

A part of Cindy wanted to get up and run. Another part wanted to stay and hear the rest of his story and just be with him. There was no logic to it. Dammit, she wanted to curl her face into Kenny's neck.

"Kenny, I am interested in why you had to burglarize somebody's home. But do you know how frightening that can be? To have someone digging around in your home in the middle of the night?"

Kenny looked down at the table, then up and off to the side that faced the river. As he might have said, "The moon was upon it."

"Well, all I can say is that I couldn't help it. Now, some people will tell you that you can help it, that you can decide what you can do and what you cannot do. Me, I try to go to sleep at night but find myself restless. I find myself getting dressed, putting on

my black sweatshirt, my black jeans, my black shoes. I have me a mask of sorts I made outta a stocking cap. I will have a house in mind, a house I've been by many a time."

Cindy shivered.

"I know lots about locks. I once worked for a locksmith company. Most locks are simple. You can get into lots of houses with a paperclip, a narrow screwdriver, a dental pick, a credit card, what not. Me, I done made me a copy of the locksmith's master key. That helped me into most houses. Now the thing that excites me most is that I can walk around at night in someone's kitchen as a mouse might. Once inside, I'd lean against a wall for a while until my eyes got used to the dark. Then, I 'maged my fingers were like antenna and I put them before me and to the side of me, like a bug, like a roach. I like feeling like a roach because they live so long. They can survive most anything. They can survive our secrets. Sometimes people would groan in their sleep, cough or get up and look around. Now and then, they'd even stumble right past me standing upright against a wall. I can't tell you how exciting that is. Or to turn a knob on a bedroom door and slide open drawers and see with a small flashlight what was hidden in there, knowing the people of the house are sleeping only a few feet away. Sometimes I'd get on the floor and crawl along the carpet, up the steps and ...."

"Oh, just stop it, Kenny," Cindy almost shouted, putting her face into her hands. "You're scaring the crap out of me."

He's a nutcase, she decided. I've let myself be suckered in by a psychopath.

"Sorry," Kenny whispered, again bowing his head.

Mr. Patrone appeared from the shadows, quietly circling the table as if to see if it was current but Cindy knew he was simply looking after her, one of his regular customers. He stood above Kenny for a moment, glanced at Cindy's face and moved to the next table gathering and lifting away soiled plates.

After Mr. Patrone handed the plates to a server and greeted guests at another table, Kenny leaned on his elbows towards her and said, "You see, it's really about me being able to see in the dark. It's about the light in the dark."

She might have been afraid. She wasn't. He was just being Kenny again, talking, the Kenny with the smile and emerald eyes.

Thinking back, she probably seemed judgmental and indignant. She wanted to tell him she hoped he'd get help in prison. Ha! How stupid she'd been. Get help. What did she or anybody know about getting help in prison.

They sat a long time in silence watching the lights of the restaurant blink in the flow of the river. The air started to get chilly. She had forgotten to bring her jacket.

"I'll write you, Kenny," she said at last, shivering.

"Please don't do that," Kenny said softly. She could see he was getting very nervous. She both wanted to go; wanted to stay. He had a draw about him. He lit another cigarette. Tomorrow, he would be a prisoner.

He cleared his throat and said, "It will be hard enough. A guy like me, to be in jail for one thing, for another to have a beautiful woman I can never be with again writing me letters. That would be torture, 'specially knowing I can't have you." His eyes showed tears. "If you send letters, I will have to think about you. I'll think a lot of things that aren't true, that aren't real for me. I'll think you'll be here when I come back. But you'll move on, you know you will. They all do. I seen several start teaching, say they'll stay forever, then get themselves married a year or two down the line, move on, and never be heard from again."

Cindy blushed. His whole speech flew by her except for the part about a "beautiful woman." When he turned away again towards the river, she repeated those words to herself.

Cindy thought about Donald, then about Kenny. Kenny had led her to a crossroads. Weighing the two, she knew she wouldn't be able to live her life with a guy like Kenny. She needed someone like Donald, a winner, a jock in fact. He could have played football at the university. But it would have taken him away from his studies. He did try to do everything right. During their courtship they shared novels. He recited poems to her, loved to hike and travel and ski, scuba dive on winter holidays on his family's dime. He was clean too, didn't smoke and offered her a healthy pedigree. Still, a few things worried her even then. Though he was kind to her two cats, he was hell bent on becoming a prosecuting attorney and dead set on putting murderers to death. It was his ideology that troubled her. The fervor of his self-righteousness.

"What will you do, Kenny, " she asked, "once you get out?"

"Like I said, I think I'll try to get me into a special school. Oh, not maybe not a college like yours, but some kinda school for a guy like me. Get into photography. Then again, maybe just work in an office. I don't look forward to a lot of hard work in the rain and snow. 'Course maybe nobody will have me after this."

"You got the job at Morgan Elementary."

"Yeah, but I lied, to tell the truth."

After she drove Kenny back to his car at the art gallery, they stood outside his car and kissed again automatically. A short hard kiss and for her, arousing. She wanted more. He stepped aside, took her in his hands and held her at a distance to look at her one last time, kissing her goodbye on the cheek with a "glad to have known you" look. To her surprise, she pulled him back, pushed her breasts into him so forcefully she caused him to gasp. The hug became a sensual embrace. He moved to pull away but she wouldn't allow it. His next kiss was firm, moist and rich, not like Donald's with his thrusting greedy tongue. Kenny didn't force his hands down her pants to touch her buttocks as Donald did. He kissed her again fully on the mouth, smiled at her with his bright eyes, took a mental snapshot and let her go. That was it. What she really wanted was for him to rough her up, take her to what she imagined was his tawdry apartment and give her the works.

Unlocking and opening the door to her apartment was a disappointment. Now she was keyed up, sexually excited, wanting to finish. Donald was out of town and Kenny still in town but gone for good. The phone began ringing and kept ringing every ten minutes or so. She knew Donald was on the other end; later she found he wasn't calling out of love, but of jealousy, to keep control, control of her, her sexuality, her life,

She uncorked a bottle of Chardonnay, put on her jacket and sat on the small balcony of her apartment, continuously petting the tiny heads of her two cats. She rubbed them until she thought they might be rubbed raw and sobbed the sob of those who live a lie but seem unable to live without it.

Two months later, during summer vacation, she received the photograph in the mail. It arrived in an irregular envelope, unsigned and with no note, just her black and white photograph smiling under the arboretum in the milky haze of an unearthly and timeless light. She could see small droplets below one of her eyes.



After she moved with Fat Frat to California from Kansas years ago and pieced together their first family album, the photograph of her under the arboretum in early spring was one of the first photographs she slid under a clear plastic cover. For some reason, Fat Frat not knowing its history, had objected to it. "Cindy," that's not you," he'd chuckled nervously. "Where'd that come from.? That's just a pose of some kind."

With each of her children, Donald, Jr., her first born chubby boy and Fat Frat look alike, and her sweet Kendra, she assembled a new album and another, and out of those albums fashioned an "all time" album that held her most precious photographs. She must have tossed Kenny's photograph into her college box then.

Seeing the photograph again in the stale afternoon light she couldn't decide whether to shred or frame it. She set it on the old wooden kitchen chair beside her. Looking out a small window onto the mountains in their distant perfection she wondered if it was a perfection that was not hers to have. Kenny, poor Kenny, she thought, but moved on from there to her packing and future plans and decided to shove him out of her thoughts. Before she put the lid back onto the box she hesitated and slipped the photograph back inside.

She thought about Lottie, San Francisco and what it would be like to live with another woman. As for men, the kind of men you bumped into these days, throwbacks to the 50's, Fat Frats like Donald, just wouldn't do either. She only wanted to keep her days coming and going alone with no one giving orders or raising expectations, take in some concerts, read some books, stroll by herself through the streets, sit on benches in art galleries, watch the way natural light touched things, the tops of trees, water sliding in rivers, the faces of people who had lived some. She wouldn't have time in her life-to-come for a Twenty-First Century Man, unless, perhaps, he would be a guy like Kenny.

\* \* \*

The tourist secured his camera bag onto his shoulder and opened the door of the small shop, causing a set of small overhead bells to shake. The glass window advertised the usual surfing posters, 24-hour photo service, credit cards accepted, passport photo service, types of film and cameras for sale.

He shifted the case off his shoulder and gently set it by its long strap onto the floor. No one stood behind the glass display counter. He heard the sound of processing

equipment in the back room through the door leading into it. In a few seconds a middle-aged man appeared. He was of medium height, slender build, with salt-and-pepper hair rubber-banded into a short pony tail, an island man, tanned and lined by many years in the sun. He wore a faded tank top, nondescript shorts, discount store thongs and a small gold ring in his left ear. He smiled as he wiped his hands on a stained towel and approached the counter. It was a kindly smile under unusually sparkling green eyes.

“How may I hep you?” he asked.

“My camera seems stuck. I don’t know much about them,” the tourist said. “But, to put it simply, it just won’t go. It blinks, so it does have power. But the shutter jams. No response no matter what buttons I push. I’ve haven’t dropped it or anything.”

“They can be stubborn. Let’s have a look at your gear.”

The tourist lifted the case onto the countertop and unloaded it: the camera, wide angle lens, a large zoom lens and its standard lens.

“Quite a rig,” the man said. “By the way, name’s Kenny.”

“Hal,” the tourist said uncomfortably. He just wanted to get on with it. Get the camera to work and be done with it. No useless chit-chat.

Kenny picked up the camera and tried to put it through the motions. He set it back down and leaned toward the tourist on his elbows. Those eyes again. The tourist was not used to having someone look so directly at him.

“Hal, this here thing’s a machine some engineers with a lot of time on their hands done dreamed up. Now, I’m not one to make a guy feel bad. Not right. Not right at all. But whoever sold you this monster sure saw you a comin’.”

The tourist felt deadfooted in his Birkenstocks . His first impulse was to break Kenny’s nose. He felt talked down to. But Kenny didn’t have that silly grin on his face like the bearers of bad tidings usually had.

“Hal, I don’t know of any professional photographers who’ll spend this kind of money for cam-er equipment.”

The tourist noticed right off how Kenny said the word, “camera,” like “cam-er.” His confidence fell two notches.

“For one thing, it’s not needed,” Kenny said.

With that, the tourist let his confidence level immediately rise. By his tone of voice he could sense this guy wasn't going to take him to the cleaners.

“Most professional photographers I know put their own rigs together to suit themselves. The people who make this stuff, and that’s all it is, they just do it to make money. It don’t make pitchures any better than the old box cameras your grandfolks carried about. I don’t tell you this to make you feel bad. I tell you this because I don’t want you to spend any more money on it. As for today, I can’t help you. There isn’t anybody on these islands who can help you. How long is your stay?”

The tourist felt irritated knowing that Kenny knew he was just another tourist.

“Two weeks.”

“Figured.”

Not just irritated. Slightly pissed. He's a cool one, this island rat, the tourist thought. Under-impressed by anything or anybody, it seemed. Washed over by sun and sea. He didn’t care a damn about whom he was or what he'd done, about Wall Street, about how famous he was in the world of finance, any of that, no, not this guy. Oblivious about his new girlfriend, his neurotic kids, his nagging ex-wife, none of that. An old hippy probably, this guy. He could bury him in a finger snap. But he probably didn’t care. An untouchable. Yet, at this particular moment, two kids and a girlfriend back at the five-star hotel whining and complaining, he needed this insignificant runt more than Kenny needed another customer.

“Only the manufacturer can fix this,” Kenny said. “On your return to the mainland, you will need to mail it off to them. Looks new. Still on warranty?”

“Yes.”

“Good. May I suggest something?”

“Okay.” The tourist found, much to his annoyance, he could barely speak. His voice had gone down under. A kick in the nuts. Despite all his independent research, a flop, or perhaps this smoothie was trying to rip him off.

“Once you get the cam-er back, advertise it. Sell it. There will be many a person who will pay a good price for it. You will at least recover some of your investment. I’m sorry to have to tell you this, Hal.”

No, sir, no mister, no anything. Just Hal. Only his girlfriend and a few close friends were allowed to call him that.

Kenny exchanged a sympathetic grimace with the man.

“Now, as to your current situation, I offer these three options.”

Here comes the con, the tourist thought. Still, he was ready to scream. He was in a hurry. Where was his executive assistant? But what could he do? This guy had him by the short hairs.

“You can just buy disposable cam-ers to cover you while you’re here. You know the limitations. No zoom or a very limited one. They will take as good a pitchture of you and your family as any. Two, I have three different cameras here for a few hundred dollars with zooms and auto flash, all of about equal quality, that you can use for the remainder of your trip and perhaps hand down to your kids or your nephews. Good beginner’s cam-ers. Three, I have two keepers, in the four to five hundred dollar range that will last you for years. Amateur types but solid. If you decide to spend a lot of time in photography, then you can decide on your own about what equipment you want to spend a lot of money on. Now, you don’t need to take my word for it. There are two cam-er shops just down the way and, of course, several large ones at the town center.”

Kenny slid open the glass on the case from behind the counter, removed several cameras and set them on the countertop.

“These on your left are the least expensive. The other two are ones you will want to give some thought to.”

“Give me a minute.”

“In your own good time. Excuse me, though, my wife is out, so it’s just me here with a backlog of film to develop. Ding the little bell here on the counter once you decide. Look around. I’ve got some fine shells and polished coconuts. Some framed ortwork too. My wife does watercolor, more than sloshed-on stuff. And I’ve got photography up on the walls. I can make larger or smaller prints. There’s my portfolio you can browse through. I don’t charge much to ship.”

Kenny nodded politely to end the conversation, then added:

“That’s really how I make most my living. I travel to ort shows now and again.”

Kenny turned into the doorway of the back room. The tourist glanced up from the counter to the wall behind it. Awards were hung in frames in chronological order. Few years were absent. Some of the awards were international. He then scanned the other two walls and saw several photographs of the same woman. He was in a hurry, his girlfriend probably in a twit with the two kids. Even so. Though he didn't count himself as connoisseur, the larger framed photographs surprised, no, astonished him, especially in a small shop on an island like this.

The woman in the photographs appeared to be in her late twenties, early thirties, a dark-skinned island woman. Athletic looking, with flowing black hair, barefoot, luxurious lips needing no makeup, in simple strapless dresses. The largest framed photograph had a small "Not For Sale" tag in one of the bottom corners. The photos pictured her in several places and poses, against the backdrop of a waterfall, a large volcanic rock, in a sunset, on a beach with the ocean behind her. Though the woman was their central feature, they did not seem to be portraits. They were studies — that's what they were — studies of nature in unusual hues and dimensions of light and dark. Even the darkness glowed with reflections off the sand, the ocean, the sky, the cliffs and the hills behind them. He felt spellbound as he went from one to the other.

What held the tourist more than any of them was a particular black and white photograph of another woman hanging at the very end of the long display, also not for sale, a younger, striking Anglo-Saxon woman in a blooming Victorian garden that the photographer may have been astute enough, or lucky enough, to have caught at the exact moment in a certain late afternoon light in which the woman stood under an arboretum captivated by something or someone very rare, hands slightly opened at her side, lifted as if in a greeting or state of surprise, standing, so it seemed to him, in the full perfection of her youth.