

## TALK

“*Dear Delores,*” Heywood’s note began. Dolores read the first two lines, crumpled the note and hurled it straight ahead in a strike-three fastball. It fell behind the two-drawer cabinet where Heywood had placed a very old 12” by 15” black and white television that only worked now and then. He attached the note he scribbled with a ballpoint pen on a large piece of brown paper ripped from a neighborhood grocery store sack on the screen of the television with a tiny thumb sized piece of clear tape.

She stood in the middle of the stained Persian rug Heywood bought at a thrift store, two suitcases at her side and her mouth open. Heywood had finally acted on his threat. He had gone to Kathmandu. Or not. The fact was, he wasn’t there in the apartment.

She refused to believe what she saw. His apartment always looked like a mess of throwaways in an abandoned garage that was neatly arranged, dusted, vacuumed and wiped clean. For her, that described Heywood’s basic contradiction. An orderly mess.

Gone were his thrift store backpack, his black cadet hat, his black leather jacket and well-worn hiking boots. Gone too were a dozen or more shoe boxes of index cards containing notes for his Master’s thesis, “Boswell’s Mirror: A Mirror Into The Mirror,” notes he had accumulated over their two years together. At seeing them missing, she shouted: “Oh, no, Heywood, you didn’t...you wouldn’t have...you couldn’t have...” and screamed so loudly the elderly man in the upstairs apartment pounded the floor with his walking stick hard enough to scatter snowflakes of powder from the ceiling. She ran out of the apartment’s front door and circled to the back of the three-story building to where the dumpster stood. It was a Tuesday, trash day. She threw her hands into the air. The one day she wanted the trash truck to be a little late, it was early. There was nothing left but pieces of paper, empty plastic grocery bags and pages of newspapers stuck to the scum at the bottom.

No one knows, not even Delores, how she made it through that first night alone after tossing Heywood’s note. The next morning she left the blankets of their bed scrambled, lights on, dirty dishes in the sink. Heywood, fastidious about his mess, wouldn’t have allowed it.

She had returned to the apartment after leaving a mansion owned by her friend and mentor, Fredrich, where she had been staying during her separation from Heywood to tell him

that he was going to be a father and it would be best for them and the baby to reunite in one way or another. She hadn't yet figured out "another" but hoped Heywood would be willing to talk about their living arrangement. She had only been gone five weeks after their major fight and the tantrum she unleashed as she stuffed a few belongings into a small suitcase and stomped into the street with the words, "Don't worry. I'm never going to bother you again."

She had hurried to the apartment on impulse after hearing the news from her gynecologist. Shock and surprise on Heywood's face was her first thought. Her shock was that he was no longer there.

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The night they first met Heywood stood slumped at the front of the line at the Beaux Arts, a fine arts theater where she worked as the newly-appointed assistant manager. The student she hired to sell tickets, usher and serve at the bar failed to appear. Delores would have to fill in. She had just unlocked and opened the front door when a string of patrons lined up at the ticket booth. Delores moved into the ticket booth window with Heywood facing her through the glass, a tall thin gangly young man in a black tee shirt and faded jeans, his long brown hair scattered beneath a black cadet hat, his shaggy four-inch beard hanging unevenly from his chin with a slight curvature at the tip. His upper lip was hidden by an unkempt uneven mustache.

He broke the silence through the round speaker opening with, "Is this another one of those dumb foreign films with subtitles where the characters do nothing but talk? If yes, I don't want to spend my time sitting through it."

Dolores felt offended. She looked at the line behind him and knew that many were regulars. They might overhear her reply. Before she could consider what to say, she blurted out:

"I've seen it twice. And it stinks." Which was true. She could hear some polite chuckles from the line. She needed this job for a number of reasons. She relaxed when she saw the line stand firm.

Heywood leaned his elbow on the counter of the ticket booth.

"The movie may stink but I don't think you do," he said quietly. "I like the way you look."

Delores gave him back his direct stare.

"Are you one of those assholes who likes to pick everything apart?"

"Yes, I am," Heywood said. "As a matter of fact, I object to most things in today's world."

They are foolish and stupid, just like this place.”

*So, you are a prick,* Delores thought. *“What things? What does ‘things’ mean?”*

“Look,” she said. “Do you want a ticket or not?”

“I don’t want one. I want to be with you. When do you get off? We could have a cup of coffee.”

His words rattled her.

“Not cappuccino?” she smiled.

“Not my style,” Heywood smirked. “That’s just for trendy sorts.”

But for the glass between them, Delores might have slapped him. She heard herself blurt out again.

“Okay. Come back at one,” and did not know why she said it.

“Good deal, miss. What’s your name?”

“Delores.”

“I shall return and not disappoint you.”

“Asshole,” she whispered at him.

“That I am,” and with those words, Heywood turned and wandered into the early evening and dull lights brightening the theater and restaurant district.

What did Heywood do in the interim? He walked past the bars and restaurants and thought about the nature of the world, how lacking it was over all, how sweet the coming spring smelled. He thought about Delores, her mouth, her cleavage, her smile, what she might look like without any clothes.

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Before she met Heywood, Delores lived with a girlfriend in a tiny apartment several blocks from the theater district. After their late night conversation at a nearby coffee shop, Heywood led her to his apartment a few blocks from Beaux Arts. She immediately decided she was in love with him and couldn’t figure out why. She moved into his apartment a week later. His apartment was larger than her girlfriends’. His bedroom had a balcony that overlooked a street lined with bushy trees and caught a fresh breeze from the nearby park. They could talk privately there and see the moon and the stars. The area was in an old neighborhood that was being gentrified. Except for the inside of Heywood’s apartment the older apartments on the block had a charming red brick look. The first floor still had a counter and a nook for room keys.

There had been a doorman once. Heywood's apartment was the only apartment on the second floor. At first sight Delores thought it shabby. Delores soon learned only the contents were shabby. She had made her way from a rural town to the big city and knew the score. She felt safe and comfortable in Heywood's digs.

On that first night Delores was surprised to find herself walking down the street with a stranger. She was not that kind of young woman. She had always been cautious about being approached by wise guys. Heywood seemed different. Pushy, yet easy going. Easy to look at.

As promised, he walked with her to an outdoor café and helped seat her at a small round table. The café was open for another hour so they ordered first and began talking as though they had known each other since childhood.

Heywood's tone and demeanor suddenly changed from the smart ass who had been so rude at the ticket counter to a more serious young man. They gave each other short takes. Heywood's mother died giving birth to him. Though he dated often, his father never remarried. It was just his father and Heywood. His father traveled during the week, leaving Heywood with a live-in nanny. Dolores didn't know her father. Her mother left her with an aunt and disappeared.

"I'm trying to be a Cinderella story," Dolores told him. "My aunt had four girls and expected me to stay home, clean house, cook and watch them. I took off one day when she was at work. Hitched a ride from town to town and ended up here. I worked as a waitress and took some night classes. In my time off I went to the movies. I want to be a screenwriter. But I don't know anybody in the business. So, I decided to work at Beaux Arts. Now I'm assistant manager. It has some really rich patrons. One of them, a man who goes by Fredrich, has been especially helpful to me. He's the movie critic for the entertainment section of the Sunday edition. We talk about movies all the time. He even loaned me some money to help pay the rent."

Heywood listened with a serious frown. Though he had yet to meet him, he wasn't so sure though about the guy known only as Fredrich. He kept his doubts to himself. At least, that night he did. Not a hustler, he was as surprised as Dolores when he stood, took her hand and led her to his apartment. He was amazed that once in his bedroom she undressed in a flash. Just like in the movies.

Delores found Heywood odd. He helped out at a record shop in the theater district, spent several afternoons and nights at the university library filling index cards with notes for his

Master's thesis and, during breaks in between, at the park under a favorite tree. He had already finished his course work. Instead of buying anything new for the apartment he preferred small antique items like his turntable and television set. Old used things. He didn't tell her about the trust his father, deceased when Heywood was fifteen, had left him. Which explained how he could afford to spend only a few hours at the record store three days a week and take her out to dinner. Nothing fancy. He didn't have the clothes for it. Nor patience with conventional wisdom. He liked to debate with anyone who took him on.

Despite their contrary opinions, they soon developed a plan. Heywood would continue to work on a master's degree. Then a PhD in literature. He wanted to be the head of an English department at a large university.

"Change things around," he said. "Too much politics. Too much time spent on theories and protocols." And he wanted to create programs for inner city kids using his position to "show them that writing well is important and reading can be fun." Making changes was the crux of his thesis: to use Boswell as an example of a life wasted writing about someone else's life, like the life of the philosopher, Samuel Johnson.

Delores never quite understood what Heywood had in mind, how his thesis was going to change anything. She just knew he was passionate about it.

For her part, Delores would continue as assistant manager at the Beaux Arts, watch movies, take writing classes, make contacts, work on ideas for screenplays.

"Surely," Delores often said, "I can write screenplays more complex and insightful than the ones I see at the theater."

"No doubt," Heywood honestly conceded.

They would move to Hollywood when the time was right.

The rub that ended in a massive argument with each of them throwing objects at each other came after a year or so after Dolores decided to join a group of young business women who had lunch occasionally at a place called, "The Midday Candle." Boyfriends were allowed to sit in and contribute. No subject was ruled out. Delores invited Heywood and Fredrich to join her. She considered Fredrich as something of a patron, shared thoughts with him about movies they had seen, the business of movies, contacts he might have when she was ready.

Heywood secretly resented Fredrich in his expensive suit and tie, hovering over her with a broom mustache covering the rim of a glass of wine, taking her to lunch, buying scarves and

small pieces of jewelry he thought were right for her. Heywood asked around and discovered that Fredrich didn't need the newspaper job. He was a trust baby like himself, an art collector and dealer, and lived in a mansion he had inherited. He seemed harmless enough, asexual. Heywood was not jealous in that way. He just didn't like Fredrich taking up the time Delores could be spending with him.

"I guess it's okay," Heywood said. "Your friends at The Midday Candle I mean. They bother me for some reason. Eat spinach salads and sniffle at me when I order a cheeseburger with bacon and onions."

"You're being paranoid," Delores told him. "Or maybe you feel intimidated. Too many smart women?"

"Maybe. They spend an awful lot of time with their date books trying to decide when to schedule the next meeting."

"Whatever you say," Delores said.

During the few lunches he joined, Heywood's mind would drift into the trees above them. He was addicted to the wind stirring the leaves. He smiled now and then at the women and other young men in the gathering to show interest. Then stopped going to the lunches with Delores at all with the excuse he had better ways to spend a lunch hour.

He and Delores developed a routine. She came home from the theater just after midnight to find Heywood fingering through his notes and turning the pages of thick books he checked out of the library. The two sat out on Heywood's balcony and talk. About what? God. Politics. Books. The ups and downs of their days, the films she was showing, exhibits at art galleries, their future plans. Sometimes made love at three in the morning.

"I wonder when the turtle doves have sex," Heywood speculated.

"I think they sleep at night."

"I'm glad we're not turtle doves."

The next day Heywood would fix lunch, play music, accompany Delores on short walks until it was time for her to leave for work at the Beaux Arts or for a class at the university. Delores liked to say that Heywood was her drug of choice.

"Heywood, you can really do it," she often told him.

"That's quite a compliment," Heywood smiled. "Given your track record."

“Heywood,” she smirked. “You don’t know a thing about my love life. You are intolerable.”

“Well, thank you anyway,” Heywood grinned. “You’ve made my case.”

Delores demurred. Her *respondez-vous* when he was being obnoxious was to change the subject. “Now, where are you at with your thesis?”

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“Dear Delores...” Heywood’s note began. Each time she recalled his words she wept and cried out to the ceiling, “Why, Heywood? Why?”

The “Dear” part wounded her deeply. It was not like Heywood to use such a word. Too formal. *He must truly love me*, she thought.

Thinking back, she remembered that Heywood’s discontent first appeared when he refused to attend the lunches with her at The Midday Candle. “The Young Old Bag’s Club,” he called it. “Yabba, yabba, yabba,” he mocked. “And nothing to show for it.” She had no way to retaliate because Heywood had no real friends. He was a loner. While generally keeping up their daily routine, he would lay with earphones beside the speakers hooked up to the old turntable or to a used boombox and to sing to himself with his eyes closed until she left for work. Some days he told her he was going to the record store to help out his friend, a self-made hippie named Jerry, when unknown to her was actually going to the park to hang out.

Then there were the parties. As part of her job, Delores was required to organize them several times a year. They were fundraisers to keep the losing enterprise going and to introduce the cognoscente — as Fredrich liked to think of himself to some of the more important films they were going to show in the near future. Again, at first, Heywood would accompany Delores, even deal out the *snacks* as he deemed the *hors d’oeuvres*, in his refusal to use *fancy* language and pour the wine samplers. A time came when Heywood told Delores he just couldn’t find the energy or interest to show up with a straight face. She felt deeply hurt and feared Heywood no longer cared for her.

“Heywood, are you planning to leave me,” she said in a quivering voice.

“Heck, no,” Heywood said. “I don’t want to do that.”

“Then why won’t you be with me when I need your support and caring.”

Heywood paused to carefully choose his words.

“For one thing, support is a phony word, don’t you think? I mean, an ass-kissing word. For another thing, those people talk in phony voices. Instead of saying, ‘film’ they pronounce the word as *‘fulm’*. Instead of saying cinema, they say *‘ceenema.’* Then, there’s always Fredrich hanging over your shoulder with his Walrus-stash and holding out his glass for more wine. Sorry. It’s not for me.”

For the second time that week Delores stormed out of his apartment for a class with no goodbye and no kiss.

What Delores didn’t know, and Heywood didn’t have the courage to tell her, was that that he had also given up his interest in Boswell and in the PhD program. For starters, the professors were a bunch of competitive, condescending pissants, constantly bickering; others, frustrated writers with little or no talent. Heywood had been expecting red intellectual meat. Not more talk. What Delores didn’t know was that after she went to work or at The Daylight Candle, he would simply wander the neighborhood, avoiding the foot traffic and afternoon boozers in the bars who babbled so much he was driven to linger in the park. There, he would find again his favorite tree, a willow, and lean against its trunk. He neither wrote nor read nor philosophized. He wanted to simply experience, mostly himself. His thoughts were about nothing. He stared through the roving branches of the willow at the sky. He napped, awakened, caught an image like a soap bubble, watched it pop, slept again.

Delores noticed his shoeboxes with index cards stopped growing. “Oh,” she said, “I guess you’re about ready to start writing.”

“Not quite yet,” Heywood said. “A few more details. Part of my research. It still needs work.”

“Time is passing, Heywood. Why not just get started? Write an outline at least. An opening paragraph. Make a case.”

“I don’t tell you how to run Beaux Arts. Why tell me when and how to write my thesis?”

“I just want you to get started,” Delores snapped, and noticed that she was snapping at Heywood.

“Do you want to do my research?”

“You know I can’t.”

“Then why not just bug off.”



That night they did not make love. Neither slept. Delores left early for the theater without lunch or a hug and kiss, leaving Heywood on the floor with his headphones.

She spent more time with Fredrich out of spite, going to lunch, discussing movies and the current showings at the city's art galleries. Fredrich played the role of the kindly, patronizing uncle. Heywood shrugged. He cared but didn't care. He was enjoying his time alone, not from Delores, but from her crowd, the artsy sorts, the professors, the wannabes. Their constant meaningless chatter.

After reading some of her screen play drafts, Heywood decided he could easily write better screen plays than Delores ever would, especially because he didn't hang out with the theater crowd or have Fredrich with his bossy mustache breathing down his neck.

Delores kept the pressure on.

"Write your goddamn thesis, get your PhD and let's get started."

"I'm tired of waiting," was the inference with each grimace, every direct order. After several frustrating nights she dreaded coming home to the apartment after closing the theater to have her nightly glass of wine with Heywood. She hated her angry and disloyal thoughts.

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"Dear Delores..." his handwritten note began...

On another day under his thoughtful willow, Heywood devised a new strategy to divert Delores from becoming, in his astute opinion, more and more like her theater crowd. Delores discovered his scheme on a typewritten page taped to the refrigerator door. At first she stood before it puzzled, then irritated. It was a list of two columns of numbers with common expressions beside them. No. 1 said, "Hello." No. 2 said, "Yes," No. 3. said, "No." No 4, "Goodbye." And so on., The list even included words like, "Amazing," and "Brilliant."

Thursday night had become their date night. It was one of Delores' nights off. The afternoon of the same week as the Heywood's list appeared, he opened the yellow pages of the telephone book to point to the name of a Chinese restaurant he liked. Once they were seated at their table, Delores discovered that every item on the menu had a number next to it.

The waiter, an eager young man, approached their table with his order pad and said, "Anything to drink?"

"A diet Pepsi for me," Delores said. "And I'd like to see a wine list."

"No. 47," Heywood said.

“Oh, you want the Peking Duck?”

“No. 2 (No). Heywood said.

“Oh,” the waiter said, “you might like to start the Egg Drop Soup?”

“No. 2 (No).”

Heywood looked at the couple at the next table. He pointed to a glass of water.

“Okay, water,” the waiter said with a quizzical look and departed to place the drink order.

After the waiter left, Delores cut loose.

“Heywood, on our special night out? What is the hell is going on with you?”

“63 (Go Figure),” Heywood said.

“Dammit, Heywood. I don’t get what’s going on here. What are you trying to prove now? You’re no good for me like this. For all I know you could be in Timbuktu or Shambhala. The way you’re acting, what difference would it make to me?”

“No. 44 (TS),” Heywood said.

“Now what am I supposed to make of that?”

“No. 63 (Go Figure).” Heywood’s voice was brusque.

In the next few minutes as the conversation continued by the numbers, Delores reached her boiling point. She smacked the table with her fist. Heywood called it her Latin temperament.

“No, Heywood. I’m not going to let you get away with this.” She leaned across the table towards Heywood in a confidential manner. “Look, Heywood, Fredrich has offered me use of one of his bedrooms. A suite, he says. It has all the necessities: shower, toilet, fridge, sitting area, desk. A real toilet. No dingy stools.”

Delores looked as glamorous as she had ever looked, Heywood thought during her rant. He had been leaning on his elbows, then slumped back in his chair. He scratched his left nostril which had been irritated by a long nose hair and then tweaked his beard.

“Okay, Miss Know Everything. You go live with that old leche. In the meantime, I shall enjoy the summer sky.”

Delores pushed back her chair and stomped her foot. She took a last frustrated look at Heywood and rose to leave. As she did, Heywood mouthed behind her:

“By the way, I hope you enjoy cluck-clucking with those old hens.”

The insult was one Delores could not allow. She heeled and marched directly at Heywood. She swung her big black purse directly at his head. He ducked. She missed.

On the rebound she caught his mouth, busting his lip.

“Ouch, dammit!” Heywood shouted and stood as if to attack her. Out she went, leaving him gripping his mouth.

The waiter brought Heywood some ice cubes wrapped in a small towel. After the bleeding stopped, Heywood ordered his meal using words instead of numbers. He ate chicken, broccoli and rice slowly through his busted lip and walked home the long way up before circling back to his apartment.

After leaving the restaurant Delores hurried to Heywood’s apartment, found her small suitcase, called Fredrich, waved down a taxi and soon after alighted on Fredrich’s front door stoop. He greeted her in a purple smoking jacket and led her up a winding staircase to one of the rooms at the far end of a wide carpeted hallway.

It was the loveliest room she had ever seen. Pure white, silky, smooth as whipped cream, with a television, a half kitchen, even a Teddy Bear set against the pillows of the bed. After showing her around the mansion, Fredrich graciously left her to herself. Once alone, she spit out, “Screw you, Heywood.” She kicked off her shoes and cuddled into an easy chair by the bed. After a few minutes of comfort, she wept. Not just about Heywood. About her life. Why had her mother abandoned her? Why had her aunt treated her like a slave?

Contrary to how Heywood had characterized him, Fredrich turned out to be a complete gentleman. She seldom saw him. He was absent during the day; Dolores at Beaux Arts at nights.. Now and then, up late, he might scramble her some eggs sherry in the kitchen and share a glass of wine. Most nights when she wasn’t working she spotted him in the living room in front of the fire place in a smoking jacket, his feet up on an ottoman, reading or talking on the phone. He often dressed to go out in a suit and tie or a tuxedo. He had friends over, men and women, for a drink or a small party. She was not invited. There was a cook and two assistants on call, servants who tended to household chores and two yardmen who managed his garden. He was different in the mansion than he was at the theater. He rarely spoke to her in his comings and goings except at the theater. As the weeks passed, she noticed that there was just something wrong with Fredrich. He was odd but not in the way Heywood was odd. He never attempted anything sexual, whether implicit or explicit. He never intruded or was a bother. After all, it was his mansion. She guessed what bothered her, even when she didn’t see him, was that she knew he was there, sitting in front of his fireplace, smoking elaborately curved pipes in one of his fanciful

silk smoking jackets. What he lacked was a hunting hound perched beside him. The rooms smelled to her of funeral parlors, faintly floral, a bit too sweet.

Several weeks after leaving Heywood, she began to feel nauseous and strange. Regular as the sun, she hadn't yet had her period. Her doctor, a young female friend who had sat in on some the lunches at The Midday Candle, tested her and calmly announced that she was pregnant. She thought back at the last time she and Heywood made love. A good afternoon not long before the scene at the Chinese restaurant. She had never imagined getting pregnant while on the pill.

One morning after she heard the sound of Fredrich's car leaving the circle drive of the mansion, she decided to go back to Heywood's apartment. Impulsive, true, but that was her wish. For better or for worse. Heywood needed to know about her pregnancy even though he had never called her to apologize and she had never called him. Though the theater was close to his apartment, she took taxis back and forth from the mansion with its long winding drive to the Beaux Arts, directing the driver away from a route that would not pass by Heywood's place. Made her wonder why they had never accidentally crossed each other on the street. When the taxis became too expensive, Fredrich cosigned a loan at his bank so she could buy a used VW Bug. She also bought two suitcases to hold the new clothes she bought to replace those she had left behind, thinking she might leave Beaux Arts and travel to Hollywood without Heywood. Now that she was pregnant, Hollywood seemed another fantasy out of Disneyland. Maybe Heywood would have missed her or mellowed or tossed out his numerical plan.

She wrote Fredrich a note thanking him for his generosity. She he would call him to explain.

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After her return to Haywood's apartment and her first night alone, Delores showered, unpacked and prepared to go to work at the Beaux Arts. As she looked around and saw again the mess that Heywood left behind, she snapped back to her days as a waitress and how she had made her way to being assistant manager.

"I'm in shock," she said to the mess. "But I've got to make do."

Heywood had never included her in the practical matters of his mess: how much was the rent, about the utilities, what bank or banks he used. She only knew that he had been left some money.

A few days later she heard the phone ring. Maybe it was Heywood! No. It was Jerry at the record shop.

“Hey, Delores, do you know where Heywood is? He was supposed to help me unload and file a new shipment of CDs. He never showed up.”

Delores gulped.

“Uh, I haven’t seen him either. I don’t really know what’s up.”

“Damn. He knows so much about music. He’s almost irreplaceable.”

“No one is irreplaceable.”

“Well, maybe not. He’s got the info right at his fingertips. All kinds of info.”

“Sometimes too much info.”

“I don’t know about that. Hey, if you hear from him, can you have him call me?”

Dolores almost said, “No.”

She swallowed.

“I’ll do my best.”

“Sure you will, sweetheart,” he said and hung up.

Dolores decided that she needed to call the landlord, Mr. Bentley. He rarely answered a call on the first attempt. She left a message and hurried off to the theater. Mr. Bentley returned the call and left a message.

“Delores. This is Charles Bentley returning your call. Never you mind about the rent. Heywood made an arrangement with the bank. Some kind of special account. The bank will not only handle the rent but also the utilities and trash pickup. He said he had made a cash deposit into your checking account. Call me again if you have any other questions. Good night to you”

Delores did not know if she needed to be overjoyed or sad. Fredrich continued to hover over her on the big show nights, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. He did not question her about Heywood. He seemed too pleased with himself. She felt an urge to tell him to kiss off. She did not want to seem ungrateful. And she might need his bank account for a loan now and then. Part of the job. Keep the customers happy.

Whenever she thought of Heywood, she felt her stomach. It was only slightly bloated. The throwing up bit lasted longer than she thought it might. In those moments, she despised Heywood. After throwing up, she yearned for him. When he was up to speed, he was such a funny clever sexy man to be around. Heywood, why?

She mooned over Heywood so much she lost a few beats. Tripped up at the theater with some bookings. The manager, Edwin McNight, who was also the owner and a patron of the theater, chose the films he wanted to show for the other patrons. His plaything, and the only quality that she could see that made him something of a celebrity with the upper social class. More of a hobby than a profit center. Profit center was a term she picked up in one of her classes. Maximize the sale of the booze, candy and popcorn. Make the most of the ticket. He cautioned her to keep her mind on her work. Scared her. She needed the money and the contacts.

The theater was seldom full and much of the time peopled by a mere handful. The theater, a relic with its elaborate early twentieth century decor, was often more inviting to watch than the dreary or ridiculous movies McNight selected. The excitement of working at an art theater and mingling with its more eccentric clientele was beginning to dissipate, especially with Heywood on the loose. Sitting out on the apartment balcony with a glass of wine and a baby growing in her stomach was not what she had mind.

On a day off she took a second look at Heywood's apartment and decided it needed a complete clean up. She would take action and get that faded dirty carpet out of there. Trash the encrusted ashtrays that Heywood never used because he did not smoke and coffee cups growing green with the makings of penicillin. As she pulled the television cabinet to one side, there it was. Heywood's crumpled note. She jumped back a bit before picking it up between thumb and forefinger like a soiled candy wrapper that had been smashed on the sidewalk too long. The wrinkled form had gathered dust balls. She brushed them off and set it gingerly down on the card table. She sat on one of folding chairs by the kitchen table and stared at it for a moment, trying to decide if her wound had healed well enough to handle the rest of his words. The note had become a "thing," the word Heywood used to describe almost everything. It occurred to her that he generalized more than specified. *What things?*

She reached out for the note and slowly pulled it open. A torn section from a grocery store sack. Was that all he thought of her? What about a sweet card? Or a nice piece of stationary? In their two years of togetherness, he had not sprung for one present. Not even for her birthday or for Christmas. He didn't believe in either.

Since the day she crumpled the note and tossed it behind the television cabinet, she had become more like Heywood. The sky he yapped about became more clear. She decided to stop working so hard, skip the lunches at The Daylight Candle . Let Heywood's checkbook roll, walk

more often in the park, sit under the trees. She smiled thinking of Heywood's salutation. When she had unfolded the full length of the note on the scrap of brown paper, she read:

*"Dear Delores,*

*I decided to take your advice and go to Kathmandu. I went to library first to check it out. Not quite. Looked at Timbuktu. Worse. I figured the people there wouldn't understand a word I said nor they mine. Instead, I am hitchhiking my way across the country to find a spot where I cannot be contaminated by other people and spend some time studying myself. I believe this will lead to finding my pure self. At which time I hope to return. In the meantime, feel free to use the apartment. Honey, nothing against you. I just did not like my thesis or my professors who were, as I've said many times, tiresome, cranky, petty and mean. I do not know if you will have me back but I really, really hope so. I wish you a lot of screenplays. Just make them real. When I get back, maybe then we can sit down and talk. Heywood*

Delores held the note in her left hand, gestured with her right.

"I wish I had known this on day one," she said, deploring herself for being so impulsive, a trait Heywood had brought to her attention. She stared at the note for an undetermined amount of time, her thoughts teeter-tottering between joy and anger. She set the note down on her lap. Memories of Heywood zoomed past, from her first sight of him to the last distorted configuration of his face. She held her chin and bottom lip with her left hand, gestured with her right. Then said to his mess:

"No, Heywood. I am not going to sit here the rest of my life waiting for you to go through some kind of transmigration. No. Just no. There are plenty of other people in this world to talk to."

She calmly tore up his note and watched the ragged pieces fall like brown leaves into her new wastebasket.

She had a baby blooming in her stomach and a new screenplay to write.