

## *NAKED AND WET*

Marianne sat alone under a tree by the river, smelling the freshness of blossoming lemons which were growing in a nearby grove. The wind must be strong, she thought, to carry the scent so far downstream. Occasionally whirlwinds of dust were seen flying skyward, then vanishing. It was shortly before noon and the sun, surrounded by only a few clouds, cast short fat shadows.

She watched the waters of the river being divided by a large protruding rock downstream. Part of the river went one way around the rock, part another. Both parts flowed together on the other side.

A small branch fell to the ground next to her, landing in the shadow of the trunk to which it had once been attached.

Her cheeks became puffed, making her already roundish face even fuller as she began to think about Peter. The thoughts were familiar and she fell into them smoothly:

-- Taking off his clothes in the lemon grove, he dived into the water and his arms stretched over his shoulders as he flowed downstream with the current. Just as he passed this

tree he saw me -- trying to hide my embarrassment. Two years ago. I was such a child then, it seems so long. I ran upstream along the river. When I turned to look back at him running after me, his body naked and wet, I know he would eventually catch me.

-- Finally I fell, he on top, kissing me with his moist lips, shaking water over me. I couldn't decide and he was kissing me harder and the sun was shining off his brown hair, making it blond and the dirt felt soft beneath me as he laughing and his eyes gleaming I asked him to be kind and he smiled I can feel his hands running slowly over my breasts I pressed them harder against me my breath coming faster while the scent of the lemon blossoms so fragrant he began to run his hand down my stomach I was so young I held my breath so he wouldn't think I was fat he pulled up my skirt dripping water on me I was breathing so hard the sun whirling I had to close my eyes and yes it was right I know it was yes I know.

-- I must remember to walk slowly so that I don't trip over my gown. I'll go over the path again and again so that I can keep my head high for our celebration.

.. ..

When Peter reached the tree, he saw that Marianne had fallen asleep. . Noticing that his shadow was disappearing, he looked up and saw that the clouds had become thicker, temporarily obstructing the sun.

He knelt and massaged her hair, carefully brushing the school-girl bangs to the side. Marianne didn't awaken but turned on her side and pulled her knees up to her stomach, reminding

him of a childish unborn simplicity. He put his hand over her eyes, shielding them from the sun which was reemerging from behind the clouds. Since the sun was directly overhead, their bodies cast no shadows.

-- Now, when you are perfection, is the only time I could ever be happy with you. Innocence and purity -- the dream I demand from reality.

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Marianne partly opened her eyes and, focusing on Peter, reached gropingly toward him. He put her head on his lap and continued to stroke her hair.

"Let's throw stones into the water," Marianne said, jumping up. She ran to the side of the river, picked up a flat stone, and tried to skip it across. "Three skips," she said laughing. "Now you try."

Peter picked up a pebble and slowly got up. As he cocked his arm to throw it, he looked downstream. There lay the protruding stone. He watched the water flow, part to one side, part to the other. He dropped the pebble.

Marianne looked away, still laughing, and said, "Do you smell the lemon trees?" But as she said it, the wind died down. Silence crept through the foliage. The sun returned behind the clouds, casting all in shadowy greyness.

Peter had sat down again and was fiddling with the fallen limb to distract himself, but became angry at his weakness.

— For once, show her who you are.

He pushed the branch away and looked at Marianne. But when their eyes met, he looked back at the branch. He pointed to the protruding stone. Her eyes followed the direction of his hand. As she looked towards the stone, Peter realized that he had again begun tearing twigs from the fallen branch. Angrily, he hurled it into the river. It floated lazily out of sight.

"There's something dividing me, Marianne, that keeps me from acting. Everywhere is that stone forcing me two ways." Becoming conscious of his fingers tearing the grass from its roots, he clasped his hands until they were pale white. His fingernails cut into the flesh. Marianne saw the line of a muddy wet path along his cheek.

It was shortly after noon. The sky was dark, threatening rain, and the wind indifferently twisted through the branches.

Peter sat alone under a tree by the river. The blood on his palms smelled stale. He watched Marianne, crying, run towards the lemon grove. This time she didn't look back. If she had, she would have seen Peter sitting beneath the tree, as naked and wet as he was two years ago.