

Cherry Blossoms

Her tight black denim skirt shifted, her mod flip of coal black hair bopped, and her drape cardigan lifted as Mons tapped down the marble steps. Jules called for her to wait up. While negotiating the steps he flattened his tumble of dirty-blond hair, tucked his tee shirt into his jeans and adjusted his denim jacket. He wanted to say that the Monuments, the historic shrines, the city itself all paled beside her, that she was the only sight he needed. But when he arrived beside Mons on one of the landings, he tugged her shapely waist and fumbled for words, "Look, I didn't come down here for a tour of DC -"

Cigarette in hand, her upraised arm created a buffer between the two. Dark eyes darted from exhaled smoke to a family passing along the steps. Once they passed, Mons said, "Don't take this vulgarly, Jules, cause that's not how it's meant. But I'm sorry if you came all the way down to Washington this weekend and didn't get what you expected."

His expectations certainly did not include standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial trying to find the right words. The two nineteen year olds - the taller, lighter in hair and skin Jules with the sultry, shorter, dark haired Mons - studied each other suspiciously. The clouded April Day reflected their current mood but Jules didn't want nature staging a melancholy drama, not when he'd hoped to cast

Mons in her usual role as witty ingenue. After last summer and her winter break had passed in a flash of stardust, this dreary DC day plodded forward on careful words and awkward silences.

“ I shouldn’t have spoken that way last night,” he sputtered finally. “I’m sorry . . . this is not the weekend I wanted either-”

“No, you’ve made it clear what you wanted!” she said, with a defiant finger flip back of her mod hair.

“What?!” He asked, feeling insulted and a bit guilty.

“Look at the way you acted last night when I left to go to Sylvia’s room!”

After arriving yesterday, Jules had put her estrangement off to the stress from nearing the end of her semester. In the drawing room of her quad, with her roommate Sylvia in attendance, Mons did her usual witty expounding on topics from astrology to James Dean to gangsters to philosophy. Greek philosophy. Taught by a Professor Downing. The mere mention of his name had Mons and Sylvia speaking cryptically. Jules promptly went on the defensive (ie - “are these open discussions here or should I go powder my nose?”). He also resented that Mons did not sit beside him and avoided his touch. His suicide bomb burst a

couple hours later, when Mons decided to sleep in her roommate's room instead of with him. That's when he accused Mons of being ' a flaming little bitch on the rag'.

At the bottom step, choking back regret, Jules cried out in his own defense, "Yeah, I made a mistake! I've apologized! . . . But last night you abandoned me. Long before you left your bedroom . . . You abandoned me. You abandoned us!"

Her pretty brown eyes brimmed with tears. She turned and walked away. Jules hurried after her. In black short skirt and high heeled boots she looked like a dark Cinderella fleeing before midnight turned her back into the girl he'd known. Behind them the great monuments of the National Mall receded with the twilight. The pair funneled out toward the tidal basin: toward dark trees and dusky grass and the open waters of the Potomac quivering in the background. When a breeze off the river blew Mons' black hair across the sacred profile of her face, Jules put his arm around her shoulders. Her soft wool cardigan and dark silky hair warmed his heart like old times.

They walked a few steps, enjoined, guiding each other over path and grass; the damp evening air warded off by their movement. Mons ducked out of his arm and after a couple steps turned to walk backward; extending her drape cardigan out with each hand like a cape, she explained, "the man monitored my every move! Then

he had the audacity to think he could corral me in some Virginia Colonial! . . . I mean is that the extent of his imagination? Is that how well he understood me? Like I am going to forfeit my youth and dreams to be suffocated forever!”

Feeling closer than they’d been all weekend, Jules said hopefully, “So this guy is like some stalker/control freak? . . .”

“Professor Downing? . . .” She grimaced as if her description of him had been a tad biased. “Good God, no. Not in any criminal way. ”

Jules stared at the Potomac tidal basin’s Yoshino cherry trees, seeing their fallen petal garlands merge with the dusk, barely noting their presence, not even aware that these were the famous cherry blossom trees of DC. One thought - born of a past commitment of hers, of theirs, born out of fleshy, breathy, yet unconsummated times in his bucket seats last summer - preoccupied him (‘Preoccupied’ was perhaps too soft. The Potomac could have parted in two and he would not have noticed, having clenched his teeth so firmly on his one concern). Delicately, as if he was a reporter floating one final question, he asked, “Did you sleep with him?”

Her eyebrows rose before she looked away. Mons sighed, “I’ve moved on from . . . the experience. . . I was going to tell you last night. I am sorry. I’ve always had

fun with you . . . But I can't pretend that being away a whole year hasn't altered my perspectives."

'The experience, my perspectives' - Jules scoffed to himself, thinking she'd just read from a press briefing, her voice far removed from her usual carefree tone. He then recalled a more recent promise and asked her, "Is this the real reason you didn't come home for spring break?"

She glared at him. "Do you remember where your car is parked?"

"Of course," he bristled. They silently continued along the asphalt pathway. Jules remained a step or two ahead, pretending to search for his car but actually hiding his tears of confusion and disbelief. Had she invited him down to come to her rescue? To renew shared fantasies of their Ferris wheel climb to unfathomable stars? If only he hadn't spoken so vulgarly, if only she had been more up-front about what had happened . . . Aye, last summer seemed a decade ago.

Mons broke their silence. "I'm sorry, Jules, but I need to catch up on my school work and I have term exams in two weeks. This isn't about you or about Professor Downing, this is about me growing up and realizing where I am in life. So when we get back to the dorm I'm going to study and then sleep in Sylvia's room. I'm letting

you know now so you don't feel like you're being led on. I'll give you my key if you want to go out. We can have breakfast tomorrow morning before you leave. ”

Whatever tiny hope he still had for their relationship vanished with this soliloquy . Bitterly, he corrected her, “ I think you mean to say ‘don't feel like you're being led on - *any longer*’.”

“I'm not leading you on . . .” She said. Her pretty dark eyes and long lashes penetrated the dusk with something like an appeal for mercy. “ we're good friends. We talk, we write, I value our time together, but it's not as if I owe you something. . . We also now live a couple hundred miles away from each other.”

“Yet you invited-” he started to say then stopped. He realized he was only going to repeat last night's failure.

They continued walking. Mons lit a cigarette. She exhaled smoke out the side of her mouth, commented about the damp air and joked feebly that his beloved Firebird might have been towed. Jules tried to smile and think of some witty reply, some way to show that he too could take one on the chin and still hint at a grand future . . . But nothing came into mind. All's he saw was the limbs of cherry trees, free of their blossoms, blending with the spring night.

END

