

Bye Bye, My Love, Good Bye

Every time I skate a full circle, Eddie slaps my hand. I've learned to grab the side of the rink when he's about to do it, because if I don't, I fall on my behind. Falling didn't hurt that much the first time, a year ago in '57 when we'd first starting working at Ronnie's Rink-A-Roo and were having fun on our break. It kept happening, though, and Eddie would just laugh his head off. Now, I keep steady on purpose, and there's no way I can fall down.

"All right there, Marcy?" he grins as I come to a stop, grabbing my hand and pulling me to him. His eyes crease at the corners at me with my hair all messy. I've been skating for about ten minutes, with Eddie watching. Ellen's not here yet. "We should probably get back to the window soon. Boss Ronnie's gonna flip, you know that."

I slide my skate back and forth, then lift it up so that the wheels make a *wheeeee* sound. "Poor old Ronnie," I sigh. I cock my head to the side and finger-comb my ponytail. I can feel my face glowing from the exercise. "Always so busy making cheese for all those nachos. Do you think she'll ever have time for a man? Or are they all going to leave her like the last one, because she smells like cheese?"

Eddie's quiet for a moment. "You shouldn't say things like that about Ronnie. Not when she gives us free nachos every Wednesday." Then he leans in and kisses my cheek.

I have to turn around and look at the little kids roller-skating for a minute; my smile hurts too bad. I take off my skates and we creep back to the concession stand; Eddie glances around for Ronnie while I put my skates away. Then he corners me in the room with all the cubbies for the skates. I close my eyes and pull my long skirt up. We breathe hard. The parents are on the

bleachers, the kids are in the rink, Ronnie is wherever Ronnie goes when she's sad to avoid her job.

No one ever holds me as tight as Eddie.

It was like this our first time together, too; two months after Eddie got the same after-school job as me. There were so many people there that day, but they all stayed in their places and left us alone, somehow; like magic. Almost as if the skate room became our world and no one could find us, no one could hurt us.

I'd seen the look he had given me the day before; so soft, so calm and so quiet. "Hey, Marcy, can you pass the tongs?" he'd said.

I went to hand him the tongs after positioning a frank on the cooker, but they slipped and clattered onto the ground. I panicked, remembering how the last time I'd dropped a spoon in the garbage and put it right back in the beans after, my little sister Linda had gotten bad food poisoning that night. I'd thought I'd killed her, but she recovered after spending three whole days in bed listening to Buddy Holly on our little record player. The floor in the concessions booth looked fairly clean, so I picked the tongs right up and passed them to Eddie, when I saw the look on his face and realized he'd been watching me the entire time.

That whole night I was thinking about Eddie, thinking and thinking while I was peeling potatoes, while I put the TV tables down in front of me and Linda, my sister. Thinking while I pulled the covers up to Linda's chin and stroked her cheek and sang her "Bye Bye Love." I thought so much that I didn't sneak out that night to Richard's trailer next door, our bachelor neighbor. I just stayed in bed with my own covers pulled up and thought about Eddie. When I sat by him at school the next day in the juniors' Algebra class, I had made up my mind.

All I had had to do to capture the man I wanted to marry was to unbutton the front of my cotton print dress enough to pull the sleeves down on my shoulders. He had never seen a girl's whole bare shoulders before, never mind the rest of it. That afternoon in the skate room, Eddie held me, after we had made love, and told me about his family while I thought about the perfect house we would have, far away from this town, where we could go and be in love always.

"Ronnie's back," Eddie whispers. We walk out of the skate room into the main concessions booth, where Ronnie is stirring a pot of cheese. I see through the window a thick head of glossy dark hair spinning on the skate floor before I see the rest of Ellen's tiny skater's body. Just like that, Eddie is out of the booth and stumbling backwards towards the rink. Before he turns I see how pink his cheeks are.

I sidle up to the concessions counter, my eyes on the couple kissing. I keep my shoulders straight. Ronnie gives me a sidelong glance, and I pick up the tray of nachos to put in the oven. "Hard to see how much he likes that girl," she says. I watch the oven. "He better get right back here. Just as soon as he knows the Queen of Sheba is happy."

"She's never happy. He's not happy." She doesn't hear me. I grab a rag and wipe pizza grease off the counter. Ellen is a beautiful figure skater who practices in the roller rink sometimes, because it's cheaper to drive here than all the way to the nearest ice rink. She has no friends because she spends all her spare time outside of school with Eddie or practicing. She's been Eddie's sweetheart for two years now.

I'm nothing more than dust behind the counter to Eddie and Ellen. It has to be this way when they're together. I know Eddie wants to marry me; I hear how much he loves me every afternoon in the skate room or in his room at his parents' house. But they've been dating so long

that it's going to be impossible to tell her. It can't happen just yet. It will hurt her too much. Her whole life has been filled with a demanding time commitment, and when Eddie leaves her, she will have nothing but the ability to glide on ice with metal blades.

She's a virgin, I know it.

Soon, Eddie comes back to finish his shift. We make small talk. After he leaves, Ellen comes up to the stand and leans on the counter. "Marcy. You've got no clue what Mrs. Simmons said in class today. She said that dolphins mate for pleasure, and that sometimes humans mate with dolphins. Isn't that positively hideous? I just about fainted, I was in such a shock." She's keeping her eyes wide, but I can see she's trying not to giggle hysterically.

When Eddie's gone, Ellen clamps herself onto me. When Eddie's gone, I get the full brunt of all the little worries and "shocks" of Ellen's day. I am her *faux* friend. Of course, when Eddie's with her, she becomes as chilly to me as what she turns all the figure-eights on. Just like she does with any other girl, except that I'm the only girl in the school who accepts her gestures when they're offered. Keep your friends close, yes, and your enemies...

I never had any friends, either, but I've had the dignity not to pretend someone was my friend who wasn't. I've always had plenty of time on my hands. When I was fifteen, Richard moved in beside my grandparents' trailer, and I would go talk to him after school. We talked for hours sometimes, while Gramma Ada was asleep with her sherry glass and Grampa Larry was finishing up a day of selling eggs door to door.

Richard was forty and had lots of blues and R&B records. He used to live in New Orleans. One day, a few weeks after he moved next door, he told me to visit him later so he could show me how to roll a joint like Professor Longhair did it. I didn't know who that was, or

what a joint was, and Richard probably had never really met Professor Longhair; I knew this, but I crept out my window that night anyway, very late. We had whiskey and smoked. Soon I was at Richard's every other night.

By the time I found out I was pregnant, I had turned sixteen and had already been working at Ronnie's for a few months. I went and sat on Richard's front porch without knocking; his door opened after I'd been there an hour or so. I was sobbing, as quiet as I could. I was too afraid to tell him. He had to dump me on his couch and spend half an hour trying to figure out my problem from me. When he did, he put his hands over his face and said, "Well, I know a doctor we can go to. We better go right away."

Tiptoeing back in my own front door to grab a sweater, I glanced at the blurry television set. I turned it to a very low volume so Linda could sleep. Linda was thirteen, but she was always a light sleeper, and the baby of the family. Babies are never allowed to grow up.

When I limped back in to the house, an hour before Gramma Ada always woke up, I saw Grampa Larry's head was in exactly the same place as when I left him. I crept into the room Linda and I share, gave her a kiss, and curled into a ball on my bed.

I kept going over to Richard's, but in the weeks afterward, I didn't do anything besides starting to drink more than I had been when I went there. Somewhere around this time, Eddie got his job working at Ronnie's with me.

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I didn't know Eddie well yet when, one day at work, Richard came in with a lady who lived on the other end of the trailer park. They'd come for a skate date. From the window, I saw

Richard turn to watch the preteen girls' lesson group, with their haphazardly tied hair-ribbons, practice while the lady went to the restroom.

When they were leaving, Richard walked up to the window, lady in tow.

“Well, hey there, Marcy.” He even put on a smile. “*Sh-boom!*”

I smiled back. It was a kind of weary smile; I wished he wouldn't talk to me here. Or come to a roller rink where there were small children at all.

“I've gotten my hands on an old Dinah Washington 45, maybe I'll bring it around and play it for your grandparents tonight?”

“Sure. That would be neat.”

After he walked away Eddie suddenly went ape right beside me, all excited. “That guy? You know that guy? My friends and I see him all the time at the record store, he's always buying blues stuff and never says anything. He's really hip, you know?”

I laughed. “Yes, he's our neighbor. I know all about Robert Johnson and Bessie Smith and all the old ones.”

Eddie froze. “Marcy! You know everything! You can do anything. You skate well, you take care of that goofy little sister of yours, you say you help cook dinner at home, you know the blues. You are something else, Marcy.”

I just smiled again and looked back out over the skaters, ready to go home for the day. Eddie's shift was already done, but I remember Ellen hadn't come in that day and Eddie talked to me until I was done too, asking me everything I knew about music, and did I know about the

new stuff? Chuck Berry, Little Richard? At the end of the day, he told me I looked tired, and that I should tell my Gramma to make Linda do the cooking help that night.

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The day following the dolphin conversation, I'm standing at the concessions stand with Ronnie, again. Today, Eddie goes off with Ellen as soon as she gets here, going out back behind the rink. They are there for ten minutes or so. I put pretzels in the oven and take them out. I take inventory of all the candy in the jars. When they reappear in the doorway, I look at their faces closely. Eddie's is pink.

For the rest of his shift, Eddie stands by me at the counter but hardly notices I'm there. The entire time he's watching Ellen twirl on the wood floor. I take all the customers' orders, Eddie gets them ready and serves them. I sneak glances at him. Did he tell her about me? Does he feel terrible? When Ronnie comes by, I analyze her, too. Does she know now what's been happening? Is she happy for Eddie and me?

Eddie leaves. Ellen comes up to the counter. She's breathing heavily. "Oh, Marcy, you've no idea what's happened today!" I wait, but Ellen never says what's happened that's so wonderful. Instead, she smiles down at the floor, and seems to forget me standing there. Until we close, Ellen chatters on about choir and the new clothes she bought when she went shopping the other day. She sits sideways on a chair she pulled up to the window and periodically tips her head back to look at me, to see what I think about saddle shoes or second sopranos, but I barely hear her. Her words fade in and out.

I go home on the bus. I say I'm feeling ill and go straight into my room and shut the door, and wrap myself up in my blanket. I do not go and see Richard tonight.

The following day, the same thing happens. Eddie and Ellen go off on their own when she arrives; they return; Eddie works his shift in a trance. Ellen talks to me about mundane things with a breathless joy for hours while I work. The third day, tears actually start running down her face and she can't stop smiling the whole time she's talking at me. On the fourth day, Ellen abandons her skate practice – she can't spend a single half hour away from Eddie's side. Ronnie smiles and lets her in the booth to sit on Eddie's other side while the two of us work. I take most of the orders. Eddie is busy facing Ellen with his back facing me. By Friday, they've ceased to ignore me, and start palling around with me like I'm in on some big joke with them. They steal pretzels when Ronnie's not looking and offer to split them with me, peeking at Ronnie and giggling, but I can't eat the morsels Eddie rips off for me. I do not see Richard on any of these nights. I do not see Eddie alone.

When Ellen leaves after speaking with me on Friday, Ronnie helps me into my jacket after I'm done cleaning. I turn around and face her. "Are you coming down with something?" she asks, placing her hand on my forehead. "Naw. Your cheeks are just a little flushed. Maybe you're overheated from spending all that time with those two." She winks at me conspiratorially. The sight of Ronnie's dull, wrinkling skin and limp hair raises panic in me. I leave as quickly as possible.

Saturday I am in bed all day. I watch the sun smooth itself with a blurred edge along the scuffed floor of our room. Grampa Larry and Gramma Ada are on a trip to the beach this weekend. I'm supposed to watch Linda. Linda comes and sits on the edge of the bed, reading

teen magazines, humming; when she gets bored of that, she plunks herself in front of the television. When she's in the living room, I reach under my bed for Gramma Ada's sherry bottle that I placed there the night before, after they'd left. There's a good three-quarters of a bottle left. I down the rest of it in a few minutes. I close my eyes.

"Linda," I say, holding the wall as I come out from our bedroom. "I'm gonna go see Eddie, okay? You stay here with Wallace." Wallace is our hound dog.

Linda turns away from the television set. Her eyes spear me. "What is wrong with you?" she says. I have to hide a lot from my baby sister, and she doesn't like not knowing what I do, ever. "Don't leave me with the dog. You haven't talked to me all day. I'm so bored and Wallace stinks. He ate something out of the garbage."

"I'm just going to see – Eddie, okay?" I manage to keep my spine straight until I can grab the side of the door and edge onto the porch.

"All right, fine!" Linda yells as the door swings shut.

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Linda has known for some time now that I go over to Richard's; she's heard me creeping out. She knows that I smoke with him and has been curious about the smell on my clothes and how it doesn't smell like cigarettes. Two weeks ago, I couldn't get her to stop whispering at me when I was getting ready to visit him.

"Can I come?"

“Go to sleep, Linda.”

“Please? I want to hear the records he has. You always get to go and you never let me come with you and it’s not fair.” At the end of this sentence her voice had raised above a whisper.

“Bye, Linda, I’ll see you in the morning.” I was still whispering.

“I always hear you when you get back, too, you know! I always hear you leave and come back!” She was shouting now, but I heard tears.

“Linda! Shut it!” I yelled back. I wouldn’t be going anywhere tonight, I realized, as Gramma Ada opened the door. A few days later Linda begged me again, during daylight, and once again I refused, this time screaming at her. Gramma Ada thought she’d borrowed one of my dresses again.

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“Bye bye, love.

Bye bye, happiness.

Hello, loneliness.

I think I’m a-gonna cry-y.

Bye bye, love.

Bye bye, sweet caress.

Hello, emptiness.

I feel like I could di-ie.

Bye bye, my love, goodby-ye...”

I stumble on the way down the road to Eddie's parents' house. I think I'm concentrating a little too much on the singing; it could either be far easier or far more difficult to move forward without it. My shoes were getting in my way, slipping down my heels, so I kicked them off at the end of the mobile park driveway.

Rounding the corner onto Eddie's place, I realize just how many times I must have been here in the early afternoons on weekends, when his parents were working and Ellen was at the ice rink. It's so familiar and so welcome that it's easy to pretend Eddie will see me and come running to open the gate for me and drag me in the house and throw me on his bed. As I reach the door I can feel the tears soaking the bags under my eyes, sloppy and raw.

I don't see Eddie's parents anywhere. Swaying past the kitchen, I tug up on my dress and slash at buttons at the same time until it's off. I claw my brassiere off; the clasp scrapes into my skin. Next, down comes the petticoat. I trip and stumble until my stockings are gone, my panties. Everything goes on Eddie's parents' floor, couch, counter; wherever they land. I fall over many times before I am naked.

I roll from shoulders to chest around in a circle down the wall until I come to Eddie's room. He hasn't closed it all the way. I hear sounds. I start to choke. I tumble and knock the door open. On my hands and knees, I look up at Ellen lying on her breasts, naked as I am, Eddie behind her. Their faces wear the same horror. Ellen screams, but just after she starts to shriek, a kind of roar rips down my stomach and out through my throat. All I can hear is some monster, wailing and wailing at an inhuman pitch. I have a vague sense of the pale jiggly bodies in the room waving around my head, but I'm about to pass out. I can't stay here.

I arch backwards until my shoulders touch the floor, then pull the rest of myself over until I'm on my feet again. I don't look at Eddie. I don't look at Ellen. I shuffle back down the hallway, grab my dress, and somehow make it out the door and down the steps. I've forgotten my underthings. I pull the dress over me anyways.

I fall and hit a tree with my head about half a mile back to the trailer. When I come to, it's still pitch black. My head throbs but I can walk more easily. I look down at the ground, my brain is off; my feet pull me towards home.

When I get there, I see that the lights are on, and I hear music playing. There's a thick, cloying marijuana odor that engulfs me when I reach the door. I swing it open and see something that confuses my still-addled brain: two naked bodies on the sofa; but I've just left Eddie and Ellen. They can't be here as well. Slowly, I see that instead of two white, skinny things, one of the bodies, the one on the bottom, is much smaller than the one on top, whose face I can't see because his head is bent down over the other person's. The bigger body is darker, more ruddy-complexioned, like it's seen a lot more years.

I can't stay up this time, even on my knees like I did at Eddie's. I crumple to the ground. "No," I sob. "No. Linda."

Richard rolls around and looks right in my eyes through half-closed lids. "I came by, saw your folks weren't around. I brought some joints. Linda here wanted to give it a go. She's been in La La Land for two hours now and she loves it." He looks down at her.

She turns to me now and says, "He gave us some sherry, Marcy," and I realize that she's drunk, too. She says, "we were out, but now Gramma doesn't have to buy it next time she goes

to the store. I have her birthday present already and it's so early." She starts giggling. Wallace is sound asleep at the end of the couch.

As long as Linda's smiling and laughing, Richard stays on top of her, laughing too, looking back at me like it's all one big joke. But I go to the kitchen, open a drawer, and pull out Grampa Larry's carving knife, and Richard leaves.

Linda puts her head down against the sofa arm and sings, "To know, know, know him, is to love, love, love him..." I make my way to her, gently put my hand over her mouth, whisper "Shhh." I find the blanket on the ground, smooth it over her, pull it up to her neck, and tuck in my baby sister. My head falls on her chest and I cry myself to sleep.

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I count the eggs, a dozen at a time, and place them inside the cartons. Sometimes they crack when I put them down in the box and I have to throw them away. Each time it happens, I think *what a waste*.

I tip my head back and let the Saturday morning sky warm my face. Everywhere, it's green; the air smells like the fresh-petaled geraniums in the little box under the window. We have a real garden, too, in front of the house. It's just new, but Grampa Larry's got tomatoes and beans and butternut squash planted in there. Little sprouts that will be corn and carrots are starting to shoot up from where Linda and I sprinkled seeds last weekend.

I told our grandparents that we needed to move. I said that Richard had touched Linda while I had gone to buy some cocoa. I couldn't say anything else, how it was my fault in the first

place, for abandoning Linda, for letting her find out in the first place that I was leaving at night. I had no idea what they would do, but the next day, Grampa Larry got us to start packing up our room, and by the next morning, we were out of the trailer park. We stayed at our aunt's place until Grampa had found a house that was for sale the next town over. To help make up for how much it cost, Gramma Ada started baking and selling pies, and me and Linda started selling eggs at a stand in front of our new house on Saturdays, since egg deliveries aren't made on that day. I took Linda with me to the place where Richard had taken me and got her fitted for a diaphragm, like the one I had.

Linda comes up next to me and says, "Open!" I open my mouth and Linda drops a cherry tomato in. It bursts like a sunbeam when I crush it between my teeth.

I think of Eddie. How he wrote me a long letter and sent it to our new address; how I read it once, and folded it up neatly and placed it in the corner of my closet under some old sweaters I don't wear anymore. I grab Linda's hands and start dancing with her, twisting side to side and telling her to sway her hips a little more. I lean over to her ear, and whisper.

Baby, It's You.

