

Four teenagers growing up in the 60s and 70s

Crossroads: Heaven In Her Eyes

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CROSSROADS

Heaven In Her Eyes



Larry J. Bristol

Crossroads Part II: Heaven In Her Eyes

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Sunday, March 1, 1970
(How Much Is That) Doggy In The Window

When the boys finished their guitar practice at Larry's house that day, he seemed to be in an upbeat mood. "Hey, guys! Follow me! I want to show you something."

"What is it?" Sam asked warily. She had seen the twinkle in his eyes and suspected they were in for a joke.

"You'll see," he grinned. "Just follow me!"

He led the foursome through his front door, made an immediate right turn, and headed for his neighbor's house, that of Bernard and Mary Beth Massey. They stepped onto the front porch and knocked on the door. Shortly, Mary Beth greeted them. "Hello, Larry. I think I know why you're here. Come on in!"

"Thanks, Mrs. M," he grinned. "These are some friends of mine. I want to meet Sam, Julia, and John. Guys, this is my neighbor, Mary Beth Massey."

The kids exchanged greetings with her, reintroducing themselves to give their last names. Sam also explained her real name was Susan, rather than Samantha. "Well, follow me," Mary Beth smiled. "They're in the back room."

Larry urged the others to follow along as they walked through the living room, the dining room, and into a small room in the back being used as a den. When they stepped into the darkened room, there was the faint but unmistakable sound of whimpering coming from a large basket sitting on the floor.

Mary Beth stepped to the side and motioned the kids to look inside the basket. They were delighted to see a small black and tan dachshund looking at up them, panting lightly, and wagging her tail happily while she nursed four tiny dachshund puppies. One of the puppies was colored in black and tan, much like the mother, while the other three had the more widely known red sable color.

"Oh, how adorable!" Julia squealed. "How old are they?"

"Almost seven weeks," Mary Beth answered. "Sally is already trying to wean them. They're starting to eat puppy chow, but keep coming back to mama, probably more for comfort than for nutrition."

"Can we hold them?" Julia asked.

"Of course!" Mary Beth answered. "Sally will probably appreciate the help!" With that answer, Julia reached into the basket and carefully picked up one of the red sables, a cute little male. "That one was actually the runt of the litter," Mary Beth smiled. "It's been our experience the runt usually turns out to be the sweetest of all."

"This one certainly is sweet," Julia giggled. She brought the puppy up to her face, and he was happily licking away.

Sam and John each picked up a puppy, and started laughing as the puppy began to play with them. Larry reached down into the basket and scratched the little mother behind her ears before lifting the final puppy. "Have you found homes for any of them yet?" he asked, even though he already knew the answer.

"There are a few interested parties," she replied, "but you know how we do things. We won't commit a puppy until they're fully weaned, and have all their shots. I'm sure there'll still be one available if you know someone special who'd want one."

This was all staged. Larry had spoken to Mrs. Massey earlier, and told her he knew some people who might be interested in taking some puppies. One family had previously owned a male dachshund, but it had died about a year ago after living

with them for sixteen years. The other had recently had a family tragedy. The Masseys were very particular about the people who took their dogs, wanting to make sure each of these precious darlings found a wonderful home.

“I wish I could have this one,” Julia said excitedly, “but I’d have to make sure it was OK with my parents before I could even ask!”

“That’s not a problem, dear,” Mary Beth said. “They won’t be ready to leave mama for three more weeks. If you’re interested in him, I’ll hold him for you. After you make sure it’s OK with your parents, you could take him when he’s ready.”

“Could I?” Julia asked excitedly. “Oh, but I need to know so much! Like how much do you want, what shots he needs, and... Oh, I need to know everything!”

“Don’t worry,” Mary Beth smiled. “We raise puppies as pets. They don’t have papers, or anything like that. All we want is to find a good home. Other than that, all we ask is enough to cover the vet expenses for their shots, and so forth. Besides, an anonymous benefactor has already agreed to pay these expenses for you.”

“An anonymous benefactor?” Julia asked with a surprised expression on her face. It didn’t take her more than a moment to realize who that was. She looked suspiciously at Larry, who looked away and tried to act innocent. “You sneak! You knew I couldn’t resist, and would want to have one of these puppies! Why didn’t you just tell me?”

“It was more fun this way,” he laughed. “Besides, I had to make sure you were ready for a puppy first. The only question is whether your parents are! Julie, it’s my intention to make this a gift to both you and your parents. The puppies will be ready to leave mama by the twentieth. Isn’t that your parents’ anniversary and your father’s birthday?”

“Yes, it is!” Julia smiled. “Oh, Larry, you’re so sweet!”

“Hey, what if I want a puppy, too?” Sam asked. “Are you going to pay the vet bills for me?” She wasn’t sure she could take care of a puppy, but wanted to tease Larry a little.

“As a matter of fact, it does!” he said with a smile. “I thought you might want one once you saw them. The same does *not* go for you, John! You’re on your own! In your case, I don’t think you qualify as being able to provide it with a good home!”

“Oh, I don’t even want to let go of him!” Julia grinned. “Mrs. Massey, can I bring my parents to see him? They’ll fall in love with him just as much as I have!”

“Of course,” Mary Beth grinned. “Call first to make sure someone’s at home.”

“Have you thought of a name for him yet?” Sam asked.

“No,” Julia laughed. “That’s just one more thing I’ll have to do!”

“Would you be interested in a suggestion?” Sam asked.

“Sure, Sam!” Julia said sincerely. “Do you have a good name for him?”

“I have a suggestion,” Larry offered.

“I was thinking you might call him Snoopy,” Sam replied, winking at Larry.

“That’s a great name, Sam!” she smiled brightly before Larry could protest. “How about it little fellow? Do you like the name Snoopy?” Enjoying the attention, the puppy wagged his tail and licked her in the face again. Laughing delightedly, she added, “That settles it! If you come home with me, we’ll call you Snoopy!”

Larry smiled and nodded his head. But when Julia was not looking his way, he gave Sam the dirtiest look he could manage. Sam laughed hysterically, the best laugh she had enjoyed in quite some time. “Mine is a girl; I’ll call her Snoopette!”

“You both might want to consider my suggestion,” Larry tried once again. “The Snoopy in the comic strip is a beagle, and these are dachshunds, doncha know.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Julia smiled. “Snoopy seems to like the name.”

“What was your suggestion, Larry?” Sam grinned.

“My sister came up with it,” he explained. “She’s studying linguistics, and has learned a lot about other languages. She came up with the name ‘Pesky Dog’ and I really like it. It turns out that ‘pes’ is the Hungarian word for ‘dog’, and ‘ci’ is the Welsh word for ‘dog’, so the name ‘Pesky Dog’ literally means ‘dog dog dog’.”

“I like it,” Sam smiled. “OK, I’ll name mine ‘Pesky Dog’ if I get to keep her.”

Tuesday, June 16, 1970
The Boxer

From John's house, Larry dialed the number he obtained from the student directory. "Hey, Mike! This is Larry."

"Hi, Larry. What's up?" He was surprised since Larry had never called before.

"John and I are going over to Lake Somerville to check out the campsite. I also scored a case of Coors this afternoon," Larry chuckled. "I thought you might want to join us."

Now he was *really* surprised. "Sounds good! Who's going?"

"Just John and me," Larry replied. "You're welcome to join us, but you might want to take your own car. We're thinking about camping out overnight, just to make sure we have everything we need for the weekend."

"No problem," Mike replied. "When are you leaving and where will you be?"

"We're out the door as we speak!" Larry said. "Look for us in Big Creek Park."

"I'm right behind you!" Mike chuckled.

"Let's go, John," Larry said hanging up the phone. The boys waved goodbye to John's parents, then hopped into the car.

"You're full of surprises," John said backing into the street. "I didn't know you even liked beer that much!"

"It's not my favorite," Larry agreed, "but when it falls in my lap on a hot day like this, I won't turn it down." The truth was Larry had called in quite a few chips in order to get the case of beer now getting cold in John's trunk.

"It also surprises me you'd offer to share it with Mike," John said. "You've never been on what I'd call the best of terms with him."

"I'm trying to mend my ways," Larry chuckled. "It's not his fault he has the girl I want. He won't be around forever, and I ought to study his ways. Maybe I can pick up some pointers on how to attract and hold her attention, doncha know?"

John stared at Larry after that comment. "You really *are* full of surprises today!"

"I like singing outdoors," Larry said, changing the subject. "I wonder if there will be any girls over there today."

"There usually are, especially on a great summer day like this, but there'll be a lot more this weekend. Maybe they won't have boyfriends with them!" John reflected on that thought and laughed. "Is that what you're up to? Are you trying to find him another girl?"

Larry had been looking out the window, but turned to face John. "Do you think it might work? I'm willing to try!" After they grinned at each other, he added, "No, John, if I find any horny, unattached girls, I'm looking out for myself. He can find his *own* girls. He's done well enough so far. He's certainly done better than me!"

"That's more like the Larry I know," John chuckled. "Now you just sound bitter! If you find any horny, unattached girls, don't forget your old buddy, OK?"

"What would Valleri say?" Larry fired back laughing. "I'll tell you what I'll do. If we can only find one horny, unattached girl, I say we share her, but I claim firsts!"

"Deal!" John laughed. "I'm willing to take sloppy seconds!"

"I'll get her nice and clean for you using my tongue!" Larry laughed.

The boys teased each other back and forth in that manner for the entire ride over to the lake. They arrived about 7:00, leaving almost two full hours of daylight remaining. The number of people in Big Creek Park was what they expected. There were few tents, and only one camper, but there were several groups of people preparing their campfires for cooking hamburgers and hot dogs. Here and there, they saw a vehicle parked with an empty boat trailer. All in all, it looked like a typical day at Lake Somerville.

They did not find the grand prize – a large cache of unattached females. They parked in a nice spot near the water and hopped out, setting up their “campsite” of two stools, two guitar cases, and one large ice chest. They gathered some wood to build a fire later, then relaxed in the nice breeze blowing inland from the lake.

“Do we have to wait for Mike to get here?” John asked, trying to look thirsty.

“No need to wait on my account! For all I know, he got lost somewhere and drove into the lake!” It was wishful thinking. Driving from College Station to Somerville involved making only one turn at a wide spot in the road called Lyons.

John opened the ice chest, removing two cans. After handing one to Larry, he popped the top on the other and sucked down half its contents in one long pull. “Far out! I needed that. Thanks for sharing it, man!”

“No problem,” Larry smiled. He popped the top on his own can and took a small sip, not planning to drink much beer that evening. He started strumming a few chords to limber up. John soon joined in, as they began to work on some songs from the *Let It Be* album recently released by the Beatles. The first of these was Larry’s favorite from that album, called *The Long And Winding Road*.

Anyone could see the sadness in Larry’s eyes when he finished the song. “Don’t worry, my friend,” John said sincerely. “You’ll find the end of that road someday.”

“I still believe that, John. I just wish all these other jackasses would go away and let me have *my* chance.” Seeing Mike’s car turning into their campsite, he waved. “Speak of the devil...”

“If you really feel that way then why did you invite him here?”

Larry shrugged and replied simply, “It was necessary, John.”

“Hey, guys!” Mike said. “Thanks for inviting me.”

“Thank Larry,” John smiled. “He’s the one who scored the Coors. I hope you don’t mind we didn’t wait for you!”

“No big deal,” Larry grinned, handing Mike his first beer. “It won’t take you long to catch up. I’m still on my first can!”

“Getting in a little practice?” Mike asked.

“Yeah. I noticed a group a couple of campsites down has a boy-girl imbalance. I’m hoping some stray girls might wander up to hear better. This old guitar has helped me in that regard time and time again.”

Larry and John continued to practice, preparing for the big party. After a few songs, as he had hoped, some folks from the other campsite moved closer to hear better. There were two guys about the same age as Larry, and four girls, a year or so younger. “You guys sound pretty good,” one of the girls commented.

“Thanks,” Larry smiled to her. “Have a seat and join us. I’m Larry. This is John, and that’s Mike.”

“Nice to meet you, Larry,” she said. “I’m Nancy, and this is my cousin Chris. That’s Frank and Virginia, and behind them is Mike and Malinda.”

Larry and John smiled at everyone and shook hands with the other guys, while Mike paid all his attention to the girls. After the introductions, the newcomers sat down to listen. Nancy elected to sit in front of the stools, while Chris sat nearer to Mike. The couples sat close to each other, and the boys practiced a few more songs.

"I liked that one!" Nancy said. "Do you guys play professionally or something?"

Larry laughed. "Most of the time we play to get invited to all the better parties."

"Really?" Nancy asked. "Have you made records?"

"No," Larry smiled, "but we've made tape recordings. We used to play them on the radio during a Saturday night radio program."

"Wow!" Nancy gushed. "Do you have a name for your band?"

Larry and John grinned at each other. "We're called the Drug Company, but we're only drinking beer tonight." The newcomers laughed at the suggestion, and wanted to know how they chose that name. John gave the formal explanation.

Malinda joined in, "Hey! Aren't you guys playing at the big party this weekend?"

"So it seems," Larry smiled with false modesty. "Are you guys coming?"

"We are," Malinda giggled, "and so are Frank and Virginia. I'm sure Chris would like to come, and I think Nancy may *already* be breathing hard!"

Nancy took off one of her shoes and threw it at Malinda as the rest of the group laughed at her expense. "Well, from what I understand, there may be plenty of opportunities for that this weekend!" Larry laughed. Malinda threw Nancy's shoe back and stuck out her tongue.

After a few more songs, they decided to light the campfire. Larry moved closer, sitting on the ground next to Nancy. When the boys resumed, Nancy positioned herself even closer, just far enough away so to not interfere with his guitar playing.

Every now and then, John and Mike would grab another beer. Larry eventually finished his first beer and slowly started nursing another, sharing most of it with Nancy. None of the others accepted the offer. The two couples announced they were going for a walk and would see Nancy and Chris back at the campsite later.

John began to play some guitar solos, giving Larry the opportunity to pay more attention to Nancy. They talked quietly, while Larry answered her questions about their music and accepted her compliments. Eventually, during a lull in the conversation, they found themselves smiling into each others' eyes. Larry took the opportunity to lean forward and collect a small kiss.

All of this would have put Larry into a good mood, except for one thing. He looked over and saw Mike was also making time with the other girl, Chris. *What a jackass this guy is! He beats up a beautiful girl like Julie one weekend, two-times with another girl a few days later, and then plans to be back with Julie the following weekend!* His attention was so focused on these matters, that he could not enjoy Nancy's company as much as normal.

"I should go," Nancy whispered to Larry after they exchanged a few more kisses.

He wondered if Nancy was using the same sort of code talk he always used. Letting her go was the last thing he wanted at that moment. He knew after she was gone, he would be faced with completing the task he had set out to do, and frankly, he was frightened by the prospect. "Will you be coming to the party this weekend?" he asked.

"I don't know yet, Larry," she said sadly.

"I hope you do," he said. "I'd like to see you again."

“Me, too!” She was happy to give Larry her telephone number when he asked.

“I’ll be here, watching for you,” he told her. She smiled warmly and rose to her feet. “Can I walk you back to your friends?”

“It’s not necessary,” she said softly, then giggled, “Chris will protect me. Come on, Chris! We need to get back. I think the others are ready to leave.” Chris said goodnight to Mike and climbed to her feet. “I’ll try to make it to the party. Even if I don’t, give me a call sometime.” She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. “Goodnight,” she whispered. He whispered back to her, and suddenly, she was gone.

A few minutes passed, and Larry was aware that the cars containing Nancy and the others had departed. He sighed with the realization it was time for him to conduct his business. “Would you do me a small favor, John?” he asked calmly.

“Name it, bud,” John replied.

Larry looked him in the eye and asked, “Go for a walk, will you, John?”

At first, John seemed stunned by the request. He quickly realized that Larry had some personal business to conduct with Mike, and that was why they were there in the first place. “Good idea,” he said. He stood up and started walking, in no particular direction, making himself scarce.

Larry watched his friend walk away. Once he was out of earshot, he turned his attention to Mike. “I asked you out here under false pretenses, Mike. I want to talk to about something, man-to-man.”

“You have my attention,” Mike said.

“That’s the first step,” Larry said, wishing the next steps would be equally as easy. “I need to know something, Mike. Did you give her that black eye?”

“What are you talking about?” Mike replied.

“You know exactly what I’m talking about,” Larry said.

“Yeah? So who wants to know?” Mike asked, starting to get angry.

“I do,” Larry said staring at him.

“That’s none of your business,” Mike said.

“I’m *making* it my business,” Larry said calmly. “It’s a simple question. All I need is a yes or no answer. Did you hit her?”

“What if I did?” Mike asked with a sneer.

“That depends on whether or not it was an accident,” Larry answered flatly.

“OK,” Mike answered with a great deal of hostility in his voice. “I hit the little JAP bitch. She wouldn’t do what I told her to do, so I hit her to put her back in her place. What are you going to do about it?”

“You’re never going to do it again,” Larry said simply.

“I will if she needs it!” Mike said defiantly. “And next time I’ll hit her a little harder, to make sure she understands.”

“No, you won’t,” Larry said. “I won’t allow you to hurt the people I care about.”

“How do you plan to stop me?” Mike challenged.

“If you hurt her, I’ll come looking for you. I’m going to give you twice as much punishment as you give her.”

“Ha!” Mike laughed. “I can take you out with one hand!”

“That may be true,” Larry said as he stood. “I’m no fighter. You may beat the shit out of me – this time. But I promise you won’t escape without getting bloodied yourself. If you hurt her again, I’ll be back, and next time, I’ll be better at it. And

I'll keep getting better as long as it's necessary. I'll always give you twice the punishment you give her."

Mike made a lunge, but Larry was expecting him to make to first move, and was ready. The only advantage he had was that Mike had consumed alcohol, and his reactions were slower than normal. He stepped out of the way, leaving a foot in Mike's path, then stood patiently while Mike got back on his feet.

"You want to play games?" Mike asked. "I'm going to beat the shit out of you!"

"That's your prerogative, but I promise you'll get that pretty boy face bloodied."

Mike moved forward again and swung at Larry's face. He saw it coming, but could not move out of the way, so he launched his own fist at Mike's eye. Both blows connected. Larry was prepared for the blow and managed to withstand it. Mike was stunned Larry managed to land a blow at all and was not prepared for the follow up. When Larry's left fist landed in his gut, he doubled over, and Larry lifted his knee into Mike's face, catching him squarely on the nose.

Hoping Mike would take the opportunity to stop, Larry stepped back and allowed his opponent to catch his breath. Unfortunately, Mike was even more enraged now. He came after Larry again, now treating him with a little more respect than before.

Mike knew how to fight, whereas Larry had just doubled what little experience he had in his entire life. It was not long before Mike's experience was telling, and he was able to deliver blow after blow to Larry's face and body at will. When Larry collapsed to the ground, Mike attempted to kick into his stomach. Fortunately, it landed on Larry's hip.

Returning from his walk, John saw the last moments of the fight, and ran to help his friend. He tackled Mike just as he completed the kick to Larry's hip. "What the hell is going on?" he yelled, pinning Mike to the ground, managing to get Mike's right arm behind his back, immobilizing him.

"Get off of me, you asshole!" Mike demanded.

"No fucking way!" John shouted. "Are you OK, Larry?"

Larry's first reply was merely a moan. Slowly, John watched his friend pulling himself back together. Larry sat up, looked at his hands and then rubbed his hip where it had been kicked. He rubbed his chin and saw blood on his hands, although his vision was not as clear as normal. He tried to say, "I'm OK," but the words were unintelligible.

John then saw Larry's face. There were multiple cuts around his eyes, most of them oozing blood. Blood also ran from his nose and from the corner of his mouth. Mike also had some cuts, but Larry had clearly received the worst of the damage.

"Let go of me!" Mike demanded, struggling to free himself.

"Not till you calm down, dick head!" John growled. "What the fuck is going on?"

"He asked for it," Mike insisted.

"Yeah, sure," John said, twisting Mike's arm a little harder. "He goes around picking fights all the time! I'm always having to bail him out like this!"

"It's OK, John," Larry said, his voice a little clearer. "I *did* ask for it."

"What?" John asked in amazement.

"I knew he could beat the crap out of me, but I picked the fight, anyway." Larry groaned as he straightened out his body a little more and got to his knees. "Did I hurt him at all, John? Did I manage to draw blood from that pretty boy face of his?"

“Yeah,” John said. “You bloodied him a little.”

“Then let him go, John,” Larry said. “That’s all I wanted.”

John stared at his friend in wonder, then looked to Mike. “I’m going to let you up, but when I do, you go straight to your car and get the fuck out of here. Don’t even think about going anywhere near him. Do you understand me?”

“I hear you,” Mike replied angrily. “Just let me go!”

John relaxed his hold on Mike’s arm and stood up. Mike turned over, his eyes glaring, looking first at John then back at Larry. “Get out of here!” John insisted.

“I’m not finished with you!” Mike said to Larry.

“Yes, you are,” John said bluntly.

“I’m finished with you unless we need to have this discussion again,” Larry said. “I’ll always deliver twice the punishment you give her. That’s a *promise!*”

Mike rubbed his chin and saw the blood on his hand. He also felt the swelling around his right eye and knew he was going to have a shiner. Larry actually *had* delivered on his promise, dealing out twice the punishment he had given Julia. Mike looked at Larry and saw the determination in his eyes, amazed that Larry was willing to take that kind of beating just to deliver some punishment of his own. “Fuck you!” he said to Larry.

“You’re not man enough,” Larry spat.

Mike turned and walked to his car, climbed under the steering wheel and drove off. “Jesus!” John said examining his friend’s face. He helped him to his feet and walked him to the car. Larry managed to climb into the passenger seat while John collected their things. “I’m taking you to the hospital!”

“I’m OK,” Larry said. “I’m sure it looks bad, but actually, I’ve never felt better in my entire life. Just take me home, John.”

“Not a chance,” John insisted. “At least let me get you cleaned up first. What’s wrong with you? Have you completely lost your mind?”

Larry winced as he turned to look John in the face. “He hit her, John.”

“What do you mean?” John asked, “Who did he hit?”

“He hit Julie,” Larry answered. Remembering her face inflicted much more pain than did his wounds. Salty tears ran down his cheeks, stinging those wounds.

“Why?” John asked.

Larry sat back in the seat and closed his eyes. “Because she wouldn’t do what he told her. He said she deserved it, and that he’d do it again and again as long as she disobeyed him. What else could I do, John?”

“Jesus, Larry!” John said. “Why didn’t you tell me? I’d have been happy to join you. We could have taught him a lesson he’d never forget!”

“I appreciate that, John. I hope he’s learned that lesson, albeit in a different way.”

“He might have killed you! You’re no fighter!”

“Sometimes,” Larry said philosophically, “a man has to do what a man has to do.” He looked at his friend and pleaded, “Please, John! This is just between the three of us, OK? I doubt he’s going to talk about it, and I certainly don’t plan to. It’ll be obvious I’ve been in a fight or had an accident. If anyone asks, I’ll tell them I slipped in the bathtub.”

“The doctor isn’t going to buy that,” John told him.

“He doesn’t have to. He doesn’t need to know who, what, or why in order to clean

up the cuts and send me home. Please, John! I don't want this to get back to Julie. How could I ever explain it to her?"

John drove on in silence until they were almost to the hospital. "OK. I'll keep quiet about it. Will you let Sam in on the secret?"

Larry tried to chuckle, but winced. "Sam will probably figure it all out for herself in a day or two. I gave up trying to keep secrets from her a long time ago."

John drove into the emergency entrance at St. Joseph's Hospital and helped Larry out of the car, receiving immediate attention when they walked through the sliding glass doors. Not only did they clean out the superficial wounds on his face, they insisted on taking X-rays to confirm there were no broken bones. And since he was a minor, they also insisted on calling his parents.

"I'm Doctor Anderson," the voice said. "You're a very lucky young man. There are no broken bones and no internal injuries. As far as I can tell, all you're going to have is one hell of a black eye. Would you like to tell me how this happened?"

"Would you believe," Larry said imitating Maxwell Smart, "that I fell in the bathtub and hit my eye on the faucet?"

The doctor grinned. "No, I don't think so. It's obvious you've been in a fight."

"Will that be obvious to everyone else?" Larry asked.

"Perhaps," the doctor said. "Perhaps not. What does the other guy look like?"

"Actually," Larry said trying to laugh, "it was a *girl* that beat me up. That's why I'd like to say I fell in the bathtub!"

"That must be some girl!" the doctor grinned.

"She is that," Larry agreed. "She really is some girl!"

The doctor understood more than Larry wanted. "The problem is I can smell beer on your breath. I've already run a blood test and know you didn't drink much, but you're a minor and shouldn't be drinking at all. What do you think I should do?"

Larry looked at him. "Sometimes a doctor has to do what a doctor has to do."

"I'm supposed to contact the police," the doctor informed him.

"I'd rather you didn't do that," Larry said calmly.

"It would complicate matters for you a bit," the doctor agreed, "especially since they'd insist on knowing the name of the 'girl' who did this to you."

"Yes, sir," Larry said. "That would indeed make it complicated. Is there anything I can do to convince you to look the other way? I'd rather not bring 'her' into it."

The doctor considered for a moment. "I'll tell you what. Tell the truth, the whole story, and give me a chance to decide for myself what to do. Will you trust me?"

Larry thought for a moment and decided he would trust this doctor. If he did not give a satisfactory answer, the doctor was sure to call the police, and the last thing he wanted was to give Mallory an excuse to lock him up! His only chance was to convince the doctor it would be the wrong thing to do. His best course was to tell the truth. "It's like this, doc. There's this girl. I'd rather not mention her name."

"Your girlfriend?" the doctor asked.

"Only in my dreams," he said sadly. "I've known her almost four years. I hope it'll be different someday, but for now, she's my friend, a very special friend."

"Are you going to stick to the story that this girl beat you up?" the doctor asked.

"No, sir. It was her boyfriend."

“Go on,” the doctor said.

Larry stared into his eyes. “He hit her, doc, hard enough to give her a black eye.”

“You saw him hit her, so you jumped him?” the doctor asked.

“I didn’t actually see it. He hit her last Saturday. She tried to hide it, but I saw the black eye on Sunday and figured out how she got it. I wanted to talk to him, so I bought some beer to lure him out this evening. When I confronted him, he admitted he hit her and would do it again until she learned her lesson and obeyed him.”

“Not a nice guy, is he?” the doctor asked rhetorically.

“No, sir,” Larry continued. “I told him I was going to give him twice as much punishment as he gave her, and every time he hit her, I’d be back to do it again.”

“I see,” the doctor said. “So you beat him up?”

“Hardly,” Larry grimaced. “I’m no fighter. I knew he would beat the crap out of me. But I promised he wouldn’t come away unbloodied, and I’m happy to report that I managed to deliver on that promise.”

“You knew he would beat you up,” the doctor asked, “but you picked a fight anyway, just so you could give him twice the punishment he had given to this girl?”

“Yes,” Larry answered. He knew the doctor was sure to believe him. No one in their right mind would tell such a story unless it was the absolute truth. Maybe no one in their right mind would ever *need* to tell such a story.

The doctor nodded his head and smiled at him. “I’d have to say she must really be some girl for a guy to get himself beaten up trying to protect her! Is she worth it?”

“Oh, yes!” Larry said looking him in the eye. “I believe she is.”

The doctor nodded his head and smiled again. “My advice is that you find a way to make her *your* girlfriend, so you won’t have to get yourself beaten up anymore.”

“I’m trying,” Larry chuckled. “God knows I’m trying.”

“I want to see you again in a few days,” Dr. Anderson stated, changing the subject back to medical matters. “Or you can go to your own doctor. Do you have a doctor you go to regularly?”

“Yes, sir,” Larry answered. “Dr. Pope.”

“He’s a good man,” Dr. Anderson said.

“Yes, sir,” Larry agreed.

“Then you go see him,” Dr. Anderson smiled. “I’ll confer with him and if I find out you haven’t been taking care of yourself, I just might change my mind about some things. Get out of here! Your parents are waiting outside. I wonder what story you’ll tell *them*.”

“Me, too,” Larry grimaced. “Thanks, doc! Thanks for everything.”

Friday, September 18, 1970
Empty Chairs

Krystal met Larry and John when they walked into the courtyard of the apartment complex. “Hi, guys!” she said brightly. “Thanks so much for coming to the party again this year.” It was the annual *Gamma Alpha Sigma* sorority party, traditionally held on the Friday of the first full week of classes during the fall semester.

“You’re very welcome, Krystal,” Larry said returning her smile.

“It’s good to see you,” John smiled. “How are you and your sisters doing?”

“Just fine,” Krystal grinned. “They asked me to give you two messages, Larry. The first is that they’re sorry they couldn’t be here tonight to collect another teeshirt from you. The second is that they’ve exchanged Tweedledee and Tweedledum for some much better models. They said you’d understand what both messages meant.”

“I do indeed!” Larry laughed. “When you see them, tell them I missed adding another teeshirt to their collections, but was delighted to hear the great news about the exchange.”

“They also wanted me to ask how you were getting along with *your* quest.”

Larry looked at Krystal and sighed. “I’m still working on it even though my prospects don’t look very bright at the moment. Tell them I’ll continue to work on it as long as there’s any hope at all.”

“I’ll tell them,” she said with a more serious expression, which quickly brightened once again. “When Penny and Nichol finished school, I took over the downstairs apartment, but my mom and dad kept the one upstairs so they can come visit. Here’s the key. It’s yours for the night! Feel free to use the hot tub, as well!”

“That’s very kind of you, Krystal,” Larry said.

“Don’t mention it!” she grinned. “Let me know if you need anything, although I’m sure you’ll be just as capable of taking care of yourselves as you were last time!”

“You let me know if *you* need anything,” John said with a snicker.

“Oh, I will,” she laughed, “but I should warn you, John, that my objective at these parties is always to try something I’ve never done before. I’ll see you guys later!”

Larry and John grinned at each other when she turned and walked away. There was something fascinating about the way her backside wiggled in that hot pink bikini. “She’s never tried *you* before, Larry,” John grinned.

“For once, can you be serious, John?” Larry asked with a wistful smile.

They decided to mill around for a while, checking out the other fascinating possibilities arriving for the party. Neither of them had any serious plans to pursue any of those possibilities. John was content with the relationship he was enjoying with Valleri, and was expecting to hook up with her after the gig was over. Larry was simply not interested in a one-night stand. He still missed Nancy, and knew there was only one girl who could readily take her place. That quest was not likely to be achieved tonight.

Larry heard Sam’s voice coming from behind. “Hey, guys! Are you going to give us a good show tonight?” As he turned around to greet his friend, one of his legs stopped in its tracks from shock, causing him to nearly trip over himself. Sam was not alone.

“Hi, Larry! Hi, John!” Julia said with a bright smile. Larry decided he now knew what it must feel like to drown. First of all, he could not catch his breath. On top of

that, they say a drowning man will see his entire life pass before his eyes as he goes under for the third time. He experienced this phenomenon in that single instant.

“Hi, Julia!” John said. “Wow! You look hot tonight!”

“Thanks! Do you think so?” She made a pirouette to show off her new bikini.

“Down, boy!” Sam giggled. “I saw Valleri heading this way a moment ago.”

“How about you, Larry?” Julia grinned. “Do you like my new bikini?”

Larry still could not speak, so he nodded his head and smiled. It never dawned on him Julia might attend this party. He should not have been so blind-sided. She was a freshman at A&M, and like all the other female students, she was invited to the *Gamma Alpha Sigma* party both to meet the other girls, and to have some fun with the cream of the guy crop. *What about Jonah? Was their relationship changing?*

“Come on, Julia,” Sam urged. “Valleri’s over by the beer keg. Let’s hang out over there and check out all the hot guys!”

“OK,” Julia giggled. She waved at Larry and John. “See you guys later!”

As she walked away, Julia exhibited the same fascinating wiggle Krystal had showed before. Larry’s mind, however, noted a distinct difference. Krystal’s wiggle made him feel a little tingle of delight in his groin and brought a smile to his face. Julia’s wiggle brought a similar tingle, but this was overwhelmed by a searing pain in his chest.

The party was soon in full swing. At the appointed hour, Larry and John took the stage and began their program. It was not long before they were holding the crowd in the palms of their hands. They mixed some new material into the program that basically repeated many of the songs from their concert at Lake Somerville. Near the end of the first set, they repeated *Hang On the Bell, Nelly* which was as well received as at the Lake.

When the crowd settled down, Larry announced the next song. “I’d like to dedicate the next song to Nancy.” The strength of the emotion Larry put into the song was crystal clear. When he finished, the air was charged with that emotion, and a hushed silence fell over the crowd. This silence was broken by a round of applause that slowly gathered momentum. He waited patiently for the applause to slacken, announced they were taking a break, and immediately walked off the stage without waiting for John. He went directly to Krystal’s apartment, unlocked the door, and disappeared inside.

Knowing Larry wanted to spend a few moments alone, John did not follow him into Krystal’s spare apartment. He looked for Valleri, and found her with Sam and Julia. The girls were surrounded by a group of guys trying to make a big impression, hoping they would be able to spend some one-on-one time with one of these girls later that evening. John was reasonably sure they would not be successful with Valleri, figured they might have a reasonable chance of success with Sam if she was in the mood, but had no idea of their chances with Julia. It occurred to John his friend should be here, trying to make his own impression on her! He decided to talk to him about that when he returned.

John worked his way through the crowd and joined up with the girls. Julia was the first to greet him. “Hi, John! Where’s Larry?”

“Upstairs,” he replied, nodding his head in the direction of the spare apartment. “I think he wanted to be alone for a little bit.”

"I understand," Sam said. "It's not hard to see how much he still misses her."

"Yeah," John said sadly. He tried not to look at Julia with any more intensity than the others, but noticed she kept darting her eyes upstairs, to the door of Krystal's apartment. "He misses her when he thinks about her, but he's really OK most of the time. He's just lonely." With that last comment, Julia and Sam exchanged a glance and a nod of their heads. He noted that even Valleri joined them.

Valleri broke from that glance. "What are you guys singing in the second set?"

"Nothing you haven't heard us sing before," John grinned. "That last one was the only new song we're doing tonight. Like we did at the lake, we're going to wrap it up with Larry's original songs."

"I'm curious about something," Julia said. "Why is it *you* always call them Larry's songs, while *he* always says the songs were written by the two of you?"

John shrugged and smiled. "He gives me far too much credit. He's written them all himself, both the lyrics and the music. I might have been around some of the time as he worked, but I never made any actual contribution."

"I imagine you helped him more than you realize, John," Sam added.

"Maybe," John said simply.

"Are you going to sing *Valleri* for me again?" she grinned.

"If you want me to," John smiled. "I'm sure Larry would let me work it in." He knew it was already in the scheduled program. He doubted Larry was planning to repeat his performance of *Julia*, but he had not expected her to be here, so he might change his mind. He would also mention that possibility to Larry when he came back. Maybe he could capture her attention this time if he tried again.

When Larry returned, there was little time to discuss such matters. "Hi, girls," he said brightly. "How do you think we're doing tonight?"

"Just great!" Valleri said enthusiastically.

"Just like always," Julia added with a smile.

"Thanks, guys," he said softly, then focused his attention to Sam. "Could I have a word with you, Sam?" When she nodded her head, he added, "Would you guys excuse us for a moment?" He and Sam stepped away for a private discussion.

"What do you have on your mind?" Sam asked him.

"I think you already know, Sam. Why is she here? Did you put her up to this?"

"No, Larry," Sam answered sincerely. "She brought the subject up when she got her invitation. She wanted me to tell her what actually goes on at these parties."

"And you told her?" he asked.

"Of course I told her," she replied. "I told her that all of the girls on campus were invited, especially the incoming freshmen, but the invitations for guys would be highly restricted. Couples were allowed to come, but not encouraged. The intent of the party was to allow people to experiment with new relationships, even if those relationships lasted only for this one night. She seemed to be particularly interested in that aspect."

"So you talked her into coming with you?" he asked.

"No, Larry," Sam explained, "it was more the other way around. I could sense she wanted to come, but didn't want to come alone. I told her Valleri was sure to be here, but she wasn't satisfied with that. She wanted to make sure *I* was planning to be here. Maybe she wanted to know she wouldn't be alone, that she had a friend to

support her.”

“Did she tell you why?” he asked. “What is she looking for tonight?”

“I don’t know, Larry,” Sam said. Larry tightened his lips and shook his head. After a moment of silence, she asked, “Why don’t you find out for yourself why she’s here?”

Larry saw the encouragement in Sam’s eyes. He looked at his friends standing a few yards away and sighed. “How can I, Sam? The last thing I want is some sort of one-night stand. My dreams for the last four years are not because I want to get inside her bikini. I want a relationship that will last. I believe she’s the one I’m destined to be with, not for one night or even three, not three weeks, not three months, but for a lifetime.”

“It doesn’t have to be just a one-night stand,” Sam said softly.

“I know, but surely that’s part of the equation as to why she’s here. Think about it, Sam. Put it in perspective! Unless you know something I don’t, she hasn’t broken up with Jonah. That relationship hasn’t ended, so why is she here? Could it be she’s here to experiment with something else in order to confirm her feelings for Jonah? What else could it be besides a one-night stand? Maybe she’s not the girl I thought she was.”

“I wouldn’t judge her without knowing the facts, Larry,” Sam answered. “There’s obviously something going on here that you don’t understand.”

“You’re right, of course,” he replied. “I’m just confused by all this, and I need some time to think it out. Unfortunately, right now I have some work to do. Let me go see if I can drag John away from Valleri long enough to do the second set.”

Larry and Sam returned to the others. As he stepped by, Larry tapped John on the shoulder, signaling it was time. They waved and went directly to the stage. Taking only a moment to ensure their guitars were in tune, the boys launched into their second set.

Friday, May 28, 1971

Homeward Bound

After lunch, Larry made a pass through the assembly lines, greeting each of his friends before a shift change sent them home. It was the last day of the semester, and he wanted to say goodbye to each of them before everyone left for the day. That evening, he would be heading back to his home in Bryan to spend the summer in school taking classes.

Shortly before 2:30, he located a large cardboard box and began to pack his personal belongings. The fancy executive desk set went in first, nestled safely in the bottom of the box. Next, he packed items from his desk drawers, such as personal letters, carefully making sure he did not inadvertently pack any material relating to work. There was little chance he might come across any classified documents in his desk; those were supposed to be kept in locked security cabinets when not in use.

One of the last items to be packed was the photograph of the *Four Musketeers*. He smiled as he stared into the faces of the friends he would soon be seeing again. He even smiled when he looked at Julia and stared into her green eyes. His mission to forget her had not been accomplished. He still longed to be with her just as much as always, but he had now resigned himself to live his life one day at a time, and let the chips fall wherever they would. She needed him to be her best friend, and he was determined to be the *best* best friend she could possibly imagine.

“Looking forward to seeing your friends back home?” Gerry Halbrook smiled.

Larry set the photograph down on his desk and returned the smile. “I surely am!”

“You haven’t been back home since you came here, have you?” Gerry asked. Larry merely shrugged his shoulders, and gently shook his head. “Last time we talked about going home, you didn’t think you were ready. Are you ready now?”

“I guess I’m as ready as I’ll *never* be, Mr. H,” Larry grinned.

Gerry returned his grin. “You’ve changed a lot over the last few months. Are you sure your friends will even recognize you when you get there?”

“Maybe. I hope so. I think you’re right. I *have* changed, but I think it’s for the better. Maybe I grew up a little. In what ways do you think I’ve changed, Mr. H?”

“I can’t quite put my finger on it,” Gerry said. “You seem to be more relaxed.”

“I know what you mean,” Larry smiled. “I suppose I *am* more relaxed. I used to spend a lot of my time thinking about *yesterday* and kicking myself for all the mistakes I’ve made. And I spent the rest of my time worrying about *tomorrow*, and how I could make it turn out the way I want. As a result, I didn’t have any time left to take care of *today*! I don’t spend so much time thinking about yesterday and tomorrow anymore, so I have a lot more time for today.”

“That makes sense,” Gerry said. “Stopping to smell the roses, and all that sort of thing. What do you think brought about this change?”

“Do you know that famous prayer, Mr. H?” Larry asked. “The one that asks for strength to change the things you can, courage to face the things you can’t change, and wisdom to know the difference? Maybe that prayer is being answered. I realize there’s nothing I can do to change the past, so all I can do is face the consequences with courage and conviction not to make those same mistakes again. I also can’t change the future. All I can change is the here and now, and then have faith that, as a result, the future will take care of itself.”

"That surely sounds like the beginning of wisdom to me, Larry," Gerry said reassuringly. "What about that little problem we talked about earlier? Did you manage to forget that girl who was troubling you so?"

"Hardly," he laughed. "What's different is I no longer deny my feelings. I've always loved her, and I now accept that. The most important thing in the world is to make her happy, even though that means I have to let her be with another man."

"So she's going to marry that guy and move to Israel with him?" Gerry asked.

"As it turns out, no," he shrugged. "She broke the engagement. Apparently, she decided she wasn't ready to get married at all. He either could not, or would not wait until she was. I imagine he'll be leaving for home as soon as he can – alone."

"His misfortune is your gain, right?" Gerry smiled.

"Not really, Mr. H," he replied, his lips tight. "Maybe it could have if I'd been there at the time, but I wasn't, and sure enough, she already has a new boyfriend."

"That figures," Gerry said. "I'm sorry to hear that."

"No need to be sorry," he smiled. "It isn't your fault. Besides, according to my new philosophy, since it's one of those things I can do nothing about..."

"You'll face it with courage," Gerry nodded.

"One day at a time," he continued. "As long as she's happy, then I'm content."

"What do you know about him?" Gerry asked.

"Not much," he shrugged. "I've met his father, Ken Koffmann, Sr., the owner of a manufacturing operation down there. Have you heard of Koffmann Industries?"

"I can't say that I have," Jerry said.

"Her new boyfriend is Ken Jr., his son. He has more money than you and I will make in our entire lifetimes combined, and he loves to show it off."

"So he's showering her with gold and jewels?" Gerry scowled.

"So I hear," he nodded. "I wouldn't have thought Julie would be impressed by that sort of thing. Maybe I don't know her as well as I think."

"Maybe she's not as impressed as you think," Gerry offered.

"I guess I'll find out soon enough," he shrugged.

"Well, I hope you have a great summer," Gerry said, offering his hand, "and good luck in your work assignment next fall."

"I hadn't thought about that," he confessed. "Won't I be coming back here?"

"You'll be coming back to TI," Gerry smiled, "but you'll probably be assigned to a different department, to give you broader exposure. I hope you'll drop by and let me know where you are. I'd also like to hear how your personal life is going."

"Thanks, Mr. H," he smiled. "It's been a pleasure to work for you. I hope I've helped in some small way. When I get back next fall, I'll drop by for a chat."

"I'll be looking forward to that," Gerry smiled. "You've been a great help to us. I'm proud to have worked with you. If you're all packed up, you can go ahead and take off anytime you want to. It's almost quitting time anyway."

"All I have left to pack is this picture of my friends back home!" He picked up the photograph, packing it carefully into the box. "And now even that task is done!"

"Then get out of here!" Gerry grinned.

"Yes, sir," Larry said returning his grin. "Thanks, Mr. H. Thanks for everything."

"You're welcome, Larry," he smiled. "Goodbye! Have a safe trip."

"So long, Mr. H," he said as Gerry turned to walk away. "See you in September!"

Larry picked up his box of belongings and headed down the corridors of the North Building, stopping briefly at the security desk so they could inspect the contents of his box, then walked into the parking lot. It was already extremely hot inside his car, and he had to keep the windows down for a few minutes to circulate fresh air as the air conditioner struggled to reduce the temperature.

By 3:00, he was merging into the traffic on US 75, southbound from the TI plant in Richardson, heading for his apartment. The southbound traffic going into the city was lighter than the northbound, as usual, and he made quick time down the North Central Expressway, exiting left onto North Henderson Avenue, left again onto Willis Avenue, and finally turning right into the parking area for his apartment. He was well on the way to vacating his apartment. His clothes and everything that could be easily handled had been packed the night before, leaving only the things he needed for this last day. The general cleaning had been done earlier, leaving only the kitchen and bathroom.

He started cleaning the refrigerator by eating anything that looked edible. Everything else went down the disposal or into the garbage. He wiped the refrigerator thoroughly, and emptied all the ice trays. Next, he wiped up the oven cleaner applied the previous night, and washed it completely, finishing by wiping the door and the range top so they were spotless. Finally, he applied a cleanser to the sink, then stood back to admire his efforts. The kitchen was actually cleaner than it had been when he moved in! Similarly, he attacked the bathroom with equal gusto until all of the fixtures were spotless.

Satisfied, he moved all of his personal belongings, with the exception of his guitar, out to his car. The guitar would not go into the car to suffer from that heat until *he* did! He made one last check to ensure he had packed everything, turned over the keys, thanked the manager for letting him move in on such short notice for such a short time, then picked up his guitar, and headed to his car.

By 7:00 o'clock, after he had made a quick stop to fill up the tank with gas and to purchase a soda to drink on the way, Larry was on Interstate 45 heading south. In just three and a half hours, he would be home.

Monday, September 20, 1971
Auld Lang Syne

Larry arrived at the Jacobson home precisely at 7:00, just as promised. Julian answered the door, as expected. "Hello, Larry. The girls are in the kitchen."

"Hello, Mr. J," Larry said. "Shouldn't I be saying '*Happy New Year*' as well? I understand this is the first day of Rosh Hashanah."

"If you like," Julian smiled, "but this holiday has very little in common with the other one. This is a time for introspection. The main purpose is to look back on the mistakes of the previous year, and begin to plan the changes for the new one."

"That doesn't sound so different to me," he grinned. "It sounds to me just like you making what I would call a 'new year's resolution'. Is that it?"

"I guess it's a little like that," Julian smiled. "OK, happy new year to you!"

"Thanks, Mr. J," he smiled. He headed for the kitchen, ready to help Julia study for her math course. "Hi, Julie! Hi, Mrs. J! Happy New Year!"

"OK, happy new year!" Jessica giggled. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Don't go to any trouble, Mrs. J," he grinned. "Scotch on the rocks is fine for me. I like to have a slight buzz by the time midnight rolls around. Oh, no! It just occurred to me the new year starts at sunset, rather than midnight like I'm used to. I'm already way behind! You better make that a double, Mrs. J!"

"Are you serious?" Julia asked before she saw the grin on his face and the twinkle in his eye. Catching on quickly, she put her hands on her hips and glared at him, trying to hide her smile. "You schmuck! What am I going to do with you?"

"I presume you're going to study with me," he said, "unless you've asked me here under false pretenses. Give your mother your drink order, so we can get started."

Julia sighed and shook her head. Shortly, she looked at Jessica, who stood there smiling patiently during the opening ceremonies for tonight's festivities. "We'll have lemonade, if you have some made, mom. Otherwise, soda will be fine."

"Lynchburg lemonade?" he asked hopefully.

"Sit down and shut up!" Julia demanded, pointing at the kitchen table.

"Two lemonades, coming right up!" Jessica said pleasantly.

"Man!" Larry sighed, pretending to pout.

Larry and Julia were having a good study session, as well as a lot of fun, teasing each other in much the same way as the evening had begun. He was in a good mood, and it was fun to to both work and play with the girl he cared so much about. Just before 8:00, however, his mood swung into the negative. When Ken arrived, Julia hopped up from the table to greet him, leaving Larry dangling in the middle of a sentence. He realized this situation was a mixed blessing. One moment, she was sharing both work and play with him; the next, she was running to greet another man, a man Larry truly despised.

"Come into the kitchen and say hello to Larry first," he heard her say to Ken in the foyer. "You have a few minutes before the game starts." There followed some muffled voices, but he could tell from the tones of voice there was disagreement between them. Moments later, Julia pulled Ken by the hand into the kitchen. "Ken's here. He's going to watch football with daddy while we study, isn't that right?"

"That's right," Ken said stiffly. "You could watch it, too, if you would just take

my advice and forget about this college nonsense.”

“Now Ken,” she said sweetly, “we’ve already talked about that. I think it’s important for a girl to get a good education these days, even if she decides she doesn’t want to have a career of her own. Don’t you agree, Larry?”

“Well, I suppose,” he said, stumbling for words. “It all depends on what she wants to do. She should go to college if she wants to, or not. It’s completely up to her.”

“There, you see?” she said to Ken as if Larry made a strong argument.

“That’s not...” Ken started, then glared at Larry in a menacing manner.

She put her arms around Ken’s neck and kissed him. “Go watch your silly old football game. We have work to do.”

Ken grumbled softly, but started towards the family room as ordered. He stopped, however, and looked back at Larry with an air of arrogance about him. Larry got his silent message loud and clear: *Julia kissed me, not you. She’s my girl, not yours!* There was nothing he could do or say in return. He simply stared at the floor. Perhaps he was watching his heart as it sank even lower. After all, Ken was obviously right.

Larry was terribly confused. One moment, Julia seemed to be coming on to him, flirting with him, and teasing him the way a girl might show she was interested in a boy. The next moment, she was putting her arms around another guy’s neck, kissing him before Larry’s eyes, flaunting the fact she had another boyfriend, almost daring Larry to do something about it. His mood followed the same pattern, and turned upward again after Ken left, and they returned to working and playing once more.

Larry was quietly studying some of his own course materials, when Julia started up a new conversation. “Something just occurred to me. I’m surprised you knew this was Rosh Hashanah. Have you been doing some more research into Judaism?”

“Not recently. This is just the first time I’ve been around on this holiday.”

“Maybe,” she said thoughtfully. “It’s not a big deal, I suppose. I mean, it’s an important holiday and all, but I guess since it doesn’t have all the trappings of holidays like Pesach or Yom Kippur that goyim like yourself don’t notice very much.”

“I suppose,” he said softly. “Your dad said it’s a day of introspection. You look back over the last year at the mistakes you’ve made, and plan changes for the new year. Other than the crazy celebrations, it sounds a lot like the new year on the Gregorian calendar.”

“I guess I’d agree,” she smiled. He could almost see the wheels turning in her head as she examined the events of the last year. She sighed, and with a pensive look added, “Lord knows I made plenty of mistakes last year I need to think about.”

“So did I,” he said soberly. “Do you really think you made so many mistakes?”

“Maybe not many in turns of numbers, but I surely made some whoppers!”

“Like what? Oh, I’m sorry. I don’t mean to pry. It’s none of my business.”

“No, that’s OK,” she said with a slight smile. “I don’t mind talking about some of them. It was just about this time last year I made what was probably the worst mistake of the whole year. I had to make a choice as to how my relationship with Jonah was going to proceed. I tried to check out another... possibility, but I didn’t read the signs correctly, and so I... Well, you know what I did.”

“Do you really think that was such a mistake, Julie?” he asked. “Jonah is a fine

man. I'd hardly call it a mistake for anyone to develop some interest in him."

"My mistake wasn't that I was interested in him," she explained, "but I let myself be blinded by my emotions. Yes, Jonah is a fine man, but he isn't the right man for me. I was simply in love with the idea of being in love, and couldn't see reality. The letters you sent got me to realize the truth about some things. Now I'm starting to see the truth about a lot of other things, as well. I can never thank you enough for your help, Larry."

"Well, if something I did helped you, I'm very glad, Julie," he said softly. "So, if I understand this holiday correctly, you're now supposed to make plans to prevent that sort of mistake from happening again. Is that right?"

"That's right," she smiled. "I made two mistakes. First, I tried to read some signs, but I failed miserably. I've already asked daddy for some help in reading such signs. I think I understand a little better now. I won't make *that* mistake again."

"Good for you!" he said brightly. "Your father is certainly a good source of advice. What about the second mistake?"

"Falling in love with love?" she giggled. "I've always had a good idea of the man I'm looking for, and now it's even more clear. Jonah didn't match that dream, but I deluded myself. I'm a little older and wiser now. The next time I fall in love, it will be because I've found the man who truly matches my dreams."

Larry smiled and nodded his head. "I hope that's the case. I've had some similar experiences in my life. It's easy to find someone who matches your dreams if you want to find them as badly as I have. I won't make that mistake again, either."

"You did that?" she asked.

"All the time," he said. "That's why I always got myself hurt so badly. I can't tell you how many times I thought I'd found my dream girl, only to have reality kick me in the shorts. Now, I'm more analytical when I evaluate how closely a girl matches my dreams. I know what I want. That's not my problem. My problem is getting a girl as wonderful as that to want me!"

"Quit saying that, you silly goose. You can have any girl you please!"

"I think we've had this discussion before," he laughed. "How many times do you want to hear that old joke, anyway?" They shared a small laugh together. "If that's the only mistake you made last year, I'd say you had a pretty successful year!"

"It wasn't," she grinned. "I made plenty of others." Turning a little more pensive, she added, "I made another one last spring after I broke up with Jonah. That mistake wasn't so bad, *per se*, but since I haven't corrected it, it just keeps compounding."

"I don't understand," he said.

"It's OK," she smiled. "I wouldn't expect you to understand. It's my problem, something I can correct whenever I get enough gumption. The crazy part is I have this feeling something wonderful will happen when I take care of that mistake. Do you ever get a feeling like that?"

"I'm not sure, Julie," he said. "Whenever I think something wonderful might happen, it's just wishful thinking on my part. But there's one mistake I've made over and over and over. There have been a lot different reasons why I keep making that mistake, but I now realize the main reason is because I've been a coward. I let opportunity after opportunity pass me by without acting because I was afraid of failure. Well, here is *my* resolution for Rosh Hashanah! If I should ever be so lucky as to have that opportunity again, I will *not* let my fear overpower me. I'll

never make that mistake again!”

“That’s the spirit, Larry,” she said warmly. “Go for gusto! Whatever it is you need to do, I know you can do it!”

“I hope you’re right, Julie,” he said, feeling somewhat encouraged by her expression of faith in him. He thought about the irony of what she was encouraging him to do! “Whether I succeed or not is certainly important to me, but perhaps it’s even more important that I simply try. If I don’t overcome my fear, then I’m probably doomed to be unhappy for the rest of my life.” When he looked at her, he saw a smile that made his heart soar. Determination filled his thoughts. *Yes! I will overcome my fear! I will tell you what is in my heart! If I have to live alone for the rest of my life, then let it be because I failed to win your heart, and not because I was too afraid to try!*

They sat together in silent reflection for a few moments. Julia broke the silence by teasing with him another time. “Well, I need to overcome my fear of the first math test, or I’ll be unhappy at least for the rest of the semester.”

“You’re outrageous!” he grinned. Her smile told him she agreed with his assessment, and really was not particularly unhappy about that fact.

Larry and Julia finished studying a little after 9:30, and moved into the family room to join the others. At halftime, the Detroit Lions were leading the Minnesota Vikings by a score of 13 to 3. When Julia sat on the sofa next to Ken, reality raised its ugly head again, and Larry decided it was time for him to leave. “Goodnight, everybody,” he said.

“Why don’t you stay and watch the rest of the game with us?” Julian suggested.

“I really should go,” he said, recognizing his old code phrase.

“You’re welcome to stay,” Jessica added. “Why don’t you relax with us for a few minutes and enjoy the game?”

Julia looked at him, and he saw in her eyes she hoped he would stay. He could never refuse anything she might wish. “OK, I’ll stay for a while.” When Julia smiled at him, he could only return her smile. Ken strategically placed himself in the middle of the sofa, with Julia to one side. With Julian in his recliner, the only seats available to Larry were on the sofa next to Ken, and on the love seat next to Jessica. He selected the latter.

This was the opening game in the second season for Monday Night Football. Keith Jackson, the anchorman from the first season, had been replaced by Frank Gifford, who seemed to be a natural to play against the antics perpetrated by “Dandy” Don Meredith and Howard Cosell. After the kickoff to open the second half, Minnesota made an impressive eighty yard drive, scoring a touchdown to cut Detroit’s lead down to 13-10.

Most of the conversation in the room was about football. Meredith and Cosell got into a discussion about football injuries, and how the players of the day did not seem to be as tough as those of the old days. “He’s right,” Ken stated, “the players today just don’t seem to be able to play with as much pain as they used to. They get a relatively minor injury, let’s say they pull a groin muscle, and they’re out for weeks.”

Larry made one of his typical offhand remarks. “I wonder why any of those guys would pull a groin muscle in the first place. With all the money they’re making, it seems to me they could afford to *pay* someone to pull it *for* them!”

Ken actually laughed out loud, while Julian was a little more reserved.

“Interesting point!” he agreed with a chuckle, winking at Jessica. She merely grinned and shook her head gently as she looked around the room. Julia showed no reaction at all.

When he saw Julia had not smiled at his joke, Larry remembered the conversation on his birthday about buying and renting love, and wished he had kept this joke to himself. “Sorry,” he said, hoping she would understand the reason for his apology.

The Vikings pulled ahead 16-13 on the strength of two field goals, one following a Detroit fumble deep in their own territory. Especially frustrating to the Detroit fans was that their place kicker, Errol Mann, had missed several field goal attempts that evening. With only seven seconds remaining to play, he made a record setting seventh field goal attempt to tie the game from a relatively easy distance of thirty-three yards. It was the fifth attempt he missed that night. The final score was Minnesota 16, Detroit 13.

“They ought to fire him!” Ken stated. “Anyone who can’t do his job any better than that shouldn’t *have* that job!”

While no one could argue, Larry felt a lot more sympathy for the kicker than did the others. Mann had missed on five attempts. Larry realized he had personally missed on seven opportunities. He could have told Julia how he felt about her after she broke up with Jimmy, or after Frank, or Bill, or Ed, or Steve, or Mike, or Jonah, but he had missed all of those opportunities. *Ken is right about one thing. I probably don’t deserve that eighth chance.* “And now I really should go. Goodnight, everybody!”

Four teenagers growing up in the 60s and 70s

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