

The platform was empty but for her and four young white men, circling around a young black man. It looked like a game, because the white ones were laughing and jumping around like kids, but there was no mistaking the serious fear on the black man's face. He was not dressed shabbily, but in a gray business suit; he had no defense. Two of the whites held up half-empty bottles of beer. She could hear in the distant tunnel the sound of the train, and with feverish sensation covering her skin, she shouted out, Leave him alone!

She might as well have been a ghost or a gust of wind, because they went on shouting epithets at the man, and trying to grab hold of his shoulders. He was quick. His fear made him fast, and vicious, and he struck out successfully three times, but then he lost all vitality as they went in on him as a pack. [...]

G's anger took over her, and she kicked and used her fists on the bare flesh, their arms lifted, their faces, laughing until it was too late for them to do as they wanted and they threw the man in the grey suit on the ground, kicked him, and ran back out of the station... just as the train pulled in.

G was shaking from her knees to the top of her head. She watched a handful of people pass, pausing to look at the man getting to his feet, to brush himself off, and straighten his tie. Someone asked her if she was all right. She nodded, and as those others retreated, and the train pulled out, she became terrified, all the anger departed, and she started after the small group of commuters quickly, only wanting human company in case those four should return. Her breathing was not automatic, too high in her chest. [...]

He said *Wait* with an accent, and she turned to see the smallish man in the grey suit, his lips cut, his cheeks scraped, and one eye puffy, trying to smile. Thank you, he said several times, and asked to know what he could do to repay her. Nothing, nothing, its okay. [...]

"My name's Augustine," he said. "I was just on my way to Harvard Square, you know? Then these men came out of nowhere and jumped me. I never had an experience like that, not even at home. And I owe my life to you." [...]

What is your name? I owe my life to you, I do."

"You already said that, but you don't," said G.

"Then what do I owe it to? Luck, the subway coming at the right moment, I don't know."

She didn't look in his direction the better to analyze the mystery of the event, and its loneliness. What stunned her was the sensation of having been there at all, of having nothing to do with it, of blacking out, in a sense, for those seconds of violence rebounding from her. The intelligent and restrained self, her self, with whom she identified night and day, was simply not present during that time. To be praised, then, for taking action made no sense at all. No rational decision had been made; she had physically reacted in a way she was utterly unprepared for. [...]

On the streets in Harvard Square, they stood around, then headed for a brightly lighted cafeteria, where the few faces turned to watch them as they passed. Inside they got tea, slopped onto a plastic tray, and sat at the plateglass window.

"I come from southern Africa," he told her, "from Durban, to be exact. I don't know if you know anything about Africa."

"Not much. Only about Lumumba."

"Well, I was schooled by Episcopalians, which is why I speak English, you know?"

"Yes, I wondered."

"Here I'm studying international law, actually."

"Really," she murmured, hanging over the heat of her cup.

"Do you want to give me your name?" G went ahead and gave it to him, her whole name, finding nothing to fear in someone who came from so far away and with whom she could laugh so easily.

He, meantime, thought she was a person of color, meeting her that night with her August tan high on her arms, legs, and face, and her kinky hair flying.

"You must be West Indian. Or Cape Verdean maybe?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, your skin tone, you know. You must be of mixed blood?"

G looked down at her arm lying on the formica table top. It was café au lait, the same to the tip of her fingers, and she wondered at this fact, saw it as a surprise, and looking up at his smile, she couldn't resist the lie: a small reward, or gift, to herself, from her future.

"My mother is West Indian," she said with a big joking smile. "She lives in-um-Barbados."

"And your father?"



"Here! I live with him."

"He must be of English extraction?"

"That's right."

"Can I walk you home, Gemma," he asked then.

"No, no, it's nearby, don't bother."

"Well, I'd really like to see you again, to take you somewhere a bit nicer than this, you know?"

two

They went, that Saturday night, to a French restaurant on Beacon Hill. There was a small courtyard for outside eating, with white wrought-iron tables and birch trees studded with Christmas lights. For a while they talked the usual, about Cuba, Kennedy, Communism, poverty in Boston, slumlords, the Welfare system and the domino theory; and meantime G was being affected by the lie she had told him. Deception made her pity Augustine as a victim, hers, and the pity in turn made her feel more at ease with him than she did with most people. Pity made her empathize with him, wholeheartedly, while being herself—if only at surface—a person of color made her distant from but likable to herself. When the subject turned to race, she was almost ready for it.

"Did your mother and father have difficulty, as a mixed couple, in this country?" asked Augustine.

"Uh, yes, of course! They lived a pretty isolated existence without many friends between them. His family wouldn't speak to him again after he married her. They were horrified."

"His family? What about hers?" asked Augustine, as if surprised that she would only register the reaction of the white family.

"Oh well, I don't really know. They were off in the West Indies, what was left of them."

"I see. And for you? The child, or children?"

"Children. My brother and I. We were proud of it, our heritage."

"No one teased or was cruel to you?"

"Only sometimes," she said quickly and sought to change the subject. "It's hard to talk about."

He asked if she had ever been in love.

"Once, yes," she admitted and her eyes flashed at the thought of the man.

"What happened?"

"He went back to his wife and children."

"Ah. That's bad. Loving someone married, I mean. Especially if you're not married too. I always heard a married man

should only have affairs with married women, and vice versa. This way each person has love to return to, when that one ends."

"That's very cynical," she said.

"I don't think so at all... Ideally, however, one should not have any affairs, with or without a married person."

"All I know is, I was happy when we were together, and I can't imagine it would ever repeat with anyone else."

"Was he black or white?"

She told him white and now he paid particular attention of the shape of his fork. He turned it up and around the light, examining the notches and grooves in its flat fake silver.

After dinner, they walked for several lonely blocks, in the warm summer air, to the combat zone where there was a nightclub called Slade's Paradise. It was a sleazy spot with a long bar down one side, and tables and a stage on the other. Primarily a black club, frequented by the occasional white sailor or student out on a lark, it was not unsafe for whites to go there, in 1962, because the division was too complete to cross with even the contact of violence.

G and Augustine danced in the style of the times, not touching, but circling close, bending at the knees and lifting up again; and then they watched a female group sing and gesticulate in gold lamé dresses, hair straightened and bobbed. The club was hot and filled with those fore-sexual smells of alcohol, sweat and smoke. G observed Augustine less intelligently now, and with more the desire of a twentyish woman who is ready to be filled with love and children, a little desperate at the nerve ends, but still selective, cautious. His small, tense frame in a herringbone suit and slow-moving hands made her eyes spark and moisten, like her mother's years before, so she leaned in close to this man waiting for him to touch her. He didn't. Not there, not on the streets and not even when she dropped him at his building, before driving back to hers. He just thanked her for the evening and promised to call. When she went inside, she breathed the air as if it were a liquor that could pass into her body, and give it a rush of emotion. For something, in her, was missing, only to be replaced by something lesser and lighter. [...]

The first time she went to his apartment it was with the flushed anticipation of physical love. Sex with him would affirm the lie that she was a person of color, and would then set her on a fresh course, a liberation she longed for. She had no doubt of his desire for her, and her internal organs felt as red and fresh as roses shaking in drops of rain and sun. Warmth traveled the stem of her spine. She breathed from her abdomen, knocking on his scraped and cracked door. When she saw him, she was both hot and shy. Immediately she sank onto his sofa, waiting for the rest to follow. He handed her a cup of tea on a saucer.



"It's wonderful to see you," he told her.

"You too."

She imagined herself with her soft brown skin and black curls pulled into a pony tail like someone from some old Southern novel. She smiled in a way that would be called demure, and tilted in his direction. He wore his shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows, and smoked a small cigarillo. He talked about his home and said:

"I'm engaged to a woman who is now living in Geneva. We will be married as soon as I've finished school."

"What's her name? Tell me about her," said G and he told her while her temples and throat throbbed less with disappointment than with embarrassment. After this day she entered the rest of the season with his friendship central to the system of her time, her work, her new image. Her lie about her race made her see the world fresh the way you do on the first October day which is clear and blue. Each green leaf sustained the shadow of another green leaf - a black cut-out. The pavement littered with mica unnoticed before, and squirrels ate nuts with focused relish. Grains of sugar seemed larger than ever; cream was sweeter; and the smell of the air anywhere was human and familiar. It was being in love with the new person that she now was.

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three

Love, which excitedly insists that one individual is an exception to all the others, can be exhausted by this very excitement. Dieter drank too much, and G did too, and every time they were together, they became drunk, and consequently they suffered the following day. Dieter dealt with the suffering by working all the more intensely on his book, locked up in his home with six-packs of beer, while G, who couldn't afford the cure of alcohol became tremulous, fearful and subject to those harsh waves of anxiety that once lifted her up and over like efforts on the part of pure spirit, locked into substance, efforts that seemed liberating in intention.

It was late fall when Dieter's book was nearly complete that he got in the mood for change, again. He felt stultified by Boston and figured he should move to New York to ensure the success of his manuscript. He was not happy with himself, or the habits that sustained him over those months. And he decided to switch from cigarettes to a pipe, from scotch to wine, and from his relationship to G to some X, Y, or Z who would not be time-consuming. He set a date, February first, for the delivery of his manuscript and himself.

Meanwhile he feared telling G of his new program. He didn't want to cause a scene and tried, frantically, to think up a way

of leaving her which would make her believe that she had brought it on herself. He lavished her with the loving kindness of one who is leaving. He pitied her for not knowing what was coming. He dropped hints of his restlessness and of his obsession with success.

Everyone but G suspected Dieter of planning to depart. Augustine, among others, felt that Dieter was unable to commit himself to her because of her racial background. [...]

"Are you bothered by Gemma's background?" Augustine asked after a while.

"Why would I be? You couldn't get much better," said Dieter with a conspiratorial smile. "Blue blood is supposed to be the clearest in this country."

"Blue blood?" Augustine asked, curious. "I never heard that expression."

"I can't believe you lived in Boston this long, and haven't heard it."

"Ah well. You know this city is as bad as the Deep South in many ways. I never met her father, but Gemma's mother must have left because it was intolerable here."

"I suppose he was intolerable. He's pompous," said Dieter.

"And racist too?" [...]

Augustine scrutinized Dieter carefully, seeing how deftly he was avoiding a direct response to his question. The avoidance in this case was the response he expected, but something more was troubling too. He waited for Dieter this time to speak.

"Does Gemma talk to you about her family background?" Dieter asked.

"Sometimes, but not much."

"How would you describe her racial type?"

"Well, mulatto, I guess. And you?"

"I don't know the word for it, I guess." [...]

Now they both stared off into a distant space and forgot each other and the necessity for conversation. Dieter knew at that moment he could utterly humiliate G by giving away her lie. But he drew back because it was more strange than he could ever imagine.

The next evening he went directly to G's apartment, after completing his quota of work for the day. The twilight lay blue on the rocky streets, and from down there, the light in her window, coming through bamboo and chintz, looked as innocent as a child's hair. Dieter went through the usual moves of opening drinks and smokes before confronting her directly with the knowledge he now had.

"What do you think your doing about this race issue?" he asked, his voice all outrage. "You aren't any more black than I am!"

"I can't explain it. Just leave it alone!" [...]



It was clear to everyone who knew her that, when Dieter left her, G was effectively destroyed. That she came from some privileged and educated background, black or white, was obvious to her friends but it was now irrelevant in the face of her excessive drinking and her attraction to anonymity to the point of self-annihilation. She scraped bits of money together, just managing to pay her rent and eat meager food and drink chemically infected wines. She became and remained pale.

In the following summer, Augustine left to return to South Africa and then to move to Geneva and his fiancée, permanently. Before his departure, he and others agreed that G was not black at all. They wondered if she had ties to the CIA, if she had, for all that time, been spying on them. It was not so much her lie that made them suspicious as her tie to Dieter, who seemed, in retrospect and with his growing success in New York, to be suspect. Augustine left without saying any of this to G, and her other friends left too, heading south, or to New York, away from Boston, which they said was hell for any person of color, and none of them said anything to her either. It was a way of forgetting her.

## Marigold Linton Transformation of Memory in Everyday Life

(1982)

*In 1972, Marigold Linton undertook a singular memory experiment. Like Hermann von Ebbinghaus, who had founded the classic psychology of memory about a century earlier, she was her own subject. Every day she recorded at least two events from her life; every month she tested her ability to remember, order, and date a sample of the events she had previously recorded. Linton has presented the basic results of the study elsewhere; here she reflects on some of its implications. How can we understand the effects of "emotionality" and "importance" on memory? What are the long-run consequences of repetition? What kinds of events will be remembered best? The answers are often surprising. Particularly intriguing is Linton's very un-Ebbinghausian forgetting curve; it is linear with a slope of 5 percent a year. How can we reconcile such a pattern of forgetting with the existence of memories more than twenty years old? Linton's own explanation, based on the diminishing effectiveness of the original cues, that a different forgetting function might be observed with different forms of cueing. Perhaps she is right; perhaps, on the other hand, most of our oldest memories are the product of repeated rehearsal and reconstruction. So far, these are the only systematic data we have.*

*Some years ago, my curiosity about how memory functions in a naturalistic setting led me to an investigation of my own memory. During the course of this six-year study I developed event items based on my own experiences, and later attempted to reconstruct the probable dates of the event's occurrences. (Dating may seem a rather restricted, perhaps even uninteresting behaviour, but its quantifiability continues to appeal to me). Performing a prolonged study on personal life events has, I believe, provided me with a unique perspective on memory functioning; perhaps some of these insights, as well as well as a description of the unforeseen difficulties in constructing this research may be informative to others. [...]*

The stimuli for this long-term study were brief descriptions of events from my life written each day throughout the study's six-year duration. At first it seemed there might be a simple set of heuristics for describing events, but rather shortly I abandoned the search for simple regularities. So wide a range of content and presentation styles may be employed to specify events that the elements necessary or sufficient to describe "an event" have continued to elude me. To avoid unnecessary narrowness in my event pool I accepted all

brief unique descriptions. (No description exceeded 180 letters, and when it was written every item was discernible from all other events then accessible to memory). These criteria were dictated by my major dependent variables: dating accuracy (only unique items can be uniquely dated) and response speed (reading times must be brief/uniform enough not to differen-