

SHEER'S GONE MISSING

Seldom shone those eyes upon that shore anymore. Those were Sheer's eyes. She is a maiden who formerly would walk down to the beach every other day or so. I know this, for I always walk to the beach from my apartment, each day, since my job is only from the morning till noon. Anyway, for the last three weeks, I've come to speak to Sheer rather oft. And when I wasn't speaking to her, I would behold her sight from afar, further up the beach than her, who stood or sat watching the even skyline and the Sun sinking thereto. Thus I saw not much her foreshore; nor was there any need to. Methinks she knew not that I was there. Now, I had long bidden clean from onlooking at women out of lust, but somehow I wist this were a sundry case, and so I let my eyes freely lie on her shoulders and hang onto the strings of her long, straight, glistening hair, that was of a ruddy, fallowish blond. Though it took a few times of seeing her, I now have a fair enough likeness of her in my head. That is special, as most of the time my mind forgets and forleaves a maiden's look no later than I wend and walk away from her, as sadly must unfalteringly happen.

Her hair hung down to the bottom of her shoulders the last I saw of her last week (for it sundered from time to time, as she sometimes wore her hair upholden in a clip or in a bow, and once lately she had it shorn). Always she wore some kind of pants cut no higher than her knees, and as for her shirt, ofttest it was short-sleeved, but from time to time she durst wear, albeit ever modestly when you look at everyone else on the beach, and you know what I mean, some shirts sleeveless, that bared her bright (for her skin-hue was stark light, much unlike most who indwell this whole State of California) and uneven but pleasingly, prettily so, shoulders, and also the straps of an undershirt or the like.

But she has not been there, at that shore, lately. She had told me nothing beforehand, either.

It is as if there were a Sheer-shapen hole in the middle of the three-dimensional space of that beach, as long as I go by there in the evening; a stead waiting to be stood in; a space waiting to be filled. I can almost see her see-through shape standing there now, unshifting. I wonder when she'll be back, if

she'll be back. It seems darker on that shore, too. Like her eyes truly shone a ghostly light.

Letten to speak in contradictions, I would say that Sheer's personality was both shy and forthcoming at the same time, shy in one way, an outward one, and unshy in another, The other.

Much of her time at the beach, Sheer spent reading books and even sometimes writing in a notebook. Of course, she did this through the window of a pair of thick glasses, which seemed to hold the whole host of hues at their edges, iridescent like an oily puddle; or, as if the glasses were the narrow peeping-holes on the outside of a great bubble, on the inside whereof she either was trapped or abode by her choice. She never let me know what exactly she was writing of, however.

She seemed, when she read or wrote, wholly disinterested in the Outside World, forebusied with the wordmeal uncovering of the book's world; or, in the case of writing, the shaping of a World of her own. That is, if she were writing fiction. If it were a Daily, it was then a business of taking a snapshot, as with a photo-camera, of our Outside World, to stow it, to keep it, for as near to everlasting as could be managed.

A few days have gone by, and the most amazing thing has happened today: I found what unmistakably were Sheer's glasses, lying on the beach-sand, in the same stead she always goes. Now I am very worried for her.

Methinks the lenses are in fairly good shape, as if they hadn't been there for very long. Sundry scenarios have arisen in my head as to what's befallen her: maybe she was kidnapped; maybe she but dropped her glasses and has some truly quite normal grounds for not being at the shore lately; maybe she — no, surely — she went there while I wasn't there.

I haven't her phone number, so I can't call her. I know not where she lives. I know not her last name. I know nothing and have nothing but a pair of glasses: hopeless. I will go back tomorrow when it's bright out to seek more clues. I truly should have done that today.

Two days later. I sought about the beach yesterday, but found nothing; nor have I seen Sheer. It has come to me that the same stark, bewitched focus wherewith Sheer reads her books, is that which I have while I watching her and reading her movements and fluctuations and lacks thereof like a book, and the ways the light springs off of her, while she sits or stands on the sand. I am not sure what I sought to get out of watching her like that exactly, only that there be something, thereof am I sure.

Two more realizations have come to my mind: 1) That since Sheer had evidently been at the beach at an earlier time than me on the day that she lost her glasses, maybe she has only shifted her hour of going there, not stopped altogether. And 2) How can she read her books or write whatever she writes without her glasses, now that I have them? unless she have a spare pair. But has she? I plan to take my day off of work tomorrow and go to the beach in the morning and abide for her there till the evening. And of course I will bring her glasses with me, that I may give her them back if she be there.

It is now evening, that of the next day. And no sight of Sheer. I sit in her stead writing this, sitting on my bottom with my knees serving for a table, just like I've seen Sheer do many times. At a sundry angle at the right time of day, her hair would truly glisten. She had a sundry spriness about her, a lightweightness in her movements as I recall them now, that is hard to betell to others. She seemed actually aerodynamic, holpen by her thinness. She was thin, is thin — the past tense I reckon has come about from her being gone for so long, for what feels like forever — and likewise are her limbs, especially so. She is a few years younger than me and seems unaffected by the evils of aging thus. I am already young. Yet all of her movements are so much swifter and milder than mine, though indeed she is a wench.

I have now abidden longer, all the way into the dusk. To no avail. She knows that I come here every day. And what about her glasses? Won't she need them? I think she is not okay. You know, you can drown easily in the sea.

But I've never once seen Sheer swim, I know, it's silly. Only reading. I meant that my idea were silly, not she.

The next day. I had a dream last night wherein Sheer was back at the beach at Sunset and we spoke a little, and her freckled face bore her thick-lense glasses once more, and she pushed them into place, her face went toward me, away from her notebook. Then she walked away as I sat watching her from the sand. Like the skin of her uncovered arms and shoulders, Sheer's voice is slightly uneven, bumpy, at the level of the waves of sound as given shape by a graph, at the microscopic level. This slight boyishness that this lent her endeared me to her all the more.

So after thinking about her too long as I lay there in bed — this is Saturday; I have no work — and arising, awaking from my day-dreams, or morrow-dreams, as they ought to be called, I sat at my desk in my apartment where I had set Sheer's glasses, and I looked at them awhile. Every pair of glasses has a slight tint in its hue, be it a yellow one or a blue or a purple. Sheer's are tinted to the bluer side. I was sad for her. I hoped that she were alright, but I understood that she were not.

That same intensity wherewith I wontly read Sheer and Sheer reads her books, therewith I studied that pair of glasses from every angle.

It was written on the metal, "OCULOS Glasses." I know my Latin well enough: oculos means "eyes." I think. It doesn't matter. What matters is finding Sheer and asoothing that she be sound.

Some time has gone by. I looked up Oculos Glasses on Google Maps, to find that they do retail, the nearest shop three miles away. Naturally I went thither. The next one after that was one hundred and twenty-three miles! This is a relatively small business.

Anyway, I brought Sheer's glasses in case they were needed for whyever. They were not.

The man at the counter there, who was not an eyeleech himself, was kind enough to give me Sheer's last name: Stellet. Sheer Stellet. I thanked him — his

name-tag said Roy — and I've now come home. I tried looking through her glasses and got dizzy for a while. A little one, albeit.

Soon wi will eft go to the beach. It's soon to be noon. An hour away. Maybe I should go now.

I went to the beach. It's now evening. She was not there again, as I foresaw. I also looked up Sheer's full name on the internet, to no avail. I found nothing. Since Sheer's been gone I haven't seen anybody fill her spot. It belongs only to her. Of course, in her awayness I've sitten in that spot. I don't know what that means.

I believe that Sheer knows not that I have her in my mind at all, or that I spend any time on the beach idly watching her. Maybe in her perilous condition, whatever it be, this knowledge might bring comfort to her, if only she knew it. I have spoken with her no more than ten times. But even without speaking to her at all, I knew she was, I reckon I'll say, "significant," to me. Like I were bound by fate, by God, to meet her, and that this were some kind of wending point in my life. I haven't done much for myself since Sheer's gone missing. Like she is a — like her absence is a hole in my the cloth of my life, or like a thread that binds a whole garment together that has just been undone. Everywhere and everywhen now seems empty. Or it can be likened to a light that washes a whole room in its shine and warmth, at once switched off, leaving all in blinding darkness. And the room goes cold, too. Even the brightest thing in my life, the Sun, doesn't feel as bright or warm or soothing anymore. I ween it was not Sheer's eyes, in truth, that shone upon the shore, but the whole of her. Or maybe some kind of "aura" that is in the Ghostly World, that interacts with ours.

The first time I met Sheer — actually, the only time, as you can only 'meet' someone once — there was a certain "foretelling" feeling in my heart, that, "This is important. Go talk to her."

That time I remember that I had a very boring day. And work had ended a little late, actually hours late, and so afterward I went down to the beach from my apartment, and there was this maiden sitting on the beach-sand, her hair

down and swaying lightly in the breeze, wearing a thickly woven red shirt. Quite short sleeves, and rather tight-fitting. She was a little bent over, writing on a notebook upholden by her thighs. That was not even a month ago, but it feels like a year or so. Looking for something exciting, and following that mysterious yearning in my heart, I came near and sat down beside her.

But what will I do to save her? I know she is in danger.

Trying to look through her glasses made me dizzy, as I once more thought over the facts and how that might lead to where she is. My mind wox dizzy too.

Then my heart grew hopeless and the dams of my eyes burst open, and out dripped a tear, before I eft-gathered myself and even thought, foolishly, maybe she is but at home all this time, and soon she will come back to the beach! But no, I knew she was in plight. If only I had taken a likeness of her, I thought.

I yelled a curse.

And what was the worse, my memory of her look was also beginning to wane.

Only with hardship did I sleep that night and rise the next morning to go to work.

It was fittingly foggy that day, and when I went in the evening down to the beach, she was not there (how surprising).

As I'm writing this later that same night I cannot recall much of what happened, owing to the becloudedness of my mind (and the weather), but as I ought to have done earlier, I drove to the nearby police station from the apartment and reported Sheer Stellet as a missing person.

And seemingly they said they would look into the matter, though my heart is telling me they will not.

When I awoke the next morrow with a bright idea that I had gotten from a dream, or at least one of those fore-waking slumberry wanderings of

consciousness, I called in sick to work (which was a lie) and got to the TRUE work.

Giving another shot at the internet, I went to LocalPhoneBook.com and chose our town Norced Harbor as the borough, and input her full name, hitting Enter.

But of course first I had to make an account (which brooked no small deal of time), and, to my glee, there was one entry shown and one entry only: it had to have been hers!

At that point, whether anyone might answer the number or not, I got up and leapt about in my stead a few times, so thrilled was I to have a possible lead. And I know that smile on my leer was ear to ear. (And, as if it mean something, those rhyme with "Sheer.")

Whatever the case, the site yielded me no further lore about her. (And to access other websites with more information, you had to have some kind of Investigator's License, so they were worthless to me.)

So like a man whose stopped heart was made to beat again, I sprang up out of my seat and rushed to the landline, dialing the number...

But my quickened heart sank once more, as if to death, when her voice, sweet to the ear as it was, said to leave a message. I left one anyway. *Perhaps* she might answer. And now I knew she lived alone...

At least hearing her voice in any medium was still freshening as a drink of cool spring-water in the fierceness of drought, and brought back my inner picture of her.

Well, I thought, she must truly live near, for the area code was the same as mine. Like tens of thousands of others, no doubt... However this was no news anyway, as I already weened strongly that she would walk to the beach straight from her house (meaning it were near).

"I know!" I yelled.

As if God had shinned a light onto my soul, I sat back down at my computer and looked up "Nearby private investigator." THEY should be able to

access the sites that would give me her address, kin, and other information about her(!) from the name alone.

Pleading my case to P.I. Charles Aston as if my fee (\$200) were not enough, he soothed me that he would have her lore sent to me within the hour.

It was a rough hour to bide, but forty-two minutes in, he called me back, telling me it was sent in an email; and as for where she lived, it was so-and-so a number, Meadow Road. And I yielded him my great thanks. My heart felt as if a wave of cool water overswept it. Meadow Road was but a few streets down from my own.

I headed straight thither in my car, seeking to find a few clues at least. I didn't even swap my clothes my excitement was so great.

Surely enough, she lived in an apartment herself, and every way in the building was locked. So I just bode standing outside for someone to go in or out.

Leaning onto the building-side in the nearest shade, I watched the fore-door and side parking lot gate, till out trod a woman from the main entrance, holding two dogs' leashes in her hands, as I ran over, swang open the door, and strode inside. She had looked a little bewildered but kept on going. I was in!

Wait!— Nowhere did Mr. Aston give her apartment number! But my heart rested at once when I saw the directory in the middle of the lobby. I sighed, my short breath coming back to me. Sheer was on floor two, apartment seven. I hurried up the stairs.

And as if Sheer's head were about to be shorn right off her body any second in that very apartment unless I intervened, I banged the side of my right fist against her door, just in case she were in there.

"Sheer! It's me!"

The apartment was still as a stone, and seeing through the looking-glass, all its lights were off.

I sighed again, of sorrow this time, and crouched down to the floor against her door, thwarted. Sheer was taken.

Soon, though, I arose again, and—as if a mere pawn in Fate’s hands, or mayhaps a free being in such hands but beseen through a short-lived ghost of guidance—kicked aside her door-mat out of wrath, and a key appeared from under it. Sheer’s spare key to her apartment.

Seeing my own bout of raw anger fit into Godly foresight like that dizzied me nigh as much as looking through Sheer’s glasses did. I was stricked dumb for too long as I stood there, before I picked up the key, carefully eft-laid the door-mat, unlocked the door, and walked inside. Glaringly, no-one had been there for days.

Things were neatly in their stead, I saw turning on the lights, and there was only one bedroom. The flat smelt comely, and her bookshelves were lined thickly but orderly with books, each one of which seemed worthy of reading.

There was no token of a struggle at all. But merely by looking at the stead, I could tell that 1) a woman lived there; and 2) that woman was Sheer. Indeed, someone with good taste.

Throughseeking the place, I saw she had no landline, meaning the number I called was a cell.

I found in her bedroom closet all the sundry clothes she would wear to the beach, and much more, from elegant to casual. And—behold!— on her bed were her notebook and pen!

Firstly I didn’t want to read her daily without her saying alright, but much weightier than that, maybe it would give me clues about where she could be. And I would take Sheer’s life over her privacy any day! So I, sorrily, read the last week’s worth of writings.

While none of it was of any worth to the case, every leaf I read of her words made me ache for her ever more, till I swore that whoever had captured her, I would break his skull open. And if such a man-thief showed himself right then, I would have done it in a braid. But I realized that my sheer fury would no sooner find her than the undertaker, and I breathed softly and slowly to settle down.

Shortly thereafter I went on seeking clues, looking through each room carefully. Once more nearing wanhope, I found a card lying at the edge of her desk in her office. It said, "Pear Acres Home Loans! 0% interest 10+ year term! Set you up financially!" And it had a phone number written in big print. It had a nearby area code.

I checked her notebook again and noted that her last entry therein had been three weeks earlier.

Sadly finding little of worth, I locked up the flat and left, taking the spare key with me and the Pear Acres card, about which I felt a sundry weirdness, something oddly eerie wherefor I could not say then.

There was something about the thin, unglossed and one-sided paper of it, and the dull blue hue serving for its background and the relative dearth of information given. Even its shape was flawed, the rectangle's edges slightly short of straight. Nor would I have been too keen to these anomalies were it not that I found it at a missing woman's home.

When I got home, a little downcast, I wrote "Pear Acres home loans" into Google, even in quote marks, and nothing at all came up.

So what had I left but to call the number on the card?

Shaking a little yet not even sure this were truly a lead, I rang the number, for Sheer.

"Hello," said the fore-recorded voice of a man brightly, but in a way that gave off an underlying grimness. "You have reached Pear Acres. We're not in right now. Please call back later, or stop by within our hours at [so-and-so a number] Satterfield Drive. Thank you." And it hung up.

Strongwilled and seeking an answer, I looked up the address, for the supposed business was waxing too uncanny for me yet to forsake the matter. Something, I reckoned, was afoot.

I found no picture of the lot, but I did find that deal of Satterfield Drive was right beside the foot-hills begoing Norces Harbor to the Northwest, an area I had never been. All that was there were empty fields and wild barrow-paths

anyway. It was impossible that a loan company's office might lie there; something greater was behind this. Mayhaps, I thought, whoever had taken Sheer.

Fitting myself with the heavy bat I kept as a weapon, a flashlight, the Pear Acres card, a map, and a few other items, evening slowly creeping upon us, I set forth in my car, with a shaky heart.

Again and again, I uttered to myself, "I'm doing this for Sheer. I'm doing this for Sheer." I thought of her the whole time, and her eyes that lit the shore.

As the fear sought to withhold me, I but answered, "Sheer's in danger."

When I reached the cursed address, an empty field with a weakly gated path leading into the hills, the Sun had somehow already almost set. I got wearily out of the car with my bat.

The path had lately been trodden upon.

For a braid I wavered. But I whispered to my heart— nay, to her— "I'm going to save you, Sheer." And my legs bore me on the way.

As I fastened my watchful eyes before me, I durst not make a sound.

Soon darkness fell over me, over everything, and I was deep amidst the mountains, along a winding, sandy road.

I might call aloud for Sheer, I thought, but that could put her in even greater plight.. If she were there at all... My heart ached. And I was thirsty, too.

Not long did it seem, before the twilight had gone and the night taken its stead, and I felt like dying. Not that I were dying, but that I wished to.

I crouched down, overwon (Sheer was not there after all), ready for the wolves to eat me, and I laid down my bat.

Once more the dams of my eyes opened, and tears flew down my leer, even onto my tongue, that tasted the salty water, and a light shone on me!

The man I had heard on the phone held a flashlight in his left hand and a handgun in his right.

"Greetin's, partner!" he scoffed. "Lookin' for Sheer?"

I said not a word.

"Yer Winston, right?"

I was.

"Well get up; yer comin' with me."

The hairy man beckoned to me with his left hand, and I arose and walked before him as he held his gun at me. I forsook my bat.

If only, I thought, I might get him to fall to his left, off the hillside and onto the needle-sharp thorn-shrubs beneath. Each thorn was as big as my little toe.

The man led me a way along the path, and retched that he was going to sell me and Sheer as slaves in Guatemala. "Too bad y'all might get separated!" That was all he said about her.

I hoped he was taking me to her.

After a while we reached an even field atop one of the high hills, whereon was built a big but worn house near the middle.

In one corner stood an unsightly wooden and steelen-bolstered shed, with a lock and chain at its infare.

On the other side of the field but still before the house, was a wan blue van, and the start of a dirten road down the hill, foreguessedly leading back to town.

I could reckon what I thought was in that shed.

The house lights were still on, so the man shut off the flashlight and beckoned me, who yet walked before him, toward the shed's door.

But insooth I was happy and smiling, for I was likely about to see Sheer once more!

He had me stand by the door's left, and bade, "Don't move."

The gun ever pointed toward me, he slowly bent down and dropped the flashlight and slowly rose up again.

Then he reached with his left hand into his right pants pocket, and drew out his keychain.

But he couldn't unlock the lock with but one hand, so he bent down again slowly to let down the gun on the ground to his right, while he carefully unlocked the door.

At that instant, though formerly I had no will to fight against the man, and rather one to bear out his every bidding for the while, bent down myself swiftly as a blur only as much as was needed to fang the metal flashlight, and smote him in the head with the heavier end while he had but begun to reach for his gun, and I struck him so hard my whole arm ached afterward.

The blow was loud but his mouth still, and a little blood splashed, as he fell lifeless onto the earth.

I could not believe what had just befallen, and so I stood still for a long time, mere unshifting as if nothing had. For a time I was calm. I dropped the bloody flashlight.

Soon my face turned to dread, and then mirth, knowing what I had just done: I had saved Sheer.

So I went and fetched a heavy stone from nearby in the field, and smashed it on the man's head, hearing a crack, so that he couldn't come after us later, nor anyone else.

Then I picked up his keychain and unlocked the door, and then opened it. Sheer was inside!

"Sheer!"

The fright on her face turned to the greatest happiness when she saw me and heard me call her name.

Clean-licked chicken bones lay in a heap at the shed's corner, and her clothes looked wretched.

"Winston, why did you come here?"

I led her out of the shed and retched her what had happened, nigh having forgotten the man I had just slain.

As I was about to look for the key to the van on the keychain, Sheer hugged me heartily.

The blood rushed to my head and I felt as if I were dreaming.

She was so happy!

She told me that she had been trapped there for weeks and that Mr. Artred (the dead man) of Pear Acres came to her apartment for an appointment she had set up with him to talk about getting a home loan, but then he knocked her out and took her here.

Then, he forced her to talk about anyone who might notice her being gone, and so she said, "Well... There is one man..." And so he said he would lure me over, to sell me as a slave too in Guatemala. That, she said, had only saddened her more.

I cannot remember much else of what either of us had said for a while, other than how relieved we were to see each other, and she was sorry for selling me out (which I said turned out well in the end!).

We both got in the van, and I drove us down the hill.

"Sheer, I have your glasses."

"Wait, really?"

I explained.

And she said something like, "Wow. I can't believe you remembered me! That man had taken my glasses a long time ago."

"I'll take you home so I can give you them back tonight."

"Thank you!.. You just saved me..." Even in tatters, like the ones she wore, I thought her appearance shone. So I told her about it; that is, the "brightness" that I feel she gives off.

This made her happy. She told me she didn't think anyone had noticed her on the beach, not even me.

I told her I thought something was special about her.

And we went on talking so friendly to one another, as I tried to find my—our— way among the foot-hill roads and the highways. Both of us were the most pleased I could recall either of us being.

"Well, I think, actually, that you're interesting too, Winston."

"Wow.."

".. So thank you again for saving me.. I never thought YOU would think about me at all."

"Don't thank me. This is what I needed to do. Man, saving you has brought me back to life.."

"The same definitely applies to me!"

We talked a bit more, and then she said, "Winston, I feel kinda scared to go back to my home tonight, you know.. Do you think that maybe I could stay with you for the night?.."

I smiled. "Yes, Sheer, you can. That would be alright."

"Wow, thank you so much."

"Ah! Look, it's my car!" I had gone in a roundabout way to find it.

She laughed. "Nice."

And we changed cars and left for my apartment.

"Wow, your car's old!.. I like it!"

"Thanks. Oh. Look, Sheer, I'm sorry I took your key—" I handed her the spare key back. "But I had to find you.."

"Don't worry about it! And this's great, 'cuz took my other key."

I checked and found that on his keychain, and gave her it as well.

"Woah, that's even better!"

"Sheer, maybe you should get a change of clothes from your apartment first; these clothes are filthy!"

"Oh, you're right.. You'll take me there?"

"Sure!" And thither I drove. "...gosh I missed seeing you on the beach.."

"You know, I think I missed you too. And you actually came for me!"

"I reckon I'm about as glad as you are!"

"No, you are not!" She laughed.

"Yes, I am!.. Hey Sheer?"

"Yeah?"

"What's your favorite book?"

"Oh man, I— My favorite book is On A High-Up Place, by Art Delaquilla. It's hard to describe, though."

"All of your books looked interesting. And what I saw of your writing, too."

"Oh, thanks. Sometimes I write stories. I could show you some, some time."

"Oh, please."

Sheer's hair and face, though dirty, still had that sheenness about them. She was exactly as fair as I remembered. She was still thin and soft-skinned. She looked as comely as ever. And now she (obviously) wasn't wearing her glasses.

"Sheer, are you hungry?"

"A little."

"Okay. We'll have to make dinner when we get to my apartment. Well, I'll make it for you, actually. You've been through enough."

"Thanks. We could make it together," she suggested.

"If that's what you want, then let's do it."

"Cool."

"I believe we're almost at your place. How about you also bring some of your stories, and we can read them later tonight?"

"Yeah! Good idea! So I'll just run up and change my clothes and get whatever else I need — and the stories — and I'll come back down."

That's what she did, and we headed back to my home, gleeful. And how pretty did she look in her clean pants (of a dark red hue and velvety), shoes and short-sleeved purple shirt!

When we got to my apartment, I laid out a bed and blanket for her in my living-room, we made dinner and talked, she read me a bewitching tale of hers, I bade her goodnight, said I would bide home from work again the next day, and we slept. I had good dreams.

A few days later she went back home, but we agreed we would see each other at the beach soon, I bade her a warm farewell for the night, and we sundered.

Two days — or maybe it was three days — later, she told me by the shore about how she really wanted that home loan as we were chatting, and so I gave her an offer...

One month later we gathered our savings together and made the down payment on a cheap house in the inland side of town by the dry hills and wilderness. And so we left our apartments (but not our belongings, mind you!), and began dwelling at our new house.

How thrilling that was for the both of us!

I had left my journal unwhole for two years, but I only now filled in the rest when my dear wife Sheer told me I ought to finish it!