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Justin-Mark

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"He called himself Justin, for his image; I used his real name, Mark. I'd known him as Mark all our lives. Why should I change just because he needed an image?"

Cover Page Footnote

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Justin-Mark

By Kathleen A. Daly

He called himself Justin, for his image; I used his real name, Mark. I'd known him as Mark all our lives. Why should I change just because he needed an image?

Justin-Mark defied description, for, though he was medium in/build, with mousy brown hair and a large nose, he was striking. Some say it was his grey-green eyes, edged in black. I always said it was not his eyes, but the soul they revealed.

"My name is Justin," his voice would boom, "and I come, not as a leader, but as a brother." And after that, you lost his words in the intensity of his expression, the lightning in that grey-green soul reaching out through dark lashes. Oh, he talked about God and love and salvation, you knew that—but the people who came to Justin came not because of God or love or salvation. They came because Justin called them.

Yes, he was a preacher, but he could outdrink any man I know. He'd grab a beer right off stage, pop the top and drain half of it. "Marty," he'd say, "I don't know kid, rough show. Did you see those old ladies sitting right up front, just prayin' I'd slip up on Scripture?" He'd take another long drink. "They just wanted me to fail—no faith in Justin's word." And he'd walk away, muttering "rough show, real rough. . . ." He always called them shows, never speeches or missions. Maybe he didn't believe Justin's word, either. Or maybe he was afraid he did.

One night, we finished a show in a small town in Connecticut. The whole crew piled into a couple of cars and headed out for pizza. Somehow, it ended up just Justin-Mark and I in his beat-up little Volkswagen—The Preacher and the poor lost soul who followed him, not because he was right, but because she'd known him all her life and he'd never lied. Mark and Marty, from way

back — only now, he was a disciple and she was still a kid, not looking for answers, but a home.

Yes, I guess I loved Justin-Mark. How do you not love the man who's never in his whole life let you down? He had kissed me once, when I graduated from high school. But by then he had "found himself in God," and he never touched me again. It was okay, he was happy with God and his self-imposed celibacy and all that. Who complains when her best friend is happy?

Anyway, that night Mark was driving, not saying a word. All of a sudden, we were out of town. "Hey Mark, where are we going?" But he said not to ask.

After about twenty minutes, he slowed down. We were in front of a black iron fence and he stopped the car. I saw the white stones. "A cemetery? Mark —"

"They're here, Marty, both of them. My parents. All these years, and they're here." We got out of the car.

Then I remembered. His parents had died right after he was born, in a car accident, I think. Some relatives took him away from here and brought him home, to my home. And now, twenty-three years later, the Preacher takes me to the graves of his parents, stranger to us both.

"I miss not having known them, but if I had, I wouldn't be here doing what I've been doing for so long. They were farming people, you know," he said.

And he started to cry, softly and quietly, the tears of a little boy in a man strong enough to acknowledge them. So I went to him and held him and let him cry, for hours I guess. Then he stepped back. His eyes, oh God, they scared me, both red-rimmed and shining. He held me at arms length and just looked at me, into me. "Oh, Marty, I'm so sorry." He kissed me, as if he was angry, as

if he was fighting something.

We drove back to the hotel in silence. At my door he said, "Goodnight, Marty." He smiled. "I guess it's morning, though, isn't it?"

I watched him walk away, slower than I'd ever seen him move, his shoulders slumped as if he had given up. Or as if he'd finally seen something he'd tried to ignore for too long. And suddenly, I remembered Mark as a young boy, sitting on the curb away from all the other kids. He used to go off by himself for just a few hours every week. I asked him why and he told me he had to get away from all those people who had families. He said he didn't have one, and it made him different. But he wouldn't say why.

Justin-Mark, always moving, always sear-

ching. Until tonight, when he realized he had nothing more to find. I closed my door and cried.

The graveyard looked different, peaceful in daylight. Weeds and wildflowers grew around the black iron fence and among the markers. Alone there, I found a strange balance in the sky, the trees and the stones. I stood before the three white stones for a very long time, waiting to cry. But the tears never came. I picked some daisies and set them against the cold stones and walked away.

They say he never knew what happened after his car left the road that night. I hope they were right.

