Goodbye To Faith

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

"Gary hated classical music. He often said so, especially while he was in elevators or fancy restaurants. Not that he was in either of those places often, because he hardly ever left the house and when he did, it was rare for him to spend money (at least his own). Well, Gary was hardly a 'classical' male."

Cover Page Footnote

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GOODBYE TO FAITH

BY JEFFREY SLATER

Gary hated classical music. He often said so, especially while he was in elevators or fancy restaurants. Not that he was in either of those places often, because he hardly ever left the house and when he did, it was rare for him to spend money (at least his own). Well, Gary was hardly a “classical” male.

He left abruptly, which wasn’t like him. Gary was a lazy tub of warm beer and tepid bacon fat. His shirts had mildew odor. For him to go anywhere more than six or seven traffic lights down the road was unusual. Heck, this is the guy who crashed with his parents until he was almost 30 because, according to him, he “already had it so good.”

Before Gary even got back to San Jose, he was in over his head. He was supposed to wait with the money at the pay phone in front of Blowfish Sushi at Stevens Creek and Winchester. Someone would find him there. He sat on a hot metal bench.

Gary hated fish.

But he needed the money.

He sat and thought about his wife, who loved classical music, and how his kids would never see him again. He wished that he could have been smarter, so he could have made a better plan, gotten out of trouble. He thought about pizza…and how much he wished these people hadn’t told him to wait in front of a sushi restaurant in the southern California sun.

The breeze salted his nostrils. “Why would anyone want to eat fish and rice when they could have pizza?” he thought to himself.

Dank, bitter fish odor.

Not surprisingly, no one was paying attention to Gary. He was fully forgettable in every way.

Then his phone buzzed from his pocket, and it seemed to vibrate the whole bench. It wasn’t who he thought it would be.

Gary silenced the phone and just held it in his lap. He didn’t move a muscle. He was waiting in front of that damned sushi restaurant with the money.

Five minutes went by. Ten. Fifteen.

The phone rang again. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” Gary thought as he looked at the number. He flipped the phone open. The caller was frantic.

“Gary? Are you there? Your wife is at my house! You told me you left her! How did she find me? What the hell is going on?”

“Calm down, Alex, calm down. I did leave her. I’ve got to meet some people first, and I’ll be there.”

“Gary, is this what I think it is? Those people? Weren’t you supposed to have paid them? Are they mad you didn’t pay them?”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ve got it under control.”

The voice on the other end rushed to say something but Gary clammed the phone shut…the modern kind of “click.” As he put the phone in his pocket, his hand brushed the butt of a revolver. A sleek, mean-looking thing with a cherry red wooden handle.

Gary had never been cool or intimidating, but now it was different. Now he was in over his head and he knew it. This was the first time he had ever carried a gun in public.
Under the bench Gary clenched a duffel bag between his ankles. It had been almost two hours. They weren't coming. They were dead. "Maybe they didn't kill everyone," he thought. "Maybe they're trying to make them talk, to find all the others." Suddenly a grim realization splashed over him: someone wanted to kill him right now, and would probably succeed.

Gary decided to leave.

With old parts and beat shocks, Gary's Silverado shook something terrible when it went more than 60 miles per hour. Now driving for his life, Gary's elbows stuck out wide and his hands white-knuckled the rotund steering wheel. His arms flapped like windsocks in a hurricane.

He had to get to Alex.

Somehow, even though a foul storm of fate had befallen him, Gary could think of nothing but his wife, Faith. He regretted the way he reluctantly grew apart from her, and how he did nothing but watch as their marriage crumbled. Now she wanted to move to the other side of San Jose, closer to the water. She was taking to a younger man with a degree in music something-or-other. He had a studio apartment in the proverbial hip part of town. He played the piano and the saxophone, and wanted Faith and him to learn the violin together.

And that brought him to Alex's house. As Gary pulled up, he saw his wife. She strewed in the car, honking. Gary leapt out with the duffel bag and circled the truck's back end, signaling "one minute" to his wife with a raised index finger.

As he ran to the front door, a black sedan pulled up in the street. Both passenger-side doors flew open and two men sprang out in trench coats. One of them started running full-tilt straight at Gary, and the other walked smoothly toward the house brandishing a small machine gun. He spat a short burst of bullets at Gary to startle him.

Terror nipped at Gary's legs and he fell momentarily. He quickly got up and sprinted for the front door without the duffel bag.

Faith gasped in disbelief and then leaned over in her seat, trying to hide.

From inside the house, Alex opened his front door to examine the scene. At that same moment, Gary was dashing headlong into the doorway. Alex didn't even have time to react. It was a form tackle fit for Monday Night Football as both of them went hammering to the ground. The sprinting man in the trench coat had closed on Gary, and he pounced through before the door could be closed. The three of them were in a pile of trouble.

The man with the machine gun sauntered to the duffel bag, picked it up and paused, calmly. He turned back with big black sunglasses and barked at Faith's car. "Who's there?"

Not necessarily wanting to be truthful, but not wanting to risk a hasty lie, Faith shouted, "Gary's wife!"

The trench coat turned to the sedan and began to speak, but sudden gunshots drowned him out. Six of them: loud bangs, all in a row. It sounded like someone lit off a band of firecrackers.

The other trench coat emerged from the front door, checking himself for blood and wounds. He appeared to be OK, and walked by his partner smiling. He was brandishing and admiring a massive pistol with a cherry red handle. He chuckled. "Ol' boy had an automatic .357—good taste for a degenerate snitch."

The man with the duffel bag perplexedly furrowed his brow for a moment, then repeated himself to the black sedan. "We supposed to do anything with the wife?"

A reply boomed out: "I wasn't told anything about women or children. Make sure she didn't see anything!"

The man with the duffel bag turned and raised his machine gun toward Faith's windshield. He wondered if she had seen anything. Faint police sirens could be heard in the closing distance. Faith wondered how close they were.
She’s rigid and withered and comfortable in her new life
"I’m happy now" she says, but there’s tar on her tongue
She goes out with her friends and drinks hers morals away
She goes out with her friends and she drinks her thoughts of me away
I’m not the one holding her through the phone anymore
And I can’t let go but I can’t hold on anymore
She’s lost my trust and my love and some of my respect
How long can she drink me away before I stick up for myself?
The girl I loved is long-dead, now
What am I holding onto?
And my hands are hopeful as I imagine hers holding mine
But her hand doesn’t fit anymore and I don’t even recognize her
She gets drunk on the weekends and high at night
She smokes cigarettes between the highs and lows
And she told me she betrayed me but it doesn’t really matter
And she’s a hollow human shell in the image of a girl that I loved
And she’s a hollow human shell pretending to be the girl that I loved
But she’s not fooling anyone anymore