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The Biscuit

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THE BISCUIT

DAY ONE, 2002

I thought I saw Edward today.

In retrospect I mostly think I did not see Edward, on the other hand, well who knows.

I was in the Trooper, driving west up Dean Keeton from the interstate and there he was: the Drag, Guadalupe and 26th, short like Edward, wearing Edward-looking clothes and those black Converse hightops with the scrubbed white laces and soles. Feet rocking heel to toe, shoulder-length explosion of yellow hair. We were, then, in effect, practically face to face once again with only the sea of Guadalupe between us.

Was it? My longlost little chicken?

Well well well, I said to myself, channeling R.L. Burnside. What if it is, what then? Strangle him? Or fuck him?

Nothing, I realized at that moment, had changed. Nothing.

Probably I had it wrong. Assuming he yet breathes, Edward Zahg tickles the keys far from Austin. New York, if he's cooking, maybe on his way to Radio City Music Hall for his regular stand-in conducting job, waving his stick for the Rockettes. Or he could be headed to a theater where some new musical nobody knows about yet is in the works.

He yet lives, I know that. From his Facebook profile I have gathered, he yet walks the earth and pursues a musical career. I discovered he was, at one point, working on an operetta, in collaboration with his wife Urszula, the alleged, albeit overweight, dancer.

An operetta?

Like the Edward-looking person, I had the red. When the right-turn arrow glowed, I waited. Nobody behind, middle of the early afternoon, light traffic: I took advantage.

He used to call me "Cynth," like his keyboard. When he spoke of a particular chord or musical phrase and used the word, (Let me show you on the synth, he might say to our composer) I watched his bumpy pink tongue—rounded at the tip and thick—with fierce concentration as it slid between, then slightly past, his teeth.

Edward had stamina to burn. *Cynth*, he would whisper in my ear after maybe *and* hour and a half of a varied push-pull. *I'm going to come now, Cynth.*

Dreaming of Broadway, we were working together on a musical called "Aldora's Place" based on an article I'd written about a woman who ran a Houston halfway house for men waiting to

have trans-gender surgery. Edward served as musical director, I as writer, the one who—among those of us the actors and musicians referred to as the creative staff—was considered the serious one, responsible for the musical book, the one to whom everyone else turned for ideas and opinions. After all, I not only wrote books, I read them. Yet in Edward's presence I became as soft and melty as microwaved ice cream. I would have done anything for Edward Zahg, I think. And almost did.

He could also be out on the musical highway, waving his stick who knows where—Omaha? Cleveland? Oak City?—instead of pounding the keys. Sleeping in another cheesy motel, spending nights with his next road toy once he's made the nightly call home to Canarsie to his wife, the waiting Ursula.

One night I showed up at his door before he'd hung up. This was before cell phones. Frowning, he greeted me by placing his finger over his lips, then motioned me out of the room. The hotel was an old resident hotel, built for retired Shriners and their wives, with living room, kitchenette, bedroom. I went into the bedroom and slithered under the bed.

"So," I heard him say in a teasing voice, "did you see your boyfriend at the gym today?"

Sexy, taunting, a little marital joke.

When he hung up, he refused to acknowledge my presence. Eventually, I crawled out from under the bed. He didn't want to see me or talk to me at first. Then he did.

There is no touring show in Austin or on the way that I know of, no traveling "Rent," "Cats," or "Wicked", and certainly no way in the world Edward Zahg would come to Texas except for a job, not even to Austin.

Nonetheless. Sitting at the light in the Trooper, I came wildly alive, heart rocking out in a wild dance.

The person standing on Guadalupe across from the university was plugged in, white wires down his chest, buttons in his ears. When we were together, Edward heard his own tunes. I knew where he was by the hum and chug in his throat, and after a while I could identify song and singer, sometimes Dr. John, sometimes Charles Brown. Professor Longhair, Fats Waller, Jaki Byard, all the striders. We used to listen to Was/Not Was, which is now all but defunct. I could tell when he was doing "Dad, Hey Dad, I'm in jail, Dad..." or "Open the door, get on the floor, everybody walk the dinosaur..." from the uh-uh-unh sounds he made, the boppy moves of his short wide feet.

Do I create a dwarfish, stunty guy? Well, there it is. The heart goes where it goes. We can only follow.

Edward, my biscuit, my boy, are you back? Is this you again?

Surely not Edward at Guadalupe and Dean Keeton in front of the falafel shop, not because it couldn't have been but because what are the chances? But whoever it was had Edward's shape and despite the heat, wore those same jeans, tight at the top and ankle, puffed-out between. And

when he got the Walk signal, he scooted across Guadalupe the way Edward used to, blond locks bouncing, bowlegs doing double-time to make up for the short stride. Did I see a biker's earring or two in his right earlobe, pirate's sword or diamond stud, glinting in the afternoon sun?

Maybe. Who knows. Maybe.

Blue Man Group was playing the Erwin Center later that week, their rock tour, "The Complex." My friend Daniel had an extra ticket. He was going to do mushrooms of the magic persuasion, then go. Did I want to join him? Trying to imagine Edward's pale face painted cornflower like Vishnu, his yellow hair tucked into a cobalt latex cap made me laugh.

Shrooms, Daniel said, would get us in the right mind to appreciate the Blue Men. I'd never done mushrooms. On the biological clock, you might say I'm into the late-night hours, maybe too far along to be taking a turn into psychedelic wonderland. On the other hand—never one to turn down an adventure, especially now when conventional wisdom says I'm too old—I wondered if Daniel still had the extra ticket.

From the Trooper, I couldn't tell about the earrings. Over the years, eyesight changes. At a distance I'm fine, up close I have the drugstore readers. But I have lost the middle distance. Edges blur, distinctions fade. Earrings I think I see might not be there at all.

The Edward-looking person turned downtown toward the university. I was headed in the other direction.

Edward Edward. Semitic dumpling, chewy biscuit. My heart.

Harry once asked me, "Are you finished with Edward?" This was in the early days of my brief time with Harry Pastor, who I met only months after that terrible Christmas when Edward forsook me while I waited, waited, waited for his call, lying in my high-tech bed beneath a padded reproduction of Titian's "Danae and the Shower of Gold," hung low so that it served as a headboard.

A New York hotel, of course. The sheets were Italian, the duvet perfectly white, the room closet-sized.

There, like lush Danae, in erotic anticipation I awaited my reluctant golden wishy-wash. Who neither showed nor called.

He was doing the Radio City Christmas show, 45 minutes on, an hour and a half free then back to the podium.

Harry—a somewhat famous chef, meticulous down to excruciating details, whether of ingredients in a recipe or my life—was serious.

Edward? I lied. As if to say, Edward Who? Of course.

Harry said nothing.

My life. One secret to the next.