

I almost miss him, eclipsed as he is by the stark white blouse and night-black pants of the hostess leading him across the room. He has turned gray, a mist that trails in her wake, a near void amidst the burgundy wine, white tablecloths, mahogany furnishings and bright, fresh food.

*- That's him? He's not what I imagined.*

I almost tell her I was wrong, that the slope-shouldered shell is not my former brown-haired, bright-eyed, laughing lover with the rough hands and soft kisses.

*- He's changed.*

I have changed, too, and for a brief moment regret the twenty pounds I've put on, the fact that I've been gardening and my face is smudged with dirt.

*- You're glad, now, to have escaped, I bet. I can't see you being happy with a man like him.*

I look at her, the one he married, sitting across from him. As brown as he is gray, she wears tailored slacks, a cream shirt, a string of pearls. Not an extra ounce to soften her frame; all her unworn pounds weigh him down. They don't speak to each other, menus held like shields between them.

*- I wouldn't have been with a man like him. He wouldn't be that man if we'd stayed together.*

I cried at our parting. Tear of loss, tears of self-pity. I resist the urge to cry again. Tears of sorrow, this time, tears of frustration at what might have been.

*- He got what he deserved. He should have stuck with the one he loved, not left her for the one who made sense.*

She is angry for me, and I appreciate it, but she does not understand. We are what we are and he made the only choice he could. I don't hate him. I never have.

When we leave, I will kiss his stubbled cheek and clasp his softening body to my own and wonder if he ever misses the long-gone pieces of his soul.