



"Once Queen was admitted..."

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Once Queen was admitted, Bride spent the days with her, Booker the nights, three of which passed before Queen opened her eyes. Head bandaged, is contents drugged, she recognized neither of her rescuers. All they were able to do was watch the tubes, one clear as glass turning like a rainforest vine, others thin as telephone wire, all secondary to the cup over her mouth's rasp.

MTK

During the three days it took for the ashes to be ready they obsessed over the choice of an urn. Bride wanted something ornate in brass; Booker preferred something environmentally friendly. When they realized there was no graveyard within thirty miles, or a suitable place in the trailer park for her grave, they settled for a cardboard box to hold ashes that would be strewn into the

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river. Booker insisted on performing the rites alone while Bride waited in the car.

Although heartfelt his ceremony was pitiful: the ashes were lumpy and difficult to toss and Booker's musical tribute at riverside was out of tune and uninspired. He cut it short ^{*/} and sat down on the grass resting his forehead in his palm. What made him think he was a talented trumpet player or that playing ^{music} it could be his language of memory, of celebration or a displacement of loss. How long ^{had} ~~should~~ ^{childhood trauma} the past hurtle ^d him away from the rip and wave of life?

Queen's remains touched by a rare but welcome breeze drifted further and further down current. The sky too sullen to keep its promise of sunlight sent hot moisture instead. Finally, Booker joined Bride sitting alone in the Jaguar.

7
* and threw
the trumpet
into the
water. After
which he

The quiet was thick, suffocating. Bride took a deep breath before breaking into that unbearable silence.

"I'm pregnant."

"What did you say?"

"You heard me. I'm pregnant and it's yours."

Booker gazed at her, looked away for what seemed a very long minute, then back. "No," he said. "It's ours."

Bride took Booker's hand and he threaded his fingers through hers. Leaning back on the headrests they let their spines sink into the seat's soft hide of cattle. Staring through the windshield they started to imagine ^{tentatively} what might be their future.

No lonely unattended child with a fishing pole passed by and glanced at the couple in the dusty green car. But

if one had he or she might have noticed the slow smiles of
 the couple, how wide and soft their eyes but not ^{care} wonder at
 all what ~~could~~ ^d cause that shine of happiness.

A child. New life. Innocent. Knowing nothing of
 death, unsullied by memories of mangled tortured boys,
 rose tattoos; no clutch of an unborn twin, no dangerous
 lies told to earn love; no hasty oblivious romances, above
 vanity, cowardice, missing body parts and disappointing
 families.

They believe.

A child. New life. Innocent. Immune to evil or
 illness; protected from kidnap, beating^s, molestation,
 bullets, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing,
 abandonment. ^{free} Error. All goodness. Minus wrath.

So they believe.