

BRIGHT FLASH LITERARY REVIEW

journal for flash and short fiction

Soccer players get to cry all the time. Kickboxers are red in the face and ass when they are kicked, as Ralph was so many years before in the delivery room.

Dr. Franzblau had smacked Ralph. It was one of his perquisites. For nine months back there, it had been so pleasant in the amniotic fluid. Since then—and now—it was dog-eat-dog. It was the tile and floor covering business. He couldn't kick the customers who constantly haggled for lower prices and bargains. That is a major difference from kickboxing and soccer. And, if Ralph kicked the tiles or carpet remnants when he was alone, that only made matters worse. Then his face shriveled, and he cried out in pain.

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David Sydney is a physician. He has had pieces in Little Old Lady Comedy, 101 Words, Microfiction Monday, 50 Give or Take, Friday Flash Fiction, Entropy Squared, and Grey Sparrow Journal.

SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

Spring Flowers

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By Matias Travieso-Diaz

Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action.

Without it we are nothing.

Luis Buñuel

Winter was over. It was time for new spring plantings around and in front of Sam's house. In the past, this was one of the many tasks his wife took upon herself. Now she was gone, and it was another obligation he had been forced to assume.

In front of the house were two large clay pots that were to be filled with annuals that would bloom continuously well into November. Those flowers added a splash of color that made Sam's house, a conventional brick colonial, more

inviting to visitors and added to the home's curb appeal. He needed to take care of those pots as soon as possible: he was putting the house on the market in a matter of weeks.

Sam was planning to order the plants from a catalog, since he was not in the mood for going to one of the garden centers that he and Edith used to visit each spring. He decided to fill the pots with the same flowers his wife planted every year, for they were heat and drought resistant and came in several colors, though they had always bought the intense scarlet variety that contrasted well with the brick of the house walls. They grew low and spread out throughout the pot nicely; best of all, they required little care. He was going to get them.

Now, what were they called? He had owned these plants for years, but at this time he was unable to recall their names. *No problem*, he told himself. *I'll flip through the catalog and I'll find them.* He opened a printed catalog he kept for reference and, to his surprise, found nothing that resembled the plants he used to see in his driveway year in and year out. He went online, and searched through articles on annual flowers, seed catalogs, garden supply vendor sites, and other sources. Nothing: the plants he recalled were not shown anywhere.

He went to sleep, mystified. After a restless night, he woke up, still thinking of the flowers that had disappeared from the face of the earth. And then, trying to extend his mind around the mystery, he made a new discovery: he could not remember at all what the plants he had kept in the pots by the entrance of his home looked like.

He tried to reconstruct last day's search for the evanescent flowering plants and focused on sightings during his European vacations. He seemed to recall there was one country in which the plants he sought were often found, displayed on balconies, stone urns, doorways, any place where flower pots could be placed. It was a small country next to Italy, with a coastline right on the Adriatic Sea. What was its name?

Sam realized he had no idea, and started to panic. Forgetting a plant was one thing; losing track of an entire country was something else. He rushed to the world globe he had kept since high school. Sure enough, the Italian boot was there, immediately recognizable. However, across the Adriatic there was a large indentation he had not noticed before: opposite Italy there was a wide gap, with the Adriatic extending to Slovenia, Hungary, Bosnia and Serbia. How could that be? Was his mind playing tricks on him?

Not only that. After a while, Sam could no longer remember ever having been to that place teeming with flowering houseplants.

Sam then recalled that he and his wife had met another American couple at their hotel in Vienna and enjoyed their company so much that he and Edith decided to travel with the other couple into the Balkans. Surely, those people would remember where they had gone on their joint vacation. What was the fellow's name? Sam did not at the moment remember, but was sure he would find it on the directory of friends and family he kept on his laptop.

He went through every entry in his directory three times, and then through all his saved e-mails, and could not find any messages to or from the elusive couple. Worse yet, after hours of searching, he realized he no longer knew who he was searching for or why. And he became very scared.

Sam could no longer consult his wife, who had been dead for over a year. He decided to confide in his best friend Janos, who knew as much about Sam's comings and goings as any person alive. He placed a call: "Janos, I need to talk to you urgently. Can you have a beer with me as soon as possible?"

“I can come right after work. Is that soon enough?”

“Yes. Usual place? I’m buying.”

“See you then.”

He was too jittery for beer, so he had a quick scotch, neat. And then another. And still another. Sam had just ordered the fourth one when Janos squeezed his shoulder. “Come on, Sam. Get hold of yourself. What seems to be the problem?”

“I think I am losing my mind. Do you remember how we always keep two large clay pots on the driveway of our home, a few steps from the front door?”

“I guess so.”

“Well, yesterday I could not recall what plants we placed there, and the ones that for a moment I thought we had used don’t show up anywhere on the internet.”

“That’s odd, but not too alarming, I think.”

“Well, it gets better. I seem to recall seeing those plants everywhere in one country in the Balkans, on the trip Edith and I took to Europe seven years ago. Do you remember that trip?”

“Sure, you brought me a nice set of glasses from Prague as a souvenir from that trip.”

“Well, I can’t find the country where I thought I had seen those plants. It doesn’t show up on any maps or articles on the Balkans.”

“Now, that’s impossible. Where was that country that you can no longer find?”

“Across from Italy, bordering on the Adriatic. It has some nice coastal cities, and borders Bosnia and Serbia, and Hungary as well.”

“My friend, I have not been to that part of Europe, so I can’t be sure, but I don’t think that such a place exists.”

The fourth glass of scotch was then delivered. Sam downed it in three gulps, placed a fifty-dollar bill on the table, and ran away without saying goodbye.

Sam woke up bearing all the signs of a punishing hangover. His stomach ached as if he had eaten coals, he had trouble keeping his eyes focused, and a terrible headache was mounting by the moment. What had he done the night before to cause all this discomfort?

He must have been drinking. Alone? He seldom got drunk at home, out of respect for Edith. He must have gone out with one of his friends. His fuzzy mind started focusing. Yes, he had been at a lounge with someone, but who?

A stream of ice cursed through his veins as a thought came to him. Yes, he had been drinking with a friend, a very close one whom he had known for many years, but he could not pinpoint his name or conjure up his appearance.

Sam dragged himself to the bathroom, and threw up interminably. This made things a little better – good enough at least to walk into the kitchen and pour himself a glass of tomato juice, a popular cure for hangovers. He despised

tomato juice.

He sat at the kitchen counter, dutifully downing one gulp after another of some revolting liquid. As he did so, Sam ran through his mind the names and faces of all his friends, close and casual, even acquaintances. One by one, they were considered and rejected. “That’s not him... not him ... not her, either...” As each person was brought up and discarded, he or she disappeared from his consciousness, and did not return.

And the horrible truth finally revealed itself: he was running out of memories. He just had to think of something or somebody and an image of the subject would flash before his eyes, then vanish. Everything that his brain had accumulated over sixty-odd years of existence was fleeing, leaving him as empty as an eaten-up corn husk.

“No, no, no!” Sam cried to himself. “Edith, please help me!” Invoking his dead wife immediately brought before his eyes a still beautiful woman, her face contorted by sorrow and pain. In a moment, the image flickered and disappeared with a woosh, leaving Sam with a feeling of overwhelming, unbearable emptiness.

Sam returned to the bathroom and reached for the bottle of sleeping pills that someone in his household kept to fight insomnia. He downed all the remaining pills and washed them with a glass of water.

He shuffled semi-consciously to the bedroom and lay down. He wondered who he was and why he felt so tired. As his eyes closed, a single word dropped, half-formed, from his lips: “Edith...”

And then there was silence.

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Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over eighty of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies and paying magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. Some of his unpublished works have also received “honorable mentions” from a number of paying publications. A first collection of his stories, “The Satchel and Other Terrors,” was released in February 2023 and is available through Amazon and other retailers.

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The Last Time I Saw Aunt Lynn

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