

Good Old Clark Street

In the years following his mother's death, Bill found himself on his own, holding various apartments in the city, many wrought with the noisy maintenance of the streets below, such as the digging required for the area's early-1980's transition from analog television to cable.

The city had really done it this time. This was no ordinary hole. Bill estimated its depth to be at least ten feet below street grade. The churning, earth-moving equipment thrashed through layers of tar, brick, and old cobblestone, revealing a rich history long since buried. Even the old, dulled rails encased in gravel from the days of the city's streetcars were visible. Bill felt the nostalgia of decades past as he sat in his window, one of the many benefits of the rundown storefront apartment he rented.

He had everything he needed here in this neighborhood. Two doors north, a small establishment known as Quamar's Bar provided Bill with many a relaxing pool game and drink, to wind away any frustrations from dealing with the recessed local job market. The dark-skinned owner of the bar, a man from the Middle East, blasted his country's strange music through the saloon in the waning morning hours, after his patrons had drunk themselves well into submission. Quamar felt very entertained, observing the effect of the sounds he enjoyed on these silly locals who purchased his watered-down beer.

Bill's access to the tiny sandwich shop across the street was most convenient. His bedroom window view enabled him to know exactly when it was open. This proved to be quite an asset when his girlfriend Linda visited, for he could retrieve her favorite, the Italian Bomber, most anytime her hunger called for one.

He greatly appreciated her company. His taste for beer was starting to show at his belly line, and the skinniness of his childhood had all but vanished. Bill had an extremely bad habit of deliberating through everything he did, so the spontaneity necessary to meet with the women of the city was something he struggled with, especially with the walls his mother had taught him to build. Yet Linda was so easy to deal with; perhaps she also built sheltering walls around her and needed someone to draw into them.

Even the first time they met, his apprehension equaled hers. He was on the train, with four of his friends, traveling to see the latest Cheech and Chong film downtown. They sat apart from one another, their minds altered, when she ventured into his space and claimed the empty seat next to him. She scratched at what appeared to be a book of crossword puzzles, rapidly filling in one of the pages, surprising Bill with how quickly the words of the paper matrix came to her.

"Damn, you're smart!" he acknowledged. She laughed, because the challenge undertaken was but a simple word search puzzle, but he did not have to know this.

They became good friends as she visited him through the next year. Perhaps owing to the many King Crab legs Bill and Linda shared at the Fin N' Claw restaurant often frequented, or possibly due to his hopelessly romantic yearning for her, the two maneuvered closer to each other's hearts, sharing many a passionate afternoon together.

Coming and going several times, a troubled relationship maintained with another man, who sheltered her through these secret interludes, limited the time she could spend with Bill.

Today she had something to tell him, something special. He had asked her many times to share his apartment with her, but she avoided this, not wishing to lose the secrecy of their romantic intimacies.

She did not seem to mind that he presently lived on unemployment insurance, for the apartment

where he stayed seemed huge compared to her small studio. She admired the view of Clark Street from the large front room and private bedroom adjacent, and could live with the smaller section in the back containing a typical, urban, worn, petite kitchen and bathroom.

Bill sat quietly, sipping a late afternoon cocktail of whiskey and water on the tattered gray couch barricading the front room windows. Tonight he wanted something stronger than the usual cheap beer that Quamar served him, something that did not fill him too quickly.

The air suddenly filled with his doorbell's loud buzz. Looking down onto the street, he spotted Linda standing at the building's door downstairs, and his nervousness as to whether she would show eased greatly.

After moments of apprehension, she knocked at the thick, black front door to the apartment, and Bill opened it immediately. She handed him a paper bag that was proving to be a burden in her arms, revealing herself to him.

Her thick black hair swirled sensually about the sides of her face and over her copper-brown shoulders. She smiled pleasantly, and Bill started to melt, for she was wearing the outfit that was his favorite: a thin black cotton top and matching flowing skirt, revealing the contours of her slender young womanhood.