

A SHELF IS A BOOK, OR NOT

BY

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A SHELF

A SHELF IS A BOOK, OR NOT

She did not care much for books, either their contents or their designs. She had a job in a bookstore to help pay her university fees. Her father, a builder, had gotten his start by building book shelves for local profs. He now specialized in commercial interiors, and he had built the bookstore interior where she had just started working.

Her father and the owner of the bookstore were friends, not close, but friends because they played rugby in a local men's league. Since she had mostly grown up in her mother's household about twenty miles from the university, she did not know the bookstore owner. Her father had a charming way except for notable exceptions. He was not very charming when she said that she really didn't like books and preferred to try to find a job as a waitress or a bartender. Her father was paying her tuition, and the bookstore was part of the financial plan. She met the owner and decided after a few minutes that she could manage the assignment.

The owner was a trust-fund baby. It was small, but he had been responsible. He had opened the bookstore with no illusions. He could break even, not make much profit, and that was fine. He carried books from small presses, and he specialized in fiction and poetry by unknown but promising writers.

The space was small. With the right design it could include a coffee bar. The owner served a very dark coffee from a California roaster he had run into when he was a student at Berkeley. He kept the selections to a minimum: house, espresso and latte. His coffee bar was popular among the locals who ranted about the Starbucks and Beamers that were more interested in menus of coffee rather than the coffee itself. On some days he sold more coffee than books, and the hired help was more often employed in serving coffee, washing dishes and chatting with coffee drinker than with book readers.

The owner's new hired hand didn't mind the coffee-bar assignments since coffee was easier to deal with than books. The counter, which her father built, showed the coffee beans in glass enclosures, but the coffee-making machines were built into the wall behind the counter. It was a handsome arrangement and efficient except during the early-morning or late-afternoon rush when perhaps as many as six or eight people were ordering coffee.

The owner, if he was in the store, always helped out at the coffee bar. She rather liked working with him because he seldom became agitated the way she did when customers hemmed and hawed.

She also liked working with him because he was just slightly taller than she was. She was conscious of her height especially behind the counter because to accommodate the glass-enclosed coffee-bean containers the counter was higher than the waist-level counters in most shops. When she placed a cup of coffee on top of the counter she found herself looking most directly at the cup. Her father was tall but her mother was short, and she had inherited more of her mother than her father. She had her mother's Italian face, round, soft, Raphaelesque. With

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one exception – a upward curl at the left corner of her lips that often became a snarl. When her mood was light, she had a lush smile. When not...unfortunately, few people ever saw that smile.

The owner was sitting with a good friend. They tried to have coffee together every morning. They had known each other in Berkeley, and when the owner had decided to return to the town he had grown up in, he eventually talked his friend into trying it for a while. Over the years since graduation they had kept in touch, sometimes flying to a resort for a romp after which months would go by with one-sentence emails and eventually one-sentence text messages. Long phone or cell conversations after breakups and breakdowns. It was their way.

Local folks were known to talk about the relationship between the owner and his writer-friend. Their height differentiated them, but both carried weight-lifter bodies. Their attire was not flamboyant, not grunge, more like exhausted and could have resided in the same closet. It was often remarked,

---“Do they wear each other’s clothes?”

Their demeanor could raise eyebrows. When they were together in public, they were a challenge to most everyone around them. They enjoyed conversations with students but ignored the academicians who often circled their table, as if waiting for an invitation that never came. They described the local intelligencia as *moins que rif et raf*, who could look miffed and mystified when the pair invited students into their conversations but never their mentors. They enjoyed holding court, selective court.

They knew that people talked, no, whispered, about them, and they did all they could to keep the conversations going. In spite of the fact that it was known that the owner had never been married but his friend had been married three times only allowed the whisperers to juice up the story. When they attended concerts or openings, they would walk arm-in-arm, although they drew a line at kissing. Their gay friends loved it, and they would join them arm-in-arm. How their lives had clicked the way it did had led them to many conversations and bottles of good Bordeaux, which for many years because of his impecuniousness the friend could not afford to buy and counted on his pal to do the honors. In the last decade that had changed. They contested: who could find a little-known but pricy Bordeaux that would dazzle themselves and their friends. In assessing their own lives they had finally settled on a rung below David Hume’s Skepticism and above Friedrich Nietzsche’s Nihilism. Something more like Alfred E Newman. Both were writers of off-beat subjects, although the friend had by the time of their reunion come to know greater success, not exactly inside the mainstream but close enough to make a good living. The owner could never just focus on the writing part, but the friend had learned how to hide away to write, emerge for *l’express* and hide again. The owner kept rationalizing...too many childhood phobias. They presented a rather complicated relationship, although for them it never was.

When the owner returned to his hometown, he was treated like the prodigal he wasn’t. His family was prominent and well-off, but he had made his own way and lived by his own wits, knowing all the time he could dip into his trust fund when need be. And he knew upon his parents’ demise there would be more. He had used some of the trust to finance several different start-ups where

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he worked his ass off, fucked and smoked a lot and turned bluer and bluer until he had an epiphany — coffee would be his salvation. Funny how brain chemistry works. The prodigal had returned to do coffee. Not at all Biblical.

The friend had hit the road after their Berkeley days, met and married a young academic at a southwestern university. They lived together, married in Vegas, even though during their courtship her lovers periodically moved in and out, and divorced in Reno. Even without third-parties, they were doomed. She was successful and he wasn't. Even worse, she was brilliant at self-promotion; he, a struggling writer, had nothing to promote.

He moved to LA on the spur of the moment, fell in love with a city that everyone else hated and wrote with a verve he'd never known before. He and his few belongings occupied a tiny, nondescript apartment. He spent his days exploring the LA that was hidden away on side streets and back alleys, and spent his nights writing about the charm, the sordid, the orneriness of the city. He won readers by posting online and won a publisher by dispelling the monotony of her marriage once or twice a week. His writing began attracting enough attention to make a living. His best essays were about visiting small out-of-the-way galleries and studios and the people who created in these spaces, while also holding down day jobs, smoking or shooting, often feeling desperate but seldom succumbing to desperation. They scrounged the movie industry for jobs, they entered as many competitions as they could find and slept with gallerists, patrons and each other. He found dozens of ways to describe the energy of this world, and that became his signature as a writer.

He married again, a younger woman, who rented one of those spaces, was ambitious and talented and was knocked up by her therapist. Needless-to-say the marriage ended. In the meantime he had successfully peddled a short novel about growing up in a small town that had a high incidence of alcoholics and fundamental Christians, and while the book earned him some good review, it had more than anything else added to his bank account. It also became easier for him to sell his reviews and essays. Another marriage to an even younger woman had no more durability than his earlier marriages. But in lieu of marriage he acquired an agent (no hanky-panky) and a degree of financial security that made early middle-age life more comfortable.

So, in a casual Skype conversation he and his buddy decided to reunite. He could write anywhere and he had pretty much exhausted the potential of LA. His friend had also published with his own funds two books of free-verse that reviewers had not totally ignored. They decided on the spur of the moment it was time to reunite so they could talk about the things they loved doing. His friend's bookstore with coffee sounded like the haven he needed at this stage of his life. His friend's home town was another matter. For years, described as a dead-end Happy Valley by his friend, he had to suppress his doubts and fears.

Her first morning behind the counter she met, well, more appropriately, waited on the friend. He asked for the house coffee, paid and thanked her and walked over to the table where he and owner always sat. And since he came in almost every morning she soon learned his name without being introduced, as he had similarly learned hers. He was always friendly and asked

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about her classes and how the job was going. She kept the details of her life brief, and she soon knew more about him than he knew about her.

One morning the owner came over to the table after the coffee line had dispersed and said to his friend, she wants to know your status.

---“My status?” the friend asked.

---“Your status.”

---“Do I have a status? Maybe she was thinking....” Before he could finish he heard,

---“S...t...a...t...u...s. She knows the word, you apparently don't. So, what should I say?”

---“I'm more than 40 and growing older.”

---“She knows your age, not your status.”

---“OK, I'm currently without status.”

That was truthful. He was not sleeping with anyone at the moment. The owner knew that too, but he couldn't resist putting his friend on the spot.

---“What should I expect after you tell her my status?”

---“I don't know. You'll have to wait to see.”

For the next several weeks he waited. They had their usual over-the-counter conversation, and nothing else worth noting.

---“Am I expected to push this ahead? I'm not inexperienced in this regard, but I haven't yet turned my charms on someone more than a quarter-century younger.”

---“I warn you,” said the owner, “she's moody. The moods are not always visible. You might best let this thing ride. She has a boyfriend, and she's often pissed off at him, as she appears to be this morning. Or perhaps at her dad. Or – don't flip out over this – at you.”

Despite the fact that his long-time buddy now dated sporadically, he was remarkably savvy about reading the female mood. The owner had sisters, the writer had brothers.

---“At me?”

---“A possibility, even though I doubt it, since I know you as well as I do, you've not done anything yet to deserve one of her mood attacks.”

The news was good. His long manuscript, a historical novel based on the life of a late-nineteenth-century writer whose papers resided in the university's special collections, had a publisher. Up to this point he had read few historical novels, Gore Vidal's *Burr* and Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, being two that stuck in his memory. He had become fascinated with the

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archives of this little-known writer only because his letters and journals were far more interesting than the fiction he wrote. He wondered why a person can write beautiful things in letters and journals and not come close in novels and stories. He thought he knew the answer, in part at least. Literary critics. Those clowns who cant, “Let me tell you how....” The little-known writer had composed a story about an architect, another about building a building and a novel about how society dumbed down design. Interesting ideas, interesting characters, but written as if rules had to be followed. The better-known writer, like his subject, had an interest in design and had spent time trying to figure out what it was about design that could be fascinating, compelling, inspiring or (too often) the opposite. The subject’s cache of papers, letters, journals were full of drawings and sketches and commentaries that somehow could never be transposed into his fiction. That was the core of the novel — a split life, more like a splintered life. The owner had read the manuscript several times, as had two other friends in other places. He had followed up on some of their suggestions but had learned to follow his own instincts. The agent had no trouble placing the manuscript, and the book was due out in a few months. He had already seen some publicity. He cringed. He also wondered if his first ex was still ravishingly promoting herself. He was sure she wasn’t reading his stuff.

So, launching the book had pushed the curious query of the coed behind the counter into the background, although, each morning he saw her, he found her deliciously attractive. He enjoyed seeing her and missed her when he didn’t see her. He remembered a warning he had issued to himself in an earlier romance — “You flew into my life and now I must fly out of yours”. He reissued the warning to himself each morning but to no avail. He couldn’t detect the varying moods, which his buddy picked up on without much effort. When she looked at him, she often held her gaze for seconds, far longer than she should have. He almost always turned away. On a scrap of paper he had written “I tried/A new face/I couldn’t let go.”

A further complication. During the wait he’d met a divorced lady closer to his age, and while he was seeing her, their romance was barely moving ahead. That was fine by him.

Then, out of the blue one morning the counter spoke. She invited him to a party. He had never seen her so endearingly enthusiastic. He said yes, not the slightest hesitation. It was planned for the next night, and she would fill him in tomorrow.

---“So you’re going?”

The owner already knew about the rendezvous when his starry-eyed friend joined him to drink the coffee she’d handed him after the invitation.

---“I think so. I don’t know the details yet.”

---“You will.”

On the way out she handed him a note with the details. He was to meet her at the book shop the next evening, and they would walk together to the apartment. He did, and they walked to the apartment a few blocks away. As she folded her arm into his and walked as close as she could,

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she warned him, not without with some relish in her voice, that at a party of college undergrads he will be viewed with curiosity, suspicion and maybe hostility. And he was. She was clearly enjoying it.

---“How about that coke?” she asked with her hand on his shoulder.

---“A coke? Anything else?” he answered tentatively.

---“No, a coke” as that big smile broke out across her face.

Then he remembered one of the few times they had bantered at the book-shop coffee bar.

---“How about a date for a coke,” he had asked her.

---“You can’t be serious,” she’d replied and then added, “You’re regressing. Who drinks coke?”

---“I do,” he had replied sheepishly.

He began to laugh and sensed for the first time he was feeling smitten. “God damn,” he thought. “Fly away! Now!”

They were seated across from each other with others whom he did not know spread around them.

---“What is the color of my eyes” she asked without any warning.

---“I, I...don’t know, but I’m looking,” was his answer with a reddening face. (He had always been afraid to look into women’s eyes. From the distance between them he knew they were dark, blue or a shade of blue or...)

He felt embarrassed by the question, and the arrival of her boyfriend diverted her attention but only added to the embarrassment.

He stayed a while longer, feeling more and more out of place, and when he decided to leave she gave him a hug and her address. A surprise to say the least. As he walked home, he decided, instead of flying away he’d write to her. Better at writing than talking. He had decided.

While he was at the party, phone messages had piled up. Even though it was still early, he decided he was in no mood to deal with what was behind those messages.

The next day, before he left town for a week and after he had dealt with the phone messages (and the anger of the lady in the new but slowly-advancing romance), he wrote the woman behind the counter a letter. He wrote a very brief but honest summary of his life, he commented on the age difference with some humor, and then with a maybe this, a maybe that, if she were willing, perhaps, they could get together for an evening, just the two of them. He added his home phone number and that of the place where he would be staying for a week. He mailed the letter on the way out of town.

The new romance had said to him the night she met him at a local bar,

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---“I think I’m going to like you.”

He had never heard anyone say that to another person. She was a nurse, not an RN, and worked in the hospital in a nearby town. She rented a house on a farm property outside of town. She was tall, statuesque, blond, upbeat, frisky, temperamental and utterly mysterious. Mysterious defined all his romances because, as his pal never let him forget, “You don’t get it, do you?” He had not made love yet to the nurse, and despite her anger this morning about everything on the phone before he left, he knew they would. With the book/coffee-shop gal making love seemed remote. He felt that way in part because he knew all the moral codes forbade him. Moral codes were no match for sexual codes.

Three days later the phone rang near midnight in his borrowed quarters.

---“Hello.”

---“Hi, it’s me, you said I could call.”

---“Wow, I sure did, and I’m glad you did. How are you?”

---“I’m OK. A little tired. Lots of hours at the book shop.”

Then she rapidly reeled off,

---“I got your letter, I loved it, I read it twice, I want to know when you’re coming back?”

---“Ah, I’m glad you read it, I wasn’t sure you would, and I’ll be back by the weekend.”

---“Good, can we get together?”

---“Of course. Do you want to call me?”

---“Here’s my number.”

Like a couple of high schoolers dancing around the what-do-I-say-next dilemma.

Suddenly she became very talkative, more articulate than he had expected, about what she liked, tolerated and hated. He heard details but the mystery was hardly penetrated. He felt wobbly and lay down on the bed for the rest of the conversation. A half hour later they ended the conversation. He continued to lie on the bed, not knowing right from left or up from down. At the end of the conversation she said the sooner you get back here the better. He thought of a line from a song, “Why did you have to go and say something like that?”

It was a week before they had their rendezvous at his apartment. In the meantime he had spent a night with the divorcee, and they had done what he knew they would do. He was sure she would invite him back, and he would come back. It was the most intimate conversation they had ever had, and yet he kept thinking...what was missing in this conversation? There were gaps that he tried to get her to fill in, and she couldn’t or wouldn’t. He was glad that all the work on the manuscript was done because with two women circling him he certainly had no energy to work

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on it. His pal only chuckled when he described the past few days. The writer did not reveal the tentative agreement to meet the hired help in his apartment. It didn't matter. The owner knew.

On a beautiful, warm evening she showed up. She was not dazzling. She was dressed in a white, short sleeve blouse and shorts. Her hair was free flowing, and she wore no makeup. Her legs were shapely and muscular from years no doubt of riding bikes. It was a sexy body. She kissed him on the cheek, and he kissed hers. Both were nervous, but that soon passed after he opened the champagne. She said she had never drunk much champagne, but she liked it. He said it was his liquid diet. And they laughed about that. Then, they fell into an embrace, and her kiss was like a bolt of lightning. Her breasts were firm but felt tingly. Her arms were firmly wrapped around his neck.

---“Are you going to feed me,” she said suddenly but quietly in his right ear.

---“Feed you tummy or your libido? Forget that.,” he said as she clasped her hands around his scrotum. “Yes, your tummy, when we're ready, but we need to go to the store across the street because you never told me what you like to eat.”

---“I don't really like to eat, but I need some sustenance, so let's go.”

They actually walked around the store for a long time. She knew more about food than she had let on. He was known to be a pretty good cook, and she must have known that, thanks, he speculated, to his buddy.

---“Is cooking to be a challenge tonight or something simple?” she asked.

---“Probably not up to a challenge,” he declared in all honesty.

They settled on shrimp, an avocado (for the green mayonnaise), some endive, tomatoes and garlic (to sauté), a chunk of *parmigiano-reggiano* and a *baguette*.

---“Should we get another bottle of champagne?”

---“Indeed,” she said.

---“Any dessert?” he asked.

She smile and shook her head sideways.

The feast took about a half hour to prepare after they got back. She was handy in the kitchen, as he suspected after their walk through the store.

He cooked the giant shrimp in their shells in boiling water with peppercorns and lemon for a few minutes before running them under cold water. As he made the mayonnaise, she marveled how perfect the avocado was, and he explained how he had learned in the open-air markets around LA to pick a perfect avocado.

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---“Hold it in the palm of your hand and use your fingers to check the resiliency of the skin. Beware if it’s too hard or too soft or has too many mushy spots. The pros can also read the skin coloring, but I never quite mastered that. The problem here is that we get avocados picked early so they can endure the dog-sled journey across country. In California they grow in the fields behind the markets.”

She smiled without the curl in her lip as she cut the endive, tomatoes and garlic into pieces, added them to the olive oil just beginning to bubble in a sauté pan and twirled and flipped them several times before dumping them in a dish and grating the *parmigiano* on top. The baguette was sliced and placed on the small table he had bought at Ikea during a prior marriage.

She pulled up an armchair that he offhandedly told her was the Presidents’ Chair.

---“President of what?”

US Presidents. He explained he had inherited it from his mother and she from a neighbor-spinster long deceased. As he pulled a stool to the table, she said “Tell me. All the details. I collected paper clips, each size having its own drawer, you recited Presidents. Details, don’t leave anything out. That way I get more shrimp.” So he did.

---“You learned to recite the US Presidents while on the lap of an old maid sitting in this chair?”

---“That about sums it up. After she died, the chair came to my mom. By the way, I can recite the Presidents forward and backward with dates?”

---“Of course,” she said as she moved the dish of shrimp to her plate. “Go for it. I’ll guard the shrimp.”

---“Paper clips?” He could hardly wait for the answer.

---“I had numerous design philiias as a kid.”

---“Besides paper clips?”

---“String, ah...discarded pencils, you’ll love this...dust bunnies...”

---“Shit yes,” he said as he looked around, “I’ve got a few to contribute.”

She exhaled heavily in the direction of the corner where dust bunnies might be residing.

Her fingers were nimble in shelling the cooked shrimp. He took a picture of her in action with her permission. They shared their dreams, their sleep dreams. They were different but equally odd. Then, they turned to life’s dreams. She wanted to make a name for herself, and he was about to say that doesn’t come without costs only to remind himself not to be the scolding, experienced senior partner. He kept his counsel. Always the problem in youth versus age, romantically speaking. He also kept his counsel about the shrimp, few of which had crossed his lips.

---“What’s your favorite body part?” she asked.

---“Butts and legs,” he shot back.

---“That’s two parts.”

---“They can’t be separated. And yours?”

---“Feet!”

---“Unfair. That’s two parts.”

---“Wrong again. One part with two pieces.”

---“Feet? How many ever guessed feet?”

---“Like Turandot...wrong answer and you’re out.”

---“You know Turandot?”

---“Doesn’t everybody?”

---“I don’t think so. We might have done a survey at the store. So, my fate is sealed?”

---“You get points for being close...legs connect to feet.”

---“We’ll be allowed to sleep tonight?”

---“Not you. The question is why do I like my feet?”

---“Absolutely. That is the question.”

She discarded her sneaks, came around the table, placed her left foot on his right thigh and before he could react her right foot on his left thigh, hoisting herself into a standing position, her head almost touching the ceiling, their hands clasped.

The stool and its occupant wobbled, as she shouted,

---“See what I can do with my feet!”

She slid down into his lap, pressed against his very attentive cock and dropped her tongue in his mouth.

---“You’re naughty,” she said as she jumped off. “I knew that.”

It mattered little that he had never thought much about feet. He would never forget them. A night much to his liking – no script, no rules, no tomorrow.

They moved from the table to the balcony where he laid out a pile of cushions over the concrete floor. They lay down next to each other and watched the sky. The sun was fading, the moon was rising, and a gentle breeze (seven stories up) kept the evening heat at bay. For a long time they

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watched without talking and only barely touching. The half moon was rocking on its backside, and was soon joined by the brightest of the sky's objects.

In the engulfing darkness they embraced, and she slid on top of him. It became passionate and fierce. Her tongue was firm and everywhere. He had lost track of his.

They embraced, released, embraced, released in some kind of night-sky rhythm that caused her to say,

---“This is crazy” and the cycle began all over again.

An explosion of feelings and yearnings that had been growing in each of them for weeks. She unzipped his jeans and then hers. Partly disrobed on the balcony but in deepening darkness, as the moon passed behind his building, they found each other.

They were both lost and they both knew why – they had gone farther they they thought they would. She would not let go. Never before had a woman attached herself to his body so fiercely. Finally, without a word and any recollection of time she let up, got up, dressed herself and began to gather her few belongings. It was well past midnight, early in the morning, and he offered to drive her home.

---“No,” she said, “I’ll walk.”

---“But it’s...”

---“I said I’ll walk.”

Walk she did – right out of his life.

Maybe once or twice after that he saw her, but the few times their paths crossed, she ignored him, as if she didn't know him. He was not as tore apart by losing her as he should have been. Years later, however, he felt the loss he should have felt earlier. After the night of balcony love-making and the walkout, the romance with the nurse took control of his life. More so than he felt comfortable with. Moving in was being discussed. One of those relationship negotiations he tried to avoid. He would tentatively agree, and she'd find reasons to renege; and he'd go the opposite way, and she'd talk about dates for the move-in. He couldn't quit the sex, but he thought about quitting the rest of the relationship. Without details his friend knew the agony he was enduring.

One morning at their table Mr Coffee put his arm around his buddy – as clerks and customers couldn't hide their curiosity – held him close so he could whisper in his ear,

---“Lose one, gain another but worry yourself to death why it turned out that way. It's all in the...,” as he inserted his tongue in his ear, and when he let go, they were convulsed in laughter, and everyone turned away.

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The morning counter had new faces, and in a way he was spared having to agonize directly about the walkout. He was sure his pal had changed schedules to accommodate his changed circumstances.

Chagrin and fear surged through his being, as he listened to his voice mail.

---“Meet me at your coffee shop at three-thirty pronto.”

Pronto was an irrelevancy. The nurse was always late. Not today. She was there with her coffee when he arrived and at the back table with some books sat the one who was. She sneered a sneer that could be seen across the space that separated them, slammed her books shut and walked toward the door, and when she was behind him, he being virtually paralyzed, she stabbed her fist into the small of his back before exiting. The nurse missed most of it; he wished he had. His muteness for the next half hour enraged her. Her drug activities — that helped to solve the mystery — also enraged the local narcs, and several days later she was arrested along with her son and several others. The writer had lived a messy life but without drugs. If he'd succumbed, would he have been able to resolve the mystery earlier? Would her behavior that rocked between ferocity and tranquility have registered with him in a different, a more revealing, manner? Months later, she called to say she was sorry, she had been sleeping with another guy while seeing him and was expecting in a month or so. The charges had resulted in probation. He asked how she was doing physically and financially (he had lent her thousands of dollars to pay her bills, used instead probably to buy white powder), and she only responded that she was clean. That was good, he said, and they hung up.

He finally took leave of the university town when his buddy had closed the book/coffee shop and had taken his inheritance after his parents' deaths to set up an ecological refuge in one of those threatened tropical regions. They stayed in touch electronically but seldom saw each other since the former bookstore owner had no reason to come home and his friend hated the tropics. The writer finally moved to a big East Coast city where he could listen to jazz and write essays for several different Ezines on subjects of his choosing. He was also teaching writing at a community college. He liked the challenge of trying to entice kids who never thought about writing to give it a try. He had also reformed. Hands off. And he was working on another novel.

In doing some research for the novel about two architects, political revolutionaries who wanted to launch a style of design that beckoned others to revolt, he saw a reference to a book about book shelves. He had never forgotten about another set of bookshelves in his life. A little more digging revealed that a woman who lived not far, in the next city, was behind these creations. One model appeared to be suspended in thin air (by a series of wires and pinions on the wall side). Another was a shelf that was a triangle inside a triangle where one book was leaning on the vertical side, another was lying flat on the horizontal side and a third along the hypotenuse, held in place by an ingenious and nearly invisible sleeve that the book actually slide into. Her most famous because it was the most avant-garde and because she had installed them throughout her house, as featured in *Architectural Digest*, was a thin, horizontal, heavily-starched fabric that was itself a book shelf, some short, some long, with slits cut about half way through the fabric, of

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varying widths, into which a book slide upright. In some cases there was only one slit for a three-foot-length shelf, and in others dozens of slits. The fabric came in various colors and weaves. It caught the book-shelf world as well as the design world by surprise. It was not just a bookshelf it was art about shelves that hold books.

He ran across reviews that described her design as post-next-modern. He did not recognize the genre, but he came to attention when he saw her picture in an article about the shelves. It was the woman behind the counter. At first he didn't recognize her because the round face had given way to a longer, thinner, more pointed countenance. She had come to look more like her father, one of life's ironies. The longings he knew from long ago had taken hold again, at great risk he knew from past experience. Then, he found more photos with a man and a child. The longings slunk back into their recesses.

He found her email, sent her a note in which he expressed admiration for her shelves, congratulated her on her domestic endeavors and described his life since.... He hoped for a reply but feared for his sanity. Weeks later, while he was sitting in an airport, a reply came. – polite, curt and mainly affirmative (she remembered him and liked his story). He continued his research on rebellion and architecture, sent her a few friendly emails and thought about installing some of her shelves on his walls because he liked her ideas and worse he wanted her back, when he received a blistering and angry email demanding to know what he was trying to do, establish a friendship that had never existed and bothering her with stuff that had nothing to do with her. It closed with,

---“Get lost. I barely knew you.”

He had been told off a few times in his life but this took top honors, as it sucked out the marrow. Now he knew the full brunt of a mood attack.

Within hours the shock turned to recognition. He knew with a sense of regret but also contentment why he was still single, and the better for it. Among other relationship misalignments he'd never learned mood battles.