Andrew Coburn
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Poised to race into a wave, they were an eye-goggling couple. The young woman was raven-haired and uncompromisingly beautiful, and the young man, heroically built, stood well over six feet. The classical Greeks surely would have elevated each. Two mature women standing at the tide line were unable to take their eyes off them. Mrs. Simmons, glistening with lotion against the burn of the sun, nudged her friend. “They’re gorgeous. I’d give anything to watch them mate.”

Mrs. Bourque seemed to smile. “Ringside?”

“Balcony, if I could have opera glasses. You know who that is, don’t you? Margaret Neal’s daughter. Her age, that was me.”

Mrs. Bourque knew that was a stretch. At twenty Mrs. Simmons had been a bit of a looker; now, at forty, she was a fatty, her backside explosive in a pink bathing suit. Mrs. Bourque, still trim, had survived two marriages that never should have taken place. Her first husband was untrue from the start, and her second was an alpha male with a cigar in his face. Each divorce was a blessing, no matter what the priests said, her nose thumbed at all of them. And no children from either marriage, another blessing.

Mrs. Simmons said, “That young man is a hunk. Who is he?”

Mrs. Bourque said she believed he was one of the Wheelwrights, who had a summer house around the bend. The tide line swept past Mrs. Bourque’s feet, and the frothy water crushed her toes and scaled her ankles. Her toenails were painted purple, which for some reason made her remember the first time a priest planted a communion wafer on her protruding tongue. Mrs. Simmons’s voice startled her.

“Oh, look!”

As if spawning in the waters of the Aegean, the lovely young couple sprinted toward the arc of a wave and threw themselves into it before it crashed.

“ Fucking showoffs,” Mrs. Bourque said.

Diane Neal was the apple of her father’s eye the moment she was born, a doll of a baby and a true beauty by the time she entered first grade, where she was smarter than most, as if beauty determined brains. The principal tried not to stare, the janitor fought urges, and her teacher likened her to Shirley Temple. The year was 1938 when the silver screen, along with radio, was the highlight of people’s lives, certainly her mother’s. Her mother wanted to submit her snapshot in a poster competition, but her father had visions of pedophiles swarming out of the woodwork and said, “No way in hell!”

Rambunctious at recess, Diane severely skinned a knee and was whisked to the principal’s office. The principal, who housed a first-aid kit in his desk, was roly-poly and well in excess of himself but moved with surprising speed to attend her bleeding knee embedded with tiny pebbles.
Without a peep from her, he tweezered them out while mentally having his way with her. Then he bared her foot and kissed as many toes as he dared. A game, he told, her, but she knew it wasn’t. After school she told her teacher that she didn’t like being pretty, and her teacher said, “In time you will, dear. Just don’t let it go to your head.”

Home, she heard her mother say, “Beauty can be a blessing.”

“Or not,” her father said.

Which is it? she wondered.

Sundays at United Methodist, her parents sat in a front pew while she attended Bible class, so many stories, so much happening in the olden days when God was a voice in the sky and Satan the boogeyman, the two of them manipulating poor Job, whom she visualized with a puckered mouth doubling as a toy whistle. On the way home, her father at the wheel of a weathered Ford that seldom started on the first try, she asked whether all those Bible stories were true.

“They could be,” her mother said. “But not necessarily.”

“Don’t tell her that,” her father said, eyes on the road. “Of course they’re true.”

Her father was in real estate and the owner of several marginal properties awaiting buyers. Times were tough. Service in the Massachusetts National Guard supplemented his income. A lieutenant bucking for captain, he looked especially smart in his two-tone uniform, the jacket chocolate with brass fittings, the trousers beige with a sheen. Her mother took loads of pictures of him, one of which was later used in the local paper following his death on a Normandy beach, captain bars on his steel helmet and a prayer book in his sea-soaked pocket.

The loss left Diane uncertain whether he had ever truly existed and made her wonder whether she had created him with crayons, her mother validating the ruse. Unsettling was her discovery of love letters written to her mother and stashed in a fancy chocolate box. The letters weren’t from her father but from her mother’s high-school sweetheart, who wrote from his heart and his loins, impassioned words that added another dimension to her mother, who became more real, her father less.

“Tell me about Gregory.”

“You’ve been snooping.” Margaret Neal feigned anger while indulging a memory that sparked a smile. “He thought I was hot stuff.”

“Were you?”

“It was all in his little adolescent mind.”

Diane was fourteen when her mother ventured out of her grief and began seeing a man named Bruce. Bruce had a pleasant smile emanating from the loose contours of a face meant to instill trust, but his arctic-blue eyes spooked Diane. A frequent visitor and an occasional overnight guest, he approached her one evening when she was doing her homework and whispered in her ear as his overly eager fingers climbed her bare arm. Repelled, she pulled away. She said nothing about it, but her mother knew something had happened. After Diane had gone to bed, Bruce felt the point of a knife against his throat and Margaret Neal’s breath hot and hard on his face.

“Don’t think I won’t.”

He believed her, and that was the last Margaret Neal saw of him, though Diane ran into him a decade later at Logan International Airport. Despite his hair loss and weight gain, she recognized him but couldn’t remember his name. “Bruce,” he said, his smile intact, and with a gush of whiskey
breath told her he considered her an anglicized Sophia Loren, nothing lost in translation. When his loose face tightened, his smile vanished. “I’d have married your mother just to get at you.”

“No way in the world, sir, would she have married you.”

They stood eye to eye, two tall women, five-ten in stocking feet, Diane Neal and Mrs. Wheelwright, a generation separating them. Almond eyes and high cheekbones gave Mrs. Wheelwright a fashionable face. She said, “My son has a striking appearance, a warm heart, and an average mind. He won’t shake the world, but he’ll make a good husband.”

Diane, in her final year of college, had no thought of marriage. Damon Wheelwright was her pal and, at tender times, her lover—but nothing surging beyond that. Having spent a summer in Paris, her blood ran hot for Edith Piaf’s singing, Samuel Beckett’s absurdities, and Simone de Beauvoir’s intellectual twists and turns.

Mrs. Wheelwright went on. “Damon’s trust fund ensures security. I realize money isn’t everything, but life is so much lovelier with it. Do you agree?”

Diane did agree. After the war, properties once deemed marginal sold for hefty prices and gave her mother the means to expand their lives, which began with the purchase of a house in the same sweet part of town as the Wheelwrights. The result was that Diane and Damon became a pair, the presence of one adding value to the other. Strangers thought them siblings and stiffened when the two exhibited seemingly unhealthy affection toward each other.

“You’d be perfect for the family, dear.” Mrs. Wheelwright pressed her smile on her. “And you’d be doing me a huge favor. Think me superficial if you like, but I couldn’t bear to have unattractive grandchildren.” Her smile pressed harder. “Would you answer something truthfully? I know you will. Does Damon have any same-sex interests?”

Diane took a half-second. “Absolutely not.”

“Thank God!”

Ensconced in a chaise on the porch of Mrs. Bourque’s rented cottage, Mrs. Simmons sipped a margarita, her second, and imagined herself strolling the moonlit beach, running into a buccaneer, and becoming his booty. She felt the evening’s salty breath on her face and fancied it his. Mrs. Bourque glanced sideways at her and said, “You feeling all right?”

“Fine,” Mrs. Simmons said briskly. Her eye on a passing gaggle of girls, she envied their youth. They didn’t fret about their faces tarnishing overnight and needing to be refinished in the morning. Stretching her legs, Mrs. Simmons scrutinized her plump ankles. “I want to be young and beautiful again…like Margaret Neal’s daughter.”

“Her name’s Diane,” Mrs. Bourque said. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

“I’m a little tipsy, that’s all.” On her first date with her husband, Mrs. Simmons got tipsy and was impregnated. Back then Fred Simmons had a bit of style but now was addicted to house
slippers and television. She was glad to be away from him for a while. Mrs. Bourque divined the tilt of her thoughts.

“So how’s Fred doing?”

She resented the question because Mrs. Bourque had once quipped that if the dictionary people ever defined an old fart they’d print a picture of Fred. “Fine,” she said and, cushioning a hand behind her head, wondered whether somewhere on the beach Margaret Neal’s daughter and the Wheelwright boy were copulating beneath a blanket, perhaps where boulders cast the longest shadows, strollers giving them a wide berth out of respect. Mrs. Bourque said, “Ever wish it had been different?”

“What?”

“Everything.”

“Enough!” Mrs. Simmons said. “If you don’t mind.”

An hour later, emerging from a quick shower, Mrs. Simmons was a burst of pink that was, she liked to think, too much for her husband and, for that matter, too much for any man. The bed in the guest room had crisp sheets that pleased her skin. Eyes closed, she listened to surf sounds, waves crashing and splintering. Sea air shuffled through the open window. Mrs. Bourque spoke to her through the closed door.

“Good night.”

“Good night,” Mrs. Simmons said and, knees raised, entertained herself with both hands, all ten fingers, as if she were a she-devil in heat, marauders in longboats arriving.

Diane Neal, a foot soldier in JFK’s run for the presidency, rejoiced when he won and grieved when he was killed. Later, though no fan of LBJ, she worked doggedly for him because Barry Goldwater and the specter of the mushroom cloud scared the bejeezus out of her. In between times she freelanced for various magazines and met men ready to make fools of themselves over her, which she discouraged. Except once. Felt sorry for him, a freelancer like herself. Then it took her six months to get rid of him.

She was too busy for long-term entanglements. Too much terrible stuff was going on. The nightly news aired slaughter in Vietnam, upheaval at Kent State, police helicopters circling People’s Park in Berkeley. Martin Luther King was killed. Then another Kennedy. Something was rotting in the country. Could it get worse? It did. Nixon. She wrote controversial pieces about his personal henchmen, Haldeman and Erlichman, and proudly made the Enemies List.

The day Nixon resigned she was in New York and took time to visit an old friend, who now lived in the Village and worked at Harper & Row not as a ranking editor, as she had thought, but as somebody’s assistant, the sort of job usually given to a bright young thing from one of the Seven Sisters. They ate Italian at a restaurant on West Nineteenth and grinned at each other.

“You’re more an eyeful than ever,” he said.
She winked, for he was still her handsome Damon, her Adonis now silvered at the temples. She wanted to hug and kiss him, he looked so good! “You’re not so bad yourself,” she said. “You must work out.”

“Sure. Don’t you?”
“Sort of. I’m always on the go.”
He tilted his head. “How’s life?”
“Life?” She twirled angel hair with fork and spoon. “Odd you should ask. I’m doing a piece for *Rolling Stone*. According to Schopenhauer, life is shit. Death will flush it away. According to Nietzsche, God is dead...maybe never alive.”
“You a cynic now?”
“Realist. Let’s move to real talk,” she said, and each asked after the other’s mother. Margaret Neal was into real estate, had an eye and nose for it, and was doing marvelously well. Mrs. Wheelwright, busy with benefits when she wasn’t wintering in Florida, was severely disappointed that her only child had never married.

“About time we talked about that,” Damon said and looked Diane full in the face.

“Why didn’t we? We could’ve, should’ve. Was it because I didn’t have enough oomph in you-know-what?”

She wanted to hold his hand. He’d be her Rock Hudson, she his Doris Day. Pillow talk. She missed that. Not that it had happened often, but such fun when it did, the two of them looking at each other with affection and mischief, post coitum triste never more than a gentle problem.

“Don’t sell yourself short, Damon. Please don’t do that.”

His face fought for expression. “You and me. I suppose it’s too late.”

Her sympathetic smile held him together as it often had when they were young and groping. “I would think so,” she said and gave it more thought. “Yes, Damon, definitely too late.”

Later, rising to use the ladies’ room, she looked down and saw he was bald where his head lay at night and felt the same gentle sadness as in the old days.

She won a Pulitzer for a series of columns she wrote during a year of the Reagan presidency. One began: *Agent Orange is the reason so many of our Vietnam vets go to an early grave and glow in the ground.*

Another: *Mr. Reagan views the homeless as simple folk craving the urban outdoors.*

And another: *Space Shuttle Challenger explodes, killing its crew, mythologizing Christa McAuliffe, and exposing the arrogance and irresponsibility of NASA. The majority of Americans, however, rise to the agency’s defense, as if national pride needed protecting at all cost. The dead crew members become not victims but godlets gazing down from Above.*

The man in her life was a fellow prize winner she met at the awards ceremony, a journalist turned book author and twice a Pulitzer winner. He had a high-bridged nose, a la Robert Mitchum, in a seasoned face that led her to suspect he was better looking now than when younger. He’d had
two failed marriages, children from the first, none from the second. “Don’t bullshit me,” he said when she told him she was fifty-five. He thought she was late thirties, forty at most.

“I accept compliments,” she said, hair chemically coaxed to its original hue of honey.

They soon had dinner together, live music in the background. Dancing, he was an intimate voice in her hair, against her neck. She intended to fly back to Boston where she maintained an apartment but instead accompanied him to his place on Riverside Drive. He told her he hadn’t been with anybody in months, maybe a year, and she said, “Join the club.” Each intuitively trusting the other, they undressed and stood uncensored, uninhibited. “All for me?” he said admiringly, and she said, “I could ask the same of you.” Covers drawn down, she lay back on her elbows while he chivvied her open and with one slow lick drove her over the edge. She relished the release. Then, assuming the masculine position, he made himself a force in her life, one that would last nearly two years.

Shuttling between LaGuardia and Logan, they shared residences, beds, closets. Best of both worlds, they said. Concerts at the Hatch Shell, Shakespeare in the Park. Public Garden, Central Park. The Charles, the Hudson. They went to movie houses, the arty ones, to see old favorites. Marcel Pagnol’s trilogy. Jacques Tati in Mr. Hulot’s Holiday. They traveled. They swam stark in the Aegean, Poseidon their protector, lesser gods in their wake. Despite Iraq’s war with Iran, a driver taxied them from Baghdad to Babylon, fifty-five miles marked by photos and plywood cutouts of Saddam Hussein. Touring Babylon’s ancient ruins, with the sun-baked air of history on their faces, they rummaged for traces of the Hanging Gardens and the Tower of Babel. Ben claimed he glimpsed the ghost of Hammurabi. Diane went along with the delusion for the adventure.

They collected quotes:

Even this he cannot do right —Josef Stalin, after his son botched a suicide attempt.

Happy is the country where they know at whom to throw their bombs —Rebecca West.

Christians scream worse than atheists on the death-ward —Robert Lowell.

They planned to marry, honeymoon in Hawaii, the date set, but then he learned he had cancer. Why in hell did he have cancer? Pancreatic, worst kind to have. Where was God in all of this? Didn’t matter. She wasn’t a believer, nor was Ben. Burning bushes. Parting waters. An angel delivering a stay of execution as Abraham is about to butcher his son. All a bunch of crap. She held his hand. “Ben, don’t leave!”

But he did, mercifully fast. A blessing, someone said. She stayed bedside, ten minutes, twenty. Unless it was her imagination, the body twitched twice as if unaware it was dead.

In December, Mrs. Simmons and Mrs. Bourque booked themselves on a Caribbean cruise that catered to people escaping Christmas and seeking solace from the throes of aging. Mrs. Simmons, who had lost her Fred to congestive heart failure, hoped she’d meet an interesting man, but the only one who latched onto her did not meet expectations. Mrs. Bourque said he had the color of a corpse and only an occasional blink kept him from being buried alive. “No need to be nasty,” Mrs. Simmons said.
In July they booked a cruise to the Mediterranean. Their second evening at sea Mrs. Bourque drank too much sherry and was rude to an old duffer who introduced himself as Donald and said he’d been in the banking game, high finance. Mrs. Bourque found his face a nuisance to look at, too common, too nerdy, and told him to “fuck off.”

Watching him leave, Mrs. Simmons said, “That was totally unnecessary.” Mrs. Bourque shrugged while muffling flatulence.

At a stopover in Barcelona a youth speaking poor English put a move on Mrs. Bourque, who said, “Do you know how old I am, young man?” He said it didn’t matter, she should simply remember him in her will. In Messina the air was humid, heavy, each drawn breath a burden. Mrs. Simmons felt faint but stayed on her feet, and the two women took refuge under the awning of a sidewalk café, where they drank more wine than was prudent. Tipsy, Mrs. Simmons grew enraged over the memory of her husband’s penis. “It wasn’t hefty, it was skinny. All he could do was poke.”

“Poor Fred,” Mrs. Bourque said. “Born pathetic.”

Mrs. Simmons suddenly took offense. “We had our moments.”

They spent an exhausting day on the isle of Delos, where the Aegean sun burnt Mrs. Simmons’s nose, and the relentless heat nearly brought her lunch up. Angling through one of the crowded market squares, Mrs. Bourque saw someone she thought she knew. Margaret Neal’s daughter? Couldn’t be. By now Diane Neal was past fifty and that woman appeared nowhere near it. Her male companion had a Robert Mitchum look. Were they forms or figments? No matter. The crowd swallowed them.

On the long voyage home, Mrs. Bourque apologized to the man she told to fuck off. “Donald, right?” He nodded, and they went into the forward lounge for a drink. “Don’t know what I was thinking,” she said and proceeded to tell him about her ex-husbands, the first a philandering rat bastard, the second a cigar-chomping sonofabitch who tried to tell her what to do.

“I’d never do that,” Donald said. “Marry me, I’ll give you everything you want. I was in banking, you know.”

“Are you quite well off, Donald?”

“Yes, I am, if I do say so.”

“How old are you?”

“Eighty-one and fit as a fiddle.”

Mrs. Bourque sipped her margarita. “Sorry, too fit…and too young.”

At age seventy-nine Margaret Neal suffered a broken hip. Diane gave up her digs in Boston and moved back to her mother’s house, back to her girlhood surroundings. Gazing at her with pride, her mother said, “You’ve really made something of yourself. Your father would’ve been proud.”

Three weeks later on a Sunday evening she saw her father on public television, footage of a Normandy landing, a god-awful battle for a beachhead. Her mother screeched, “That’s him!” Who? Couldn’t be. Her mother was crying, jabbing a finger at the screen. “Yes! Yes!” How could she tell?
A helmeted head and a partial face with features visible only for a second before the camera swept on. “That was your father!” Embalmed in history, frozen in time maybe mere moments before he was killed. Who could say? Her mother couldn’t stop trembling. “He comes home, he won’t know me. He’s still young, I’m this white-haired old lady who can’t walk straight.”

Diane left on a writing assignment and was back by the following Sunday. Katharine Hepburn in *The Corn is Green* was on A&E opposite the public channel’s *Brideshead Revisited*, which Diane would have preferred. Her mother said, “Your father loved Hepburn.” Seeing the helmeted man on film, captain bars visible, had made her father more of a myth than ever, a player in a fantasy. She was nearly sixty, her father forever under thirty.

She left again to interview the sole surviving son of Rose Kennedy, who was celebrating a birthday. In a widely distributed piece, she wrote: “Out of the fruit of thy womb, Rosie, came the stuff of history.” Her mother said, “Your father would’ve thought that irreligious, but I like it.” For her mother, her father had become a presence again, a whisper in the brain, sometimes a tap on the window. Later, over a light supper, her mother said, “By the way, Louise Wheelwright phoned. She wants to see you.”

Years since she had seen Mrs. Wheelwright’s fashionable face, which to a large degree had held its own. Words sprang from Mrs. Wheelwright’s mouth. “You told me Damon wasn’t a fag. You lied!”

Unfair. Plenty of times she had believed he wasn’t. Other times she had merely wondered. Mrs. Wheelwright spoke from the acerbic curl of her lips. “When’s the last time you saw him?”

She tried to remember and couldn’t. “It’s been a while.”

“A long while?”

“I guess.”

“He has AIDS.”

She composed her face to speak. “I’m sorry.”

“If you had told the truth, I’d have gotten him help. Since you didn’t, you should’ve married him. It would have made a difference.”

How much of a difference? Truth came in all flavors, like people, like puppy dogs. Real truth was your face in the morning. She pressed her fingers against her temples. “For God’s sake, shut up!”

She drew the wrath of the religious right when she wrote that TV evangelists preached so much bullshit that they smelled like fertilizer. She called Jim and Tammy Bakker pint-sized absurdities, money ministers, Jesus merchants, entertainers whose religious routines soared beyond slapstick into hysteria. At a talk she gave in Raleigh, North Carolina, someone threw a book at her, a Bible no less. The incident was reported locally and picked up by Fox. When she returned home, her mother said, “Aren’t you getting too old for this?”

“This is my life, Mom. What else would I do?”

“Enjoy life.”

“If I enjoyed it any more, I’d be giddy.”

Her excitement built when Bill Clinton, despite baggage, wrested the presidency from George Bush, a war hero *Time* magazine depicted as a wimp. She admired Clinton’s intellect and
asked how anyone could refer to a Rhodes Scholar as “Bubba.” On the other hand, concerned about his excesses, she called him “pecker-happy—and that spells trouble in River City.”

She covered the O. J. Simpson trial and termed the verdict a mirror image of white justice in the Old South. She mourned the death of Dean Martin, whom she had once interviewed, designating him the mellow side of Sinatra. That same month she learned that Damon Wheelwright had died. No formal funeral, no memorial service, only an anonymous cremation. Mrs. Wheelwright’s mandate: “Less said the better.”

Mrs. Simmons lost a leg to diabetes and her life to cancer. Mrs. Bourque couldn’t attend the funeral. She was in a nursing home, trapped in an airtight world of old age and disease, and humiliated because she had to use a bed pan and rely on others. She cringed when other residents greeted their children with contrite smiles, as if apologizing for still being alive, and she loathed old men who were lewd at all levels. She wanted to go home. What home? She wanted her cloudy eyes to brighten and her old body to spring straight. Not going to happen!

Her niece sent long-stemmed roses on her birthday but didn’t visit. A young idealistic priest popped in on her, admired the roses, and mused, “Does a flower choose to be beautiful or is beauty thrust upon it?”

Mrs. Bourque said, “Who gives a shit?”

She dreamed of Mrs. Simmons’s moony face. With arms outstretched, Mrs. Simmons looked like shelter. “She was beckoning to me,” she told the semi-retired doctor in the midst of weekly rounds. “She wants me to join her. What do you think of that, Doc?”

“I think we ought to get you into a chair, Mrs. Bourque. “Make you mobile.”

“I think you should get me a new life.”

Diane Neal no longer bothered coloring her hair, which didn’t prevent male dinner companions from feeling she added to their worth. In Boston her escort was a former ranking FBI official, whose voice had rhythm and a touch of the south. He enjoyed slapping his wallet open and flashing his past authority, a harmless affectation. In Washington, over a bottle of wine, a Post editor told her he remembered himself as a baby in a stroller, his mother fixing his blanket. He also claimed he occasionally saw himself as a dead man, his sparse hair perfectly combed, all his feelings gone.

“ Weird,” she said.

“Isn’t it.”
They talked politics. She didn’t trust the second George Bush, who had ducked service in Vietnam and, she mused, probably had a yellow streak running down his back and rippling into his arse. The Post editor was looking intently at her.

“Will you marry me?”

“’Fraid not.”

“Why not?”

“There’s an answer. I just don’t have it on the tip of my tongue.”

She was in New York when the unthinkable happened, the 9/11 thing. She wasn’t near the disaster site but was there when George Bush arrived to shake a firefighter hand and assume an appearance of strength, wisdom, and leadership. She understood his going to war in Afghanistan—but Iraq? “The guy killing us is Osama bin Laden, not Saddam. Someone tell George!” she wrote for one magazine, and for another, “War is the beat of a hammer against the bone of a human head.”

“Be careful,” a friend advised. “You’re sounding like a propagandist.”

Another said, “Take a rest. You look like hell.”

She flew to London for a long weekend on her own, stayed at The Dukes, broke bread with a man she met there, saw two plays (one with him), and in Piccadilly Square took pictures of pigeons strutting about like plump and pompous ambassadors from a grander era. When she returned she learned her mother had had a minor spell. Nothing to worry about, the doctor said. Her mother was eighty-nine.

“Good God, how old am I?”

At age ninety-one, after major surgery, Margaret Neal was transferred to the rehab unit of Shady Lane Nursing Home, where she was expected to spend no more than a week, two tops. “I have your word on that?” she said, and her doctor said, “You do.”

She said to Diane, “You’re a witness.”

The doctor, his eyes assessing Diane, said to her, “Bet you were a looker in your time.”

Seventy-two years old, Diane said, “I’m still a looker.”

Later she and her mother lunched in the dining room, each particular about what they put into their stomachs. Her mother picked at a garden salad. “I wish I’d had a grandchild.”

Diane looked up from her plate. “Hell of a time to tell me.”

Her mother speared a cherry tomato. “There’s a high school classmate of mine here. She didn’t have a happy life. Two marriages, both bad. Her name’s Bourque. That was her second husband’s name. Impossible to have a conversation with her. They put her up on the third floor. That’s for people mentally and physically out of it.”

“That’s sad.”
“I get that way, shoot me.” Margaret Neal’s head rang with a song she hadn’t heard in a long time. She hummed a bit of it. Who had sung it? Must’ve been Sinatra. He had sung everything. She said, “I dreamed of your father last night. Him so young, me so old. We didn’t speak. What would we say? What would we have in common?”

“Me,” Diane said.
About the Author

Andrew Coburn is the author of twelve novels, three made into French films. His fiction has appeared in *Eclectica Magazine*, *Contrary Magazine (University of Chicago)*, *Oregon Literary Review*, *Underground Voices*, *Summerset Review*, *Amarillo Bay Review*, and *Metromania*.

Andrew Coburn on the Web:

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