

5.

Well! We all know the story where the old bohemian learns to trade the pain of failure for the joys of art. This is not that story. I had done something which was technically impossible. I had had Rudy, and art, and nothing. But I hadn't had you, and I could not live without you, enough was enough. Several years after mine mother's death, I was just about to jump out mine window when I did hear footsteps on the stairs. Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Sorry! I am just stepping out!" For I had used [Hide 'n' Save]'s vortex to prise the bars from off mine window and was just squeezing one leg through.

Boom!

"This better be good!"

"Robin Cruet?"

That did give me pause. Was I Robin Cruet? Or Ruth Lebinsky? "Who wants t'know?"

"Yer grandson!"

Well. This was good. I could always jump out later. So I did drag mine foot back, climb down, hobble to mine door and look through mine peephole. A man, a woman, and a boy of about seven. I did open up.

"Are you Robin Cruet?"

"Er, yes. I believe."

But the boy said, "She not my grandma. She white."

So. I did lock the door behind them and go back to my business, and returning to mine chore, did manage to get mine foot over the ledge once more. But little light steps could be heard, and the lightest knocking--bim, bim, bim. A reedy voice: "Robin Cruet! Robin Cruet!"

Well! I did heave mine foot back and go open the door on the boy.

He said, "Hide me."

Well! He certainly had come to the right place.

"Why?"

"They will lock me up."

"Why?"

"I got a tail."

Footsteps on the stairs. There was no time to think. I brought him in. He disappeared. Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Seen a small Afro-American boy, name Nevil Cruet?"

"No, why?"

"It is a police matter."

"I'm sorry but I cannot be of help."

I see them peering around. Naturally, they see nothing but the mats and the Royal. Well, the bent window bars. They did go peer out the window to the yard below. As they saw nothing, they could not rilly stay.

When they are gone a reliable amount of time, I whisper, "Nevil. Nevil Cruet. Come out." He does not. I tie a cloth around my ankle, attach it to the radiator, and go in, groping. Nothing.

"Nevil? Oh, God. Say something."

Well, Nevil said something that made me say, "Nevil? Don't move."

I go for Rudy.

Well, we manage to get the poor kid out. He emerges saying, "Heh, heh." He already wants to go back in.

Me: "Er. Shouldn't you be going home to your mother?"

"She dead."

Me: "Don't you have a father?"

He looks at me scornfully. "You don't need a father."

I had been so isolated, I could see that, perhaps I had missed some new development.

However something else was my more immediate concern at this moment. "Nevil? When you were, er, invisible. You made a certain remark. Now listen very carefully, Nevil. *What was that remark?*"

"\$@()?"

Rudy and I exchanged looks.

Me: "Excuse me?"

Nevil: "\$@()?"

Rudy and I did exchange looks again, thus, each ended up with his or her original look.

At last, Rudy did clear his throat: "!#%&(\*^\$@ < :}|/#???"

Nevil: "<<<<<<"

Rudy scratched his head: "<?? <!!"

Nevil: "!!"

Even I could follow that. Nevil was sure. But sure of what? "Rudy, I'm practically following this."

"He is speaking very pure Grigorian."

"Excuse me?"

"It is easier to follow than the bastardized version."

"Rudy! Hold on! Wait a minnit! Yer the one I cannot follow! Wot's this Grigorian?"

Now Rudy and Nevil did exchange looks. So, as the reader may well imagine, I was

mighty pleased to have mine original look back or young Nevil would have it. Finally Nevil did say, "You know like in school you not eposed to say Eskimo, but Inuit."

Me: "Er. Certainly."

Nevil: "You eposed to say Grigorian."

"Instead of wot?"

Rudy said to Nevil, "Tell her."

"C-A-R-T-O-O-N."

Well! It didn't seem like such an insulting term to me. For I had always felt it possessed a certain charm, the charm of history. Still, I suppose it wasn't fer me to say. Moreover, "Is Grigorian rilly how you say it in yer own language?"

They both now began to wink.

"Hold on!!!! Boys!!!!!! Hello????????? How do you say it in yer own language?"

Rudy, Nevil: "!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Oh, well, certainly. Naturally you would wish to say 'Grigorian' instead."

Now they begun to wink again. Then they did somersaults, apparently. "Nevil--Rudy--boys! Hold on, here. Let's backtrack here. Hello? Boys? *What was Nevil sure of?*"

Nevil did say: "My grandma name Robin Cruet."

Well! At that moment, a lightbulb had gone off in mine thought balloon, whatever that does mean with me. Nevertheless, there it was. "Rudy!!!! You got some explaining to do. Those papers that I got married with--the Robin Cruet ones? What did you trade for 'em?"

Rudy said, "Nevil's mother."

Me: "She was your girlfriend?"

Nevil was reading Rudy's thought balloon. "He her father. You don't need one."

"Rudy! Let me get this straight! You traded custody of Nevil's mother for her mother's papers?"

Rudy shook his head. "I got the whole closet. The papers w'r in it."

"Rudy! Is this true? You did relinquish custody? Why?"

Nevil explained, "He the skeleton in the closet."

Rudy blew his nose. "I int'feared wid their prospecks. The family c'd pass fr real characters."

"Rudy! For God's sake! I can't believe you believe this stuff! There are no real characters!"

"Now she tells me."

"Use yer noggin, Rudy. It's a contradiction in terms!"

But Nevil was already staring at the bump under Rudy's belt. "You got a tail?" he asked Rudy. "I got one too." He asked me, "You got one too? Hey! Why she crying?"

I wished to have a grandson.

"On paper, you do."

"Rudy, did I say you could read my thought balloon?"

Yet I could see his point. I say I'm Robin Cruet, it's fiction. The law says I am, I am.

"She not my grandma."

"Her name is Robin Cruet, too."

Nevil deliberated. "My grandma black."

"Nevil," I said. "Can you see me?"

Nevil gave me a long look. Then he shook his head.

So. I could be black, too. No one could see mine characters, or me. I say I'm Robin Cruet, I'm not. The law says I am, I am. Still. You cannot see me. So. I could be black. As, Sirgash was black, and Zizi also, Minnie and Walter, plus, that old dame who said a penny was worth value. I had not mentioned their race. That does not mean they were not black. You just could not see them. You cannot see me. I had not mentioned mine race. I believe. It's true Nevil had called me white, but he was just a child. You just had his word for it, and he barely spoke English. Thus, due to mine artistic limitations, technically, I could be black.

Nevil gave that some thought. "You not my grandma, though."

"That's true, Nevil. However, since your mother and presumably grandmother are dead, and yer dad's out of the question, whilst the authorities presumably will lock you up because you have a tail, you might arguably be better off with us."

Nevil (impressed): "What she speak? Hippie?"

Me: "Nevil, there are no hippies any more."

Rudy: "There never was."

Nevil began to cry.

"Now see what you've done, Rudy. Nevil, hold on. Certainly, if you wish to go, yer free." Nor did I have the heart to tell him how little worth value that was. "But if you wish to stay with us, it could hold up in court. For technically, I am yer grandma. And after all, I'm married to your grandfather. I believe."

Rudy: "Oh, rilly? You believe in marriage?"

"Common law, Rudy! The law is not involved."

Rudy: "Tee, hee!"

Nevil: "Tee, hee!"

Well! I begun to see a new Rudy here. For I had always thought he was a realistic cartoon, but that was a sort of chauvinism on mine part, for in fact, his apparent realism was arguably mere assimilation. Now I begun to see him in his pure form, he was not realistic at all. And, boy! When I got him on the linoleum that night, well--mmm, aah, ooh--the reader may well imagine!

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Well! To make a long story short, we did finesse the court hearing where I got custody of Nevil, for I had papers, and during Nevil's questioning, bless his heart, he spoke entirely in dialect.

Judge the Hon. Ganula Oliveiros: "Robin Cruet?"

Me: "Yes, yer honor."

Her: "Your honor."

Me: "Your honour."

Her: "Your honner."

Me: "Your honner."

Her: "I'm having trouble seeing you."

Me: "Yer not the first to say that, believe me. But I am black." Well! It went over.

Whew!

That was about it fer me. Now it was Nevil's turn.

Judge the Hon.: "Is that yer grandma?"

Nevil: "?|?/\\^? <<<<>>>><!"

They threw him out.

But I knew what he meant, for he spoke pure Grigorian, which even I could understand, and it meant: "My grandma? I don't think so!" But, with the special nuances of the language, implied, more or less, at the same time: "But don't you think she is a comely harridan?"

So Rudy and I became grandparents.

For Rudy was Nevil's grandfather because they both had tails, and I was his grandmother because I had his grandmother's name, on paper, but Rudy's tail was on paper, too. Oh, you thought Rudy was real? Nor do I mean he was a C-A-R-T-O-O-N, and by the way, if the reader thinks I'm about to say "\*\*\*\*\*" or even Grigorian, forget about it. But that was not mine point anyway. For this is not some fucking memoir. This is fiction. It is a piece of paper with a lie on it, like the one that made me Nevil's grandma. And if that isn't worth value, I don't know what is.

So. Rudy and I did bring Nevil to the playground. And many did bring their grandsons and their granddaughters to the playground at this time. It was the next bohemia. It rilly looked very much like the previous one, though it cost more. Tuna in tins, \$1.19. Corned beef hash, \$2.39. And kidneys, forget about it. They could not be had for love or money.

Film students did monopolize the slide, and fights did break out between them and parents who did prefer their own kids use it. Toddlers did swan dive off this old prewar slide.

There was human poop behind the climbing equipment. And in the ladies room, a smell. Crack vials. Bloodstained syringes. Caretakers in hennaed hair.

And there were jazz musicians, and girls in orange ski hats. There were new languages, too, as: hindi, filipino, urdu, dos, bar code.

And there were freezing clubs further east in basements. Galleries the size of Chinese laundries. Guerrilla girls. Police sweeps. Squatters in jumpsuits.

Families in little houses with tile fronts. In tenement buildings with no heating system. In Hoboken. In Williamsburg. Austin. The Bay Area. Don't forget the Motor City. In Camden Town.

The winds did rise, the snow did fall. I did put my hat on, and my enormous mittens. My watery eyes. My flyaway irongrey hair. My sneakers.

I was learning a little Grigorian myself, as, "!!!!XXXX12345XXXX!!!!" which caused Rudy and Nevil to clutch their sides and fall to the pavement, giggling, yet it got my point across, which as the reader may have guessed, was: "You get off that right now, I'm counting to five!"

So. It was the new day. Rudy did take Nevil to school. They both groomed their tails.

Even Grigorians had self-esteem. Mineself, no. And had I had some, I would surely have thrown it away. For did I need self-esteem?

I had no waist. Yet did I need a waist? Just one more marker for my long breasts. You've heard of long revolutions? These were long breasts. I would buy them shoes when they hit the floor; espadrilles, I think. My forties were over. I was what I'd read. Trash.

And I did have big, spotted hands with split nails. A hollow, frizzy look which nothing could now improve, even a better coat. Even a haircut. Perhaps I had made the wrong choice . . .

But had I had a choice?

As I look back on mine life, I think: perhaps Rudy was right about hippies, in the sense that I was not one. It's true I wished to eliminate distinctions and in many respects had had success, but it is all so long ago I'm not certain that was what hippies were ever about. Perhaps it was just drugs. But that obviously is only part of the story, as there are drugs aplenty today. Hippies, no.

Sometimes I think about the fact of my relationship with Rudy, for he was after all a different species, well, genre. It is perplexing to think how recently this sort of mixing was forbidden and subject to prejudice. I barely noticed Rudy's difference. Days would go by without mine giving it a moment's thought. It was never about the exotic parts, as the tail, which had so impressed Ruth. In fact I could barely tolerate the thing. I thought about dimension, it is true. I was sexually attracted to his language and, well, his penis, certainly. But it was his directness that I loved.

When it comes right down to it, for me art did serve a purpose. For we all know the story where the heroine does choose the boring romantic hero, ignoring the minor grotesque walk-on we all rilly prefer. This was not that story. Because I had read that story!

So. I had not eliminated the distinction between art and life, for who would want to? I had eliminated the distinction between cartoon and life.

And me? I was not a cartoon, nor a real character. I lived in the magic margin--bohemian, you see. We did not save the poor. We were the poor.

I did go to Key Food. I did there purchase sundries, as, spaghetti which had evidently fallen off the boat. 59 cents/lb! Ramen noodles, 5/\$1.00. And eggs remained a bargain. I did carry mine bags back to mine door. I did climb up the front stairs to 2C with the groceries, where a note did inform me that Rudy and Nevil had gone to "\*\*\*\*\*" School. Rudy did evidently add, "P.S. Go to yr rms. Got somethin' fer ya!"

I did put the groceries away, near a jar containing cabbage from, I believe, 1979. There was green mold here in the shape of France, you see. Furred grease on the stovetop splashback.

So. Back to the Royal. For in the end, it gave me Nevil. It gave me Rudy. It gave me [] and [2] and [3] and so many more. I just didn't have you.

Well! I did grab mine mop and pail from a [] I'd left outside the door and, killing two birds with one stone, did rub the mop back and forth as I made mine way down the front stairs. Across the courtyard. Up the back.

Well! I did sweep the hall. I did mop the hall. I did put mine cleaning things in the old [] by mine door at the top rear landing.

I did stop to unlock mine door. Yet I stopped wholly. For the landing was empty. The hall was silent. Yet I felt a presence. Mine hairs stood on end. Was it fear, back from extended vacation?

I did unlock the door and rush to the Royal. The Royal remained. The window bars remained. The drafting tables remained.

I waved mine hand. Mine hand remained.

I took one step. I remained. Two steps. Ditto.

[Hide 'n' Save] was gone.

Well! The existence of neutrinos is proven by the scientific explanation that there is no other way to explain other things. The absence of [Hide 'n' Save] is proven by the explanation that there is no other way to explain that, when I waved my hand, when I took a step, when I took two steps, my hand remained, as did I.

So.

I walked around mine rooms. I did look on the floors. Under the drafting tables.

I peered under the bent window bars. So! Thieves again! Or suicide.

Unless . . .

I did run back out in the hall and stood on the empty landing. And then that presence struck me again. For, nothing was there. Yet it begun to occur to me that, as nothing, it seemed on the familiar side.

Well! I did screw mine courage up. Then I did let 'er rip.

Me: "HEY!!!"

Nothing: "WE!!!! HAIN'T!!!! DEAF!!!"

So! Well! Fine! I did attempt to locate nothing by waving mine hand. It disappeared.

Nothing: "I believe you got yer mits in our closet."

That give me pause. However, evidently fear was still out of town for I did boldly ask, "Are you thieves?"

"Hippies."

Hippies! I began to feel a little faint. "Say something."

"Certainly."

Well! They talked like hippies, certainly. So! It was the new day. There were hippies, and they believed in private property. Theirs, certainly. Mine, no. So!

Well! I thought it wisest to play for time. "It's not rilly a closet."

"Duh."

"Well! Er. How did you come by this so-called closet, which by the way is technically called [Hide 'n' Save]?"

"Some character traded for it."

"Did he have a tail?"

Evidently there were more than one of them, as they engaged in a brief discussion here. They evidently concluded: "Yes."

So! Rudy had traded fer [Hide 'n' Save]. "He's not rilly a character."

"Duh."

Well! I was, naturally, trying to master mine emotions, when I did notice a sort of slithering noise, which did recede down from the landing now. Evidently these hippies, who had

evidently traded fer [Hide 'n'Save], were slithering down the stairs inside it. I did go hobbling after 'em. "Wait a minnit! Wait a minnit! What did you trade fer it?"

There was a pause, and some heavy breathing. "A car!" Then the slithering did recommence. Well! I was playing for time, you see.

"HEY!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Need help?"

Heavy breathing. Whispered consultation. Then: "Got soda?"

Well! They certainly had come to the right place. I had been saving orange soda on the window ledge for approximately 14 yrs. I brought it down. They drank the soda, apparently, and returned the bottle.

"Where are you from?"

"Canada."

So! They were Canadian hippies. They looked like nothing. They thought mine original [Hide 'n' Save] was worth something. A car! The soda was free. They were free, too.

Not me.

Well! I did watch nothing go down the stairs, across the courtyard, and down the front hall, but not up to Rudy's evidently. I did run ahead and hold the front door open.

Them: "Oh. We forgot to mention." And a somewhat unhygienic hand did appear, holding a piece of paper. "You left this in yer--in [Hide 'n' Save]."

Well! "Er--thanks."

"Thanks fer the soda."

[Hide 'n' Save] had been with me for so many years. It was the great one, I believe. It had become like a child, a pet, an aging parent. It had deserved more. Now it was out in the world, nor would I know it if I saw it, nor would you. You even less.

Well! I looked up and down the street. Nothing remained. Nor have I reason to believe it has stopped remaining even now.

So! I walked the walk, down the front hall, across the courtyard, up the back steps to mine rooms.

Well! I began to feel a little faint here. For I had got what I wanted, a trade, but lost what I had: nothing. I had never had you, certainly. But I had had nothing. Now I lacked nothing, too.

Well, I did the rounds of the rooms again, yet nothing was not there. I did return to the bent window bars, feeling fainter than ever. For I had the impression I was falling into a depression that would dwarf all its predecessors. Well! It certainly seemed this depression was approximately 5 stories tall.

And as I had already bent the window bars, I thought it would be a waste of that original effort not to squeeze through, for I was cheap enough to wish to save something, and what I wished to save was effort for, as I may have forgot to mention, I am not merely cheap, but lazy, too. So!

Evidently I had lost some weight chasing Nevil these past months, for mine legs did fit through more easily this time.

Well! With some effort I was on the other side of the bars, looking down at mine yard from the ledge. The soda was gone, but there was some old fruit out here, and other items, including a milk carton which dated back to 1988.



Cats did defecate in the yard below. Squirrels did disport. And in the distance, car stereos went boom, boom, boom. Well! I was picking mine target area below, when a rattling noise in mine pocket did attract mine interest. It was the piece of paper the hippies had handed me. It was a letter, apparently, which read as follows:

"Life serves no purpose. In this way, art imitates life, so what is rilly the point, as I already did it first. Nevertheless, I have always had a soft spot for bohemians, for you are such jerks. Yrs &c, God."

So. I sat on the ledge and pondered this, for it was evidently the meaning of life: God had a soft spot for bohemians. There was one problem, certainly. We were atheists. Why should we believe this guy was God? Or, say He was God. If we didn't believe in Him, what good would it do us that He liked us, for it would be as if it had never happened, certainly. Faith can move mountains, whilst skepticism can say, oh, rilly, I hadn't noticed.

The State says yer married, it depends. It says I am Nevil's grandma, I am. God says He's God, it is a different matter, theological. All I say is, someone said He is God. This anyone could believe. Thus it did likely happen. I don't say it was not a lie. Say I did lie, though. Say no one even said He said He was God. Yet I have been honest throughout. Unless I lied when I said I was honest. When I said, "Here if I say it's true, it's true," etc. Say I lied then. Say I lied throughout. Wait a minute, I did lie throughout, as I believe I mentioned. For fiction is a lie, and what is wrong with that? It is a lie to say I could not live without you, since live I evidently do. I believe. And when God says, art imitates life, excuse me but, He could be lying too. Or, I could have lied when I said He said that. Or, as Forhan and the Nebulites, who believe in the space between things, would have it: he said That.

Well! Speaking of neutrinos. The news was, evidently they had real mass, and the proof was, they could change. Perhaps [Hide 'n' Save] did not have real mass after all, for it had remained the same for at least 15 yrs, and why not? For it was perfect. Rudy had changed; in fact, who had changed more than Rudy? So he evidently had the most real mass of all. Yet I had changed too. After all the years with Rudy, I sounded less like mineself than those Canadian hippies did.

And you? Well, it was hard to say, as I had never seen you. Yet I could see that you had changed, too. You did not want me for different reasons at different times. Initially you did not want me because you could not see anything in me. Later you did not want me because I was useful. And I was such a bargain, too. For you could have had me for nothing. You didn't want me for nothing. You didn't want me for anything. You were a real piece of work.

And I could not live without you.

Yet live I did. So! I had done one more thing which was technically impossible. Unless I lied when I said I could not live without you. Or I could have lied when I said that live I did. Wait a minnit. Here we go again. I did lie. I believe.

I did not lie about you, though. For it is certainly true that you didn't know I was alive. I knew you were, though. And it is true you could have had me for nothing. Talk about cheap! I was still waiting by the phone! Or would have been, had I had a phone . . .

Oh God! For, speaking of nothing, it only now occurred to me that those Canadian hippies might be you. Oh God! I forgot to ask them!

So! I reconsidered, you see. So! I was standing on this ledge and begun to feel dizzy,

naturally. Well! I begun to turn around. For arguably if I hurried, the hippies might still be in the street below, and I could ask them if they were you. So I did labor to make mine return past the garbage I had stored over the years. The soda was gone, it is true, but the milk carton from 1988 did remain. And there was rotten fruit here, too.

Well! We all know the story where the suicide changes her mind but on the way back from the ledge slips on a banana peel and . . . . .

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Heh, heh.

This is not that story.  
Duh.  
I wrote it!