

# MEMORIES OF THINGS PAST

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When he met her she was playing the flute. He touched her hair.

I have to go home, she said. I'll go too. If you like, she said. We'll meet my mother.

They walked behind the school. She was quiet. He always knew her to be quiet. He looked up the hill where her house was. She talked about her flute.

They looked out the window. The ocean was angry. He touched her hair. I like your eyes, he said. She said nothing. She would hardly talk, even when he knew her a long time. He liked to talk. She smiled later that day. He tried to kiss her. She looked out the window.

The porch overlooked Temescal Canyon. The brush was dry and brown and gray. The stream could be heard, a faint trickle. The wild buckwheat was blooming. He touched her hair. She looked out over the ocean. There's Catalina, she pointed. He nodded. There was no fire in that day.

She held tight to her chair. The porch was reddish wood, but not redwood. The sparrows were flitting through the canyon. They would go walking soon. She looked away.

Up the canyon is a stand of black-walnut trees. We'll pick walnuts. She looked out at the island. I like to swim, but only when it's hot. He touched her hair.

They crossed the bridge. She played the flute. She was playing the flute a lot, he thought. He had his own way of doing things. She was another person. She was playing Bach. He played the same piece. They played duets, along the fire road. He felt a wave of heat.

The sun beat down, as it always did up the canyon. It was always hotter up the canyon. The water was gone in summer. He used to see frogs; he liked the bluejays, and the beehive.

She played the flute when he first saw her. She was fifteen. He touched her hair. He smiled.

The bridge was old. He always went there. Just when he began to find a new way to try things he would forget. He liked her mother and always talked to her while she was studying or looking at the island. Sometimes he took his oboe up the road and played Japanese melodies. He wanted to tell her but where would he begin, on such a hot day, when she would not talk. He played his oboe a lot. She played the flute, and then he saw he was starting to be like her again.

He was alone, somewhere else, his oboe in the closet, it was also hot, the canyon was hot and far away, he was thinking about her, he was touching her hair. He was walking up the canyon past the two peach trees. Funny, he thought. I've been coming here half my life and never noticed them. The blue small flowers were out, and the wild cucumbers with their green soft spines and yellow flowers but not both at the same time of

course. The stream was dried up now, except near the bridge. He tried avoiding her. She never talked anyway. Still he knew he liked her only it shouldn't have mattered but it did. He improvised a little on the scale c d e-flat g a-flat c with the beautiful minor sound that if you changed the e-flat to e-natural you got a Balinese or Javanese sound. Balinese music, his teacher said, was loud and percussive--a stimulant. Javanese music was quiet and meditative: you drank tea and lay down and dreamed and listened to red-cushioned mallets striking thud thud thud on tuned bronze gongs. He touched her hair.

She turned across the porch. He wanted her to smile.

He met her in school. He knew her sisters. She was younger, played her flute on the bridge over the drying-up stream; quiet sad Japanese melodies. He tried to like himself, but the more he went on the more he liked her. They played a little. She played the e-natural and he the e-flat and the blend of Japanese and Javanese was smooth and graceful. He stopped playing and stood still, trying to remember what it was about him that was different. He looked across the bridge and walked in that direction, leaving her behind. Then she put in the e-flat.

She had studied in India. She climbed after him. He was getting tired, starting to give up. What would it be like, he wondered, if he were calm. He looked at her and did not touch her hair but thought instead about the air in his house and the way he was looking for the way to play so he would be unlike anyone.

What if you sound like others, does it matter, and he touched her hair and drew his hand away.

She played the flute and he knew he liked playing with her in Temescal Canyon and also sitting with her on her porch or talking with her mother. They sat at the counter drinking milk and eating apples or cookies looking over the canyon or down the canyon to the ocean or over the ocean to Catalina. Now he knew what he was doing.

She was playing her flute they were playing in the canyon past the bridge on the hot dry road in ninety-two-degree summer heat with little water and the scrub jays flitting after berries and the sun directly overhead. He stopped for a moment and touched her hair, and touched it again, and he took away her flute and kissed her, and the ground felt hard the sky looked blue when he opened his eyes she was smiling a little now but not talking because she hardly ever did. He gave her back her flute and for a moment he thought he had been himself more than ever before.

He was playing the Bach again, and she walked down the hill ahead of him, slowly. Then they crossed the oak bridge built for fire trucks. On the porch he was talking to her but he had lost it.

How old are you? he asked. Do you like the stars, or the moon. I'm scared, she said. The ocean looks incredible when there's a red tide and you're high, he said. You seem older, she said, and then it came back to him. They were on the beach at the foot of the canyon. They had climbed down a steep path. He was stroking her hair, she was smiling now.

She was smiling touching his neck her hands were refreshing. He wanted to swim she was there first. She was younger, didn't think as much as he did, just did things she liked to do without thinking. He was always shy.

They looked at the red tide coming in and when it ebbed the flashing green diatoms rushed out in the curl of the waves. He tried to make things orderly, but she said he should just kiss her when he felt like it, even though it was difficult for him if she didn't show him some sign first. But she laughed and he kissed her, their backs pressing into the yellowish-white soft sand. They scooped up handfuls of wet sand and watched the diatoms green sparkling in the darkness. It was breezy and warm.

He could not maintain the intensity she was a virgin she was going to stay a virgin he was scared to try anything on the beach.

Why did he return there that night, years later, if not to look at the place they sat and wonder what happened, what didn't happen. The past was long ago he didn't know if it even happened of course it had. It was the same with who he was: he couldn't remember, he couldn't remember what he was looking for; he was a character in a story. The person directing him would not could not did not know how to get there himself and was using him. Was there anything? What is on the beach, up the steep wall, her house, the porch? Today her mother is sitting looking over the Pacific at Catalina. The canyon is there but different. It's going to be a park. There are fences now, and people, and the small white houses inside the grounds before the trail begins--the small white houses, I wonder if they're there. Why do I go there today? There are places I want to go, other places, but where are they? I am not looking for the girl with the flute. I am not looking for my childhood.

No, he said to her, I am not. He touched her hair and kissed her and she looked across the canyon which sometimes seemed wide as a valley and they were walking up the valley to the fork in the road and they turned left together, playing their Japanese and Javanese melodies. They were looking out across the Pacific Ocean feeling the breeze coming down the canyon. It was silent, absolutely silent.

She hardly talked and he talked a lot and he did not know why he was there except that someone had put him there and had not asked him and he was aware of someone making him touch her hair again and again as if to remember the touch. He was no longer afraid of where he was now, sitting and thinking far away. He was different. I don't want to think about her. I want to forget yet I go back because I am sent. Then he knew he loved her.

She never talked she played flute in the canyon: she too had been sent. He was walking up the road alone, feeling some resolution near, he didn't know if it would come or when.

She was in high school and then he saw it all repeating again.

When he first saw her he wanted her she was fifteen a virgin that was 1966 Christmas time he loved her she didn't love him never smiled never talked liked to kiss for hours, he frustrated trying to get away before it was too late. He had lived in San Francisco but he didn't know about free love, he was shy. His whole life he was shy upset and

withdrawn. She played her flute he talked to her about drugs and the ocean he was high he had never known free love. It didn't matter where he had been what he had done he had never known free love. He touched her hair, she looked across the narrow canyon they sat on the porch looking at the stars. He knew it would be hard to stop.

He is making me go again and again, he said. I am here for him not for you. Who is he? she asked, breaking a long silence. He sent me to touch your hair until he remembers. But who is he? she asked, again and again. They got out the telescope and pointed it at Mars. I want to look at my planet, he said in the dim starlight around them over the porch. The milk was gone, and most of the apples. Down on the beach, they saw people walking along soft sand holding hands kicking tiny green sparks out of the wet sand whenever they went down to where the water was breaking. A hot wind blew down the canyon. The stand of black walnut trees rustled. The beehive stirred. The small white houses creaked. The sycamores swayed gently. It was quiet, up Temescal Canyon. No one had been there in a million years.