

Craig: List Me

Short story by Allison Fine
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Music Up: Peter Gabriel *Shaking the Tree* “Don’t Give Up”

Colors: Saffron and Magenta

Car: VW Jetta, new, whatever the current year is

Movie: “Inception”

TV Show: “Mad Men” (for me: nostalgic)

Road Sign: Yield

Writer: Faulkner and/or Thomas Pynchon

Quote: “One is either living a little more or dying a little bit.”

Religion: Buddhist with a touch of Jew, Christian & Platonist

Line Spacing: Triple

Craig, I must tell you. I am advertising in the “Platonic Friends” Section because I have no choice. Life is difficult and then you find yourself (sorry *yourself*) bulleted, aligned, spaced and disregarded. I may be older than the average, obviously older than you, and you are the average are you not? Or, well—what is the average in this global market? Is this a global market, or a comically *Golden Market*? The fatted calf is swollen, waiting for the tide to strip off the meat, and maybe an Abraham to come down and see “Knock it off! I gotta couple’ a rules here.” Oh, that’s wishful thinking. No interventions, right? Just more of the same the same the same, the same.(Repeat loop endlessly)

Craig, I may be over sixty but I’m still dreaming. When the flood comes I have a band-aid. I call it the wisdom of suffering. Kind of like your grandmother—*bubbe*? Remember her? And have I got a *bubbe maise* to tell you! A tale of the ghetto I live in—you know, the ghetto of the old? That invisible invented space where you all pushed us when we got too old to carry children and too young to die? Oh, sorry, you didn’t know you put us here—you thought we went here voluntarily! I mean, don’t we like to retire

and hang out with the hanging flesh and dropping eyes crowd—just like our own? We all want to flock together with those birds, right?

I really get nostalgic over Plato's philosophy of the ideal archetype. And here I am! The idealized archetype in the flesh! Divine, not human, only appearing to be so, a trusted teacher and a friend, a lover, a sexual dynamo, but ok. Teacher. Mentor. Educator. Coach. Spiritual Adviser. This is a place for the non-carnal intentions—sorry to transgress. Forgive me Craig, I still want and crave upon occasion. In my mind's eye, I am beautiful. Do you want to see me? Craig! Answer! Please! I am almost lost!

Archetypal Woman

From Craig to Archetypal Woman:

I can almost see you; a kind of 60+ cougar right? You: loaded right, and maybe bored? Me too. I am bored. I hate my job. I am a Printing Press Machine Operator. There are a still a few of us left. I offset lithographic presses, letter or letterset presses, flexographic or gravure presses, I produce print on paper or other materials such as plastic, cloth, or rubber. That's my day job. My real vocation is acting. I've been in over a hundred plays, maybe more, a couple of films and TV commercials, I've got a presence here, know what I mean? I have a lot of friends too. Friends. Platonic. But boy, could I use a Cougar!

Whaddaya think?

Boy Biotic

To: Boy Biotic

I am not sure what your name means. What is Biotic? And what is a Cougar? Is that an archetype? I am lost here. I am not, as one person put it, a “natural sexy ‘oral giver’ whatever that means, and is that Platonic anyway? Friend, O Friend, Where Art Thou Friend? Where is the friend to pull flat twists into my hair, listen to Beethoven with, someone to enjoy life in the “in between land?”

To Cougar: What is an archetype? I am lost here. Clue me in. Also, where is “in between” land? Is it near Indiana? I have an ex-girlfriend from said State.

Boy Biotic

To Boy Biotic: I am not a Cougar. Stop calling me that. An Archetype does not a Cougar make. “In-Between Land” is that space between life and death. I thought that was self-evident. How old are you?

Woman Archetype

To Cougar Woman Archetype: I am 32.

Boy Biotic

To: Boy Biotic: I am angry. Can you take that?

To CWA: Of course. I love an angry woman. It often translates to Flaming Lips etc. and all that.

Boy Biotic

To BB: Are you playing me?

CWA

To CWA: NO.

BB

To BB: BB used to stand for Bridget Bardot? Ring a bell?

CWA

To CWA: No. Before my time. I am playing you somewhat. You need to lighten up.

How 'bout it? Face time eh?

BB

To BB: No "face time" as you put. I am somewhere between sixty and God. I've never had plastic surgery.

CAW=Cougar Archetypal Woman, or Crow as in "Caw Caw Caw!"

To CAW CAW: Face time or I cut you off.

BB

CAW: Cut me off. I am unafraid. What have I got to lose? I am already alone or we wouldn't be having this "conversation."

BB: Why did you put conversation in quotes? Look, what's the problem here? Is it fear of Sex? Are you afraid to undress in front of a stranger? Do you have body-image issues? Are you afraid of orgasm? Or fearful you can't have one or you might die having one?

CAW: I am throwing your emails into the spam bin. Never email me again or I will call the authorities.

BB: What authorities? The Spam Police? You can't run away from yourself.

To Craigslist List Editor/Help Desk: I saw an ad for a Housecleaner under the writing/editing section of Jobs. This is upsetting! Are you trying to suggest that writers must be housecleaners because none of them can make money as writers? This may be TRUE but are YOU suggesting it, because, because—well, it isn't you, is it? It's the person who placed the ad so I should really address my vitriolic anger at them.

IF YOU NEED PERSON CLEAN YOUR HOUSE...PLEASE EMAIL ME.....THANK YOU

Location: Stamford.

Is this Stamford Connecticut? For God's sake not even New York? And what grammar!
If you need—person—it should be “if you need A person...” Oh well.

BB: I miss you. I just found out I have Cancer. My mother wants me to come upstate to stay with her but perish the thought. She was an OK mother but I don't want to die in my mother's arms. This is not how I imagined things would be. I had everything to look forward to and now I have nothing to look forward to.

CAW: This is terrible. What kind of cancer?

BB: I won't do this in public.

CAW: All right. Face time is in order. I live in Brooklyn. Where do you live?

BB: Brooklyn.

CAW: Brooklyn's a big place. Shall I come to you? Will you come to me? Give me your phone number.

BB: Numbers are not exchanged on Craigslist. Give me your address. I will snail mail you my information, all right? We can arrange something.

Some Days Later:

Kevin Levinski, a young looking, rather handsome man of 32 arrives fifteen minutes late for his lunch date with Mary Shea, a sixty year old hottie wearing a blue jean mini skirt, magenta tights and three inch Payless designer heels. They meet at the Heights Café on Montague Street, near her place in Brooklyn Heights, although he has to travel from his place in Williamsburg. Kevin looks disheveled, as if he hadn't slept in a week,

and his skin is the color of egg and ash. Mary takes one look at him and all her sexual thoughts go right out the window. She wants to mother him. Is it possible?

She is sitting in the far back corner reading a two-week old *New Yorker*, an article about short men. Kevin is 5'10" tall—he's in the middle somewhere, so short is not his problem. What is his problem? She looks up to see a scared young man holding a book in one arm and his satchel loosely thrown over his left shoulder, looking down at her.

"Kevin? Sit, sit!"

He sits.

"Do you really have cancer?"

"Yeah." Kevin says. "I want some coffee."

Mary stirs her latte with the wooden stick thing she got from the counter. Kevin goes to get his coffee and Mary forgets to breathe until he gets back. Some minutes later this shaking, scared young man is sitting in front of her, nursing a coffee, his satchel slumped forlornly on the floor next to her left foot. The satchel is dark red, "burnished red" the ads call it, with a snap front and a long shoulder strap.

"Nice Satchel, Kevin."

"My mom got it for me. On line."

"She loves you."

"Yeah." He takes a long, slow drink of coffee and looks around the café; eyes of deep dark green framed with blond lashes, curly, medium brown hair. The boy is a lovely young man and he has a terrible thing going on.

"This isn't fair. It should be me, not you."

"My dad died two years ago."

“Of cancer?”

“No, he had congestive heart failure. He was waiting for a transplant but he died first.”

“I’m sorry.”

“He was 58. I thought he’d live forever. So did my mom. He owned the Light and Lively Dry Cleaner in Williamsburg. We’re famous—for our light and lively service or whatever.”

“Are you going to take over the business?”

“My mom sold it. We owed money on the house. She needed cash.”

“What does she do?”

“She’s a retired nurse but now she has to work. She’s working for a private company and hires out to do home care for the elderly. She moved upstate to be close to my sister and my Aunt. “

“How old is she?”

“Fifty-four.”

“Wow. Lord, I wonder what I’d do if I had to work.”

“Are you rich?”

“No, but I have an income. My ex-husband takes care of things. He left me for a twenty-eight year old actuary and feels guilty. I milk it for all its worth, you know. Probably mercenary, but I stayed home for twenty five years taking care of him, and I think he owes me!”

“No kids?”

“No kids. He was the kid.”

“Would you take care of me if you had to?”

“I’d take care of you no matter what. “

“I have to leave my job and my apartment. I can’t keep working and my roommate can’t support me. I’m going to the hospital on Thursday. Wanna come with me?”

“All right.”

With a sudden and swift decision Mary leaps into the unknown, something like a dream but with the ragged awful edge of reality to it. There is fear and all kinds of mixed up feelings and emotions that really scare her silly, but somehow she knows that there’s really no choice to the matter at all. It has already been concluded sometime before, perhaps in a boardroom of fantastic characters that do discussions and things about human beings while they float three inches above the ground. All she knows is the sad and soft sweetness of Kevin’s face; the simple manner in which he asks her to jump onto the running board; his life and possibly his death and something else she feels excited to touch. Ecstasy? Could there be sexual innuendo? Is she crazy or worse, depraved? This fierce but sacred moment slaps around her face like a taut wind on urban winter days. She has the understanding of that. Plus she knows anomie well, having entertained the boredom of her age quite long enough, thank you! The terrier of ennui has set in for a long stay in her life, barking incessantly as small terriers do, and there are no more opportunities for escape.

Looking at Kevin’s profile as he looks at her black plastic shoes with the yellow rubber heels and soles, there is a sudden gust of wind inside her stomach. I could love this man, she thinks, and I could take care of him at the same time. Perhaps it will be his

last fling and mine too! *We will dive off the Grand Canyon into the sky like Thelma and Louise!* A romantic thought, but needless. His cough brings her back down to the scruffy floor, his brown sensible shoes and the polite murmur of the Heights Café.

“I’m gay,” Kevin announces softly.

“Oh.”

“Not that it matters. I just think you should know. “

“All right. But I think I love you. Does that matter?”

“I was bi-sexual in High School, but since I was twenty-one it’s been exclusively men.”

“So this isn’t going to be your last fling.”

He laughs. “Oh yeah, right! I already had that. I just responded to the Craigslist ad because I liked your tone,” he answers her unasked question.

“I’ve never taken care of anything except Cooper and my jade plants,” she adds, taking a long sip of the latte.

“Cooper?”

“My ex. He’s a lawyer by day and a science fiction writer by weekends. He got one of his stories published in *Asimov’s Science Fiction*. They’ve been going for thirty years. It was a great honor. He thought it might lead to a book contract but it never did and then he met the Actuary, Monique. His full-length novel is a mess anyway. I read it. It falls apart in the middle and keeps changing tenses. His main character is a flop.”

“You mean his main character is a loser?”

“No, he’s supposed to be some great scientist or something, but Cooper just couldn’t pull it together. The character sounds more like him, a lawyer, than a scientist and he’s not convincing anyway. No emotional clarity.”

“Are you a writer?”

She is silent.

“All right. You are. Maybe famous. Right?”

“I taught music to deaf children for fifteen years.”

“How do you teach music to the deaf?”

“Sound vibration. Up from the floor. They feel it. And dance to it. Hebrew Institute for the Deaf, Avenue 1. “

“Are you Jewish?”

She laughs a raucous laugh. “Mary Shea? That sound Jewish to you?”

“No.”

“Irish Catholic all the way. Up from Boston. Met Cooper at Brooklyn College—we were both students there—him, pre law, me, Music Composition.”

“What instrument?”

“Flute, piano, a little viola. Aaron Blayer was my teacher. He was great.”

“How did you end up teaching—“

“Let’s table this discussion, can we Kevin? It’s about 2 blocks to my place. Wanna come over? I have some leftover meatloaf and we can sit down at the great big dining table and hash over every little detail of our silly little lives!”

“Ok,” Kevin, reluctant, but sad, a little wise, wary, still, he likes the crinkles around her eyes.

“I warn you—I am looking for a Fitzgerald kind of epiphany,” he tells her as they leave the café and head out to her brownstone on Myrtle Street off Flushing.

“What does a Fitzgerald epiphany look like?”

“Civilized people going to pieces, laughter “rising toward the summer sky...” the appearance of true and total joy unhampered by guilt or expectation or pragmatic thoughtful repose. You know, drunken people who are rich and dress well.”

“Civilized people are constantly going to pieces—I thought that was what civilization was all about. Put quotation marks around civilization, ok?”

“Drunken *white people* I should add.”

“Does it make a difference?”

“Most definitely.”

“Drunk is drunk, in my book. I grew up with alcoholics. Everyone in my family was a drunk. Except me.”

“Oh. An unfortunate childhood.”

“Not so bad. We laughed a lot! Cried a lot! My dad finally died at forty-nine of being drunk too long—liver and kidneys just gave out. My mother grieved, then she got herself a younger guy who stole all the insurance money dad left her and she died.”

They walk on and on. She almost regrets leaving her car at home.

“It could be a novel if we have time. But more likely, a short story.”

“I have no intentions of writing my memoirs,” she tells him.

“That’s OK, I’ll write them for you.”

“Can you do that?”

They round the corner and her home is in view.

“Here we are,” she says, a trifle tired suddenly, drawing her breath in small gasps.

Up the stairs, to the door, in the keys caressing the double lock, punch the number code into the alarm system in the hallway and—

“This is it,” said with a sweeping arm.

“It’s enormous.”

“We got a good deal in 1984. It’s paid for now. Just property taxes. He pays them, of course.”

“He must love you somewhere.”

“He has faith in the original work—you know, what we had when we were nineteen and—“

“Like the Gatsby people. The Fitzgerald People.”

“Perhaps.”

He follows her with a touch of melancholy and a slight drag to his feet from the foyer to the lovely warm, golden-lit dining area with the *etageres* theatrically displaying collector plates from all over the world. Then to the kitchen—warm smells, a hint of garlic and basil, glass and tile and wood and appliances that gleam and shine, much as he hopes they will in heaven where he plans to go, no matter what, if he believed in it, but his cynicism does not allow it.

“I want to adapt to this, but I am not sure I can,” he tells her.

“Sit down at the table, I’ll serve you the best meal you’ve had in years. I’m a great cook and I’ve taken cooking classes on and off for twenty years. I could be the head chef of a restaurant if I wanted to.”

“Why don’t you want to?”

“I don’t know.”

“You can be the writer of **my** story. How’s that?”

“I told you, I don’t write. Dance, music, cooking—that’s it! Enough, don’t you think?” she says this to a strange guy sitting at her kitchen table, a large, thick plank of wood Harry Stein made for them when they first got married, a plank with knot holes and knife nicks and a couple of dark stains. A warm, hard, thick kind of table that spells *permanent*. She reaches into the enormous double-sided silver Sears refrigerator with the ice and water taps and the pull out freezer on the bottom pulling out onions, two carrots and a handful of kale and begins chopping it all with an enormous Ginsu knife on the chopping board next to the sink.

“So, you can write my story?” he asks again, strangely not listening to her answers.

“Oh hell—forget that! I can’t write a shopping list! I go blank with words and a piece of paper! Give me food and spice and a thousand mouths to feed!” She says this as she bends over, her ass reaching to the ceiling, the spandex tights underneath the short jean skirt pulling tight against the ample cushions of her buttocks. He notices but says nothing.

Up she comes with a large crock-pot and a long chafing dish, wrapped, and several plates heaped with things that look good to eat if they are warm and happy. *Like, you are sitting in her kitchen*, he muses.

“Get ready for gastronomic orgasm!”

“It’s not Cancer, Mary, it’s AIDS.”

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Music Up: "Someone to Watch Over Me"

Colors: Black and Gray

Car: Buick Regal

Movie: Angels in America

T.V. Show: Nurse Jackie

Road Sign: Handicap Loading and Unloading Only

Writer: F. Scott Fitzgerald

Quote: "In the real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning, day after day."

Religion: Catholic

Line Spacing: Single

The hospital room was not an exciting place to be. Mary was in over her head and she knew it. This "dying thing" as she called it was not really her bag, although her life would surely be characterized as a mixed bag. Getting left, harried moments running around doing too much for other people, (living people), wishing she had a quiet moment and then when quiet moments came fidgeting like crazy unable to handle the thoughts racing in her head—the fear of nothingness, the fear that it would all be over—she'd rather be in the fray, she told her friends. And in the fray she was. But here, in this room where Kevin was struggling to keep breathing, machines and I.V.'s everywhere, Mary was truly out of her element. Every time his eyes opened she saw the terror in the blue irises, the sadness and the fright and the question—*where am I going and what will I be doing?* The question hung in the air between Mary on the chair and Kevin in the bed.

"Why can't they open windows in hospitals?" she asked and Kevin smiled a little smile. She went over to the window to somehow force it but a nurse walked in as she was trying with all her energy to pull the window open.

"You can't do that," said the nurse, a forty-something African American woman with large dangly earrings, a beautiful smooth face; deep burgundy lip stain and a bottle

of moisturizer in her right hand. “Try putting this on his legs, and feet and hands and arms—his skin is very dry. It feels good, doesn’t it?” addressing Kevin. He nodded.

The touch of skin to skin--the contact--Mary feared she could not maintain the distance she needed to move on with her life if this happened, and hadn’t she had enough loss anyway?

Reluctantly grabbing the bottle from—what’s her name?—*Shenequa* said the name tag—Mary spurted some replenishing, hydrating cream onto her hands, gingerly lifting the sheet from over Kevin’s legs, and began rubbing the cream into the translucent white skin, blond hair freckled over the legs, the sad mournful ankles barely able to support his little body, emaciated now, even after all the weeks and weeks of cooking she did for him. His skin was like a robin’s egg, the feet and toes lay dormant, barely moving as she rubbed cream all over them. Shenequa, satisfied with the result of her commission, left the room after passing a hand lightly across Kevin’s face, as if to smooth out the fear, and spoke with a low voice Mary could barely hear, “It’s gonna be all right now, son.”

Finally Kevin’s mother arrived, later in the day. He had been in the hospital four days and Mary did not want to call her. Kevin finally took it upon himself to use Mary’s cell phone while she was down in the cafeteria eating a crab salad and coffee and dialed his mother, leaving a message on the voice mail: “Hi this is Carol—I’m not available, you know what to do.” Did he know what to do?

“Mom, it’s Kevin. I’m in Brooklyn Hospital. Room 814. Can you come and see me?” He hung up after this, after thinking for some moments, there was really nothing more to say. He’d tell her everything when she got there. Or nothing.

Music Up: Plants & Animals “Early in the Morning”

Colors: Opalescent White

Car: Tesla

Movie: Ferris Buehler’s Day Off

T.V. Show: Hero

Road Sign: Dead End

Writer: David Foster Wallace

Quote: “The interesting thing is why we're so desperate for this anesthetic against loneliness.”

Religion: Buddhism

Line Spacing: Double, Single, Triple, And Quadruple

For several days Mary had an obsessive need to cook recipes for two: Poulet a la Saucisse, Curried Chipotle Potato, an incredible Pineapple Upside Down cake, Seafood Tangine, Spicy Thai Lobster Soup, Miso-glazed Black Cod in Coconut Broth. The creativity was pouring out of her like never before, getting rid of the pain and the pleasure until she was completely numb. Across the street on the avenue leading to the trashed monument celebrating a forgotten WWII hero who she had forgotten to even notice, she saw a young man with a red satchel out of the corner of her eye. She was sure it was Kevin—it was! Opening the window, despite the cold, she shouted out: “Kevin! Kevin!” The young man kept walking, obviously not hearing her. Running with the kind of speed she would have dubbed “desperation” down the steps, out the door, she was somehow able to catch up with the red satchel carrier and tap him lightly on the shoulder from behind. He turned, his face ruddy with the cold, a cigarette tucked over his left ear.

“Hello?” he said, not paranoid, but not exactly happy either.

“I’m sorry. I thought you were someone else.”

The mad dash down to the street had winded her terribly, and it was with an incredible amount of weariness that she entered the kitchen once again, the smell of burning grilled snapper in mango sauce filling up the kitchen, the entire house, her life.

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