



Concrete Illusions

by Ben Amato

“Fiction is fact waiting to happen!” Mr. Deeds stated, bringing his mug down a bit too hard, rattling the breakfast table. The other regulars at the Terrace Café did not look up to see who made the noise. They even knew what Deeds was saying.

“You have to realize how each of us creates our own reality,” Deeds was staring into the bleary eyes of his early morning companion. The teenager slumped in his chair and slowly sipped his coffee.

“We are social animals, destined to exist in communities that foster growth, enlightenment and fulfillment.”

Oh man, it's just too early for this, Thompson thought as he squinted into the morning sun. *Getting up at 7 a.m. is not part of my vacation plan.*

“Would you like some pastries, croissants or cakes?” Helen slid a tray under Thompson’s drooping nose. When she slowly lifted it, the aroma of the fresh baked goods pulled the groggy teen into an upright position.

As he filled his plate, Helen turned her head and gave Deeds a glowing smile.

“I greatly enjoy greeting each new morning with you,” Deeds said sweetly into Helen’s warm gaze.

“Would you like some?” she gracefully moved the tray, and herself, into his reach.

“Not right now,” he politely said, with a slight smile breaking out as he said the last word. “Treats like that are meant to be savored and enjoyed later in the morning. Only the young and foolish wolf down such sweetness in one ravenous bite.”

Deeds turned his gaze from Helen towards the stuffed face of his breakfast mate. She moved off into maze of other tables and hungry diners.

“To get a true picture of yourself, look into the faces of others, not our own reflection in a mirror,” Deeds resumed talking, but his attention shifted back to the waitress. “It’s relationships and the people around us that determines and defines what we really are.”

“Is this another lecture about my friends?” The sugar in the éclair and the topic brought Thompson out of his morning coma.

“The trick is to know yourself and the person you want to be. Surround yourself with good friends, family and associates. Then treat them the way you would like to be treated.” Deeds finally leaned back in his chair, looking as if he had just stated the true secret of life.

“Know thyself,” Thompson mumbled through his pastry, in a bored dead voice dripping with sarcasm and chocolate. He knew some Greek said that. *Or was it Roman or some actor in a film?*

“Good morning Mr. Deeds,” Susan said, as she pulled a chair from a neighboring table and sat down. “Will we be seeing you at the courts today?”

“Late in the afternoon, with the sun just going down,” Deeds stiffened in his seat, at first a bit startled but now rigid with excitement. “Tennis is best after the heat of the day. You’re more relaxed and the competition builds an appetite.”

“Around 5 then. I’m so looking forward to a match.”

“Let’s keep it friendly,” he replied gently. “It’s more fun to play with someone than against them.”

“Up against sounds pretty good to me,” Susan volleyed back, as she jumped to her feet and sprinted away.

Deeds loved how young and fit she looked in her morning jogging suit. Men wear sweats, women grace spandex, he thought. Thank God.

“You have to know what you want,” his eyes followed Susan as she dashed off, “and then you go after it.”

Thompson stuffed another powdered cake into his cheek.

“Look around. Come on, lift your eyes from that plate.” Deeds was trying to coax some conversation on to the table. “It’s a brilliant morning with a warm breeze, perfect to start a new, exciting day. I began to create this moment years ago, when I discovered the three things I really wanted in life. I imagined my perfect world, wrote my own story and now I live it.”

“So what are the three things?” Thompson’s muffled words fell like the crumbs that littered his black “Sex, Drugs and Rock-n-Roll” T-shirt.

“You already know them,” Deeds replied, nodding his head towards the chest of his breakfast companion.

Thompson looked down, noticed what he was wearing and gave out a surprised laugh. It sent a cloud of confectionary sugar from his packed cheeks and both he and Deeds shared a morning giggle.

“We exist through our relationships with others, whether it’s business or pleasure,” Deeds saw Ms. Roberts enter the café and gave a slight wave. “Our real measure of control in life is how we treat others. And that comes back to us in how we are treated. This in turn becomes what we believe ourselves to be.”

I be tired, Thompson thought, as he slumped back down in his seat.

Even the blind could read his body language, so Deeds leaned back away from his lectern of cereal, coffee and juice.

“Visualize your life. See what you want to become and then fulfill that dream.” Deeds punctuated this conclusion with another sip of the coffee, this time setting it gently back on the table. “But you’ve heard me tell you this way too many times,” he added.

I know, thought Thompson, who had to force himself to think it rather than say it aloud.

“Would you like some,” Helen appeared back at Deeds’ side, gently bumping his arm, “more coffee?”

“Always,” replied Deeds, smiling towards and beyond the twin pots Helen held in front of her chest.

“Good morning Mr. Deeds,” said Ms. Roberts as she slid into the empty seat on the other side of him. “How are we feeling today? Chipper, I see,” she added, giving a slightly catty look at Helen.

Helen poured out a cup and feeling the slight chill in the air, moved off. She tossed back a smile to Deeds.

“I’ll be seeing you around noon,” Ms. Roberts said, glancing first down at her clipboard and then to Deeds. “The massage will come first, then the lap pool and then the spa.” She placed her schedule on the table and gently took Deeds’ hand, slipping her slim fingers around his wrist. She felt his pulse begin to race.

“What are you planning today,” Deeds was talking to Thompson but was looking deeply into Ms. Roberts’ blue eyes.

“I’m meeting the guys at the docks,” Thompson said. He thought about a six pack, a couple of doobies and dangling his pole in the water to see what would bite. Strange, he noticed, the sly little smile Ms. Roberts’ had on her tight lips matched his own.

“I never liked fishing,” Deeds replied, submerged in Ms. Roberts’ twin pools of baby blue. “Too much uncertainty leaving it up to the fish. If you want a seafood dinner, give me a snorkel, a spear or a menu.”

That brought a full smile to Ms. Roberts’ lips. Thompson slowly got up, leaving both the last pastry and Deeds.

“I’m heading out,” Thompson said, accenting his words. “I’ll be home late.”

“No problem,” Deeds replied, his smile growing wider by the second. “I’ll be home late, too. I’m having a romantic dinner out.” Deeds turned his head towards Thompson and gave him a short wave.

“Then I guess you’ll be wanting the blue pill too,” Ms. Roberts said in an icy voice. With an annoyed but a bit puzzled look, she filled a small cup with his daily meds and a small little blue one from a small container in her breast pocket.. “Who are you planning on dining with?”

“I’m hoping an evening out is what my doctor ordered.” Deeds said and his smile melted her frozen blue eyes.

Thompson looked back at his grandfather with a feeling of sadness. He felt bad leaving the old guy alone, sitting with his rehab doctor. I would go crazy here, if I was cooped up all day in a home. No friends, no family, nothing to do. It’s a bitch growing old.

He gave his grandpa one more wave and disappeared down the cobblestone walk.

“There’s a lot of you in him,” Ms. Roberts said, reaching out to take his pulse once more. This time her touch was more tender and loving. It was her pulse racing a bit.

Deeds smiled. “Do you have the Stones Greatest Hits CD for later? I’m in the mood for a little Rock-n-Roll.”