

Rega turned her back to the water and felt it caress her head and drench her hair. The water streamed down, and she closed her eyes as it poured over her body. Then the enchanting girl from the mirror was there, and the girl's soft hands swept over Rega's head, down her neck, and in and out over the curves of her breasts and stomach. The girl disappeared as Rega opened her eyes to kiss the water, her lustrous laughter ringing in Rega's ears. She knew it had been the same girl who called to her in the den, and she remembered the longing she had felt when her dream ended. Rega stood for several minutes listening to the water crash down on her, trying to hear the laugh again. Steam seemed to leap out of her skin, arising from the heat of the burning water and the cold air. Her eyes closed; she let the water play with her face, drip down her arms, tingle her breasts, soak her legs, and glide off her toes to the drain. Rega reached for the shampoo. With soapy hands, she slowly massaged her head, sudsing up her hair until it felt thick and foamy. The water became blindly jealous and with rage shot down hard to rid her of the shampoo, but the victory did not last long since Rega already had the conditioner in her hands. In the end, the water won and all traces of the struggle were gone, washed over the hills of Rega's breasts and the hole of her belly button into the tub basin. She enjoyed the sensual pleasure of the water's victory, and ran her hands over her hair one last time.

Before the idea of staying under the water a little longer completely surfaced, Rega turned off the faucet. One last dribble fell to the drain. Letting the cold air rush in and freeze her wet skin, she pulled aside the shower curtain and reached for a freshly washed towel. It was fluffy and soft to the touch, not rough and flat from overuse. Rega patted her face dry and ran the towel over her arms before flipping her hair in front of her. She rubbed the towel over her breasts, into her stomach, down one leg, and up the next. She dried her back, and wrapped the towel around her head. Wide awake from the shower, Rega climbed out of the tub and back into the bathroom. The shower had left behind a room of steam that caressed her naked skin. The hands that ripped off Rega's

## The Girl, Part Two

by Jennifer Poorbaugh

shirt reached down for it, pulling it against her leg to her stomach. The vibrant girl was there in the mirror, too. The girl looked out at Rega and smiled. Rega smiled, too, and moved closer to stare into the girl's blue, ember-like eyes again. But she blinked and the girl was gone.

Rega moved down the hallway to her room again, her naked image growing larger and clearer in the mirror at the end of the hallway. A few inches from it, she reached out to touch the girl's smooth, warm face, but appearing so suddenly, the girl was gone just as quickly. Rega shuffled across the room and slid on some black underwear and her favorite black bra from her dresser drawer. She moved toward the closet slipping on the first shirt her hand grasped. Rega heard the girl's brilliant laughter calling, and she turned back to her dresser. As she



pulled out her favorite pair of jeans from another drawer and slipped them on, Rega looked into the mirror. There was the girl, smiling and laughing. The girl's eyes twinkled as she flirted with Rega. Rega smiled as the girl beckoned with a waving hand for Rega to join her, but Rega shook her head, and the towel fell to the floor. Rega couldn't go no matter how much she had wanted to be with the girl in her dream. As the girl disappeared, Rega whispered, "Good-bye, my lovely friend," and grabbed a book off her desk, moving off through her beige room to the front door.

Rega ran through the cool, morning breeze into the woods near her house. She lay down in a sunlit spot on the mossy bank next to the little waterfall where she read her books and bit into a fresh apple she had grabbed off the kitchen table. For an hour or two she read, laughing occasionally at the events in her book. But her imagination began to run away, turning her into a character

from the book with her own plot of adventures and near deaths. Rega rolled over on her back, sliding an arm under her head. Her book remained near her, open to a now forgotten page of fantasy, the bookmark thrown aside. As she traveled through enemy territory, crossing dangerous rivers and leaping small ravines, Rega's mind wandered farther away from the book's setting. She soon forgot the other characters and flew into the sky to escape her pursuers. Soon even they were left behind, and Rega landed softly on the secluded bed of moss.

Rega's happiness radiated outward, filling the small clearing in the forest as she sang and talked to herself, alone yet not alone. Were she asked where her happiness came from, who knows what the answer would be? Maybe she would reply by hugging the person who asked and attempting to explain her joy at simply being alive. Or maybe Rega would point to the waterfall, the water so close she could feel the spray misting her skin. But since no one passed by, the question was unasked, and Rega remained alone. In her mind, she was free. She was free from time, from rules, from society. Knowing she was free, her laughter rang clearly across the field. A soft laughter, one of joy. Every time Rega saw a new cloud pass over the treetops, she traced it with her finger. If someone had been close to her, they might have heard Rega describing what she saw, not only the shape of the cloud but its personality. She may have even been conversing with it, commenting on its fluffy dress or asking where the wind might be taking it.

Rega closed her eyes, dreaming of the girl from her morning's dream. She wished the girl were with her to share the day. Rega smiled and murmured, "I love you," but then she grew lonely, not able for a time to keep herself company, and fell to listening to the wind. Standing up after her long rest on the cool ground was daunting, but Rega didn't show it. She brushed the moss off her clothes and picked up her book, carefully replacing the bookmark on the right page. Then, as she looked around the clearing once more, Rega set the book down again and slipped off her shoes. She refused to let her day be destroyed just because the

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