

MARTA

By Jerold London

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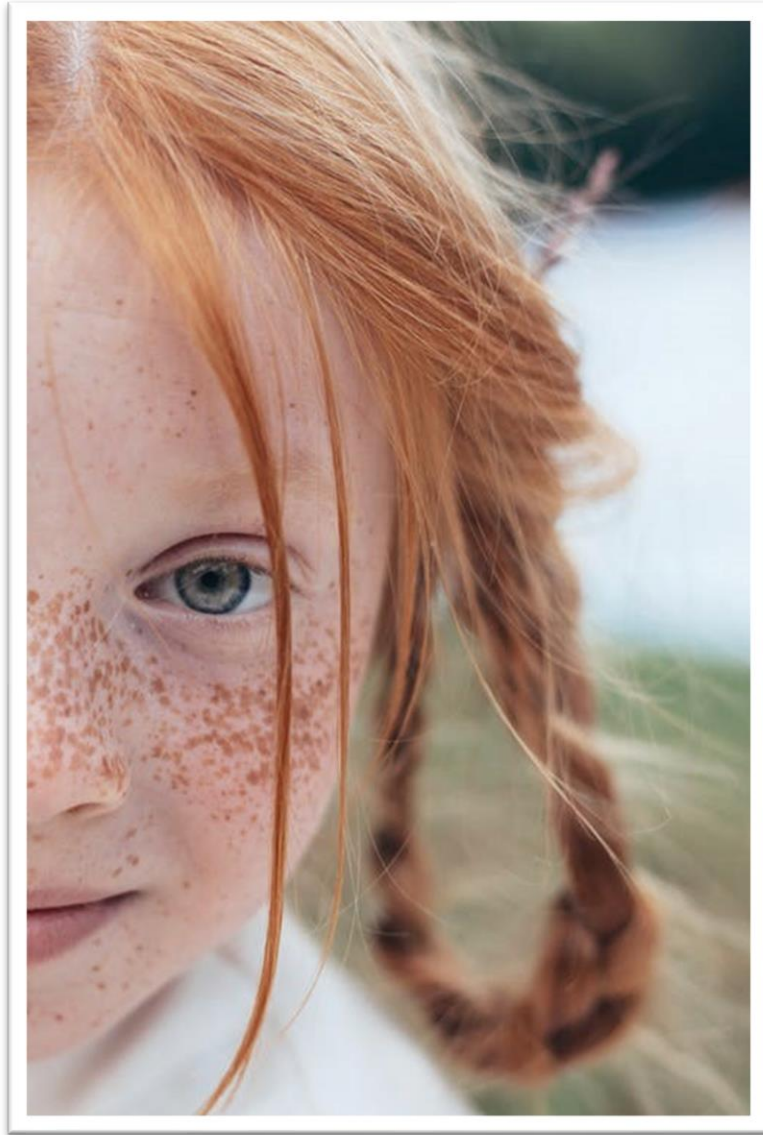


Photo by Ron Lach from Pexels

Remorse is memory awake. While seeking revenge, dig two graves.
– Emily Dickinson – Douglas Horton

MARTA

TIME AND PLACE

Late spring or early summer, noticed by trees and flowers in bloom.
A path. Hills, maybe even mountains, in the distance.

CHARACTERS

KNOWN, a man in somewhat later years with a backpack.

UNKNOWN, a woman in somewhat later years with a backpack.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

SCENE

KNOWN and UNKNOWN are walking side-by-side.

KNOWN

There are many things get forgotten. I do remember that.
Their telling me that.

UNKNOWN

So you've said.

KNOWN

But I can't remember exactly what. What things get forgotten.
I forget. Have I told you that?

UNKNOWN

If you could remember them, they wouldn't be forgotten.

KNOWN

I spose not.
I mean, I spose when they said forgotten they must have meant truly forgotten.
Not just a lapse of memory thing.

UNKNOWN

What you haven't told me, I don't think, is: Why?

KNOWN

Part of the choice, it must be. Part of the compact. I don't know.
This is such strange territory for me.

UNKNOWN

I'm not so sure I'm so glad you brought me along.

KNOWN

Did I? Did I bring you along? Really?...
What I remember is, you were walking along, and we started talking.
About not remembering. Because we had the same experience, walking along.

UNKNOWN

No. I know for a fact you asked me.

KNOWN

When? When did I ask you?

UNKNOWN

When we were younger.

KNOWN

I knew you then? When we were younger?

UNKNOWN

Must have.

KNOWN

I'm sorry. I don't remember that.

UNKNOWN

That would have hurt my feelings, once. I'm certain of it.
For you to forget that, about me. What made you say such a heartless thing?

KNOWN

No hurt intended, I assure you. I had no idea it was heartless. Sorry.

UNKNOWN

Nonetheless, it would have hurt.

KNOWN

I don't think I even know your name.

UNKNOWN

Looks at the palm of her right hand.

"Unknown." What's yours?

KNOWN

Looks at the palm of his right hand.

"Known."

UNKNOWN

Not much has changed, has it?

KNOWN

Since when?

UNKNOWN

Since whenever.

KNOWN

What do you mean?

UNKNOWN

The man's name is always known, and the woman's is unknown.

KNOWN

Well, there's some comfort in that.

UNKNOWN

I guess so.

KNOWN

[*pause*] I remember their telling me one more thing.

UNKNOWN

What's that?

KNOWN

I'll be happier not knowing.

UNKNOWN

Not knowing what?

KNOWN

What I bargained away.

UNKNOWN

You bargained it away?
Your memory?

KNOWN

Parts of it.

UNKNOWN

Something you didn't want to remember.

KNOWN

Must have been.

I wouldn't bargain away what I wanted to remember, would I?

UNKNOWN

I don't know. I don't think I know you that well.

KNOWN

You probably did the same thing.

UNKNOWN

Not that I remember.

KNOWN

I guess they did a better job on you....

I figure I'm a man of familiar years to yours,

and that there was something haunting us we couldn't get out of our minds.

And we came to them, and I guess, asked.

Or, more likely, they asked us:

What's the one thing in your life you would most want to change, if you could?

And I told them. Whatever it was. And you told them the same thing, probably.

And it's gone. Along with most everything else.

And that's why we're walking here.

UNKNOWN

You've thought about it that much?

KNOWN

Must have.

UNKNOWN

And it's made you happier?

KNOWN

Must have....

How about you?

UNKNOWN

Now that you mention it, yes. I'm pretty happy now.

KNOWN

Is there a lesson in all of this?

UNKNOWN

It's just

KNOWN

[beat] Just what?

UNKNOWN

Sometimes a feeling wells up inside me. About what I've forgotten.
Up to my chest, and it tugs at my heart.
A longing, lonely feeling. A nagging sensation.
Like I've forgotten someone I should remember.
Does that ever happen to you?

KNOWN

No.
Well, maybe.
A child perhaps.
Sometimes I think, a child perhaps. With red hair.

UNKNOWN

A child? Is that what it is?

KNOWN

Or just old imaginings.

UNKNOWN

Did the child have a name?

KNOWN

It's frustrating....
No. I don't think so....
Marta, maybe

UNKNOWN

A girl?

KNOWN

Might have been. I can't be sure.

**KNOWN bends over and picks
something he closes his hand around.**

UNKNOWN

What is that?

KNOWN

A spider.

UNKNOWN

A spider?!

KNOWN

It's not poisonous.

UNKNOWN

How do you know?

KNOWN

Because it makes me happy. Non-poisonous spiders make me happy.

UNKNOWN

Let it go. It creeps me out.

KNOWN releases the spider gently to the ground.

UNKNOWN

You're a strange man.

KNOWN

No. Not at all. I just have strange moods....
[beat] I had a cat, once, who ate spiders.

UNKNOWN

No you didn't. Cats don't eat spiders.

KNOWN

Well, somebody did....
[beat] Do you have a green jacket?
It seemed to me just now I remember you in a green jacket, with a cat.

UNKNOWN

Must be, you're dreaming. I have never had a green jacket.

KNOWN

Well, no matter....
Do you think we used to talk much?

UNKNOWN

I've wondered about that myself.
One does, when they first get to know someone.
Then you don't, so much, anymore.

KNOWN

What gets in the way?

UNKNOWN

Memories, I expect.... And remorse.

KNOWN

Do you remember? Were you beautiful then? You're beautiful now.

UNKNOWN

I was young once, and that was enough. For young men's eyes.

KNOWN

Many of them?

UNKNOWN

None of your business.

KNOWN

I remember a dress, I think. A white dress, with a green jacket, and you in it.

UNKNOWN

I've never had a green jacket.

KNOWN

What happened? Did *I* do something? Or did you?

UNKNOWN

Does it matter?

KNOWN

I don't know. I was just wondering.

UNKNOWN

If we did something, with them, about our memories, like you've said.

And it's not just something in the air here doing this to people.

Or our age, heaven forbid!

We must have done it for a reason, and should just let it lie.

We're still here, aren't we?

We didn't kill each other, did we? Or commit suicide.

Let bygones be forgot.

KNOWN

You think it was that bad?

UNKNOWN

What do *you* think?... tearing old memories apart like that? if that's what we did.

KNOWN

[beat] *We must* have had bad memories. And now we're happy.

UNKNOWN

Happy as vestal virgins. Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind.

KNOWN

To know, or not to know, that is the question.

UNKNOWN

That makes cowards of us all.

KNOWN

And yet, I think I do remember a bit of you, when sometimes in my sleep I awake
with an odd contentment, as dreams of you fade off.
Might even be in love with you.

UNKNOWN

That's sweet.

KNOWN

Was it another man? Or another woman?

UNKNOWN

Who knows?
And who cares now?

KNOWN

It must have been some deception. Why else would we do this to ourselves?

UNKNOWN

Will you stop?
This is getting us nowhere.

KNOWN

There must be a sponge inside me,
that's never satisfied till it sucks back old memories.

UNKNOWN

More like a leech, sucking back curses to torture us to our graves.
Let bygones be bygones, Sir, and find us a place to sit.

KNOWN

A spot to heal old wounds?

UNKNOWN

If that were possible, yes.

KNOWN

I'll find us a place.

They continue walking.

UNKNOWN

Little Miss Muffet sat on her tuffet, eating her whatever and whatever.
And along came a caterpillar

KNOWN

I don't know. A caterpillar??
I don't know much about caterpillars.
Where they come from. How they're made. Or butterflies, out of silk.
It's all too confusing at the moment....
In the trees?

UNKNOWN

In our minds. Must be in our minds. The old and the new. In equal measure.

KNOWN

I don't know. So much of what was old in my mind is gone.
It's all too confusing.

UNKNOWN

To me, as well.

KNOWN

Might we look for another companion?

UNKNOWN

What other person could possibly understand us?
What's left of us?

KNOWN

[*silent*]

UNKNOWN

[*pause*] What? What are you thinking about?

KNOWN

I think I know something.

UNKNOWN

What? What do you think you know?

KNOWN

Why we're here.

UNKNOWN

Why?

Why *are we* here?

KNOWN

We're well enough fed and clothed, are we not?

UNKNOWN

True.

KNOWN

Then why are we here?

UNKNOWN

What are you getting at?

KNOWN

I have a dread in me that grows and is unnamed.

UNKNOWN

Then don't.

KNOWN

Of what may be revealed to us, if we break our pact.

And how an old memory may become an old enemy, to maybe kill us.

Or send us to Hell.

UNKNOWN

Then don't.

KNOWN

[*beat*] Was it you, or was it I,

who let Marta run out of the house that cold night into the dark and die?

UNKNOWN

She must have been out of her mind.

Yelling at you for what horrible things you said about me.

KNOWN

Yelling at *you*, for what you did with them.
Child that she was.
With only a thin green jacket on over her dress.

UNKNOWN

Ten years old.

KNOWN

Angry. And only your green jacket on.

UNKNOWN

I never had a green jacket.

END