

## JACQUELINE DOYLE

### *The Snows of Yesteryear*

There's a knock on the apartment door, and when Richard opens it, Simone is standing there in front of him in the dimly lit hall. Not looking so great really—her long blonde hair tangled, showing brown at the roots, face a little haggard. She's wearing a fake lynx fur jacket that he recognizes, and scuffed green cowboy boots that he doesn't. Her gold-flecked eyes glow in the semi-dark. For a second he feels a rush of elation, just like before. Then he remembers, it's over.

"I want everything back," Simone says.

She doesn't look angry, exactly, or friendly either. He hesitates, confused. Does she mean her stuff? It's been almost two years, and she didn't leave much behind. Six months ago he'd finally crammed most of it into the back of the hall closet.

#### *Simone's stuff*

Some books on yoga, *Jokes and How to Tell Them*, Rimbaud's *Selected Poems*, an Enya cd that she left in the CD player, some half-finished packs of incense, a grocery bag of clothes that were in the laundry when she moved out: two pairs of lace panties, a faded lime green bra, a Brown University sweatshirt (though she'd gone to Cal). A leather bound notebook where she'd written a some love poems, hard to understand and maybe not about him. An exercise gizmo for firming your abs.

She's staring at him and he can't quite read her expression.

Does she mean the past? "I want everything back" like she wants what they had, all of it?

San Francisco was brand new to him when Richard met

Simone in Golden Gate Park back in 1990, so different from Ohio, where he'd grown up and had just graduated from college. Summertime. Fog, not much sun. Later, fog but no snow. Part-time work, no humdrum 9:00 to 5:00. Lazy mornings drinking French roast coffee in bed with Simone while they read the *Chronicle* and decided what museums or matinees to go to. Overcast afternoons at Pier 1, where they took pictures of the tourists taking pictures of the sea lions. Sunset walks on Ocean Beach, buffeted by gusts of wind—a real beach in the city, just a ten-minute stroll down Balboa from their Outer Richmond neighborhood.

And the bad stuff. Did she want that back too? Weeks without heat or hot water because the landlord wouldn't fix anything. Money problems. Arguments about how uptight he was, how messy she was. The time she tore up their tickets to La Traviata and left him standing on Van Ness outside the opera house. The fights in their bedroom late at night when the neighbors banged on the wall for them to shut up. The time she threw the copper-bottomed frying pan at him and he brandished a steak knife.

*Some other stuff in the kitchen*

He can't really remember which pots and pans were hers. The frying pan was his, and the wok, even though she's the one who used it. He's pretty sure he didn't have an omelette pan before they moved in together. The orange enamel saucepan missing a lid was hers. A lot of the spices. The Indian cookbook. He never eats Indian food any more.

"Come in," he says. He almost adds, "I want it all back too," but he's not sure he does.

He opens the door wide, flashing on the cops at the door the night he and Simone broke up, memories unreeling in a

kind of eerie slow motion, with a series of freeze frames at the end. Shattered glass. Pulsing red and blue lights. Neighbors huddled in the hallway. “Good evening, officers,” he’d said, trying to sound calm while Simone shrieked in the background. “Come in.”

Could it be payback that she’s here for? Maybe some Take Back the Night empowerment thing. He can imagine her in the audience at a rally, fist raised high, face shining, roaring “Yes!” as the speaker shouts, “Time to take it all back, ladies!”

Shit, it wasn’t his fault. Maybe some of it. What she’d suspected about his coworker Cynthia was true, even though he’d denied it to the very end. It hadn’t meant anything. Richard can hardly remember Cynthia, who doesn’t work in his office any more. And there was her fucking cat, of course. Dionysos. Anybody would have hated that cat. Still, he could have handled things better.

He’s feeling guilty about the stuff he gave away after Simone left. What if she wants it?

“Are you ...” she starts to say, just as he’s saying, “Do you...” They both stop. She touches his cheek, and runs her finger along his jaw. Her eyes darken like they always did before sex.

### *Stuff he gave away*

His sister took the Moosewood cookbook, a bunch of vitamins, some incense, and the Cincinnati snow globe. Simone collected snow globes, each its own magical world. “Imagine we’re walking on these streets,” she’d whisper, holding a globe up to the light. He could see snow falling all around them, feel the snowflakes melting on his face, her warm hand in his. New York, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Albuquerque. Paris, Budapest, Rome, Tokyo. The globes used to be all over the apartment, and she left a couple of them too. Cincinnati on the windowsill in

the bedroom. San Francisco on a glass shelf in the bathroom. When you shook the globe, silver glitter swirled around the San Francisco skyline in slow motion instead of snow. A software developer he dated on and off, a girl named Margey, had oohed and aahed over it the first time she slept over, and he'd given it to her. "Where are the snows of yesteryear," he'd said, to impress her. He thought it was Rimbaud. Turned out to be Villon, he found out later, but Margey was impressed anyway, or seemed to be. Simone would have known it was Villon and called him on it.

Without even thinking, Richard reaches out to caress Simone's breast, then kicks the door closed as he pulls her into the apartment and puts his arms around her. She kisses him like she's starved. They don't even talk, just stumble into the bedroom, feverishly fumbling with buttons and zippers, panting with the effort of pulling each other's clothes off, baring skin, licking and sucking and biting. God, he's missed her.

The sheets and duvet are in an uncomfortable tangle beneath him when he wakes up a few hours later, chilled, the sweat evaporated from his skin. He squints at the red numbers on the digital clock face in the dark. It's only 11:00. He can hear the shower running, and see a line of light from under the bathroom door.

Is this a passing mood of Simone's, or some long-range plan? He doesn't really know what he wants. He's remembering the limbo of indecision that kept them together for so long—the Cynthia thing, which Simone never really let up on, and the week she disappeared, taking Dionysos with her, never telling him where she'd been (probably a week-long revenge fuck, but with who?). And the fights—Jesus, the fights, and that final fight over the cat.

### *The cat's toys*

When she'd moved in, Simone said the cat wouldn't be in the way, but of course it was. There were little cat toys under the sofa, the bed, the table, everywhere you looked. Richard was always stepping on them. Plastic mice on wheels. Balls with catnip inside. Clumps of feathers. Not that the cat cared about the toys. It was too busy playing with other stuff, batting things off the table, for example, smashing the crystal wine glasses his mother had given him, one after the next. Never mind that they'd been his grandmother's, and were irreplaceable. Every place you sat was covered with cat hair. The cat coughed up disgusting hairballs on the couch and bed. Once it peed in his open briefcase. Simone said she couldn't smell the cat box but the apartment stank.

They were drinking shots of tequila the night they broke up. They started arguing about the fucking cat, which was meowing for no reason and wouldn't shut up. Richard finally reached the end of his rope, picked up the life-sized Buddha head sculpture on the coffee table (Simone's, of course) and heaved it at the cat, who darted out of the way, of course, as the head smashed through the window. It happened fast. Glass everywhere, excited voices in the corridor outside, neighbors banging on the door, sirens, flashing red and blue lights from the street below, the sound of heavy boots as San Francisco's finest stomped up two flights of stairs to their third-floor apartment. He was lucky he hadn't killed a pedestrian or caused an accident. He was lucky they didn't arrest him. "It was a mistake, officer," he said, and it had been.

### *The Buddha head*

He'd always disliked the Buddha head, which was large, and mounted on a metal stand with a three inch pole. Visitors

invariably asked about it. “Have you been to SFZC?” No, they hadn’t been to the Zen Center, but meditation would probably have helped.

“You monster! You sick fuck,” she screamed, sobbing uncontrollably, as the cops tried to quiet her down. “Who would do that to a defenseless animal?”

“That cat’s a demon from hell, and you know it. Don’t pretend you don’t!”

It made sense to him at the time. Richard had actually been half convinced that the cat was demonic, deliberately sabotaging their relationship. They had to shut him out of the bedroom when they made love, after Dionysos jumped on Richard’s bare back with his claws extended. Simone just didn’t see it, wouldn’t see it. He thought it was cute when he first met her, the way she was always cradling the cat in her arms, stroking its sleek black fur, crooning, “My Dionysos.” Not so cute when the two of them moved in with him. The apartment wasn’t big enough for two people and a cat, at least not that cat.

### *More cat stuff*

He’d carted the leftover stuff down to the row of garbage cans on the sidewalk a few days after Simone moved out. The hooded cat box that had a filter in it, but always smelled like cat shit, no matter how much incense Simone burned. The smelly food dish and open bag of Johnny Cat litter and dilapidated scratching post that the cat had barely used, preferring to ruin Richard’s couch, which was in tatters. Good riddance.

The bathroom door opens, emitting clouds of fragrant steam. Simone is wrapped in a fresh towel, one of the striped ones. She must have pulled it out of the cabinet. He remembers the day they bought them at the Union Square Macy’s together.

He paid for them, but she was the one who picked them out.

“I’m starving. Do you have anything to eat?”

She’d always been hungry after sex. And talkative. He hadn’t minded, until she’d started accusing him of not listening. “God, why don’t you ever say anything? It’s like talking to a tree.”

“Sure. I mean, not much. How about some tuna fish?”

It’s the only thing in the cabinet, but right away he regrets mentioning tuna fish. Simone used to give half a can to Dionysos when they made tuna fish. The cat would rub against her legs and yowl, tail quivering, until she put some in his dish. And then purr like a maniac while he gobbled it down.

“Mmmm. Sounds good. You don’t have a hairdryer, do you?”

He’s glad he doesn’t. He knows she’d ask questions. “So, whose hairdryer is this? Are you still seeing her? I mean, did she just leave this here?” He isn’t really seeing anyone in particular, though he hasn’t washed the sheets since the last time Margey was here. Well, Simone hasn’t gotten to the point of sniffing the sheets yet.

Richard watches her comb out the tangles in her wet hair as they eat sandwiches at the small kitchen table. They catch up on their jobs. He’s got a full-time sales position. She’s now working for some arts non-profit that’s about to go under. They talk about the Grateful Dead’s final concert and Yoko Ono’s new art installation. Simone doesn’t tell him what she wants back. He wants to ask but he also doesn’t. He just wants to look at her. The sleeves of his terrycloth bathrobe are too long, and she’s rolled them up. He can see the fine hairs on her arms. He’s glad she’s here. Back, if she’s back. They can always talk about things later.

But she’s gone in the morning before he gets up. She doesn’t take anything with her.

He never sees her again.

*Simone's stuff*

He doesn't remember when he got rid of it. He doesn't have anything of hers any more. Her belongings must have joined the detritus of other people's lives on the shelves of the Salvation Army or Goodwill. Someone, somewhere, is reading her copy of Rimbaud, someone has torn her poems out of the leather notebook and written their own.

In time Richard gets engaged and then married. He and his wife move to El Cerrito, just over the Bay Bridge. He doesn't miss the tiny apartment in Outer Richmond, but he worries: what if Simone comes back? Will she even bother to look for him if she finds other occupants there? It shouldn't matter. He knows that. He loves his wife, who's bright and attractive and makes a good living as a freelance journalist. They never fight. He loves their two kids, both doing well in school. He likes his job as marketing director at a tech magazine well enough. He knows he's pretty lucky. But once in a while he thinks about the three tempestuous years with Simone, who turned his life upside down. Her appetite for life, their endless walks, their erratic schedules and freedom from responsibilities. The days they spent on a blanket in the park reading poetry aloud. The passion that fueled their breakups and reconciliations. The snow globes all over the apartment. Occasionally he looks for her on the Internet, not planning to contact her, just curious, but she seems to have disappeared. It would be like her to reinvent herself with a new name. Wherever she is now, he can't imagine that she's settled down.

He sits at his modern glass desk in his eighth-floor office at the magazine, looking out over the cranes, construction scaffolding, and mushrooming high rises of a changed city. Simone must have changed too—he knows that, but when



he thinks of her, she's the same blonde girl he met in Golden Gate Park, slouched on a bench with her chin tilted up, hands jammed in the pockets of a fake lynx jacket.

*Simone's snow globe*

Richard wishes he hadn't given the San Francisco snow globe away. He imagines showing up on the doorstep of Margey's apartment in the Mission to ask for it back. Margey wouldn't be there any more. The building has undoubtedly been demolished to make way for pricey condos. Close to twenty years have passed, and the city has been transformed, utterly and irrevocably. He feels like they gave it away, he gave it away, though San Francisco was never his to keep. He remembers the glitter swirling in the snow globe, the rainbow hues of the skyline, the moon over the Bridge, a perfect yellow orb.