

Risks

By Ian Hawkes

Gordon thought that maybe, just maybe, this time she would fall in love with him.

For truly he had looked dashing in Egypt, when the buggy was spilling rocks into the sarcophagus caverns and he, in rippling leather three days unshaved face, had made the jump. And shirtless on the banks of Amazonian steam, with hands wrapped firmly around that anaconda's head he had cut the perfect figure.

But never had he driven a motorcycle. For this, he thought, surely she would fall in love with him.

Rose was the type of girl you only find once. Gordon, the type of man you might possibly find everywhere, had known this when he saw the backpack she wore. It was leather, or it had been, but was so patched it had its own voice. "Life is Short: Take Risks!" said the bag. Gordon put down his paper. He threw away his coffee. Life is short, take risks.

But ten days later as he sat in the adjoining hotel room, trying vainly to push images her hissing shower brought so colorfully to his head with history book pictures he had studied for years, Gordon couldn't believe that he was about to see the places he had only told his middle schoolers about. He knew also that he had sold his car, his house, his job, and his life for this. And he tried to tell himself it was for the pharaohs, and the temples, and the things he thought he loved more than it all. But the shower hissed truth.

This morning, in another adjoining room, while she took another shower, and while he sat holding yet another photograph, Gordon thought he missed his car. Eight years on the run is a long time, and his soul was melting slowly from the heat of foreign beaches. She didn't know he carried a picture of her in his pocket. She didn't know a lot of things, and secrets were filling up

the spaces he once juiced with love. The shower turned off. Gordon put the picture in his pocket and tied his shoes.

But now her hands were clenching his colander heart and every so often a wisp of her scarlet hair tickled his face. The motorcycle drowned out the sounds her mouth made, so close to his ear he knew that for all his stupidity it was the lipstick that made him tingle, not the ricocheting bullets. And the cars that chased them down were still only the ambience for something Gordon knew might be the finale. He didn't miss his car anymore.

Cobblestones rattled their way at impossible angles to the end, to the canal.

Life is Short: Take Risks.

The bike cleared the canal like an angel, a miracle, an arc of triumph. Gordon closed his eyes, and entwined in his Rose he ascended to a heaven you never find in the sarcophagi. He thought maybe he should be worried about landing. But suddenly it seemed it didn't matter.

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