

## THE FATAL GLANCE

Paul slowly turned the knob of the door which led to the backyard of the house where Kathy lived. He looked around to see that no one was watching. Then he opened the door and peered into the narrow alley. He heard the blast of a radio, which he figured to be from the house next door. He decided it safe enough to proceed to his destination. He closed the door and stood erect in the dark alley, his heart beating excitedly.

He thought of the first time he met Kathy, that is, when he first fell in love with her. Even though he somewhat knew her during childhood, he had never thought of becoming familiar with her, nor did he have any personal interest in her. In short, she was just a good friend. But one Sunday, after a long absence, Kathy came to church. Paul was suprised to see her sitting alone in the dimmed room next to the sanctuary. At first he didn't recognize her. He stopped and scrutinized her.

"Kathy! What a surprise! What brings you here? Where have you been for so long?"

"Oh, I decided to see what's going on around here. Haven't been around for months."

"You haven't come to church since I came back from college. That Sunday you ran up to me and kissed me right on the cheek in front of all those people was the last time I saw you. I'll never forget that day."

"I hope you weren't offended by what I did. I was so glad to see you. You know, you were gone for two years, and I hardly heard about you."

"Well, I really didn't mind that kiss at all. In fact, I rather enjoyed your vigorous enthusiasm, and especially that gleaming smile of yours."

"It's only natural for me to be like that. I believe that life should be happy, and people should enjoy themselves."

"That's quite different from what you thought before. But I'm not too acquainted with your thoughts to make snappy judgments. About all I know about your thinking are those several letters that you wrote."

"I'm still interested in knowing why all of a sudden you became interested in corresponding with me?"

"I really don't understand it myself. It must have been that double date when you were with Dave. I was impressed with those risky ideas about life, religion, and God that you expressed. I didn't realize that a girl could do that kind of thinking. Of all the girls that I have ever talked with, you are the only one who thinks and talks open-mindedly, with the ability to tolerate unconventional ideas. It almost sounded as if you were an iconoclast, ready and willing to destroy your own values and traditions and help correct other's views so as to construct your own world, a world of the individual, a world where a person could follow his intuitive nature and at the same time feel responsible only to his own conscience. But enough of that talk. I don't want to get philosophical now. By the way, what are you doing nowadays?"

"I'm living with my next door neighbor, a young woman with a five-year-old boy. I've been living there for about two weeks already since my father kicked me out of the house."

"Kicked you out of the house? What for? How did it happen?"

"It's a long story. It's been building up to a climax for about three months. My Dad's quite a drinker. He usually comes home from work with oozy eyes, wine-smelling mouth, and smoke stained clothes. He just smells filthy. I try to keep away from him, but he's always calling for me and blames me for every wicked fault that he imagines. He's been calling me a prostitute, a whore, and even a bitch. You know how that hurts a girl. I tried to keep away from him, but then he condemns me for avoiding him. It's impossible to please him. Inwardly, he despises women, even though he makes love to them, and so he takes it out on me and my mother. I feel sorry for my mother. She was thinking of leaving him but now that she has another child, it's too hard for her. She needs some support for the child. But what happened with me surprised me then and I'm still amazed at how it all happened."

"I was ironing my clothes one evening, getting ready for school the next day, when all of a sudden my father burst into the room like a hungry wolf and started cussing at me for no reason at all. I guessed that he was drunk again, so I just shut my mouth and continued doing my work. He thought I was purposely avoiding him, so he grabbed my shoulder and spun me around. I was shocked at his viciousness, but I calmly told him to leave me alone. He answered with vulgar words saying that I was treating him like a dog. He was playing on my nerves and I couldn't stand it too long. I asked him again to leave me alone. When I said that, he took a hold of my sweater and almost ripped it off. I didn't know what to do. I was in panic. So I swung the steam iron and banged it against his skull. It didn't knock him unconscious, but he was stunned a little. I wasn't going to wait for him to regain his senses, so I ran out the door, into the backyard, climbed over the fence and ran into my friend's house. She was willing to help me for a while, and since that day I've been living there. I've been keeping away from home. But I do get to see my mother when my father isn't home."

"What an experience! You really have to live through quite a few things."

Paul sat next to Kathy thinking of the first letter he received from her. He was wondering whether he should become friendly with her. After all, she was quite an amazing person.

Her first letter said: "I was very pleased to receive your letter. At first, I couldn't believe my own eyes. I guess I never did expect anything from you. Your letter kind of shocked me. I really wouldn't mind at all if you are getting friendly with me. I also mean it from the bottom of my heart by saying

that I would never mind your friendship.

"You said a lot of nice things in your letter. Should I take it as a compliment or shall I ignore it? I'm not used to reading anything like that. You are the first person that really understands me in so many ways that no one has. I guess I never had to tell you about myself, but you already knew about it. You don't make me feel like a big sinner when I talk with you.

"You know, I completely agree with you about the crowd being like a dead log. I also agree on the point of love. There are few people who love spiritually, through the soul. They always confuse physical love with spiritual love. I feel that love through the soul is stronger when it is used in the right direction.

"Not many people know that living realistically is a much better life. When a person pretends in life, he will never know for what purpose he exists in this big cruel world. The world is so cruel in so many ways because people make it cruel.

"When a person lives by his own thinking and refuses to listen to what people say, the society to which he belongs judges him and condemns him because he disagrees with them about how he should lead his life. It is a hard struggle to survive in this world, especially if a person wants to make something important through his existence.

"Well, I guess I said enough about everything. Our existence would be great if people saw life like you do."

Kathy really did have strong views about life. No doubt she constantly brooded over her unfortunate position in life as a daughter of an unconsiderate father. But it must have been such hard times as she experienced at home that led her to think seriously about life. Paul didn't really feel sorry for Kathy's situation. It wasn't out of intense concern or pity that he was attracted to her. He didn't exactly know what it was. It was a mystery that he felt should be discovered, a riddle that needed to be solved, an experience that had to be lived through in order to be understood.

Her second letter revealed more of her fabulous mind:

"Your letters impress me very much, especially your feelings and attitude toward life. I think that life should be lived by each individual, and not by the mob. I don't think that a man can fail. He can always accomplish something in his life. We can't live our lives in vain. Sure, there are a lot of disappointments in life, but you can't live without having some disappointments. I don't think a man should try to escape himself. When he does, he will find himself to be a failure. In one sense, we are failures because we don't try to discover why we are here.

"Is happiness sin? Is there a difference between pleasure and happiness? Of course, there are different kinds of pleasure. But do some people realize it? Somehow, some people just can't get used to this modern world and this modern environment. They'll always believe that something new is wrong. And then also, no individual has the right to say that he is better than another, because no one is perfect. I guess I'll just have to live the way I live right now. It's not too bad. After all, everyone has difficulties in life."

Paul decided that it would be amusing to find out how this intriguing character lived, acted, and behaved in everyday life.

He casually glanced at her beautiful face in the semi-darkness. He could distinguish the hazel brown eyes peering from behind heavy black eyelashes. He smiled at her and marveled at her soft dimples that barely shown on the corners of her mouth. Her skin complexion was very fair and smooth like the tender skin of a young child. It would be challenging and adventurous to be with her.

After a long silence and much deep thought, Paul again looked toward Kathy and asked her, "Doing anything tonight?"

"Not especially."

"How about going out with me to a nice cozy restaurant? I'm quite starved, and I thought maybe you'd like to keep me company."

"Well, I don't have any plans for tonight. I guess your proposition is accepted."

"We'll take off right after church, O.K.?"

"Sure."

"I'll meet you outside."

Paul shivered with excitement as he stood outside, waiting for Kathy. It was unbelievable how readily she accepted his offer. So unexpected. He didn't know what to think. Somehow, he wasn't sure of her and of her thoughts or actions. He recollected one ambiguous letter that she wrote:

"You tell me that a person should never be afraid to stand up for personal rights. I agree with you, but what happens when those rights are considered to be sinful? For example, my friend and I were planning some day to take a long trip. My parents believed such a thing to be immoral, because I will be missing church, and then, I am too young. So what am I supposed to think? When I thought of working as a stewardess, my mother was opposed to the idea, because I would meet different men, and I might do something wrong, if you know what I mean. I was telling her that not all men go for a girl with only "sex" in mind. It may be the main thing in this modern society, but it is nothing to be ashamed of. They make it look so ugly that I feel sorry for them. God created us with emotions and with passion. Why should we make ourselves afraid and ashamed of it? It just has to be with the right person and in the right place."

Such a letter could lead a person to indecent thoughts, but Paul realized that there was more to Kathy than just her femininity. While talking with her, Paul felt Kathy to be an impetuous person, but yet he considered this to be a very important trait in her. She wanted adventure, and she needed someone that could lead her through an adventurous life. She was like the ocean that never kept quiescent, it was always in motion. He recalled the last letter that she wrote to him:

"You see Paul, I don't like to do the same things day in and day out. Something in me always urges me to do things that are different. I do them when there is a feeling for that certain thing. Whenever I have a strong feeling to read, I read; if I

have an urge to go somewhere to look at the beautiful nature, I go. There are so many beautiful things in this world if you are only interested in beauty. Just across the bay there are beautiful, green mountains. When you look down from them you can see the water of the ocean splashing against the rocks. And when you look up, heaven seems very close to you and to your heart. That's how I feel."

That first night with Kathy, Paul felt heaven extremely close to him and to his heart as he embraced with Kathy. The arrow of love pierced his heart on that warm summer night as the two of them stood under the full moon by a placid lake. Paul's thoughts soared above the hemisphere and high into the starry sky where they dispersed into vain air. He never felt this way before. He was ready to devote his entire life to love the precious treasure that he discovered straying in the whirlpool of life.

What an event to remember, thought Paul as he inched his way down the dark alley, feeling with his hands against the walls of the building and softly scraping his feet along the ground in case of any interfering obstacles. The damp air stunk with the odor of dead fish. The paint on the walls of the building was peeling and the wood was beginning to rot. There must have been at least a dozen rats in such an unkept house. Paul almost stepped on one as he tip-toed toward the backyard door. He noticed the garbage sprawled out on the top of the wooden stairs. The lights were turned off in the living room and in the kitchen. Either no one was home or else everyone was sleeping. He guessed at the latter. The backdoor squeaked as he slowly pushed it open. He hoped no one heard the almost inconspicuous sound. He was more careful in closing the door.

Paul looked up at the lighted room. He was overjoyed, knowing that he'll be able to see her tonight. He stepped back into the small yard that had several exhausted rose-bushes planted along the fence. The rest of the yard was showered with dead leaves from a tall eucalyptus tree which stood in the left corner of the yard. Wild weeds had outgrown the former green grass, and dirt was piled up in small bunches on the cemented area. Paul stood behind the protruding part of the basement wall and looked up again into Kathy's room. The time he caught sight of a moving shadow, which he supposed to be Kathy. The blinds were up and part of the lighted room could be vividly seen. The bed stood directly in front of the window and right against a wall on one side. The other side was invisible from where Paul stood. The velvet curtain, which evenly clung to the left side of the window, hid the view of the rest of the room. The closet was packed with numerous dresses, blouses, and coats. Paul noticed it in back of the bed. He evaluated that Kathy was probably sitting at her desk, doing some school work, or else she was spending time in front of the mirror.

Paul was impatient to talk to Kathy. He stooped over the ground and selected a soft round piece of dirt, which he twirled in the palm of his hand before he finally decided to hurl it against the window. The soft dirt splattered into pieces upon impact with

the glass. The sound which it produced was like a faint knock against a hollow piece of wood. Nothing stirred in the room. Thinking that she didn't hear the soft thump, Paul chose a tiny rock and sent it flying into the window. This time the sound was hard and quite audible. The glass vibrated with a soft ring like a chime bell. When Kathy didn't answer again, Paul concluded that she must have gone out of the room, probably for a midnight snack, or maybe to wash up before going to bed. He decided to wait till she returned and then to try again. Meanwhile, his thoughts drifted to the two day week-end which he spent together with her at the Sacramento State Fair.

Before that trip, Paul had already made up his mind that there was an intrinsic magnetic force that pulsed with her every move. He visualized her mind as being engrossed with energetic vibrations of universal concepts which penetrated every minute part of her and which commanded a strict, meticulous consistency within her life. He plainly understood that she was a rebel, not of revolutionary fashion, but of the uncompromising manner. Her whole being rebelled against the disorder of society that was forced upon her. Because of the indifferent treatment that she was faced with at home, at church, and in society, her whole body and soul reacted repulsively. Nostalgia for friendly love and a comfortable home life gripped her heart and tore her soul into agonizing torment. Seeking to find a position in existence and finding none, she attempted to impose a position of non-existence by self-extermination. Preserved by fate, she continued her struggle for dignity by solitarily living in self-pity and sorrowing for her uncertain future. Finding no comfort at home, neither with friends, she sought for consideration from the mundane affairs in life. But seeking for love (or was she seeking for love -- and if not for that, what was she seeking for?), she could find it only in the company of such that love. These were some of the conclusions that Paul came to after being with her a few times prior to the trip.

Paul came over Kathy's house late in the morning. She was ready, as usual, and they rapidly were on their way out of the big city, over the bridge, and across the bay. Their conversation broached on theology.

"You know, Paul, I'm bored with religion. All those traditions and rituals -- they don't seem real to me. It looks like it's just a game, something that people play for a while and then, all of a sudden, they just throw it off and continue being just another person. They're not themselves. It's hypocritical. I can't understand it and that's why I don't want to be part of it, because it looks so unrealistic."

"Kathy, I think you've hit one of the major points in religion, that it is mainly something that people have to live in spite of themselves. To me, I've always thought that religion has to be

an adoration and a worship of God. But what it mainly amounts to, it's just a worship and an adoration of oneself. Instead of worshipping God, we begin to worship ourselves; we begin to uplift our own spirits, and put ourselves high above others."

"You know something? Sometimes I try to pray, and it's so hard, because I don't seem to be able to reach out to God anymore. He just doesn't seem to be there. Once in a while I feel lonely, and I think back to my childhood days when at times like that I'd get down on my knees and I would feel the presence of some almighty spirit, the presence of some divine inspiration. And I would feel so happy and so good inside. But now I'm beginning to think that, as a child, I needed something like that, because I was afraid. I didn't know what was coming in life. But now I feel that I'm mature and I know what's coming in life. I know that it's a miserable existence. I'm beginning to live according to the principle of taking life just as it is, instead of trying to reform life. I'm just accepting it the way it is."

"But sometimes you have to take religion seriously, Kathy. Personally, I don't believe that Christianity should be a religion. I thought a lot about it and I've come to the conclusion that Christianity is a life. You remember before Christ came to earth? It was quite a different life from the one which he innovated. People were always gathering together as nations -- the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans. It was always as a nation, like a huge mob, that people acted and lived. But after Christ came, he introduced the life of the individual, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither white flesh, nor black flesh. Of course there was, but I believe he meant that people should no longer live with dependance on others. Life had to be individually, with each person responsible for his own fate. A person had to stand by himself."

"That's what I've been trying to do. But every time I think of God, I just don't seem to be able to actually believe in him, probably because I can't comprehend him nor can I fathom his mysterious wonders, that is, if it's he that does everything. Before, I could almost feel his hand guiding me. Why is it like that? Why can't I really believe in him anymore?"

"You started to mention before that religion was, somehow, a game. I think you've become sick of that game. You don't want to play in it anymore. You want to play another kind of a game. And then also, you want to get out into real life, to get into the swing of things. In order to do that, you have to throw off the old traditions and former tenets of belief and pick up new ones. Instead of being a follower, you become a leader, a leader of your ownself, knowing how to rule and control your own emotions, passions, and desires."

"But why is it that some people make things, which are really clean, look so sinful, so repulsive?"

"Don't forget that they all have guilt feelings about their life. No doubt, in their childhood they spent many days in blaspheming God and living in debauchery and spending their life wantonly. And now, they've come to realize that the only meaningful

life is to just be holy and righteous in the sight of God. And so they look down on all the things that they used to indulge in. Don't worry, they know what most of life is about. Maybe not all of it, but at least most of it. And so they're trying to save you out of that same sinful life, at least that's what they think it is."

"But I don't look at it as sinful. I think that it is part of our life, something that every person must experience in order to know the fulness of life, to know what life is really about."

"In order to do that, you must continually think of others, so as not to become egoistic. Once you become selfish, you start obtaining whatever you want through any manner, through all kinds of means, whether they're good or bad. After a while, a person's conscience fades away, and he no longer feels anything good or bad, he just does something out of necessity. He becomes an opportunist, who grabs the thing that he feels is best for him, not worrying about what is best for others. And that is what I believe true religion is -- living for others."

"You're right. Everytime I make somebody happy, I feel happy myself. It's as if I just came out of the water, washed clean, and the water itself being cleansed. And then everything is so bright. Oh, it's such a wonderful feeling. I really enjoy making people happy. I feel like that's the main duty in my life."

"I think you'd be a tremendous person if you'd think like that all your life. Within a short time you've made me so happy -- I can't explain it. It's something personal, within one's own soul. But everytime I talk to you, you seem to always elucidate some divine essence. You know, it's as if you were some kind of an angel that distributed blessings upon every person."

"You're becoming too idealistic, Paul. I appreciate your worthy praise, but I don't want to be regarded in such a manner. I'm nothing to be worshipped. Even though a person sometimes wants to be highly esteemed, all I want is to be respected."

At the fair, Paul and Kathy really lived it up. They played one game after another, throwing nickels, dimes, and even quarters, just to enjoy the pleasures of life and knowing that just a few moments in pleasurable living could seem so wonderful. They walked by several booths where people were laughing and throwing money into little squares. Once in a while, someone would yell with exuberance, because they won a prize. Paul too won several poodles, a pink and a blue one, but it was all in the game of making Kathy happy. They went up the giant wheel, riding up to the top, from where they looked down on the whole city, across the fairgrounds, and into the dark blue sky. They saw fireworks spreading out into hundreds of different colors -- pink, blue, yellow, orange, green, purple, red -- every imaginable color. It was a splendid night. There on top, Paul put his arms around Kathy and whispered, "Kathy, it's wonderful to be with you." Then he kissed her. As they flew through the night sky, their emotions whirled within their own little world, thinking



how they could make life more meaningful.

They spent the night at her uncle's house. The next morning, Kathy, smelling fragrantly with perfume, woke Paul up with a tender kiss on his cheek. They spent the day at a lake nearby. They swam together, laughed together, talked together, sang together, and were jolly together. By the lake, they lay down on a blanket and enjoyed the torrid sunshine. Paul smoothly glided his hand across her back and felt the comfortable, soft skin of a woman. Later on that day, he felt the softness of her breasts and the responsiveness of her lips again.

Paul's thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of the same shadow in Kathy's room. He noticed the shadow moving toward the closet. He could barely see the top of her wet hair as he noticed that she was hanging her dress on a clothes-hanger. He stood watching. He didn't see her moving anymore after she sat down at her desk. He supposed that she was either reading or maybe writing. He wasn't sure, but he thought he'd wait a while longer. He wanted to think some more before he made his move. He wanted to think once more about the trip they took to Russian River and about how their lives almost parted there.

It was on a Saturday afternoon and they had arrived at the river's end, down by the ocean. They sat in the car and watched the ocean waves splash violently and vigorously against the hard rocks. The rocks never budged. They resisted every move that the waves made against them. It was so realistic as Paul thought of Kathy's character and of her firm stand and her intransigent spirit. Later on they rode to a favorite camping place, where they decided to build a fire. There by the fire they sat enjoying each other's company again as they read stories to each other and talked about life in general. Paul watched Kathy as she stared at the swift river and sang her favorite song, "Moon River."

"Dream maker, you heart breaker  
Wherever you're going, I'm going with you  
Going to see the world, there's such a lot of world to see.  
We're after the same rainbow's end,  
Waiting round the bend.  
My huckleberry friend, Moon River and me."

But that evening as they sat watching the hot, crimson flames crackle and rise into the starry sky, Paul felt Kathy going into one of her unexpected, melancholy moods. He always felt that she was an unpredictable girl. He never knew what she would say or do at the next moment, just like the sky, which can be calm at one moment, and then bring on a boisterous storm at the next moment. He watched her red face glisten in the light of the red fire and noticed an unsmiling face. He thought he'd break the silence.

"It's wonderful being out here, you know, Kathy? Makes me think of the beautiful nature and how it is splendid to live where life is quiet and placid, where man can think of himself and of others."

"I suppose so. That's probably what it's making me do now."

"What are you thinking about?"

"Oh, nothing. Just thinking."

"I've been wanting to tell you for a long time that you're quite a lovely and marvelous girl. I really do like you a lot. In fact, sometimes I think that maybe I'm getting into the position where I might be falling in love with you."

"Paul, let's not talk about that. I don't like to talk about things personal like that, not really."

"What's the matter? Are you afraid of love?"

"No. It's not that. Sometimes I don't feel that I have the capacity to love someone."

"Maybe that's because you've never given yourself the chance to love."

"Well, mainly that. But also, I've never found someone that I can honestly love."

"I guess you're excluding me when you say that."

"Paul, I've come to really trust you and confide in you a lot. But to tell you frankly, I don't love you. You're a great friend. But that's as far as it goes."

Paul not only felt insulted and rejected, but he felt like a complete failure. He had been trying to overcome his doubts and fears concerning her love. But deep inside himself he knew that, all along, this girl had no genuine love for him. But yet he had a faint hope, that he would keep fighting, being brave and demanding, and would overcome the obstacle that stood between them, whatever it was. He lay reticently on the flimsy sand and glanced at the flames, imagining an arising spirit, a spirit that would bring them together. He imagined a distant utopia, a place where they would meet, their hands would clasp, and they would be reunited. Where that somewhere was might have been just in a dream.

He watched the flames slowly disappear and almost felt as if his entire heart had been consumed and there was no more love left for anyone. He felt that his love for Kathy had withered away, as if all the former love was unreal, devoured and burned up, and only ashes of memories were left.

On the way home, Paul tried to be exuberant.

"You know, Kathy, if I was somebody else, I probably would have bawled my heart out or gone into a rage. It actually is a sad ending to the love I shared with you. But then, I have learned how to think positively. There are numerous times in life when a person can't have things go the way he wants them to. And he must just accept them the way they are. Yet, no matter what happens, he can still continue trying. I have no regret for our friendship, and I hope it won't terminate tonight."

"Oh no, I always want to be friends with you, Paul. You've been a great help to me. You're always near me to talk with me. Somehow, I can tell you some of my problems, which I just can't tell others."

"I'll always be glad to hear from you. Actually, I don't want to ever forget you. You're too outstanding an individual to forget."

"Let's not start that again, Paul. I don't want all those compliments thrown at me. I don't believe I deserve them."

"I just wanted to let you know how I felt."

As Paul stood in the yard thinking, he almost shed a tear-drop. All he wanted now was to see her, even though he didn't love her intensely anymore. He was still thinking about her when he noticed that the former shadow reappeared. He stared at the window and watched. The next moment, he saw her climb on the bed, stand on it, and raise her hand to pull down the shade. He saw her face and her body. She was stark naked. Paul trembled at what he saw. It was the most beautiful sight he had ever witnessed. He was hypnotized by the beauty of the breasts, the thighs, the belly, and by her whole body. There was not a piece of clothing on her, and he saw her in her pure, natural form. It was as if today was the day when God took her and created her out of a rib of Adam. She stood there as beautiful as the first creation of God. And as Paul's eyes trailed her hand slowly pull down the blinds, he stood paralyzed, as if he was glued to the ground.

She was gone. She turned off the lights and pulled the covers over herself as she took herself into her personal dream world. Paul couldn't believe what he had seen. It was like a dream. To him, it was the fatal glance of passion. Now he really wanted her. But he realized that he could never have her. She was beyond his reach. She was unconquerable.

*Paul John Wigowsky*

