**Throws of the Roll**

She’d seen him twice since it happened on that late summer night in 1976. Both times, during a brief meeting at a party, on mention of the accident, he giggled and he laughed, skirting the issue, all in good fun you know. He wasn’t ready to say, I’m sorry.

As for her, she had told the story many times before, in the classroom. Pretend you are sitting around a fire, she would tell the students. Bring the story alive through concrete details. Tell me everything you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel, not with your heart, but your hand. What you feel with that ornery muscle in your chest comes later.

She remembers sitting in a ditch looking up to see the sky covering the earth like a dark blanket shotgun holed, allowing points and slivers of light to come through. Dust clouded up as she reached up tentatively to feel the dirt that covered her. Though she could not see the color of the warm liquid that pooled in places on her flesh, she knew it must be blood. Silence reined, not even a lone hoot from a perching owl. Not one pair of headlights snaking down the back woods road. They were miles from anywhere as the panic clenched inside her.

She weakly stood in that ditch and she fell, her right knee now numb, the blood running from lacerations, and yet she called for him, whom she begged, she pleaded, she coaxed to slow down.

Here they were face to face once again in meeting number three many years later. She now knew that this event, which left her daily reminders, was less of an accident than she dreamed.

What do you remember? I have a remarkable memory for detail, he said proudly.

I remember the car sitting in the ditch, he said, and the tires spinning round and round.

I remember the roof of the car smashed down to where the windows roll up, she whispered.

I heard you calling me, he said, but I didn’t know where you were. I was lying in the back seat.

I was sitting in the ditch, thrown from the car, dust circling me in swirls, her words tumbled slowly.

No one wore seatbelts back then, he added.

I wanted to be found, she said. The night was so dark, there was no sound, I felt so all alone. Yes, I called for you. You stumbled over, the blood running in a river down your arm.

There she lay in the dust at his feet. Not Guinevere at the feet of Arthur in Almesbury where her convent stood. She lay in the dust at the feet of the man who almost killed her.

What happened at the hospital? He asked.

I don’t remember much, she said, thanks to the pill you gave me minutes before we rolled.

Little did she know, the one he popped made four.

Our accident was the fourth for me that day, he confided.

She turned to him on this their third meeting and asked, are you kidding me?

Three pills by the early afternoon, he recalled, washed down with a six pack of something lite. We weaved on the road. We miscalculated distances. By the time the police stopped us, the van was already dented multiple times. They impounded the van and Dave and I headed over to the house of a little gal he knew. She let me borrow her Mustang to come over to pick up you.

He drove for miles without accident to come to pick her up. She was staying with her parents for a couple of weeks before a move to the west coast. Sandwiched in between lay an interview with Panam Airlines. She wanted to fly the international skies. One look at the cast upon her leg, the stitches running like railway tracks, they dismissed her.

How did the accident change your life? He asked.

She thought, let me count the ways.

She trusted no one behind the wheel for a very long time. More than once, hell, many times, she reached for the wheel or studied a foot poised above a break, holding her breath. Every curve brought panic and speed of any kind forced her heart to pound. She could not breathe; she could not breathe, please, for God’s sake please, let me drive. I will not harm you. That way I know I will have the chance to live.

The impact itself haunted her dreams. Not the emotional or psychological ramifications, though no doubt they remained a part. Rather the impact of the metal somersaulting across the earth. So fast like a blur of crashing sound, a kaleidoscope of sights and rushing panic. No, snapshots of her life did not flash before her. There was no time. She often described the experience as a fist beat into a palm marking a moment between life and death.

He laughed when she begged, pleaded, and coaxed him to slow down. He did tell her this time when they met that they were going seventy. Too fast on a curving road in the black of night that late summer evening when he tempted the mistress of fate at their expense.

Should she pound him on the chest? Should she slap his face silly? Should she yell and scream the fury, the frustration, the bewilderment, the tragic sadness of how a person takes the life of another into their hands and plays with it like a ball?

Yes, he now says he’s sorry, so very sorry, he says this over and over.

She knows it’s true.

But it’s the knee that aches when the air grows dense. The cricks and cracks when she bends it. The scar that can’t be missed.

It’s that somersault of metal. The knowledge when you are in it that you might not make it out alive. It’s the pound of a fist into the palm. The waking up during the night in the throws of the roll, the sweat gathering when she was riding in a car. His car, her car, any body’s car, we’re going to crash, we’re going to crash. She reaches for the wheel. Her foot stomps upon the floor. Her eyes engage with the speedometer and do not waver.

Of course, it is better now.

Many years have passed.

He said, I came to see you in the hospital.

She said, she doesn’t remember.

Your dad walked up to me carrying a shoe. He held it up before me and asked, where is her shoe? We can’t find her other shoe.

That’s all he could say to me, he said. But I understood. His little girl had almost died.