

EARLY RETIREMENT

On a brilliant day in late September, on the lawn near the Green House of Arcadia Park, 55 year old Nate Turner set out to reclaim his youth.

His wife, Ellen, saw it happen, although it would be months before she connected cause and effect. She had stood at a table arranging purple narcissus mums for the annual flower show. The green house in front of her created a giant mirror in which she could see, in reverse order, the blue, cloudless sky, rust and yellow leaves of the trees, people meandering among the tables of flowers.

She watched Billy Hudson in a red warm-up suit glare at the blue ribbon on a cane plant. His expression said he thought it inferior his own entry. Ellen smiled at her face in the glass. This watching while her back was turned delighted her -- spying with no risk of being caught. She watched her husband, Nate, carry a display table from the pile under a tree and struggle to unfold the legs. She observed his expression, the determined set of his jaw, noting that he seemed busy and content for a change.

In the glass she watched a graceful figure in jeans approached. Ellen knew this young woman, a newcomer to Arcadia. She searched for the name. Ellen always filed away a phrase to remember names. A pretty girl is like a

Melody -- Melody Perkins, the wife of the pharmacy intern at Drew Drug. A pretty girl indeed! Long auburn hair, Mediterranean blue eyes, seductive young body combined with wholesome good looks.

Nate rolled the table to its feet and turned toward Melody. Ellen's mirror showed him coming to full attention, chins and stomach tucked in, chest puffed out.

"Hello, Mrs. Mason," said Melody's voice at her back.

Ellen turned around, feigning surprise. "Why Melody, how nice to see you."

"I didn't know there was a garden club in Arcadia. This show is wonderful"

"Thank you. This is our twentieth year, and for the first time my husband is available to help. Melody, I'd like you to meet my husband, Nate."

Nate nudged his wife against the table in his eagerness.

"Well, hello, Melody," he said, in a voice half an octave below his usual tenor.

At that moment, a man carrying a clipboard signaled for Melody's attention. She ignored Nate's outstretched hand, seeming not to see him all .

"Excuse me," she said to Ellen in a preoccupied tone. "Something I have to take care of." She walked swiftly away, her leather sandals whispering on the dying grass.

Nate stood with his hand stretched out between the pots of mums, his face the color of the terra-cotta planters. And at that moment, Ellen would realize later, something dark and desperate took root in his psyche. It found empty and fertile ground. Nate retired the previous month as manager of the Arcadia Lawn Furniture Factory.

The first week at home, he announced he would build a boat in the

backyard.

"Let's buy one," Ellen said. "We can afford it."

Nate was adamant. It must be built by his hand. He ordered 15 manuals on shipbuilding. Each day he met the mailman at the front walk, inquiring after his books, but by the time they began to arrive, Nate's attention had turned elsewhere. He piled his expensive purchases on a shelf in the basement without a glance inside.

He was busy with his new interest -- housekeeping. For days, he followed Ellen and the cleaning lady, making notes as they worked. At the end of the week, he handed Ellen a time and motion study outlining inefficient procedures.

"The problem is," he said, "women keep house exactly as their mothers did, with no thought for modern methods or technology."

"When are you starting on the boat?" Ellen sighed.

But Nate would not be put off. At the library he checked out a book called Homecare for the 21st Century. He read it in an afternoon and the next morning, following the writer's advice, he rose at 5 a.m. and started vacuuming -- under the bed where Ellen lay sleeping. By ten he striped and waxed the floors.

"Nate, that's no-wax tile," Ellen complained when she saw what he was up to.

He spent nearly \$1000 on new electrical appliances to make cleaning more efficient. When Ellen complained about the expense, he fired the cleaning lady.

"We'll save enough to cover the cost," he said. "All you have to do is approach this in a businesslike way. A house should run as efficiently as a factory."

Within a few weeks, Nate grew bored with his new career. Using the appliances gave him backaches, he said, and the detergents made his hands break out. Ellen rehired the cleaning lady at an extra five dollars a day.

When planning began for the annual flower show, Ellen offered Nate as a helper thinking perhaps community service might capture his interest. He purchased white table clothes and satin ribbons, complaining all the while they could get a better deal if they bought wholesale. But he did seem to enjoy himself -- until Melody Perkins' snub.

The morning after the show, Nate announced, "I'm going on a diet. I need to lose twenty pounds."

"Okay," Ellen agreed, "I could lose a pound or two myself. How about bacon, eggs and hashbrowns this morning before we set out on the road to health?"

Nate mulled the suggestion. "No," he said. "I'm beginning right now."

For the next six weeks Ellen prepared healthful, low fat meals. Nate ran in the park at dawn. Near Halloween he pointed out that his paunch was less pronounced as he sat at the table eating low fat cottage cheese on toast. By Thanksgiving he posed each morning before the antique framed mirror at the foot of their bed.

"See that," he said, as he sucked his stomach in under his rib cage. "It's ten pounds now." As the Christmas season approached, he'd lost 15. Ellen cheated on her diet after the first week. She kept a package of chocolate chip cookies behind the cleaning products under the sink. Once Nate's cleaning phase ended, it was the safest secret place in the house.

One morning, as Nate stood naked before the bedroom mirror, he suddenly looked closely at his face.

"Hand me my glasses," he ordered his wife, who was still lying under the

comforter. "Oh, oh," he said, glaring into the mirror. "I've got crow's feet."

"So? You're 55 years old," Ellen said. "You've earned them."

"I never had crow's feet before. It's the weight loss. My face is thinner."

Ellen sighed. "Fat people don't have wrinkles, Nate. You can't have it both ways."

"Oh, yes I can," he said. When had she seen that look on his face before? Ah, yes, 1972, when an Arizona manufacturer undercut his prices with a cheap line of patio recliners. He had refused to be run out of business and eventually won his old customers back.

For a moment, she saw again the tenacious, optimistic man she fell in love with 30 years ago. Ellen's first job out of high school was as a secretary at the furniture factory. From the first day Nate appeared as the new management trainee, she knew he was the man for her. Who could resist him? Nate had a way with people, a sure sense of who to pat on the back and who to kick in the behind. He loved his job and he made his employees and customers love it too. His enthusiasm never wound down or clocked out. The small factory in a nowhere town grew and grew in Nate's capable hands, finally emerging as the leading manufacturer of lawn furniture in the country.

The owners were well aware they owed their considerable fortunes to their manager. When they sold the plant, Nate was rewarded with a generous pension, stock and other benefits that assured a comfortable retirement. It was hello easy street, sliding into old age without a care.

Or so we thought, Ellen said to herself as she watched Nate mutter his discontent into every mirror in the house.

"Crow's feet. How can I have crow's feet?"

One day at lunch, he made an announcement: "I've got an appointment with a plastic surgeon in the city."

"What for?"

"I'm getting my eyes fixed."

"You're kidding me."

"The hell I am. Listen, Ellen, you may be willing to let yourself go, but that doesn't mean I have to."

"I resent that," she said, dropping a Christmas gift she was wrapping.

"Okay, okay, I didn't mean it that way. But look, doesn't it bother you that you're not the best looking woman in a room anymore? You were once, you know."

Ellen considered the question. "I guess I had a twinge or two the first time I realized men didn't look at me in quite the same way they used to, but I got over it."

"We have to get old, but we don't have to look old."

"What's wrong with enjoying who you are? I look at young women,-- like that pretty Melody you met at the flower show -- and I think 'isn't she lovely?' But I sure don't want to be her age again."

His face fell. Mentioning Melody was a mistake.

The surgery was done a week later, in the doctor's office, under general anesthetic. Ellen accompanied Nate, sitting in the pastel waiting room, staring at the silver and pink walls until the operation ended. Then, she drove home, navigating the icy roads, alone, as he slept off the tranquilizer the doctor gave him.

For a few days the skin at the outer edge of his eyes looked starched, but that disappeared. They attended six holiday parties, and not a single person noticed the difference in Nate's face. Still, he was happy. He studied his appearance constantly in the bedroom mirror.

"I think I'll get a hair transplant," he said, brushing at the bare spots

retreating on either side of his forehead.

"What about your boat? Isn't it time you started?"

"Just think how good I'll look standing at the wheel with the sea breeze blowing through my thick hair."

"Blowing through the holes in your thick head is more like it," she muttered.

"I heard that, Ellen. My hearing is great. I just want to look good. Is that so bad?"

In the dermatologist's office, Ellen watched when Nate's first transplant was done. The nurse settled him into a reclining chair, then the doctor entered and set to work. Just like needlepoint, Ellen marveled, as she watched the doctor remove hair at the base of the skull and punch it into the front of Nate's forehead with a needle-like tool. Blood ran across his eyebrows and into his ears. The nurse caught it with a wedge of cotton.

"Wipe that up," the doctor ordered as a few red drops splashed on the tile floor.

The room grew fuzzy around the edges. Ellen felt her stomach twist. "I'll wait outside," she said taking deep breaths to fight nausea.

Four more office visits were required to complete the transplant. On the following trips, Ellen stayed in the outer waiting room.

Not all of the transplants thrived. Nate mourned every tuft of hair that landed in the sink. Still, most of the grafts stayed in place, and she had to admit the effect was pleasing. He looked younger. Ellen critically surveyed her own salt and pepper mane in the bathroom mirror, and wondered if it might be time to begin coloring it. What if people think you're Nate's mother, she asked the image in the glass. Well, what if they do, Ellen? You know who you are. What do you care what people think? She slammed her brush down on the counter,

disgusted with herself. She would store that kind of thinking away, she decided.

In fact, it looked as if Nate's quest for his youth had been satisfied. For several weeks their lives returned to normal routines. Then Nate told her about the liposuction.

"There's really nothing to it," Nate explained, "they inject a solvent into the thighs and vacuum out the fat."

"Will you listen to yourself? 'The thighs.' That's your inviolate body you're talking about. What's the matter with you?"

"There's nothing the matter with me. Anything that makes you feel good about yourself..."

"Stop quoting Ann Landers."

"Dear Abby, and you don't have to go with me. I'll get someone else to drive."

"That's a good idea. I'm not sure how much more of this I can stomach."

Nate developed an infection as a result of the liposuction. His fever soared to 104. His right upper leg swelled to the size of a watermelon. The doctor told Ellen to put on alternating hot and cold packs and to pick up a prescription he would phone into the pharmacy at Drew Drug.

It was five minutes to closing time when Ellen hurried into the drug store. The pharmacist on duty was the owner, Conrad Drew, a man she had known since grade school.

"How's Nate?" he asked, as he handed her the prescription. "This is a heavy duty antibiotic you got here."

Without meaning to, Ellen found herself pouring out the story of her husband's medical adventures. Tears slid down the side of her face as she spoke. Conrad came out from behind the counter and put his arms around her. She cried into his white coat.

"I'm sorry," she sniffed. "I guess I didn't know how upset I was until I told someone."

Conrad seated her at a round table near the lunch counter and poured her a Coke. He rang up a last customer, a woman buying a birthday card, locked the front door and turned the sign to "closed."

"What's gotten into Nate?" he asked, as he sat down beside her.

"Melody Perkins."

"Melody, my trainee's wife?"

"The whole thing is so stupid. I introduced Melody to him one day and she didn't even see him. To her he's just an old man. Nate can't take that. He's decided to be young again."

They talked for half an hour shifting the conversation gradually to their school days when Conrad was called "cowpie," and to the death two year's ago of his wife, Susan. Suddenly Ellen looked up at the clock and realized an hour had passed.

"I shouldn't have left him alone so long. He needs this medicine."

"Sleep will do him more good than anything."

She stood up. "Thanks, Conrad. It's really nice to have an old friend, or maybe I should say a long-time friend."

"Old's fine," Conrad grinned.

For two weeks Nate did almost nothing but watch game shows and situation comedy reruns on cable. Ellen brought his meals to the living room and helped him into the bathroom.

One day when she felt he was sufficiently recovered to pay attention, she looked him in the eye and said, "No more, Nate."

He did not question her meaning. "You've got that 'I'm really serious' tone in your voice."

"I'm really serious."

"Okay, okay, just contact lenses. Then, I quit."

He chose turquoise blue lenses, quite a change from the gray-green eyes he usually wore. When he returned from the optometrist, he walked into the kitchen blinking and beaming. Ellen bit her lip. No need to tell him he looked like an extra from a sci-fi movie. She'd never seen a human with irises that color. Later in the day he spent \$1600 on a turquoise and silver necklace to match his eyes. He began wearing his shirts open to show off the jewelry.

More and more, Ellen found she needed items from Drew Drug: a pair of nylons, a case for her reading glasses, a box of envelopes. Conrad seemed delighted to see her. One day he asked her to lunch. She started to say no, but before she could open her mouth, Conrad interrupted her. "Perkins can stand in for a few hours. I know a great restaurant over in Milton. Unlikely we'd see anyone we know."

Well, why not, Ellen thought. Nate would never miss her. Several weeks ago he joined Gym and Trim when he felt his chest failed to meet the standards set by his turquoise necklace. He would be there for two or three hours lifting weights and swimming in the pool.

She enjoyed the drive to Milton. A storm two days earlier whitened the winter fields and decorated the trees with sparkling ice. Conrad pulled off on an access road.

"Want to walk?" he asked. "There's an old pair of Susan's snowboots in the trunk."

They tramped through a wooded area under tall maple trees, their boots squeaking against the snow. A squirrel carrying a nut darted across their path. He dropped it for a moment to scold them, then grabbed it again and scampered up the tree.

"That reminds me," Conrad said, "I'm hungry too."

"It's so pleasant here. I hate to leave."

They stood for a moment, looking up at the tree, watching the squirrel watch them. Then Conrad put his arms around her and kissed her. His large, bear-like body felt good against hers, warm and protective.

"I'm going to a pharmacy convention in San Diego next month. I'd like you to go with me," he said.

Her first response was anger. What kind of woman did he think she was? One who sneaks around behind her husband's back? Well, she asked herself, what are you doing right now?

She smiled. "Do you know I had a tremendous crush on you in high school?"

"You did? You should have told me."

"Didn't you notice me hanging around your dad's drug store? I used all my baby sitting money buying cherry cokes, so I'd have an excuse to sit at the counter and watch you make malts."

"Come to San Diego with me and I'll make it up to you."

She looked out over the snow covered landscape. "I don't think so, Conrad, though I've got to admit it's a damned attractive offer."

The restaurant served excellent food. The walk in the snow had increased their appetites and they ordered seconds on everything. Ellen thought she had never enjoyed a meal so much. It was wondrous the way Conrad stowed food away. Quite a contrast to Nate's recent mealtime behavior. He kept a scale by his plate and weighed his portions.

"These prawns are wonderful," she said. "I've forgotten what fat-fried tastes like."

"I eat out most of the time. Can't stand to be in the house alone."

"You really miss Susan.."

"It's eerie, like she just dropped down a manhole or something. One second she's there, and the next, gone. No transition. No warning."

"Someone told me it was a brain aneurysm."

He nodded. "Probably born with a defect in the artery."

Suddenly they found themselves discussing odd and sudden deaths of people they had known. A pall settled over the table until the waitress carried in a huge plate of peach cobbler.

"Dig in," Ellen ordered, "life's uncertain." Conrad did not even smile.

By mid-afternoon, they returned home to Arcadia. As she got out of Conrad's car, he said: "Remember, the San Diego offer's still open."

During the next month Nate went faithfully to the Gym and Trim each day and each morning he checked out the progress of his pectoral muscles in the mirror at the foot of the bed.

"Not good enough," he muttered. "Nothing's happening."

Ellen shopped at the Hi-V and stayed away from Drew Drug. Her behavior embarrassed her. What could she have been thinking going off to a mid-day assignation? Really it was not like her and she resolved to never do it again. Still, she looked at herself in the bedroom mirror from time to time and said, well, lady, you may be 53, overweight with stretchmarks and fallen arches, but somebody wants you. Clearly, Nate didn't. They had not made love in months. She missed Nate's silliness, their laughter, more than she missed the sex. It is the jokes you share that make a marriage, she thought.

They had once made love in the darkened balcony of the First Baptist Church, while the choir rehearsed in the loft at the other end of the sanctuary. A

mention of choir practice could send them both into a fit of giggles, much to the mystification of their friends.

It was that boyish impulsiveness in Nate that she loved. It countered her serious, careful nature. They balanced each other; they were a set -- until recently. She wondered if Nate, as he strove toward perfection, was repelled by her aging body. Or maybe he was just tired from all the weight lifting.

One afternoon, as she was changing the TV Guide in the pouch next to Nate's chair, she found brochures from a plastic surgeon explaining a procedure called a chest implant.

"What's this, Nate?"

A red tinge of embarrassment crept up his neck. "Something I got from the doctor."

"It looks awful."

"It's a silicone implant. It goes in your chest to make it larger. They sort of stretch the skin over it."

"Oh, no!"

"Now just a minute, Ellen. I haven't decided to have it done. I just asked about it."

"Nate, you promised!"

It was only a matter of time until he informed her of the date for the operation. Ellen was unsurprised.

"Get yourself cut up any way you please, but I won't stay here and watch it. I'm not sure where I'm going, but I'm leaving."

Of course, she did know exactly where she was going -- to San Diego with Conrad Drew. The week of the convention coincided conveniently with Nate's surgery. Though she told herself she had forgotten all about the San Diego trip, she realized the dates were engraved in her memory. She called

Conrad at the pharmacy:

"It's Ellen. I know you're busy, so I'll keep this short. I'd like to go to San Diego with you after all."

"I have customers here right now, but I'll be happy to fill that prescription for you. Come in tonight and I'll have it ready."

When she went to the pharmacy that evening, Conrad gave her a plane ticket. He booked her on a flight later than his, so they would not be seen leaving together. She told Nate she was attending a flower show in San Diego. She left him the number of the hotel where she would be staying, telling him not to call except for extreme emergency.

Nate paid little attention to her plans. He was too excited about his own. He talked to a tailor about altering his jackets to an athletic cut. He engaged a male nurse to stay for a week while he recovered. His good-bye to Ellen as she dropped him off at the hospital door was perfunctory.

"Have a good time, dear."

"I intend to," she said.

Spring had already arrived in San Diego. As Conrad and Ellen drove from the airport to the hotel in Conrad's rental car they passed green grass, displays of petunias and crocus, and trees starting to leaf. A breeze from the ocean gave the air a fresh, salty smell.

"Ah, spring," Ellen said taking a deep breath. "It's hard to believe Arcadia is still under a snow blanket."

"Wonderful isn't it? What do you want to do first?"

Ellen thought for a moment. "Let's have a hot fudge sundae," she said.

They stopped at a park for ice cream and coffee and then checked into the hotel. When Conrad signed them in as Conrad and Ellen Drew, she felt the blood rise in her cheeks. She hadn't considered how he would handle the

registration. Why not just use their real names? Putting her down as his wife was wrong, dishonest, and it made her feel cheap. Was the desk clerk looking at her funny? Was that a smirk on the bellboy's face? I'm way out of my element here, she thought. What in the name of God was I thinking of, when I got myself into this?

The feeling stayed with her in the room as they unpacked suitcases and placed clothes in drawers. Ellen chattered nervously. She brought the wrong clothes, she said. The steward on the air plane threw her a bag of peanuts as if she were a monkey, she said. The view of the bay from the window is gorgeous, she said. Finally she stopped still and covered her face with her hands.

"What's the matter?" Conrad asked.

"I'm scared to death. I've never done anything like this before."

"Me too," Conrad said. "Susan is the only woman I've ever been with."

"I think a hug might help."

He put his arms around her and held her tight against him, rocking her slightly back and forth until she relaxed. She listened to the steady thud of his heart. Slowly they began to undress each other. Conrad's body was thick and sturdy as an oak tree. The whiteness of his underwear said it was bought new for the occasion. She found that oddly touching. Without warning, he pulled her down onto the bed, and pulled the sheet up over them.

"Why?" she asked.

"At our age, it's best to cover up."

"And pretend we're 22 again?"

"Wouldn't it be lovely?"

No, Ellen thought, it wouldn't. Desire drained away as if a plug were pulled. Conrad sensed her sudden distance. "Said the wrong thing as usual," he said, falling on his back and taking her hand in his.

They lay side by side holding hands, watching the light of the setting sun move across the room and disappear into twilight. Eventually they fell asleep. Ellen's last conscious thought was of Nate.

She was awakened the next morning by a ringing phone. She returned to consciousness dazed and disoriented, unsure where she was. Conrad's pillow still held the indentation of his head, but he was gone. She picked up the phone.

"I have an emergency call," said the hotel operator, "for an Ellen Mason. You were the only Ellen I could find in the registry."

"I'm Ellen Mason," she said.

Nate's doctor was on the line. Nate's heart stopped on the operating table, he said. "An allergic reaction to the anesthetic. Still in serious condition. Come as soon as you can."

"Will he be okay?" she asked.

"I'm not sure."

Ellen called the airport and booked a flight, then had the hotel operator page Conrad. He arrived back in the room just as she finished packing. He had wakened hours ago and gone out for breakfast.

"I'll go back with you," he said, when she told him what happened, but she refused. Better that he stay and attend the sessions as he planned. She called a taxi and went to the airport alone. Please let Nate live, she prayed as the taxi sped through the spring morning. I don't want Conrad Drew. I love Nate. I have always loved Nate. Don't let him die.

Nate looked tiny and white as bleached bone, lying in the hospital bed. So many tubes and wires ran from his body that a metal arm had been installed over the bed and the lines attached to it to keep them from tangling. At the head of the bed stood a large black box with a series of digital displays and flashing

lights. Ellen recognized the blood pressure and pulse rate windows. The others were a mystery. Other machinery lined the right side of the bed, robot attendants with neon lights and beeping voices.

Nate's arms were tied down. IVs were inserted at wrists and elbows on both arms. His chest was heavily bandaged, but wires ran down and disappeared inside the gauze. Bags of saline and blood hung above his head.

Ellen made her way through the jungle of tubes and machinery and took his hand.

Nate opened his eyes, the old gray-green eyes. He seemed to recognize her. He tried to speak, but the tubes in his mouth and nose made it difficult.

"I came about an hour ago. You were unconscious," she said.

His lips moved in what seemed to be a question. She put her ear close to his mouth.

"How does my chest look?" he whispered. Then he passed out.

Conrad called her at home that night. "Nate's in bad shape," she said, "I don't know if he'll make it."

For days Nate's vital signs rose and fell. His weakened condition invited infection. Antibiotics cleared up the redness and swelling in one incision, only to have it occur in another. The changing of bandages was agonizing. Ellen held Nate's hand as the nurses ripped away the layers of gauze. He was too weak to cry out, so Ellen did it for him. His naked chest looked as if he had multiple stab wounds.

Then his body rejected the implant.

"We'll have to remove it," the doctor said, but Nate wouldn't hear of it.

"I went through all this," he said, "I want my pecs."

Conrad came to the house when he returned from San Diego.

"Please don't come here again," Ellen told him as kindly as she could.

"My husband is very sick and that's the only thing I can think of now."

After six weeks in the hospital, Nate came home. He was exhausted, but the infection was under control. Ellen poured her vitality into him. She read to him from the ship building manuals. She encouraged him to eat.

The coming of spring seemed to give him new hope. He walked out to the backyard one day to look at the spring flowers. Within a week he walked around the block. Frequently he admired his chest in the mirror when he thought she wasn't looking.

Conrad called one evening while they were watching television. "I have to see you," he said. She went up to their bedroom, so she would not be overheard.

"It's over, Conrad. Please don't call again."

"Just like that? You can just cut me out of your life so easily?"

"You were never in my life. Let's just forget..."

"That man is a vain idiot. How can you stay with him?"

"History, I guess. I know he's vain. I know he's foolish, but he's my vain fool. What can I say?"

"I'll never forget you...never," Conrad said.

About a month later, Ellen heard he planned to marry a widow he met at the Methodist Grief Recovery Group.

One summer evening as Nate sat at the card table in the living room paying bills, he reached out and caught Ellen's hand as she walked through the room.

"I'm sorry I put you through this. All these bills, all this nursing."

"Well, you are damned good looking. Of course, I always thought you were."

Nate chuckled.

"Growing pains," she said. "I guess you still get them at our age."

"Not you, Lady Cool. I think you were born mature and sensible."

"Oh, ho, Nate. There's a lot you don't know," she laughed. And damned if you are ever going to find out, she added silently.

Nate's remorse for his obsession was shortlived. The next day found him again admiring himself in the mirror at the foot of the bed. They took daily walks to build his strength. As they passed store windows, Nate's attention to his reflection was rapt. So much so, that Ellen frequently had to pull him out of the path of other pedestrians and oncoming bicyclist.

In the fall Ellen agreed to help again with the flower show in Arcadia Park. Nate felt strong enough to participate, although the doctor warned he must do no lifting. What appeared to be massive muscle was only silicone.

The last Sunday in September found them again arranging flowers outside the glass greenhouse. This year Melody Perkins was on the committee with Ellen. She spied the couple hard at work and hurried over.

"Ellen," Melody said, stopping in front of their table. "I've so wanted to meet your husband."

Nate neither saw nor heard her; his reflection in the glass commanded his entire attention.