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## Nothing Is What It Seems

by Ray Arthur Monigold II  
*a story in THREE PARTS*

### *PART ONE - The People*

She was my first serious crush. She was the only cocktail waitress at the neighborhood restaurant where I worked as one of the bus boys, every Friday and Saturday night, from 5:00 p.m. until our work was done - which was about 3:00 in the morning. Her name was Maureen and they NEVER called her "Mo". In her late twenties she seemed exotic to me. She didn't smoke and in 1963, that was a stand out - everybody smoked. At sixteen, I smoked. The other bus boys smoked, the cooks smoked, the waitresses smoked, the bartender smoked, the dishwasher smoked, the owners smoked, the patrons smoked, Maureen didn't smoke. It was subtle, something that went unnoticed until you had spent time with her, then it slowly sank in - all those "No thanks".

She was elegant. She talked with elegance, she looked elegant, she even walked elegantly. Each step was an execution of elegant purpose. Her left leg traveled in a slight arc to take the lead and then, only after it was firmly landed atop a high heeled shoe, would the right leg follow in its own smooth sweep to overtake the left and affix its stiletto heel and sole to the floor. These separate actions were stitched together in motions so smooth and quick that it caused her hips to dance in recoil. She was thin, not skinny, filling out her clothes with an economy that accentuated her mystery. Her arms carried expressive hands - always waving or pointing in kind gestures making the observers feel as though spot lights shone upon them when she aimed their way. Dressed in tight skirts and ruffle trimmed tailored blouses, brains, beauty and grace were her stocks in life.

The restaurant had been re-possessioned by the two current owners a few years back when they were operators of a bail bond company and the former owner's son skipped town. They thought their world ended the day they paid the court fees. But the restaurant they got in exchange turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Almost immediately they spent their savings fixing up and painting the place. The lunch counter was scaled down and rebuilt. The kitchen behind it was expanded and opened up to show off an open flamed steak grill trimmed in copper sheet. New booths were installed and a small waiting area was decorated by a few comfortable chairs at the door just in front of a welcoming cashier-hostess station that separated the restaurant from the entrance. A liquor license had been transferred and the old store room that once ran across the entire back half of the building was split in two with a cocktail lounge built behind the fancy grill. In the other half a banquet hall for Kiwanas lunches and such had sprung up behind the restaurant side that could be quickly opened up for overflow crowds at night. Lighting in the place was soft and low, helping set the mood of an intimate group space, while the booths offered the feeling of personal privacy.

No one under twenty-one could go past the imaginary line just after the big swinging kitchen door that defined the lounge entrance. Not to get matches, smokes, cokes or anything. Only waitresses went in there, or patrons.

That lounge was Maureen's domain. The bartender was a former boxer who looked almost uncomfortable in his always crisp white dress shirt tucked into his black creased slacks and shiny shoes. A fresh black tie was held close to his shirt with a gold clip adorned by a diamond that matched his large pinky ring. His stubby, muscular hands, while deft in their bar-tending duties, also acted as the sentinels of impending doom warning anyone who would even think of misbehaving. He was there to make drinks and back up Maureen. But everyone knew Maureen needed no back up. Maureen was her own woman - period.

*PART ONE - The People (cont'd)*

Patrons would always be greeted by their names, both in the formal and familiar. Some had favorite tables or booths. Some knew their way to the lounge and would always stop at the grill to chat with the chefs. But everyone who came to dinner was there for the social interaction. Yet some went beyond that to conduct business, or make deals. It was always lively, busy, warm and friendly with men in suits and women in dresses, gowns, wraps or furs and lots of jewelry. The bus boys wore white shirts, shined shoes, black ties and crisp emerald green waste jackets while the chefs were in starched white topped by tall chef hats. Even the dishwasher changed his starched white shirt and trousers twice per shift. The time flew by in a flash as people politely treated each other with respect and high regard.

Near to closing time one Friday night, Maureen came out of the lounge and found me clearing a table. I felt her presence before she confirmed it with her announcement. I nearly left my skin as she said -

"Ray. My father is coming to town and I would like you to go to lunch with us. If you wouldn't mind."

"Me? Lunch? With you?"

"With me and my father. I would like someone to balance out the meal and I thought of you. You've always been nice to me and I thought perhaps I could repay the favor with an informal lunch."

"School clothes or dress clothes?"

"School clothes will be fine, Ray." she sort of chuckled as she said it, like it should have been obvious to me.

We set the time and place and I finished clearing the table. Later, changing clothes in the basement locker room, with the other bus boys and the chefs, I was tempted to share what Maureen had said. But instead I simply savored the moment.

END of Part One

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### *PART TWO* - The Settings

The summer of 1963 was an innocent time, and not just for me, a naive 16 year old who was attending his thirteenth school thanks to his father's continual military related reassignments. It was a time of innocence for all white Americans. The Iron Curtain of the USSR had gotten thicker since the end of WW II, sixteen years earlier. The news had become a dull background noise filled with the continual stories of crisis in the world and strife in the American Southern States because of the nearly unbelievable civil injustices suffered by the black population at the hands of white biggots. No one in Seattle Washington acted as if they cared or even noticed. Everyone in Seattle seemed to get along with each other just fine (so long as we all stayed where we belonged). The country had been scared witless the previous winter when our young president, John Kennedy, faced down the crude, gruff and now feckless Nikita Krushchev over the missile crises in Cuba that had threatened the very existence of the world. That too had faded into our complacency as we all seemed to enjoy the wonderful warm sun of another Seattle summer as it dried out the soggy remains of the now gone, but familiar snowless, grey, rainy winter.

Television had just become an acceptable form of entertainment but it's ubiquitous status was still a few months off, triggered when, unbeknownst to us that summer, we would all crowd around TV sets with the same sense disbelief as gawkers staring at a car crash. And then, just a year later, we would be properly horrified at the ceaseless film footage of close combat in Vietnam filled the TV screens for a half hour at a time, seven days a week. In the summer of '63, national news lasted just 15 minutes each Monday through Friday night with nary so much as a news bulletin on weekends. And TV watching was still a neighborhood event, where people would even schedule informal pot luck dinners before watching just one program, like Ed Sullivan.

And people were still civil. Seattle lived up to it's moniker of the friendliest little city in America. And we had even become the accepting, although unwitting "Hosts to the World" with Century 21, our very own Space Needle logoed world's fair. But even the excitement of that affair had calmed as all the temporary buildings and most of the fun rides had been removed and packed away, opening the once crowded areas to become the huge meandering free central park of Seattle.

Outings were a dress up affair in 1963, with suit and ties for the males and dresses for the women folk. Men always opened doors for ladies and stood for their entrance or when they left the room. Men tipped their rapidly disappearing fedora hats (most men said if the President can go out without his hat, then so can I). NO baseball caps were worn, except by ball players on the baseball field or by small kids in short pants to make them look cute. Movie theaters had a dress code that had just become a bit more lax, to everyone's concern. Dating teenage boys were allowed in without suit or sport coats and ties as long as they wore slacks, dress shoes and a sweater or dressy jacket. Girls needed skirts or casual dresses, but no trousers were permitted. When families attended movies, everyone was dressed up. People went out for dinners fairly regularly, properly attired and mannered, making an evening of it.

There was even a class of clothes called schools clothes which excluded blue jeans and casual shoes. No neck ties, but a pressed shirt was a must. And shoes were expected to be shined. No tennis shoes (and they were just that, rubber soled canvas shoes for playing tennis), likewise no basketball shoes either and even suede was sometimes brought into question. The most casual slacks permitted for boys were cords, but only in winter and they had to carry creased legs. Girls suffered the same shoe rules, sans high heels, but were also never permitted trousers or pants for either the school or dress clothes classes of attire. Only when school was let out could play, or after school clothes be worn. And by 1963 that included loose fitting jeans for both girls and boys. But one would never go "out in public" or leave the neighborhood dressed in such a fashion.

*PART TWO* - The Settings (cont'd)

Cars were big and bulky, gas was cheap, only in the sound of the price, but pricey relative to the median wage of the era. I think the minimum wage had hit a dollar an hour by then. So gas at thirty cents a gallon for a car that averaged 10 to 15 miles per gallon was expensive. Plumbers, family doctors and general practice lawyers made about ten dollars an hour, maybe as high as fifteen, but only for specialists. Hamburgers sold for fifteen cents and fries were eleven. MacDonalds was so rare that I can't remember one in Seattle. Drive In restaurant were very popular for both teens and families. It was the closest thing to fast food back then. But you stayed in the car and finished your dinner before leaving. TO GO was an uncoined phrase. Pizza Parlors had yet to be popularized.

A very expensive house would have sold for \$10,000.00, the average upper middle class house was about half that. Top of the line new cars hovered below the magic "...they'll never pay three kay" with the average no frills car at around \$2000.00. A car heater was still an option, but it was hard to find a new car where heat was not installed. There were NO FM radios in cars and most homes had only an AM radio.

Popular with teen agers and adults alike was the "...but everybody's got one" clock radio. About nine inches wide, four inches tall and nearly as thick, their five primary sides were made of genuine plastic, in bright pastel colors. The sixth side was the back and it was covered in a thick paste board manufactured from petroleum infused paper. But all these radios were placed against a wall or desk, so the back didn't matter. Centered in the front was a square clock face in gold tone or chrome trim. There were grills flanking the clock, but only one speaker was installed making the other grill a fake (no stereo yet). There were tiny knobs living around the outer rim of the clear plastic covered clock face. These were used to set the time, alarm and "mode". You could usually turn the radio on and off with the mode knob and set the clock to wake you by radio programs or an obnoxious electric buzzer, or just turn it off to sleep-in on the week ends. The station tuner and volume knobs could be anywhere on the sides. But usually once a radio station was tuned-in it would never be touched. Only the volume control was needed. With only a hand full of radio stations in Seattle, there was little need to "spin the dial". One, or perhaps two for teenagers and a couple more for the grown ups. That was it!

1963 was powered by practiced happiness and nearly complete self centered apathy. This should not be considered a negative. It was simply the way it was. Seattle was isolated, now that all those foreigners and out of towners had left after the World's Fair. Boeing was plugging along and had most of the city on it's payroll. Everyone else had the task of providing services to the Boeing workers, or were the civil servants that kept the city running for their convenience. It wouldn't be until November of 1963 that Seattle would have the rug pulled out from under it's pacified existence. The Kennedy shooting rocked the world, true, but it woke the sleeping Seattlites and put the town into a state of near insomnia. It seemed that just after we stopped watching the former president's funeral on TV, the Vietnam war rushed in to take it's place, and the tube maintained it's unrelenting hold on everyone's attention forever more.

END OF PART TWO

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a story in *THREE PARTS*

### *PART THREE* - The Lessons

Without the aide of cell phones, ubiquitous computers, iPods, the internet, SUVs, polyester, lead free paint or gas, cable or Dish Network, diesel cars, pick up trucks used as cars, fast food, digital cameras, BIG BOX stores like WalMart and COSTCO, the citizens of 1963 Seattle still managed to survive -

I parked my mom's car because my own 1946 Dodge business coupe had again failed to start. I walked just a few paces when I saw her standing on the sidewalk, waving to me. Looking back now, it seemed like a TV shampoo commercial or something equally as sappy. My heart raced and I picked up my pace, not wanting to look foolish by running. Running to someone is something you do when it's your maiden aunt or grandmother.

As a matter of fact, just that morning I had shared my excitement with my grandmother, who once again lived with us. She had been my constant companion when I was very young, acting as a surrogate mother while mine was in school and a baby sitter when my folks went out. She had even taken me on long trips to Chicago to visit my aunt. We would also ride the Seattle trolley bus downtown and back most Saturdays and shop. Then, as my dad moved around the country, she only moved in with us a few times. But now that we had our big house in Seattle, and we each had our own bedrooms, she was once again my pal.

Anyway, I had told her about my "date" with Maureen and my grandmother cautioned me about the situation, reminding me of Maureen's own words that the lunch was to be with THREE people.

"Remember, Ray. Believe only HALF of what you see and NONE of what you hear."

I didn't get it. But there were a lot of sayings my grandmother had that I didn't get.

"Ray. It's so good to see you today." Maureen said with a big smile.

"Sure Maureen. I'm sorta glad I'm here. Er, I mean it's real nice to be here. That you invited me, I mean." How red was my normally pasty white face then anyway, I wondered.

"Let's go join my father, he's saving us a table." With that she wrapped her arm around mine and gently led the way. Introductions were a bit tense for me because Maureen was still holding my arm as we introduced each other. And her father never stood up either, which I found odd.

Lunch was good, sort of. I had a hamburger, but it was one of those restaurant jobs that comes with the top off and a few potato chips on the side. I knew why the top was off, it fills the plate up. The milk shake was served in a water glass, not a fountain glass and the normally obligatory metal shake container for self refills was also missing. It felt strange, being in this restaurant and knowing how it was all supposed to work. The place was somehow different. A little off. And there were no bus boys. It made me feel uncomfortable somehow.

Plus, there was Maureen and her father. They spoke like he was her boss or something. That really bothered me. Him with his -

"And this is how you're going to live your life? Where is the future? What about becoming a secretary or school teacher? Something that pays well for a woman, and has a bit of respectability. Maureen, let's face it, you're not getting any younger. You need to find a man and settle down. When will I get my grandchildren?"

While Maureen held her ground using -

"I make four times what a secretary or school teacher makes. I have friends, real friends where I work. I have responsibility and respect in my life. I don't want to loose that by giving my life over to a man. YOUR grandchildren must first be MY children and I'm not sure I ever want that. What I do want is YOUR recognition that who I am, who I've become is because of the great job you did raising me. The education and opportunities you provided for me. Be grateful dad that even though, as you say, I have become a big fish in a little pond, at least I am a big fish."

*PART THREE* - The Lessons (cont'd)

This went on as polite banter all through lunch. Maureen seemed to sense my uneasiness and from time to time she would stop and ask how I was doing, how school was going, how I liked work. Be it nerves or some innate understanding that her questions weren't real, I would answer as briefly as possible.

When we left the restaurant I distinctly remember that I had left a dollar tip under my empty pie plate because Maureen's father had left nothing. Waitress tips were how I made my money. Well, my hustle helped. The quicker I could clean a table and reset it for the next group, the more groups a waitress had which meant more total tips. And the better I helped serve and clear dirty dishes during a meal, the bigger that tip was likely to be. The better the tips, the more the waitresses shared with the bus boys at the end of the night.

I also remember how Maureen, even after all that she had put up with from her father, how she held his arm and pulled him close, putting her head on his shoulder as we slowly walked towards the cars. Then three well dressed ladies briskly walked up close behind. They were chatting rather loudly and without even trying I could make out their conversation as I trailed behind Maureen and her dad.

"Isn't that disgusting?" "Yes, that young woman is fawning all over that man." "Why he's old enough to be her father." "This modern society is going to rack and ruin - I swear."

I wanted to turn around and explain, but before I had a chance they turned, walking into the Woolworth's store. I did the only thing circumstance had left me - I ran up next to Maureen and tugged at her free arm saying,

"Maureen, Maureen, there were three ladies just following us and they said you should be ashamed having a boyfriend old enough to be your father. And they said it was disgusting how you put your head on his shoulder. I didn't have a chance to tell them he IS your father before they went in Woolworth. Let's go back and explain. Come on, let's go."

"Ray" she smiled at me as she spoke, "there's no need to tell them anything. They wouldn't believe it anyway. They couldn't accept an explanation now if they've judged us before the truth was known. Besides, didn't your mother ever tell you? Believe half of what you see and none of what you hear."

END OF PART THREE

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(followed by the *EPILOG*)

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### *EPILOG -*

It's clear to me now that we never allow ourselves to know the whole truth, because the entire truth would drive us mad. Our leaders also apply this principle. Jack Nicolson said it best - "The truth? You want the TRUTH? You can't handle the TRUTH!" One of the differences between functional sanity and an institutionalized existence is our ability to measure the amount of truth we contain. Ignorance, as they say, is bliss. While truth is drive you nuts, and set you free.

I have a sense that memories are placed in a file folder, each initially full and complete with every last detail. But as our mind's vault loads up, space is culled through elimination. Old memories are stripped of their details to make all the folders thinner, creating room for new memories. Sometimes an entire event ends up gone for the sake of space.

I also know that this story, this memory lives in a bright pastel folder, covered in little heart stickers with the pencil doodles of smily faces. And now, in the retelling it basks in the new light of missing details. I know that life was not quite as spotless as my mind portrays. But I know that the big pieces happened. The restaurant was real. The prices were real. I know that most everyone smoked. I know that Maureen, her father and my crush existed.

And most importantly, to me, I know that the lessons of that day are still with me - Nothing is what it seems.

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Founded in 1946