

Kathryn Jackson

The Wind Went West Alone

Morning extended its apology. From the base of the row of trees into which Monument Hill crested like an arrested wave, long-knuckled shadows beckoned the Sun along its inevitable path. Neither Rachel nor the wind had slept the night before. Each had stayed up shuddering on either side of the window neither was strong enough to close. Both wore the moist pink cosmetics of April's earliest light. Rachel folded the brown paper; she tied up her parcel in blue yarn. Arm in arm with the clouded visions intended for her dreams, Rachel turned east, and slowly. Dragging her eyes along the scar running toward town, she knew she would have to hurry to keep up with it.

She passed the library where she owed \$23.00 in overdue fines for *The Collected Works of Edna St. Vincent Millay*. She passed the market where she had not shopped since two weeks before when her check for apples and oranges had bounced. She passed the grammar school from which she had been suspended in fourth grade, and the hedgerow behind which she had smoked her first cigarette. She passed the fountain in the center of town, and wished more for the change she had spent on wishes than for the changes she had wished for. She passed the ice cream shop where she had fallen in and out of a sticky, sickly love. She passed the bar, open even at this hour, where she had made the acquaintance of the strange angels who guided her now:

"If you can get to this address, ask for Simon. He can help you with your problem."

Rachel hadn't realized she had a problem until she was offered a solution. She walked quickly, with her head up and her eyes down, as she passed through daybreak, and crossed the tracks that had brought her to this place. To pass the time, she pretended she was a poet. She walked for two-thirds of an hour.

The door before her was unremarkable enough, if one excepted its size. Fashioned out of four prodigious planks of a black-weathered wood, and resembling—except for its angle so inconvenient to dining—a public



picnic table, the door dwarfed its fellows standing sentry in the rain-washed alley. The hardware was unexceptional, again, excepting its size, and not at all when one considered the probable weight it bore. Three-inch high block letters had been carved into its surface:

The Elysium Repertorium & Trust, L.L.C.
Memories: Consignment and Alterations

Rachel pressed the back of her small, dry, ungloved, left hand against the door as if she were checking for a fire on its other side. She felt

nothing. She faced her palm against the door and cupped her right ear against the wood between her thumb and forefinger. Her right hand clenched the scrap of paper on which the address had been scribbled: the edge of some daily news, torn in the shape of Idaho. She listened for an instant or two, and then whirled around waggishly. The alley was empty except for her, the dozen or so other smaller doors, and the irregular raindrop. White chimney ribbons mingled overhead, and wed with the faint sound of a bicycle dragging through gravel. She heard the fainter jostling of its bell.

Curling her fingers around the handle's trigger, hugging the brown paper package under her arm firmly to her side, and sketching a short breath, she released the catch. The door swung inward and Rachel followed. The perimeter of the room was lined with clothing racks arranged prismatically. Immediately to her right floated an ankle-length, double-breasted purple woolen overcoat with wide heliotrope fur lapels and doublewide cuffs. To her left hung blood-red overalls with bright brass fasteners. In the far back corner hung a hand-lettered sign: "Sale. Irregulars." And another: "Tailor on Premises."



She blinked behind her pink lenses. The room was brighter than she had expected it to be without windows, and she congratulated herself on what must have been her womanly intuition to not remove them upon entering the shop. Two rows of freestanding shelves encompassed the room: leather-bound and gold-embossed journals; floral-patterned diaries with ju-

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venile locks; sheaves of papers bound –stacked and rolled– with broad smoky ribbons; report folders and stenographer's notebooks, black and white composition books; three-ring binders of every conceivable width and color fenced in a cluster of short filing cabinets and hip-height bins brimming over with pillows and stuffed animals. She could see the pink trunk of an elephant intimately engaged with a tartan tortoise.

At the center of the room, flanked by jeweler's display cases, between an empty workbench and a counter with a cash register, over what appeared to be the Sports Section, perched Simon wearing a banker's visor and tiny headphones, the cord disappearing over his shoulder. His head was bobbing so anomalously it was impossible to imagine the rhythm he might be enjoying. He was ignoring an oversized steaming mug directly in front of him, examining statistics over its brim, never placing the mug to his lips, and holding the newspaper far enough away that he would not spill on it.

Rachel could only hear the ticking of the clock behind the man's head, and was terribly conscious of the sound of her own voice.

She spoke to the old gentleman. "Excuse me?"

Without removing his headphones, Simon tracked his mug vigilantly until it rested on the pocket calendar laying open on the glass case. Having placed the mug on the surface of the open pages of the days, he glared at their intersection deliberately for a moment before releasing the mug, but stared a moment longer before relinquishing claim with his eyes. He glanced back repeatedly, as a pitcher might eye a runner on base. The mug did not spill.

"What may I do for you?" He turned his eyes slowly to meet the voice's source, but located Rachel's mouth a good two feet further down than he had anticipated, and looked her down and up critically twice before he relaxed his

forehead and sighed, "What do you *think* I can do for you?"

Rachel shuddered under the accusation, but kept her head, and her tongue in it, and settled her sight on the reflection of her feet in the glass case between herself and the old man who had noticed, and was addressing, the bundle under her arm.

"You're not lost and looking for the bus, you're here to see. . . "

"Simon?" She consulted Idaho. "I'm here to see Simon." In her blue slicker, with her head cocked just so, brow pinched inquisitively, Simon would not have been surprised if she had hopped sideways toward him, up onto the counter, and then started to sing. He wrote himself a note to laugh about it later. Turning back from the calendar with the mug he had lifted out of his way, he lifted it higher to indicate an offer.

"Yes, please."

He placed the mug before her on the case and made a shooing mo-