

Don't you just hate reunions? Reunions, to me at least are gatherings of strangers who have some period of time in common but who have been separated by the intervening years and the life experiences that go with them. I find myself with a fixed smile on my face and a furious desire to make for the door at the first polite moment. Reunions always seem to be such good ideas when they are suggested, but you forget that time has carried you and the others at the reunion in different and sometimes adversarial directions.

I might not have been at this particular reunion, except that the owner of the company I had very profitable dealings with had personally extended the invitation.

"You will be joining us on Saturday won't you? Everyone will be there."

I raise an eyebrow and he has the decency to look somewhat abashed.

"Ag, you know what I mean."

Then

"I would really appreciate it."

So, here I stand with a glass of white wine in my hand, a glassy look on my face and an urge to run and hide.

People at reunions try to ignore the years, the missing gaps of life experience and concentrate on reclaiming the bon homie, the team feeling, the esprit de corps. They concentrate on their memories and try to force their feelings about your shared history down your throat. A good example is my nick name. Don the Dof. Dof? Stupid, slow, a dunce. Everyone has used the name this evening, each one trying to part of the crowd, not the outsider. Not like Don the Dof. Don the Dof was always the outsider. Why did they keep me around? Simple. They all fancied themselves as leaders, as stars, as trail blazers and those parts always require a bit of muscle to do the unromantic stuff. Carry stuff to the 4x4. Pack bags, change tyres and generally be there to do the grunt work. I play the part of slow, stolid muscle so well that my presence doesn't threaten the glow of self-satisfaction.

I'm ranting aren't I? Sorry. Lets try a different tack. Let me tell you what the reunion is all about and then you may understand my discomfort.

Two years ago, almost to the day the team, led by Jason 7over there broke through the floor of a millionaires mansion and entered the water filled cave that had lain beneath the foundations of the mansion since it had been built a decade previously. It was only when the millionaire wanted to add a wine cellar that the cave had been discovered. It says much for the architect and the construction firm that were on site that they didn't just break through without realising what they were doing. If they had the entire structure may have collapsed. Apparently a foreman had detected tremors that made him uneasy, he summoned his boss, who summoned the architect. The architect agreed with the foreman and a geologist was summoned. The geologist, using high tech ground penetrating radar and low tech hammers found the cave and its load of water. After months of careful mapping the millionaire was presented with two options. Forget the wine cellar, lay a huge slab of reinforced concrete on top of the cave and forget about it. The other option was to measure the pressure of the water, ascertain water flow if possible and then make a more informed decision thereafter. He was I am told warned that the second option could cause his fancy house to possibly collapse in very spectacular fashion. However if the water was controllable, the cave could be turned into an indoor swimming pool that might be unique in all of the world. The millionaire opted for the second option, the water turned out to be controllable and a tiny camera showed the cave swimming pool to be a possibility. The final decision had to be made after a human inspection had been made.

Jason being a high profile speleologist and cave diver was approached to do the inspection. He assembled a team of brainy individuals and, as usual, included me as the muscle. The floor was reinforced, a strong dam was built around what appeared to be the thinnest part of the cave roof and a hole carefully bored through the floor and into the water. There was no huge fountain of water, just a gentle trickle. slowly a ring of holes was bored until a complete circle had been described. A number of gentle taps started the cracks between holes and soon the trapdoor broke free and fell into the cave.

I went first. "To clear any heavy obstacles." said Jason.

I lowered myself into the water and floated there for a while getting my balanced sorted. Then I started to deflate my buoyancy compensator and breathing bottled air I dropped below the roof of the cave. I sank just a bit more than a metre before landing on the floor of the cave. I reached for my torch and then stopped, puzzled by the amount of ambient light. There was light from above which was to be expected, but there also seemed to be light coming from one side of the cave. The light was a shifting mix of yellow and pink. I lowered myself into a flat swimming position and slowly finned my way toward the shifting light source the lead connecting me to the surface spanning out behind me. What I was doing was stupid and dangerous but my curiosity was piqued. At what I assumed was the cliff face at the edge of the mansion was a wall of calciferous rock. A curtain wall I have heard them called. A curtain wall is a flat vertical surfac formed much like a a stalactite but in a long flattish sheet. The wall was opaque and what I was seeing was light from outside shining through the curtain wall. The colours were caused by different chemicals in the calcium curtain. As the water moved I was suddenly pulled backwards by my control rope reminding me of the others waiting above surface.

I finned back and surfaced.

"Well?" Jason was not well pleased, I had been down far too long.

I spat the Demand Valve out of my mouth.

"See for yourself. Quite safe." I pulled myself out of the water and prepared to be back up for the exploratory team who, assured it was not immediately dangerous entered the hole in a rush.

Everyone crowded around the hole waiting and watching the team disappear. There wasn't much to do so I unhitched my dive gear and sat there with my legs hanging in the water. Forgotten by the mob of onlookers.

"What is it like down there?"

A soft voice right next to my ear.

I jumped and looked around. A young woman with deep violet eyes that seemed to twinkle with light and intelligence squatted next to me.

"You went a long way for a safety check? And fast. What did you see?"

I shook my head. There was no way I could describe what I had seen. She arched her eyebrow.

I sighed. "Nature in all her secret perfection."

"I want to see."

"Wait for the team to get back."

"No. Take me down. Now."
Imperious.

"You can't go down like that. You need a costume. A wet suit. Environmental protection."

Before I could blink, the sheath like dress was gone and she was standing next to me, in a diving skin rolling the sleeves down.

"Next excuse?"

"You won't win you know." The millionaire looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes. Quite, quite wilful she is. Take her down."

I grabbed a second mask from the bag and handed it to her. She smiled, spat in it and washed in the water.

"Me first. Then you sit on the edge facing me and I will lift you in. We will buddy breathe. You know what that means?"

She responded with an divers Ok gesture.

"Hard breathing?"

She gestured correctly if not a little impatiently.

"Lets go."

I lifted her in, feeling the lithe strong body beneath the diving skin causing me to hold onto her slightly longer than was absolutely necessary. I noticed that she didn't object, in fact smiled quite lasciviously at me.

I passed her my buddy dv and we submerged together. I pointed her in the direction of the light. We lay there watching the play of colour. Vehemently she gestured toward the light. I shook my head. She glared and tried to go alone, forgetting the buddy tether. Stopped short. If she could have, she would have stamped her foot. I gestured, Surface. She shook her head. I grabbed her and hoisted her up out of the hole.

"No. I don't know how dangerous it is there. I am not going to zip you into a body bag. Forget it."

She snarled at me and stormed off.

"Good man." I got a pat on the shoulder from the millionaire.

I waited for the the team to return. First Jason with pictures and words, then two more. Then? Then no one. Four went in. Three came out. I grabbed the one who had just surfaced.

"Where is George?"

They all looked around. So busy with their grab for glory, they had not gone buddy buddy. Not stayed tethered. Now George was gone.

"Come, lets go find him. Quickly."

We finned to the curtain wall. We finned back. Circling, back and forth. Nothing. No George. I led them around the walls of the cave and then finally found what looked like a collapsed roof and from the pile of rubble a fin extended. Frantically I started lifting rock. It was razor sharp, my hands started to be lacerated, filling the water around me with blood. Another rock came off the roof, crashed on my shoulder, ripping my wet suit, cutting furrows into my shoulder. Another rock rolled free and then George was freed. Still breathing but badly injured. I looked around, the others had retreated when the rock had fallen on me and were staying way out of danger. I pulled George free, heard him scream into his div as a broken bone scraped and then he passed out. I swam him back to the hole and safety.

They have by that time got a paramedic on the scene and Georg is whisked off to hospital, not before being dosed heavily with pain killers. I stop the bleeding of my hands and shoulder with a tee shirt and carry the gear to the truck. I dump the last load and turn to join the others in the meeting that convened to "discuss the way forward" and bump into the Jennifer.

"You are still bleeding. Come with me." Imperious again. I look at my torn hands and realise she is right. "Come. I want to strap you up."

I am too tired and sore to argue and I follow her into the house and into the kitchen. She seats me at the table, goes off and fetches a quite professional looking first aid kit. She starts on my shoulder. Slowly, gently cleaning the wound. Dropping chunks of stone into a plate. Eventually my shoulder is clean and patched and she starts in on my hands. She talks to me all the while. What do I do? Where do I live. What interests me? I answer the stream of questions as best I can and become completely lost, enchanted, enslaved. All I can think of doing is taking her there and then on the table. The half smile she gives me every now and so often seems to hint that she knows exactly what is on my mind. Then she sits forward over the table her face over my wrists and looks up at me.

"Lets see if your fingers still work properly. Fine motor movement test. Touch your thumb on your pinkie. Good. Now on the ring finger? Good. Forefinger, fine. Index finger?"

I cannot resist, her nipples are just too close, I extend my hands a fraction, take her nipples between thumb and fore finger and squeeze gently. She doesn't move or react.

"Good. Now see if you can move the fingers sideways."

I roll her nipples back and forth and feel them start to grow under my ministrations.

She reaches forward, lifts my chin and kisses me full on the mouth.

"Not today. Soon." Then she pulls away and we stare at each other in silence. Eventually she shudders, then:

"Lets get you bandaged up." and completes the bandaging of my hands.

I leave tasting her mouth on mine, see her eyes and the feel of her arousal in my fingers. I am lost. I curse myself for a fool. Reaching way beyond my station. Allowing her to toy with me. It doesn't matter, I am still lost.

George survived the experience and now walks with a limp. I have still have some scars on my hands and shoulders.

The others swore it was my fault . I was safety, I was Don the Dof. It had to be my fault.

We parted then. Jason continued the survey, paid everyone except me and we lost touch for a while.

Then they needed muscle again and I was once again invited along. They paid for everything, I was the poor relation. The village idiot, incapable of earning a decent salary. A labourer, earning labourers wages.

I always get invited to reunions, to slide shows, to lectures. Just for completeness. I never say anything, am never invited to. I don't have much to say.

So that brings us back to the reunion. It is being held at the architect's place and it was he who invited me. Knew that I had bad memories of the whole issue, but pressurised me. I buckled and arrived.

The party starts getting rowdy. The architect tries to describe the pool that now graces the mansion, he fails. Jason taunts him. He finally agrees to take us and see if we can talk our way in.

I am seriously reluctant, but again he is seriously insistent. I buckle and join the slightly pissed bunch in the big SUV and we head out to the mansion.

All is darkness when we get there and we head down a side road and find a maintenance entrance. We sneak down the road and get to the gate which is very strongly bolted. No way in.

I look up and notice security cameras and motion sensors.

"Time to move. Before the cops arrive and arrest us." I tell the group.

They are not drunk enough not to take note of the situation.

We start back up the road me taking up the lead. Suddenly there is light, there are people. Security at the exit. We are trapped.

The security chief is there.

"It's your lot. One year reunion? Thought you might try it."

Somehow I am suddenly the spokesman.

"No harm done. We just wanted to see the pool. We are going."

The millionaire is suddenly on the balcony just above us. "Not joining us? We were also celebrating the pool."

I am angry and ready to walk away. This is my final outing with these fools.

"No, I for one am not staying. I have had this lot. Finished."

"Is there nothing I can say to make you change your mind?"

The soft voice of Jennifer. She has haunted my dreams, infested my fantasies, broken my sleep. I can still feel her strong lithe body in my hands as I shoot her out of the hole. Feel her nipples on my fingers, her mouth on mine. In the darkness of the night, I lust after her and know I am wasting my time. I look at her. She is still that vibrant strong woman I held in my hands a year ago and she is wearing a similar dress to the one she had that day we met.

I am for the moment speechless, my dreams crashing into reality. My dreams fleeing before the reality of my hopelessness.

"No." I say and turn to walk away. Not wanting to be humiliated in front of every one. Not wanting

anyone to see my desire for her. The effect she has on me.

Before I can respond another face appears.

"Maybe he is too stuck up now? Him having gotten his doctorate and all."

One of the audience that attended my thesis defence. At the time I couldn't figure out what she had been doing there.

She smiles.

"Jennifer said you were the man so the family asked me to keep an eye on you. I didn't have much to go on. Don the Doc? I found you though. Mr Donald Charles. Sorry. Dr. Donald Charles now they tell me. We watched you and we all agreed with Jennifer."

I glared at the architect. "You set me up?"

He smiles gently. "Of course. Everyone does what Jennifer wants." He pauses, "I wouldn't be looking at anyone but Jennifer if I were you."

"Are you sure you don't want to stay with me?" asks the soft voice of my dreams. I turn to look at her. She has rolled the dress down just as she did that day of the dive but this time there is no diving skin and she is naked down to the waist, Her skin is a golden sheen and flawless except for a single star shaped tattoo that decorates her right nipple.

"Nothing?"

She asks again.

Foolishly I look into her eyes and drown there. You can hear a pin drop, she smiles, "Please?"

I climb up onto the balcony to stand next to her.

"Just one quick drink." I hear myself say and gently roll the dress back up.