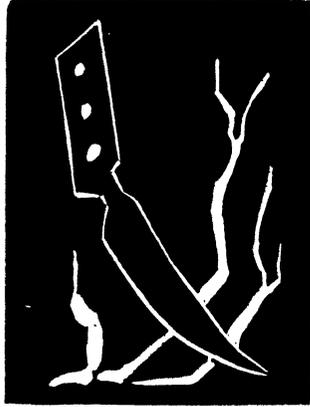


# To Tell You Straight

Jauvanta Young



**D**ARLING, I whirled. I went wild in my head. I stood in front of the mirror with my eyes shut and took off the black dress and the copper bracelet and put the sandals back in their box. It was all cool and falling light on the floor only I kept my eyes closed till I bumped into the door of the closet.

Then it was all right because it was like someone else hanging up the dress and straightening the belt so the bit of turquoise shone and the little silver dots. It was her Yang dress. It belonged with Indiscrete and a pale face. It belonged with slant eyebrows and black hair and a sweet mouth and high young breasts he said and that was her.

Only there were crooked black twigs at the window so it wasn't all right any more.

Then because you like the earrings too I took them off and hurt wild and quiet in my head when I laid them on the dresser because I don't betray you easily, darling. I always get the light panic in me first and . . . that's how it twists . . . I didn't mean to betray anything it was my tongue and betray is a hard quicksand word. All I did was take off the earrings, then think what I did, not think and then do it.

It is an unfortunate thing that words once said though smudged off again leave thin shadows on the mind and if you run your fingers over them you can feel small ridges. How do you paint an unfortunate thing? How do you cast it away from you having once known it?

So I have betrayed you again now, darling, just now with the silent things I said under the things I said. I closed against you after I promised not to.

Darling, please don't look at it as that. When I go away from you sitting beside you it isn't you but me that's the wrong thing. When the dark spinning starts so fast in the sunlight. The small spidering thoughts bend all crooked as I brush them off staying close beside you. Only somehow I get weak. I turn to look at you and the words don't come when I know you could put them straight for me only you're on the other side of the spiderwork and I keep brushing it away saying "I'm sorry—please, I'm sorry."

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I've made some judgement inside me, that this is the first turning away from you of many turning days. No. Not at all.

Today wasn't important. It was nothing. I've told you that—that it meant nothing and I'm ashamed it has built up to seem so much. Marian would say I'm tired and need sleep. Tom would too. Maybe so. Maybe it's very good sense they're saying but I'm going to leave it alone. There's all the sun outside. You see, don't you, I can't crawl away from it with the spidery things still stinging. I can't crawl away from you.

It was all nothing to begin with. I went to the reception and walked around the candleflames going through the motions and the sweet talk my my what a bright child and so well behaved and all the time waiting with a small laughing song in me. Then I called you as I'd promised. When you didn't answer, that was all right. Of course it was all right and should have ended there, no reason why not. I knew there were half a dozen things that could have happened—otherwise you'd skip the details and half break your neck to be there when I called. Knowing that, I walked home and took off the earrings for no reason at all except that later it hurt.

It's bad with the sun shining. Trapped like, trying to tell you straight with my twisting words seeing how they shine before they cut you.

Darling, did you ever watch a small kid play with a butcher knife with three smooth spots on the handle watching the light slide on slide off so bright so bright? It makes no matter that the knife is sharp has cut many times. Each time the knife twists the light shines off a little differently.

And it's like the wind turning grass crooked on its stems all

the way across the lawn when you know grass doesn't grow like that shining wrong in the sun and each little turn of the wind is such a small thing, only when you go away you see the grass lying crooked across the lawn when you know it really isn't that way and really isn't crooked only you called it that once and now you have to go away knowing it's not at all important only all over the lawn the grass is lying crooked and you don't like it.

Do you see what I mean . . . that that's the only way I betray you and betray isn't the word for it only sometimes I can't talk the things straight in me and the wind blows very lightly from many directions.

And there's another funny thing too now that I'm talking about funny things. It's the way Tom paints. It's the way a person can paint hurt or pain or ugliness into a picture beautifully and because the picture is beautiful the hurtness eases only in a way it's worse. Tom did it with child-birth and you remember the roses how blackly he painted them and then covered the canvas with a dark cloth. It's the same with music and now I'm sorry I thought of this because you know what I'm thinking of and it's a little too close still for the others to see.

And it's the same with remembering things . . . I mean it's being a funny thing. One rarely remembers ugliness as such except casually, impersonally, even when the ugliness is set in the mind so that it turns up over and over again. But when the ugliness is mated with something strong or firm or very moving, when it is tangled with some feeling of security or has-to-be-belief in God the Father or in husband faithfulness, then the ugliness is a personal violation and a danger to be caught so close that the eyes blur focusing beyond it and I'm near-sighted anyhow.

Only it isn't ugliness that gets tangled up here. It's fear.

And it's funny too how fear can be ugly and crooked and twisting and beautiful too. And power too. Only if power is beautiful it can lead to engineering or fascism or both, not that I'm crusading against engineering.

And how if you look at it as the ends-means game starting from cause or from means? Where you throw the dice fast for a four and a three and suddenly something else is remembered or learned and the whole frame-up of consequences and implications changes so now it's a two and a five on the dice. What do I say then? That it's all a toss-up according to the way the wind turns

and I'm getting into deep water over my head and mixing my metaphors and had better get out?

O.K.

I can do that.

I can run off in my head.

I can think about sociology and how the professor says that's a good question when I ask a good question and never answers it only marks down a value mark on me with his eyes for the class to see and goes on. And then how he was a little too glad to see me when I came back this fall and I talked my way away from him and out the door . . . very good friends see you sometime. Oh there's lots more.

"No," you say, "don't . . . don't smile like that" . . . when it's all so amusing, the funny things, crazy talk of mind and knives and crooked grass. It's so small. She calls him up and he's not there so she goes home to have a good time wild whirling in her head in many directions like fog skittering flat along the ground under a high wind.

It's all fine and miserable and I laugh and laugh.

Only it isn't small.

It vanishes and more comes out of time with the same flaw, the same pattern. Days ebb into nights and nights into new days under many moons. Always the sift out of id into action made of small threads that twist and go straight and keep changing—small threads caught into the person for the space of one breath out of many, which slowly modify it.

Darling, I wasn't smiling.

