

EXCERPT FOR LIGHT AND TENDER BLUE

We lived this way for half a semester. Then the Junior Counselor stopped me in the hall to ask me how things were going. I said, "Fine. I don't see much of my roommate but we get along."

He laughed and said, "Roommate, you must be kidding. You have the only single room in this dorm."

I laughed and said, "I was kidding." Then I shut up and walked away. I was very confused.

When I opened the door to my room, Don was there. I said, "Don, I just met the Junior Counselor in the hall and he said this was a single room and I did not have a roommate. So who the hell are you?"

He nodded his head and said, "He's right. This is a single room. I moved in here in September 1958 and I have been here since then. You are the first roommate I have had in four years. None of the others ever stayed. Until you got here, I have been alone. Why didn't you leave when you found that the room was occupied?"

I answered, "I requested a single room but wrote that I would accept a roommate if a single room wasn't available. So I moved in."

He smiled and said, "I like you."

I said, "And I like you."

He said, "Sit down. Let me tell you a story."

I sat down at my desk chair and wheeled it around so I could face him. He sat cross-legged on his bed and told me his story.

He told me about working for four years and

then coming to this college in 1958. He asked for a single room and got this room.

He really enjoyed the freedom of going to classes, being in cross-country in the fall and track in the spring. He met girls and dated some. In the fall of 1960, he met a freshman girl who was using a study carrel near his own. He began to have whispered conversations with her on occasion. She was shy and studious. Eventually he asked her on a date.

She told him that she was engaged to boy back home. He left her alone to study that day. Every day after that he always greeted her and they talked for a while before getting to their studies.

When he met her in the halls or on the sidewalks, he would walk along with her for a ways. Eventually he asked her to have a coke with him at the student center. She said yes and it was the first of many conversation dates over a coke, during a walk along the banks of the creek, and even sitting next to each other on a park bench.

In November, he told her that he loved her.

She shook her head and said, "You can't love me. I'm nearly engaged to my guy back home."

He said, "Oh, but I do. I really love you."

She kept saying that he couldn't be in love with her and he mustn't talk about it or she would have to avoid him from then on. He was able to convince her that they could just be friends.

He didn't see her until after Thanksgiving break. The snow had fallen and he was on one of his solitary walks down by the lake. It was the first time he had ever seen her there.

She smiled as soon as she saw him. She said, "Kiss me! I've just been chosen as a candidate for Winter Homecoming Queen."

She held out her arms. He put his arms around her and kissed her; and he kissed her and he kissed her.

She responded with such wonder and surprise that she could respond to his kiss.

When they came up for air, she said, "I've just been standing here, feeling good about myself and I saw you and I wanted to share my good feelings with you. I didn't know that I loved you so much until just now."

My roommate was ecstatic. He let go of her and literally danced with happiness there in the snow along the lake shore. Then they walked and talked along the parkway on the way back to her dorm.

While they were still out of sight of the campus buildings, she said, "Kiss me again. I don't believe it's true."

He kissed her and the same magic was there. He was so happy. When they broke from that kiss, he pranced and danced around and he didn't notice a car coming down that rarely used road. It hit him. It killed him.

I said, "How can you be here if you are dead?"

He said, "I don't know. I don't understand it. I am sure I am dead and yet I feel so alive. But when I leave this room, no one can see me. I have form and body only in this room. I can communicate with you but to no one else – unless they come into this room."

I said, "I don't understand you. I am not sure that I believe you."

He said, "My God, I don't believe it either. But it must be true. I only seem to have a body during the day. You see me now, but tonight when it is dark, you will only be able to see me when you turn on the light."

I said again, "I don't believe you."

He said, "Wait! Wait until tonight and we will see."

We did. It was true. How, I don't know. He didn't know. He just knew that his girlfriend was still at school. Her name was Karyn. She was a senior and she was very sad and lonely as she completed her degree. She kept to herself and had no friends. She rarely spoke to anyone, unless spoken to.

He went to her all of the time, but he could not reach her or communicate with her. Her grief was so great that it shut out his attempts to touch her mind and thought. She wasn't open to his presence and she wasn't open to the presence of anybody else.

He asked me to help. I did.