

A Prequel to “Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of
Light!” by James Tiptree

By Noah Mader

Hot summer night, big raindrops falling faster now as she swings along the concrete sidewalk approaching the Twin Anchors — one of the few taverns left in the old desolate city. Smiling, she thinks about how liberating it feels to walk in the rain at night, letting her thoughts roam freely, admiring the raindrops as they fall aimlessly. How she loves to walk! How great would it be to walk across the country, free from commitment and worries just like the rain. She then wonders if one day she'll be able to quit her job and work in the courier industry. She strolls into Twin Anchors and routinely walks toward the back of the dimly lit tavern for the bar where she is met with a glaring smile from her best friend.

“Heyo, Sister!” she shouts.

“Howdy sis” the friend replies, analyzing her clothes, “who are you trying to impress tonight?” She glances down at herself and realizes her attire is quite revealing compared to usual. Her new outfit must have shrunk in the wash. Oh well, a little skin won't hurt anybody, right? She decides to take her mind off her dress and begins ordering drinks. It's wonderful how just a few shots can make her feel so free. From the outside I seem to have it all she thinks: a husband, a newborn, a well-paying job. The more she has, however, the more she feels trapped with responsibilities. She hates how the world is cruel like that, taking away her freedoms all the time.

It's not long before she is accompanied by a sweet, sturdy man full of excitement and conversation. How kind of him to continue to buy her drinks and keep her company! After too many drinks to count, she staggers to her feet and nearly falls over. The world is spinning and she can hardly tell up from down. She knows she is supposed to be walking home with her friend but the man she had just met is escorting her out of the tavern. The sudden feeling of having to vomit preoccupies her thoughts and she continues with the man anyway, unaware of where she is going. She gets in the car and closes her eyes.

“Yes, she was extremely drunk. She kept telling me she was very ‘trashed’”

“How accurate would you say her memories of that night are?” the prosecuting attorney asked.

“I’m not sure, she doesn’t even remember the fact that I left the bar early.”

“If you were her only friend at the tavern, then why would you leave her there alone?”

“I was tired. If she wanted to get home safely, then maybe she shouldn’t have drunk so much. She’s not my responsibility; she should be able to deal with her own problems.”

The attorney bit his lip. If only women knew when to stop drinking, he thinks to himself. He jots down some final notes and wonders how much money he’ll still make when he loses the case.

—She feels paralyzed with anxiety. She is confused, angry and hopeless. Why her, she wonders. Was it really her fault? Was she to blame? No, she couldn’t be, right? She’d always felt vulnerable but now she feels like she cannot even step outside her house. No one can see her like this: weak and ashamed. She never should have gone to that bar. She should have known that things like that happen there. If only she wasn’t so foolish and helpless.

“What was she wearing that night?” the lawyer asks.

“A very revealing outfit. She easily could have gone out in a more modest outfit if she wanted to. The other women there were significantly more covered up. I felt seduced by her overt presentation of her sensuality,” the sturdy man responds, looking deceived.

The lawyer glances across the courtroom and notices tears building up in the woman's eyes. He has no sympathy at all for her. He smiles knowing he's saving an innocent man from the grasps of a lying woman. He continues his questioning and asks "Were there any other reasons why you felt the woman was seducing you?"

"She was flirting with me the entire night and asked for my phone number. She even left the tavern with me and never asked to go home." The man answers.

"No further questions your honor."

—How cruel this world is she thinks. No one believes her. Some believe the story, but no one believes that her intense pain and suffering is real. She continues to weep alone in her room. She is too anxious to leave it because of the unknown dangers that await outside. She walks in circles to calm herself down and wonders if she'll ever find an escape from her prison of fear and anxiety.

"It's time for her to get over it," Maria rambles on to her husband, "she can't hide from her responsibilities forever."

"She'll end up alright I think. Our daughter is strong," he responds hesitantly.

"I hardly even talk to her anymore. She locks herself in a room for hours on end."

"Ever since she lost that court case she has gradually been getting worse. It might be time to do something about it. The other day, Henry discussed the possibility of getting her prescription drugs to relieve some of her PTSD symptoms."

"I didn't need any treatment when I went through my mental health crisis. I was myself again within a month. If I can take it why can't she?"

—Everything makes her feel powerless and trapped. She refuses to be embraced or comforted by anyone. It would put her in too vulnerable of a position. It is imperative that she be alert at all times; she can never, *Never!*, let her guard down again. She will not even acknowledge her husband. Men cannot be trusted as sisters can. She thinks about a world where men don't exist and grins to herself at the thought. She needs a way to escape this world of evil men.

“The delusions are getting worse,” Henry pleaded with the psychiatrist, “there has to be something else I can try because the pills are clearly not working.”

“Electric shock is always an option you can turn to if you are desperate. The treatment could possibly correct the delusional system or at least stop it from expanding.”

“It's worth the risk. I'll do anything to get her back,” he moans. Between his job, supporting his wife, and taking care of her baby, who she no longer recognizes, he has no time to himself. He wonders how everything spiraled out of control so quickly. His wife used to seem so happy. How did she end up in a psychiatric ward? He wistfully flips through a scrapbook and stops at a picture of a young woman in a yellow dress smiling.

—It was time to hit the road. She has spent too much time at this hostel and needs to get moving if she is going to make it to Des Moines in decent time. She picks the lock of her window and sneaks out. She takes the ramp up to the expressway and looks across the miles of dilapidated gray buildings. Couriers get to see so much. A broad smile creeps across her face as she walks worry-free into the world.

References

Tiptree, James. "Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light." *The Fiction of James Tiptree, Jr.*, by Gardner R. Dozois, Borgo Press, 1984, pp. 144–162.