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Patience

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Kelly saw it too, sitting up on the bank like a caricature of a lighthouse, but with no beacon to guide the ships at sea — just a dumb owl staring into the river with bright green eyes. What a place for an outhouse. It hooked: Patience her of when she was a child and her mother was always telling her to "be sure you go to the bathroom," before they left to go anywhere, "because it's your last chance before we get there!" Now the outhouse was telling her "It's your last chance, all ashore who're going ashore!" All at once Kelly knew why her arms felt paralyzed even though she was still moving them to paddle. That paralyzed feeling was her struggle not to give up — as long as her arms were paralyzed to any movement but paddling, she could not give a signal to surrender. The hell with that outhouse! She didn't need to go to the bathroom after all.

The canoe sped past the outhouse and Jeff had a moment of almost imperceptible relief. They had just entered the bend in the river which opened into the canyon, and the current was erratic and the water was crashing against the rocks.

He could feel the canoe being swept toward the rocky center of the river. He began to work his paddle harder and faster. They were moving closer and closer to a large log which was lodged against the rocks in a position parallel to the river. Instinctively he knew the girls were thinking the same thing he was — if they timed their move right, they would use all three paddles at once against the log as a push-off point for leverage against the current. If they could push hard enough while they were moving, and if the paddles didn't split, they might be able to get out of the fast current.

Patience

By Pamela Heckler

On a crisp clear autumn day, seventeen year old Gabrielle Brecht entered her home for the last time. The house had been sold to include the furnishings, so it appeared much the same as it had always been. Only the decorative accessories and personal items had been removed. As Gabrielle stood in the foyer she wondered why she had not also been included with the sale of the house, since so few items of her past were being moved.

Gabrielle entered the living room and dropped onto the sofa, with her feet and legs stretched toward the imaginary heat of the empty fireplace. The familiar scent of her mother's cologne was interwoven with the floral fabric of the sofa cushions; and she was reminded of her mother's beautiful face. With her long blonde hair braided and knotted at the back of her head with only four hairpins; (which was one of the many things that had always fascinated Gabrielle about her mother). She had formed the conclusion sometime ago that only someone with movements as graceful and controlled as her mother's, could keep so much hair in place with so few pins.

With much effort and a sign of misery, Gabrielle raised her body from the sofa and slowly moved down the hall to the solarium. The sunlight streaming through the windows and skylights exaggerated the emptiness of the room. This had always been her favorite room. In this room, she had napped in her playpen, played with her dolls, and done her schoolwork, while her mother worked at her easel. The palms, rubber trees, and other immense tropical plants which her mother tended so faithfully had been removed, and were already being placed in the new house by the moving men. The missing plants reminded her of bedtimes long ago and she could hear her mother's whispering voice.

"Dig a hole and plant you deep,
with lots of soil around your feet."

As her mother said the rhyme, she would draw back the blankets, pat the center of the bed, then Gabrielle would climb into bed, and her mother would press the blankets around her legs and feet. Then Gabrielle would choose an imaginary plant, flower, or vegetable to be during the night and her mother would sprinkle her with kisses to help her grow.

The corner of the room where once her mother's canvas, easel, and paints stood had dots of colored pigment on the tile floor; giving hints of the once artistic domain. Gabrielle pulled her jacket tighter around her shoulders as if the emptiness of the room reflected her own vulnerable state. She turned from the room and began to climb the staircase; caressing the banister with such sorrow that her vision was momentarily blurred, and she tripped on the steps halfway up the landing. She approached the doorway to her bedroom, stopped, and chose to lean on the door frame rather than enter. It was as if some inner voice warned that all the self control she was so desperately trying to maintain would be lost if she were to cross the threshold. Sounds of laughter and recent tears seemed to mingle with the dust particles dancing in the sunlight that was seeping from beneath the window shades. She remembered Sarah, her oldest friend saying,

"You are so lucky, Gabrielle, to have a mother like yours. My mother could never survive without my father; let alone be a success like your mother." Gabrielle had replied with pride in her voice,
"My mother is very independent, I guess she doesn't need a man around."

The last few months had changed everything. The night in July would forever be imprinted on her mind. She had just returned from a camping trip with her father. She felt dirty and sticky and had only wanted a bath. Feeling cool and refreshed from her bath, she had entered her bedroom to find her mother sitting at the dressing table staring into the mirror. Her mother had turned and said,

"Gabrielle, I have the most exciting news to tell you — Dietrich and I are getting married."

Gabrielle had quickly put her head down and began rubbing her hair dry with a towel. She had needed time to answer and could not let her mother see her expression of shock.

"Why, that's wonderful. I'm so happy for you!" That is what she had said. But what she felt was entirely different. She had wanted to scream and protest,

"Why do you want to get married? You're successful and you have everything we need. We have been happy together. I have a father, and don't you think this will be different!"

Kelly was the one to watch. When she made her move, the other two would have to move at the same time. Jeff knew Chrissey was watching Kelly, too.

Kelly's paddle came out of the water and was held horizontally, ready. Chrissey's and Jeff's paddles were poised and ready, and without really thinking, they moved in unison, their paddles jamming the log hard. The canoe lurched sideways and they had their paddles back in the water at once. As they moved sideways, they also moved forward with the river. Suddenly they found themselves moving along very fast, but without struggling. They had found another current in the river that moved steadily forward. The rocks and the dammed up logs were finally behind them. Ahead of them, must come into view through the gray mist, was the bridge.

For a few seconds they all just let the river take them along. Then Kelly turned and looked back at Chrissey and then at Jeff, her wet hair in strings struck across her face, and then she grinned. Chrissey turned and looked over her shoulder at Jeff and he could see she was smiling, too. He felt his own grin almost splitting his face. He raised his hand and touched his brow in a little salute to them.

Then he reached back and patted the wallet in his pocket. It was gonna be a great, great party!

Instead of saying what she really felt, she had walked over to her mother and gave her a hug and kiss. She had been playing the role of the understanding daughter since her mother and Dietrich had first started dating, and it seemed too late to change. Gabrielle had started noticing the changes in her mother right after her return from Mexico; where she had met Dietrich, who was also vacationing there. Her mother had shown less interest in her painting and began rearranging her schedules around Dietrich's visits. She had certainly laughed more and looked more beautiful as each day passed, but Gabrielle found it difficult to share in her mother's new found happiness. They often invited her to join them, but she somehow felt the invitation was made out of politeness and a sense of duty. Since her mother and Dietrich were both German she spoke in German and had further alienated Gabrielle. As time passed, she began to feel more like a foreigner in a strange land than Dietrich did.

Gabrielle closed the bedroom door, hoping to end the replay of these disturbing memories. As she moved back to the stairway, she tried to sort out the confusing thoughts that were going on in her mind. With the house sold and all things familiar gone, she did not know where she belonged. Her father had said she could live with him, but his leaving fifteen years ago had always kept her from feeling secure in his presence. Gabrielle stopped at the bottom of the stairs and knew she had to make a choice. The one option she had not yet seriously considered came to mind. She could just get into her car and drive until she found somewhere to belong or someone who wanted her.

Adrienne Brendt was busily adding the final touches to the new house. She moved from room to room delighting in all that she saw. The furniture purchased on their European honeymoon was beautiful in the living room. The den had been designed with a Mexican motif as a memorial to Dietrich's and her first meeting. She followed the moving men into Gabrielle's room and began to unpack the boxes as they were set down. The brass bed and wicker furniture had been imported from India, and was meant to be a special surprise for Gabrielle. Adrienne could not wait to see the look on her daughter's face when she saw the room. The first box she opened held Gabrielle's expansive collection of family photographs. She could not resist the temptation to lie across the bed and browse through the albums. Nostalgia and excitement mingled within her as she stared at a picture of Gabrielle taken when she was two years old. She began to speak softly, not only to herself, but to the picture of her daughter that she saw before her.

"Oh, the struggle of surviving those first ten years. My foolish pride when Edward walked out. I still remember those words spoken in pain and anger."

"I don't need you; go find yourself! Go ahead — travel and experience all those things you think marriage and a family are keeping you from! Gabrielle and I will get along fine without you or any man!"

"What a fool I was to say such things. So many times I would have died if I hadn't had you Gabrielle. I admit there were days when I resented your presence and dependency on me, but those were the times that I came to understand Edward and sympathize with him. Edward gave into those feelings and left. I was determined not to. All I had then was my talent, and you Gabrielle, and I knew you would give me the strength to use that talent to help us survive. Papa's words were with me daily,

"We Germans are called stubborn, but it is really our desire to survive and not give up. In America, we shall use our strength and courage to make our stubborn dreams come true!"

"Dietrich is so like Papa. I remember when we first met, just hearing his voice brought a rush of emotions within me. Maybe it was to have someone to speak German with after so many years. I'm not sure, but that first night I cried the first real tears in fourteen years. I had kept so many feelings inside me since your father left, like a woman's natural desires. You, my plants, and my painting were the only things that I trusted enough to get close to. The fear of my rejection and failure had become like a cancer growing inside of me. That is why I took the trip to Mexico. I know that you think I have changed and I'm not quite sure how to explain it to you. I have learned so many new things about myself since meeting Dietrich. I was wrong to think that being independent and strong meant living without a man. I don't want you to deny your womanhood as I have done. Dietrich has said that I must be patient to give you time to adjust to a new mother, a new father, and a new home. I am still a bit frightened and unsure of these new feelings Gabrielle! We both need your love and patience as well so that we can all get to know ourselves and each other better."

Adrienne closed the photograph album and jumped from the bed at the sound of a car door slamming in the driveway. She moved to the window and stood waving at Gabrielle as she walked toward the front door to enter her new home for the first time.