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# THE WAITING GAME

Martha Elias Downey

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Someone...is waiting for me.

I can sense it when I walk home at night  
out there, just out of sight  
waiting, watching, debating when to make a move.  
I can feel it when the hairs on my arm rise up slowly  
and there is a tingle on the back of my neck, only  
it doesn't stay there.  
That tingle, shivery tingle, finds  
the bottom of my spine  
and that's how I divine that  
someone...is waiting for me.  
I imagine and hypothesize and theorize  
that the encounter will happen in some dark alley -  
the *marked* and the *mark-er* meet and greet and all manner of devastation is heaped on me.  
Yes, that is what I fear.  
Deep in my belly, that's where I hear the fear talking  
so when I am walking  
I am praying, hoping, that nothing happens.  
It's okay, I'd say, to be praying...for nothing.

But nothing will not happen.  
I know that this someone will, eventually, catch up to me.  
It might happen in broad daylight, who knows?  
Perhaps I am in a park, and someone suddenly appears in a bush- whoa!  
(though I think that highly unlikely)  
I think about it often, more often than not, about how I'll be caught off guard.  
When I open the closet door, the refrigerator door, the shower door, the elevator door  
pick a door, any door -  
I always feel like  
Someone...might be waiting for me.  
Sometimes I think I can see the *wait-er* out of the corner of my eye, a glimpse  
just out of my peripheral vision  
like when you're sitting too close at the theatre during a Bruce Willis movie and a fight  
breaks out in a restaurant - as you know it has to - and there are those two guys in the  
background that never really come into focus and they hope you won't notice that one of  
them is looking right at you.  
Yes, someone...is waiting for me.  
I know he is, or she is, or they are, or it is.  
No, not *it*. Maybe *he*, maybe *they*,  
maybe someone big enough to convey *they* even though *they* are one.  
Yes, some ONE is waiting for me.

This One is so patient. The patience of God, it would seem.  
 This One is always present. I cannot shake the feeling, asleep or awake, that I am never alone.  
 This One is annoyingly hidden. Like the wind. I can see the effects, but these eyes can never truly catch a glimpse of exactly where or what or who One is.  
 This One watches. I know this and do not know it.  
 When you feel the gaze of someone upon you, you are drawn in their direction.  
 You know?  
 I know!  
 We know!  
 Some One is watching!  
 Some One... is waiting for me.

But I am waiting, too.  
 I am waiting for the day when I will have the advantage.  
 When I turn around a corner just a second before the One expects me to  
 or I open that closet door and catch the One on the floor, asleep  
 or I peek behind that bush in the park and the One is relieving himself -  
 Hah! I will definitely have the upper hand then.  
 And when that *then* happens  
 when opportunity presents itself to me like a stairway to heaven  
 I will get right up in the elusive One's face  
 (you would think we were going to embrace but I will have quite another purpose in mind)  
 and I will ask,  
 "What do you think you are doing? Following me around all these years and never showing yourself?"  
 I will call the One a coward, or a control freak, or whatever accusations come out of my mouth at that moment to give voice to the years of fear and anxiety and doubt that I have suffered under those invisible eyes.  
 If he has a lethal weapon, I suppose I will die before I get to say the next bit,  
 but if he is a doddering old fool, and some days I suspect that he is, I will tell him that this isn't funny.  
 Not amusing in the slightest degree.  
 Can't he tell that people get freaked out by someone they can't see?  
 "Who are you?" I will ask. "I need to know who you are!"  
 Are you the long lost brother that I never knew I had?  
 or the old man I pissed off years ago, who has been getting angrier and angrier by the day watching and waiting until the time is right to make me pay?"  
 And that's as far as I get in my fantasy  
 because I can't see his face and  
 it seems kind of pointless.

More pointless than I know  
 because one day, the One just appears.  
 He is not here  
 and then he is here.  
 (I don't do boxing, but I have often thought it would be a good sport for me.  
 I am fast and can think on my feet.  
 But fast feet only get you so far.  
 You've got to be able to land a punch, and do it convincingly.  
 But look at these arms. Are you convinced? Me neither.)  
 Anyway, the One appears.

No time for fear.

The One is here. I am here. Game on!

You know, I thought he would use his invisibility to take advantage of me.

I thought he would catch me off guard and hit me hard.

I thought he would play on my fears, drive me to tears, for sure.

But this One...

This One is not what I thought.

I don't even know how I know it is him when I see him, but I know

and being fast on my feet, I make the first move:

Power blow to the chest! I expect him to crumple to the ground, stunned

but he grabs me and we both go down, tumbling.

(I suppose wrestling would have been a more useful sport to fantasize about than boxing)

My arms are my weakness and I have no hope of getting a good hold on the One.

Not a full nelson, not a cobra clutch, not the chin lock. Nothing sticks.

I needn't worry about using any wrestling tricks, though

because *he* is holding onto *me*

in a giant bear hug.

The kind a big black bear might use, a grip that says you are mine because I'm hungry and it's going to be a long winter.

But I am fast and small and I wiggle and wriggle and struggle and wangle my way out of his grip.

I leap back on my feet.

"You can't have me," I say!

The One, he stands up and waits.

I don't know what he is thinking, but the longer I look at him, the more I am sure I don't like it.

So I make another move. I call it the "All-In" maneuver!

This time, I will have him!

All four limbs are in the air as I execute a flying tackle

but I feel only the bounce of my body off a solid surface.

He is no longer a bear. Now he is a rock!

I grab at the slippery smooth wall of some familiar yet foreign substance and find no handhold.

And I am afraid again. The elusiveness is back.

I thought I had him, but I have nothing...

I will not be left with nothing!

Not after all this! Not now!

I grasp for something, anything that will keep the One from disappearing.

The edge of his shirt finds its way into my hand and I hold on tight.

"I will not let go," I say to myself.

"You will not let go," I tell my hand.

"I will not let you go," I say to him.

"Not until you give me what I want!" I demand, as if beggars and losers get to make demands.

I think of all the *why's* I want answered and all the fears I want to be assuaged.

But that is not what comes out of my mouth.

The One is waiting (by now I know he does this very well)

and I decide that this is the advantage that I have been waiting for. It is mine for the taking.

"I want what you have," I cry!

"That confidence, that strength, that lack of uncertainty, that ability to wait and wait and wait and never get discouraged."

The One speaks: "What's your name?"

What? He's been following me around all these years and he doesn't know who I am?  
But then I realise, surely he is saying this because he is about to pull out his chequebook  
and make me rich here and now! He just wants to get the name right! Of course!

I reply: "I am *Trying To Get Ahead in Life*. With one 'i'."

The One smirks, at least that's what his face appears to be doing. Odd.

But before I can finish the second "d" in that thought, I am on the ground.

He has me pinned, flattened, crushed.

I count to ten in my head but it doesn't matter.

It could be one or a thousand, it would be all the same.

I cannot move. I can barely breathe. I think I might be paralyzed or maybe dead.

*Ouch* does not begin to articulate what my bones are feeling.

Something is definitely out of place.

I feel woozy and would fall down if I was not already...down.

Suddenly the pressure lifts and I am alone.

I look around and see no One.

Only me and the ground and a small piece of paper near my left hip.

It IS a cheque, and it is made out to "Good Wrestler." Or maybe there is only one "o." I  
can't quite tell.

I get up off the ground, bruised but a whole lot braver.

Strange. How is it that I can lose the fight, yet feel like I gained the whole world?

Something is definitely out of place here.

(smile)

*This poem is loosely based on Genesis 32 and a few other bits of the Bible.*

