

Ryz'n had smashed into a trashcan when she torn out of the motel parking lot. Then she had run the red light at Veer Avenue. From her rear and side view mirrors, she watched the can and lid careen separately and wildly out of the parking lot into the street behind her. Ry had been too irate to stop and pick up the trash. Instead, a few minutes later, she braked to a screeching halt out in front of her parent's brick rambler. A gong-banging headache had supplanted her previous nausea. As she stepped out of the automobile, a thoroughly humiliated and frustrated Ryz'n made a conscious effort to calm her nerves. As she crept toward the house, she prayed three Our Father's and Three Hail Mary's, making herself repeat each succeeding prayer more slowly than the last. By the time she reached the front door, Ry felt a bit calmer. However, like her head and body aches and the sweet-sour taste in her mouth, her anger, embarrassment and her deep, deep hurt remained.

As she closed the heavy front door behind her, Ryz'n leaned with the back of her hands squished against her butt and her palms against the door. Unintentionally, she posed in much the same manner when she had played the pinup for Nick. The thought of that fiasco caused her broad shoulders to slump, as the initial overwhelming sense of extreme hurt and embarrassment came stealing back through her once more. She fought against nausea. The family's pet Skye terrier Scruffy Junior was all over her, jumping up to her waist, but Ryz'n could not receive the pooch with equal joy. Instead, trying not to cry, a chagrined Ryz'n twisted her torso and turned her face about, into the door. Resting her left palm against the door frame and her right cheek upon the back of her hand, she pressed her weight into her hand. Her palm slid down until her face came to rest near the switch for the outside light. Falling silent at Ryz'n's feet, Scruffy seemed to sense her master's tristesse and ceased her joyful greeting. Ryz'n sobbed lightly into the wall, while she felt blindly for the wall switch and, finding it, flipped off the outside light. Crying more softly, yet extremely distraught, she walked down the length of the couch to turn off the lamp, left on by her parents for latecomers. Ryz'n switched off that lamp, as well. The dog followed her haplessly between the couch and the coffee table.

Returning unsteadily now in the dark, over the same narrow route between the couch and the table, Ryz'n shooed the dog away, but she stumbled. Banging her right shin, against the top edge of the rectangular, wood and glass, coffee table, she fell down onto the couch with her upper torso while her bent left leg rested on the floor. Thinking Ryz'n was playing now, Scruffy Junior renewed her playful welcome. The Skye terrier leapt up onto Ryz'n's arm and shoulder, only to fall back to the ground unceremoniously when Ryz'n failed to catch her. The terrier jumped onto the couch and licked at Ryz'n's tear-stained face; however, Ryz'n was in no mood to play. With the back of her right hand, Ryz'n flicked the dog away off the couch and onto the floor. Scruffy whimpered at her master's uncharacteristic show of rudeness.

"Leave me alone, Scruffy. Leave me alone," sobbed Ryz'n angrily. Wisely, the pet obeyed and crouched, panting reverently at Ryz'n's knees. The pooch's sad expression

## *Out at Home*

reflected her master's sorrow, as her black eyes peered out from under the dog's unkempt eyebrows.

For Ryz'n, the bump in the night was too much—the final straw. Tired and alone, supremely humiliated and rejected by the one whose approval she sought above all others, the only one whose approval really meant anything at all to her, Ryz'n let loose the floodgates of her heart. And the tears flowed freely. Seeking relief from the pain and embarrassment, she sobbed into the couch uncontrollably.

*Oh, God, do I deserve this for acting like a whore? Why? Why did he have to say that?*

How had he known? If he had no memory, how could he know that, since he had shipped out that she had gained weight and inches in her waist? Everyone complimented her on her figure, but secretly she had always been afraid her backsliding ways would cost her. He had helped her to create her figure, but she had let herself go lately. Hadn't she seen the faint tremors against her belly last night when she had inspected herself in the mirror? *Too much fast food and too little swimming!* She knew it. And so had he, somehow ...

And how had she had behaved, parading herself before him as if she were some working girl from The Block on East Baltimore Street? And all the time he had stood there limply, looking at her as if she was some kind of an idiot. He behaved as if he knew she was trying hard to be something she wasn't. What a phony she was and he had seen it, seen right through her. How mortifying! Despite her ample breasts, he knew she could not compare to that freakishly huge, lying, husband-stealing trollop in San Diego and what's more, he knew it, too.

Still, the thing that had really irked her, which more than anything else had prompted her shameless behavior tonight, even more so than Nick's cool reaction to her baring her person before him, more even than the lewd photo of her nemesis, was her husband's earlier fumbling responses at dinner to her Dad's questions. The idea that Nicky wanted merely to "date" her, his own wife! And live at home with his parents but without her, why that, that "was the most unkind cut of all." Yet, he could STILL CARRY THAT AMAZON'S PINUP PICTURE IN HIS WALLET! And Ry had carried that burden around in her heart all evening, as well. She should have told him directly about how she felt about that photo. Then, she should have torn it up in his face and made him flush the damn pieces down the toilet along with all the other crap!

Certainly, he was not the Nicky she had known. Shoot! He did not even know who he was, for Pete's sake. She had tried to force him to be something that he was no longer. She had thrown herself at him unabashedly and he had not caught her. He had brushed her off as she had brushed off Scruffy's overtures just now. Her actions had cried out for his love and acceptance and they had gone completely unheeded. Even worse, when he had unwittingly said the one thing that could set her off at that moment, she had reacted like a complete moron. Oh! She was so ashamed. How could she ever face him again? Did she even want to? Would he want to see her after her despicable behavior?

In her extreme angst, Ryz'n noticed the bedroom hall light had switched on.

## *Pity Party*

“Sheena, is that you? Bryce? What are you all doing back here?” Ry recognized her mother’s alto.

Mrs. Ryan strolled down the hall into the living room.

“Ryzanna? Is that you, My Baby? Oh Honey, what’s wrong? Are you hurt?” Ry’s concerned mother hen approached and sat down on the couch next to Ryz’n’s head. Ryz’n’s mother bent over to stroke her first born’s shiny, dense tresses.

“What is it Ryzanna, are you hurt? Why such distress?”

Ryz’n blubbered that she had just fallen into the coffee table.

“Oh that thing! Your father keeps saying it’s just a nuisance and I guess he’s right. Where did you hurt yourself, My Baby? Let me see. I’ll turn on the lamp.”

“No, no, please don’t do that,” sobbed Ryz’n, covering her leg wither hands and turning her head away. “Please, just, just leave me alone, Mama.”

“‘Mama?’ My goodness *this* must be serious. Why, you haven’t called me that in ages. Much like me and very much *unlike* your sister, you have always kept your troubles to yourself, My Baby.

“Oh, what’s wrong, Honey? What is it that put you in such a state?”

“I’ll, I’ll be all right. Please go back to bed, Mother. I’m sorry I woke you.” Ryz’n sniffled, holding back the sobs that swelled just beneath the surface.

“Ah, we’re back to ‘Mother’ now, are we? My Baby, My Baby! How could I sleep when I know you are in such distress? Sometimes, it helps to talk. I know you don’t often confide in me or in anyone for that matter. I know you have born many griefs in your heart these last couple of years, my darling. Did you and Nicky have a fight? Is that it? What is it, My Baby?”

Mrs. Ryan stroked Ryz’n’s tear-stained cheek tenderly. As long as Ryz’n could remember, her mother had called her “My Baby” as though it were her real name. Rarely did she bestow that demonstrative upon Sheena. As a child, Ryz’n had enjoyed the special attention, while as a teen she had endured and then loathed the moniker. Now Ryz’n tolerated it because she knew her mother loved her dearly and would have sacrificed her own life for her. Indeed, she had sacrificed her life in a way, by bearing Ryz’n when her mom barely had turned eighteen. Her mother’s voice was so filled with compassion now that it compelled Ryz’n to break down and disclose private thoughts she would normally have kept to herself. Uncharacteristically, the words tumbled out of Ry’s mouth in an uncontrollable torrent.

“Mama, I, I never expected anything like this. I thought that if he came back, missing an arm or a leg or whatever, we could work around that ... as long as he came back. But this, this is too much.” Ryz’n sobbed heartily, placing her head in her mother’s broad lap, where her mom stroked Ry’s head gently.

“Oh Honey, what happened? I know Nicky has changed. He’s ... he’s so, so distant, so shy, so ... lacking in emotion. Sometimes tonight, I wondered if he truly were the same passionate boy who left here to fight for his country, for us, so long ago.”

Ryz’n cried, compelling her mother to pull some tissues from the pocket of her housecoat. “Here, Honey.” Ry accepted the tissues and used them liberally.

“I saw your face drop tonight at the dinner table when your father—Oh, I could have just killed him!—made those remarks.” The woman clenched a defiant fist towards the distant snore, trickling from the master bedroom.

“You’re afraid that Nick does love that California blonde instead of you and that he may not want you, is that it, My Baby?” Ryz’n nodded sheepishly.

“Oh my dearest one, why do you worry? Did the Lord answer our prayers to bring Nicky home to you safe and sound only to have him take up with someone else? Did you ever think of that? Where is your faith? Didn’t you always say the Lord “will perfect all that concerns you?” Your faith has been so strong these last few years when ours was so weak. I honestly never thought—” Mrs. Ryan began to weep also, but caught herself—“I, I never thought that boy would come back to us alive, never! Yet he has. It’s a miracle. And I’ll be darned if the Lord will waste such a miracle!” Mrs. Ryan bobbed her head defiantly.

“Well Mother,” cried Ryz’n in between sobs, “we can pray for another miracle then—that Nicky’s memory will return and that he’ll want me, want to, to make love with me.” Once more, Ryz’n burst into tears.

“What are you saying, Ryzanna? You mean to tell me the two of you haven’t yet ...?” Mrs. Ryan searched her daughter’s tear-filled eyes for an answer, but one look at her mother’s distraught face told Ryz’n her mother understood the whole story.

“My Baby, My Baby.” Mrs. Ryan clutched her eldest to her ample chest, rocking her and cooing to her, as she had done so long ago, when Ryz’n was a little girl.

“It’ll come, Honey. Give him some time. He only just got back yesterday. A lot of veterans have problems when they come home. You know that. And you know, well, with his wounds, maybe he can’t, although I hope for your sake that he *is* all right.”

Angrily, Ryz’n jerked her head up, accidentally bumping her mother’s chin with the crown of her head, “He didn’t have any problems with that Hawaiian police detective or that lying, two-timing adulteress in San Diego!”

Startled at her daughter’s sudden anger, Mrs. Ryan sought to soothe her, by looking on the bright side. “Well, that’s, that’s good news, you see, isn’t it? I guess. I mean, it proves, well, it proves he’s capable.” Mrs. Ryan’s weakly reassuring smile melted away quickly, as if she realized something did not sound quite right about her response.

“Oh Mother, how could you!”

“I’m sorry dear. I-I ... But Ryzanna, you know you *can’t blame him*. The poor boy has been struggling for over two years, trying to find out who he is with no one to help him. *Now* he has more family and friends than he ever knew existed, doting over him, not to mention an adoring wife who follows him everywhere. Yes, yes I watched you tonight Honey, hovering all about him, clinging to him, following him all over the house. Why, you even followed him into the bathroom once, for Pete sakes!”

“That’s ‘because I love him so, Mother. Oh, I love him something awful, Mama, just awful, even more now maybe than ever. He’s so, so vulnerable right now, so fragile. I wanna help him, help restore him to the Nick we all knew and loved. I could help him,

too, if he'd just let me. If he let me make love with him once, just once! I know, I know—" Ryz'n began sobbing again. Mrs. Ryan stroked her daughter's hair tenderly.

"Aw, I know you love him My Baby, I know you do. Sometimes when we love so much, when we clutch so tightly, the best thing, and the most difficult thing to do, is to step back, take our hands off and trust in the One Who made us, the One Who knows 'the desires of our hearts?' Isn't that what the scriptures say? Trust me, My Baby, I know what I am saying. Do not abandon your faith now, Ryzanna."

"That's from the Psalms, Mother. It says '**Delight thyself also in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass.**' But I don't know, Mother. It feels like the Lord is playing with my heart, dangling Nicky in front of me as if he was some type of carrot and then there's what I did, what I did tonight!" The girl sat up and buried her face into her mother's large bosom once again, as the water works flowed once more. Again, Mrs. Ryan comforted her by tenderly stroking her hair and patting her back.

"Shh-shhh. There, there, My Baby. What could *you* possibly have done that could be so bad my dearest one? Hmmm?" Ryz'n raised her, talking in between sobs.

"Oh, I threw myself at him, shamelessly. Oh, I was so pathetic, Mother! I found a picture of HER that fell out of his wallet—one of those pinup pictures! She even wrote her measurements on the back of it with a note asking him "not to forget [her.]" She might be a bigger woman, but not a better one." Ryz'n cried some more, before she sniffled.

"Yes, yes, of course she's not." Her mother pet her head as if Ry were Scruffy.

"So pathetic! I stripped for him, Mother. Yes, I did. He didn't ask me to. I just, I ..."

"You just had to show him you were the better woman, by stripping?" Her mother arched her eyebrows.

"Oh, Mama, you see right through me, don't you?" Ryz'n sobbed heavily as she looked up at her mom.

"No My Baby, it's just that we are so, well, so much alike in so many ways. You are My Baby and always have been. There was a time with your father when he came back from his tour in Germany and I, well ..."

"What Mother, what about you and Dad?" Suddenly curious, Ryz'n turned off the water works for a minute.

"Well, that's between the two of us, but you know that I, well, I have always understood you better than Sheena ... And Nick didn't react like you thought he would? Yes?"

"REACT? REACT?" He did nothing, ABSOLUTELY NOTHING! Actually, I think I made him uncomfortable. Can you believe that? The only time he even widened his eyes was when he glimpsed our 'Indian heritage.'"

"Oh Ryzanna, please. That's not necessary."

"Those are your words, Mother. You told Sheena and me that every female descendant of our great grandmother Urmila bears that heritage and we should be proud of it. After all, that's what you always told us, Sheena and me. Wasn't it?"

“Yes, yes, I know Dear, but please ...” She patted her daughter’s forearm to quiet her and return to the major topic at hand. “And so, that was his sole reaction, no other comment?”

“Oh yes, after I practically begged him to say something. He, he” Ryz’n began sobbing again. “He said my wai-waist was too, too large. Oh, oh, ooh! Can you believe that? How could he know?”

“*Know?* Know what, My Baby?”

“That my waist *is* too large! Mother, you know I’ve gained weight since he left!”

This revelation prompted another jag. Mrs. Ryan clutched her daughter to her bountiful bosom once again, stroking her long hair and cooing as she had earlier. “Fiddlesticks,” murmured her mom.

Her mother asked gently “How much sleep did you get last night, my own?”

A muffled “About two hour—maybe,” escaped the smothering of her mom’s chest. Mrs. Ryan asserted forcefully.

“My Baby, My Baby! It’s been ‘about two hours’ for every night since last week, when you first heard Nick was coming back here. You have been running around like crazy for so long. You’re completely exhausted. Now I want you to do us both and Nick, too, a big favor. You take a sleeping pill and go to bed and sleep in late tomorrow.”

Ryz’n raised her head, “But I’ve got to swim in the morning. I’m going to lose this weight, if it’s the last thing that I do!” She spoke through clenched, determined teeth.

“Oh, fiddlesticks! You don’t need to lose an ounce! When Nicky left for the War, you looked malnourished, emaciated, like a skeleton. However, if you really want to swim, swim down on the Banks. The surf will give you a better workout anyway. That fine salt, sea air will invigorate your soul and will help you sleep better, too, give you rest for your body. You’ll sleep better at night with the ocean breeze and sound of the surf drifting through your open bedroom window. You go down tomorrow instead of Friday. Take Barbara with you. Your father and I will follow on Friday after he gets off of work.” Ryz’n pulled her head back from her mother’s bosom to speak directly to her.

“But what about Nicky? What will he think? Mother, I said some awful things to him tonight, just awful.”

“Oh, you still want to see him then?” Her mother smirked knowingly.

“Well, well, I ... I’m embarrassed of course. And I did say some horrible things to him. I, I told him to run home to his mother and took off my hair ribbon and told him to stick it ... Well, you know where, but yes, yes of course I want to see him. I mean I love him and, well, Sunday is my birthday, after all.”

“Yes, your twenty-second on the twenty-second!” retorted her mother primly self-satisfied. “Don’t worry, your father and I will bring Nicholas along with us. We’ll give you the best birthday you ever had.”

“But that means I won’t see him again until Friday night, Mother.”

“Yes. I think you two need some breathing room. Two days is not too much to ask.”

“It is, when you’ve been apart for more than three years!”



## *Pity Party*

Mrs. Ryan had no comeback for that one. She developed a blank stare.

“OK Mother, OK, maybe you’re right, but if something should happen to him between now and then, why I-I’ll”—

“Ryz’n you’re thinking crazy, Daughter. Have faith My Baby. Now go to bed. Go take that sleeping pill. No, take two! Everything will look better in the morning. You’ll see. There now, my dearest go, be a good girl and do as your Mother says.” Ryz’n sniffled long, righting herself on both knees in a prayerful position, with her forearms resting in her mother’s lap.

“All right, Mother. You’re right. I know it. Thank you for putting up with me. I’m such a mess right now. I’m sorry to dump all of this on you. I, I never wanted to, honest.” She smiled wanly through her tears. Mrs. Ryan hugged and kissed her pride and joy good night.

“Nonsense, My Baby. I wish you had confided in me more during Nick’s absence. But you always kept your thoughts tied up so closely inside. You are the joy of my life, Ryzanna Christine. When you hurt, I hurt. And, even though you seldom spoke of your pain when Nick was away, I hurt with you. These last three years, we have hurt a great deal, the two of us, apart but together. But the joyful times are coming again. You’ll see, My Baby, you’ll see. Now, go ahead and don’t forget to take those pills, Honey.”

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Ryz’n obeyed her mother. She took the sleeping pills, said her prayers and went to bed. She prayed Nicky would forgive her for her actions. Nicky? How could she ever face him again? She had made an utter fool of herself tonight. Ryz’n’s mind raced. The sleeping pill had yet to take effect. Ry bit her lower lip as she lay on her back upon her high, four-poster bed, staring up at the mint green canopy overhead, anxiously spinning her engagement ring round and round her finger between her two wedding bands.

It was not so much that she had removed her clothes and paraded before him as if she were some cheap dancer from East Baltimore Street. Although, certainly, that had been more than enough. When she had been high, Ryz’n had never been prudish where Nick had been concerned, modest maybe but never prudish. With all others, yes, of course, no matter who or where, she had rebuffed them all, well, all except for that damned Tommy Tremain and her refusal of him had come too late after he—OH! He didn’t count ... but Nicky. Then there was poor “Don Juan,” as Sheena jokingly had dubbed Ry’s longtime admirer and sometime suitor Don Leipzig, what he had had to suffer from Ryz’n’s Roman Catholic modesty! But with Nicky, she had never refused him but that once. And that was out at his grandmother’s house, when they had first started dating. And the havoc ensuing from that one rejection of him had taught her sweet submission was the better policy with Nick. So Nick had cured her of such pious abstinence and, then, well then, she had become pregnant when the doctors had said that was impossible. Oh, she did not dare think of that now or she would never sleep. She forced herself back to her present fouled up mess.

Nicky had taught her to enjoy her sexuality. He was a great teacher in that regard and they had shared their love with one another beautifully. However, his source of

knowledge in that area had proven to be a bone of contention between the two of them. Yet they had picked that bone over, digested it in part and thrown out the rest. They both had put it behind them before he had left for Camp Lejeune, but she had never totally forgotten. No, her nearly nude, lewd display tonight and her teasing shimmy did not disturb her Catholic conscience. After all, she was his wife. No, but his rejection of her had pricked certainly her Irish pride. She longed so badly for his approval, for his love. Then, in his ignorance, with one callous remark, Nick had rebuffed her in a manner the consequences of which he could not begin to imagine. Her sickly physical reaction had been involuntary, but genuine. However, the more she thought of it, the more she felt like an utter fool. She knew, given his amnesia, there is no way that he could have remembered the size of her waistline, let alone anything else about her.

Yet, it was not just what happened in the motel tonight that had contributed to her complete embarrassment. There was a whole history behind her negative reaction. The history of her chubby physical appearance, of playing second fiddle to Sheena in particular, and of being a wallflower in general, all that was even before Little Nick. However, Little Nick had changed all that, too. He had accepted her as she was, but he had helped to change her into what she could be. With his generous assistance, Ry had slimmed down and grown up. Her face had cleared up. Her body had matured. Her vexing female problems, which had caused her to miss so much school her sophomore year (almost to the point of being held back), had dissipated and then disappeared. He had coaxed her into exploring her natural musical skills with the band. He had instilled confidence in her in so many ways. She had blossomed with him, physically, emotionally, sexually, musically, in every way. The proof was in GRT's celebrated success, which she had sustained partly during his absence. His influence helped her to become celebrated in her own right. Most importantly, he had loved her. Oh, how he had loved her! As if there would be no tomorrow is how he had loved her! (See, and there almost wasn't!) And she had loved him right back, completely uninhibited. Well maybe, after she had imbibed a few glasses of wine, she had matched his intensity and his passion, kiss for kiss, caress for caress.

Now, he was just a shell of himself. He did not even know her—this Dixie. Shoot! And she had blossomed into an adult, a successful adult, toughened by his absence. Armed with her celebrity status and her acquired confidence, she had had the temerity to confront the President of the United States over the government's deception and slackness in searching for her missing husband and other POW's. So why should an amnesiac's innocent crack like the one Nick had made about her waist tonight affect her so deeply?

Ryz'n teared up. Lying upon her back, single tears dripped down, around either side of her face into her ears, as they had when she had been a little kid. She wasn't really worried about the "muscle" weight gain. She could lose a few pounds easily enough. She had done that before. She had been running around so much the last eight months, trying to locate Nicky and fulfill all her school and business responsibilities that her diet and exercise routine had suffered. She had eaten poorly, less fish and more fast



## *Pity Party*

food. Moreover, since the onset of the diving season, Ry had substituted diving almost completely for her swimming regimen.

How had he known that she had gained weight? Maybe it was just a bad joke as he had said. But she could and would remedy the weight issue. That was not a problem, just a temporary condition, a mere matter of a couple weeks or three. She would start tomorrow as her mother had suggested, down at the Banks. She was determined.

Her mind darted. She thought about what her mother had said: “Where was [her] faith?” Her Mom and Father Vizconni had often mentioned that one of her most enduring qualities, aside from her faith in Christ or perhaps because of it, was her fierce loyalty to those she loved. She had had plenty of opportunity with Nick’s long absence and the worldly lure of the entertainment business at her feet to betray Nick, her faith and herself. Nevertheless, she had not done so. Despite rumors and gossip columns to the contrary, she had not betrayed him, even though she had come close once. That had been another fiasco, unfortunately, a much too public one. She never dreamed Nick, an MIA-POW, would have fallen in love with someone else. She never dreamed he would have been married right now, in fact, to that adulterous blonde had he not been such a proficient ballplayer. Now tonight, her attempt to recapture him completely for herself had blown up in her face. Ryz’n literally and figuratively had stripped herself of her dignity before him. Yet, the nausea she had experienced was due, almost as much to his rejection of her as to the bursting pain inside her head. The nausea alone had embarrassed her, even more so now, as she silently wiped the tear drops from her face and dug them out of her ears. Her actions with him had been so atypical of her naturally calm, impassive nature. Nicky always had been the emotional one, the impulsive one. Now, it appears their roles had reversed. Thinking back on it, she had been behaving poorly ever since she learned of his return last Friday and confronted that big-boobed liar!

Yes, she had been overreacting all week, acting like a total fool. This self-realization increased her anxiety. She should have laughed at his poor joke, realizing he was merely being facetious with that quip about her waist, and taken him in her arms and kissed him. Had she done so, she would be in his arms right now. She felt sure of it, but now, now, she needed sleep. Yes, what she needed now was rest. Then tomorrow, she would fix up everything. Tomorrow, she would start to make it all happen.

As the sleeping pills pervaded her system working their somnolent magic, Ry’s head became heavy. Her eyelids drooped. She felt the drug relaxing her entire frame. Yes, she would take Barb along with her to the Banks tomorrow. Barb was a pleasant and affable, though at times, overly chatty companion. Right now, Ryz’n would welcome some of Barb’s mindless chatter. Ryz’n could do no more tonight. Her mother was right about that, too. Ry needed rest, needed it desperately. She would see Nicky Friday night and make it up to him, in a big, big way, if that was what he wanted. This *would* be her finest birthday ever! She would sleep now. She had already done more than enough for this day. A thoroughly relaxed and total, sweet surrender stole over and through her being. She found the placid repose that comes only from complete surrender.