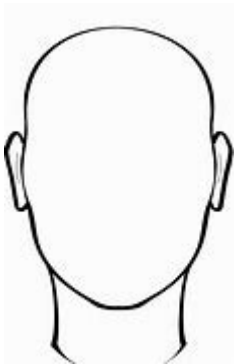


Your **f**ace



Face



Face



Face



*it's all yours.....only you*

By

**R**obert **S**piegel

**WHY I LIKE IT: Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...**

*“That face, that face, that fabulous face, it’s clear I must beware. I’m certain if I fall in love, I’m lost without a trace, but it’s worth it for that face...” - The Producers*

*Robert Spiegel’s, “Your Face,” is one of those stories that tests our consumption. How much will we let our obsession, our willingness for the I’ll-let-you-take-everything-from-me-if-it-makes-you happy mindset, our revelry at self-destruction if we’re recreated from the visage of another, take hold and control the forefront of our thoughts and actions? I’m reminded of a song lyric by The National, “You know I dreamed about you, for twenty-nine years, before I saw you...” What resonates with “Your Face” is the metaphor of longing and need, of familiarity and obsession, of creation and destruction. Our speaker is infatuated. The face they see permeates the core of their being, their reality, to the point that what is imagined becomes part and parcel with what is real, and there is something gorgeous to be said about walking the fine line between the purity of love and the insanity of love’s delusions. One almost has to hand it to the speaker for their devotion to a view that only they can see. When you look into a mirror is it a reflection of yourself or a composite of perceptions? Spiegel’s work seems to beg the question can one justify a declaration of existence when there is no other pair of eyes to lend us credence? Does your face exist if there is no one else there to view it, and, once being seen, is there any depths to dredge for the brief moment you appear in another? “Your Face,” is there to remind us of the fragility of our own perceptions in the face of love, obsessions, realities, and insecurities. At face level, definitely a story worth looking at.*

**QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)**

Honestly, I didn’t know what I was getting into. The early glow of love is like fentanyl laced with meth. How do you keep your head? By the time I sobered up, I was 18 promises into a life that was 14 light years from anything recognizable as my own. Part of me thought, how the hell do I escape? Another part of me thought, maybe I can live with this new self that isn’t even me. I mean, how much value did my authentic self have anyway? The purity of poverty and isolation?

## Your Face

Your face first appeared across the rugged landscape of northern New Mexico. I could see arroyos and mesas spotted with sagebrush – beautiful to the teeth. Slowly I began to see two eyes and a nose. Then that wry smile tinged with easy sarcasm. A private joke? Doesn't matter. Dreams were coming alive. I was eagerly falling in love, not concerned that love is tricky when it's pure. Love is love, but this love spanned the landscape.

Your face entered my life slowly, first from the side, then all the way in front. Back then, I thought your face was outside of me, something I was watching. In truth, your face had slipped into my inner life through a back door. Your face entered the cells of my internal organs and became a force with its own energy – not my energy. Unthinkable, I thought. But maybe not. Maybe this is how things go.

Soon your face was always inside, next to each thought, next to each feeling. Sometimes in the foreground, always in the background. If I checked my thoughts even briefly, your face was present. Sometimes in comfort, sometimes in hostility, always diminishing part of me.

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Your face was like a home I built, a cottage up a dusty road to the high banks of a lake. Wooden chairs out front under ancient pines. A place to sit and listen to the birds. All kinds of birds, those cheerful and those suffering. Your face was there with me. If I got bored and had to go inside – or even down to the town – that would be ok. When I returned, we lived in an adobe house on a bright mesa. The house needed tons of work, but that's the thing about adobe homes. At night I could hear the wind taking bits of it away.

I'm not always on the mesa. I spend plenty of time in the city. From the city, I can see the mountains at the eastern edge and the mesas to the west. That's a challenge. If you spend too

much time watching the landscape, you'll get hit by a car. I tell myself I'm ok here, but your face sees right through it. Your face knows I don't belong here.

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I had my own face once. For years I didn't know it was there. I thought somebody else's face was in its place. I wasn't excited about finding a face of my own. It made me feel self-conscious everywhere I went – like I was trying to be something I wasn't and everyone could tell. The face made it hard to blend in, like impossible. Blending in is important; it's the opposite of having something to say. I have nothing to say, and faking it is painful. I wasn't happy about having a face.

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When I discovered your face, it was a relief, more than exciting. It's like I knew something was coming. I expected it to show up any day. I didn't know what it was, but I was certain it would find me – just like that song in *West Side Story*. I didn't know what was coming. Maybe it's a car. Maybe it's some new kind of weather. Maybe it's the switch I could throw that would take all of the pressure off. I waited for years.

The sense that it was coming never waned. I could forget about it when I needed to work or help somebody move or give somebody a lift to the airport, but it didn't go away or even change in intensity.

Something was coming. Of course, when it came, I didn't recognize it. Not at first. "This can't be what I was waiting for all these years." But there it was, tangible, alive, not a force, not an idea, but a face. Your face.

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We live in a world of things and places. The car, the apartment or house or sofa where I'm crashing. We go to work and it's a place with things. Cooking utensils, laptops, forklifts, therapy chairs. Offices, classrooms, and warehouses. But that's not where we really live. We come to resent these places and things because they're so uncomfortably insistent – and they are not where we do our living. They demand our recognition, our surrender. They claim they are the only reality. But they are not real. It can take decades to discover that simple fact. They are not

of the world we live in. They are like small children who believe they are the center of every world – both fun and painful. Things and places, I must leave you now. For a face has come into my life.

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And it's not my face. That's the important thing.

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I'm sick of my face, and I've only been aware of it for the shortest time. Mostly I just looked out through it and didn't consider that it was a face. I mean, it must have been a face – nose, eyes, lips – but not really a face. You would think that discovering my face would bring me some comfort, some sense of actuality or belonging. It didn't do that at all. It brought shame.

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When a moment – one moment – changes your life, it usually comes as a surprise. Even when you know it's coming. Like the first kiss. In most cases, you don't know when you wake up that day that you'll be having your first kiss. Then it happens, and it changes everything. At first, it doesn't seem to change anything. But looking back after years, it really did change everything.

Sex isn't like that. First sex is tricky. Was it really sex? Is this sex? You look back and think, "Yes, that first time was sex, but it didn't count." By the time you run into sex that matters, all the sex leading up to it was just fumbling around. I think some people never find sex that matters. But that's ok.

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Your face mattered. I knew that immediately.

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I remember the first time I climbed your face. I was surprised by the inclines, far steeper than I expected. I thought it would be an easy hike. A cool afternoon breeze. I thought it would be impossible to get lost. I spent half the day pulling myself up the highest hills to see if I could get a view of where I was. No such luck. When I reached what I thought was the summit, I saw there were hours of climbing yet, more than a day's worth. So I backtracked, trying to find where I

started. It was dusk when I found, finally, the trailhead. I was exhausted. Something like this happens every time I let myself think I know your face. I don't know anything.

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Sometimes your face is an isle lost among the misty San Juan Islands, ferry waves washing over its smooth surface. Other times it's grazing land that has suffered years of drought. Not yet a desert, but on its way.

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When it really hit me that I had a face, I had to face – so to speak – the idea that I'm human. I mean . . . human. I don't know where I came from, but it wasn't from humans. It takes some getting used to. It first hit me when I was about eight and I thought, "I'm a person?!" It may seem strange that was such a disturbing thought, but it was. I was outside playing with the other kids when it hit me. I was so disoriented, that I ran up to my room and laid down on my bed. I kept saying to myself, "I'm a person." My bed seemed to be spinning. Over the next few weeks, the thought kept slamming me. Eventually, the thought didn't do a thing. Yet I'm still not fully comfortable with the idea. I came here from somewhere. I don't know where, but it wasn't from humans.

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Your face makes me interested in being human. Since your face has taken over my life, I am making a bet on being human. I think being human is the whole point. I was ready to have your face take me away to some newborn world where all creatures were coated with love. I knew betrayal would eventually mark this new world that held your face at the center, but I was ok with that. I can handle betrayal. Yet your face didn't take me to a newborn world. It brought me here where I'm human. I wasn't sure I could handle being human. But maybe with some help.

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Let's talk about the weather. Storms were growing before your face traversed the horizon. When the storms hit, I was unprepared. Not just for the storms but for your face. How could I possibly prepare for such an event, your face? In a storm. It brought me close to myself. Too close.

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How many lifetimes have I lived with your face, chased your face down crooked halls, over parched fields, across a wide expanse of skin? How long have I avoided your face?

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My heart breaks when I see you now. Everything lost. Lost love, children lost, and no way home. Once I had a home. I had a wife, a son, and daughters. What is this life now? Something dark. A test? No, tests are trivial. Only your face remains. And I can't take it all in. It's too much.

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I'm ok now. Really. Sorry.

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Kinda funny. Take everything away, and waves of something – not sure what – rush in to fill the holes. I know I'll be gone soon, but soon doesn't seem to come. Endlessly I'm here. Each day I'm still here. Attitudes slip away. Beliefs too. They were wrong when they said nothing lasts forever. I'm in the NOW now. Ain't that the shit? I'm in the now when it doesn't even matter. It doesn't solve my anxiety or depression. Only time solves that. When the anxiety and depression finally leave, it's without any effort, without untying one knot. The anxiety and depression didn't last. I lasted. These things in life we reach for come to us when we don't want them. We thought they would be pleasurable – the end of troubles – but their presence is yet another pain, only deeper. Everything is pain but your face.

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I knew it, I knew it, I knew it. Your face is some weird truest thing. It outlasts life.

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Then I met you on the street and it was the same face. How do you approach somebody when you recognize their face from dreams and landscapes? What are your first words? "Do I know you?" or "Want to get a cup of coffee?"

I was stunned. I chickened out and kept walking. "No," I told myself, "No, no, no! Go back to her!" But I kept walking. I just couldn't figure out what to say.



Only later did I realize it was for the best when I couldn't think of what to say. If you see the Buddha on the road, kill it. I was fortunate. My Buddha just walked away, leaving me – finally – to return to the peace of poverty and isolation.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *“Your Face” came from another planet. The idea popped into my head to write about a face that could become a home. That opened a “Trout Fishing in America” door. I like stories, so I was bewildered by a narrative that wasn't a story. Then I thought, there's a story here. It's just hiding in the bushes among the skeletons. All of this happened, more or less.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Robert Spiegel is a writer living in Albuquerque. He works as a senior editor for Design News His fiction, poetry, memoir, and drama have been published in such diverse publications as Gargoyle, Fleas on the Dog, Rolling Stone, and True Confessions.