

## **A Friend That I Knew Long Ago**

By Robin Lee Lovelace

There were rumors about him. He never had a girlfriend. He kept to himself. He had one close friend. Only one. He graduated a year before I did.

Ten years later. He contracted AIDS. He had a friend that worked with me who also had AIDS. When it became unbearable for his friend, he killed himself with a handful of pills and a couple shots of vodka. He mourned for his suicidal friend, even though he believed this same friend infected him.

The last time I saw him was in the hospital. His face was changed by the disease, eyes hollow, jaw sunken, nose turned to thin cartilage under opaque skin. I brought him flowers and a get well card. He never got well.

He told me he'd been reading Hemingway. He picked up a book that was lying on his bed and read a quote.

*There comes a time when you look in the mirror and you realize that what you see is all that you'll ever be. And then you accept it. Or you kill yourself. Or you stop looking in mirrors.*

Years later, I came across that quote again. Not Hemingway. In his fever my friend was confused. Tennessee Williams.

Right now, my television is showing the latest death numbers from a spate of apocalyptic fires surrounding Los Angeles, while two terrible wars rage overseas and the newly elected President is trying to annex Canada.

The skies are turning hot and the ice caps are melting and the population of people in the world has grown to over 8 billion and I think back to my friend, all those years ago, lying in that hospital bed, his flesh and spirit burning away, wishing medicine could save him and I asked myself, what did he do in his last days? Did he stop looking in mirrors or did he just accept it? And I wonder what we are doing now, in these suicidal days. Accept it? Or have we just stopped looking in mirrors?

I turn off the television and close my eyes and realize that like Blanche DuBois, I don't want realism, I'm fucking tired of realism, I want magic.