

Janie Conway Herron

## Snaps

*Virginia smiles as she mounts the last photograph in the album. The photograph is a reflection in a mirror of Nick and herself naked on her bed. The mirror is very narrow and mounted on a white wall, which serves as a frame for the image. Nick kneels on the bed behind her, one hand on her breast, the other round her waist. His face beams out at her. Her face is covered with the camera as she's taking the picture. She smiles at the unintended effect of the photo. The viewer, the photographer, and the subjects are perpetually reflected in the mirror, the photograph capturing only a second of their lives. She closes the embossed cover of the album. Inside, a hundred captured seconds lay waiting to be discovered.*

Nick loved Virginia, he had always been certain of it. The way he spoke of it, so suddenly and sincerely when they hardly knew each other, had surprised Virginia who had never been certain of anything, particularly love. She searched his eyes for the trace of a lie. His smile, so utterly guileless, gave no hint of deception. He spoke of love so easily, his deep voice spinning a honey web around her heart as she rested her head on his chest.

They loved to play games, it came naturally to them. Nick remembered how easily their fantasies intertwined, it was what made him love her. Virginia, always so eager to turn life into an adventure.

Virginia and Nick, on a deserted beach pretending they're in a movie:

'What kind of movie?' Virginia is laughing, she is running naked into the wind, holding a sarong between her upstretched arms so that it billows like a sail above her head. Then she turns so that she is running backwards, twists the sarong around her head and body, turning herself into an Arabian princess. Dark eyes flashing she beckons Nick towards her.

He lifts her up and carries her to the edge of the waves, they cling together rolling over and over. Nearly hysterical with laughter, Nick whispers in her ear, 'My little China girl.'

Later while they make love, Virginia keeps a camera beside her. Nick is licking the salt from her body, slowly circling her nipple with his tongue. Virginia reaches for the camera, her voice low and husky.

'This is starting to feel like a B-grade sex movie.'

Nick looks up to answer just as Virginia presses the shutter. It is a perfect picture of waves breaking on the shore, with the blurred shape of Nick's head and Virginia's breast in the foreground. They like it, it is their secret. Virginia says 'We have captured a perfect moment, it is ours to keep.'

They are out shopping one day, but it's not an ordinary shop, they are buying delicious, exotic foods, cheeses and olives and wine, candles for a romantic dinner.

Together they choose the trappings for a make-believe first dinner date. They are carefully manufacturing each moment in order to achieve a seeming spontaneity. They lay out the table, then Virginia dresses for the evening. She dresses carefully from the inside out, she wants to impress Nick every step of the way. Already he seems like someone she doesn't know very well. When she is ready she pokes her head round the door.

'Now don't look, I'm going out now, I'll give you twenty minutes to get ready then I'll come and knock on the door.'

Out in the street, the darkness adds to the illicit feeling of the evening. Virginia walks along peering into half-curtained windows. Smells waft out of open doors, conjuring pictures of pasta, basil, garlic and ginger, the spices of life. Virginia picks flowers and slowly makes her way around the block. She stretches the time out, making sure that she keeps Nick waiting. By the time she gets back to the front door her heart is pounding. She has convinced herself that she doesn't know Nick at all. Almost frightened that he won't be there, she knocks and he takes some time to answer. By the time he answers, Virginia has convinced herself that he has forgotten their dinner date, she is close to crying.

When he opens the door, she looks like a startled trembling bird, small and black, dark eyes glistening. She hands him the flowers. She is so beautiful, and vulnerable. His instinct is to pull her into his arms, fold her up in them, protect her. She smiles suddenly and he remembers the game and gathers a polite distance around himself instead. He ushers her inside. The candles are lit, the music is playing, the stage is set. But Nick feels uneasy, everything is so fragile, there's danger at the edges of the evening. Virginia begins to giggle, she is hugging herself,

her arms folded in front, hands clasping her shoulders as she hops from one foot to the other.

'My God, I'm so nervous, I feel like I hardly know you.'

Nick laughs with relief, it was all starting to be too real. All the strangeness falls away. They drink the wine, eat the food, smoke a joint. They make love on the floor, wildly and passionately, while somewhere outside a woman's voice is singing in soft cocktail tones, 'Will you come inside me, will you come inside me.'

When Nick looks up into Virginia's face she is mouthing the words at him. Nick dissolves into Virginia, there is no distance between them anymore, no dividing lines, he is being consumed and he would gladly disappear inside her body at this moment, be a tiny soul inside her soul, seeing the world through her eyes. When he comes to, they are separate again, her finger is tracing a line along the side of his body, she is smiling at him and asking him a question.

'Remember when we first met? Remember the question I asked you? I was nervous that time too.'

How could he forget, both of them sitting side by side, talking the elusive talk that people do when they are setting each other up. They were talking up juggling time, and Virginia was the one who broke the ice. Leaning across, her hand touching his with just the slightest pressure, she made it so easy for him when she said, 'Have we got time for an affair?'

Nick has a video camera, he wants to make a movie of the two of them making love. Virginia is not sure, not because of any prudishness but because she does not want

to see her own naked body on the screen, she is afraid she will hate the sight of herself. In her imagination she sees every little fault, every fold of her belly, every line on her face. Nick is protesting, she will look beautiful, she is beautiful. Fat, ridiculous! He loves her breasts, he loves every part of her. Besides it will be just for them, nobody else will see it.

They set up the bedroom carefully, Nick stands in the corner with the camera rolling. Virginia, shy at first, isn't sure what to do. A tape of ambient music sets a slow pace. Sitting on the bed she rolls a joint. The cat rubs against her arm, an intimate act that helps reinforce the atmosphere. Virginia begins to undress, she is still uneasy and keeps smiling at Nick behind the camera. He waits until he has set it up at the right angle to catch them both and then comes over to her. He helps her undress, then she undresses him. They smoke the joint and laugh into the camera. It has turned into a peephole, a keyhole in a door, with only their own wicked voyeurism staring in at themselves.

When they play it back, Virginia feels like she is watching a French art movie. Her body moves before her on the screen, responding to Nick's caresses. To her surprise she begins to like herself more than she thought possible. She warms to this woman on the screen, surprised at her warmth and vitality. She sees angles of herself she has never seen before. No mirror marks the line of otherness, a continuous eye views the action dispassionately. The tenderness that comes through is theirs alone. On the screen Nick's obvious love for her brings tears to her eyes. It is down for posterity, not frozen in a moment but kept in a little time capsule. Like a pill, she will swallow it and keep it inside her. The film draws to a close with Nick and

Virginia waving at the camera. Hugging each other close the viewers view themselves and wave back.

Virginia has to go away for the weekend. As the train is leaving Nick promises a surprise for her when she returns.

'I'm going to get dressed up for you,' he yells over the clatter of the train moving out of the station. He is running alongside the carriage, he has a strange expression on his face, one she has not seen before. The whole weekend she ponders on the look. It wasn't the usual mischievous one that went with the games they played, it had a vulnerability in it that hinted at something completely new.

It was something that had been inside Nick for a long time, something he had told no-one, not even his mother as he had peered inside her wardrobe, touching the softness of her dresses. He had sensed she would not understand. Yet he understood, young as he was then, that the woman part of himself that longed to escape into the light, to express herself in the public eye, must remain locked inside his tiny male body. He always took a keen interest in women's clothing. Lovers looked suspiciously at him when they discovered him looking through their wardrobes, and he found it too difficult to explain clearly. So it remained a closely guarded secret. But Virginia had brought up the subject herself, saying, 'You'd make a beautiful woman you know, you've got such long legs.'

So he confessed it all to her, and she laughed gleefully, she thought it was wonderful. When he told her how he sometimes dressed up in her clothes when she was out, all she wanted to know was which ones he could fit into. So Nick learnt to

relax about it and now he was planning something special for her, he hoped she would like it.

Sunday afternoon he spends hours soaking in Virginia's bath salts and oils. Picking out some of Virginia's clothes he plans his wardrobe carefully. By six o'clock he's dressed, ready and waiting.

Virginia arrives home, the house is in darkness except for a light from under the bedroom door. She knocks gently.

'Come in.'

Nick's voice is soft and gentle. She opens the door slowly. Although she's half expecting it, she finds she is not prepared for what she sees. There on the bed sits a caricature of herself. Nick is in her black jumpsuit which falls casually off one shoulder, his hair is tied back with coloured scarves, he has her earrings and bracelets on. For a minute she's not sure if it isn't her own blushing face looking back at her with fluttering eyelashes.

'Do you like me?'

Suddenly she realises just what she is being shown. Nick is naked before her, his confession complete. He is showing his most vulnerable self to her. She takes his hand and holds it to her cheek, holds his warm palm against her face.

'Yes I do, I love you, I love every part of you.'

Nick is relieved, he'd half-expected her to rush out of the room, or double up with laughter. But she is serious as she lies down beside him. He runs his hands

through her hair, kisses her passionately on the mouth. Words come tumbling out of him.

‘I want to be like a woman with you.’

It sounds like a whisper coming from some far off place. Now she is laughing, for already his masculinity is showing itself in a most obvious way.

*A small child is playing, filled with curiosity she has found a photograph album hidden in the back of her mother’s closet. She lifts it down carefully. Making sure no one is around, she shuts the door of the room and sits on the floor. A delicious feeling begins to rise up from the pit of her stomach as she opens the gold embossed cover.*

## Author Bio

Janie Conway-Herron has extensive experience as an academic, novelist, poet, musician, lyricist and scriptwriter. Her work has been published extensively in journals and anthologies. Janie’s novel, *Beneath the Grace of Clouds*, was published by Cockatoo Books in 2010. She is currently working on her next novel, ‘Spotlighting’ due to be completed soon.

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