



story by Matthew Ward

Going Back to You

I knew that after three months of bliss and one week of arguments this woman and I were breaking apart.

You have to know that all the time I was with her I was thinking of you. I promise...

You said we have to be honest with each other, and so you have to know about this.

The last time I was with her was at the movies in the middle of the day. The movie was *Twister*. It was 1996. That was a long time ago. She and I were in the centre of the top section; there were maybe only three of four others in the whole place.

Just at that point near the beginning of the movie when there's that chase to get to the tornado first, my hands fumbled around the curviest jeans in the free world that to my frustration just wouldn't unlock, and she wouldn't help me one bit—she just stared at the screen and smirked.

Bill Paxton and Helen Hunt looked destined to get back together, I thought, yet I knew that after three months of bliss and one week of arguments this woman and I were breaking apart.

After the movie we sat in a café. I only had a drink of peppermint milk 'cause I couldn't stomach anything solid. (She didn't have anything at all.) After ten minutes of silence I could feel the fury in my head like waves; the spit in my mouth was sticky, rancid, and tasted something like I imagined dog shit would taste. And then from out of nowhere I calmly suggested a friendship before it all got any worse.

She had a look of panic, then

regrouped, agreed, and we hurried away down the mall, our previously inseparable hands now hidden behind backs.

That afternoon at the university two female friends told me they were sorry to hear about the breakup. I said I wasn't sorry, that I was happy. They laughed a little bit too boisterously for my liking. "You know that I can't write when I'm with her," I told them, "now I can go back to writing."

"We know," they said, smiling, "we understand."

That night I walked home, single again. You remember how it went down: I had a shower and then, dried and dressed, made it into the lounge room and flopped onto the overstuffed sofa with you. I took a notepad and pen, and quickly composed a line or two, then an hour passed and I found I had written five pages of lovely, biting prose.

You smiled and kissed my cheek, then slapped it firmly and told me that if I ever left again you'd leave me forever, and I knew that was more than I could ever take—I'd kill myself rather than be away from you again, I knew.

As you and I drifted off to sleep that night I thought of the day's events: of the movie and the parting, of my friends consoling me and one of them saying as she left: "You know, an imaginary muse is not really a girlfriend..."

My reply surprised even me: "She's actually better than a girlfriend."

You like when I say that, don't you?