

Whispering – 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner 2008 All Stars Writing Competition – by Paul Stimson

Josh pauses at his front door, fumbling for his keys. His grip on Julia's waist tightens as he thrusts the key into the knob.

Several years prior, both had fled abusive relationships. Ever since, they had vacillated between a never-again attitude, and a series of encounters – all of them too hot too soon, thus destined to burn out.

Josh and Julia had lunched together at work countless times, their friendship only recently developing into attraction. Lately they were comfortable visiting each other's homes. They had shared a laugh over Samuel Johnson's definition of remarriage, "The triumph of hope over experience." Down deeper, it was anything but a joke.

Now inside Josh's home, Julia is startled to see a length of red velvet ribbon, stretching from the front door knob to the arm of a sofa in the far corner. "What's that?" "An adventure," he replies.

Pressing her close, he lifts the ribbon loop from the knob and leads her two steps up the hall, taking up the slack. He hums the opening bars of "Whispering" as he begins to dance her in slow circles. Julia lets out a gasp of apprehension as the ribbon tightens around her shoulders, but her alarm washes away in a flood of arousal as her imagination races ahead.

"Whispering while you cuddle near me," sings Josh, softly in her ear.

"Whispering so no one can hear me," she whispers back.

During one of their long dinner conversations, Josh had told her of his grandfather's "fifteen minutes of fame," long before Andy Warhol was around to define it. In 1922 a new song had captivated the nation. Its popularity resulted in arrangements for various ensembles, including the college marching band where the eldest Josh played the sousaphone. Surprisingly, someone had arranged the "Whispering" melody as a solo for the sousaphone, which otherwise had little to say except oom-pah-pah. Twenty thousand fans sat enthralled that day as that throaty melody reverberated in the stadium. Largely as an echo of Grandfather's love, Josh and Julia had taken "Whispering" to heart as their song.

As they whisper their song to each other, Josh guides the entwining ribbon downward, four inches per turn, with each circle of their dance. Their breathing synchronizes, inhale against exhale, as the ribbon presses them together. Each inhale picks up warm, sweet air from the other's exhale. "It feels like I'm breathing part of you into me," whispers Julia. He nuzzles her neck, murmuring, "Breath and spirit are one and the same."

He thrills to the press of her breasts against his chest. She, anticipating sensations yet-to-come, tightens the circle of her arms around his waist. As the ribbon helix spools over their hips, they instinctively lean away to draw it tighter still.

"*Whisper and say that you believe me*" sings Josh as their knees press against the cushions. Slowly, gently they tumble onto the sofa. Legs intertwined, they whisper the final line in unison, shallow breathing forcing breaks in their song:

"*Whispering. . .that I. . .love. . .you!*"