

Josefina

Helene Simkin Jara

Hoy

Looking out my kitchen window, I see Josefina sitting on the deck with her swollen legs sticking straight out as she combs the hair of one of her many *Barbies*. Soon she will make them dresses in happy colors of red and blue, and plain *calzones* without lace. Her knees are swollen from bone on bone after walking for 15 years behind Juan without even a suitcase to hold her one dress, *un rebozo*, a pillow, a little box of plates and babies in her arms. She is smiling and singing with the radio to a romantic Mariachi song. A husband is singing to his wife reminiscing about their youth and reaffirming his devotion to her.

Niñez

Her first job, when she was only 13 years old, was in the *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* seminary where she made *tortillas*, washed clothes, swept, cooked and cleaned for 30 people for one peso every month.

Josefina and I are in my kitchen now, sitting at the table and drinking herbal tea. She tells me that her mother died of dysentery when she was young. Her father gave her little sister away then to a family who didn't want her. They made Marienne sleep in the corral with the pigs and the cows because she disgusted them. A tear leaks from Josefina's proud face as she tells me this. We drink more tea.

Hoy

Josefina is putting little pink ribbons in the hair she is carefully braiding on one of her *Barbie's*. Josefina's face is rich with wrinkles from 79 years of laughter, tears and *corajes*. Her brown skin has been kissed by the hot Mexican sun, unlike *Barbie*, who has also never been surrounded by children, grandchildren and great grandchildren screaming, dancing, fighting, or crying.

El Marido

I ask her about her wedding day. She looks at me directly with her sharp, brown eyes and tells me that she left her husband dancing at the party and went home with her father. Juan didn't come to get her. Eight days later, she went to find him. He was living in a tiny room, with only a *petate*, a little corn, a *metate*, and a little container of petroleum. She told me she asked him why he didn't come for her. He turned his head to the wall and said he was waiting for her to come. They had ten children.

Josefina swings Barbie's stiff arms up into the air while she slips on the

latest carefully-made pink gingham dress. She tells me about the stiffness in her own arms when she held out a blanket for hours in front of the lean-to by the side of the road where they were living, soaked from a storm, trying to protect her babies. Her arms were aching as they shook, but she had to hold the blanket up to protect her children from the rain. She had to wring out the blanket and hold it up again, *rezando a Dios* to keep them well. They had moved 40 times already because Juan was never satisfied with where they lived.

Sus Hijos

We are sitting at the kitchen table again looking through the window at the morning glories climbing the fence on the deck. She tells me that they often had no food at all when her children were babies. She barely had milk in her breasts to feed them. She shakes her head in disbelief and anger when she thinks of those times.

Josefina likes the tea I buy her because it has lots of different *hierbas* in it to calm her nerves. I look at her kind, brown, wrinkled face across the table from me. She is telling me about her eldest son, Evodio, who surprised her one day with a present. "*Mira, Mama, lo que tengo para usted,*" he said. "A blonde baby with blue eyes. I found her at the orphanage and no one wants her." Carmen became Josefina's eleventh child. The word got out later that the child was Evodio's from an affair he was having and that the mother had threatened to abort. He wouldn't hear of it and promised her that his mother would bring up the baby as if it were her own.

Carmen suffered greatly. The women never accepted her. She was ostracized, ridiculed and often ignored. Josefina was caught in the middle. She couldn't throw this little girl out into the street. She had promised Evodio to keep her, but her daughters hardly had enough to eat themselves, let alone share with someone not of their own blood. They resented her blonde hair and blue eyes and what they considered to be the doting of their mother. At age 18, Carmen tried to kill herself by swallowing too many pills. "She's just trying to get attention as usual," they said.

She tells me she is proud of her children because none of them are drug addicts or are in jail. They all know how to work, she says.

She smiles, recalling a story about Antonio and Lorenzo when they were little. They would get up early because they were hungry and didn't want Josefina to have to stretch the food for all 11 children. So they would go from house to house asking for a little *taquito*. Antonio would do the talking. He had no shame.

Once, when he was 10 years old, his father Juan had a guest at the house named Sacramento. Antonio put his hands behind his back and began to dance and dance until Sacramento gave him 20 pesos. He took the money and ran. He bought *un burro de queso con un chilito* and ate it, slowly.

I show her the mangoes I just bought at the farmer's market. We sit together at the table, sipping tea again. She tells me about her son Agustin when he was nine years old. His favorite fruit was mango. She said he and a friend walked down a steep cliff near their house because there was a mango orchard down there. When they got to the bottom, a storm came in and they couldn't get back. When her son didn't come back at night, Josefina went to the Red Cross, the Green Cross, and the jail to look for them. She finally called the firemen, who climbed down the cliff to look for them. A farmer had seen them and offered them a barn to sleep in. They slept face down on a bed of cornstalks with their little arms outspread. When they got up in the morning, they noticed that underneath the cornstalks were hundreds of scorpions. Awake all night and sick with worry, Josefina was beside herself. Then suddenly she saw Agustin walking toward her smiling, carrying a boxful of mangoes on his head.

We were laughing this morning when I reminded her about the leather suitcase she found in East L.A. a few years ago. Even though I've heard the story before, I ask her to tell me again. I can picture her looking out her kitchen window in the projects near Sears. The streets are filled with old cars, broken glass, graffiti and mothers with their children. The smells emanating from the apartments are from *tamales, enchiladas, pozole, frijoles, salsa, and mole*. "So, you saw a suitcase on top of a car," I prompt her. She tells me that it was there all day. And it wasn't on top of a car," it was in the flatbed of a truck. She said she waited until Carmen came home from school. She thought that if it were still there, then she would ask Carmen to grab it and bring it in. She counseled Carmen to touch it first to see if it didn't have a dead animal or something inside. Together they put the fine leather suitcase on the floor in the living room and opened it up. Josefina told me that Carmen and she looked at each other then, puzzled. "Mama, it's only grass!" Carmen said. Together they looked at the bricks of grass in amazement. "Why would anybody do this?" they said to each other. They decided to wait until Antonio came home. He would know what to do. After conferring with three of her sons, they decided it must be marijuana. Antonio sold the suitcase full of grass to a neighbor named Heito. Josefina told me Antonio gave her \$200. But, what really made

her happiest, she told me, was that she got to keep the leather suitcase.

Sus Hermanos

"What about your brothers," I ask her? She cries again. She tells me her brother Antonio came to visit her after 14 years of absence. When Juan saw him in the kitchen, he said, "Who is this man? You don't have a brother Antonio! I will not permit him in my house." He told her that he had to leave. When she told her brother what her husband said, he asked her to give him her *bendicion*. He said he thought he might never see her again. And he didn't.

"Did you have another brother, Josefina?" I ask her. She looks out the kitchen window when I ask her that. Her jaw tightens. She tells me Jose stayed with her and Juan when he was young. She said his job was feeding a neighbor's cows.

Josefina supports her weight with her hands on the kitchen table and slowly stands up, walks over to the kitchen sink, grabs a pot and starts to scrub it hard as she tells me that Juan beat Jose with a thick rope because he came home late. She turns to me and with clenched teeth says "I said to him, 'hit him until you're tired, Juan! Beatings don't cost money. And you haven't even bought him one *camisa*. You aren't even worthy of a name. You are no one to us!" She put the pot in the dish drainer and we walked back to the kitchen table. "Do you want me to make you a cup of tea?" I asked her. She nods her head. "Juan beat me after he beat Jose," she told me. "But my tears were for my brother's pain".

Ahora

Now, Josefina has seven houses where she can stay. Her children pay for her to travel to East Los Angeles, Santa Cruz, Denver or Guadalajara. Her son Rito built her a house with three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a patio in the front where she keeps a dove that sings to her every morning.

We drink more tea. She teaches me how to make *pozole*, *tamales*, and *enchiladas* during the 6 weeks she stays with us. It has taken me 18 years to get up the nerve to ask her to show me how, and 18 years for her to get over her shyness around me to accept that she can teach me something. We laugh at the sink and the stove together. I am thinking I feel more comfortable with my mother-in-law than with my own mother.

She is talking on the phone to her family in Guadalajara. She is telling them that I'm so good to her because I bring her tea. I love to buy her presents. I bought her a white sweater today. She told me not to do

that because her family will be jealous because they haven't bought her a sweater. Or worse yet, they will want the sweater. My kids say that she's my little doll. I like to dress her up. If I buy her a pair of shoes, she won't wear them. She's too embarrassed to wear something new. She keeps them in a special place in her closet in her house in Guadalajara. She tells me that that is where she has kept all the things I have given her. When my mother passed away, I gave Josefina her shoes. They wore the same size. Exasperated, I say, "But Josefina, guarding them in the closet doesn't make any sense. You're supposed to enjoy them." She laughs her easy laugh, covering her mouth with her hand and tells me that she doesn't want to get them dirty. She'll save them for a special occasion. "What special occasion? Josefina, you don't even like to go to *bodas* or *quincineras* any more." She sits back in her chair, laughs again and says, "It's true, isn't it."

Josefina tells me that a house without children is a sad house. Josefina loves to hear the television blasting, the radio playing mariachi music and romantic love songs, children crying, screaming, dancing, playing "*barajas*" and sucking on "*paletas*" that are dripping down their square chins.

Barbie's black high "*tacones*" need adjusting. Josefina is tugging on them and remembering worrying about her children walking "*descalzos*" in the wet dirt. They would always get fevers and sometimes get "*anginas*." Josefina lifts up the blue dress with flowers on it that she just finished making for one of her *Barbie's*.

She is angry when she thinks of the people in the market in Guadalajara where she will sell her *Barbies*. She tells me that they lift up the dresses and look to see if the *Barbies* are wearing the original "*calzones*" with elastic and lace. She says that half the time they get smudge marks on the dresses and then just throw the *Barbie's* down on the ground if the "*calzones*" aren't original. She told me she just sews normal panties. "Why does it matter if the underwear is fancy or not?" she asks me. Still, she has enough "*tela*" now to make a thousand dresses for the fifty *Barbies* that her son Jorge found for her at the flea market. She can sell them for 45 pesos each.

Hoy

It's Sunday and I'm looking out my kitchen window at a big lump under a blanket on the swing. It is Josefina. She sleeps as long as my cats. Now she hoists herself up to sitting, turns on the radio and begins to sing softly. She has a blue *rebozo* wrapped around her shoulders and is wearing the sunhat I gave her yesterday. She will leave us today at 3 p.m. and take the Amtrak to Los Angeles. She is surrounded by four suitcases, three of which are entirely full of *Barbies*.

Sarah Green-Crawford,
Belonging



High Stakes Roxan McDonald

It's the screams that swim inside me.
The things that make me so mean.
Not so much the ones I let out
But the ones I swallowed.
It's my voice that ricochets around
In me.
It's the times I didn't call out for help.
When my voice rose up in terror and I
Swallowed hard.
The first time. That's the one, the big demon
behind them all. That first scream when he
came in and started that on me. Started running those
Big hands over my tiny body. And I knew
It was wrong-and I laid there with my voice
banging against the backs of my teeth and
I pretended to sleep. Maybe the truth is that
I knew I should have screamed but I didn't know
if it would have made a difference. Would she
have saved me? Would she have run down the
hall with her night gown streaming behind her like
a shadow and her hair glowing? Would she have
been my Joan of Arc? Would she have stopped it?
That woman who needed love more than anyone I ever knew?
Could I have asked that of my mother? Asked her to give up
all that sick love for my inadequate heart? The
truth is that he loves her better that I ever did.
I sewed myself up with my little girl screams.
And really I'm not sure if it happened today if I'd let one out
knowing the stakes.



Sara Friedlander

Research

Patricia Grube

I am doing some research on events
That led up to World War II.
Things keep getting in my way:

My father's face as the radio
Blared out the news, "Germany invades
France - - -"
It was 1940 and over and over we heard
That German troops were marching into
France.
I still hear him pacing the floor, marching
again
Across the fields as he did in 1918.
He experienced it all again, blood, mud,
hunger,
Mustard gas and a shattered face.

I try to push it off
Back to the books
The cold statistics.

But there is my brother's body
Riddled by machine gun fire,
Falling there in the same field,
Surrounded by boxwood hedges.
Falling near the village
Of Domremy. In the field
Where Jean d'Arc kneeled
To hear the angel's prophesy.

Dad's stories had always been of war,
How he had fought near Domremy.
How he knew the Maid of Orleans kept him
safe,
Showing him where to take cover
In ditches and cellars and barns,
Places only she would know.
How many times have I heard
Dad tell us about the saint.

I think she saved his life in 1918.

But she didn't save my brother John in '44.
I would like to think that the soldier saint
Was holding my brother's hand as he died.
But his fingers, frozen in death
Were tight on the trigger
And the gun blasted bullets
To continue the fight while his buddies fled.

What happened there
In the neighborhood of the soldier saint
I'll never know, except
After landing on the beach
And fighting through the fields of France
My brother died in Domremy,
Where the saint had saved my father.
Why did she hold my brother's fingers on
the gun?



Sara Friedlander

Terious Is Dead

Hye-Young Jung

“Do you take this man to be your husband?” “Do you take this woman to be your wife?” “I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

A sweet kiss, a happy smile, a wonderful moment and people think this is the greatest choice for my future. I will never regret my decision to enter this happy marriage. I will love him forever.

I think that’s what most women think when they make a wedding declaration. But I wonder how many people still think they made a great decision ten years later.

When I made my wedding declaration, a priest asked me, “Do you take this man to be your husband?” I almost said, “I’m not sure damn it!” I bit my tongue and swallowed my words though. “Terious is dead, Terious is dead,” I repeated again and again to myself as my husband responded loudly to the priest with a big smile, “Yes, I do.”

I met my husband in kindergarten. He lived across the way from my house, I watched him grow up. The first time I saw him he was crying while hanging from his mom’s long skirt. He was a crybaby. I used to tease him for crying all of the time, take his toys, and kick him in the sandbox. The next day he always showed up with his mom to pay me back. His threats never stopped me from kicking his butt though.

At that time, even after all of the teasing I put him through in kindergarten, he followed me wherever I went. I never expected that he would be my husband in the future, but destiny was cruel. When my Prince Terious died in my heart, I had to accept reality. I had to accept it even if it meant the crybaby across the street was to be my future.

It was the middle of fall and I was in junior high school. At that time, I fell in love with Terious, who was a character in a popular Japanese comic book. He was just a dream. He had beautiful melancholy eyes and long white fingers. When he rode a horse galloping across a field, his long shiny hair flew in the wind and his strong hands tightened the reins. He had a big castle on a hill which everybody called “Rose Garden.” I dreamed about dancing with him among the roses while smelling their sweet scent.

One day, I stood next to the open window in my room, staring at the road as usual. In my mind, I was ready to dance with my Prince Terious in his garden while red and orange leaves on the road waltzed with the wind outside my window. Suddenly, an unbelievable scene captured my eyes. I couldn’t believe what I saw. My prince, my Terious, was coming toward me. His long hair flew in the wind and his deep

brown eyes twinkled under black lashes. What's more, his white fingers held the bicycle tightly just as Terious held the horse's reigns. He smiled at me and passed like a mirage. I was confused. The man who smiled at me was real. My mouth dropped and I stared at him like I was looking at a ghost. Next, I pinched my thigh strongly to confirm I was not in a dream. The next day, I started to look for him all over town. I searched everyday. After all, this was my fate. About one week after I started scouring the town, I finally found him at the store. Although I was so happy that I had finally found my Terious, my heart started pounding and my cheeks burned with shyness. I followed him slowly without being noticed. He walked for a while and, just after he turned in to an alley, a little girl jumped on him and cried, "Dad, ice cream." My Terious swooped the little girl up and said, "Hey sweetie. Let's eat ice cream with mom."

I couldn't think of anything. My mouth was frozen and I heard the sound of my heart breaking. I ran and ran until I couldn't listen to their happy sounds of laughter. When I was almost to my house, I tripped and fell down on a trashcan. I couldn't see well because of the tears falling in my eyes. It was awful. I just sat and cried loudly like a baby and, of course, I didn't notice that my future husband was watching me from his bedroom window. I cried for three days and three nights and I buried Terious deep, deep in my heart.

Time flowed like a river. In no time I turned from a girl who dreamed about a comic book prince into a woman. Across the street, my husband also grew up. He became just an ordinary neighborhood friend after my Terious left me with a broken heart. Sometimes, we used to hangout like casual friends without any emotional involvement, at least for me. Eventually, he confessed how much he had loved me his entire life. The day before he went into the army, he came to my house and showed me his draft notice. He stood up for a long time and asked with a thin crying voice, "Will you wait for me?" (In Korea, every man has to serve in the army for thirty months.) I didn't answer him, but I knew I would wait for him and that he would be part of my life. Later, he knew my answer when I came to visit him at his camp far from our town.

I've been married for twelve years. I still doubt my decision to choose him as my husband when he farts under the blankets, or uses the same towel to dry his face and feet. But whenever I look at my daughter sitting next to him at the dinner table and see his eyes on her face, my doubts fade away. Their smiles make me very happy that I decided to marry the crybaby across the street and confirm that my Terious is dead.

Shelf Reside

Andrew Dolan

Breeding
Keeps us breathing
Its been abused, and many times over
A mental disorder
As powerful as our will to live
Yet emptiness is all it could give
In the rawest, sick and intense
To all, I cannot dispense
What does and does not make sense
Make it quick
Make it random
Make it solo, instead of tandem
But the populous wouldn't fathom
So don't tell them what happened
It's not about whose mentality is the purest
In this hour of my own reality
I'm the surest
Peace follows solitude
What's right for them
Is different than you
They'll indulge Hustler
You might prefer Dr. Seuss
Yellow eyes or purple shoes
Grasp chaos or strive for order
Some bow to the voices
Mistake a nickel for a quarter
Merge with the panic
Walk with the porter
Wish for a lunatic
Or stoop a standard shorter
Some consume
Till they're consumptively sick
Waste their skin
Now poke it with a stick
Some backwardly finish
Before they begin it
This train's derailed thought
It cannot go on another minute



Shane Pilster, *When stars fall, a person will sing*

Andrew Dolan

Not here
But there
I'll be
They'll see
In futuristic times
A century
A line
A habit of mine
Don't worry
Stay sorry
Maybe win
The lottery
Jackpot
Poke smot
Dream a lot
About fiction
Addiction
Pleasure and pain
Loving in vain
And going insane
Has it happened to you?
I'm truly blue
A few marbles
Are missing links
Not knowing
Only guessing
While doubting
All that is real
Not those surreal
Hallucinations to some
Visions to one
And nonsense to none
Post adolescence has begun
And begot
M is a rebel
H is his middle initial
Does this human ring a bell?
He fell
Don't tell
Them what I say
And display
In my eyes
Hiding ties



Spirit Guides
T. Mike Walken

That bind
Thought and perspective
Veins injected
Food for thought
Now digested
What am I?

Gods

Carol See-Wood

My mother-in-law asks me if I believe Christ is my savior.

I want to tell her I see gods in the worn brown boulders
clumped in the middle of Love Creek
storm water cascading over them
sliding into brown froth-filled pools
rushing down, carrying tree trunks, old tires and once
the heavily decomposed carcass of a pit bull

I see them in the awkward startle of the great blue heron
when it lurches into the sky, long legs dangling
the radiant blue flash of kingfishers careening
along the course of the creek like Jedi warriors

I hear the gods in the ranting of ravens
shrill cry of a Cooper's hawk
dueling hoots of two great horned owls
the eerie barking of coyotes at dawn

I feel them in winter storms
wind raking through pine
snap and boom of tree limbs soaring
crashing to the forest floor

And I know one winter night
after five straight days of pounding rain
I'll lie in bed, quilt pulled up to my nose
cat thrumming against my thigh
I'll listen to the roar of the nearby waterfall and
I'll hear the gods coming

Rising water will pour in through the window
lift my bed, I'll float out
water carrying me over the edge of the falls
plunging into the creek
racing over the rocks
down
down
to the river.

After the Knife

S. Christopher Johnson

I

When it was a quarter to five in the morning, Richard at last understood that he was not going to fall asleep. His chest was burning when he left the bed, as though a ball of hot mud had lodged under his solar plexus. He staggered to the bathroom and washed up, and dressed himself. Outside his window stood the willow tree he had recently begun to hate; he sat on his couch drinking a cup of coffee, and he looked at the tree, and waited for the sun to rise. The sky was brightening into an unusual clarity.

He didn't know where the money was going to come from.

Because not only had Nicole left him, she had taken his job while she was at it. He had been working at the newspaper, and when she got her B.A. he arranged for his editor to interview her—he had an idea that it would be nice to work with his girlfriend—and when she got the job she dumped him. Richard immediately quit; in fact he walked out. He couldn't stand the thought of ever seeing her again.

The next time he read the paper, there it was—Nicole was writing his column. He knew that his editor had purposely assigned her to that column. He could have had somebody else write it, or he could have discontinued the column; but having her write it was punishment for walking out on the job.

And he learned that she'd had a boyfriend all along, a guy named Davis. Richard had even met him once without suspecting a thing. But then, he didn't care about the boyfriend. It could have been anybody. The fact that he had been deceived was what hurt, and this fact poisoned most of the memories he had of good moments in their relationship; for when he remembered her sweet words to him he also remembered that she had other plans all along.

But even so, a good number of Richard's memories of Nicole were not tainted with bitterness. He sometimes had a difficult time connecting the woman who had used him with the Nicole he remembered.

When he grew weary of being angry with her, he would bring to mind a winter afternoon they had spent in the park on the other side of the river—it was possible that they had spent many afternoons in this way, but he remembered it as one afternoon. Her hand had been warm in his as they walked on the trail, past the tennis courts and trees and sculptures, and as they talked about their future together. She was to receive her B.A. soon, and he was to go on working at the newspaper; he was considering the idea of taking his columns and using them

to write a book. She encouraged him; she thought it would be a good book.

He had leaned against a tree and pulled her body to his. She was smaller than he was but powerfully strong and liquid: embracing her was like taking a wave from the ocean and trying to hold it in place. Richard felt the muscles of her back working under her shirt, and he realized that he was content with his life. For the first time in years he had somebody to make plans with, and to love, and to live with.

But then it ended.

He thought he might get a newspaper, go to the café, and scan the classifieds. Richard left his apartment before the sun had fully risen, and he decided to walk past the ocean on his way downtown. The sky deepened into an uncommon blue as he walked; he had the sense that the sky was leaning inwards and preparing to collapse. It never looked like this. But he felt strangely apathetic about the sky—and about everything. He realized that he was neither moved nor disgusted by many things which usually provoked strong reactions in him: for instance, the smell of the ocean and the seaweed, and the smell of rotting fish at the wharf; the odor of urine in the side alleys; the sight of vomit splattered against the wall of a bar; the crushed glass in the streets. He felt numb.

The café was still closed when he arrived. He bought a newspaper from a vending machine and sat to wait on a bench a dozen yards down the street. Nobody was in the street; he felt as though he were the only human being in the city. Richard unfolded the paper and scanned the employment listings, and didn't see anything likely. He tried to read an article or two but it was useless: when he stopped worrying about money, the thought of Nicole obsessed him. Richard decided that he was too tired to think clearly, and he forced himself to re-fold the paper and forget about looking for her byline and photo. He knew where it was anyway. He knew what it looked like.

The deep bell of the clock tower struck six times, and soon the lights came on in the café. Richard watched as an employee propped the doors open, but he felt too weary to get up and go inside. And when a small group of homeless men gathered around the entrance to the café and began bumming change from the people going in, he felt even less inclined to have coffee. He felt a little queasy and his chest still burned; he reasoned that coffee was probably not the best thing for him just then.

But then a man emerged from the lobby of the former hotel next to the café. Richard recognized him—they had met in a bar a couple weeks before, at the same time he met Davis. He was an acquaintance of Nicole's boyfriend. His name was Sergio.

He was an enigmatic man who never spent, as many people do, an entire conversation exchanging greetings and good wishes; even if he had just met you, he soon launched into a discussion of the most uncommon and deeply-felt things. Richard knew that Sergio had some terminal illness—was it lung cancer?—and perhaps this was what gave his conversational manner its startling urgency. He was tall, with a bramble of peppery black hair on his head and a graying moustache; he always looked as though he had forgotten to shave in the morning.

His apartment was some kind of a gathering place for his friends: according to them, Sergio hosted a kind of philosophical jam session once or twice every week. Richard had been invited to join them ‘any time.’

Sergio stood among the homeless men and had a brief conversation, then laughed and went into the café. For a short time Richard contemplated the place where Sergio had been standing, and then he forced himself to get up off the bench and go into the café. Inside, Richard saw that Sergio was waiting for his coffee in the brew bar; Richard ordered one for himself and paid, and then stood near the man to get his attention.

Sergio smiled when he recognized Richard. “Good morning,” he said. “How have you been?”

Richard offered him a humorless laugh.

“Of course,” Sergio said. “I’m sorry. Would you like to have a cup with me?”

Richard shook his head. “A what?”

“I am sitting over there,” Sergio said genially. “If you please, you are welcome to sit with me.”

Richard nodded in assent. “Thanks. I think that—”

“Ah, there it is,” Sergio announced, removing his coffee cup from the brew bar. The paper cup was only half-full. To Richard’s amazement, Sergio made up the entire difference with cream.

“Half and half,” Sergio joked. “This way, I get some fat, some vitamin C, vitamin D, with my morning coffee, no?”

“Ah,” Richard said unsure whether to smile.

“I will be over here,” Sergio announced, as he walked past Richard.

When his coffee was ready, Richard brought it to the table. Sergio glanced at the newspaper folded under Richard’s arm.

“May I borrow the sports?” he asked.

Richard could not understand this question.

“The sports section of your paper,” he elaborated. “May I read it?”

Richard sat down and laid the newspaper in front of Sergio.

“I only read the sports,” he explained. “The rest is all the same news. All bullshit. The same old bullshit, every day. The sports news is

the only news worth reading. It is always the same. It is the only place where you can really see genuine enthusiasm every day of your life. It is beautiful."

Sergio began reading, and Richard rested his head against the wall. He folded his arms and, after a few minutes, nearly fell asleep. It startled him when Sergio folded the pages together with a sharp crackle.

"A real passion these men have," he continued. "Even the writers make that apparent, although they have no poetry."

"I knew the guy that writes that column," Richard said. "He was really into it, all right."

He stared at the folded newspaper for a moment and finally he couldn't stand it any longer. He opened it to the one place he had forbidden himself—Nicole's column, with her picture. He glanced at it and looked away; but he wanted to drink in her features. He wondered what had really happened, what might have been. He wanted to contemplate their life together. Richard shoved the paper back towards Sergio: he felt like a furtive boy.

"Ah, Nicole," Sergio said.

Richard stared at his cup of coffee. Everything seemed surreal in his sleep-deprived state. His perceptions were slow: even his own thoughts moved slowly and he understood them with difficulty. It took a few moments for him to realize that Sergio had seen and understood his action. Richard looked up at him.

"Apparently Cynthia knew all along," Sergio said, mentioning a mutual acquaintance.

"What a bitch," Richard muttered. This meant that Cynthia had concealed the deception when she could have told him and spared him a lot of pain.

"No, no. You must not think that of her. She was doing the best she could."

Richard drew the newspaper back to himself a second time, and looked again at Nicole's picture, her column, her words. He realized what he was doing and sighed, and pushed the paper away.

"It is difficult," Sergio said.

Richard looked up again: he saw deep sympathy in the man's face. He thought the sympathy strange.

"This is a bad place to discuss this," Sergio said. "I live upstairs a couple floors. Would you like to come up?"

For a moment Richard examined the blonde wood of the café table. He followed the current marked out by the swirls of the grain under the varnished surface. Finally he tapped the newspaper a couple of times and announced that he didn't know what else to do.

Upstairs, in the former hotel, Sergio's room smelled like stale cigarette smoke and coffee. Sergio opened the window to let in some

fresh air. The room was very bare. Over by the window there were some chairs around a card table with a strangely pitted surface; a lamp and an ashtray stood on it, near a book with a gray dust jacket. In one corner there was a mattress with a pillow, made up like a bed with clean sheets and blanket; in another corner there was a small "kitchen": a tiny refrigerator with a beat-up electric hotplate resting on it, and beside that an old stainless steel pan with a lid, some bowls and plates, some silverware, a wooden-handled knife and a file, and a cutting board. Along the wall to the right some distance from this the door to the bathroom stood open.

Suddenly Richard felt his stomach wrench, and he ran to the bathroom; he retched into the toilet with a mixture of physical relief and embarrassment. The burning feeling in his chest intensified. When he felt safe he washed his face and returned to the main room, where Sergio was waiting for him.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm so sorry."

"No, no. There is nothing to be sorry—you are sick. You need sleep. I can see that. Go, lay down—" he pointed to the mattress. When Richard hesitated Sergio insisted again, and Richard gave in, too weary to argue. Sergio pulled the window shade down, darkening the room, and walked towards the bathroom; then Richard was asleep.

II

When Richard woke he started up in fear: he had momentarily forgotten where he had slept. It was early afternoon, and a humid heat had settled in. He had been sweating in his clothes, and he felt greasy and his chest still burned, but he felt healthier, and hungry. Sergio didn't seem to be home. Richard opened the shade and pulled the window open, and looked down onto the street.

He sat down in one of the chairs by the table and realized that the black pits on its surface were burn marks, as though Sergio had left cigarettes burning on the table from time to time. The book on the table was *The Complete Plato*. Richard idly brought the book to his lap and flipped through its pages. The book had been well-studied: an unusual number of outside margins bore notes in red, blue, green, and orange pencil. The spine was broken at "The Symposium"; the pages in this dialogue were well-thumbed and underlined, and crisscrossed with notes in English, Spanish, French, and German. Richard wondered whether Sergio had made all these notes himself—it seemed unlikely, but the handwriting was similar no matter what language it spelled.

Then he noticed that other notes throughout the book were in these other languages, and further, all notes in Spanish had been written in red, all notes in French had taken blue, and so on. Richard had a vision of Sergio sitting at the table, reading this philosophy with a box

of children's colored pencils in one hand, pulling out orange when he felt the text deserved a German word, green when English seemed most suitable. In the image, Sergio's face had a kind of absurd profundity, and Richard laughed in spite of himself.

Sergio opened the door while Richard was still sitting with the book open in his hand, looking vaguely into the distance with an amused expression on his face; startled, Richard slammed the book shut and set it on the table, and stood halfway up, and sat down again.

Sergio laughed and shut the door. "Doing some reading? It is allowed, you know."

"Not really."

"Not allowed?" Sergio took the paper bag he was carrying and set it on the floor beside the refrigerator.

"Not reading, really. Just looking at the book."

"You like philosophy?"

Richard hesitated for a moment before deciding to tell the truth.

"Not much. It's kind of boring."

Sergio gave him an indulgent smile. "You are probably hungry?"

Before he could deny it Sergio continued:

"I do not have much, but I do have rice, beans, tortillas, cheese, tomatoes—"

"Oh, no—you don't need to. I've got food at home. I mean—"

"Don't argue. It's my treat. Let me heat up the rice and beans."

"No, really—"

Sergio plugged in the hotplate and opened his refrigerator. From two plastic containers he poured enough cooked rice and beans for them both into a pan. He returned the containers to the refrigerator and extracted a tomato, a carrot, a head of cabbage, a block of cheese, a tub of salsa, and a package of tortillas. He picked up the knife and cutting board and brought all these to the table in front of Richard. Sergio spoke as he cut the tomato and carrot and sliced the cheese:

"I live on this meal. It is very inexpensive." Sergio pointed at Richard with the knife. "You pay attention. You may need to do this yourself soon. You eat half a pound of rice each week, half a pound of beans each week, and cheap tortillas, a little inexpensive cheese, a small tomato, some carrots, half a head of cabbage a week. You follow? And you make some pepper sauce yourself if you like. Six dollars a week, at most. In this way you do not starve and you still have plenty of money left over for coffee and cigarettes." Sergio gestured at the bag beside the refrigerator, as if to indicate that it contained these latter items.

"And the occasional drink out, I suppose?" Richard asked.

"Davis pays for me when I go out," Sergio explained. "He insists on having a friend with him when he goes out."

Sergio stirred up the beans and rice, saw they were warm, and piled equal amounts onto each tortilla. Then he divided up the tomato and cheese.

"You eat the tomato raw, like so, you keep all the nutrients," he explained.

"Thank you so much."

"My pleasure. It is my duty, as a friend." He rolled the burritos and they began to eat. "I know many people who are starving," he continued, "who are *really* starving, because they do not know how to eat. They spend four times what I do on food, on alcohol, mostly, and starve in the street. I talk to them. I know them by name. What do they know about living? They are distracted by pains in the stomach. Their lives are ruined by stupid habits. But then, look who's talking—" he laughed— "some of my friends—Davis—seems to think I live on coffee, cigarettes, and booze. I admit I have some bad habits, but I do not try to live on them."

After a moment Sergio apologized.

Richard had not been listening closely. "What?"

"I'm sorry for mentioning Davis."

Richard shook his head to dismiss the idea and looked back out the window. He watched the heat-rippled air above the downtown rooftops.

"I just don't get it," he said. "I mean, Nicole. We even talked about marriage."

"You loved her?"

"I don't know." He took off his glasses and let his vision blur. "Possibly."

"I have given the subject much consideration."

Richard was incredulous. "About whether I loved Nicole?"

Sergio smiled. "No, about *love*. Coffee?" Sergio held up a bag of coffee beans.

Richard shook his head. His stomach felt still uncertain.

"It is good for you, you know. It stimulates the blood, the breathing, wakes you up. It stokes a fire in the mind. No?"

"No thanks," he said, with a little laugh at Sergio's colorful metaphor.

Sergio shrugged; he ground the beans and set some water boiling, and brewed his coffee.

"I have been studying Plato's thoughts on the subject," he said, with a gesture towards the book.

"And what does he think?" Richard asked.

"For the most part, he thinks that love is a longing for something, something good, that you do not possess. And he thinks that the ultimate object of love is eternal beauty. For instance, what you really want, when you love a beautiful person, is to achieve immortality by

having beautiful children with that person.”

“Sounds like Darwin.”

“Yes, I agree, so far it does. But there is more than this—what you are loving in that beautiful person is not her beauty *per se* but the principle of beauty which you have discovered in her. Or him,” Sergio added.

“Okay,” said Richard, “But I should know, appearances aren’t everything.”

“Naturally, and Plato understood this. The love of physical beauty is simply the crudest form of love in his scheme. More subtle than this is the love of another’s personality—the love of a beautiful personality, or at least one which you find beautiful. This is a more, if you will, *spiritual* form of love.”

“What if you’re deceived about another person?”

Sergio shrugged. “So you’re deceived. It’s not your fault. Why should it be?”

“Sometimes you feel like it is,” Richard said. “You feel like an idiot. You say to yourself, ‘I should have seen this coming.’ You look back and there was *this* and *that* and *this* and all together these things that didn’t make sense before, and now they make perfect sense, and you see exactly what was going on the whole time. I think she even tried to warn me at one point—she said something strange and I didn’t understand her.”

“What did she say?”

Richard sighed. “I don’t feel like trashing her, okay?” He fell silent and looked out onto the street.

“I think that Plato is missing an essential part of the truth,” Sergio said, returning to the subject. “Love is not merely a longing—I think it is also something we run from, something we fear and even hate on some level. It seeks us out, really. It’s not something we go looking for—it’s something that just *happens*, and then you must live with it. It pursues *us* in some sense. And there we are, caught between this love that we fear and this other thing that we desire. We possess neither, we are free from neither. What do you think?”

“I don’t know what to think.”

“I’m sorry,” Sergio said. “Probably we shouldn’t be talking on this subject while it is still so fresh for you.”

“No, no,” Richard protested. “Go on. I’m more worried about money right now.”

Sergio stood and retrieved a pack of cigarettes from the paper bag. He brought it back to the table and started tamping it against his arm.

“There is another segment of the dialogue which I think is more pertinent, which does not state Plato’s views,” Sergio said. “Most of the dialogue consists of a collection of speeches in praise of the god of

love. In one speech, the speaker tells a fable about human history. In the early days, he says, all human beings were actually gigantic round things like the sun and the moon and the earth."

Richard laughed. "So everybody rolled around like marbles on a plate?"

Then it was Sergio's turn to laugh. "Yes, exactly! I need to remember that phrase. But—in the end, humanity became too proud, a familiar story, and the gods punished them. They took each human being and split it into two parts, which after the knife looked just like we do, and then the gods scattered the halves across the earth, making certain that each half lived far away from the other one. And so this is why we go looking for that One Special Person—we are looking for our other half."

"That's nice," Richard said, smiling, "But I don't buy it."

"Don't buy what?"

"The whole soul mate thing. I think if you believe *that*, when you finally get with somebody you run the risk of feeling like you've 'settled' for less than you really deserved—you would always be tormented by this feeling that your *real* soul mate is out there someplace, that you missed that person because maybe they live in Illinois, or somewhere."

Sergio looked very displeased.

"I have loved," Sergio announced at last, in a defiant tone. He examined Richard's face warily. "I have loved, and I live alone here now, with my thoughts, and now I am dying with nobody to help me. Perhaps it was worse to be loved in return, to have felt *that* so I could feel pain at its absence later. And you talk to me about torment?"

"I'm sorry," said Richard, concerned that he had somehow upset Sergio. "Were you married?"

Sergio gave him a quizzical look but then dropped it and shook his head.

"No—but we did not believe in marriage. It didn't apply to us anyway. But this is not my point. I was working towards this—that the idea, that the prospect of love informs our entire lives. In this way it is much like the fact of death, but much more important than death—more important because we die only once, death is final, death exerts its pressure upon us our entire lives, and it is another thing we fear and even crave sometimes, but it is easy to ignore most of the time. But we cannot ignore love, or the lack of it. From the moment we know our parents, we are feeling love or its absence, and we may not escape love until death. And *that* comes sooner than you think."

Sergio took a cigarette from the pack and lit it while looking into the street. "*Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux, nox est perpetua una dormienda,*" he murmured.

"Excuse me?" said Richard.

Sergio turned to look at him. “A Latin epigram. *When once our short life has burnt away, death is but an unending sleep.*”

III

Once the sun had begun to set, Richard left Sergio’s apartment. Sergio had given Richard a warm invitation to return, and said he had enjoyed their conversation. Richard said he felt the same way. It was the truth. He had not experienced such communication for a long time.

The evening was still warm, as if the day didn’t want to let go, and there were so many people on the street that it surprised Richard. Then he remembered it was a Friday. He decided not to go straight home; he thought he might go and have a drink alone.

Richard went to another café and had a beer, and while he sat outside on the porch he listened to the people talking around him, and watched people walk by on the sidewalk. He felt a strange kind of peace. Somehow it didn’t matter quite so much that he didn’t have a job, that his savings were running out, that his last girlfriend had turned out to be a fraud. The problems he had been having were no longer interesting in themselves; although he could not forget them he no longer felt singled out.

Eventually he walked home, and he was so glad to see the ocean that he walked on the shore. Bonfires were burning on the beach above. He watched waves muscle up onto the sand only to fall back into conflicting eddies, and when he looked up and saw the cypresses struggling against the black sky, he noticed that the burning in his chest had ceased.



Steve Zoerner



KOAK

Yoni Talk

Deborah Stehr

I don't think I know my yoni that well
though we have congress often
and things less political
But she has nightmares of being dried and withered
frustrated
unable to produce that
fleshing, freshet flower
the orgasmic opening hug of hallelujah
a generous pleasure of open-chorus
given by hands and open palms
praises those curves
encircling the sky
of reddening peach pink dreams
sunsets of silk and cotton-
Aaaahhhh!

She has nightmares that she can't come.

Or maybe I do.

Maybe I should go talk to her,
better yet
go inside,
yes, go inside her
sit down and stay awhile
as my grandma used to say (but not about her yoni)

What would women say about their yonis
if they were to gossip?

*Guess what my lovely pussy said to me, the other day
I just couldn't believe it*

Or what would our yonis say about us?

*She wants me to do what? With who?
'Oh I don't think so, honey child!'*

Or maybe,

Work work work, that's all my Selma knows how to do

Or,

Breathe baby breathe! That's it, don't get too far if you're

suffocatin'

or laughing,

She just lays there and lets him do it all!

I didn't know before I started listening in,
that yonis speak in soft southern black accents
(oh, I'm sorry, African-American)
I hear their low toned laughter

Sit down and stay awhile, my yoni might say,
If my grandma and I had sat down inside her yoni or mine.
What would we have said from there?

The world is a soft loving place, child, you remember that.

And maybe I'd have said,

But Grandma, why is Daddy so hard?

*Don't you worry none, child, all that is hard
also wants to be soft, inside*

And if my yoni had had intercourse with my mother's yoni
(that word means more than one thing)
What would we/us/her/me
I
have said?

Yes, that's what I thought.
A yoni should be seen and not heard.
No one needs a loud yoni carrying on and on and on.

Sit down and stay awhile, Yoni says,
Tell me your worries.

Why is it that she lives in my body
and I've never gone down to visit?
Well I've visited,
but I didn't stay
a fortnight
or even overnight.

What would I see with yoni-vision?
What would I understand with my yoni's heart?

Men come here so often
seem hesitant to leave

my last lover made it a point to stay as long as possible
it was a goal he made in murmurs in my ear each time,
or maybe just often.
Maybe it's embarrassing to go back out into the world having lost
your form
you come in strong,
and leave leaking,
pillows and sadness look good,
wiping yourself off and cuddling that woman instead
grateful to be at peace.

They come here to lose it,
I know-
I don't mind he never reached his goal of staying forever
but I like that he wanted to.

If he had my yoni would probably have found her other voice
and it wouldn't have been low, soft, southern and gentle-

But what do I come here for
Not to ask for pleasure
She always will give that
 except in my dreams
 at least in this respect things are in the right order
 reality is better.

I come here to sit,
Still
To be as Yoni
A wise woman beautiful

To know the longing is mine as is the satisfaction
The Yoni the perfect center of generous contentment
A place where space does not mean emptiness
But cozy, inventive room
A lot of low laughs and stroking,
Powerful women who move All through
A well placed word
A lifted eyebrow
A known intention
A calm that rules.

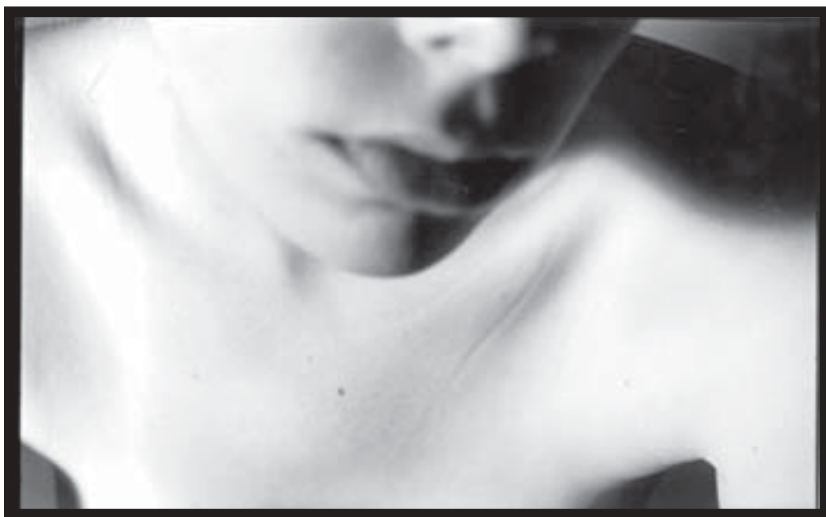
You are the heart at the bottom of my body
You Yoni Red Flesh Flower
My rich foundation of contentment

Everything is all right here
In this spacing presence.

Serene, she smiles,
Buddha learned it all from her
Opening for me, for you
Knowing everyone is looking.

*Come on in
Sit and stay awhile*

*Yes, I say,
I will.*



Katie Holman

Original Sin

P J Friermuth

Original sin wasn't very original

Barbecued spare ribs, mashed potatoes and gravy coulda made "sin" at least high cholesterol. Nothing against apples, but if you going to get hung, you might as well get satisfied... hang for a dime when you can hang for a dollar?

Let me introduce myself, I'm Eve.

You remember, "slinky", dissatisfied... suspicious of religion brokers and bankers... men's fathers mostly, sales-men who wear mortuary black and tell me my savings are only collectable after death. Well, I'm dying - withering away on my wish-bone- wishing in fact I were dead if I have to suffer through another of Adam's "Tow the line! Keep your nose clean!" sermons. You remember "Adam"? - my old man, the Play-It-Straight "Big Spender". The "I'll loan you a rib but you gotta pay me back." kinda guy. OK. OK.. I know... "Adam! ... but there's not a lot of guys out there to pick from. Of course, he's "faithful", but he's typical male... mostly chickenshit... doesn't have the guts to enjoy it a little.

"Enjoy me!" I tell him

"I'm your beautiful wife" bored beyond all Belief, especially bored believing 'bout the "Hereafter". "Hereafter" what? What's 'hereafter' mean besides some old "Later Honey, Not tonight Honey. Not here. Not now, Honey" and, "Heck no Honey! I'm not going to buy us a round. We're saving up for the big unseen green pasture just the other side of the hill". Oye! Where's a man? the kind who says, "Honey, Let's lie down in green pastures now. Let's lead each other on into the river. Muddy still water..."

O Adam, my Adam, born normal, male... trembling

Under your fig leaf of a "reason", repeating, "Woman, you obey!" and "We don't gotta have no 'Knowledge.' That's why God invented TV." O Adam, grow up! Now you want to put the blame on me 'cause you "c'ain't get no satisfaction"! "Original sin!" whatever... Original Excuse!

If any of our progeny are reading this ...

Hey, it wasn't really your fault, the way you turned out, especially Cain and Abel, what with a cracker like Adam for "Dad". So blow off your "diet" ... Go ahead, plunge on in while you can. Grab a little rib with some meat on it. Suffer. Die. So what? Buy everybody a round, or two. When you wake the next morning next to your honeypot, you're 'Bornagain', ... a bornagain with a "Stick-with-me-New-Man guarantee".... and please, please no more "Original Excuse" stuff... Neverwas much going on in "Paradise" no-how and "Hereafter" know this: from now-on, we're gonna go ahead, ask for what we want: "spare ribs, mashed potatoes", and after dinner for desert, just a little "original"

sin.



Kelly Woods

The Sibilance of Skin

David Thorn

smoothly supple sleek & moonlit skin
silkworm slinky sensational skin

skin so serene & lavishly freckled
secretly sweet yet o so cool & speckled

your smokey stippled smoldering skin
sensuously soulful & shimmering within

your innocent sexy spellbinding skin
o you sorcerer of the moon's blinding spin

whose spices simmer with your secret sun
who smile & smirk & smell of cinnamon

you who swell the nights with your sacred sin
who sway my heart with your sibyl's grin

o serenade me sweet and long
o sing your siren's celestial spindrift song



Andree LeBourveau

PGR 135

Crazy Horse speaks in English to Black Buffalo

Woman's daughter on September 3, 1877

David Thorn

What of this is mine?

Then, I was a child and buffalo were as the trees
In the Black Hills, as the stars above
on a moonless prairie night, as drops of water swirling
where the Rosebud and Yellowstone meet,
as these curly auburn locks upon your precious head.
And a white man was as the white buffalo then,
a thing spoken of but rarely seen,
but a kind of feeble ghost as when the demon
sickness overtakes a lone pine.

What of this is ours?

Then the trees were our mothers and the hills.
The stars told us stories at night then
and rivers sang of our ancestors,
of ponies, of coup against the Crow. Mothers all,
I was nursed at the breasts of every mother
in the village. The buffalo our
mother chewed the spring grasses that grew over us
when we fell like leaves in the autumns
of our lives. But the white
man was growing stronger, nursed by the wheels
of groaning wagons, the dark oils
of his machines, his Winchesters and Colts,
his greed for land or gold or sport a hunger greater
than that of a hundred vultures in each throat.

What of this is gone?

The plains were my school, teaching me the way.
Never in all my journeys was I lost.
Never I lacked for water, shade. Always I knew in which direction
home lay. As a young man I sought my vision
as a hungry eagle seeks prey. My heart
clamored for that meat. And I
saw, as Little Hawk saw his own place, how I must
live to help our people fight
these invaders whose hands choked
every wild creature with chains, with cages, with that new
school for you.

What of this is yours?

Daughter, I am not old enough to return to my mother but
I am already gone.

Here we do not breathe,
we do not feast, we do not dance for the sun, we do not
make love like warriors.

I don't even have two ponies for you.

The language of our people, it's unchained
galloping words, is like the plains in summer suddenly
and forever smothered by a ghost hide of snow.

I have nothing left to give you. You must find
your own way in this blinding white,
among these winter words
spoken by one who's even now freezing in the storm.



Kelly Woods

A, O, Way To Go Ohio

Stephen Lestat

When you're hitchhiking, interstate truck stops are welcomed harbors. In reality, they are the closest we will ever come to the sailing ports of old. Gleaming eighteen wheel frigates loaded down with all matter of cargo – some legal, some not so legal – sit temporarily moored in crowded harbors of oil-stained concrete and tar.

Happily (which can be another word for ignorant), I strolled into the air-conditioned restaurant, which was located dead center of the paved harbor. My stomach was now making it clear that something else besides a stale Slim Jims was going to be needed for the long, as yet uncharted, journey ahead. I decided to stop at the lunch counter and get something to eat. It was one o'clock on a Friday afternoon in the middle of Ohio, and the atmosphere was buzzing with weekend energy. An empty stool called out to me and I obligingly sat down. All the waitresses had little red, white, and blue ribbons with a tiny American flag in the center pinned to their uniforms. I suddenly realized that this was not just one of your average run-of-the-mill American weekends, no sir re Bob, this was Memorial Day Weekend. *Had I been on the road for over a week?*

I glanced around and saw that most of the booths in the restaurant were crammed with families proudly upholding the stereotypical idea of twentieth century Americana. It was amazing how they all looked basically the same. Mom, wearing a light-colored sleeveless blouse that she hoped would show off her anticipated tan, sunglasses flipped up patiently resting upon a finely brushed bed of dead protein (hair), her right arm slightly sunburned from dangling out of the car window. And there was Dad, with his determined look of concern and chromatic vigilance, checking his watch every two minutes, making sure they were on schedule. Wouldn't want to disappoint Uncle Charlie and Aunt Harriet.

Then of course there were the children (two was the norm), bored, half asleep and dreading four more hours of each other's company. Their only relief was being able to torture their parents with the ageless question, "Are we there yet?" I tried to recall stories from my own childhood and riding in a hot car in the middle of summer vacation, but I couldn't seem to remember any. I figured that (at the ripe old age of twenty-three) such things must fade out temporarily for physiological reasons.

Anyway, I made a brief inventory of my net worth: four dollars and twenty-seven cents. Then I turned my attention to the menu. Just as my eyes started to focus on the lunch specials, I felt – rather than heard – a loud commanding voice from behind me.

“Sir, please stand up and place your hands behind the back of your head.”

Now I had been the around block, as it were, and watched enough reruns of the *Rockford Files* to know exactly what was attached to that voice: it was usually a uniform with the word “Police” on it somewhere. I also knew that attached to the uniform, and readily accessible to the person wearing it was a very persuading mechanism called a gun. I obeyed the order. Slowly rising from the stool, I noticed that the gun, which was supposed to be in his holster, was actually pointed at the side of my head. I placed my hands behind my head and the officer directly behind me started to pat me down.

“Got any weapons or needles on you?” He asked.

“No sir,” I responded.

Thanks to James Garner I knew that the proper edict for an arrestee to use when addressing the arrestor, was “Sir.” It was equally important to speak only when spoken to. Unfortunately, I had not watched as many episodes of the *Rockford Files* as I thought, because I forgot the last little detail of the arrestee directions.

“What the fuck,” I blurted out.

Oops.

The third cop on my right gently pressed the barrel of his gun against my temple and strongly encouraged me to watch my mouth.

Now a funny thing often happens when you feel the cold weight of handcuffs on your wrists. You completely relax and all doubts you may have as to the reality of your situation are completely wiped out. I believe it’s called powerlessness.

I was quickly led outside. We passed by several booths stuffed with restaurant patrons with wide eyes and open mouths of half-chewed food. I couldn’t help but think what a great conversation ice-breaker they were going to have at Uncle Charley and Aunt Harriet’s.

Outside in the parking lot, I was gently placed down on the ground face first, which gave me an ant’s eye view of an endless parade of cowboy boots. Tony Lamas, Fry’s, and the occasional pair of old Dingo’s scuffled past my flattened cheek for what seemed like an hour. Over the dim roar of idling diesels and far away traffic, I could hear the crackling of police radios, as my new friends in uniform conversed back and forth in a triangle of static and secret alphabets.

Finally, one of the officers placed his boot on my back, standard police issue Rockport’s I would imagine, and removed my wallet from the pocket of my dirty jeans. After what seemed like another hour, but which was probably more like ten minutes, the two officers grabbed my arms and effortlessly hoisted me to my feet. As my eyes came back into focus, I noticed something unsettling about the way they were dressed. These guys weren’t your average run of the mill local cops, no sir; these boys were corn-fed Ohio State troopers. And let me tell ya,

if you looked up “good ole boys” in a phrase dictionary, you would most likely see their pictures. Why, just to be considered for the job, you have to bench press over half your own weight, know all the words to *The Devil Went Down To Georgia*, and read someone their *Miranda* rights while chomping on a mouth full of Skoal.

This was starting to look serious.

The other two officers got into two separate cruisers and quickly sped out of the harbor, which left me with the guy that had the squarest jaw of the lot. I kept thinking of Dudley Do-Right and his horse, Nell, but decided that Officer Dudolf was a more fitting name for him. Anyhow, gathering all my nerve and using my baddest biker tone, I demanded to know what was happening.

Hey officer Dudolf, what the fuck? Why the handcuffs... hu?

Actually what came out sounded more like a shy thirteen-year-old adolescent going through puberty.

“Excuse me sir, why (squeak), am I being handcuffed? Squeak.”

“We just need to take you down to the barracks to check something out. If everything checks out, you’ll be free to go.”

Everything? What’s everything? I didn’t like the sound of this.

“Can you at least tell me why I’m being arrested? I said.

“You’re not being arrested . . . not yet anyway.”

“What am I *not* being arrested for?”

No reply. Instead, Officer Dudolf carefully stuffed me into the back seat of the cruiser.

“Watch your head, son.”

We made our way on to I-71, and I was somewhat upset to see that I was now going back in the opposite direction I had just worked so hard to come. What had taken me a little over three hours to trudge in the blazing sun, I now covered in as little as a half an hour inside the air-conditioned police car. I had to keep as still as possible, so as to keep the handcuffs from digging into my wrists. This made my field of vision rather limited, giving me two choices for something to look at. One was the endless miles of rusted, barbed wire fences hugging amber waves of grain. The other was the back of Officer Dudolf’s sun-burned neck, which looked like a road map of unfinished highways on red Ohio clay.

Finally we swung into a twisting gravel driveway, which led up to a small cottage. The fading sun bathed the whole scene in a surreal orange glow. It was more like entering one of those creepy Thomas Kincaid oil paintings than an Ohio state police barracks.

Once inside, I was handcuffed to a large hard wooden bench that was probably handcrafted by the local Boy Scout troop for extra merit badges. After what seemed like forever, another officer (who was dressed in a blue light special suit that appeared to have been purchased at K Mart) came in and sat down next to me on the bench. He, too, was

the size of a small Buick, and I wondered if maybe they didn't give these guys steroids with their regular paychecks. He smiled, which was not reassuring in the least, and revealed his immaculate dental work, which was marred only by a tiny strand of lettuce. Then he reached into his coat pocket, removed a funny little hollow tube key, and began to unlock the handcuffs.

"Probably wondering what this was all about ey?" His voice was high and short and didn't fit his profile at all.

I sat there massaging my aching wrists, thinking: *That's the stupidest fucking question I have ever been asked.*

However, once again recalling the *Rockford Files* I decided to keep it civil. Besides it looked like I was almost a free man.

"Yeh, the thought had kinda crossed my mind," I said.

He proceeded to explain that somewhere outside of Cincinnati, a young man had tried to kidnap his own son at gunpoint from an elementary school and was last seen headed west on I-71. Apparently I fit the description of this upset father right down to the color of my socks. I was detained, he explained, because they needed to have a picture faxed over from the Cincinnati police department to be positive I wasn't the guy they were looking for.

"And, I'm happy to report, you ain't the guy," he said, while digging a toothpick into his pearly whites.

No shit Einstein.

"So I'm free to go?" I said, more like a statement than a question.

"Your free to go, Ace."

I was almost out the door when I decided to push my luck a little.

"Think I could get a lift back to the truck stop?"

He looked at me with the same expression as my third grade principal when I asked to be excused from gym.

"Wada ya think we are, a fuckin' taxi service?"

I didn't answer. I just turned around, and walked out the door into the Ohio night air. It was pitch black.

As the door slammed behind me, I suddenly realized that I had absolutely no idea where I was. Yeh, I was in Ohio, but where in Ohio? I felt like I was in...purgatory – no, scratch that – it was more like hell. I walked down the gravel driveway, tiny stones crunching and popping under my shoes like little cannons disrupting the stillness of the night. Reaching the end of the drive, I looked left and saw nothing, not even a streetlight. I wondered why in hell would they put a state police barracks out in the middle of nowhere and then I remembered that this was hell, and in hell you don't need streetlights. I considered going back and asking one of the Buick boys for directions, but discretion being the better part of valor, I decided to push on. Off to the

right, a dim red glow through the trees caught my attention. A restaurant?

I headed down the road with a new bounce in my step, feeling a bit relieved at the thought of finding humans in the middle of the Ohio woods. However, my high spirits were suddenly frozen in place when I rounded the corner and was able to read the sign that seemed to hover like an electric medieval ghost, illuminating the night in a red neon glow. It read: *THE BUCKET OF BLOOD*.

Ok, so maybe it's not your average family restaurant, but it probably holds humanity, nonetheless.

Moving a little closer, I could hear the familiar, beckoning sounds of a neighborhood bar. As one might expect, the back of the parking lot was filled with American pickup trucks in varying stages of decay. In front of the bar (as if tied to invisible hitching posts) sat several of the modern equivalents to outlaw horses: Harley Davidson's. They were definitely not the new breed of Harley's (which my friend aptly refers to as *Hardly* Davidson's) ridden by weekend warriors with crisp new leather and designer chaps. No way, these were the bikes of legend. Made to ride and fuck looking good. These were the babes you see on late night television in movies like *Chopper Chicks in Zombie Town*, and *Born Losers*. The new outlaws of the American frontier, real bikers, piloted these machines. My kind of guys. Why, it wasn't that long ago that I had to give up my hog . . . er . . . ok, mini bike . . . but what the hell, I told myself, I can blend. Proudly, I walked up the rickety wooden steps. My chest flung out, shoulders back, chin up, and through the open door I went.

All conversation stopped, even the music. You could hear the leather softly squeak, as they all turned to face me. Thirty-one blood-shot eyes, including one guy with an eye patch, were staring at me like I had just suggested they engage in an unnatural act with their mothers. This was the part of the sixties biker flicks that I had conveniently left out of my reminiscing. I stood there biting my upper lip and trying not to make it bleed.

Think quickly

"Howdy!" I said.

Oops.

I felt like that gazelle on the *Nature Channel*, just before it gets devoured by a pride of lions.

Their looks all changed to disgust. Then the music started back up and they all turned around and resumed their conversations, which I assumed were about the best methods of killing and burying a hippie without getting caught.

I walked over to the bar, my chest somewhat deflated, and ordered a Rolling Rock. Over in the corner, under a plastic imitation tiffany lamp, sat a full-size pool table with its green felt faded and worn

from years of straight eight. Behind the bar was a rack of pool cues, none of which appeared to have any dried blood on them. This was a good sign. I fished my change off the bar and walked over and secured the next game in traditional fashion by placing my quarter on the rim of the table.

Misery loves company, but it hates competition. Consequently, I've found it wise when engaging in bar conversation to avoid one-upping the other guy. As I sat there nursing my first of many Pennsylvania ales, the guy next to me – who was chewing beef jerky and slightly drooling – stuck out his calloused hand.

"Name's Larry," he said, slightly slurred but coherent.

Larry looked to be all of twenty-one, if a day. He had a slightly crooked smile, highlighted by a few missing teeth on his front grill. What teeth Larry did possess were a light shade of moss, as in green.

"Nice to meet ya, Larry, My name's Wol . . ."

"Hey, you ain't a faggot or nothing, is ya?"

Jesus Christ.

"Cause I can't stand faggots, Should all be fuckin' shot!"

Jesus.

"No way man, not me," I said.

Thank God.

I started to go into the history of my short marital career, when Larry cut me off.

"You like guns?" he asked. His mouth was full of beef jerky.

"Sure, yeh, I love guns." I lied.

"You like pussy?" he asked.

I raised my eyebrows and nodded affirmatively, attempting to feign a look that said, "What, are you kidding?"

"Definitely." I said, being careful not to eye any of the biker chicks. I started to worry about where this might be leading.

For the next hour and a half, I listened to "The World According to Larry." Seems Larry was mainly concerned with three things in life: beer, firearms, and pussy. I assumed from the logo on his hat, which read: *YOU CAN TAKE MY GUN WHEN YOU PRY IT FROM MY COLD, DEAD HANDS*, that pussy probably ran a close second to firearms, which came right behind beer. As I sat there listening to his tall tales about hunting and the proper guns to use in each situation, I became more and more fascinated by the whole concept of being able to shoot dangerous projectiles at various forms of municipal property like stop signs and fire hydrants. This uncharacteristic line of thought was no doubt aided by the fact that Larry had taken the liberty of ordering us shots of Wild Turkey preceding each beer. It appeared that seeing as to how "I weren't a faggot," he was more than happy to pay for the shots. Now I don't remember exactly how much Wild Turkey and Rolling Rock I consumed, but it was enough that I eventually came up with

the bright idea of going outside for a little target practice.

Now if you had stopped me on the street an hour before and asked me if I thought would be a good idea to go out and conduct a little target practice in the middle of the night after consuming somewhere between eight and ten shots of Wild Turkey, along with a half dozen bottles of Rolling Rock, my answer would have most probably been a resounding "NO!" Yet there I was, a self-proclaimed pacifist and peace-loving hippie about to do exactly that. Oh, the demon alcohol.

Now in order to assure me that he was a trained and competent gun handler, Larry pulled out his wallet – which was difficult given his state of total inebriation – and proudly showed me both his current NRA membership card and his Ohio hunting license. Then he smiled, burped, and proceeded to fall backwards off his stool. After making sure he didn't injure his trigger hand, we began to complain to the bartender about the shoddy condition of the establishment. The bartender (and I assumed part owner), Chas, took immediate offense at our constructive criticism. Then with words that would have made any pirate jealous, Chas asked us to leave, proclaiming that we had had enough. Go figure.

"Bullshit!" Larry said, weaving from left to right. "Wee just getting' warmed up."

"Yeh," I said, nodding my head overdramatically in agreement. "Wee just getting' warmed up!"

Larry waved his hand in a way that could be interpreted as over-acting in theater circles and then hailed our departure: "Let's get the fuck out a here, little buddy."

"Yeh, let's get the fuck outta here," I said.

As I headed for the door, I gave Chas a dirty look and walked directly into the pool table.

Not intimidated and being on a roll, I proceeded to complain about the location of the pool table. However, my bravery was cut short by that little voice in my head, which was forever saving my life. More often than not, I didn't pay attention to this little voice. Yet, by some miracle of divine intervention, I decided to listen for once, and I managed to exit the bar with all of my teeth. I fared no better when leaving, however, because I fell off the last step and landed on my face. And I was about to go play with guns!

We climbed aboard Larry's pickup, a nineteen seventy eight-Ford F-150, which was in the last days of its useful life. The only thing I really took notice of was the gun rack running the full length of the cracked rear window. It was empty. The floor of the truck was ankle deep with crunched beer cans and Slim Jim wrappers. Larry crammed a nameless black cassette into the dashboard and the Ramones suddenly invaded the cab playing *Rock n' Roll High School*. Screaming over

the music, Larry went on to explain his domestic situation. Seems he lived in a trailer about five miles from the bar with his lovely new bride of six months, whom I was willing to bet was all of eighteen and probably six months pregnant. In between swigs on a fresh can of Rolling Rock, he belted out my confirmation over the decibels of the Ramones.

"I just wanna have some chicks . . ."

"SHE'S ABOUT EIGHTEEN, HER NAME'S ANNIE."

"I just wanna have some kicks . . ."

"SHE'S GOT ONE IN THE OVEN."

"Rock rock, rock, rock, rock n' roll high school . . ."

"HER OLD MAN'S A REAL PRICK; KEEPS NAGING ME ABOUT FINDING A FUCKIN' JOB."

"Rock rock rock rock n' roll high school..."

"SHE'S A NICE KID AND ALL, BUT SHE SURE DON'T LIKE ME PLAYIN' WITH GUNS."

She's got a point.

"NEITHER DOES HER FUCKIN' FATHER. BUT, HEY, I AINT HURTIN' NOBODY. BESIDES, HE CAN'T STOP ME, EVEN IF HE IS A FUCKIN' SHERIF."

Sheriff?

I was beginning to have second thoughts.

Along with her distaste for guns, I wondered how his new bride (and his new father-in-law, as well) felt about his obvious affinity for beer and the other aforementioned interest.

As we drove on, swerving ever so slightly, he seemed to be getting more and more excited about the prospect of showing off his shooting talents. We turned onto a small dirt road with tall oaks and pines looming up on either side. They made an eerie bat-cave kind of entrance. His new bride, Annie, was at the door to meet us as we drove up. For a brief second, I thought she had a gun in her hand, but it turned out be a phone. She looked very mad and very, very pregnant.

Larry looked at me with a silly, sort of guilty grin and said, "I forgot; I was supposed to come right home after looking for work . . . oops."

He then let out a long healthy belch, followed by a few redneck words of wisdom.

"Fuck it."

"Yeh, fuck it," I said, as the world began to spin around me.

I stayed in the truck, (which was wise) because I was probably to drunk to walk, while Larry went into the trailer to get *some guns*. He stumbled out with a six-pack of Rolling Rock tucked under his arm and a rifle in each hand.

In the state of Ohio, you do not need a permit or license to purchase or possess a handgun, shotgun, or rifle. However, the law

does state that it is unlawful to recklessly lend a handgun, shotgun, or rifle to any person(s) who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. That would have been me.

Now at this point, Larry handed me one of the rifles and told me to be careful, because it was loaded. Ohio law also states that even though your father-in-law is a sheriff, you cannot carry a loaded gun in your pickup truck with the intent to blow away municipal property, such as stop signs and fire hydrants.

We headed back out to the main road, taking a confusing series of lefts and rights. Finally he pulled the truck over at a four-way intersection and proceeded to give me my first lesson in the proper use of firearms.

"See that fuckin' stop sign right dare?" he asked, drool running out of the corner of his mouth.

"Yeh, barely," I said

"Well blow that fucker inta next Friday!" he said, while gleefully popping another beer.

Now, I don't know guns all that well, but when I pulled the trigger on that baby, it felt as though I had just detonated a small nuclear device. This particular gun is commonly referred to as an "elephant" gun. Need I say more? The bullet not only hit the stop sign and went through, it removed the whole sign and half of the wooden post the sign was attached to, sending it spiraling out into the night like a recoiling yo yo. There was a problem, however. This small nuclear device had a scope, which I used to get a good bead on the sign. The problem was, however, that I never took my eye away from the scope. So when I pulled the trigger (thereby initiating a small nuclear-like explosion) my eye took the full recoil of the gun. At first, I thought the gun had misfired and I was on my way to meet that dude in the sky that looked like Charlton Heston; or worse, I was going the opposite way and was about to meet Vincent Price. Then I realized my mistake and I was sure I had put my eye out. I pulled the gun back into the cab and dropped it on the floor. I sobered up real quick and strongly suggested to Larry that I might need to get to a hospital. He downed his beer, belched, and in a tone that suggested utter disbelief, he said: "God damn boy, you fucken retarded or somthin?"

I began to think he might be right.

He jumped out of the cab and came over to my side of the truck. Picking the gun up off the floor, he emptied out all of the remaining bullets. Then he did something that I thought was strange; he placed the rifle back into the gun rack. Next he took the other rifle and shoved it under the seat on his side of the truck.

Off we sped to the nearest *Doc In A Box*. Larry seemed to sober up just as quickly as I had, in that his driving was much less erratic. He assured me he wouldn't just leave me there and that he would wait

to see if they were going to keep me or not. He became very concerned.

“Don’t worry little buddy; I’ll stick around,” he said

“Hey, you isn’t gona tell em my name, is ya little buddy? Cause if my father-in-law gets wind a this, I’ll be up the creek with out a fuckin’ paddle.”

Now he seemed nervous and concerned.

We swung into a dimly lit parking lot with a small neon curb sign that read: *EMERGENCY*.

He pulled directly up to the front door and as I got out, he told me he was just going to park the truck and come right in after me. I walked through the automatic doors and watched his taillights bounce out of the parking lot and fade off down the road.

See ya Larry.

They kept me overnight and really didn’t seem all that interested in the particulars of my accidental injury. The next morning, my head hurt more from a well-deserved hangover than it did from the gun scope recoiling into my eye. As it turns out, the rim of the scope made a perfect circle around the outside of my right eye, requiring only five or six stitches. I was lucky.

So on that beautiful Sunday morning, in the year nineteen hundred and eighty-two, I walked out of a little hospital in the western part of Ohio with the clothes on my back, a patch over my right eye, and the worst hangover of my entire life.

I made my way out to the highway and skeptically stuck out my thumb. Luck was on my side and I caught the first ride coming down the line, a van. The glare from the sun made it impossible to see what type of van it was. It pulled hard over to the shoulder, sending up a cloud of choking dust. I squinted my eye and began jogging up to meet it. As I got closer, I felt like I had suddenly entered a time warp, because before me sat the ugliest, dirtiest, most colorful VW van I had ever seen in my life. The back was plastered with peeling *Grateful Dead* stickers that read like a hippie diary. The

passenger door creaked open, allowing a thick cloud of blue smoke to make its escape into the morning air. Emerging from the trailing mist was a ghostly time traveler. His eyes were a glossy, peaceful shade of maroon. A long tangle of gray dreadlocks hung down about his shoulders like a weapon to be used against corporate America. A pair of faded blue jeans that were tied off by a line of hemp sat below an equally faded face of a young Gerry Garcia imprisoned in a sea of tie die.

“Hop in man; where ya headed?”

I climbed inside and took my place next to all the other bloodshot eyes, (sixteen to be exact) and I felt I had no choice but to say:

“California.”

I Could Have Danced All Night

Hermie Medley

Shortly after my eightieth birthday
some women, who claimed
to be my friends, dragged me
to a senior center dance. I'd never been
to one before, figuring everyone there
would be old. And I was right. These folks
were old, in various stages
of advanced maturity, but little
did I care. The music
from that band—*Star Dust*,
Tea for Two—transported me
on a faded magic carpet back to my youth
and filled me with a throbbing need
to get out on the floor and move.

But first I had to elbow my way
through a pack of white-haired ladies,
clustered on the sidelines like gawkers
at a car wreck. Only ten or twelve
couples were dancing, swaying
to a waltz, delight writ large
across their wrinkled faces. When
the number ended, the women
clutched their partners
in a death grip, hogging them
for the dance to come.

“Where are the other men?” I naively
asked a woman. “There ain’t no other
men,” she said, rolling her eyes. I
surveyed those fellows. Never
had a bunch of nondescript
old geezers struck me as so handsome,
debonair and sexy. The band began

began to play a cha-cha, and I would
have killed for a partner. Right in front
of me a bald old guy danced sublimely
with an ancient woman in a pink
pants suit. I looked around for a rock

or at least a heavy book
to bash her in the head, but
fortunately for us both, could find
either.

Listen

Mary Ann LoBalbo

I don't understand why you—
Why can't it be easy when...

That trust is really simple—
Not some mountain that is to...

It's like not knowing what life—
I am sure it isn't me, it's...

You just don't get it the way—
I can't stand being fenced...

Infatuation ends when—
The truth is it's real, not the...

I am here-not there-so stay, please

Jamie S. Uyematsu



To Michele

Alex Taurke

I was lying on my bed
the day you called me
And told me to sit down.
But my mattress couldn't soften
The oncoming collision of my
Youthful Idealism
With that day's
Cold Reality.

I had always told my friends,
Confidently, self-righteously, and yes
With arrogance:

If it was my choice
I would
Do the right thing.

Oh God.

Oh no.

End this.

Kill it.

I screamed to myself
The instant you said
 "I'm pregnant."



Eric Thelen

Moontown

Hye-Young Jung

As usual, I picked up my daughter from her school today. We were on the way home when I stopped the car in the middle of the road. A broken fire hydrant was spouting water like a small fountain. I parked the car on the side of the road, grabbed my daughter's hand and ran towards the fire hydrant. "Wow! Isn't it great," I said. "Mom, what are you doing?" replied my daughter. I was jumping around the fire hydrant, splashing water all over. Cold drops of water tickled my cheeks that turned pink from unknown excitement. As I spun around in the water, tiny drops reflected bright sunshine gleaming between big trees and made thousands of rainbow beads. "Mom, let's go home." My daughter's yelling brought me back to reality. My cool ten-year-old daughter was accusing me of acting silly and childish. I just smiled and drove home slowly, having left the cheerful water drops dancing around the fire hydrant while my daughter scowled at me.

At first, I didn't realize what I was doing. Why was I fascinated by that fire hydrant? Then, surprisingly, I realized that I had been trying to grab fragments of my childhood. I was playing around the water tap in Moon Town.

When I was young, my family lived in a neighborhood called Moon Town. We didn't live there for a long time, but it provided many unforgettable memories of my childhood and my mother. It was in this place where I first saw her tears of pain. She cried because of her deep attachment to money and her greed.

The neighborhood was located on a hill in the middle of Seoul. People called it Moon Town because when the moon was full, moonlight surrounded the houses like a bright halo. From the bottom of the hill, it looked like the houses were located on the moon. Another reason it was called Moon Town was because it was a poor neighborhood where the under-class lived. Those who lived in more comfortable surroundings said that Moon Town residents lived like people on a different planet. Many small brick houses dotted the hilltop where the less fortunate lived. At that time, we had enough money to live in a better neighborhood, but my mother wanted to build-up our family's savings to buy a house. My father, who lacked the ability to take care of my family, couldn't go against my mom's wishes.

The house was small and inconvenient. In particular, there was only one water tap for about fifteen families. The tap stuck out like a skinny silver chopstick from a small cement platform in a clearing amid the houses. People kept an eye on the tap as they would a small child as they roamed around the neighborhood. They took care of it in winter by making a sleeve insulated with straw to keep it from

freezing and bursting when the temperature dropped.

Everyone gathered around the tap when the water company turned on the pumps for three or four hours each evening. All of our neighbors loved to spend their evening on the platform, although there wasn't much space for everyone to stand around the tap. The scene was peaceful and merry. People came out of their houses with all kinds of buckets and lined-up in an orderly way as they started to chat about their tiring day. A woman who worked in a Korean barbecue restaurant was always the first one to start talking. She bitterly complained about her tough day with an excited voice. Smoke from the sizzling grills nearly blinded her and salty marinated meat wrinkled the skin on her hands like prunes. She made it sound like she was falling apart, but she was the most energetic of the bunch. Then the garbage man would brag about the treasure he found in the rubbish while making his daily rounds. One day it was a fancy lamp, another time a usable electric fan, and so on. Every time he showed off his latest wonderful discovery people told him what a great job he had. The scene was like a small carnival with laughing, children playing games, thousands of stars in the sky that looked like tiny light bulbs, and an anxiously waiting crowd gathered around the mist from the stream of water hitting the bucket.

I really liked to play around the water tap every evening and watching the nightly extravaganza. The man who lived up the hill carried two big buckets of water with a back-rack. Everyday he completely filled the buckets, but never spilled a drop on the way back up to his house. I also liked to see people's happy faces while they talked about their humble lives. There was one thing that really scared me about the water tap though. Kids who lived in Moon Town told me that there was a monster that came out of it at midnight and ate people's hearts. I knew that my mom used to go get water late at night, so I became worried about her. However, every night she beat the monster and got some fresh water for my family.

My mom was satisfied living there. Every night she pulled out her bankbook and counted the money that she had saved for her wish. Meanwhile, my sister and I started losing our interest in studying. We played all day long, as did the other kids living in the neighborhood. My mom didn't nag us for not doing homework. It was freedom for me, but that freedom didn't continue for long.

One hot summer night something happened to my family. It was the middle of July and the effects of a drought started to become apparent. The water company reduced our neighborhood's supply of water. The pleasant nightly gatherings around the tap disappeared quickly. Instead of pleasantly chatting, the people in the neighborhood fought and argued as they waited for the stream to flow from the tap. The happy carnival had turned hellish. Unlike the other families,

mine could afford to buy bottled water. Regardless, my mom waited through the line at the tap each evening. Moreover, she worried that we could not get enough water for our family in the short time that the tap ran. So, one night she pushed me into the hostile crowd with an old metal bucket. I felt she was forcing me to join her greed. Although I was sad and scared, I had more fear of my mom's uncontrollable greed than anything else. At that moment, something terrible happened in one quick instant. One woman pushed me to the ground and threw my cold metal bucket at me. She screamed, "I am ahead of you! I left my bucket here to hold my place in line." Suddenly my mom came out of nowhere and attacked the woman like a wolf. They scratched and pulled each other's hair while wrestling on the ground.

As they were fighting, water started to flow from the tap and the vicious woman ran for her share. My mom, however, grabbed my hand and took me home. She wailed for a long time. I saw her tears of deep pain. The next day she started packing to move. She never opened her bankbook again after that day.

To this day, my mom has never mentioned the incident. I remember it with her painful crying though. She might have realized her uncontrollable greed for money could harm her children. Although she sacrificed her dream for her children, I think the happiest moments for my mom were the days she spent building-up her hopes for a new house while carrying buckets of water. I love my stubborn mom. She never told me how much she cared about me, but I knew on that day when she wrestled with the evil neighbor woman how much she loved me.

Today I found a piece of my childhood around the fire hydrant. I miss my mom. I miss Moon Town and the water tap.



drunken lights, Lori J. Haraldsen

Ivy

Tiffany Lynn Wong

She waited for him inside a pale yellow
phone booth. He told her to wear a devil's tail.

Beside her in the back seat of a taxi
he asked, It gets dark early now, doesn't it?

The go-go dancer's neck was stiff as cement;
by the time they reached his apartment,

he had chipped away the granite cast.
On a wooden chair, she sat cross-legged

like Buddha. Wind blew sex onto her face.
I need the green, she hummed to herself.

His willow tree body shaded hers from sun.
Peeling off her g-string, he watched

the scratches move up and down her body.
She was ivy climbing on his limbs,

protected by flames that ran like shallow
river water around them on the linoleum floor.

Sonnet: Plea to a Married Lover

Jeanne Johnson

The message from your eyes and lips and touch
Belies the words that say love cannot be;
There is another needs your love too much,
Bound by the past you cannot stay with me.
And if you loved me not, I would not weep
That we so lately met so soon should part,
For only fond remembrance would I keep
Within the shadows of my love touched heart.
But if you love me, as your eyes do speak,
Then surely shall I grieve when you are gone,
For though brief knowing's formed a bond yet weak,
Our love, in time, would surely make it strong.
Yet no claim can I make beyond this plea;
Go not my love, for less than love, from me.