



Garden Window

I always loved music. Trumpets and guitars especially, or a nice clear piano. Dance music or grave ballads, it didn't matter. But here, only scratching sounds come through my window, like when the record ends and the needle skips against the label. Rats' feet on dry boards. Not so much sound as the impression of it, the idea of someone whispering about me in a faraway room, about my problems and how I am nothing. So if a sound like music came through, perhaps two or three notes as from a tuba or a vibrating pipe, I could try to have hope.

I remember Saturdays. We would work in the garden with our mother, mow the grass and rake the fallen leaves and fruit. She would give us money, and we children would walk into town. The black tar road was warm, with the smells of wild radish, fennel and dog shit from the verge. The sun would glint from the sides of mobile homes, and bees droned in the bottlebrush. Sometimes we were stung. The road went on, but we left it and took the footpath that dropped along the canal, then crossed beneath the highway.

There was shade and it was cooler there. The traffic over our heads was rhythmic; a great bellows, a groaning of trucks. The water in the stone canal was brackish and warm, jumping with waterbugs, dragonflies.

Coming up beyond the highway, there was a stand of dense bamboo. Once I cut my way to its interior and made a place to hide. Three times I took a girl with me, the summer we were seventeen. We were quiet. We heard the traffic, children throwing stones in the bald and sour canal, airplanes overhead. And no one ever knew.

It's not far beyond the highway to the town, with its shops and people. Then the flat glassy sea, the smell of which hung and drifted. The sky was painted with oil and salt.

We rode little ponies that walked in a circle, their corral strewn with hay to cut the dust and smell of pony dung. Around and around, four bits a ticket for a ten minute ride, and cowboy music from a speaker on the center pole. We left when the ponies were led away to drink and rest. Everything gets tired.

We went to the café for ice cream, rootbeer floats. The radio on the counter played swing – bright brass, clarinets and drums.

Then the days got shorter and Autumn came, and no one walked the road to town. They closed up the windows of the houses in town and Mother took us shopping in the car. Everything was quieter, except for dogs and crickets, and the calling of crows heading east for their home.

So we came home. For many years, we slept and ate and went to work, and on Saturdays we forgot about the path, the sea and the pony rides. We filled the bird baths in the garden and listened to the footsteps of blue jays on the porch rails, gathering the nuts we set out for them.

We grew old. We sat in the shade outside and let the bushes go wild. I would doze in the afternoon and hear the falling oranges.

In time, everyone else was gone. I stayed inside. I sat on the sofas and chairs and tried to hear songbirds. I moved to the bed and listened for the neighbors' barking dog and the stale breath of cars going by.

The last time I heard people, I had to stand and try to see. I crossed the room and became the glass panes of this window. There are new people now in my house, but I hide in the glass as I hid in the thicket, and watch their reflections come and go. We do not trouble each other. I just want to stay here a while, and look down on the guava hedge, on the jasmine and bloodleaf begonias, remembering.

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