

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

ONE TO THREE PAGE
STORIES & POEMS

BY LISA BETH DARLING

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Moon Mistress Publishing USA

Moon Mistress Publishing

New London, CT 06320

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Potholes—Spring in New London

The flowers are blooming after a long cold winter. Crocus, Daffodil, and Tulip pop their colorful heads through the soil to greet an ever warming sun. Trees overhead swell with buds while the adventurous gardener is turning soil and making plans for the coming season. Must be springtime in Connecticut, while this time of year is charmingly beautiful it is not without its dangers. One of which appears to enjoy lying in wait for unsuspecting or unmindful victims to happen by and fall into its trap.

Yes, Springtime in Connecticut is synonymous with Pothole Season. We all know how they're made they're the result of the simple reaction between water turning to ice and contracting the asphalt and the spring sun which warms it until it cracks, expands and ultimately becomes a road hazard. Still, even with the scientific explanation, the pothole is a very strange thing since it has the habit of forming over night and, in some cases, being virtually unseen by day until it's too late. In my town there are a few places where the pothole makes a yearly home. My least favorite of which is the corner of Willetts and Ocean Avenues. Coming down Ocean Avenue towards Ocean Beach it lies in wait as one comes up the slight grade. It is well hidden and probably grinning as the tires of my car approach. It always gets me the first time, always. I never see it and as I'm going along, probably on my way home and most certainly minding my own business

Ka-thunk! Bang!

I'm jolted side to side in the driver's seat as the tires run through this rather deep rut jarring and jerking the suspension system before returning to smooth payment once more. I think; *damn it! not again!* Then I remind myself that it's there and so I won't hit the next time. But of course I do. Sooner or later, well before anyone thinks of filling the thing in, I do remember it's there and I look at it and grin as I drive past it thinking; *you didn't get me this time!*

With regard to this same annoying pothole, if you're driving down Willetts Avenue and you make a right hand turn to go onto Ocean Avenue this pothole is completely unavoidable. You can see it sitting there grinning up with its large open mouth just waiting for a taste of tire or perhaps it'll be lucky enough to get the tang of metal. No matter how wide a swing you take—barring crossing the double yellow line—you always end up at least nicking the damn thing, the vehicle tips sharply to the right and you hope your tires survive. Sometimes it's full of water and makes a great splashing wave no matter which direction you're going in. Pity any pedestrian not lucky enough to get out of the way.

Sooner or later a crew comes by to block and hold up traffic at this busy intersection to a slow crawl. They form a bigger hole than the one already there and then fill it all in again. Nice and neat, their job done they drive away onto the next pothole. As I said it's a very strange creature the pothole, next year it will be back bigger than the year before laughing hysterically to itself, its big mouth open and waiting for a tasty treat, it will lie in wait to play again.

Rain Dance

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Published by the Chopper Journal, February 2008

The oppressive heat of a New England summer is legendary but no place more so than in New London. Here during a good heated stretch you can actually watch the buildings and people slowly melt away. The streets become so hot that it gives new meaning to 'your tires hugging the road'. Day after sweltering day all around becomes heavy as though the forces of gravity can actually be seen dragging everything and everyone down to Mother Earth. The air is thick and hard to breathe just moving from the couch to the refrigerator can feel as though you've swum several laps in the Ocean Beach pool and make you just as wet with your own sweat.

Perhaps during the middle of a day such as this the Gods will bless us with a Sun Shower, few things are more wondrous or beautiful than softly falling rain on a bright summer's day. Those lucky enough to be caught in it will automatically hold their heads backward to catch every cooling drop. The Sun Shower is a fleeting thing, in moments it's gone leaving the heat and smell of steam behind. The heat returns with greater intensity.

There's only one actual cure for this type of heat; a thunderstorm.

During the middle of an absolutely clear day all at once the sky will thicken and turn dark. Overhead Zeus lets us know that he's warming up as he tosses streaks of heat lightning across a purple sky. Thunderclaps echo over town to announce the official arrival and then suddenly...rain. Blessed rain. Not mere droplets, no simple Sun Shower, but a sheer torrent as the clouds open to drop their payload in a great sheets and fat juicy drops. Steam rises from the sidewalks and streets. Children of all ages run into the street and jump in swiftly running streams along the roadway. They laugh, they twirl and they dance in clear cool water given to them directly from the Gods, no tap required.

I dance too. Often during one of these storms my neighbors can find me outside, sometimes right in front of the house, my head held back and my arms reaching for the sky as I whirl and twirl and dance in the summer rain. For a few glorious moments nothing but the rain and I exist. If, per chance, one of these storms should strike at night rather than the middle of the day then you're apt to find me dancing in the rain in my backyard skyclad. (I do this only at night because I don't want to frighten the neighbors.)

Spinning round and round and round, naked and unashamed I dance. I laugh. I sing. With fierce intensity I feel the connection between the Sky, the Earth and I. With my arms reaching ever skyward my fingers splayed out, my long tresses plastered to my body I revel in the power of the storm, I become One with it and feel the energy rise within me and know that I have a purpose. I welcome the storm with every pore, letting it wash over me, envelope me, fill me, cool me, cleanse me body and soul. When I am drenched to the bone lightheaded from laughter, dance and my communing with the Divine, full of the storm's energy I stumble into the house, grab my husband and indulge in other more intimate delights the storm has to offer.

I love a rainy night.

The Robin, The Lark and The Dove
By Lisa Beth Darling

Once upon a time there was an old man who loved to feed the birds. Every day he would walk out into his neatly kept yard and refill the bird feeders which he kept in trees, on poles and by his lower windows. Every day he would call to them as he filled the feeders with seed and tossed out bits of old bread.

Knowing there was food around and always eager for a free meal, each morning a Robin and a Lark appeared in the old man's yard to strut around and peck at the bits of bread he'd left on the ground for them. Even though they were fairly ordinary birds the old man was always happy to see them and to watch them eat before flying off together to parts unknown. The bird he loved best was the Dove that came to sing for him as she perched high atop of the pole feeder in the middle of his yard. He would watch her taking in bird seed he'd set out and then flitting off to the nearest bird bath for a cool drink and a dip. The beautiful bird would preen and swim around in the bird bath while singing her own sweet tune which entranced the old man. The Dove never settled upon the ground to eat bits of stale bread. Instead if the Robin and the Lark were there she would watch them keenly from high above while she ate the delicious seed the old man put out for them.

The Robin and the Lark both believed the Dove to be a pretentious bird and they did not like her. They envied her beauty and her lovely singing voice so they banded together through thick and thin and squawked at the Dove whenever she came near. The Dove would only stare at them from her perch.

One day, after the Robin and the Lark had their fill of stale bread and then flew off without offering the old man so much as song for his troubles and his kindness the Dove appeared and perched herself on her customary pole. "Why don't you ever eat the bread?" The old man asked the cooing bird.

"Why should I want to do that, kind sir?" The Dove replied. "The seed is most delicious and the bread is stale and fattening."

"The Robin and the Lark like it."

"They eat it because they do not have to work for it. Believing themselves entitled to the free meal you give them, they take it and never think twice about your generosity." The Dove said. "If I sit up here and I eat the seed you have so kindly put out for me—which is much better for me and of a higher quality than the bread-- then you with your kind old

eyes can see me better and hear my song as it echoes through your lovely yard. In this way I hope to repay you for all you do for me without my even asking." She cooed and began eating seed once more cracking them open with her petite beak so the husks fell to the ground while the seed remained in her mouth.

The old man thought about what the Dove said and the next day as he refilled his bird feeders he did not put out any bread from the day before. The Robin and the Lark landed in the yard and looked around for their bread. Finding none they began to squawk and then peck upon the old man's door. When he opened it he found the two birds standing in the doorway. "What are you two doing here?"

"Where's the bread?" The Robin asked in a haughty voice. "We come here expecting bread and today there is no bread. We want our bread."

"Yes," agreed the Lark.

"I have no bread today," the old man explained. "There is plenty of seed in the feeders." He invited.

The Robin squawked and rolled her small brown eyes. "We don't like seed, it's too difficult to get to and too hard to eat. We like bread."

"If I should go to the store, buy you some bread, bring it back here and put it in the yard, what will you do for me?" The old man asked.

"Why should I do anything for you?" The Robin asked.

"Yes, why?" The Lark echoed. "Give us our bread."

"It is not your bread, it is my bread," the old man countered. "If I share it with you then don't you think you should share something with me? A song perhaps?" The old man looked up to see the Dove sitting on a high branch, she sighed as she cooed and sang a sad song for the old man.

"A song?" The Robin huffed and looked up in the direction the old man was gazing to see the Dove and hear her lovely voice. "Why should I have to sing for my supper? I am better than that."

"Yes, we are." The Lark agreed. "Now give us our bread before we starve."

"I have no bread today," the old man said again, "there is plenty of seed and I'm sure you can find a worm or two in my yard."

"A worm?" The Robin cried and cocked her wings to the side. "Do you know how much work it is to find a worm? Why should I go through all of that trouble when I know you have perfectly good bread in there and you're just not sharing it with us."

"Share?" The old man asked. "I just asked you to share a song with me and you refused. Why should I share anything with you?" The old man stepped back and shut the door on the two rude birds. A few moments later the sweetest song was heard in his back yard and he looked out to see the Dove on the bird feeder right next to his window. She was singing the most beautiful song for him and it made the old man grin as he watched and listened to her. Opening the window he held out his hand and the Dove stepped on to it. "You are a true friend, my pretty Dove." The old man complimented. "You were right about them all they wanted was whatever I was willing to give them and when I stopped they would do nothing for me in return."

"You mustn't blame them," the Dove cooed, "being common birds they know no better but that does not mean you have to continue feeding them." She rubbed her white head against his chin. "I am grateful for all you do for me." She said. "Shall I sing for you now?"

After that day the old man and the Dove spent many happy hours together day in and day out while the Robin and the Lark looked on in envy as they tried to find a handout elsewhere and found none that lasted. The Robin and the Lark spent many years together quietly starving and picking through trash left behind while they complained endlessly about the disservice the Dove had done them.

At least they had each other.

The Shaw Street Strangler

A Short Story by

Lisa Beth Darling

Eddie. They call him Eddie but this is not his name.

The night is cold and damp the only sound is the echoing footfalls of a single person walking along the empty street in a rundown part of town. Here he knows no one cares and no one will blink an eye if you scream.

Breath hot and white escapes from his nostrils as Eddie lumbers along, head low, calloused hands stuffed into the pockets of a ratted pea coat with the collar turned up. A longshoreman's hat, drawn past his ears covers an untamed tangle of mangy black hair further masking his identity. All that can be seen of his face, even under the brightest of street lights, is his fair complexion and perhaps a scruff of beard. In his black jeans and leather boots he blends in easily with the darkness surrounding him and that within him.

Three days ago Eddie first saw her walking across Montauk Avenue, pretty little Mary Sue with her young firm body, long blonde hair and big blue eyes. She was perfect. Like the others, captured him though he doesn't know why. Perhaps she reminds him of his mother or a love lost or unrequited. Perhaps she's simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Since then he's followed her to Cumberland Farms and to the Planet Fitness Gym. For as many night as days he's peered into her window to gaze upon her while she slept his face and hands pressed to the cold glass while he fantasized what it would be like to be next to her warm body. Last night he followed her to a local restaurant and watched unseen as she met a man for dinner. This last did not sit well with him. Couldn't the uninvited suitor see that she belonged to him?

Eddie knows where he's going and what must be done. Briefly he looks up at Mary Sue's unassuming home, he wonders what she's doing but he already knows; she's putting on her uniform for work. Mary Sue works the breakfast shift at the Broken Yolk Cafe; service starts at 5am. Creeping up the driveway he crouches and waits between her car and the garage. Eyes darting around to be sure he's alone and has not been seen. As he waits he massages the strand of nylon rope in his pocket and he waits and he waits with much patience until the front door opens and the young woman walks out. Sensing no danger only the chill Mary Sue gathers her jacket tightly around her body to guard, she clutches her purse in one hand and her car keys in the other. In the shadows by the garage he waits and watches and holds his breath so that she does not see it against the

blackness of the night around her. His eyes catch upon the moonlight as it dances on her golden hair. Eddie's heart beats with an ever quickening pace. The rope in his pocket, clutched tightly in his hand, appears and he unravels it holding one end in each of his rough mitts.

She's near now, so close he can smell her perfume; White Shoulders. He hears the soft pattern of her breathing and believes if he's still enough he will be able to hear the beating of her heart as she puts her key into the driver's door of the old beater she drives.

She must not get in the car. She must not drive off. Coming up close behind her he strikes! Bringing the strong rope over her head and across her throat he pulls her into him with all his might.

Fear! Paralyzing overwhelming fear!

Mary Sue cannot scream the air in her lungs is cut off as she wriggles and writhes as tries to break free. It is to no avail. Breath sultry and reeking of decay and alcohol on her cheek. Her golden strands catch in his beard and the stench of him fills what little air she is able to gulp. Something long and hard more frightening than the rope pushes into the small of her back as he holds her firmly to him.

Slowly her panicked body runs out of air and energy as the fight in her fades away and she succumbs to her fate. Darkness descends. Before she can breathe her last breath the rope falls away. Limp as a rag doll in his arms he turns her around, her blue eyes frozen in terror stare up at him as he looms over her. The palm of his calloused hand closes over the tender flesh of her wounded throat. Eddie's lips greedily descend over hers while he squeezes and sucks the last breath from her body. The bulge in his black jeans soaked with his own release. "Don't be afraid, I love you." Eddie whispers from behind rotting teeth. "I love you. You will spend eternity in my embrace. I love you."

The Woo Woo Kid

Of all the things in the world young Roberto Miguel loved baseball the most. Being a good New Londoner his favorite team was the Boston Red Sox, his favorite players; Carl "Yaz" Yastrzemski, Carlton Fisk, Jimmy Rice and Dwight "Dewy" Evans. On any given warm day you could find Roberto outside with his two best friends Steven and Connie (also big Red Sox fans) playing baseball in any one of their backyards. It's hard to play baseball with only three people but they managed. All they needed was someone to pitch, someone to bat and in case the ball was actually hit someone to be in the outfield, the batter was also the catcher but again this did not present a problem. In this they had all of their bases covered so to speak. Not that there were any bases mind you. Perhaps, first base was a clothesline, second base a post in the cyclone fencing, third was an old tire swing and home plate nothing more than worn out patch of dirt. No, it wasn't regulation but it certainly worked for them.

"Batter up!" Steven would cry when Roberto came to the plate.

"Awww, he-no-batter-no-batter-no-batter-no-he's-no-good." Connie would taunt in the outfield as they'd taught her to do even though she thought it was rude she came to understand this was a 'psych out' though it didn't often work.

Roberto would stand at the plate bat at the ready and Steven would chuck a speedball at him.

Smack!

Oh, how they all thrilled to the crack of the bat!

Over the fence and sometimes down the embankment went the ball when Roberto hit it and Connie would have to go chasing after it while Roberto ran the bases with his right hand held high in the air, his index finger proclaiming that he was 'Number One' and screaming out 'Woo-Woo! Woo-Woo!' at the top of his young lungs, his boyish face beaming a lovely bright red as he held that hand high in the air shaking it for all to see.

In the fall of 1975 the young children gathered around a small black and white television in Roberto's basement to watch the Red Sox play the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series. Red Sox fans, will tell you the Sox won that series 3 games to 4 as they had the better ball club. Alas, the truth is, the Sox lost the series 3 games to 4 and the Curse of the Bambino continued for another 29 disheartening years.

When Roberto got older he joined a little league team for Smith Insurance. Steven and Connie would often wander to Mitchell Field to watch his games. Rob would stand at the plate looking sharp in his blue and red uniform while those gathered cheered for the boy who was quickly becoming known as The Woo Woo Kid due to his ability to hit the ball out of the park and his inability to stop cheering for himself when he did. Through high school and college Roberto's biggest dream was to play for the Boston Red Sox but his coaches often told him that, while he had the Right Stuff, if he didn't stop screaming 'woo woo' others would never take him seriously and he'd never make a major league ball team. This did not deter Rob who was picked up by the Pawtucket Red Sox in the spring of 1998 and was a real crowd pleaser not only for his ability to knock 'em outta the park but for his enthusiasm for America's Favorite Pastime. The players on his team and the others made fun of him for all of his woo-wooing but they couldn't deny he was one of the best damn ballplayers they'd ever seen. After two years playing Triple A ball, Rob finally went to The Show. He was picked up by the Boston Red Sox and in his very first year had a batting average of .375 shattering the record for a rookie which had stood at .373 since 1930. Despite the advice of earlier coaches, during home games when Rob got up to bat the whole of the hometown crowd would stand up and cheer "Woo-woo! Woo-woo!"

Then came the biggest night of Roberto's life, the one he'd hoped and prayed for the one that haunted his dreams since childhood. It all happened on October 24, 2004 under the darkness of a full lunar eclipse. Roberto "Woo-Woo Kid" Miguel took his place at the plate in the last game of the World Series, this being only the second World Series the Red Sox had made it to since, very regrettably, trading Babe Ruth to the Yankees and consequently suffering through the Curse of the Bambino for 82 years. On that night the lights in Fenway Park were brighter than the sun as he stood there holding the Louisville Slugger in his hand and staring down the pitcher with his heart in his throat.

Bases loaded. The count set at 2-3. Two outs. Tie score. Bottom of the 9th, in the biggest game of his life possibly the history of the world! As the pitcher made ready the crowd held its breath and the silence was deafening.

Whoosh! Went the ball as it sliced through the air at nearly 100 mph.

CRACK! Came the response of the bat.

Ballpark franks, beer, popcorn and sodas all hit the deck as the crowd stood up on its feet cheering like roaring lions they watched the ball sail over the Green Monster. When it eventually came down it shattered a windshield in the parking lot beyond setting off the car alarm which echoed the sentiment of the crowd inside as it screamed out 'Woo Woo! Woo Woo!' The lights on the big board flashed fireworks and the words 'Woo Woo! Woo Woo!' in massive glowing letters while the speakers blared 'We Are The Champions' celebrating the fact that The Woo Woo Kid had shattered the Curse of the Bambino for all eternity with a grand slam home run.

'The Woo Woo Kid' rounded the bases in his own style. His hand held high in the air giving out the 'I'm Number One' sign, his heart racing and his face bright red as he stomped upon each base until he arrived at home plate to the waiting arms of his teammates and hoping that somewhere out there Steven and Connie were watching.

Fred's Shanty

Though he always considered himself to be neat and well dressed Templeton Anatole was a scurrilous scrounge of some renown living in a lovely if slightly rundown little abode on Butt's Beach in New London. He liked living there much as it had lively surroundings with all sorts of people coming and going throughout late spring until early fall. This little abode also had a grand view of the Pfizer Chemical Plant on the other side of the Thames River.

The best part about this particular location was its proximity to Fred's Shanty which had been the most famous hot dog stand in town since 1972. Day and night New Londoners gathered there to partake in foot long dogs in toasted buns, chili dogs, clam rolls and to munch on onion rings or french fries or perhaps indulge in an ice cream cone or a thick frosty milkshake. All the while enjoying the summer sun and salt air under the blue and white awing and taking in the view of the marina below.

Templeton enjoyed Fred's at night, well mostly at night. He didn't like the heat of the day or the crowds gathered which often shooed him aside as they believed him to be an unsavory type of character. Besides, it was best to be wary of the many seagulls flying in the day time sky. So it was at night when most of the crowds had gone home that Templeton, dressed in his finest brown suit, would dart down the road to the most famous of all hot dog stands for a late night snack. He avoided walking on Pequot Avenue as it was too busy for his taste and instead took the back way along the beach, through an apartment complex parking lot and past the swimming pool where he might stop a moment if something caught his eye. After that it was past the marina and then he was at the back door of Fred's which is situated on a hillside the hot stand being at the top and the supply section being at the bottom. No one but employees used the back door and they were often careless leaving it wide open. If he was of a mind Templeton might, and after stopping by the dumpster to see what it might offer, he would hurry through the open door unseen and look around to see what he could find free of charge. Usually he was rudely told to leave. In that case up the hill he would go to where the last of the people were gathering on a starlit summer night licking ice cream cones and engaging in conversation while they gazed out at the Thames River which was always lit up like a Christmas tree thanks to the moon, the stars, Pfizer and, of course, the never ending lights of Electric Boat.

Often in the dark they dropped interesting bits of food on the ground and he would nibble on bacon and chew on cheese, perhaps even a bit of hot dog or bit of hamburger. All the delights of the day were to be found on the ground after the crowds had ceased. Yes, at night Fred's Shanty was a veritable schmorgasborg of tasty treats.

Holding one such morsel of French fry tightly in his little hands and sitting up pristinely as possible he looked over at a pair of fat ankles and thought; *Nice shoes*.

“Eek! A rat!” The fat woman screamed as she began floundering and kicking at poor Templeton.

Stuffing the whole of the french fry into his cheeks Templeton ran off into the night back to his abode on Butt’s Beach to enjoy the rest of his meal in peace.

Diamonds & Dust

Love, it's a tricky thing and Edgar Winter never could figure it out. At the age of 35 he'd begun to believe that he would never have the traditional life that he sought with so much desire. He would spend his life in the lonely doldrums of bachelorhood.

Edgar didn't fool himself he knew he wasn't a handsome man, at 6'3 and 210 pounds he was an awkward, brawny, lumbering giant possessed of a short crop of dark hair and a rather droopy face which was oddly reminiscent of a bulldog. However, having worked in the Human Resources Department of Electric Boat for 15 years as the Chief Hirer and Firer, he thought himself to have good people skills and to be a kind man. Friends set him up and blind dates that never worked out, he even tried the computer and match.com without success. Personal ads were soon discovered to be a joke, not that Edgar was all that interested in a 'good looking' woman but he expected their ads to at least be honest and they were far from it. Bars? No good. Just a bunch of lonely drunk people and Edgar didn't consider himself a drunk though he openly admitted to lonely.

One Friday as work was winding down and he was quietly resigning himself to another weekend of nothing to do but shuffle around his home with only the TV and a few Swanson Hungry Men dinner's for company the last prospect of the week walked into his office. A lovely, if somewhat unattractive woman, by the name of Mary Brent. Mary was tall and a bit stocky, like Edgar, and she wasn't ever going to win any beauty contests but in Edgar's eyes, in that moment and every moment to come, Mary was the most perfect and beautiful creature he'd ever seen. She had the kindest eyes Edgar had ever known and when she smiled the whole world seemed a bit brighter and a bit lighter. After the interview, Edgar did something he'd never done before, he found the nerve to ask her to go to dinner with him that night. It was love at first sight for the two awkward ogres.

A three month courtship ensued in which the two were neigh inseparable and head over heels for one another. Edgar knew he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her so he began the task of seeking out the perfect engagement ring. As it turned out this was a harder thing that he'd thought and it took him two weeks of scouring jewelers and antique stores before he found just the right one for Mary. One that adequately symbolized his undying love for the woman who'd come into his life and swept him off his rather large feet. He happened upon a stunning diamond ring at local antique shop, the owner said it had been part of the estate of an old woman who'd died without ever having children. The ring had belonged to her mother and to her grandmother before that, each one having the happiest of marriages which lasted until the day of their deaths. Edgar purchased the ring and then set about making dinner plans at Tony D's an Italian restaurant he and Mary were very fond of.

The big night came and Edgar arrived early at Tony D's, his heart racing and his palms sweating; what if she said 'no'? He was certain that she wouldn't, certain she would fly into his arms and say 'yes' with much delight. Edgar sat alone at the table in the corner he reserved and waited for Mary who never showed. He called her cell phone several times but did not receive an answer. After three hours of waiting Edgar, dejected and confused went home where he found the light blinking on his answering machine. He brightened immediately believing she'd left him a message explaining everything but that was not the case. Instead a rather cold voice came through the speaker informing him that Mary had been in a car accident that night. She'd been struck head on by an eighteen wheeler on I-95. Edgar arrived at the hospital too late; Mary passed an hour before while he was still waiting for her Tony D's.

Two days later as Mary's friends and family gathered at St. Mary's cemetery to say their last good-byes to her, Edgar stood at her grave side in his best black suit with his head hung low and his heart heavy. As the minister finished the service and the mourners all filed past the grave tossing in flowers and handfuls of dust Edgar waited for them to finish before he took his turn. Picking up a handful of Earth and gazing down at the eternal resting place of his beloved he tossed in the handful of dirt along with the engagement ring; "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust." He said sorrowfully. "I'll always love you, Mary." Edgar said through his tears. The sunlight peeked out from behind the clouds to catch the diamond in the dust and made it sparkle one last time.

Summertime at the Beach

Once upon a time, Ocean Beach Park was known as the 'The Jewel in New London's Crown' now that jewel has lost some of its luster but when I was young it sparkled brighter than the sun. The place was jumping day and night throughout the summer. As kids we'd whiz down Ocean Avenue on our bicycles to the Walk-In Gate where we'd show our Resident's Passes for free entry. In those days a bike lock was something that was nice to have but not necessary and more often than not we'd simply stick our bikes in the bike rack and walk off for the day never thinking they might be stolen and they never were.

First stop was the bathhouse where most of us rented a locker for the season at a very cheap price. This was before the coming of the waterslide from the top of which one could look straight down into the roofless bathhouse and see the people inside in all their sun-bronzed glory. We'd stow our belongings, primp and prime, we'd chatter nervously about what boy was supposed to meet us or who we hoped to see. Then it was out to the Olympic sized swimming pool. Resident's passes were not accepted there and so our parents would buy ticket books and we'd bring three or four tickets with us so we could get into the pool without paying. The pool was always one of my favorite places as most of the kids gathered there and among those bused in from inner-cities such as Hartford and New Haven for the day we would spend hour upon hour in the chlorinated water which was a combination of fresh and salt water at the time as well as lying on the bleachers and soaking up the sun as we ogled a lifeguard or two. My favorite part of the pool was the high dive and I spent many a time in a long line waiting for my turn to come around so I could jump off and show my stuff to my friends below.

After that we were off to the creek where the current was strong and we'd float out to the sound with no effort just the current to carry us along. We'd catch all sorts of sea creatures; sidewinders, hermit crabs, jelly fish, whatever caught our eye. We'd dare each other to go down to the deep end of the creek and jump off the land surrounding it to bring up handfuls of muck from the bottom thereby proving we'd actually completed the dare. Tan and young with still firm bodies we'd lay on the soft sand again soaking up the warm rays without a thought to skin cancer or SPF factors, hell, we'd slathered coconut, tanning, baby and cooking oil on our skin in order to roast away under the hot summer sun trying to get that deep dark tan we all craved. Perhaps if we were lucky that certain boy who caught our eye was around we'd make out in the tall grass while strangers passed by. In those days we knew no shame and didn't want to.

Around lunchtime there were four snack shacks to choose from. In two-piece bathing suits and cut off jean shorts we gobbled down greasy hamburgers, fries, pizza and clam fritters as though they were filet mignon and would never leave an ounce of ugly fat on our young firm thighs. Perhaps then it was back to the pool or, better yet, to the arcade where video games were just coming into fashion. The game of choice then was good old pinball and I spent many a week's allowance trying to gain the high score on the 'Playboy' and 'Xenon' machines. Sooner or later, out of money, pool passes and pleasantly exhausted from our day in the sun we'd pedal back home only to return later in the night with our parents.

Summer nights at Ocean Beach were just as fun as the days with Polkabration in full swing under the big tent by the clock tower on the boardwalk. Our parents would dance and sing and kibitz with each other while handing us 10.00 so we could go off and explore the night never thinking for a moment that something would happen to one of us. Such a thing was practically unheard of back then. In nights before that when we were very young the beach was full of rides as good as any carnival but in our teens those rides went away. We'd race down to the rides which eventually replaced them and the old ticket shed. We'd spend an hour or more on the Flying Bobs (which blasted *our* music at full volume), the Tilt-a-Whirl, Paratrooper and the Round-up, getting ourselves dizzy and silly until it was time to stand in line for ice cream. While we waited, we swayed and tapped our feet to the lively polka music usually being played by Dick Pillar's Orchestra or the Oompa Band. We'd watch the adults dance—some in fancy polka costumes—and we'd laugh at them until we were pulled in to the tent to dance, twirl and spin to the beat of the music. Our nights ended the same way our days did; at the arcade. It was at this very same arcade, years later, that I would meet the man who would become my husband of twenty-one years, that's a story for another day.

Dark Angel By Moon Mistress

Magickal illusions flash in your eyes,
glitter and gleam all about your body.
Clings to you in a rich aroma,
a flowing embrace.
In unsuspecting moments, when you smile at me,
I can see them rise.
You touch me,
in ways countless and unconfessed
I am lost, overpowered
by your raw energy and prowess.
Hour after hour
I need to reach but
I cannot touch you.
Struggle swells and rages inside,
a tumultous sea.
Who are you?
Where did you come from?
Was my will so impassioned,
that with spells and potions
I called you into my life?
Are you a Magickal being?
An answered prayer?
Fate's Ultimate Dare?
Sorcerer, I watch you
work your magick.
Take in every trick.
Every curve of your face,
each sparkle in your eyes.
I do not speak.
My voice, it would seem,
like my eyes and my dreams,
has failed me.
The smallest bit of your time
lives and breathes in my mind.

For days on end
it repeats and rewinds.
Necromancer sent from the Gods,
Do you bring me messages of providence?
Of Destiny?
Or woe?
At times, I wonder,
if even you know.
Soon, Dark Angel,
Fate will step in
it will force even you
to show me all I need to know.
The storm will rage.
My small ship will be tossed upon the sea.
In the passionate wrath
of rain and thunder I will be lost.
When all cards are dealt, the final hand played,
you will rise through the haze,
fly off to places untamed. Unscathed.
Until then, I will sit quietly in the corner
wait for you to call upon me.

Starshine

Throughout the night you light my way
Watch over me while I sleep
Keep the monsters at bay.

Floating in an endless sea of dreams
Where nothing is what it seems
You're there, my constant, my solid, my rock.

One would think that you would fade
In the light of a new day
But you do not.

You stand behind me looking over my shoulder
Whispering in my ear
"Don't be afraid, be bolder"

Always do I know that you are near
Always do I know that we will never touch
Always do I love you without fear

My Starshine
My guiding light
You keep me strong protect me from harm

Always I know you are mine
Always will I want you, reach for you
Always throughout Time

You are my Starshine.

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