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May 14, 2000

[STORYVOICE]

^{Now}
 The women's legs are spread wide open. It may look like an invite but
^{Now}
 its mostly provocation. ^{If you} ~~You can't~~ look at a magazine, ~~or even a Sunday~~
^{OR watch TV} ^{you can't help} ^{these modern}
 supplement ~~without~~ noticing how ~~these fashion girls do. And the way~~
^{INSIDE} [?]
~~they dance?~~ Still, spread eagled in a chair or dancing crotch out on tv,
 they're not much different from women who lived around here once
 upon a time. You'd never see their knees—open or closed—and if they
 danced when they were young—well, it was a private affair—if you get
 my meaning, ^{THAT} ^{could be} ^{had a recklessness} ^(over)
~~although they were as reckless and wild as any pimp~~
^{plunder}
 could ^{NEVER could} want. But then or now, long skirts or none, they ~~can't~~ hide the
¹
~~innocence~~—a kind of pity kitty hopefulness. Especially the tough ones
^{glossy}
 with their box cutters and bad language, or the ^{ones} with two-seated
 cars and a pocketbook lining full of drugs who don't need to watch
^{seem to}
 their bank balances. They can't hide the sugar, ~~the~~ winsome baby girl
¹
 curled up somewhere inside, near the spine, maybe, or under the heart.

although they had a reckless
^{any}
~~every~~ fan fire could plunder.

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[STORYVOICE]

The women's legs are spread wide open. It may look like ^{an invite} ~~invitation~~ but its ^{mostly} ~~just~~ provocation. You can't look at a magazine or even a Sunday supplement without noticing how those fashion girls do. And the way they dance? But for all that they still can't hide completely the innocence—a kind of hopefulness. Even the truly wild ones with their box cutters and bad language, or the ones with two-seated cars and pocketbook lining full of drugs who don't need to watch their bank balances. Still, they can't the sugar, the winsome baby girl curled up somewhere in side, near the spine, maybe, or under the heart.

→ Naturally all of them have a story. ~~Too much notice, not enough, or~~ the worst kind. Something ~~leading to the wrong turn.~~ Some tale ^{about} ~~of~~ ~~hurt:~~ dragon daddies and ice-veined men, of love-blind mamas and friends who did them wrong. Each story ^{has} ~~the same with~~ a monster in it ^{who} ~~that has~~ made them tough but not brave so they open legs instead of

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[STORYVOICE]

Today
The women's legs are spread wide open. It may look like an invite but its mostly provocation. You can't look at a magazine or even a Sunday supplement without noticing how those fashion girls do. And the way they dance? Still, spread eagled in a chair or dancing crotch out on tv, they're not much different from women who lived around here once upon a time. You'd never see their knees—open or closed—and if they danced when they were young—well, it was a private affair—if you get my meaning, although they were as reckless and wild as any pimp could want. ^{then or now} But ~~for all that~~, long skirts or none, they ^{couldn't} ~~still can't~~ hide completely the innocence—a kind of hopefulness. Even the ~~truly~~ wild ones with their box cutters and bad language, or the ones with two-seated cars ^a and pocketbook lining^a full of drugs who don't need to watch their bank balances. ~~Still,~~ they can't the sugar, the winsome baby girl curled up somewhere in side, near the spine, maybe, or under

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*Sheltering
Country
a
forced child*

~~hearts where the hurt child sleeps.~~

where But sometimes the cut is so deep no personal story is enough, *Wave - is - me* A big, country wide one is the only thing that does the trick, that can

satisfies what explain the craziness heaping up and holding down. And a scarey story is better than a sad or bitter one. *can't*

had We have a good one around here *(over)* and we needed it to explain *hauled it out* what happened to the girl—and that boy too. Ours is about water *fishwomen*

girl spirits busting up like ~~sharks~~ out of the ocean to harm loose women

and eat disobedient children. *the tale* It came out of nowhere back in the *forties* fifties

when a couple of "see, what'd I tell you?" things happened at the

shore. Like that Up Beach woman who made love in the sand with her

neighbor's husband and the very next day suffered a stroke at the

cannery, the crab knife in her hand. She wasn't but 24 at the time. Or

that other woman—she was from Harmony and wouldn't have anything

to do with Up Beach people—who hid some letters and a purchase deed

under her father-in-law's fishing shack only to have mud turtles dig

SUNS them up. Three moons hadn't *set* risen when the greedy daughter-in-law

a good one around here. Its old, though, ~~and~~

~~and~~ almost ^{sure} forgotten ^{at} an 11

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broke her hip trying to keep the breezes and the neighbors away from the papers that damned her. Although nobody flat out saw the creatures during the shame of these guilty women, ^{everybody} ~~we~~ knew they were there and what they looked like because, earlier, one evening in 1948, some hard-headed children swam past the safety rope and drowned.

As soon as they were pulled under, the dark clouds gathering above the heads of screaming parents, subdued siblings and picknickers

^{turned into} ~~became~~ the profiles of gate-mouthed women whooping for joy. Some

took for thunder what others heard as laughter. From that time to the

fifties the ^{girls} ~~beach crones~~ were said to ^{loiter in the surf or ready to pounce on} ~~prowl the beach and pounce on~~

^{flopacron} ~~the unsuspecting only~~ around sunset (when lust was keenest, when

turtles lay eggs and exhausted parents became negligent). ^{Naturally} ~~We thought~~

they were hungriest at night when the hotel was full of visitors drunk

with dance music, salt air and the temptation of starlit water. Those

were the days when Cosey's Resort was the best and best known

vacation spot for colored folk on the east coast. Everybody came: Lil

green, Fatha Hines, etc. tk and guests from as far away as Michigan

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and New York couldn't wait to get down here where Crooked ~~Heart~~

beach swirled with young mothers and brand new school teachers;

where children rode their fathers' leg shanks and buried their uncles up

to their necks in sand. It ~~was the~~ grandparents ^{sat on blankets and} ~~who~~ watched over red

thermoses ^{Jugs} with white handles ^{leaned against} hampers and orange

crates full of crab meat salad, ham, chicken, yeast rolls and loaves of

lemon flavored cake. Then, all of a sudden, in 1958 the ~~water~~

women, bold as Jezebel, showed up in bright daylight. A clarinet player

and his bride drowned at noon. The inner tube raft they were floating

on washed ashore dragging ~~by~~ ^{scale cluttered} streams of hair. Whether the bride had

played around during the honeymoon was whispered about but ^{the facts were}

uncertain. She sure had every opportunity. Cosey's Resort had more

handsome single men per square foot than anyplace outside St. Louis

or even New Orleans. They came partly for the music but mostly to

dance by the sea with pretty women. After the drowned couple was

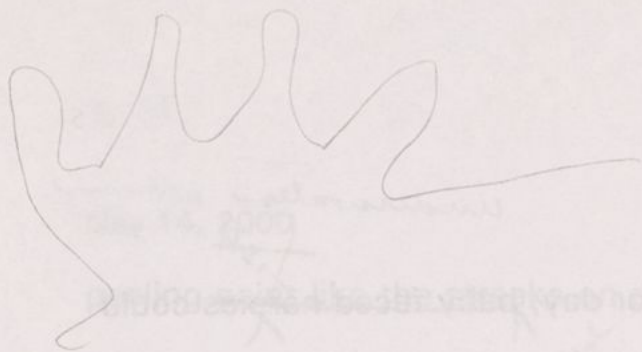
separated--sent to different funeral parlors-- women up to no good and

mule headed children didn't need further warning because there was no

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escape: fast as lightening, night time or day, ~~underwater women~~ ^{fish} baby faced harpies could shoot up out of the waves ^{to} and punish wayward women or swallow ^(over) the misbehaving young. ~~That ought to be work enough for a gaggle of devils, but it wasn't.~~ It took thirty ~~more~~ years and a boy and girl ~~for us~~ ^{to revive them,} to reckon the reach as well as the point of their appetite. All of ~~Crooked Heart~~ ^{Beach} belongs to them these days. ~~Most of us live in~~ ^{to realize that they got what they wanted for} Harmony now and except for a few fish shacks, Up Beach is twenty feet under water. The hotel part of Cosey's Resort is still standing. Sort of standing. Looks more like it's rearing backwards—away from hurricanes and a steady blow of sand. Odd what ocean front can do to empty buildings. You can find the prettiest shells right up on the steps, like scattered petals or cameos from a Sunday dress and you wonder how they got so far from the ocean. Hills of sand piling in porch corners and along the bannisters are whiter than the beach, and soft, like flour after years of sifting. Roses, which all the time hate our soil, rage here. More thorns than blackberries and weeks of dark red blossoms. The wooden siding of the hotel looks silver plated, its

to revive them.



Resort failed
story died

* nobody
there was
for
As more honeymooners
needed or wanted to recall
salt water
scaly legs
with scaly legs
and foaming hair.

~~bad women dropping net~~

whether the

→ When the Resort failed, the story
died with it. A few ^{still} people catching shellfish
in the back bays ~~don't hardly~~ remembered it - but with no
more bands or honeymoons; picnics
or swimmers; when Crooked Head Beach itself
became ~~is~~ a treasury of seajunk and Up Beach
↑ drowned * ~~other~~ the first

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peeling paint like the streaks on an unpolished tea service. The big double doors are padlocked. ^{and} Nobody has smashed their glass panels. Nobody could stand to do it because the panels mirror your own face as well as the view behind your back: an acre of chive grass edging the glittery beach, the Hollywood sky and an ocean that wants you more than anything. Despite the outside loneliness, the hotel itself seems to promise gifts and toys inside. Secrets, too, crowding those long corridors and closed up rooms. And music. The shift of a shutter hinge sounds like the cough of a trumpet; piano keys waver one note above the wind.

In 1978 Bill Cosey's widow sold seventy-five of his inland acres to an Equal Opportunity Housing developer for forty four homes so reasonably priced and generously financed even Up Beach people could afford them. That section of Harmony is called Oceanside—which it isn't—and is full of people who commute to offices and hospital labs twelve miles north, as well as former Up Beach folk. (It's easy to tell

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which is which by their hands.) The sale of Cosey had just closed, the
^{land}
^{acres} land barely plotted when Up Beach mothers were pumping mud from

their spigots. Dried up wells and degraded pipes ^{helped} encouraged the most
stubborn ^{ones} of ^{decide} them to give up the sight of the sea, its groovy breeze and
^{2%} apply for a HUD mortgage. ~~So~~ when everybody had pulled out we

^{suspected} ~~knew for certain the~~ ^{fish women had what they} water hussies wanted the whole place for

~~themselves.~~ Accidents, hotel ruin, the sale of Bill Cosey's inland acres,

unheard of drought turning marshland into mud cakes so dry even the
mosquitoes quit—none of that was random. The ^{fish women} ~~hussies~~ had won:

three and a half miles of Atlantic beach front was all theirs for play.

That should have ended the story and would have except for the girl,

the boy and, of course, the Cosey widows. People said the widows

must have struck a deal, trading beach front for protection and we

waited to see if any good could come from that much hate. For a long
^{mutual}
time it looked as though we would wait forever. Then the girl came. *

After that, after all their business was in the street, and they

disappeared from the face of the earth ^{and} it, whipped up so much feeling
^{and}

*

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that a grown up nursery story was all we had to explain what was
 known and to grasp what was hidden. Even though we knew in our

hearts the story was trash: just another wicked women tale made up to
 scare females and discipline children. In the end it doesn't work,
 doesn't explain. Even Eve, poor thing, can't carry this modern world's

evil. We need something else. Something better. A brand new tale.

CHAPTER ONE

The day she walked into Oceanside was peculiar for that part of the
 county. Chafing winds kept the temperature low and the sun was
 helpless to move outside thermometers more than a few degrees above
 freezing. Tiles of ice had formed at the shoreline and inland, the
 thrown-together houses on Post road whined like puppies. Ice slick