



## Sp. W

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Sp. W

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November 20, 2000

*Revised*

time. When the husband is walking the streets alone wondering if

I hum now. The women's legs are spread wide open so I don't talk at all. My nature is a quiet one, anyway. As a child my silence was considered respectful; as a young woman it was called discreet. Later on it was understood to be the reticence of maturity. Still, I was able to have normal conversations and, when the need arose, I could make a point strong enough to stop a <sup>blood</sup> ~~feud~~. Not anymore because back in the mid-seventies, when women began to straddle chairs and dance crotch out on television; when every fashion magazine featured behinds and inner thighs as though that's all there is to a woman, well, I stopped talking altogether and haven't said a word since. Before women opened their legs in public there were secrets—some to be held, some to tell. Now? No. Barefaced being the order of the day, I hum. The words dance quietly in my head to the music behind my lips. People come in here for a plate of crawfish, pass the time, and never notice or care that they do all the talking. I'm background. The movie music that comes along when the sweethearts see each other for the first

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time. When the husband is walking the streets alone wondering if anybody saw him down at the beach doing the bad thing he was forced to do. My humming encourages people; frames their thoughts (like <sup>when</sup> Mildred Pierce realizes she has to go to jail for her daughter). I sometimes suspect <sup>that</sup> (soft as it is) my music influences people too. The way "Mood Indigo" drifting across the waves can change the way you swim. It doesn't make you dive in, but it can set your stroke, or trick you into believing you are both lucky and brave. So why not swim farther and a little farther still? What's the deep to you? Far below, it has nothing to do with blood made bold by coronets and piano keys. Of course, I don't claim that kind of power. My hum is below tk, personal; <sup>suitable for</sup> an old woman brought low in the world's <sup>her</sup> way of objecting to the way the century has turned out. Where all is known and nothing understood. Maybe it was always so, but it didn't strike me until <sup>Some thirty years ago that</sup> ~~the seventies~~ when prostitutes, looked up to for their honesty, set the style. Well, maybe it wasn't their honesty; maybe it was their success. Still, straddling a chair or dancing crotch out on tv, these

to \*



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can hide the sugar-child, the some baby girl curled up somewhere  
inside, near the spine, maybe, or under the heart. Naturally all of them  
have a story. Too much notice, not enough, <sup>might think it's</sup>

The women's legs are wide open. You could take the spread for an  
invite but its mostly provocation: within reach but way out of reach. I  
don't <sup>spread</sup> <sup>it</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>HBPE</sup> <sup>NEW Insert</sup> recall exactly when I first noticed it (in a magazine maybe  
or on tv,) but it was in the 70's, I'm sure. Back when prostitutes,

looked up to for their honesty, set the style. Well, maybe it wasn't  
their honesty; maybe it was their success. Still, straddling a chair or

dancing crotch out on tv, these <sup>certified modern</sup> <sup>coast country</sup> <sup>land</sup> <sup>circle</sup> nineties women are not all that  
different from women who to live around here. This is ~~back~~ <sup>back</sup> country,

<sup>slow</sup> <sup>humid</sup> <sup>quiet</sup> and God fearing, so that kind of <sup>female</sup> <sup>was secret</sup> <sup>hard</sup> recklessness—the kind city men

know how to plunder—<sup>is</sup> <sup>was</sup> <sup>secret</sup> <sup>hard</sup> hidden and runs too deep for short shorts or  
cameras. But then or now, long skirts or none, <sup>wild women</sup> they never could hide

the <sup>if</sup> <sup>innocence</sup>—a kind of pity kitty hopefulness. Especially the tough

ones with their box cutters and bad language, or the glossy ones with

two-seated cars and a pocketbook lining full of <sup>dope</sup> drugs. None of them

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can hide the sugar-child, the winsome baby girl curled up somewhere inside, near the spine, maybe, or under the heart. Naturally all of them have a story. Too much notice, not enough, or the worst kind. Some tale about dragon daddies and ice-veined men, or love-blind mamas and friends who did them wrong. Each story has a monster in it that made them tough instead of brave, so they open their legs rather than hearts where that folded child is. <sup>fucked</sup>

Sometimes, when the cut is deep and no woe-is-me story is enough, a big, country wide tale is the only thing that does the trick, that explains the craziness heaping up <sup>and</sup> holding ~~the women~~ down. <sup>(making the women hate each other & gobble up the children)</sup>

And a scarey story satisfies what a bitter one can't. \*

<sup>There is</sup> We have a good one around here. It's old, though, and was close to forgotten until we had to haul it out to explain what happened to the widows. <sup>\* It's</sup> Our story is about some hellions called Claras--fish <sup>Shoat</sup> women who bust up out of the ocean to harm loose women and eat disobedient children. <sup>the kind ignorant loose</sup> It's a shivery kind of tale that came out of nowhere back in the forties when a couple of "see there, what'd I tell

\* Up Beach people tell  
how a good one  
that told  
putting more  
always foolish  
→ People in  
Up Beach where  
I live tell  
a good one



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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 [tech. term] frozen 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—well she hid some letters and a purchase deed under her father-

~~in-law's fishing shack~~ <sup>tool shed? gazebo</sup> only to have loggerheads dig them up. Three  
" . . . . ."  
sons hadn't set when the greedy daughter-in-law broke her hip trying to keep the breezes and the neighbors away from the papers that damned her. <sup>of course</sup> Although ~~nobody~~ <sup>didn't</sup> flat out <sup>see</sup> saw the Claras during the shame of those guilty women, <sup>but they</sup> ~~we all~~ knew they were around and knew what they looked like too because, earlier, one evening in 1945<sup>2</sup>, some hard-headed children swam past the safety rope and drowned. As soon as they were pulled under, <sup>the story goes,</sup> ~~the~~ dark clouds gathering above the heads of screaming parents and dumb struck picknickers turned into the profiles of gate-mouthed women whooping for joy. Some of ~~us~~ <sup>fools</sup> took for thunder what others<sup>1</sup> heard as laughter. From that time on into

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*people said*  
the fifties the Claras loitered in the surf or flopped across the beach ready to pounce around sunset (when lust is keenest, when loggerheads lay eggs and tired parents get negligent). Of course, ~~all~~<sup>most</sup> ~~the best~~ demons, like us, get hungry at suppertime, but the Claras liked to troll at night when the hotel was full of visitors drunk with dance music, or the salt air or maybe just 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, Jimmy Lunceford etc. tk and guests from as far away as Michigan and New York couldn't wait to get down here. Sooker Bay swirled with brand new mothers and young school teachers. All over the place children rode their fathers' leg shanks and buried uncles up to their necks in sand. Grandparents watched over red thermos jugs with white handles, and orange crates full of crab meat salad, ham, chicken, yeast rolls and loaves of lemon flavored cake, oh my. Then, all of a sudden, in 1958, bold as a ~~pack~~<sup>herd</sup> of Jezebels, the Claras showed up in bright daylight. A clarinet player



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and his bride drowned at noon. The inner tube raft they were floating on washed ashore dragging streams of scale cluttered hair. Whether the bride had played around during the honeymoon was considered and whispered about but the facts were muddy. 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 they knew there was no escape: fast as

lightening, night time or day, Claras could shoot up out of the waves to punish wayward women or swallow the misbehaving young. When

*Cosey lost his business*  
~~the Resort went bust~~, the story lost its grip [tk]. A few people <sup>still</sup> sinking

crab castles in the back bays <sup>probably</sup> remembered it, but with no more big

bands or honeymooners; with the beach picnics and swimmers gone;

when Sooker Bay became a treasury of sea junk and Up Beach itself



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drowned, nobody needed or wanted to recall salt wet females with  
scaley legs and foaming hair. But forty years on, we brought them  
back.

*I think of them almost every day.*

*(cover)*

Except for me ~~most of us~~ live in Harmony now, and, ~~except for a~~  
few fish shacks, Up Beach is twenty feet under water; but 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~~ <sup>smooth</sup>, like sifted flour. Roses,  
which all the time hate our soil, rage here, with more thorns than  
blackberries and weeks of beet red blossoms. The wood siding of the  
hotel looks silver plated, its peeling paint like the streaks on an  
unpolished tea service. The big double doors are padlocked. Nobody  
has smashed their glass panels. Nobody could stand to do it because

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The Casey girls have disappeared  
from view and



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the panels mirror your own face as well as the view behind your back: acres of chive grass edging the sparkly beach, a movie screen sky and an ocean that wants you more than anything. No matter the outside loneliness, if you look inside the hotel seems to promise you gifts and the company of your best friends. Secrets, too, crowd 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.

Our weather is soft, mostly, with peculiar light-pale mornings fade into white noons; then by 3:00 the colors are wild enough to scare you. Jade and sapphire fighting each other, kicking up enough foam to wash sheets in. A sky behaving as though it's from some other planet—one without rules where the sun can be plum purple if it wants to and clouds can be red as a rose. Our sand is like sugar—which is what the Spanish thought<sup>x</sup> of when they first saw it. Sucra, they called it, a name local whites tore up for all time into Sooker.

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Nobody can get enough of our <sup>weather</sup> warm breeze <sup>and grossly</sup> except when they  
~~come in from the south carrying~~ the Cannery smell to the beach and  
 into the hotel. Then guests know what ~~we~~ <sup>Up Beach</sup> people put up  
 with everyday and why Bill Cosey moved his family out of the hotel  
 and built that big house on <sup>his</sup> the Post Road land ~~he owned~~. Fish odor  
 wasn't all that ~~bad~~ <sup>bad</sup> a thing in these parts. Like marsh stench and  
 privys, it was just another variety to the senses. But in the 60's it  
 became a concern. A new generation of female vacationers  
 complained about what it <sup>did</sup> ~~id~~ to their dresses, their appetite and their  
 love making. I remember Vida trying to calm the girlfriend of a famous  
 singer who was carrying on about her steak tasting like shrimp. Hurt  
 me, because I have never failed in the kitchen. Bill Cosey <sup>told</sup> ~~always~~ people  
~~believed~~ <sup>said</sup> that's what ruined his business. That the whites <sup>who</sup> let him have  
 all the ocean front he wanted because the Cannery kept it unprofitable,  
<sup>had and</sup> ~~had~~ <sup>tricked</sup> him - the fish smell ~~ruined~~ turned his Resort into a joke.  
 to them. But the smell that blanketed Up Beach every day hit Sooker  
 Bay only once or twice a month-and nev<sup>er</sup> from February to August  
 when nets were empty and the Cannery closed. No. <sup>I don't care what he told</sup> <sup>people,</sup> Something else

If you want  
 to see what  
 he told  
 people.



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wrecked his Resort. Freedom, I think. Folks who bragged about

Cosey vacations in the fifties boasted in the seventies about Hyatt's,

Hiltons, cruises to the Bahamas and Ocho Rios. For some reason a

freedom won felt better than a freedom snatched. Whatever the

reason, Bill Cosey boarded up the hotel and sold seventy-five acres not

far from his big house to an Equal Opportunity developer for thirty-two

homes so cheap anybody could afford them. The sale had just closed,

the acres barely plotted when Up Beach mothers were pumping mud

from their spigots. Dried up wells and wobbly stilt houses forced the

stubborn ones to give up the sight of the sea, its groovy breeze and

apply for a two per cent Hud mortgage. Trouble, unemployment,

tidewater floods followed by droughts turning marshland into mud

cakes so dry even the mosquitoes quit—we saw all that as life simply

being itself. Until the government houses went up in a part of

Harmony they called Oceanside—which it isn't. It started out selling to

veterans and retired folk, but soon became a solution for people thrown

out of work and mighty close to food stamps. Now, due to campaigns

\* I know better, and Mary knows I know. Neither fish stink

nor integration was to blame: (over)

May, said she tried to keep the place alive after her father gave up, and was convinced that integration has destroyed her family.

Maybe And he wasn't like one who

9 Rights that

ly built my shack puts them to shame. At least my floors are hand planed ash. and my beams properly aged. Water was the problem

brackey water

a lot of people

Water

Rainwater wasn't good enough anymore.

Then

and they named it

The developers

Race Point men

when Oceanside

into

Churches

fix

Truth is

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wrecked his Resort, Freedom, which is the resort where I stayed about 1950

Cosy vacations in the fifties based in the resorts about 1950 and

Hilton's, which is the resort where I stayed about 1950 and

freedom was felt better than a freedom state. Wherever the

reason. The reason for the resort and the resort was the

The old sheriff ( ) died and the  
new one upped the insurance.

for the.

Cosy couldn't pay the bands  
and the liquor man too.

# Bill Cosy  
was a smart  
man. he helped  
more people than  
40 years of government  
programs.

Never mind the woman with  
shrimp tasting steak, customers

will sit next to a pring if it's the  
only way they can hear —

They will <sup>Hopkins</sup> who <sup>from another</sup> ~~can~~ Who can  
distinguish <sup>one</sup> odor on a crowded dance floor  
~~when they are dancing~~ <sup>pressing</sup>  
~~So close to their partner?~~

Cosy tried and Vida too as

And while May ~~Bill~~ → Kept blaming M.H. King.  
~~Vida tried and Cosy~~ for her trouble

for her father. ~~But~~ after while every day  
her step-mother <sup>was</sup> proving her a liar. Something else must  
have done it. Besides #



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<sup>and what they call affirmative action got busy. Now</sup>  
<sup>ing</sup>  
~~led by out two churches,~~ it's full of people who commute to offices  
<sup>twenty-five</sup>  
 and hospital labs ~~twelve~~ miles north. Traveling back and forth to malls  
<sup>they haven't</sup>  
 and movie houses ~~nobody had~~ a cloudy thought to remind them of the  
<sup>See over</sup>  
~~Claras.~~ It didn't cross ~~our~~ minds that the Claras had what they wanted  
<sup>me</sup>  
 all along: three and a half miles of Atlantic beach front theirs alone for  
 play. The story was dead to us and would have stayed that way  
 except for the disappeared Cosey widows. Meaner than most and  
<sup>etc.</sup>  
 stand offish, they ~~were~~ quickly missed because we paid them the  
<sup>get</sup>  
 constant attention disliked folks always attract. People said they must  
<sup>their souls</sup>  
 have struck a deal, trading beach front for the Claras' protection and  
~~we~~ were waiting to see if any good could come from that much sin.  
<sup>they</sup>  
 For a long time it looked as though we would wait forever. <sup>They live like Queens in Cosey's house and since that</sup>  
<sup>the</sup> ~~After that,~~ and after everybody's business was in the street,  
<sup>they seem to have</sup>  
 they vanished from sight, <sup>leaving me with nothing but a worn out fairy tale</sup> whipping up so much feeling folklore ~~was~~ all  
<sup>have</sup>  
 we had left to draw on. That and the picture of women straddling  
<sup>HL</sup>  
 chairs, only putting their thighs together when their skirts <sup>are</sup> were as  
 short as underpants. That way there was no blame. We knew from

the cheap  
 form pretty houses

with in a skirt  
 with nothing to hide

I know —————→

let alone a recollection of the Claras.

~~Nothing it didn't~~  
~~until the Claras disappeared~~  
~~Crane's mind is the~~

I started to miss the  
Cosy girls. I used  
to see one of them  
driving along - to the market  
or in her car once in a while  
for some of my  
for kids.



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~~the beginning the Clara story was~~ <sup>it's</sup> trash: just another wicked women <sup>but it's all I have.</sup> tale made up to scare females and correct unruly children. ~~We knew it~~

~~wouldn't explain.~~ <sup>doesn't</sup> Even Eve, <sup>anything</sup> poor thing, can't carry this modern world's misery. <sup>I want</sup> ~~We need something else. Something better. A brand-~~ <sup>A story that shows how broken women can take a good man down.</sup> ~~new tale.~~ <sup>I can hum to that.</sup>

conversation with her is mostly you talking while she hums. Not loud, though. L hums softly and you feel encouraged by this background music and tell her all you know or heard of. Anybody who remembers what the L stands for is dead by now and its hopeless to inquire. Even children—who have a world of time to waste—don't ask her anymore. Some said it was short for Ellen, or, Ellie or Elvira but can't anybody recall a time when she didn't take the usher's pencil and sign her tribe envelopes with an L. We gave up. Like we gave up calling Maceo's Maceo's, or supplying the missing letters. Café Ria is what it's known as. And L glides there still.

Women in love like the place a lot. Over iced tea with a clove in it, they join girl friends to repeat what he said, describe what he did

W. W.

W. W.

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world's misery. We need something else. Something better. A brand

new tale.

conversation with

though, I hope you will be able to read it. I thought

music and tell her all you know. I hope you will be able to

what the L stands for. I hope you will be able to read it.

Even children who have a world of their own don't get it.

anywhere. Some said it was a story of a man who couldn't

anybody recall a time when she didn't take the other's name and sign

her name envelopes with an L. We gave up. Like we gave up calling

Maceo's Maceo's, or supplying the missing letters. Café Ria is what

it's known as. And I guess there still.

Women in love like the place a lot. Over and over with a clove in

it. They join girl friends to repeat what he said, describe what he

new story

something to show how

brazen women can take a

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