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too. So I work in a high chair with wheels, scooting from stove to sink to cutting table. My feet are fine now but I got used to the wheel transportation and don't plan to give it up.

She's through talking too. Says it wears her out. So a 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 tithe 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

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and guess what he meant by any of it.

He didn't call me for three days and when I called him he wanted to get together right then! See? He wouldn't do that if he didn't want to be with you. Oh, please. When I got there we had a long talk and for the first time he really listened to me. Sure he did. Why not? All he had to do was wait til you shut up then he could work his own tongue. I thought he was seeing what's her name. No, they split. You lying! He asked me to move in. Sign the paper first, honey. I don't want anybody but him. It's like that huh? Well no joint accounts, hear? You want porgies, or not?"

They spice the lunch hour and lift the spirits of broken-hearted men eavesdropping at nearby tables.

There are no waitresses at Café Ria. The food is displayed in steam trays, and after your plate is heaped you take it to the cash register for cost analysis done by Maceo, his wife or one of his no-count sons.

The girl--she called herself Toby-- came in one Sunday just before

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church let out. She walked the length of the steam table checking the menu with the kind of eyes you see on those "Save This Child" commercials. L, her work finished and waiting for Maceo, was blowing cool air on a cup of pot liquor before dipping her bread in. Through the kitchen door—never closed—she saw Toby pacing before the food trays—like a panther or some such. The big hair Sandler Gibson saw was gone. Tk And although the leather jacket still covered her upper half, the skirt was a see-through, flowery thing swinging just above her boots.

One of Maceo's no-count boys waited while Toby made up her mind. He never opened his lips to say good afternoon may I help you? anything in particular? or any of the welcoming things you're supposed to greet customers with. L [said she?] just cooled her liquid and watched to see which one would behave normal first.

Toby did.

Her order must have been for herself and Heed because Christine is a champion cook. Anyway she chose three sides, two meats, one

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rice pudding and one chocolate cake. Maceo's boy, Theo they call him, smirking more than usual, moved from the cash register to load up the styrofoam plate, carelessly or deliberately letting the stewed tomatoes slide over the compartments to discolor the potato salad, forking the barbecue on top of the gravied chicken. ("Only dark meat," she'd said.) L got so heated watching Theo disrespect her food she dropped her bread into her cup where it disintegrated like sand.

Toby never took her eyes off the food. Never met Theo's eyes until he gave her change at the register. Then she looked right at him and said "I expect you do better with a posse. You seem kind of helpless by yourself."

Theo said something mean to her back but it fell flat with no audience in sight to enjoy it.

When Maceo walked in, ready to bundle L into his car and get her home before customer lines started forming, Theo was dribbling air balls in his dream court behind the register as if he'd just been signed by the X and a cereal company too.

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led by ~~two churches~~ ^{twenty-five}, it's full of people who commute to offices and hospital labs ^{twelve miles} north. Traveling back and forth to malls and movie houses ^{they haven't} ~~reborn~~ a cloudy thought to remind them of the Clavas. ~~It didn't cross our minds that the Clavas had what they wanted~~ ^{that} all along: three and a half miles of Atlantic beach front ~~there alone for~~ play. The story was dead to us and would have stayed that way except for the disappeared Cosay widows. Meaner than most and stand offish, they were quickly missed because ~~we~~ ^{we} paid them the constant attention disliked folks always attract. People said they must have struck a deal, trading beach front for the Clavas' protection and ~~we~~ were waiting to see if any good could come from that much sin. For a long time it looked as though we would wait forever. ^{then the} girl came. After that, and after everybody's business was in the street, they vanished from sight, ^{leaving and with nothing but worn out fairy tale} ~~whipping up so much feeling folks were all~~ ^{left} ~~was left to draw on.~~ That and the picture of women straddling chairs, only putting their thighs together when their skirts ^{are} were as short as underpants. ~~That way there was no blame.~~ ^{we knew how}

I know