

NOSTALGIA: 1958  
by Sandra de Helen

Moonlight covers the dewy backyard like one of my grandma's quilts: light shimmery stuff here, heavy velvety stuff there, and who knows what goes on underneath.

A new song from Jack's Drugstore jukebox runs through my head as I kneel at my bedroom window, nose pressed to the screen the better to inhale the honeysuckle flavor of the hot Missouri night. My young breasts rest easily on the varnished windowsill, my toes tap upside down to the internal replay of Elvis's "Teddy Bear." Somewhere out there in the dark is my bad boyfriend with his white silk shirt, black pants and black leather jacket slung over his shoulder. He smells of tobacco and Old Spice and Brylcreem. One curl falls daringly down his tanned forehead, risking the back of his hand.

Soon he'll whisper to me from beside the swingset at the side of the house. And I'll tiptoe to the front door and let him inside.

Or maybe not. Not that I wouldn't open the door in the middle of the night with only my baby dolls covering my adolescent yearnings. Not at all. But some nights he's too busy with his pals, his old friends from before he dropped out of high school and joined the Air Force to see the world. I resent them deeply. They knew him first, they know him best.

He's a shadow in my life, a fantasy of the night. In my fantasy he loves me and takes me away. He could. He's in the Air Force. He's been to Saudi Arabia. He's being transferred to Washington State. He could marry me and I could be an Air Force wife. I could have his sparkly-eyed babies and a home of my own.

I don't know what I'll do about high school or my dreams of a career. I want to become a powerful woman like my mother's union business agent. And, I need to leave here now.

I rise from the window and lie on my bed. Will he come tonight? In the other room, I can hear the snores my mother makes after an evening at the Stardust Ballroom. The nightclub sounds so glamorous when she talks about it with her friends. That must be why she hates coming home to me and my sister. We're not glamorous at all; me with my pimples and periods, my mewling asthmatic sister with her lanky hair. At least when Mom goes out she can rest when she gets home. Even if she does get up angry tomorrow. We're pretty good at staying out of her way.

Tonight I wish I could dress in taffeta, put rhinestones on my ears, Evening in Paris on my wrists and dance in the arms of my lover all night at the Stardust. Every night I wish I were already grown and gone.

It'll be dawn soon. I don't think he's coming. Tears slide off my cheeks and dampen my tangled hair as I try to rock myself to sleep with a pillow between my legs. My little sister stirs in the bed, so I get up and go to the front door.

I silently close the screen door behind me as I slip out to sit on the steps. The cool concrete soothes my behind, but nothing calms my raging caged spirit as I watch the sun come up on one more summer day.

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