

CHINTZ PICKLE

by Cheryl Anne Gardner

What if she doesn't take me seriously?

My sweaty testimony wedged tight behind the tragic I used to think was honest?

What if, right?

What if . . .

Isolation

Real men feel that, right?

They have something to say.

Something worth something.

That's what I thought.

What I'd dreamt.

She could make anything look sexy. Even a hammer. I didn't have to dream that, and there ought to be a law against that sort of slant anyway.

But it was late.

Too Late.

And there I was fidgety-vein and chalk-knuckle again, waiting for her on the street. A side street. Could have been any street, but when she appeared, like she always did in her high heels and bare ass, dragging a scuffed-up plastic lawn chair behind her, I pushed my hat up on my brow and lifted my eyes to hers while letting my heart sink as far into the rank of my bowels as I could let it.

We'd been here before, a different street, a mangled guardrail in the distance -- merge, yield, stop -- signs behind us and in front of us diffusing different traffic, different dust, different everything.

She didn't recognize me, but I still missed her. Missed her geometry, her stealth, her madness, and the way the lace slid across her hipbones in the neon truck-stop light. She didn't miss me though. Didn't know me anymore, and so I kept on playing until I heard the coppers hit the bottom of my guitar case.

I'd count it later.

Chump change.

Made her feel less guilty.

Or me more so.

Hey I can make change, too, baby. I can change the chords, change the tempo, change the lyrics completely, but I don't think I can ever change what I've been, on this street, or any other street.

Tin, Tacks, and Tanners . . . It just is what it is. It always being the thing in question.

And she didn't miss a thing about me. *No she didn't*. Not like I missed her -- the way she used to know me -- used to hate me -- and so the cars kept passing, and I kept on playing, hoping one day I might change my mind.

