

The Blue of Milk

by Kathy Fish

There was a woman who went to the park at night and swung on the swings and drank from a bottle in a paper bag. When she became dizzy she would stand and remove her clothes and walk the perimeter of the park singing low.

There was a man who walked his dog, who saw her, but kept to the other side of the street and never entered the park. When the moon was out and shining she looked blue he thought a naked blue or silver or the blue of milk but he tried not to look at her.

There was a small child who lay in bed waiting for his mother to return. He decided one night to follow her.

The man saw the boy trailing far behind the woman. The boy dragged a blanket. The man kept to the other side of the street and didn't enter the park.

All the nights after this were the same with the woman taking off all her clothes and circling the park and drinking from the bottle in the bag and the boy trailing behind like a ghost and the man walking his dog and seeing them both but keeping to the other side of the street and not entering the park or calling out to the woman and the boy.

The nights grew colder. The woman persisted with taking off her clothes and the boy persisted with following her in just his thin pajamas and the man persisted in walking his dog but the man began wearing a coat and the dog too wore a coat that matched the man's.

One night the man's dog, a terrier growing old and blind, started to bark at the woman as she passed by and the woman and the boy trailing behind her were startled and for the first time noticed the man and his dog and the woman stopped and the boy stopped and the woman cried out and the terrier strained at his leash and the man felt now he had no choice but to cross the street and enter the park and apologize for his dog and get the woman to put on her clothes and maybe help her and her son back to their house and God

knows what else but now he probably had to do something as they had both seen him.

The terrier stopped barking and the man bent to pick him up as he crossed the street and entered the park and approached the woman who was crying and patting the head of the boy whose arms were wrapped around her naked legs.

The man said I apologize if my dog frightened you I don't know what got into him but see he's very sweet really and you can pet him if you'd like. The man knelt and the boy reached out his hand to let the terrier smell it. Both the boy and the woman petted the terrier and let him lick their hands and the man tried not to look at the woman.

Ma'am he said you seem to have misplaced your clothes can I help you find them? The boy looked up to his mother now embarrassed but the mother only said yes let's find my clothes and she set down the bag with the bottle in it in such a way that it would not tip over.

Her clothes lay on the ground near the swings and the woman pulled them on. They were only pajamas and it had gotten quite cold now and the man took off his coat and put it over the woman's shoulders and his stocking cap he put on the boy's head and now everybody looked quite normal and it seemed okay to walk them home which he offered to do.

It turned out that the woman and the boy lived not far from where the man lived, on his own with the terrier, though he'd never seen them during the day or any other place in the neighborhood. She asked him to come inside and she would make them all tea but she was unsteady on her feet. She said this is our abode and it sounded like a warble and she made a sweeping gesture with her arm and the boy started to cry. She went to the kitchen and the man sat down with his terrier on his lap and the boy lay on the floor with the blanket knotted in his fist.

The woman brought a cup of water with a tea bag in it but the water had not been heated. The man watched the brown color of the tea swirl slowly into the clear water and said I would like to help you

if I can do you need some money or food do you have a job what can I do? The woman said there is nothing to be done or said, we are fine you finish your tea and go please. The boy dragged his blanket to the other room and the woman said we need to sleep now and she came to the man with the terrier on his lap and gave him a kiss on the cheek. The man could see her breast through the opening in her pajamas and he touched it and mouthed it and she let him and she liked it and this is how they were for some time, the woman bent to the man, the long strands of her hair falling onto the little dog's head and over his blind eyes, in the quiet of the woman's abode.

