

Until the Dawn (part 1)

by Deborah Oster Pannell

Tara was so tired. The bus connection was off again, and her ankles were so swollen. Maybe it was the heat, the humidity, she wasn't sure... but things were definitely getting worse. She sighed. At least the bus shelter had an empty spot on the bench, so as she breathed in the thick, hot auto fumes that hung all around her, she didn't have to also stand with all her bags.

Just one more stop before home, for cigarettes. She had long since forgotten how much she hated the smell of the acrid smoke in the apartment. Now it was just another part of her list of things to bring home to Peter, who was having trouble getting around this week, too. Damn, she would have to go out again for cherry juice. What a couple of cripples they were...

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Delia looked out the window, wishing she was at the shore. Just to feel the waves lapping at her toes, breeze blowing past her closed eyes... but that memory was dimming with each passing day. Out of nowhere, she felt an ache. The thought of the days gradually getting shorter as the sun baked down and fried all the concrete surrounding her house suddenly made her feel trapped.

Last night, unable to shake off the frustration of his day before they met at the concert, Curtis had cut off a whole part of his psyche and chatted endlessly to total strangers all night, while she had sat on their blanket, alone, drinking wine and eating cold, fried fish, barely connecting to the sounds of the symphony. Even the fireworks afterwards had failed to brighten her spirits, each explosion ringing hollow with a sense of wasted effort and cheap, fleeting pleasure.

Now she yearned for something to get her through the day. With a long list of tasks spread before her, she found it difficult to concentrate on the work for which she would be paid. Instead, she wanted to write stories about women with long hair, dancing naked in the forest and living in the branches of tall trees, their menstrual

blood flowing down their legs, cleansed only by thick, heavenly rains splashing through shimmering curtains of leaves.

Who is happy, she wondered. Who is satisfied? She would not drink a cup of coffee. She wanted no more sense of rising expectation coursing through her veins and quickening her heart. She laid her head on the cool table before her and breathed deeply as the tears welled up and dropped from her eyes. Hunger, thirst, desire... they all seemed unquenchable. She would have to wait this one out.

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Tara looked at Peter, sitting at his computer. He seemed satisfied, occupied as he usually was during the day with surfing the web, reposting articles on Facebook about oppression, liberation struggles, and occasionally, justice. She had made sure there was enough food prepared for the next couple of days, the laundry was done, and he had his cigarettes. The place was still a mess, but that was not going to change anytime soon. She could take a nap now, if she liked.

Pushing aside the piles of clean clothing that needed to be folded, she uncovered just enough bed to lie down. Sleep would not come easy. Her joints ached with the stress of inadequate circulation and cumulative damage. And her lungs felt so heavy with asthma today. She could hear the wheezing as she looked up at the ceiling.

Leaning into the soft, cool pillow, she felt the old familiar bitterness rise up in her throat, but she did not have the energy to embrace it. On days like today, such thoughts could send her tumbling down a deep well from which there was no escape whatsoever. Some people had healthy bodies. She did not. It was an accident of nature, a cruel twist of fate, perhaps, but nonetheless, the way it was.

She thought about that nasty woman who had moved in downstairs. Tara hadn't been rude to her, just said excuse me, could she please move to the side so she could get past with her packages. Why did she have to stop there in the middle of the landing to have a conversation with her friend, anyway? Couldn't she see that she had

a cane? "Let her fuckin go. Obviously she's in a big fuckin rush."
How could she curse like that in front of her two little children?

Was it going to be like this from now on? All of this hostility right there in her building? She was always nice, polite, held the door, didn't ask for trouble from anybody. Why would someone be like that? People were so mean. She couldn't comprehend it. She just wanted to live her life. Wished it was easier to breathe. Maybe later, when it cooled down, she and Peter could take the bus up to the botanical garden for the evening. Maybe, if she felt better.

