

The Washing of the Quilts

by Fred Osuna

Sweaty feet, drool from the weighty sleep of mid-afternoon naps, the inescapable perspiration of the South: all combine to create the entwined scent of socks and stale toothbrushes, forcing me to this annual ritual: The Washing of the Quilts.

Four of them, tossed in a back seat jumble, compete with the less natural smells of Turtle Wax and Rain-X from my recent truck maintenance experiments. I roll down all the windows.

The laundromat monitor looks up from her James Patterson and Cheetos, fighting a natural urge to smile. I'm sunshine and salutations because it is, after all, an Annual Day of Ceremony. Beside the industrial washers where I deposit my beddings, a black woman sits, thumbing her Android. "How many loads do you have today?" She pauses for a moment, never looking up, and then proceeds with her thumbing, now in counterpoint to the sound of her other thumb clicking the plastic lid on a McDonald's coffee cup. It sounds empty.

I walk to the neighboring Winn-Dixie, eye the steam tables, salivate, swoon, walk back.

In the dryer, three tennis balls, well beyond their useful days on a court, thump thud thump an uneven bass line, fluffing the down comforter's clumps. One small feather escapes onto the laundromat's red linoleum floor. I watch it move each time someone passes. American Beauty.

I press the dry patchwork art of my mother's hand sewn red and green quilt to my face: warm, fresh, not at all like a Clean Breeze. More like Love.

