

Grannies

by Gary Moshimer

The four Grannies say, "GO!" and leap from the window. King's pickup is below, and he has lined the bed with his mother's throw pillows. Sundresses fly. Blue plastic diapers billow.

They want cigarettes. I light their smokes with King's pearl-handled lighter as the truck whines down the mountain and the Grannies chant the Seven Words you can't say on television. The outings were my mother's idea, administrator of the Home. In the beginning they were fragile, wobbly hips and papery hands. We lifted them into the truck.

At the meadow they romp in tall grass. After five minutes I blow the whistle. One is missing. We see the flames erupt. King has to jump down with his extinguisher. Martha has stolen the lighter and torched her diaper again. She hoots the way she did in the sixties, burning her bras. Back in the truck the other Grannies toss her across the pillows and spank away, baby powder like fairy dust.

At the cemetery are husbands and lovers. Charlotte lost hers to the lake. He has the roughest stone, and always when she kisses it her mouth splits and we need the first aid kit, soaking blood with gauze and applying ointment. Afterwards her lips swell to the fullness of her youth, healing faster each time. We want to kiss them. The time will come.

There are apple trees, where the Grannies test bitter apples. Their dentures rattle. They make faces ending in smiles, remembering. They throw apples at us and run in circles. Our bruises accumulate. We weaken. They draw from us, but we can't resist.

There's a secret pool in the mountain. No one's found the bottom, not Charlotte's husband or the many teenagers over the years. The

water is warm. We like to believe it was made by an alien ship or jagged meteor and channels energy from the earth's core. As kids we dove from ledges, but opening eyes under the surface revealed the swirling transparent spirits, rumored to be a rare form of jellyfish. We knew better, could make out faces of those who never came back.

The pool is a vortex and, hypnotized by the slow spin, the Grannies shed dresses and diapers. They dive and circle. The water is clear so we see the change, bodies smoothing and filling, white hair growing and streaming before turning red, blonde, brunette. On the warm slant of stone we wait, until they emerge sixty years younger, shivering and afraid and needing to be held and stroked like seals or baby dolphins, their skin smooth and slippery. We lay there with our nubile Grannies, their breasts against our white uniform tops, respectful but with warm explosions in our chests. They question us with tearful eyes. When they fall asleep we dress them and carry them back to the truck. They are feverish, and we are guilty.

Back at the Home they remember nothing. They are tired and we tuck them in for a nap before dinner. We kiss their foreheads. They are old again, but not as old as before.

My mother studies our faces, tilts her head. In the mirror I am dazed, secretive, aged. After we say goodbye and leave for the day, we smoke constantly and flinch at the slightest sound.

Our girls pout when we slip from their arms. Why can't we touch you anymore? Are there others? We stare into space. Their skin feels rough and sticky. Desperate. And, unlike the Grannies, they don't need us.

