

# Maritzer's Axiom

by Gita M. Smith

*Maritzer's Axiom:* Nobody really knows what there is between two people except the two themselves, and sometimes even they don't know.

1. What surprised the family most when she brought him home was his ordinariness. Mother had set the table with her best company's-coming cloth napkins and the good bone China, while Father had donned an anathematic necktie for a meal in his own home.

My nervous sister ushered in this man -- one suitor among so many that we'd wondered what made him special -- who wore a shirt that must have spent its life in a clearance bin at Woolworth's.

An international spy would have prayed to have his coloring and face — immediately forgettable — and Father later griped that no good comes from a man already balding in his 20s.

Looking back, it seems ridiculous that we had been so snobbish, as if we were nobility when we were just as bourgeois as Bloomingdale's, one generation past canned ravioli dinners with cheap white bread.

My sister was oblivious, and during the roasted lamb, when suddenly our family became tongue-twisted into small talk, she held her gaze on a point of light in the young man's eyes that only she could see and radiated back a tremulous beauty.

2. I have been watching them for half of this godforsaken tour of duty, and you can't tell me there's nothing going on between those two.

I mean, there's nothing you can SEE, per se, but I don't need to *see* something to *know* something's there. My gut is right 100 percent of the time, and, as I've noted in my officer's log and in my notes that go by pouch twice a month to our major, those two ain't kosher.

So then, at oh-one hundred in the pitch dark, this morning, I hear laughing and clapping and bottles clinking. I'm, like, "What the hell?" and I'm out of my bunk and into the common room, and what do I see?

Them two *nancy-boys* and at least 20 more of my very best men, raising their ginger ales and Mountain Dew's in the air.

Well, normally they salute me, but this time, they give me high-fives. Someone hollers "They can ask and we can tell," and the men start to cheer. A corporal hands me a soda, and someone else claps me on the arm, like they thought we were all one big goddam happy family and all the same underneath the uniform.

3. She was the first to venture out of their tidy bungalow and stand in the patchy yard wearing primary colors and a yellow head band. He emerged some days later, in mismatched plaids and a ball cap with the Braves insignia.

From my bedroom window with its Nancy Drew curtains, I saw them as twin-like, although my Mom had said a childless married couple had moved in next door. They held hands in a shy kind of way. Their faces, with the slightly upturned eyes, had an unlined softness I wasn't used to seeing in grownups, and their bodies looked more rounded in a pleasant way.

Later, I heard my mother say the word "Mongoloid" to Auntie Jen on the phone and, "I don't see how the government can let those people marry."

In my World Book Encyclopedia I looked up Mongolia with its broad steppes where horses galloped free, and I pondered why a young couple would move from a country so wild and open to the boring corner of Chester and MacMahon.

