

# Stone Soup

by James Lloyd Davis

On my way home from the war, I met a woman.

Met her in San Francisco, winter of '66. Beautiful, tall, and blonde, an older fallen angel herself, maybe thirty-two, maybe Satan herself, I'd followed her up Nob Hill, quietly admiring her calves until she suddenly turned, asked if I was hungry.

I told her I was twenty-one.

She smiled, took me home, fed me Treblinka pancakes, Hiroshima sausages, My Lai berries with Wittgenstein sauce and a heavy dollop of cream. While I ate, she watched me like vultures do, fist under chin, with expectancy and humor, told me she'd been married.

"Four children... three girls and a boy."

On the fingers of her left hand she counted their names like numbers, "Poverty... Chastity... Obedience... and Saul."

It was Saul I guessed, who sat in a corner of the kitchen humming, playing with a spinning top that turned and churned on the linoleum floor. I remember there was music coming in the window, and a woman singing tremolo ballads in the street with a voice like Buffy Sainte-Marie.

Saul? Kid looked like he was dreaming of Damascus.

When I asked her about her husband, she laughed.

When I told her I'd been to Japan, she laughed again.

With a smile, she led me to her bedroom and I remember thinking she smelled like strawberries. Last thing I remember, she's closing the door behind us and I woke up three years later in cheap hotel in Cleveland with three cracked ribs and a broken heart.

