

The Apaches Are Losing Brooklyn

by Kyle Hemmings

I'm looking out from the thirteenth floor of the Twin Oak Hotel, watching the snow powder the city, giving the faces of downtown tenements a spotty makeover. In the room, the hooker I picked up from the 6th Ave. bar, the one with eyes from a poster diva and an orange bushfire of a hairdo, is trying to catch her breath. She's still shivering from the cold and says she can't stand to walk through it.

At the bar, she told me her name was Natasha, but she doesn't look like one. She's too thin and flighty for one thing. And all Natashas have a Russian accent and talk of the Motherland as if it were never cold and before it turned to borderlines and jigsaw pieces, unredeemable currencies. Natasha's fingernails are long and colored in two tones. Her eyes are brown and blank and make me think of a costly childhood, its inflationary economy.

I was tempted to tell her my name was Geronimo because when they took the West away from him, he just wanted to be alone. Alone was all he had and someday he planned to get even. In Natasha's eyes, I can see Geronimo.

Natasha undresses to her bra and panties and slips under the covers. She's fast asleep, the covers up to her ears. And that's okay because I'm no longer in the mood to have sex. The long walk here to this shit hole of a hotel did something to me. Made me realize how I wanted to get even with everybody whose name wasn't Geronimo.

Or Natasha.

I throw a scatter of bills on the night table, enough for the services she might have given, more than enough for a month of subway tokens, rides to and from Brooklyn. I walk out and in the hallway I hear her start to cough again. Two or three people walk by, staring past me. I could be a ghost. Or maybe they are.

In this bitch of a wind, I find my car, still leased like my marriage, and drive back to Park Slope. My wife, now well on her third or fourth lover, a man I imagine with thick hands and tiny scars over his eyes, will be sleeping soundly, gauging the depth of some imperturbable river in a dream. If she does awake, she'll say Is that you? as if I could be anybody. And for the rest of the night, she'll sleep like some unmovable fortress, her back to me, protecting me from whatever Teddy Bear of an illusion I still wish to cling to.

When I first met her, I could tell by the glint in her eyes that she liked cowboys. I asked her what her version of the Old West was. She couldn't quite verbalize it, but if she could, I would tell her that winners only shoot from behind and in numbers. When it comes to history, I can talk six guns. In our quiet moments before reruns of game shows, I often alluded to Geronimo's autobiography and told her that it wasn't his real name. It stemmed from when the Mexicans prayed to St. Jerome during Apache attacks. And if he were still alive, Geronimo would be getting lost, trying to find the right bridge, wandering endlessly through what he's been told is Brooklyn, surrendering only at a street corner he's too tired to cross.

