

Karen

by Laurie Stone

Karen was a shy horse who bowed her head and spoke with a lisp. Who knew she would become yearbook editor? Who knew she would predict a future for me?

Her mother was an artist, her father a surgeon. The palace where she lived had a sweeping staircase and oil paintings on the walls. We weren't friends, but I slept at her house one night. There must have been a storm and the roads were closed.

At dinner Karen pushed food around her plate. At school she didn't open the brown paper bags her maid packed with fried chicken or grilled steak, plus cookies and fruit, a beautiful lunch. I had eaten my own sandwich at noon, but at 4:30, before catching the bus back to Long Beach, I would find Karen's sack, tossed carelessly on a window ledge, and I would carry it to a bench or under a tree and crunch a piece of chicken or wolf a strip of steak, then check my teeth for bits.

When, in my 50s, I worked as a cater-waiter, my mother would ask how rich people lived, and I would remember the time at Woodmere Academy when Karen stole my Papagallo loafers from the locker room and paraded around with the marks of my toes etched in the soft, red leather. I didn't ask for them back. In the future she predicted for me, I had seven husbands and wore leopard print pants. Who knew she was looking that hard?

