

# Meat and Bones

*by* Lilia Souza

Last July I wore a short sundress over nothing else, and a boy ten years younger came with a composter for my back yard. I left my kids with a hose to show him the best spot for rotting food, far from the house. Another man had hung clothes-lines between my trees so that we had to duck our heads to get behind the shed. "Watch for poison ivy," I said.

That other man was by then long gone, back to his wife. The composter was a gift from the town, it looked like a flimsy rocket or a time machine from TV when I was a child. The boy was a peace core volunteer with a thin beard and hairy shins. I watched him stare at my bare feet and legs, stopping short of the hem of my dress before he bent to assemble the pieces of black plastic.

"Is there a door?" I asked, mainly to be polite, then: "What can and can't I put in this thing?" He fumbled an answer. Banana peels, yes. Meat and bones, no. No dog or cat poop either.

The man who put up the clothes line left his kids upstairs at night and came down to my bed. His stomach was soft and his hands moist as he ran them along my thighs. We had drunk wine on the beach, so he figured he could take certain liberties.

"You're cute," I told the boy, because it didn't matter. "Come back again some day, I'll cook you dinner." He stumbled, and walking ahead I stepped on a sharp stone, barefoot. Later, I noticed some blood. "Wait, let me give you my number." The boy stood in my door, his hands at his sides, and I knew he was never going to call, never going to come, that he was waiting for me to let him go. There were four more composters in his car.

"Peace core, huh?" I asked, tearing an envelope and scrawling my number on the back with my daughter's pink crayon. He nodded. I wondered what the peace core was doing in our town, setting up composters, but didn't ask. I thought they were sent to far away, foreign places where there was war and hunger and need.

I handed the boy my slip of paper. "Come for dinner. Anytime," I said. That day was the fifty-sixth since my husband moved out. The man who put up the clothes line put his hand between my legs the same night, but not more. "We shouldn't do something we'll regret," he said. Earlier in the afternoon our kids had sat side by side in the bathtub. We watched them and washed them and remembered when we had been their age, naked together.

