

A Dream Lay In Wait

by Robert Crisman

Roanne *hungered*.

Memory had ruled her forever. Shards really, edged like machetes: daddy, whose fingers had eyes in the dark. Momma, ensconced in the shadows.

Inside the church, those pairs of short eyes scoping the pretties...

The playground at school--swoopings, formations, attacks. The girl that she spit on. The boy with the matches. A first stolen kiss. The snide little wannabe rapists who lifted her dress in a dark-cornered hallway. The nun who blamed her.

It was as if she'd been stripped and then laughed at in front of the whole third grade class.

Later, there was this movie she saw. In it a woman, tall, muscled, proud. She hefted an Uzi and dressed in an outfit that flowed down her body, inseparable from her, weaving together the beauty, strength, and allure that made her The Queen.

The Queen wore a crown, a little black hat, a shell of black feathers, tipped forward to the side, with a veil that covered her eye like a breath.

The *Queen*! She held her gun lightly and *ruled*. In attendance around her, a covey of supple young gangsters. She was their rock, the dream they all dreamed of.

She stood there among them, inviolate, serene. She took Roanne over...

Roanne dreamed *she'd* be Queen. But her legs were too...short...

Wisdom has it, however, that clothes make the woman; they mold, sharpen flesh. Roanne had an eye for design; she could turn shadows to sinew. Women would give themselves over to her to be honed for the wars. She'd reshape the world: all women, men's eyes... She *would* be Queen!

Men's eyes... Like all pretty girls, Roanne had been raised to be bait for the boys. Which meant a life lived in the prison of skin.

Boys tapped on her nerves--especially the bad boys who spit on

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the old folks' religion. These somehow embodied a Fuck-You-All freedom denied her. A ticket away to some other place...

But those boys' cruelties, their callous indifference, their drumming, incessant *need*-what could these do in the end except sharpen her strong sense of place somewhere past the edge?

There were the yoyos of course, yoyos who'd lick the soles of her shoes for the chance to creep close. She filed these away for use later on.

Bait for the boys: she'd use it, embrace it, and somehow escape it thereby...

She'd reshape men's eyes and be *free*.

Roanne went downtown the day she turned 14 years old. Downtown, where the lights are all bright and the shadows are sleek. The Lost Paradise. Bad Boys in heaven and she right there with them.

And Dope...

Roanne would be *Queen*. She'd learn how to game and get over, to outwit the wolves, fleece the lambs, run the maze. Then, past the maze, she'd exhume her dream and reshape the world...

She'd retire in the end to her House on the Hill, where no danger or dread could ever molest her again.

She would live the American Dream, the Dream that ends in a splendor of uncaring comfort and ease, that soothes like a breeze on a raft floating down the White Nile, with the softest of suns caressing her lips and her brow and her breasts, and whispering the sweetest of nothings.

The Dream is 10,000 years old. It soothes just like *chiva*...

Roanne found her power.

She found it one night in the badlands. In the back of a fifth-rate hotel on the tideflats, in the room that holds all the lost children. She was 15 years old.

She'd been dodging bandits.

She came to the room to rest and replenish.

She was so *hungry*!

A smorgasbord lay on the table! She tied off and tucked in.

Roanne found her power that night in that room and the power found her.

And she hungered and hungered and *hungered* for ten million years as men circled the block with their eyes out for prey...

