

A Night In a String Of Long Nights

by Robert Crisman

The guy was one in a long line of flabby-ass tricks, no doubt. He waited at the Ramada, ready to pay her \$200 for one hour's work.

Michelle had been going single-o for two weeks, in addition to doing the doubles she did with Roanne.

Whatever innocence Michelle had brought to the game was *long* gone, even the part where she dreamed she was the star of a righteous, asskicking movie. In place of innocence, not toughness so much--or maybe it was in a strange kind of way. She was cynical, bitter, angry, all that--but she was *composed*. She'd grown a game face, a cold, sullen mask that spoke to her rage, but also reflected *resolve*, *cool* resolve that marked out the veteran of trench wars.

A veteran of trench wars, this erstwhile suburban princess, determined to press to the end.

It wasn't courage exactly. Still, this was a girl whose day-glo illusions and Disneyland daydreams lay dead as Dixie; nothing remained but the war.

The guns and the bombs in the war were for real. They shredded the flesh and tore out the soul. Still, she'd press on. She'd signed up. There was no going back.

Go back? To what and to who? Daddy? Some paper-ass boyfriend? Back to the prison of pink cheeks and anklets and shopping in malls with her Barbie-Doll friends til she croaked from sheer boredom?

She could have decided to kill herself. It was always an option, you know? But rage choked off her fear of the future. Also, simply, she wasn't yet ready to die. Nothing left then but just shrug her shoulders and keep keeping on.

Two hundred bucks would buy enough dope to feather the memory of flabby-ass trick number thirty-six million, at least

through tomorrow.

