

# Echoes

by Robert Crisman

Tonight, it turned out, they had a double. Nutcracker told them to be there by nine. Her voice raked like nettles.

They went to the bathroom to make themselves ready. Michelle had a black dress. It would have looked slinky even three weeks ago. Roanne's slacks, meanwhile, just sort of drooped off her ass.

Heroin. It helped them get through the tricks and sucked up their flesh.

Michelle, 22, a suburban princess gone down wrong byways. Roanne, 29, a Mediterranean rose grown up through the cracks in the sidewalks downtown... Both crumbling now under junk's crushing weight.

They didn't say much as they dressed. Michelle stayed sullen and pissy. Roanne grew impatient these days at that act, more ready to bark at the passive aggression behind it. Yet she helped Michelle dress, with a careful eye too, solicitous almost...

Roanne remained in her mind the mentor, protector. Her gestures of care were almost perfunctory now, but they came from deep, lasting need.

When innocence is trampled, what's left? Roanne's had died eons ago and was buried in some unmarked grave. Michelle the innocent--all but a dead memory now--had come into her life a bit like an echo of some long-lost spring. A faint, dying echo. Roanne didn't recognize it as such to be sure. Yet it stirred something in her. She wanted to gather Michelle, hold her tight.

Now, in the bathroom, all that were left were echoes of echoes of echoes...

Yet out in the world, men's eyes burned and searched prey. Female beauty, honed by design, served as bait.

Roanne held fast to the husk of her dream, to reshape men's eyes and be free...

She smoothed Michelle's dress over thighs turning quickly to sticks. Her eyes took on focus, perspective, informing her hands,

*artist's* hands, as they honed, shaped, and kneaded the ghost.

