

Shadowland

by Robert Crisman

The past shapes each breath you take.

Roanne and Rob used to goof when they lived at the Joseph Hotel in dirty downtown. He'd go up to her room, and there they'd hang out, ring changes on squares, dish the dirt.

Sometimes in that room she would talk about all of the things that she wanted to do: open a dress shop, get her kids back, remarry someday, and be a Respectable Lady.

She'd come from somewhere south of Seattle. She kept her family in half-light. Her father loomed large in her stories, though she actually didn't say much about him, just bits, tiny pieces. Rob gleaned over time that he'd risen from shadows back east and came west and just taken the things that he wanted. A true man of business, steely and dark, and a man of family as well, with a wife and two children he kept in the shade of the church and his legend.

He schooled Roanne in the rigors that shape little girls. His touch, even now, seemed to set off tremors inside her.

Roanne's mom was a cipher. The younger sib died and Roanne broke for the bright lights of town the day she turned 14 years old.

She sought out the bad boys, the dope, and the freedoms those bring.

Dad raged at the wayward apostate. Disowned her, then begged her return. Sent money, withheld it.

She never gave him a name. To Rob he somehow took shape as a small-scale Don Corleone. As far as Rob actually knew, he might have sold parts down at Shuck's.

Or, it even could be, she'd never really known him at all, had stitched him together from daydreams, themselves amalgams of fear and desire, stoked by memories of power and, perhaps, distance.

Like God, her father had offered a strong guiding hand, a hand that had guided her--where?

Rob remembered how quiet and somber she'd get at those times in the tale when her father, so long enshadowed, would start to flesh

out, erasing her blase, sardonic dopefiend charade.

The tremors Rob saw, the set of her jaw, the intake of breath; her eyes dodging light as she pulled down the shades.

All this as she waited on checks that he'd send in the mail, along with words that would echo inside her, in whatever guise, until next time.

