

No Outlet

By Christina D. Taylor

“I need money” she thought as she sat still thighs sweating from the heat of the leather seat. Sweat dripped from the corners of her eyes and perspiration invaded her underarms. Her hair was puffy and damp from the humidity. The car wasn’t on just the radio. There was no use in going any place because the gas gauge was already on red and the knocking sound from the engine was more than she could bear.

“It’s a hundred and eight degrees in the sunny city folks, be sure to steer clear of the sun between twelve and two p.m. I’m Brett Gardner for your local weather report.

Then it happened. The white Ford F-150 drove by slowly its drive sitting high above the dash board looking down into her car as though he were searching for something he had lost. She’d seen him before at the gas station and laughed at how cool he thought he looked. She guessed he was around fifty or sixty years old. The eyes never lied and his were soggy, long and lonely.

“Can I talk to you?” he asked. She looked up for the gas pump and held her hand to her brow to block the sun. At a distance youth could be presumed but up close the lie died. “No” she responded and quickly released the gas nozzle, placed it back in the holder and drove away. That was her memory of him. “I need money”. The words were clearer to her as she tasted desperation in her mouth. Seeing him pass her in his truck all snake like made the plan all the more real. All he needed was flattery; some attention, someone to look into his eyes, and make him feel twenty again.

Before she knew it, she had started her engine and began to follow him somewhere. She prayed that her presence wasn't obvious everything was supposed to appear incidental, all unintended, but the cars' engine thought otherwise and her disguise was soon exposed. Upon turning the corner she spotted the truck parked at the end of the street. Peering through the partially opened window of the driver's side door, she looked up to view the street name. All that appeared was a bold lettered gold and black sign that read, "NO OUTLET". Now she being non-clairvoyant proceeded without caution but with great expectation. "Hmm, that's odd", she thought as she parked her car along side the chipped away paint of the sidewalk address. The cream colored house on the outset displayed massive femininity. Dull green lawn frogs perched silently surprised on the brown grass. A wilted rose bush stood brilliantly against the weather torn metal window screen. She hesitated in the seat for a moment then grabbed the door handle as her eyes searched the scene to find a way to back out. "This is stupid" she murmured under her breath. As she prepared to turn the car on and drive away he suddenly appeared on the porch, eyes questioning; mouth moving. He was a tall man the color of wet tobacco. From the top of the porch steps he looked to be as tall as the house. His arms had no end as they dangled at the sides of his faded denim jeans. His chest was sunken in and his belly extended over too tight jeans. "This is too much" she thought and aborted the notion to open the door. With one hand on the smoldering hot steering wheel and the other on the ignition she prepared for a hasty take off but was abruptly halted by the presence of the stranger at her side door.

“You lost?” he asked. A frog had leaped into her throat leaving her speechless. She nodded yes. Upon closer inspection (He had adjusted his height to look her straight in the eyes) she noticed the soft feather like hairs that made up his beard.

“I’m looking for Lorraine Street, going to meet a friend to drop off some clothes.” Smells of freshly shaved wood and tobacco assaulted her senses. Silence. Crickets. Sounds. Sweat.

“I’m about to fry some fish. Would you like to come in for dinner?” The words were leaving his mouth and entering her ears but his lips were barely moving. His voice was clear and deep but his face was expressionless. There was no hint of sincerity or pleading, nor did he seem genuinely interested in her answer. Silence. Crickets. Hunger. Suddenly she remembered that along with being broke she was also unusually ravenous.

“Well, I’m kind in a hurry but-“

“It won’t take very long, I’m having salad too.” His eyes looked about as hungry as her stomach felt. Up close eh seemed relatively harmless, but so did the Boston Strangler. She had indeed disturbed the universe and there was no escaping. Silence.

“Sure”.

“Come on up” he answered. Then like that the screen door slammed and there she stood in the midst of an evening turning into night, between a rock and a hot meal.