

Buried Treasure

Mitzi Gordon

Jenny picked the bottle up off the porch and refilled my glass, splashing in a little water from a pitcher.

"I've always hated whiskey," I said. She slipped in a few ice cubes.

"There's not much left. You want to get some wine?"

"I've got some change," I told her. "We'll count it up, see what we've got."

"In a minute." She leaned back against the couch cushions and lit a cigarette, sighing. We watched a sliver of moon creep up the night sky. Near Jenny's elbow, the front door cracked open and two little blue eyes peeked out.

"Go inside, mister," Jenny said. The boy whined in protest.

"Not now," she told him. "Go. Get inside." He complained a little louder, but pulled the door shut, leaving us alone again. It was late, the street was empty, but a rushing sound of traffic on the nearby interstate washed over our houses.

Like an ocean, I sometimes said. Doesn't it sound almost like the ocean?

"That doesn't sound like any ocean," Jake would say.

But my imagination clung to those almost soothing waves. At night, noises were strange, often frightening, and it was hard to sleep. I'd be about to drift off, when dogs across the street would start barking, then yelping in pain. They cried for hours, it seemed.

Once, I dozed on the couch in front of the television and was woken by a rapid fire of sharp, cracking sounds. Like fireworks, but not fireworks.

"Do you ever hear things at night?" I asked Jenny.

"No." She looked out at the row of darkened houses, her gaze reaching through them to some unknown place.

It was quiet for a while, and then Jake came outside with a glass. Jenny stared ahead. He lit a joint and started it going around, flung an arm over his wife's shoulders and pulled her tight into the crook of his elbow.

We passed back and forth. From my chair I saw Jenny lean into Jake and smile. She started giggling and rubbing her eyes, where tears leaked out. I thought of water breaking along the shores of the bay.

We kept on with the bottle and lit some candles. Jenny moved out of the shadows to point out a little dimple beside her left eye, a souvenir from some stray cat.

"Crazy little bitch," she said. "It hung on to my face, almost blinded me." She tossed her cigarette into the dirt yard and I saw its glowing arc hang in the air for several seconds.

I lifted up the tail of my shirt to show off a long white scrawl down my right side.

"My stomach," I explained. "A valve closed up when I was just a baby. The mark grew with me – it used to be just this big," I said, holding a space of about two inches between my thumb and forefinger.

"That's not shit," Jake said, laughing. "You guys." Jenny and I looked at each other. He took a long puff on a cigarette and blew out three lazy smoke rings, running his fingers over a round pockmark on his chin about the size of a pencil eraser.

"At the hospital they pulled a rock out of here with tweezers, a big green emerald," he said. "My mom had a wicked backhand." He spat on the ground. "Doctor held it up, looked at it. Everyone looked at Mom."

Jake paused, looked out at the sky with a twisted grin. Stars winked back, diamonds in a velvet drape.

"So that's where that went!" she says, and holds out her hand. She's laughing, and the doctor starts laughing, and he gives it to her."

Jenny blew out the candles.

"Top that one," Jake said.