

Date with Helen

after Nicola Griffith's novel 'The Blue Place'

Tuesday night she asked me, "How do you feel about a performance tonight. You might find it interesting." An artist into body modification at Masquerade. I wasn't interested but she got me at curiosity. Also warm cocoa eyes. She arrived nine-thirty. In a Beetle with dented bumper and lines on rearview mirror. Orange streetlight glided across her cheek and disappeared. It was strange, being with a woman who drove in silence, who parked automatically under a light. The lighting up for those who don't get up until after dark. Down a series of ramps music louder and scents sharp of sweat and tequilla, sweet pot. She put her mouth to my ear, shouted "Want a drink?" I nodded, pulling her head down to my level, touching lips to her cheekbone just by her ear. "Beer," I said. And she disappeared cutting through twisting bodies, a thin woman appeared. Gleaming metal on her forehead, shoulders, nipples, the webbing between her thumb and fingers. Chain threaded from nose to ear to temple. The woman reached a hand and touched the corner of my upper lip. "Little ruby would look good here. Very fierce," she hissed, a ring through her tongue. A voice, my name, and Helen behind my shoulder with our beer.

The lights dimmed, a spotlight called
and the metal woman
slithered onstage. A stool and a man
invited from the audience, stripped
to the waist. She washed his pecs
and picked up a scalpel. It was like
watching someone cut into a radish
to make fancy patterns. With red paints.
To make a nice thick white raised scar.
Then she taped a gauze to his chest
he put his shirt back on, and everyone
went back dancing. I turned, Helen
licked the beer foam off her lips.
We drove back in silence
when we pulled up, she leaned across me
unlock my door. For a moment, we just
sat there, facing the velvet dark
then I was outside the car, saying good night
I would call sometime very soon.
She drove off. I stood, listening.