

g ♀ being ♀ just being ♀ being lazy ♀ skateboarding ♀ drinking beer ♀ giving each other feminine hygiene

I'm very far away from home. I'm very far away and everything is different.

Irene is shifting her weight slowly from one foot to another. She pours water from a jug into clay pots filled with jade plants. There are blue lines running from her ankles up. She looks very white, puckered and heavy. So does Paul. He has that old man's way of talking, very deep and deliberate. All his years with the firm long ago brought him this house and all the rich food with it that makes him pear shaped and heavy breathing.

• BY ZENOVIA SADOWAY •

The house. It's as big as always. Three towering stories that look out over a manicured garden and a winding stone path that leads to a beach, kissing the Pacific. It's one of those private beaches of Vancouver with its own dock and caretakers. But Avalon is close enough that if you squint your eyes you can tell what color the bathing suits are on the lifeguards lying in the sun.

People say when you go back to the place where you were raised everything looks smaller. I guess this is a different situation. Vancouver has grown. Everything. There are more Chinese. the streets are wider. the Lion's Gate Bridge is a million miles long. Irene and Paul's house is still a fortress.

Auntie Irene and Uncle Paul. I guess I expected to come back here and be a little kid again. Auntie Irene would put on her big painting shirt and drag up all the toys from the basement. Uncle Paul would put on very loud opera while he gardened in the back.

I don't remember any "coffee coasters" or "hired help" in those days.

"You're dressed," Irene wears an old woman's smile, small and dropping into jowls, "We're going to that restaurant on the sealiner. We're all meeting there. Oh, I so love that purple on you." I smile.

Faedra is my second cousin turing twenty one today. I'm not sure if I want to see her now. She was twelve before and picking chestnuts by City Hall. Or running through Stanley Park with Irene and me and the big white geese that chased you down the paths. They owned the place then. They knew it.

The restaurant is very brown and polished with big windows so you can watch the boats pulling into the dock. It's a very large, long table. Irene and Paul are at the far end. Faedra is on my right and her girlfriend Kathy on my



left. Faedra has short hair now, her perfume is strong. She wears a sleeveless, white shirt, without a bra and I can see that she didn't shave her armpits.

"Sixteen, eh? Oh, that's old enough. You're legal." She laughs abruptly and points across the table, "Doug, Todd, and Tim" she says then presses me a sideways hug, my shoulder is squishing her breast, "My little cousin, Jen."

Tim is not so attractive. He looks like a real brain and he is wearing a U.B.C. sweatshirt. Todd is very wide with muscles and a tan. Doug has very straight teeth. They're all smiling so I'm smiling but very tense.



There are drinks before the meal. I feel very mature that the waitress isn't asking my age. I get a margarita.

"Fishbowl margarita?" the waitress asks. It sounds very sophisticated.

Now I'm realizing how far away Irene and Paul really are, way at the end of the table with little salad forks and cloth napkins. And I'm not that little kid sitting next to them eating the olives from the Greek salads. It's past.

In the bathroom, in the mirror. I hold myself sideways and start wishing I had worn a blouse instead of this baggy sweatshirt.

"Hon," says Faedra, "Can you pass me some paper towel. There's no toilet paper in this bloody john."

I'm passing up dessert for a gin and tonic, double. Irene passes me on her way to the bathroom. There is dust on her face, in her wrinkles.

"Only one, okay?" she pats my hand. Then she is gone. Two generations gone. Had I run to her when I was afraid of the geese in Stanley Park? She must have been a much stronger woman then.

There is Spanish coffee after supper. Then I'm going with Faedra and her friends to the pub and hall across the road.

"Todd and Doug eill get her home alright," Faedra says. She has linked her arm with Tim. Uncle Paul nods. I'm looking at Todd and try a wink. He laughs and puts his arm around my shoulder which is good because I sense that I'm not really walking on the sidewalk.

All I can tell of the pub is that the music is too loud and the beer is warm. So I have a scotch and soda. I'm talking with Doug and Todd. Very sophisticated the way I'm sipping my drink and resting my hand on Doug's forearm when I make a point. I swivel in my chair to find the door marking the ladies room.

A soft reflection as I put on lipstick. My smile is a bit blurry. I'm glad now that I wore a sweatshirt. Most of the girls in the bar are very built. I'd have a tough time competing. I think it's very seductive the way my eyes are a little bit closed.

The bar closes at two. Faedra has already left. I'm walking between Todd and Doug to the truck. It is yellow. Oh, but I'm barely walking. Todd is laughing.

"We'll sober you up before we drop you off, okay?" says Doug. I smile.

There's a park. We drove here. It's not Stanley Park though, there are no geese. I get from the truck with Todd lifting me by the elbows. Everyone is laughing and happy.

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THE GOOSE AND STANLEY PARK