Cool Limbo

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At Tamika’s

In the tight kitchenette, petite like her mother, whose wide face was heavy with frown lines, rice and beans simmered but never boiled on the back burner 24/7—a beacon, the house’s pulse. She didn’t drive or speak English. Doorbells panicked her: Girl Scout? Mailman? Jehovah’s Witness? Or me—that Jewish boy who rode the bus with Tamika, steered her away from the heavy metal kids and offered eighth-grade Spanish:

*Hola, Señora Santos.*

*Donde esta Tamika?*

She’d smile—a vacation for her frown. Her dental work shoddy by Long Island standards, she was ashamed, the neighborhood’s only Puerto Rican lady. We’d sit on the living room’s gold velvet sofas and practice rolling my rrrrrrrrs while upstairs Tamika added more tears to her jeans, rearranged the six silver studs lining her left ear, powdered away her olive complexion.

_Come on, Michael,_ she’d call before reaching the bottom step. _Let’s bolt—in no rush but always desperate to leave the screen door behind us before her mother had the chance to say Adios._
On Castro

You might be stopped and commanded at 3 am—to help sift the curbside debris for the rhinestoned Mr. Potato Head earring some breathless Chinese drag queen—Ida Ho—dislodged during her demure attempt to re-bouf her bouffant, sashaying home in platform thongs from yet another benefit for dyslexic children of Neo-Buddhist-Jew dykes on bikes.

This may be the same revolutionary corner on which Harvey Milk started his business—down the block from Moby Dick’s and Jackhammers, where sagging gray men won’t surrender their black leather hot pants, admiring from stools glossy be-glittered kids aimed for clubs uphill or in the Haight—those boyish girls and girlie boys passing like a sequin storm as you squat and pan—some drunken drafted gold digger.

But when you discover that sandy earring, Ida’ll be so grateful—her outfit again complete. My hero, she’ll sigh. You saved him. Now his partner won’t be alone. And neither will you or anyone there on Castro—never quiet or closed to any wandering freak or square, native or foreigner—and always just a little more American than America is willing to admit.
boy witch

for three Halloweens
your mother, beautiful enough
to halt your old man’s remarks
with a simple eye roll,
would allow, even encourage it:
buying the green face paint,
sewing and then letting down
the hems each year herself—

had your plastic wand worked:
perhaps a daughter for your mother?
or a sister for you
instead of two older brothers.
maybe a potion to keep you
from outgrowing them,
some spell to stop them
from expecting tackle football.

but at seven there was no more
fabric to let out—and maybe
too little charm left in her eyes.
what a miserable cowboy you made.
an Indian would have been excuse
to paint your face again.

but no, that year your mother
revealed just how little power
she held in the world, and you
realized how little protection
you could offer her, even with
that shiny new dime-store magnum
your father put into your hand.
lounge-adelic

lavender lava lampery line lush lobbies
'luminating local long-winded loafers, lascivious lovers, lewd louses…
lanky limp limbs leaning loosely lopsided lavish leopard loveseats
lugubrious loners licking lightly lotioned lower lips, lukewarm lagers, liquors
luscious lime libation leftovers lining lacquered linoleum ledges
leather, lace, lamé, linen…
Levis, leotards, lapels, labels (Lagerfeld, Lauren, Laurent)
layering listless legions—
loquacious liberals, lipstick lesbians, literati, losers, ladykillers, lambs
lollygagging lawlessly, lingering laborless
letting lax language & limitless lazy laughter
lift lamentable losses, latent longings…
leavening lackadaisical libidos
luring lusty…leers, lays, lunges, liaisons
lassoing (if lucky) loaded Lords/Ladies leading ‘legendary’ lives
looming legitimate, large, leonine, luxurious
likely lapsing later
—lent less lenient light—
Lilliputian, ludicrous
lost, leaden
Lucite