

## Trade

By Elaine Rosenberg Miller

They had been in her kitchen for two days, the three of them, smoking incessantly and carrying on. When she went to bed the first and second nights, they remained clustered around the rickety table next to the filmed over window. On the third day she was sent out for cigarettes. As another night fell, she hoped that someone would suggest taking a ride somewhere but the rapid conversation continued, pierced only by startling cries or laughter and her hopes died. She gathered the folds of the dress that she was making and settled into a corner of the kitchen. Was there time to go for tea before the store closed, they asked. She clutched the money that one of the men had given her and ran down the stairs. She wondered, as she walked bareheaded in the bitter wind, at how they were able to go on. She slowly examined the aisles in the market. She would surprise them, she decided, left the store and went to a bakery. She mutely watched her reflection in its mirrored walls until a saleswoman demanded to know if she could help her. She counted out the correct change for a dozen doughnuts. She strolled back over the hard, broken earth of the unpaved road. She found that they had left the door open though she had begged them not to. But then she remembered that she had been the last to leave and that it was she that had left the door ajar.

“Our Japanese lady is back,” one of the men exclaimed.

“Have you brought us some goodies?”

“What has she done this time?” asked the woman.

She glowed and joined in the banter for a while but soon found herself withdrawing. Would they sleep this night? She wanted them all to fall down and sleep for hours the way they had done the last time. She took the dress to her room. She pinned the collar, softly singing the words of a ballad she had seen in a magazine and whose melody she imagined. The facing of the collar had been badly cut and its ends did not meet. The woman had insisted on helping. She made tiny darts in the material and discovered it turn into a ruffle.

“What time is it?” a voice called.

They wanted her. She swung off the bed.

“Come here, the artist will tell us what she thinks.”

The older man grasped her wrist and propelled her towards his knee. He smoothed her buttocks as he repeated his request, his fingers tracing the hand sewn flowers on the bank of her kimono.

“I think of death as having something to do with the time that you die. If you die at dusk or at dawn, it’s best. But if you die in the night or in the morning, everything is made certain and if you die in the afternoon, you’ll never know.” She scraped at the caked gum on the plastic tablecloth. The woman touched her head.

“Your hair is so beautiful. Come, I want to fix you up.”

They walked beside each other to the bedroom.

“Sit.”

She worked silently, her thin fingers twisting and pulling.

“I can’t see your eyes. Look up”

The girl lifted her solemn face. She felt herself unevenly seated on the wooden chair. She let her eyes droop, her jaw slack and her pale lips suspend in a pout. Her fingers massaged the blunt ripples of her ribs.

“Sayonara!” the men said, when she returned.

“I want to take pictures,” one announced. He unsnapped the leather case of his camera and removed the silver and blue felt lens cover and blew on it. He held a floodlight and shouted directions from behind the painful brightness as they posed in changing patterns.

“Oh, enough.” the woman said, resting against the porcelain sink.

She returned to her room and danced and stretched and wept as she touched the dusty floor with her forehead. She traced the divisions of the floorboards in the darkness. The sounds echoed. She was confident that it must soon be over. One more day. They would leave quickly. It was always over by then and they would leave very quickly.

“And here he is!” she heard them cry.

She grasped the material of her robe and raced into the kitchen.

“What have you got there, boy?”

“Come on, come on.”

“I must see.”

He was worn. Grey half-moons underlined his eyes. He sniffed and glanced around the room.

“It was cold out there, yessir, it was.”

She moved to the window as they surrounded him.

“C’mon!” shrieked the woman as they laughed.

“How was my old lady while I was gone?” he asked.

“Look man.”

“I’m fine.”

“It’s in the car, wrapped and ready to go,” he said, handing them the keys.

They grabbed their coats and hugged him and left. He turned and walked out of the room. She followed him. He threw himself on the bed. She sat beside him. She unbuttoned his jacket and flannel shirt and ran her fingers across his chest with increasing pressure.

“Aren’t you curious about what happened?” he asked.

She unfastened his heavy belt.

“Yes, I am.”

“I was arrested and I got off, could only get off by turning them in.”

He picked at an upper tooth.

“I think I have a cavity. What do you think of that?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she said, rising. She unlaced his boots and set them down. He removed the rest of his clothing and she undid the sash of her robe.

“Got to get it looked at,” he yawned, turning off the lamp and rolling over.

She slipped beneath the covers and until the sun ended their play, followed the car

# Writing Raw

*All work appearing below is copyrighted by the author.*

---

headlights beaming, moving, darkening and reappearing above her wall mounted watercolors and clay figures.

The End

**Elaine Rosenberg Miller bio:** Elaine Rosenberg Miller is a writer whose work has appeared in JUDISCHE RUNDSCHAU, NEWSMAX, THE BANGLORE REVIEW, THE FORWARD, THE HUFFINGTON POST and in other print and online publications.