

LAUNDRY

The end is near. The dust is full of cockroaches and fabric softener. Four quarters that used to be a dollar are soon to be no more. This laundromat will be razed and in its place, condos as far as the eye can see.

Glorious condos.

Soon.

My sheets tumble dry and I sit on the orange countertop thinking of all the things I'll never see again. A homeless woman plays the harmonica and sings in a language she thinks is spanish. Her face is covered with soot, little beady whites in the eyes piercing through the floor tiles with crazed condition. She recalls feverish nights singing for the duke of such and such or some captains of industry, back when she had to drink from separate but equal water fountains. She sings fake spanish to the cockroach and dust.

-Senorita, oh seniorita,
she says.

My sheets spin around and I hope no one can notice the cum stains. I think of things past.

Do you remember when we bought that book? 'God with Revolver', it was called. You found it on the bottom shelf in the back of some second hand book store on New Hampshire ave. The place is no longer there, I've checked. Do you remember I bought a timetable of train schedules for the mid-atlantic region from 1983? Afterwards we went home and made love, the way you do when you're really in love and being naked together is just a physical extension of the psyche. That was almost a decade ago.

My sheets spin around and I hope no one notices the stains.

-Oh seniorita, seniorita, help me. I sang for the arch dukes of such and such and the barristers and the ladies, oh the ladies had such lovely dresses.

Some of the stains are mine. The others belong to this mean spirited girl I had sex with last night. I knew her from the bar. She was a regular. We had a few drinks and then went back to my place. We smoked some dope and talked for a bit. I decided I didn't like her that much. She's selfish and malicious, not at all like you. But, I wanted to fuck so I took her to my room and kissed her so she would stop talking so much. I took her pants off and she removed my shirt. I threw her on the bed then she got up and reached for a cigarette. I relaxed a bit and took my pants off. I wasn't thinking about laundry at the time. I really wasn't thinking about much to be honest.

She got up from the bed, sat down in front of my typewriter and awkwardly started typing out what she thought was profound. It was a fantastic exercise in banality. It was a silent scream into the vacuum of self involvement. It was the way we whisper our youth while killing time, waiting for someone to love us the way we want to be loved. The way we love ourselves. I grew frustrated and bored. She wrote something about how we are ultimately all alone, so I picked her

up and threw her back down upon the bed. She hit her head on the radiator when she bounced. I thought it was funny. She did not.

-Oh senorita, senorita. Please come here. The machine stole my quarters. I sang for Isaacson's restaurant from 1961 to 1964 and we all had such a grand time. You know what I used to sing? Well I was a jazz singer..

Maria, the senorita, just smiles and cleans up around us. She has been canonized by clorox and vested by tide and she is the saint of the unclean, guardian of the unwashed. She wipes down counters , sweeps floors, fixes machines, and waits for the day when this place is just a memory. A roach filled can crushed by condos.

I watch my sheets spin, wondering if Maria sees the stains.

After her head hit the radiator, I pulled her panties off and went down on her until she screamed. She left a huge wet spot on my sheets. I really didn't like her that much, but I saw no reason why I should be alone on a night like this. I pulled some condoms out of my desk drawer, still a little angry that she had taken it upon herself to write such garbage with my machine.

-You won't need those,
she said.

A few things went through my mind. Before I had time to respond, she put her pants back on.

-I'm not going to let you fuck me.
she said.

She grabbed another cigarette out of my pack and lit it with quiet indifference. I laughed a little with an angry smile and figured I was getting only what I deserved. She put her shirt on and gave me the same speech I was planning on giving her the next morning. She left two cigarettes on my desk on her way out.

-I've got smokes,

I said, foolishly, sitting naked on my bed not realizing that she was taking my pack. She just smiled and walked out. I looked around for my cigarettes.

-Well played

I said, as the door shut behind her.

-I sang for arch duke so and so,
says the old homeless woman.

I watch my sheets spin as the end draws near. Soon, middle management will live here. Their clothes won't mix with mine. The colors might bleed. Their salaried shirts won't mix with my hourly socks. We won't get along. I'll have to find a new place to do my laundry and think of you.

A man walks in and starts yelling at Maria. He wants something in exchange for nothing. We all do.

It's so hot outside that sweat beads over our lips and sprays a little each time we speak.

-Senorita,

says the old woman, her tongue cooled by the mist of her brow,

-Senorita

The man gestures emphatically and saint Maria just smiles. She tells him to get out. The heat sits stagnant throughout as I sit on the orange countertop. Maria smiles at the man and again, she tells him to leave. She says it in such a kind way. Not at all like the girl who left those stains on my sheets. I sit on the orange countertop and swing my feet, pull out a cigarette and light it. Maria sees me and says,

-No smoking. Go outside,

I smile and point to the ceiling fan above me.

-This fan is not working Maria

-No smoking

-But this fan does not work

-Go outside

-I can't go outside, Maria, it's so hot. Just look at me. I'm not well. I need to stay here and smoke my cigarette under this fan, which does not work, by the way

She walks over to where I'm sitting on the orange countertop and says,

-Shoo, shoo, go outside

-But Maria, this fan does not work, and I am so very tired, and I love you Maria, I really am so in love with you

-Shoo

-But my sheets are not dry

-Shoo. go outside. No smoking

Maria is so sweet, not like that girl who left those stains on my sheets. Saint Maria.

-Ok Maria. I'll go outside. But your fan will still not work

-Shoo

I sit outside and smoke my cigarette in the shade of a tree off fourteenth street. The wind blows gently and tiny green buds fall from leaves above. They fall on my shoulders like epaulettes and I finish my smoke to walk back inside. The old woman with soot on her face is singing and playing the harmonica.

My sheets are still not dry and the old woman launches into a rendition of the happy birthday song, but she replaces all the words with her own made up language. Her lips are cracked white. Her tongue rolls around behind yellow teeth as she belts out the chorus.