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URSULA GROSSMAN'S FIRST NIGHT AT PUEBLO SPRINGS NURSING HOME

by Julian Fish

Sleep slips from these soap-waxed hands as I sweat into the dawn of my last living summer: we sour on smoking patios, pining for fatter days, drawing breath with tar-thick lungs in the volcanic spill of cement. Skin assumes the dust, and in the sun turns gold, rots purple in drooping mood, returning earthward. And everybody's lonely, everybody's horny. The mercy of a lover's shadow is somewhere on the frost-dewed shelf of memory, too high for arthritic reach. Here, on summer eves, when hot and humid indulge their rampant affair, disciples of season resume worship on motorized chairs, studying more sultry gospels in paperback: dog-eared saints with prayers for every shade of solitude. A Chinese man in silk shorts tells me he is addicted to the chocolate pudding. No, I say, no appetite of mine will survive this heat—geriatric footwear marks the end of itching passion. O, sleep! You were once in the gardens, the givenness of the harvest. In the tomatoes, in the thousand-veined tomatoes, the throbbing expanse of the watermelon, the paltry stench of the tomatoes, dying. I call it suburban luck: the twisted comedy that brings you to a place like this, where folks are killed by learning to ask less of life.