

OH BABY



FLASH FICTIONS & PROSE POEMS

KIM CHINQUEE

Selections from

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Flash Fictions and Prose Poems
by Kim Chinquee

RAVENNA PRESS

February 2008

Available now from

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or write to Ravenna Press
2910 E. 57th Ave., Ste. 10B-310
Spokane, WA 99223

ISBN: 978-0-9791921-8-0

LCCN: 2008920241

Cover Design: Pier Rodelon

January Usual

After the fourth glass of Merlot, she told him it was over. She was sure of it, there at Motel 6. It was 30-degrees, oddly warm. In Chicago, they'd slept at the Hilton. They'd walked down Michigan, holding hands and watching mimes. Now, at Motel 6 he woke her, packing, saying he had to fix his heater. She told him she was sorry. He said he knew. She said, no, I'm really sorry. She said that a lot. He brushed her cheek, looked at her, said, Honey. He put their bags in his trunk. She got in the passengers', and he drove them back to his house where they waited for the repairman.

Bar Scene

The night before, I'd seen him performing, spreading his fingers on the keyboard. I looked at the Band-Aid glowing from his elbow. I asked him what he wanted.

“Sex,” he said.

“I'm not a prostitute,” I said.

He said, “Oh?”

Entomology

He gave me fudge. I almost sat on it. He said, “That’s for you.”

I’d asked him out, saying, “What’s up, Valentine?”

We went to this place and drank beer and talked. He was in training. My friend had introduced us. She didn’t love him back anymore.

We ate pizza and sipped. I’d run marathons, but my last one was a sinker. He studied bugs. He said he lacked confidence.

Ferris Wheel

She was with another man. They'd been in Mexico. She'd looked up at the sun. She tried to find solutions.

They would flutter. Touching, swimming, laughing. He would tell her she was a girl. She was a woman.

They sat next to one another on the airplane. It appeared to be going straight.

Garden

She sat outside and waited, smelling all the Spring, hearing his saxophone, sipping.

He came back with his crystal bowl. She took a cherry and put it in his mouth, watched him wrap his lips around it. "Mmm," he said.

She saw his face on the wall.

Wishbook

She sits on the carpet, cutting out of catalogs: cribs and pets and houses, a swing set for the yard. People. She cuts out of the Wishbook, making her inventions: Ken and his wife Barbie, their children. She spreads the households on the floor, the cut-out items: furniture and bedspreads, hampers, trampolines and treadmills. She pretends the people can afford things, caring for their children.

She cuts them. She tells them to be positive.

History

The place was Southern England, with green and sheep and rabbits. The base wasn't big in size, but it was worthy and important, in World War II and history. And then there was Desert Storm, but Desert Storm was over.

I was twenty-two. After I arrived and started to unpack and my son started to explore the empty drawers, I gave him a bottle and retired to bed. I awoke to knocking on the door, reminded, and answered to a pumpkin and another kid in a Dalmatian costume. "Trick or treat!" they said, singing.

There were just five of us: the physician, the desk clerk, and two perverts, male nurse aides, and then me, the lab technician. I ordered equipment, supplies, set up quality control. Took down Desert Storm leftovers. When the people left before, they left hard, and now junk was everywhere.

My husband was a lab tech just like me. He was at that base for Desert Storm while I collected blood in Mississippi; when he came home, he came back different, which made me wish he'd stay gone. He acted surprised when I got orders. I ditched him and took my orders. I flew a C5 over, trying to shush my son with suffocating hugs, wax earplugs and a bottle.

I heard stuff, found stuff, ran into women on base and I wondered how he knew them. They laughed and giggled, wearing no bras and thin shirts. I tried to concentrate on work and on my baby. When my boy laughed, he laughed

like his father. At work, I found old charts with his initials: documentations, daily checks, temperatures and values.

Now everyone was sick. It was sinuses and viruses. When I didn't have lab work, I checked in patients. I penetrated people's histories. People will tell you anything.

I soaked up every detail. After we closed up, I went to the bunker and dusted out the cobwebs. I unfolded an old wheelchair, hearing it creak. I didn't smoke, but found an old pack of Camels and sat on the chair and lit up, thinking of my husband's old butts. I put the smoke out in a plastic spit tray.

While the bricks with which Chinquee constructs her fictions—failed or failing relationships, childhood friendships, the intricacies of family life—are not uncommon, the architecture she creates with them is rare indeed: stories now full of light, now somber, now opening the reader’s eyes to an utterly new space.



“Kim Chinquee has the dead-eye aim and the precision with language that makes her stories hit the mark again and again. They explore the jangling nervous system beneath the ordinary surface of the world, and all the irony, shock, sadness, and hope contained therein. Pitch-perfect writing broadcast on a very real, and wonderful, frequency.”

—Jean Thompson

“One of the most thrilling things about reading Kim Chinquee’s beautifully tiny stories is the great leaps that she takes between sentences—making the reader leap with her into a world of brief glimpses and bits of dialogue that are full of narrative implications, a world of perfectly chosen details that render the understated emotion of a character’s whole life.”

—Michael Kimball

“Kim Chinquee’s little stories are like Giacometti’s sculptures: she has pared away all the excess until only the essence remains. If you’re like me, you’ll get to the end of this collection and immediately start reading it again. Months later I find these stories still resonating in my memory—a phrase here, an image there, a character in search of something else. Go ahead, take this book home with you. You won’t be disappointed.”

—Robert Alexander

“A wonderful debut collection. Chinquee writes with such precision it stuns how much she gets into a small space. *Oh Baby* will break your heart in one hundred ways, just like the 800 page gorilla you didn’t read last week.”

—Frederick Barthelme

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Cover Design: Pier Rodelon
Author Photograph: Christos Tsitsaros