

An Orange Morning

By Logan Z. Hill

For the boys.

It was four in the morning and the musak version of Tori Amos hummed somewhere behind the harsh glare of the Denny's phosphorescent lights. The General, so named for his German military jacket, was intensely stirring his fourth packet of sugar into his coffee. Marc watched him from across the table with a familiar smirk that revealed both his mild disgust at the prolific use of sweetener and the steady strum of an hour old Jack Daniel buzz. The General jerked his head up as the lights from a car flared through the half closed blinds of the restaurant.

"Don't worry," Marc said and tested his black coffee against his lips, "there wasn't a helicopter. If they don't send up a bird, they can't catch me."

The General looked back at Marc then down to his coffee and began pouring a fifth packet of sugar. "Jesus you're lucky," he was whispering low over his coffee as he stirred, "we're lucky. Lucky we got off the freeway and there was that parking garage."

"Shit, the cops around here are stupid. Only thing they're good at is harassing the Mexicans and finding a black man in the Mission Viejo haystack. Hell. Even if they could find me, they couldn't catch me. Not in the El Camino."

"You sure they won't see it. I mean, parked out there?" The General looked back out the window.

"Fuck no. Between the restaurant and the dumpster? They'd have to pull into the parking lot and stop just right to see it."

Relaxing, the General straightened his back out and leaned up against the booth. He sipped his coffee and then looked up at Marc. "That was a fucked up party."

"No shit. Every time I go to a party up there, there's some asshole that's got to start shit. Always some rich Costa Mesa fuck that thinks he owns everyone that walks in the door."

"Why don't you bring *your* gun?"

"Fuck that. I'd be just as bad as that prick tonight..."

"I bet you broke his wrist, I can't believe that shit."

Marc's hand firmly gripped his cup, "Nobody pulls that shit. Not on me. What'd he expect? A girl like that? You can't just leave her at a party alone like that, she'll..."

"I saw him in the bedroom, he's was doin' speed with some other guys."

Marc shook his head, "dumb fuck. He'll be lucky if all I did was break his wrist and nose."

"Did you actually get her number?"

Marc fished a piece of paper out of his leather jacket and handed it over to the General. "No shit," he took the paper and looked at it, "Alisa, eh? When you gonna call her?"

Marc swallowed his coffee, "I don't need that shit. If she's stupid enough to hook up with an asshole like that, I don't want her." The General looked back down at the paper and began folding it up to hand back to his friend. "You can have her."

The General laughed. "No, no. No, thanks. That's all I need. Her gun-toting boyfriend thinking that it was me who broke his nose. Pacifists have a nasty way of dying when guns are involved."

"Shit. You'll have to get over that. Every fucker and his mother around here is looking to beat the shit out of someone, the more pacifistic the better. You better watch out or people'll think you're a commie."

"Was one once," the General smiled.

"Fuck me," Marc said laughing, "Seventeen and already you're an ex-commie. What? Moscow too cold for you, or something?"

The General laughed back, "No. I just figured that there was no way to change the system. Not this system, anyway. Everyone's already too comfortable. Everyone, even my dad, thinks that it will all get better if they just work harder. The only communists left are the teachers and even they're disillusioned. Fuck it. Fuck communism."

"So what are you then, Socialist?"

"Fuck no. If you're going to change, change big," The General took a sip from his coffee, dragging out the moment.

"Capitalist?"

"Nope," he smacked his lips and swallowed, "Feudalist. Old school, man, old school."

Marc burst out, nearly spitting his coffee across the table, “So what then, where are you going to set up your kingdom?”

“Hey. I’m a realist. I’m not one of the elites. I figure I’ll find some lord and offer my allegiance.”

“And who the fuck’s going to take your allegiance?”

“Don’t know yet. I figure after high school I’ll move up north. Lot’s of weirdos up there, one of them silicon fucks has to think they’re a lord of their domain. They’ll need knights and serfs an’ shit.”

“So you’re just a capitalist in feudalist clothing then?”

“No. Fuck the money. I just want the protection. It’s all about the benefits. My dad’s freelance and has to pay out of pocket. He sends me and my sister to the dentist, but he never goes. Says crowns are too expensive. Fuck. I don’t ever want to have to worry about my teeth.”

“That why you hang out with me, protection?”

“Hey, it’s easy being a pacifist with a superpower on your side.” Marc laughed then downed the last of his coffee. The General looked at the clock above the front counter, “It’s almost five.” Marc nodded and they started to pull money from their pockets. A plastic bag dropped from the General’s coat, the green contents glistening in the Denny’s lighting.

“Shit, man. You aren’t paying with that, put it away,” Marc said in a harsh whisper.

The General let a few expletives fly as he quickly bent over and stuffed the bag back in his pocket. He smiled as he straightened up, “bet a half ounce would have went over *real* well with the cops.”

“Shut up about the cops,” Marc said as he left enough to cover six coffees.

Outside, as Marc was opening his door, the General looked over the roof of the El Camino and asked, “so, what are you, then?”

“Fuck. All a person’s got is himself. I’m just a man,” the General raised an eyebrow as if to question him but Marc continued, “just a man. But,” he said with a wink, “I’m a fan of man.”