

and in the sunset cowboy jesus rides away

by Chris Wong Sick Hong – <http://www.chriswsh.com>

Cleavage. Immediately. All her shirts show it and it's not like I try to look. It's just there. Everywhere. It's not unattractive cleavage, framed by deliciously pale breasts; more familiar like braille, prominent and a rougher birthmark wandering into the darkness beneath fabric. It reminds me of the RAF experiments with LSD.

They gave six crack paratroop squads rations for two days, a map, all the acid they wanted, and instructions to find a barn visible on a hilltop sixty yards away. Four squads got lost, one ended up naked, and a man died later of complications from a broken leg. He fell out of a tree.

I picture him oblivious, crippled and grinning, wondering why his hands had turned into sunflowers. Losing himself in the crevices between the seeds as they leap for his eyes. It's hard, pretending things are what they are. Humorless. Dry.

Out of that darkness something like hope emerges, that she's more than what I remember, is waiting to scold me for not looking her in the eyes. I miss seeing them open, see them everywhere, blue piercing through the clouds at noon and welling up from the river at night. She loved it here in the swaying hills and I don't have the heart to tell her it's gone:

Marigolds in the garden to keep the rabbits away, hummingbird feeders, and always the smell of earth. Cloying, sticky...wonderful I make myself believe. She loved flowers, shrubs, berries, despite watery eyes I'm going to love them too.

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I see her everywhere, eyes closed face serene, hands clasped on her chest. I should feel guilty for saying nothing, just staring before they closed the lid and put her down. But all I could think, all I can think, as the shovelfuls rained down and others cried, was I've been there.

I've been there.