

KATA ALVIDREZ

IMAGE _____ (*For Cristie — 1954-1999*) _____

She had grown up in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where all the boys were short, their dark brown skin and wavy black hair contrasting with her pale yellow hair and light blue eyes. She imagined them lying next to her in the shade of the patios where lovers lounged in the hot afternoons, but she felt overgrown, a woman in a horror movie, hiding her thick forearms and muscular legs under loose blouses and billowy cotton skirts. She felt anchored to the hard-packed dirt, like a telephone pole on the flat highway, as she dreamed of moving to California where the men were tall and blond and where she could finally look up into someone's eyes. She dreamed of making babies.

When the cancer came, it fed first on her breast, then on her lung, and finally on her liver. The chemo brought on menopause, but she still dreamed of a lover's arms, wanting them touch her, to hold her tight, but she couldn't even look at her own scarred chest without self-loathing.

She told herself that she was fat and ugly. She hated the cancer but despised her desecrated body more than the disease that chewed away at her organs like old rust. Late at night, she cursed herself and wished she were young again for just awhile.

At 40, nearing death, she began to remember herself as a beautiful young woman, an Amazon of mythical proportions and delicate features, the girl that every boy in Santa Fe wished to fondle. And in her imagination, she let those Mexican boys kiss her after all, their tongues exploring her delicate mouth and tender nipples until she moaned with the simple pleasure of being desirable. ❖