

April

by Linda Simoni-Wastila

Nikko pulled the grey wool blanket closer, but it was too thin, too threadbare, to keep the damp from seeping through. His arm throbbed, a hotness that pulsed in waves. He knew he would see the red welts, swollen tracks to his heart, if he rolled up his sleeve, so he didn't. On the stoop above him, Josh moaned, one of his dreams taking hold. He dreamed a lot on the street, but not Nikko. When Nikko did collapse into sleep, he crashed hard; dreams were for the day time, for when buildings and people emerged from shadow, easily seen.

Nikko shivered. Damn, better not have a fever. If he did, Josh would make him go to the clinic, and then they'd ask questions. Josh, always practical, but no good at lying. Truly a minister's son. Nikko talked for them both, got them out of and into crazy situations, got them their dope, their beds, their money. It was Nikko's idea to head west.

He hoped today was May. April sucked, they'd headed up to Seattle because everyone said April had the best weather, but all they faced was a thin grey wall of drizzle. Sometime this past week he turned seventeen, along with Gemma, his sister. He didn't feel seventeen, he felt thirty, old and worn. Back home, his mother would have fixed him a special meal, usually ribs, baby backs charred from grilling, and the next night Gemma would pick, some girly meal like shrimp salad or crab cakes. But he was far from Maryland, as far as he could go without falling into the Pacific. He thought often of the rollicking waves, of being pulled under, of being weightless and senseless, and as he imagined the swells caressing him, he remembered early mornings at the kitchen table, he and Gem gnawing on toast, not talking, just taking in the quiet before their mother woke but after their father left for the day, the stillness between them, the peace, and then without speaking they would load up their backpacks and head for school.

Josh slept, oblivious to traffic thrumming on the Viaduct above them, to the shuffling of the other kids waking from under boxes and blankets, to the sun edging orange over the skyline. Exhaustion swept over Nikko, a wave, and all he wanted was an instant at that kitchen table, with his sister in the safe dark, but it was morning, time to move, again.

