

# My Old Man Was Always on the Lam

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## Ghosts of the Horse

My father coaxes my mother to Chi-Town  
The lure of easy money making salads  
At a hotel. My mother can't turn it down  
With a daughter to feed, a habit to rid

But my father is being a man, the kind  
Who expects sex in exchange for dinner  
My mother's changed, she's back in her right mind  
My father tries to push the issue further

He can't manhandle and manipulate her  
Like his pimp days using her to feed his fix  
Those numbed memories come rushing back to her  
Ghosts of the horse coursing through her veins for kicks

She leaves her suitcase and everything behind  
She wishes she could take her life and rewind

## I Spent the First Years of My Life in the Arms of Firemen

I spent the first years of my life  
In the arms of firemen,  
Drawer-less with a T-shirt  
And no shoes, watching flames  
Lick their way out our  
Windows, neighbors gawking  
At the wild late night  
Entertainment usually  
Reserved for the evening  
News, children climbing  
Onto fire trucks like a  
Sandlot jungle gym never found  
In their park-less South Bronx slum.  
Firemen carrying me through  
Railroad flats of smoke and flame  
Down narrow flights of rickety  
Stairs where kids and teenagers  
Kissed and pants rubbed  
After school or during daytime  
Hooky hours where no one  
Was around except construction  
Workers and mailmen.  
I spent my first few years  
Going from apartment  
To apartment escaping smoke  
And flames ignited by uncles  
Who fell asleep drunk and  
High with cigarettes dangling  
From their bottom lips,  
Who fell asleep with their  
Clothes and shoes on as if they  
Knew they'd have to make a  
Mad dash to the door while the rest  
Of us slept in other rooms, smoke-  
Less and secure, wakened by instinct,  
Scents and hysterical cries, frantically  
Making our way out into curious crowds  
Staring up with a strange sense of awe  
And pleasure at water hoses and  
Ax handles smashing through  
Each window, staring up at the  
Big flames and black smoke  
Smearing toward the sky.

## Alfie's

Early morning bar  
Room full of white drunks, their eyes  
Wet & daring, glare  
At my father & me—two

Black spic birds the wind  
Blew in—come in from the  
Cold for change of a  
Dollar. They turn from their

Barstools like *Wild Kingdom* lizards in  
Time-lapsed photography. Their eyes say,  
*Well well well... What do we have here?* smile like the  
Grins found in the black & white photos

Of lynchings. My father, unable to undo the  
Knot of memory, to return the smile without  
Giving himself away, does not bother to  
Speak. Instead he holds a dollar

Up at the barkeep. Before my father  
Could speak, the bartender says,  
*We don't give change here.*  
What the hell are you

Doing here? is how my  
Eight year-old mind imagines he takes it,  
For he rushes me out of there as if the bus is  
About to pull up.

Before my father could  
Turn, I narrow my eyes at them,  
Wave my little brown  
Fist in the air long

Enough for my father to  
Grab me by my bony  
Arm & yank me out  
Of there, as if to say, *What's*

*The matter with you—  
Are you crazy?*