

# Cool Limbo

Michael Montlack

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## At Tamika's

In the tight kitchenette, petite like her mother,  
whose wide face was heavy with frown lines,  
rice and beans simmered but never boiled  
on the back burner 24/7—a beacon, the house's pulse.  
She didn't drive or speak English.

Doorbells panicked her:

Girl Scout? Mailman?

Jehovah's Witness?

Or me—that Jewish boy

who rode the bus with Tamika, steered her away  
from the heavy metal kids  
and offered eighth-grade Spanish:

*Hola, Señora Santos.*

*Donde esta Tamika?*

She'd smile—a vacation for her frown.

Her dental work shoddy by Long Island standards,  
she was ashamed,

the neighborhood's only Puerto Rican lady.

We'd sit on the living room's gold velvet sofas  
and practice rolling my rrrrrrrs

while upstairs Tamika added more tears to her jeans,  
rearranged the six silver studs lining her left ear,  
powdered away her olive complexion.

*Come on, Michael, she'd call before reaching the bottom step.*

*Let's bolt—in no rush but always desperate to leave  
the screen door behind us  
before her mother had the chance  
to say Adios.*

## On Castro

You might be stopped and commanded  
at 3 am—to help sift the curbside debris  
for the rhinestoned Mr. Potato Head earring  
some breathless Chinese drag queen—Ida Ho—  
dislodged during her demure attempt to re-bouf  
her bouffant, sashaying home in platform thongs  
from yet another benefit for dyslexic children  
of Neo-Buddhist-Jew dykes on bikes.

This may be the same revolutionary corner  
on which Harvey Milk started his business—  
down the block from Moby Dick's and Jackhammers,  
where sagging gray men won't surrender  
their black leather hot pants, admiring from stools  
glossy be-glittered kids aimed for clubs uphill  
or in the Haight—those boyish girls and girlie boys  
passing like a sequin storm as you squat and pan  
—some drunken drafted gold digger.

But when you discover that sandy earring,  
Ida'll be so grateful—her outfit again complete.  
*My hero, she'll sigh. You saved him. Now  
his partner won't be alone.* And neither will you  
or anyone there on Castro—never quiet or closed  
to any wandering freak or square, native or foreigner—  
and always just a little more American  
than America is willing to admit.

## boy witch

for three Halloweens  
your mother, beautiful enough  
to halt your old man's remarks  
with a simple eye roll,  
would allow, even encourage it:  
buying the green face paint,  
sewing and then letting down  
the hems each year herself—

had your plastic wand worked:  
perhaps a daughter for your mother?  
or a sister for you  
instead of two older brothers.  
maybe a potion to keep you  
from outgrowing them,  
some spell to stop them  
from expecting tackle football.

but at seven there was no more  
fabric to let out—and maybe  
too little charm left in her eyes.  
what a miserable cowboy you made.  
an Indian would have been excuse  
to paint your face again.

but no, that year your mother  
revealed just how little power  
she held in the world, and you  
realized how little protection  
you could offer her, even with  
that shiny new dime-store magnum  
your father put into your hand.



## Lounge-adelic

lavender lava lampery line lush lobbies  
'luminating local long-winded loafers,  
    lascivious lovers, lewd louses...  
lanky limp limbs leaning loosely lopsided lavish leopard loveseats  
lugubrious loners licking lightly lotioned lower lips,  
    lukewarm lagers, liquors  
luscious lime libation leftovers lining lacquered linoleum ledges  
leather, lace, lamé, linen...  
Levis, leotards, lapels, labels (Lagerfeld, Lauren, Laurent)  
layering listless legions—  
loquacious liberals, lipstick lesbians, literati,  
    losers, ladykillers, lambs  
lollygagging lawlessly, lingering laborless  
letting lax language & limitless lazy laughter  
lift  
    lamentable losses, latent longings...  
leavening lackadaisical libidos  
luring lusty...leers, lays, lunges, liaisons  
lassoing (if lucky) loaded Lords/Ladies leading 'legendary' lives  
looming legitimate, large, leonine, luxurious  
likely lapsing later  
—lent less lenient light—  
Lilliputian, ludicrous  
lost, leaden  
Lucite