



# SCRIPT

VOLUME FOUR SPRING NINETEEN NINETY THREE DOLLARS

K A R D E N D A M M

*Hendon's Place*

Breath is short,  
crumpled inside me  
like a failed test.  
The brook is silent  
as the raven forest.

Breathe again,  
deeper than  
a diamond mine.  
Cling to an elm  
dusted by the leavings of five  
hundred years.

Darkness knuckles  
me against itself.  
The dark bloodies my wrist.  
The wind melts  
my bones.

S C R I P T



## Patchwork

Red and white blocks  
triangular patterns darting  
from the center.

I folded it neatly at the foot  
of my bed and

when the cold came  
I drew it up around my  
face,  
tucked my toes under  
its folds.

Two months ago  
a woman offered me 300 dollars  
for my prize.

"You must put this away for your grandchildren.

Do not wash it

Do not dry it

Do not pull it over  
your bed.

You are young,  
you do not understand  
the worth of such things."

Uncle Hersh had many  
women,

one with hands pricked  
a hundred times,

cracked from the dry heat  
of the fire

where she labored  
cold West Virginia nights.

Uncle

You lived so far away,

but holidays were our time.

Fourth of July meant

silver buckets and purple  
fingers

Blackberry lips that laughed  
when you sang me old plantation songs,  
stuffed my cheeks  
with berries,  
bounced me on your knee  
crooning, "yum-yum, bud-blum!"

Tonight

I gather my cherry blossom treasure  
close around my face.

Already there is an ink stain  
where I fell asleep

studying

and a small tear along a seam  
where my niece and nephew

pushed curious fingers through  
to feel the soft quilting.

It will be a tattered thing  
that I pass on to them,

but in the night

they will hear

a different voice than

the voice I hear.

They will press their cheeks to  
the threads

and hear me.

flute gleaming brilliantly in his hand and felt Guilt clutching at his throat.

alked back to the one-legged man and handed him back the ivory flute. The man  
d the precious instrument in his arms and smothered it with motherly kisses. Tears  
g from the eyes of the thief.

here can I find an ivory flute like this? To steal yours was wrong, but after hearing  
et melodies and feeling its magic in my fingertips . . . Oh, how might I come by  
flute?"

ate-player looked up at him. "Do you really want one?" he asked.  
than anything in the world!" cried the traveler.  
hat sings like the swallows, gleams like the whitest dove, and feels like goose down  
t your lips?"

Yes!"  
e-legged flute-player sighed and reached inside his coat. "Then here you are," he  
nd he revealed a long, razor-sharp dagger.

't understand," said the traveler.  
a moment he did, for with a violent swipe the one-legged flute-player struck off the  
er's own leg just below the knee. The man howled in pain as his gushed out upon  
ad.

e it from your own bone as I have from mine!" said the one-legged man. And  
at another word, he picked up his ivory flute and played another delicate air.

S C R I P T

Grace doesn't mind working the swing shift as much as the other nurses do. The  
only thing she has to miss from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. is feeding her cat who is rarely ever  
awake. It is frustrating having to pack a dinner every night for work. It's not like packing  
a lunch with a sandwich and chips. If she packed that she would be eating the same thing  
for lunch and dinner. It's a good thing the hospital has a microwave or else she would be  
sitting in the break room every swing shift spooning out cold soup from a can. She has to  
eat canned food on her dinner breaks. It's not like she has all the time in the world to  
make chicken divan or something.

Tonight Grace has to go to the Garcia's home. The hospital always assigns her  
to check up on the elderly people that the hospital knows by  
first name. She doesn't really like dealing with old people all the time. They complain  
about pains all over their body. Grace thinks that sometimes old people purposely fall  
down just so they can go to the hospital and get pampered. Her grandmother was like  
that, and her mom is on her way to that  
kind of life. Just the other day, Grace's mom was complaining about a cramp in her  
fingernail she wanted to have x-rayed.

Tonight's old person is Mr. Garcia who was just in for surgery on his knee. He  
fell down the basement stairs getting jars for Mrs. Garcia to can her homemade salsa in.  
She had to pull him up the stairs for herself, all 95 pounds of her.

Mr. Garcia had recovered quicker than most elderly patients and insisted on  
going home in a day and a half. The hospital wanted to check up on him to make sure he  
was resting his knee and eating the salsa, rather than trying to help make it.

Mrs. Garcia was always in good health but she was very old, eight years older  
than Mr. Garcia. She loved to run around doing things for her husband. He could be  
pretty particular sometimes. It used to bother her, but now she likes to humor him  
because it makes him happy. She spoiled him while he was in the hospital by bringing  
him fishing magazines, chips and salsa, and his walkman radio. She also included his  
favorite cassette of the guy who plays the pan flute. She even fidgeted with his remote-  
control bed for twenty minutes until he felt comfortable. His favorite medication was  
definitely the salsa. With sweat dribbling on his forehead, Mr. Garcia loved to challenge  
his wife to make it hotter every time.

Grace gathers only a few medical supplies for a check up and drives over to the  
Garcia's. Their house is one in a long row of small houses on a busy street near the  
cinemas.

She likes the drive over because she has to go through four different neighbor-  
hoods. Children are always outside in their yards doing something child-like. Today is  
very hot and Grace has no air-conditioning in her Impala. The vinyl is sticky and the  
burning steering wheel can only be held by the palms of her hands. A brother and a sister

S C R I P T



are standing by their above-ground blue swimming pool, crying. A dog is drinking out of it.

On the other side of the street, a mother in the yard is putting matchbox cars, Legos, Tonka trucks, and Barbies into a wagon.

"Carlos Garcia! Quit playing ping pong, you'll wear a hole in the wall. The nurse will be here any second!" said the wife.

"All right already," said Mr. Garcia. "What's the big deal as long as I sit down before she gets here?"

"She's a nurse and she'll know from just looking at you that you haven't been resting," she warned.

"Okay, I'll sit down," he said, hopping over to the sofa bed.

Mrs. Garcia asked him to put his knee up on a pillow and wait for the nurse. She made some lemonade to share during Carlos' check-up.

They weren't sure which nurse was coming to check up on Carlos this time.

They didn't like Grace as well as they liked some of the other nurses. But if Grace was the nurse, they just planned on not saying much to her in hopes that she would leave as soon as she had done her duties.

One time Grace called Mr. Garcia "Old Yeller" because she said he howled like a dog from his hospital bed when he wanted a nurse's help. Carlos just called for a nurse like normal people, he thought. He didn't like to use those call buttons. Yelling down the hall was quicker. A nurse would always come right away so he would stop his racket. They didn't like Grace that much.

Mr. Garcia appeased his urge to play ping pong by watching a tennis match on cable TV. Mrs. Garcia tasted the lemonade with a wooden spoon. It seemed like it wasn't sweet enough, but she had a cold and couldn't tell, so she let Mr. Garcia taste.

He put his quivering lips around the wood spoon and yelled, "How can I tell from that little bit? Get me a glass of it."

Mrs. Garcia really wanted to know how it tasted so she humored him and got him a tall, cold glass of her potion and went back into the kitchen.

He sipped it and they both said, "Oh!" it was too sour for him. She was clenching her heart staring at the floor, as if she were waiting for the linoleum to move.

He called into the kitchen and said, "Why did you say 'oh', you can't taste anything with that stuffy nose, can you?"

"Carlos, I don't feel good," she said. "What do you mean?" he said. "You never get sick."

"My heart hurts, it feels stuck, I have to lay down. I'll be fine if I can just lay

down."

Mr. Garcia knew there would no more pampering today. Even if it might be Grace, Carlos was glad that a nurse was on the way. Mrs. Garcia's dark skin turned yellowish-white and hot. She had felt heart pains before, but they never stayed like this one. She tried to get on the sofa bed.

"I suppose you want me to move over," he kidded, hoping to distract her from some of the pain.

A car pulled up in their driveway and stopped.

Grace was using the rear view mirror to check for lipstick on her teeth.

It took forever from the time the engine stopped until someone got out of the car. Carlos obediently shoved a pillow under his knee and waited for a knock at the door.

Grace stepped on the Garcia's muddy welcome mat and wiped off her white shoes with peeling rubber sole. "I wonder what kind of stories crippled Old Yeller has for me today," she said to herself as she rapped on the splintered door. "Boy, I really need new shoes."

"Who is it?" yelled Mr. Garcia, as if he wasn't expecting anyone.

"Grace, from St. Mary's Hospital," she called through the hard wood.

"Come in."

The house felt still as Grace twisted the doorknob and peeked around the edge of the door. Mr. and Mrs. Garcia were both lying on the sofa bed holding hands. His wife was so pale Grace figured that Mrs. Garcia must have just seen a ghost drink a ten gallon bottle of her best salsa.

"How's that bum knee of yours, Mr. Garcia? Grace chimed in her cheery nurse voice.

Carlos stared at his staring wife and squeezed her dripping palm.

"Do you want to roll up your sweats so I can take a look at those stitches?" asked Grace.

He did not answer her. He only touched his wife's wrinkled face gently, as if his thumb might smudge her.

"I'm glad you have been putting your knee up, Mr. Garcia, but I'm afraid it has made all of that red blood of yours flow to some other parts of your body, if you know what I mean. Now, Mr. Garcia, I know your wife is pretty, but you can admire her later. Are we ready now?" Grace was getting impatient.

Grace grabbed the stiff man's ankle, set it in her lap and hastily pushed his sweat pants over his knee. "You old people are so hard to get along with," she mumbled under her breath. Mrs. Garcia knocked over a lamp as Grace was tracing her finger over the stitches. "Whoopsy, did we drop something?" said Grace, without turning to see the damage.



"Would you please help her," asked the husband.

Grace turned to help Mrs. Garcia pick up the pieces of broken light bulb. "Did you just get back from a little jog," asked the nurse.

Mrs. Garcia managed to squeeze out a quick "no."

Then, as if he had jerked out of sleep from a falling dream, Mr. Garcia jumped straight up on the bed. The man who wouldn't get up and use his crutches for a drink of water in the hospital hopped over to the freezer to get something cold to put on his wife's burning face.

Carlos took out a half-gallon of macadamea nut ice cream, flopped himself at her side and softly held the cool carton on her cheek.

After seeing Mrs. Garcia feel some relief from the cold and watching her rub her chest, Grace knew that hse had needed more for this visit than the mere tweezers and scissors she had brought for Carlos' knee. She called the hospital for an ambulance.

Mrs. Garcia had suffered from a minor heart attack. In Grace's three year nursing career with the elderly, Grace had never seen anything worse than a man who couldn't aim correctly into the toilet. There was also one lady who would eat ten pounds of carrots a week, making her skin turn orange. That patient lived in fear that she was turning into a pumpkin. But, that had been the worst of it. Grace had always known the elderly to be preoccupied with their own little illnesses. Even though a cold carton of ice cream was not going to save Mrs. Garcia's life, Grace had watched Mr. Garcia forget about his own problems and spend time trying to make his wife feel comfortable, just like a nurse would.

Mrs. Garcia was in the hospital for two weeks, enough time for Grace to come up with her own batch of homemade salsa. One Friday night, Mr. Garcia was reading the comics to his wife and they were playing with the remote control bed when Grace came in for the nightly check-up.

"Hello," said Grace. "I've been working on a recipe for some salsa and I would be honored if you would taste it and give me your opinion."

Carlos happened to have a bag of corn chips at her bed side and dipped one in the red jar.

"Not bad," he said as the pores in his forehead began to perspire. "it could be hotter, though."

S C R I P T