

Marshall Street Marilyn

By *Lucia M. Perillo*

On the Marshall Street Poster of Marilyn Monroe

I go by you every day, White Lady, I go by.
In the window of the Pakistani's headshop, you stand
over the hookahs and toe rings, Zigzag and EZ Wider.
Bent toward me in your black-net jet-bead
skin-tight nothing, your breasts don't spare me anything
except the nipples. Those you keep for yourself,
the ruby quarters you'll let drop in no one's slot,
while your hands hang palm-outward like a begged
question, gimmee-gimmee-gimmying around your knees.

Me, I sweep guts in the butcher shop next door,
where the flesh is skinned and flayed and swings
on hooks, slowly in the window. The blood
gets washed down drains, but the smell lingers.
For lunch, a dozen chicken wings from Sal's Birdland,
and I sit on the broken wall at front row center,
watching you across the street, how you eye the cars
laying their cataracts of soot. My teeth
gnaw at hollow bones while I think of angels.

Like these dumb clucks, our lives are spent
in cages that have made our bodies thick, useless
for sex or flight. Instead they hook us up to tubes
and suck us dry: I could run my lips
across your glass pane and still leave no trace.
White Lady, Little Sheba, Madonna of the Snows—
your hair is the color of blank paper or heroin
or a clean set of sheets, the nostrils
and lashes black as Chinese words
on the ricepaper of your face. At seventeen
you learned to smile with your lips half-open,
your tongue paused in the hollow of your mouth—
and I can't keep my eyes off it, like my own tongue
working on a broken tooth. Each day this street
goes black then white then black again and nothing
seems to change. You're twenty-five to my nineteen
and my pocket's full of change too easily
spent. Oh my white pearl,
my platinum timepiece, my no-rust Amazon—
your being dead now might just be a good thing
'cause if you weren't dead you'd probably just be old.

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Glowing punks were clamped between our teeth
as we waited for the dark to turn
our itchy summer skin a cooler blue.
Waited for the fireworks to shoot
from the bridge that arched the wide mouth
of the Tappan Zee. There a lucky man
would be sticking butts of rockets
in a pail of sand: The Shooting Lotus,
Fox and Hen, The Fire Buddha With Report . . .
In the night beyond our dimming vision,
he would touch his punk to the fuse
like God waking Adam in the Sistine Chapel,
only backwards, because he was a man
and the rocket was god. Five days ago
American boys in Skyhawk bombers
had raked the night above Haiphong.
And as we strained the opaque silence
for the whine of bombs and engines overhead,
we could have sworn we felt them coming,
the thrill of gory havoc in our bones.
When the starbursts finally appeared,
we saw cities burning all across the sky.
For half an hour, the rockets flared
and ricocheted so loud our jaws ached.
When it was over, my brother set down
a smuggled "Bombing Plane" on top a rock,
lit it and threatened to push one of us
into the conflagration. But instead of roaring
upward with a trail of sparks and gases,
the rocket coughed and wallowed in the sedge.
Far away, on terraces of grand, colonial hotels
boys not much older than ourselves
were drinking beer, recounting victories
while the limbless wounded jeered and crawled
like crabs across the tile. The soldiers
must have kept their eyes fixed on their own
white faces, the way we locked our sights
onto the pale moon of my brother's face—
looking duped and cheated, in the end afraid
to see what lay there hissing on the ground.

► **LUCIA MARIA PERILLO** grew up in New York City and attended SU's Creative Writing Program, earning her master's degree in 1986. Her book *Dangerous Life*, published in 1989 by Northeastern University Press, was selected for the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber Award, given to the best first book of poems published each year.

This fall, she joins the creative writing faculty at Southern Illinois University.

