

PICNIC LOVE

over bar-b-qued ribs she warned him plainly that she must have a challenge or she could not love him for long. "treat me cruelly," she entreated. "the more you do, the more i'll love you," she assured. "but it's against my nature," he pleaded. "i love you and only want to make you happy," he grasped her hand over the pot of baked beans. "wimpy," she said. "i'll dump you for sure if you don't punish me." he dropped her hand. "you turd," he said. "you disgust me with your shallowness." "oh, God, how i love you," she said with round charcoal eyes.

-- leo mailman

Long Beach, CA

SADIE THOMPSON LIVES ON ELM STREET

Even though she would later marry a private-first-class, and live in a tract home on Elm Street, and have a son she'd name after Little Joe from the Bonanza tv show Louise wanted to be a movie star. Some days when she wore pancake make-up she almost looked like one. Afterall, she wore the same kind of lipstick Hedy Lamar wore; wore the same size shoes Jane Powell wore. And she smoked (when she could sneak some Camels from her father) the same kind of cigarets Delores del Rio smoked. Louise lived the vicarious life of a harlot, lover after lover like grapes popped into the mouth of a fellatrice: the lifeguard who looked like Errol Flynn and asked her to meet him by his yellow convertible so he could tell her he was married; her math teacher with the pencil moustache who tutored her in parabola and looked like Clark Gable but was too smart for her; the doctor in nursing school who looked like

Walter Pigeon but was too old for her;
the policeman who gave her a parking ticket
and looked like Alan Ladd but was
too short for her. Today,
if you mention any of this, she denies it,
like an old whore's past, gone Christian.
And she doesn't even remember
that Ava Gardner was once married
to Mickey Rooney. Or that Orson Welles once
made Rita Hayworth cut off her long red hair
and dye it blonde. Or that Ingrid Bergman
gave birth to twins out of wedlock.
It's all so silly nowadays.

NEXT SUMMER

The peaches turned out small this year --
no bigger than apricots.
No one wanted to eat them
one bite off each wasn't worth it.
I picked them
left the ones on the tree
the butcher birds and meadowlarks
had bitten into, the ants crawling on them,
the funny-looking flies coveting them.
And I left the ones that had fallen onto
the ground, rotting now, because I
liked the way it made the backyard smell.
No one wanted to help me peel them
and slice them because it took
so much time -- and I ate some
the ones with a worm on one side
the ones bruised on one side until
my teeth felt sweet and slick
and icy. I let them set overnight
and in the morning the nectar
buoyed the peaches like fat dumplings
in sauce; and I only added a little honey
to thin out the juice so that the peaches
would go farther. When
the crust had browned
and the cobbler removed from the oven
and cooled some in front of the open window
we all ate a bowlful although
it was almost suppertime
and we talked about the things we'll do with them
next summer when the peaches are bigger.