

## FELIPE'S HEART

*David Plumb*

FELIPE CAME through again and let her stay in his apartment a couple of nights for free while she poked around South Beach for a job. Felipe's heart was bigger than the sun. The overhead fan cooled her. So much for finding the job. Thank God for Felipe. She has momentary second thoughts about bringing a stranger into Felipe's house and using his bed, even though it was the guest room. You never knew in South Florida. Never knew at all. It scared her. It didn't used to. But it had worked out. He'd come and gone. The almost empty Chablis bottle stood on the nightstand. The condom lay along side it. She tried to forget about it.

Poo imagined a small sailboat drifted across the lake gathering in her navel. It sported a little red sail with the word HEAVEN written in sweeping white letters. The sail billowed, tacked, raced off toward the black hair and her right hip. At that moment, she imagined she slipped in the sailboat and sailed with it. It occurred to her that perhaps she ought to shave the hair, but the moment passed. Dreaming beat work. She really wanted to not work and just sail down to Key West and run charters. That was work, but not work.

It beat working in a wet T-shirt bar. Her ex-husband said he didn't mind. She minded. She felt too old. They fired her, she thought, for being too old. Over 30 they said. She didn't sag, and she was even 18 pounds lighter.

Men weren't the problem. Or were they? They were broke. Her husband trained horses at Calder. They'd come to Florida, well now she couldn't remember why. Her kids were in Boston. Her friends were in Boston. She'd gotten her MFA in Theater Arts in Boston. Kenny hurt his back. He couldn't train anymore. All he could do was walk the damn horses. And bet on them. They were broke. She took a job in a restaurant and spent most of her time hiding in a broom closet crying because she didn't look like a waitress. She took to wearing anklets and short skirts. It didn't help. She quit. She worked at a Goodwill receiving truck for three months.

She worked for Felipe, the gay Cuban Jehovah's Witness florist. He flitted. He danced. He cajoled. He ate pizza and popcorn. He sniffed. He had an assistant, Lena, who spent most of the time escaping from Raoul, her ex-husband who had a penchant for boxing on her head. Lena came to work with a broken nose. She stood in the middle of the birds of paradise and the ferns rub-

bing aloe on her nose. Lena sobbed. Her mascara ran down the stem of a bird of paradise. Twice a day, Raoul drove by in his low black Buick and glared at her.

Poo decided she ought to get a divorce. She screamed at the orchids. She yelled at the carnations. She ate a red rose right in front of Felipe. He handed her a second. She ate that. She managed to get four three-dollar roses down her craw before fleeing the florist shop. She hid in a motel outside Hollywood. She sat by the pool with some French Canadians from Ottawa. She drank beer and ran up her credit card. The French Canadians carried on around her as if she wasn't even there. Felipe left notes on her door via Lena begging her to return to the job.

"We love you," one note said.

"God loves you," Felipe said over the phone sitting on her dresser that smelled like mildew.

Every day for three weeks Felipe called. "God's coming," he said.

Then he stopped calling. Poo decided maybe she'd missed God, maybe he'd knocked when she was sleeping.

Poo gazed at the swimming pool below. The French Canadians sprawled everywhere. They read French newspapers and talked French.

She'd come a long way. Twenty-eight years ago, Mary Ellen Owens had fled the trailer park just east of Chicago. Fled God. Fled parents. Mary Ellen smelled like powder blue sky and warm breezes coming off St. Marcos Island on a late January afternoon. Her hair streamed down her neck in sweet red braids. She thought she looked like Judy Garland, but she had a space between her two front teeth. Her eyes were gray-blue. Wolf eyes, her brother said. Mary Ellen felt glad to be alive. God was supposed to take care of her.

God arrived in a mobile home on the southwest fringe of Chicago with six cowboy hats, twelve kids, and three guitars. Mary Ellen had been recruited by one Reeba Lark, at school. She had arrived at the service held outside the trailer park one Sunday and had been swept away by the Lord. She felt herself flying off into the gray Chicago sky, Bible in hand, blue skirt and little red shoes, when in fact she wore a plain brown cotton dress and size nine black basketball sneakers. The cowboys patted her hair, and the women, a collection of bright-eyed, God-filled balloons, and a little

girl, Reeba Lark, with banana curls, sucked her right in. Then the kids started taking off their clothes while the parents were at work. Then they started fucking all over the trailer park. Mary Ellen Owens had just decided to become a choirgirl when one Bob and Harry Lark slid her into the back bedroom of the church vestry mobile home and plugged her mouth and vagina with the necessary parts to complete her conversion. She was beside herself. She learned to play the guitar and sing songs about lambs, especially sacrificial ones that appeared in her dreams all white and bloody and heavenly with a shepherd and a staff gazing down in wonder and prayer. She went here and there with the Bible Sanctuary as they called themselves, praying with Elders, fucking with the sons, and on one occasion she lay naked with Reeba Lark while they rubbed each other's bunnies for God.

On the auspicious night of her final conversion, a great pain overtook her. The cowboys and elders and siblings had gathered in the mobile home that seemed to be full of gas fumes. They talked Mary Ellen into getting on the floor in a half crouch, whereupon they gathered around her like moths and began chanting, first in decipherable prayers and then in a buzzard frenzy, in tongues, whooping and hawing and blooping over her body. The goobie doo, la la bored down and inside her body. It began to make her scream inside. Then they started dancing around her. She could feel their monkey sweat. They made honk bunny tunes. Boowa gutty charms and goospy horror belly croos.

She covered herself. They yanked at her arms. They hooted haunted wicked oonky-waa-waas in her ear. And she SCREAMED a deep belly scream that whacked them so, they were sure the devil had arrived. So they started to exorcise the Devil with the gooby doo wish-can-whoosh-ba sissyfoo-hish-hishyee and do-can-ma, until Mary Ellen cut a gut song that BLED on the gas-fumed mobile home floor and silenced the lot. Then she exploded straight up the middle of God's Covenant, her long wet red hair dangling in her tears and her plain brown ankle-length dress sticking to her thighs. Those good black K-Mart sneakers started chewing up God's linoleum and out she ran, down the drive toward home, past home to Florida and became Poo.

Poo watched the little red sailboat bump the edge

of her navel. Maybe she could tie it to the edge of her belly with the black hair. Good thing she didn't cut it. She reached over and dropped the used condom in the wastebasket. She snapped her sunglasses on and lay back on the bed. A slight breeze flicked the blinds.

"Felipe," she said out loud. She sniffed the air. It smelled like hot white wine and sperm. "What's next?" The slow ceiling fan sliced the air above her.