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Whores & Forgetting

There's only gold and women. I have no use for the rest.

— Anonymous gold miner



I watched a man watch a whore one night. He was a white man, leaning against a street light. It made his skin look greenish-yellow. It made him look like he was going to get sick. The whores were across the street thrown up against a doorway. They were black. They had on dresses that made you crazy. Tight-assed and white and silk and running from their nipples to their knees and you wanted to run your hand the whole length of the curves. They knew it, too, those beauties. I could tell by the way they made sassy remarks and sexy gestures with their bodies. The tallest one, she had black, black, hair and her lips were too big for her mouth but you wanted to just go and smack on them. They had a sound all their own. And red. God, they were red and they kept saying to the guy looking, "Com'on over here, com'on over here," but he was afraid. Or broke. Or both. Anyway, he didn't move. He just kept looking.

He wanted her and she wanted his money. And the light was green and blue. Electric blue. Ray Charles blue. It was all iridescent blue eye-shadow and dark blue skin and wet pavement radiant-blue and red lips and tight-assed white silk dresses and smells of skin and sweat and sperm and heat and need and garbage and sewage and Brazil, Brazil, Brazil everywhere. God, it made my nostrils reach down inside and touch my soul and my sex and connect everything.

I went over there. I could feel this guy's eyes on my back. He wanted to kill me, but I didn't care. I had to get closer. They saw me coming and began moving and shaking and posing and getting ready. I was crazy,

I thrust my camera out so they could see it. I didn't care. I wanted the one in the white dress. She was mine, I thought, I'm getting her no matter what.

I raised my camera and pointed it right at her breasts. She laughed and thrust them at me, first one, then the other trying to get them both in the picture. I shot once then twice and again. I looked up and we all laughed and our eyes danced dances and then they all wanted me to fondle them with my camera. So I did. They stretched and thrust and stuck their asses out at me and pressed their secret place with long fingernails painted purple and I kept shooting. Whore's night out. The one in white, her mouth was so red and delicious and ready to suck everything and everybody on the street down into her darkness and she knew it and I knew it and I didn't look at her again.

I got scared. I was afraid they'd ask me to screw them and I wanted to and I wouldn't because they'd kill me. If not then, later.

I took one more shot and turned away and ran across the street behind the man who was still watching. He looked at me and his mouth twisted in a way that made me feel dirty. I wanted to hit him. So I left.

— *Diary entry, the author, Manaus 1990*





*N*ow, my husband — I don't call him my husband anymore — I don't like him. He's almost sixty and all those pretty whores, all dressed in jewelry, they've forgotten him now. He should die a terrible death.

— Laura, a woman
on Commerce Street, Manaus



*Y*ou can always tell how rich a man is by the size of his "pipa". They keep it tied to a string down below, you know, near their penis. When I dance, I press myself against him so I can feel if he has a "pipa". If it's bigger and harder than usual down there that means he has gold. That's how you tell.

— Anonymous prostitute, on a floating whore house,
the Madeira River near Abuna



Cridola grabbed her around the waist, pulling her down on his lap. She giggled, then shrieked. He pulled on her back until a small round breast popped out. She slapped him hard across the face. Everyone laughed. He did it again. Pulled on her bra. Both breasts now. Again she slapped him. He grabbed her black hair at the back of her head and pulled hard, pulled her head backwards. His head went down onto her left breast. She struggled, hitting him on the back and head. He kept going, making disgusting sucking noises as he went. Paulo, Rodriguez and Nelson were our body-guards. They sat nearby looking stoic and drinking beer.

A man got up from his table from across the bar. He walked up to Cridola. The bodyguards didn't move. They just watched poker-faced. The man pulled a gun from somewhere and stuck it behind Cridola's left ear. He didn't see it, but she did. She saw it and let out a shriek. The man pulled the hammer back and said, "Let her go." Cridola's mouth stopped what it was doing and everything went silent.

Suddenly, Paulo, Rodriguez and Nelson moved all at once, smooth, like they had practiced the whole thing. They stood up, each pulling a gun out from his belt and pointed it at the man's head. They cocked the three hammers at the same time and each one made a ratcheting sound with a loud click at the end. Cridola turned his head around slowly. She had saliva on her nipple. He grinned.

"Leave him alone," said Paulo in a calm voice. He waived the barrel of his gun toward the man's table on the other side of the bar. The man backed off, but he looked pissed. He uncocked his gun, put it under his belt and went back to his table. He stared hard at Cridola, then the girl, then in some other direction like he didn't want to see her get raped or something. She looked back at him fearlessly.

"Yeah! Leave him alone!" she yelled and then grabbed Cridola's head between her hands and pressed his face into her breasts. He laughed and said it was only for fun. For laughs. And he asked her to dance. She fixed her bra and looked shy for a second, then grabbed Cridola and they danced. The light was all green and red and purple. Paulo and the others sat down, drank their beer and watched Cridola dance.



When I worked in the Alvorado they'd come drunk in my bar, those whores, and they'd break bottles and stick men with them. Every night the police would come and drag a corpse out of my bar. Thank God they'd take away the bodies — what would I do with them? But then I had to pay the police. They'd come and drink free for that service. Either that, or they'd leave me with the bodies.

— "Loura", a woman on Commerce Street, Manaus



On the boat going to Manicore', a young girl was making eyes at a miner all afternoon, but he pretended to ignore her. That night, she went to his hammock and woke him up.

"What's your name?" she asked him.

"Antonio," he said.

"Are you alone?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

She paused. They made eyes at each other.

"Are you all by yourself?"

"That's right," he said. His voice quivered.

"My baby's sleeping. She won't disturb anyone..."

She motioned toward her hammock then looked back at him. He didn't move, but she leaned down and kissed him. He let her do it.

"Do you have a family in Manaus?" she asked.

He hesitated for a second. More eyes.

"No," He said, but his eyes dropped and he shifted back and forth in his hammock. He was lying and she knew it.

"Well..." she said in a whisper, and she excused herself.

He watched her as she made her way back to her hammock. He kept looking even after she disappeared. He turned over in his hammock and pulled it around his body until he disappeared in its dark folds. It swung gently back and forth for a moment, but then stopped and didn't move again.

— *Conversation overheard on the way to Manicore' by boat*



Most miners won't use condoms. They think it makes them lesser of a man. We don't care about having too many children. We just don't want the whores to get sick.

*— Mayor of Creporizinho,
A gold mining town on the Crepori River*

My husband. That sonofabitch. He was keeping women all over the place. He'd come to my bar at night with those women, drink my beer, take my money and disappear in the night with those whores. If only you could imagine how I suffered.

— Anonymous woman, Porto Velho



The whores go up and down the river on barges. The men go crazy and shoot off their guns and make a real racket. You can never get any sleep on this river.

— Paulo Sodas Nogueira, body guard for the miners, Madeira River, Airplane Beach gold mine, near Mutum

The miners drink at a bar down by where the whores wait. The ceiling is low and the place is full of smoke and glaring lights that hurt your eyes and the music is *Farro'*, a regional type of music from the Nordeste. It's dying out because the radio comes from the South and fills the cities and the streets and the minds of the kids with rock and roll. Soon everyone will forget how to play *Farro'*.

Last night, there was a young couple sitting at a table. All they did was hug and kiss. Hug and kiss. You'd think that they were on a, you know, a hug and kissing show. But they were madly in love the way they held onto each other.

There was a middle-aged woman sitting nearby, spiffed up like she was looking to get laid, desperate for a man. She was drinking a beer and staring at those two lovers. She looked sad to me.

A drunk sat at the next table and kept staring at her. He wouldn't take his eyes off her, like he was thinking all kinds of dirty thoughts about what he would do if only he had her. She didn't see him, though, 'cause she was still staring at those two young lovers, like she was trying to remember something.

Suddenly, in an instant, it was over. The two young lovers jumped up and ran out into the dark, the drunk put his head down on the table like he was going to puke, and the woman drank the last of her beer and lit a cigarette.

— *Diary entry, the author 1990*





***T**his place is full of forgetting.
The bars are full of forgetting.
The whorehouses are full of forgetting.
The gold mines at night, the floating
barges all full of forgetting. Everywhere
you go, it seems, is full of whores and
forgetting.*

*— Euclides Aparecido
Cardoso “Cridola”, foreman
of a gold dredge, Madeira River*