#1 - This Is How I Remember It

Watching Joey pop the red berries into his mouth like Ju-Ju Bees and Mags only licking them at first, then chewing, so both of their smiles look bloody and I laugh though I don’t eat even one…then suddenly our moms are all around us (although mine doesn’t panic until she looks at the others and screams along with them things like *dammit did you eat these?* And shakes me so my “No” sounds like “oh-oh-oh” and then we’re being yanked toward the house, me for once not resisting as my mother scoops me up into her arms, and inside the moms shove medicine, thick and purple, down our throats in the bathroom; Joey in the toilet, Mags in the sink, me staring at the hair in the tub drain as my mom pushed my head down and there is red vomit everywhere, splashing on the mirror and powder-blue rugs, everywhere except the tub where mine is coming out yellow, the color of corn muffins from lunch, not a speck of red, *I told you.* I want to scream and then it is over and I turn to my mother for a touch or a stroke on the head like the other moms (but she has moved to the doorway and lights a cigarette, pushed her hair out of her eyes)

Betsy Kemper

#2 - The Dance

He shuffles to my locker. Skinny Steve with the zits. Yuck! Probably wants to ask me to the dance. My last chance. Oh, well. Better than being a wallflower, like Jenny.

Deep breath. “Hi, Steve.”

“Hi, Sue.”

“You wanted to ask me something?”

Even his zits blushed.

“I wondered…do you have Jenny’s phone number?”

by Joy Jolissaint

#3 - 20/20

By the time they reached Indiana, Bill realized that Ruthie, his driving companion, was incapable of theoretical debate. She drove okay, she went halves on gas, etc., but she refused to argue. She didn’t seem to know how. Bill was used to East Coast women who disputed everything he said, every step of the way. Ruthie stuck to simple observation, like “Look, cows.” He choked it up to the fact that she was from rural Ohio and thrilled to death to be anywhere else.

She didn’t mind driving into the setting sun. The third evening out, Bill rested his eyes while she cruised along making the occasional announcement.

“Indian paintbrush. A golden eagle.”

Miles later he frowned. There was no Indian paintbrush, that he knew of, near Chicago. The next evening, driving, Ruthie said, “I never thought I’d see a Bigfoot in real life.” Bill turned and looked at the side of the road streaming innocently out behind them. Two red spots winked back—reflectors nailed to a tree stump.

“Ruthie, I’ll drive,” he said. She stopped the car and they changed places in the light of the evening star.
“I’m so glad I got to come with you,” Ruthie said. Her eyes were big, blue, and capable of seeing wonderful sights. A white buffalo near Fargo. A UFO above Twin Falls. A handsome genius in the person of Bill himself. This last vision came to her in Spokane and Bill decided to let it ride.
by Linda Brewer

#4 – November

When my daughter finds me standing in the swimming pool, water up to my ribs in November, the beige of my wool dress darkened with moisture, she’ll cancel her wedding. Even when she was a girl, she could be stubborn, but I always knew how to stop her. Sometimes just words—you’re making my heart ache—and holding on to my chest. Once, when she wanted to buy that foolish motorbike, I pushed the bread knife into her hand—you might as well slash my throat. Now she insists on marrying. She’s barely thirty-one, and I told here there’s no rush, even broke my crystal glasses and stepped on them with my bare feet. But she only walked away and locked herself in her room at the end of the hall.

Arms raised straight out from my sides, I stand in the icy water, my palms inches above the cloudy surface. My legs and feet feel numb, swollen, as though they belonged to someone else, but my belly is warm. I wait for the sound of my daughter’s car, the slapping of her tires against the pavement, the reassuring latch of her car door. She’ll come running toward the pool and cry out my name, kneel down and offer both hands to me….But it is quiet. Only the sky comes closer, the hazy dome tilting across the edges of the pool.
by Ursula Hegi

#5 – Wrong Channel

Barbarita waited impatiently for her ride as beads of sweat dripped from her eyebrows into her third cup of cold syrupy espresso. She was headed for the toilet when she heard the knocking sounds of Mima’s old Imala. “About time you got here,” yelled Barbarita from the Florida room.

“It wouldn’t start this morning.”

Barbarita got in, tilted the rearview mirror, and applied enough rouge to her face for a healthier look. She wanted to make a good impression on the doctor who would approve her medical records for her green card. On the way to Jackson Memorial, Mima talked about her grandchildren.

Barbarita knocked down all the Bibles and Reader’s Digests on the table when the nurse finally called her name.

“Sorry, ma’am, but you can’t come in,” the nurse said to Mima.
“’I’m her interpreter,” replied the polyglot.
“No bueno,” said the doctor grimly as he walked in with Barbarita’s X-rays. He told Mima, “Ask her if she had TB.”

Mima turned to Barbarita. “He says, if you have a television?”
“Tell him yes, but in Havana. Mot in Miami. But my daughter has a television here.”

Mima told the doctor, “She says she had TV in Cuba, not in Miami, but her daughter has TV here.”

“In that case we need to test her daughter for TB too.”
Mima translated, “He says he needs to test your daughter’s television to make sure it works, otherwise you cannot get your green card.”

“Why the television?” asked a puzzled Barbarita.

“How many times did I tell you you needed to buy one? Don’t you know, Barbarita? This is America.”

by Roberto Fernandez

# 6 - Carpathia

It happened on my parents’ honeymoon. The fourth morning out from New York, Mother woke to find the Carpathia still, engines silent. She woke Father; they rushed to the deck in their nightgowns. The first thing they saw was the white of an ocean filled with ice, then they saw white boats, in groups of two or three, pulling slowly toward the Carpathia. My father read the name written in red across their bows—Titanic. The sun was shining. Here and there a deck chair floated on the calm sea. There was nothing else.

The survivors came on board in small groups. Women and children. Two sailors for each boat. The women of the Carpathia went to the women of the Titanic, wrapping them in their long warm furs. My mother left my father’s side to go to them. The women went down on their knees on the deck and prayed, holding each other’s children. My father stood looking at the icy water where, if he had been on the other ship, he would be.

When the Carpathia dropped off the survivors in New York, my parents too got off and took the train home, not talking much, the honeymoon anything but a success. At the welcome-home party, my father got drunk. When someone asked about the Titanic, he said, “They should have put the men in the lifeboats. Men can marry again, have new families. What’s the use of all those widows and orphans?” My mother, who was standing next to him, turned her face away. She was pregnant, eighteen. She was the one drowning. But there was no one there to rescue her.

by Jesse Lee Kerchival