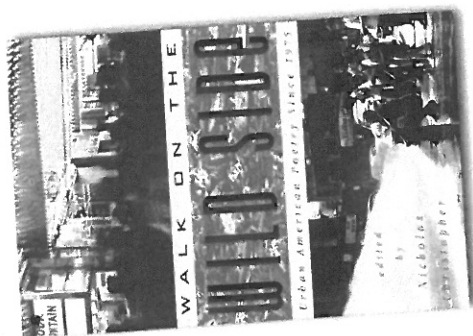




YELLOW LIGHT

by Garrett Hongo

One arm hooked around the frayed strap of a tar-black patent-leather purse, the other cradling something for dinner: fresh bunches of spinach from J-Town *yaoya*, sides of split Spanish mackerel from Alviso's, maybe a loaf of Langendorf; she steps off the hissing bus at Olympic and Fig, begins the three-block climb up the hill, passing gangs of schoolboys playing war, Japs against Japs, Chicanas chalking sidewalks with the holy double-yoked crosses of hopscotch, and the Korean grocer's wife out for a stroll around this neighborhood of Hawaiian apartments just starting to steam with cooking and the anger of young couples coming home from work, yelling at kids, flicking on TV sets for the Wednesday Night Fights.

If it were May, hydrangeas and jacaranda flowers in the streetside trees would be blooming through the smog of late spring. Wisteria in Masuda's front yard would be shaking out the long tresses of its purple hair. Maybe mosquitoes, moths, a few orange butterflies settling on the lattice of monkey flowers tangled in chain-link fences by the trash.

But this is October, and Los Angeles seethes like a billboard under twilight. From used-car lots and the movie houses uptown, long silver sticks of light probe the sky. From the Miracle Mile, whole freeways away, a brilliant fluorescence breaks out and makes war with the dim squares of yellow kitchen light winking on in all the side streets of the Barrio.

She climbs up the two nights of flagstone stairs to 201-B, the spikes of her high heels clicking like kitchen knives on a cutting board, props the groceries against the door, fishes through memo pads, a compact, empty packs of chewing gum, and finds her keys.

The moon then, cruising from behind a screen of eucalyptus across the street, covers everything, everything in sight, in a heavy light like yellow onions.

1982

About the text



1. What does the reader learn about the woman in the poem?
2. In the first stanza, find examples of various ethnic groups.
3. What is your impression of the neighborhood?
4. The second stanza contrasts man-made and natural images. Make a list of both.
5. What aspects of L.A. are being compared and contrasted in the third stanza?
6. What is the tone, or mood, of the poem? Is this a happy or sad picture of L.A.? Is it neither happy nor sad? Explain your answer.
7. What pieces of evidence of the stressful demands of L.A. city life are evident in the fourth stanza?
8. What do you think is meant by "heavy light like yellow onions?"

Discussion



1. Do you think you would like to live in the neighborhood described? Why/why not?
2. Can you recognize anything from your own life in the life described in the poem?
3. Do you think the various ethnic groups in neighborhoods such as this tend to get along with each other?
4. Why do you think the author provides the reader with so many seemingly unimportant details?
5. What is being said in this poem? What message does the author wish the reader to leave the poem with?