

## *Wilderness House Literary Review 1/4*

### **COCKROACH**

June Klein's got no breasts but it don't bother me. Not even small humps. It don't matter.

"Want some?" I shove my bucket of movie popcorn at her.

"No thanks, William." She shakes her head and stares at the screen and sits up straighter in the seat. Her hair is short and black and stays back like bird wings when they're not flying.

It's after school and the movie is TOMCATS at the Bellaire. For October, it's still pretty hot outside. June Klein's got on shorts. In the dark I watch her round knees shine like two white softballs. I feel like pinching them. She got to pick which flick 'cause she asked me to go — in the lunch line at school.

I don't mind. A girl in the movie is already stripped to her underwear.

I rattle my popcorn. "Want some?"

June Klein shakes her head and her glasses slide down her nose. It's a shame about the popcorn. 'Cause she has a big box of Sno\*Caps and I'd like a handful of those. A mouthful of corn, a mouthful of caps: the sweet with the salty.

"Huh!" I'm keeping one eye on this sexy blonde babe who's hot for the guy who's the star. Down down down her lips go, then land on his belly-button. Damn!

I push my legs over the top of the seat in front of me shoving more popcorn in my mouth. Keeping a watch on June Klein out of the corner of my eye. One by one she's eating those

Sno\*Caps. A couple of times she shakes the box — to see how much she's got left. That box has a good sound. Maybe I should go get a box of my own. But then I would miss what's coming next in TOMCATS. If she would just give me some, just a handful, it would solve that problem.

I turn my head and give June Klein a smile. She licks her lips and pops another Sno\*Cap in her mouth. It's the same thing like with Sandy Sussman — the way she licked her lips before she kissed me. I don't think I'll be kissing June Klein.

"Cockroach," June Klein says.

"Huh?"

She points at the seat in front of her and stamps both her feet and starts to giggle. "Big fat cockroach."

"Whoa!" I say, throwing my head back.

We both stare at the roach moving slow across the top of the seat. That roach reminds me of a man crossing a mountain, a man out to discover gold in gold-rush country, then he loses his horse in an Indian raid and has to go the rest of the way on foot.

I hold a piece of popcorn close to the roach.

June Klein stabs me with her elbow. "Stop that!"

The roach stops in its tracks like it's listening to June Klein's command.

"Hey, that roach has ears!" I say.

"It doesn't seem to want your popcorn."

"Give it a Sno\*Cap."

"I'm not wasting a Sno\*Cap on some old cockroach," she

says, quickly popping a couple into her mouth.

I take my feet off the seat in front of me, in case that roach should decide to do an about-face and start trucking in my direction. I decide that June Klein is some kind of pig. Only a pig wouldn't share; even if she hates popcorn. My old girlfriend, Sandy Sussman, she always shared. Sometimes I got M&M's and she would get the popcorn, and sometimes she got a Milkyway. Giant movie size. She'd put it on her lap and saw it in half with her nail file. Then she'd flip her long brown hair down one shoulder like a coon-tail, saying: "Herbal Essences keep me lookin' good."

I could have been the one she ended up with last summer. Instead she took off with Tonka — this older kid from town with this tiger tattoo who supplies her weed.

June Klein is wiggling in the seat. She's twisting her head and looking around. With the hand not holding the Sno\*Caps she's knocking at her hair. "Do you think there's any more roaches?" she says.

I'm not sure what to say to that.

The other guy starring in the movie, the one with yellow hair, is in the hospital. From cancer. One of his nuts just got cut off. He wants it back. He wants the other guy, the main star, to go find it. TOMCATS, I decide, is one sucko movie.

June Klein is staring in my face. So close, I can smell Sno\*Caps on her breath.

"What if a roach jumps in my hair?" she says.

"What do you want from me? I can't control these roaches — they have a mind of their own." I point at the one still on top of the seat. "That one looks like the leader."

"That's ridiculous!"

"Shut-up, you kids!"

I poke June Klein on her arm. "Give that roach a Sno\*Cap."  
She shakes one out of the box, looking at it in her palm.

"Here," I say, "give it to me."

But instead of passing it off on the roach, I lay it upside down on my tongue. It feels good: the hardness, the little white dots. I hold it there.

"You cheat!" she says.

"It's only one!" I roll it around my mouth then crush it between my teeth.

June Klein jumps up. "I want to go home. I hate this movie. Especially the sex scenes. If my dad finds out I'll get killed." Shit, I'm thinking. Remembering how much Sandy Sussman loved the sex scenes. Sandy Sussman being one of the first girls in school to grow breasts. Probably right now she's off with that kid, Tonka. Sharing her candy and her breasts. Both of 'em laughing their asses off at TOMCATS. In some movie theater. Somewhere.



"Blue Edge" is Susan Tepper poetry collection was published in the fall of 2006 by Cervena Barva Press. Susan Tepper's fiction has appeared in American Letters & Commentary (3 times), Green Mountains Review, Schuylkill Valley Journal (2 times) and Phoenix (forthcoming). She has been nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize and her story collection was a finalist in the Serena Mc Donald Kennedy Award (Snake Nation Press).

Her poetry and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in Salt Hill, Boston Review, New Millennium Writings, Fish Drum, Snake Nation Press, Pavement Saw, Grasslimb and Poesia.

Her first novel was shortlisted in the New Century/Zoetrope competition and is currently being represented by her agent.