

## Work by Gene McCormick

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### Hello. My Name Is...

The first thing he observes is that she has just-noticeable wrinkles (“crow’s feet”) at the corners of her eyes, and notes that her bare shoulders can be judged a bit fleshy and yet her full, sandy, wavy hair shows no gray. She is smiling at him, a stranger, presenting herself to be known wearing a summer-weight cotton dress coming just to her knees and is loose and looks soft and full and blends everywhere with its neutral colors.

She is bold:  
My name is Valentina.  
And I’m Ansel, he answers.  
I know, she says.

Looking directly at her, he wants to hold the front hem of her dress in his thumb and index finger and lift it up, past her waist even in the crowded room, above her head, and he feels she knows he is thinking this. Her smile is nothing special, but it seems sincere.

They never again meet.

## Window Shopping

The woman looks to be in her fifties,  
overweight by at least the same number,  
soft and floppy pudgy, clothing several sizes too small  
and yet he sits, secluded in his car as if in a trance,  
staring at her as she bends over  
to put her Walmart parcels in her Ford hatchback.  
After each parcel she straightens up, tugs at her sweater,  
arranging it to cover her exposed midriff.  
Her face, as best he can see, is jowly,  
accented by a short vice-like hair style  
which is too dark for her pasty features.  
Absence of lipstick or substantive eyes give the  
impression  
of a doughy face shaped by the bottom of a pie pan.  
He continues to stare at her bending over.  
Only two more parcels.

Sometimes he walks through Walmart's soap aisle  
for the smell and feel of cleanliness and purity  
and when he wanders along the toy aisle  
he has the exact same sensations.  
He doesn't push a cart because  
he never buys anything.



## **The Hollywood Story**

With a wakening air brake hiss and metal-to-metal grind, Sammi Sue Ellis is welcomed to the downtown Greyhound terminal in Los Angeles, California, in the middle of July. The driver lets himself out first in order to pull luggage from the storage compartment at the side of the bus while Sammi Sue looks out the tinted window. I'm here, she thinks. I have arrived. She brings one suitcase and the honor of being Miss Topeka 1997 and it is proud parents who add five hundred dollars to the thousand-dollar Chamber of Commerce prize and

watch eighteen-year-old Sammi board the bus to Hollywood. Her parents are wheat farmers and the crop has not been bountiful the past several seasons but they know she will quickly get a TV or movie part, or at worst a job modelling. She has her heart set on it. She had had the lead in class plays since she was a freshman and the local theatre critic said she had performed Bus Stop with more sympathy than Marilyn did in the movie.

It takes her less than an hour to get from the bus terminal to the Hollywood Walk of Fame and the Boulevard. A furnished studio apartment renting by the week is quickly found as is an agent who specializes in starlet-types straight off a bus from the Midwest. He changes her name from Sammi Sue to Suzanne and spends several hundred of her dollars for a portrait portfolio. Six weeks later she gets a waitress job in a trendy West Hollywood restaurant where important people go to be seen. Young people in her situation can't afford to date or even socialize so she accepts a few dinner offers from customers, mainly actor types who have walk-on gigs but whom she nonetheless thinks can help her meet the right people. She cuts her shoulder length hair to just below her ears, adds highlights and soon begins dating faces she recognizes on TV. They buy her dinner and help her out with rent money and before long dinner is not part of the date. She begins putting on weight from nightclub cocktails so alcohol is replaced with coke. Her breakthrough moment comes when one of her dates introduces her to the Sunset Strip soft porn movie king and she begins to appear in his movies, making enough for a month's rent or a week's worth of coke. The porn impresario changes her name to Suzette F' Lay.

When word spreads about her x-rated movie career Suzette loses her waitressing job and most of her clients.

Instead of money, she asks her remaining regulars to pay her in lottery tickets and, against all odds, after several weeks she has a \$50,000 winning ticket. She buys a one-way bus ticket to Topeka and sticks it on her vanity mirror, sends five hundred dollars to her parents and the rest of the winnings she spends on coke.

Ten years later Suzette F'Lay is long gone from the studio apartment on the Boulevard, succeeded by a string of Greyhound bus arrivals from the Midwest. Each successive renter has left the one-way ticket to Topeka stuck in the vanity mirror.

**Gene McCormick's** latest book, *Obsessions*, a unique novella-length narrative poem of realities, is available through Amazon or direct from the Middle Island Press. A follow-up, *Happenstances*, will be published this spring, also by Middle Island Press.