

# **Fabiana**

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Fabiana was old, very old. She lived alone in a small, weather beaten house half a block away and she would come daily to our house to help. She really didn't do much, she moved so slowly and, at the time, I didn't understand why my parents even hired her.

I have always been an early riser, especially on Saturdays and though I was the first in the family to get up that summer morning, Fabiana was already in the kitchen when I came down. "Would you like some breakfast?" she asked in her puny voice. I nodded and Fabiana started her slow shuffle to the refrigerator. I ran and took out the eggs and brought them to the stove before the old lady had taken three steps. She muttered something and started chopping onions and tomatoes. The menu was always the same, scrambled eggs with onions and tomatoes.

After cleaning the stove, Fabiana joined me at the kitchen table. She took a tobacco pouch out of her apron pocket started to roll her own cigarette. She held the cigarette paper between the malformed, knobby fingers of her left hand and steadied it by resting forearm on the table. Holding the Bull Durham pouch in her right hand, she held it unsteadily above the paper and started tapping it spastically with her forefinger. At first only a few strands of tobacco rained out of the pouch then a clump fell that bent the paper and it landed on the table. She closed the pouch, put it in her pocket then, laying the paper flat on the table, started getting pinches from the clump and arranged the tobacco in a series of smaller clumps on the paper. At the height of each maneuver she clamped

her toothless mouth and the tip of her nose almost touched her chin. It looked as if she was about to swallow her face. I wondered if that was possible, that someday they'd find her reversed like a sock with the bones on the outside.

Fabiana, using both hands, carefully rolled the paper, brought it up to her face, wet the gummed edge of the paper with a tongue that darted out of a shapeless orifice and completed forming the lumpy cigarette by twisting both ends. With surprising authority, Fabiana struck a kitchen match and it flared giving off a phosphorous smell along with a hissing sound. After the burning match settled to a steady yellow flame, she brought it to the tip of the cigarette which burst into flames until it got to the tobacco and she finally took a first puff. Then, looking out the window with her feeble eyes, started to talk of things I didn't and didn't want to understand.