

Fall 12-1-2007

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Recommended Citation

Gangas, Patricia (2007) "Tennis and Texas Hold 'Em," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 28 : No. 1 , Article 15.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol28/iss1/15>

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Tennis and Texas Hold 'Em

Patricia Gangas

I cannot go back to that distant place,
where the pain of yearning
silhouettes my antique body.
Tennis, my heart's love
once soothed me like songs in the wind.
I was happy when my black hair flung itself
free in the exuberance of the game,
my muscles stretched to full length.
My fist full of racquet clenched an invincible power,
as I tried to touch my need to conquer
and with the light of a winner's torch
I divvied up the small change of victory,
transforming my emotions into pastoral hymns
that hummed in the dusk-drawn evenings.

Yet, without notice, tennis departed
melting like an ice-carving in the waning of winter.

Now, I play poker, born of that sadness,
my mind closed to the chants
of forty-love, match-point and the sounds of perfect aces.
My fearless spirit sprouted anew amid decks of cards,
a contrary direction, but, like tennis, a battle of endless wrangling.
Cards are scurrilous, unruly as a sorcerer, and devoid of dignity
for their aces are more arbitrary.
Still, I carry my loneliness into the casino
sitting with scruffy men smelling of booze,
who scream obscenities at the world.
I pace the poker room as if looking for something lost,
hoping for aces in every hand,
a way to conquer growing old.