

Its You!!

It wasn't the hair that made him cry out like that, though God knows California's enough to turn anyone into a hair freak these days; well she was enough by herself with that silken waterfall of coppery-canary to freak you, and it wasn't that or the crinkle cornered arch on arch of the eye and brow or the perfect teeth, not by themselves. It wasn't even the absolute confidence with which she wore the see-through shirt through which he saw the absolute confidence of her breasts, or even that she was exactly tall enough and round enough. More than anything else, it was that she was real. Everybody does this thing, although some cats know it more than others: you see chicks, you see pix, you add and subtract and over the years things settle in-just so big, just so dark, just so-just exactly so until its all finished. Then that finished thing, that her, settles down inside you and every time you see someone, or in a magazine, or at the show, you set it up against her. It could be great, you could get excited, you could dream a lot about any of the others, but somehow they never, never check out with the her you've made. So when he saw her he yelled it out. It came out of him and he hadn't known he was going to say it, it hit him that hard.

Maybe that's how you know-it bursts out of you without a thought.

He'd just parked the Monster and was half in, half out when he saw her. She was hitchhiking with a girlfriend-they do that a lot in California. He was never able to remember much about that girlfriend, Susie or Dottie or something. Maybe he never saw her, much. There was this truck parked off the road with berries and com-on-the-cob and tomatoes and stuff, and he liked corn and that was why he stopped. He walked over to the two girls and pointed at the Monster and said, "I'll be right with you." They smiled at him and looked him over, and at each other, checking him out, and then said Thanks and went over to the car. Something developed fists inside his chest and began hitting him from inside so bard be blinked with each beat. He went over to the truck and bought corn, a couple of ears. He lived by himself.

But before he picked it up he went back to the Monster. They'd got themselves somehow into the one bucket seat. He asked her, "Do you like corn?" She said she did. He went back and got a couple more and some tomatoes and a cantaloupe, and then he saw the stocks, long clusters of white and purple flowers with a heavy scent that nobody's ever put in a bottle yet. He bought one white bunch and one purple and mixed them together right there into one big bunch, and he had never done anything like that in his life before. They went first to the girlfriend's house. Without remembering the girlfriend much, he long remembered the thick waves of disapproval she set up when she got out and the other one, her, didn't. It made him laugh when he pulled away from the curb and they were alone together, and he met her eyes and she was laughing too.

She lived in Altadena, which was a hell of a hell away from where he lived, but he didn't mind. Oh, he didn't mind. She lived in a little two-room guest house the other side of a swimming pool; the people in the big house hardly ever used it. It had its own little driveway. It was nice. She said she would cook the corn for him. She did, with some lamb chops she had in the freezer, and they ate the cantaloupe with vanilla ice cream on it and a pinch of dry instant coffee sprinkled on it. She could cook. You could tell. There were more than forty herbs and spices in the kitchen. She made up a name for him, Knightly. She said he looked like a knight in shining armor. He never did call her by her name, except sometimes Hon.

It was one of those hot smoggy California evenings and the pool looked good, but he didn't have a suit. She laughed at him and said who needs it? When she

peeled off the see-through top he saw it wasn't a see-through at all, no more than a stained glass window is a see-through when you want to look at the sun. There can't be a more perfect body than that one, not anywhere, not only for the perfection of each part, but for the absolute rightness of a breast like that with a shoulder like that, and a waist that turned just so together with such slender ankles. Also, all her hair was that same yellowy-coppery color and there wasn't a flaw on her skin anywhere.

They fell into the pool and laughed a lot, and you are not going to believe this easily but it's true: there was something about the way she did it all, something about the way she was, that made him not touch her then. They dried off on some of a mountain of thick clean towels she had and got dressed again and he never made the first pass. Maybe it was because passes often get made because a guy just has to find out where it's at, and in this case he knew where it was at. They both knew. It happened later, much later, about two in the morning, after which (it was pretty wonderful) she said softly "Knightly-night" and fell asleep in his arms. He didn't go home until Saturday.

On the way back to his place he stopped at a Rents and hired a 6-by-10 trailer. They had a hell of a job rigging a hitch for it on the Monster without bashing those beautiful chrome pipes, and it took a half hour to figure a way to get the big right-hand rearview mounted, and when he took off he was one hell of a sight. It was like a racehorse hitched to a manure spreader and people all over stopped in their tracks to watch him go by, and he was sure that one sideswipe on the freeway was caused by some yokel rubbernecking him. At his place he loaded on every-

thing he owned, which wasn't really too much. He was paid till the end of the month but screw it. He took it all out to the guest house in Altadena. She was supposed to clear out the second room for him but when he got there she had rearranged the whole house so that there was a real living room and a real bedroom instead of the overlap she'd had before. There was plenty of room in the closet for his clothes-more than he needed-but she'd fixed up everything else so perfectly that there was really no place to put any--thing of his, and anyway, who needed it? It was an Our House.

He was on Emergency then, which had always suited him fine. He was one of those lucky people who went to sleep bang whenever he felt tired, and could wake up-all the way up-in twenty minutes or two hours or ten, whatever was handy, and any part of the twenty-four was all right with him. She was a day people, however, and midnight was late to her always, and 8 A.M. was late too. She liked to be up before seven. He adjusted to that pretty well, and also learned not to talk when she was going through the complicated secret ritual of getting to sleep. Some people are like that. They have to do whatever it is they do to get to sleep, everything in the right order and skipping none of it, and if you interrupt, they have to go back to the beginning and start over. She wouldn't sleep late, not ever, so when he'd kept her up late she looked drawn and kind of sad all the next day and evening. He also found out she would go to sleep almost instantly after sex, when it was good, and it was almost always good. But the whole sleep thing was hard to handle while he was on Emergency and would get calls at two and three in the morning and get out and not know when he'd be back. She was sweet about it-she was sweet about everything-but after awhile he put in for the day shift. It meant a little less money, but what the hell.

He quit going to Mother's, which believe it or not is a chain of pool halls in the L.A. area. Nobody said he couldn't, but pool or snooker just wasn't her thing, and when he played, with her sitting patiently smiling in the front of the place and waiting for him to get done, it wasn't the same. She was nice as

could be to Scruffy and Ralph and Rod and the rest, and even the Blinker, even though she didn't dig him. Well, you had to know the Blinker. And the way she did it was great, warm and lively with all of them but there was never any doubt as to whose girl she was and meant to be. But ... it wasn't the same, and pretty soon he went less and less and didn't see the herd at Mother's any more. Likewise the hang rounds at Butch's Air cooled except when something on the Monster needed fixing, which wasn't often. Once when he went down for new connectors on his tach he found himself taking an hour instead of ten minutes to put them in, and driving away he felt a single wild strong tug inside him that he just couldn't understand. Well they were just a bunch of greasy cats who couldn't talk or think anything but chops and cams and pots and mags and slicks, but ....

In the first couple of days she gave him a medallion on a chain around his neck, a funny little twist of silver with a flat piece of fire opal on it, and he wore it night and day. For a long time he wore it swinging outside and was glad to say "My chick," when someone asked about it.

His subscriptions to Car and Driver and Road and Track got screwed up somehow and six weeks went by and he didn't even miss them. You have to know him to know what that really meant. He was very content. He'd tell her that every once in a while just to see her fight up. He told himself that too. He bought the magazines at the newsstand and when the next issues came out she threw away the old ones. He was a little shook, and although he didn't say anything, he kept the magazines at work after that.

One morning the alarm went off and he rolled out and fumbled for his clothes and they felt different. Instead of the black tight cords and the Western shirt with the rawhide on the pockets, there were a pair of black jeans, real tailored, with slightly bell bottoms and a dark dull kind of paisley print shirt with a scarf and ring attached to it. They were really cool and he liked them but he said hell, he couldn't go to work in them, he'd look like a peacock. She lay in the bed watching him with a say-you-like-them, pent-up joy on her face.

She'd made them herself secretly whenever she could snatch the time when he wasn't around, and kept hiding the pieces before he came back until they were all done. So he said what she wanted to hear and he did wear them to work that once, although he wore the medallion inside his shirt instead of outside. Sure enough the crew gave him a rough time about it and when he came home he said he'd save the bells and the paisley for parties, they were too good to risk at work. And he got to the trash before they collected it and found his black cords and Western shirt and put them away in the garage in a box with the rest of his stuff still out there. He never knew why and nobody asked him but he wore the medallion inside his shirt after that.

She made him three more pairs of pants and two more shirts, and they were really great, but for parties. They'd go to parties, people shed known a long time. They were okay parties. He never liked drinking much but he'd drink a little sometimes and like it a little, and he could take pot or leave it alone. Only sometimes after a party where he had laughed a lot, he would leave with a strange feeling that he had just crossed a desert. It could be full of people but there just wasn't anybody to talk to. One time he parked outside

one of the parties and there in the dark under a tree was a silver Excalibur. He always said an Excalibur was a piece of candy, but secretly he thought it was a whole big heap of wheels, and if anybody ever offered to swap him for the Monster he'd keep the Monster, but he sure would think it over a lot. So when they got inside he made it his business to find out who was driving it, and he had his mouth all set to sit down and really talk, but it turned out to belong to some rich chick whose daddy had given it to her for her eighteenth birthday and she didn't know an axle from an ax handle. That one time he really felt cheated and mad, and it was the first time he felt dead sure he couldn't explain it and drove home too fast without talking and scared her a bit, and wouldn't talk after they got home either.

Also she cut his hair. She could do that. She could do anything she tried, and she did it well. It looked great. It was a lot different but it really did look fine.

One night after some sex, and it really was the most, and she slipped off to sleep in the way she had, he lay thinking about things and remembered something about roll bars and anti-sways he had read somewhere, but couldn't pin it down. He got up carefully and went out to the Monster and got the flashlight and went into the garage and got out the boxes with the back issues in them, and squatted there looking them over for so long his feet went numb and the batteries quit. He sat there in the dark banging his heels against the concrete to wake them up and you know something? he felt wonderful. He put away the magazines in the boxes and then put away the boxes and limped back into the house and to bed. He didn't think she knew.

He bought heavy-duty batteries first thing next day, and about a week later it happened again just the same way. He didn't figure out what was happening—he was not the figuring-out kind, maybe. But the third or fourth time it happened he was kneeling in the middle of the concrete floor with a drag pictorial on steam turbines down at the bottom of his tunnel of light when he heard something. He switched off his flash and the color print of a bright red three-wheel squirt, with the driver in prone position, faded from his eyes to be replaced by her shadowy naked figure in the doorway. He said, "Well, I didn't want you to wake up."

She said the only bitter thing she had ever said to him. She pointed at his crotch and said, "You use that as a kind of sleeping pill for me, don't you?" Then she went back inside.

He stayed to pack away the magazines and then followed. She seemed to be asleep so he got in quietly and did not touch her. They did not talk about it in the morning.

That night they went to another party, and no less than three cats told him at different times how great his threads were. Well, she had good taste, she knew what looked good. The party was beautiful people and two guitars and a side table full of things made of rice and a lot of different kinds of cheese and wine—a desert. When they got home she went to bed and he went into the bathroom to get rid of the desert inside and out, and a terrible thing happened to him. He looked into the mirror and did not know who that was in there.

I mean it was a great haircut and the guru-style collar on the cotton-satin shirt-jacket was so well-cut it did not look freaky, and then there were the deep-buffed reversed-calf boots, like suede so nappy it was almost fur. But none of it was him, nothing he remembered, nothing he ever thought about when he thought Me. A terrible thing.

He took off all the clothes and hung them up and put them and the shoes away. Then he took off the medallion and put it on the TV and went to bed and right

to sleep.

She was up ahead of him as usual and breakfast was ready. He went out into the garage naked and found his black cords and the Western shirt with the rawhide on the pockets, and his old lineman's boots, and put them all on. He came in and ate. While he was eating she told him she had done everything in the world to make him happy. He agreed that she had and said it had all been great.

It was Saturday and he hopped in the Monster and went down to the Rents. He felt very strange, holding something inside of himself locked down tight, knowing it was no good to let it all out because he couldn't explain it to anybody if he did. They remembered him all right and got the 6-by-10 hitched on and the mirror mounted in half the time. He drove back to the house and up the driveway to the garage and loaded all his stuff into the trailer. It didn't take too long.

She came out and watched him finish. "Come inside."  
He just shook his head and vaulted into the bucket. She came over and stood beside the Monster, holding her hands together real tight. "Knightly, Knightly, what is it? Tell me what's the matter."

He could only stare blindly at the tachometer. The only thing that came to him seemed so crazy he could not bring himself to say it: I want my real name back. He said, "I'm no good at explaining things, Hon."

But she was. She knelt by the Monster so he could look down into those double-arched eyes in that frame of coppery-yellow, and she said how she had been thinking and thinking, and she realized how wrong she had been. She began a whole list of promises. She said, "Ill try to learn about cars and go with you to the drag strips and the shops. Ill pick it up quickly, and then i'll pay more attention to the way you want to look and not the way I want you to look. And I never realized it but I shouldnlve made you quit the Emergency and live the way I live." And more, like about she never had found out what he used to eat before he met her, she just cooked what she thought he ought to like without asking. She would change, she would change. Any way he wanted her to, she would change.

He almost had a thought worth saying, something about what happened to people when they had to change, but he couldn't get it into shape. Maybe later she could figure it out for herself. He started the motor and shifted into low and checked the mirrors on both sides, and then throttled way back so she could hear him. He said, as he began slipping the clutch, "It ain't any of those things, Hon.

"It's You."