

Bitch'n

A romantic couple is silhouetted against a vibrant sunset over the ocean. The man is on the left, leaning in to kiss the woman on the cheek. The woman is on the right, looking towards the man. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and red, with the sun low on the horizon. The ocean waves are visible in the foreground, and the beach is in the lower right.

**Sex, drugs, rock'n roll,
and...murder in a
1959 beach town**

A. J. Converse

BITCH'N

Dedication

To my wife of 44 years, Melinda, for her consideration all these years and especially her love, help, support and patience during the long hours of editing and re-editing this novel.

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1

Wednesday July 6, 1960

God, the cops just walked up to pop as he checked the points on our '57 Ford Fairlane. I could see them from the front room window. Every little detail, the tuft of Bermuda grass growing through the crack in the asphalt, the motion of the palm leaves at the top of the trees surrounding the tenant parking, the cloudless sky, all froze as if time itself stopped when the cops stood in front of Pop.

Pop rose scowling and closed the hood. I heard the cop's voice.

"We want to see Herman."

Pop raised his voice, the way he chewed out sailors. "What the hell do you want with my son after all the other stuff?"

The cop's legs stiffened. He folded his arms. "We want to ask him a few questions."

I moved closer to the window, straining to hear. *Nothing happened in the weeks since Joe Carlson's murder. Why...now...new evidence? What could it be...?*

I heard the word "ashtray."

The ashtray - that must be it. I hit Carlson with the ashtray stand before I finished him. I lived in fear of the authorities somehow connecting it to me.

Mom walked into the room and stood next to me at the window. "What's going on?"

I stared through the window. A smudge of grey where the lawn sprinklers had hit the window, leaving a slick of moisture that accumulated dust and then dried, streaked the lower portion of the window. I stared at it, trying to still the fear.

"I think they're talking to pop about me," I said.

I tried to keep my voice steady. My secret screamed at my conscious. Like I'd felt standing on the edge of Hoover Dam on one of our vacation car trips; the pull of the view to the bottom made my legs

weak. Just as the terrible draw at the precipice tugged at me then, I feared blurting out the truth. Knowing that Mom didn't know didn't calm me.

"Not that drug business again, I hope," Mom said.

She headed for the door to our little duplex. I watched her walk out to where they stood. She walked as if chilly, with her arms folded. The July afternoon sun in Coronado shined warm, not hot. The weatherman called it balmy.

"We just want his fingerprints..." I heard the cops say. The rest I couldn't hear.

Pop sputtered. "You're crazy if you think my son had anything to do with it. How many prints were on that ashtray, anyway – a thousand, I bet. That Carlson kid and his Mexican friends nearly killed my son. Leave him alone."

The cops looked at each other and shrugged. "Okay, we'll have to tell the chief you won't cooperate."

Pop leaned into them, his face inches from theirs. "Get the hell out of here. You don't have any business bothering my family." I could see the veins in his neck even from my side of the window.

"Tell your chief that."

Mom grabbed his arm, easing him away. He glared at the two cops as they backed away. "Tell him that," he repeated. The cops withdrew to their car.

Shit, were they on to me?

Pop stood up for me. That was just the way he was. How could I ever justify what I did? Mom, how could I tell her? They believed in my honesty. They trusted their son. Mom and Pop could never imagine that I would do such a thing...and not tell them... I would have told them. Their child, a good kid, not a murderer... in their minds, the cops had no business bothering me in the first place. My agreement to testify against Carlson put my life in danger, and now the cops accused me of killing him - no, not their son, never.

I couldn't imagine my life if anyone found out that I murdered Joe Carlson - no matter the circumstances. It must stay a secret. My thing with Liz, my plans for college, everything, gone if ever anyone found out. *Thank God, they couldn't read my mind.*

If only I could live the year over. It had started out bitch'n.

2

1959

I showed off a little with that last wave, hoping the chicks would notice this sophomore stud in the surf. Finishing near the shore, I found myself off to the right of my buddies gathered on the sand.

rose, standing waist deep in the water directly in front of the five voluptuous senior girls we had dubbed the *big five*. The warm water of Southern California's late summer enticed me to linger in the shallow water and take in the view.

It's funny how I could always notice even a slight flaw in a single chick, but when I encountered a group of girls on the street or on the beach, their collective sexiness seemed to wash out all individual imperfections. If one had a too-large mouth or another crooked teeth it didn't register. The charms all seemed to blend into one image of perfection in my mind. The big five hung out together so often that my mental image of each had been altered. Each took on the aura of an angel. They created the same effect on my buddies.

Jill Hankins stretched out to retrieve the vinegar and iodine concoction for her skin. That I knew didn't work to prevent sunburn. Nothing worked except the gradual building up of a tan. I watched her stretch out. What the hell, she could use vinegar and iodine as much as she wanted.

Shaking off my reverie, I examined them separately. Katie Gutierrez displayed a voluptuous body in a too small maroon bikini. Her rich Spaniard parents lived in one of the Coronado beach mansions. The rest owed their presence in Coronado to their Navy fathers. Sue Pricy's one-piece suit helped hide her slight chubbiness. Its low cut front showed a deep cleavage and luscious tits. Sharon Galloway's hot pink, two-piece suit showed off her figure and her long dark blond hair. Jillian jiggled in her sky blue two-piece bathing suit, the old style, not a bikini. And Liz Edgerton ...aww Liz... sat upright, her yellow bikini advertising her untouchable body. A devout Christian, her long slim shape included without doubt, the best ass in Christendom.

The lifeguards moved the red flag while I stared at the chicks. I missed it. Showing off, I turned back toward the open water and jumped up over an incoming wave. I ignored the undertow and swam out toward the bigger swells. I plunged under the crash of breakers. I wanted to reach the one perfect large rolling swell before it broke. The churning surf and undertow started to slow me, but I wanted to impress the big five. I forced my way out. The water pulled me out faster, too fast. I struggled. The water's power grew. What happened? I don't know, but shit; now I was in trouble. My stomach tightened. I could drown. *Get it together.*

The green water pulled me further toward the open sea. Flapping shards of seaweed grasped at my legs. A memory of a long past Phys Ed. swimming lecture on what to do in a riptide popped into my head. *Swim at right angles to the shore.* That old lecture seemed pointless. As the waves moved through the rip, they churned instead of breaking normally. I sputtered with mouthfuls of salt water as the surges dunked me again and again. The nose-full did it. All I needed now was a cramp.

I spotted a lifeguard on the sand moving toward my part of the beach. He stared at me. The big five swam up, looking at me. I might drown if the lifeguard doesn't rescue me, but then shit, the big five would see him rescue me. *Calm down, think.* Trying to appear cool, I stopped flailing my arms. I didn't wait for any lifeguard swimming out to rescue me. I'm tough I told myself, stifling an urge to call for help. I could see the other lifeguard approaching with his float. The chicks and my friends stared out me.

I always thought myself a strong swimmer, but body surfing and fighting a rip current were two different things. I forgot the old advice to swim at right angles to the rip. Taking a chance, I lunged toward shore as each wave crashed around me. Using the waves to over-come the current, I made

some progress toward the beach. The churning breakers still provided some forward momentum. I tapped that momentum.

The lifeguards moved out waist deep watching me. I concentrated on appearing calm and deliberate. My feet finally touched bottom.

Thank God.

My heart pounded from the exertion. I avoided the rip. I avoided the humiliation of rescue. My lungs burned. I tried to look cool and in control as I walked my way out of the water. Reaching sand, I fell over and put my hands on my knees to catch my breath. The lifeguards strode up to me.

“What the hell were you doing out there? Didn’t you see the red flag?” One of them yelled at me, nothing like a pissed-off ex-frogman to make your day at the beach. That’s how the city got its lifeguards – ex-frogmen.

Fuck you, trying to look big in front of the chicks, I thought.

Trying to act calm, I said, “I’ve been in the water for a couple of hours. I didn’t see you move the flag, sorry.”

“Well, stay out of the water it’s treacherous.” He said.

Trying not to puff, I walked up the beach with as much nonchalance as I could fake. Then I flopped down in the sand between my buddies and the chicks.

“Don’t you have a towel?” Liz Edgerton said.

She looked at me through lidded eyes as she spoke, her slim finger on her chin, one of the big five. Bitch’n.

Liz found herself talking to him. She first noticed him a couple of years before, when as a sophomore she saw him playing Pony League Baseball. A certain maturity about his mannerisms appealed to her. His body had firmed up more since then, making him even more attractive. He was average size for a high school boy but his body seemed harder, like that of a young adult. His light brown hair hung nearly to his eyes. Another patch of hair ran down his belly into his cutoffs. It drew her eyes. Was he aware that she was not much older than he?

“Hey, what’d the life guard say to you Mo? He looked pissed.” Jon said.

The guys call me Mo.

I ignored Jon and said to Liz, “No, I never use a towel; I just lie in the sand ‘til I’m dry.”

“Oh ... I was gonna offer to dry you off with my towel.”

She curled her long legs under her bottom and sat up straight, pushing her hands straight down on the sand, emphasizing the curve of the small of her back. I wished that I could dust off the sand particles that clung to her yellow bikini bottom.

“You’re welcome to dry me off anytime, Liz. You can do it now if you want.”

She giggled. “You would like that, I bet.”

She stopped herself there. Boys could be like quicksand, her mom warned her many times. They could ruin her future if she allowed her feelings to control her. Keep a tight control of her feelings until she was older, her mom preached. Liz’s mind filled with forbidden urges so she forced herself to stop flirting and turned briskly to talk to Katie, tossing her hair provocatively over her shoulder.

I turned to look at my gawking friends. Between Jon and Rich sat a small cooler with an open lid. Jon Jackman sipped on a beer. His older brother probably bought a six-pack for him. He sometimes acted as a tap for the guys.

Hampton McCarty sat next to Jon with his shades on, looking cool. He had something in a paper cup, probably scotch from his father’s liquor cabinet. He liked to replace the scotch he pilfered with tap water. The guys wondered just how much watering down the bottle could handle before the old man discovered it.

Rich Lévesque lounged laconically on his elbows.

Larson Burke sat next to Rich with his arms on his knees, grinning at the girls foolishly. He could look square just sitting there.

“So what’s the haps?” I said. Everyone in the school said haps for happening. I came to the beach early to get in some surfing. I had to get home in the afternoon to fix my motorbike for my paper route in the morning. The guys came later. We planned to hit the last beach party of the summer in the evening.

“Aw, we had to wait for Larson to finish mowing his parent’s lawn. We sat around his patio for hours in the morning teasing his sister.

“How about hanging around,” Jon said.

Then he raised his voice, looking at the girls, “We can see if the chicks wanna ride around town with us”

Jillian yelled back, "How'd we all fit in that dinky old car of Rich's?"

"No problem," Jon said, "You can sit on our laps."

"Or take turns in the back seat," Rich said under his breath.

Jillian heard it and chimed in, "Only in your dreams, Daddy-O. Never send a boy to do a man's job, always say."

The chicks all laughed. They knew who we were and we knew who they were, but hey, they were the big five. We'd never talked to them before. Now that we had some banter going with them and on the beach too, I had to leave. *Crap.*

I turned to Jon and said, "I gotta get back and fix my motorbike for my route tomorrow."

"You're getting as square as Larson, Mo. Don't you know it's not cool to have a paper route in high school. Kids deliver papers. Hell Mo, now we're sophomores."

"Hey, I don't have rich parents to give me bread like you Jon, if I want wheels I gotta pay for the car myself. That's why I'm working. Anyway it gives me beer money."

"Aww, you don't drink enough beer to get a girl high. Mo." Jon said.

"I wanna play football this year, not just sit on the bench like last year. I don't need to get caught by the beach patrol and get kicked off the team. Then there's Mom. She'd have a conniption and convince Pop to ground me forever if I got arrested. If I got drunk like you and Hampton, the beach patrol might catch me. A little high, I still can run fast."

"You're a pussy. Anyway we never get caught." Jon said.

"Hey watch that," Jillian shouted at Jon. "There are ladies present."

"Huh, where are the ladies?" Rich said, looking around as if he was really searching for some.

Jillian got up, came over, and threw a paper cup of soda on him. I hated to leave, things were getting fun.

"I'd like to hang out with you guys some more, but I gotta split." I said as I stood up and pulled on my old sweatshirt, and shuffled into my go-aheads.

What passed for the town hoods strode up acting like junior high kids. Their swagger marked them as big-shot seniors. Stan Huffman led the way. Big, blond, white and fat, he played backup fullback on the football team the previous year. If he didn't get his ass kicked out of school, he might be first string this year. He thought that he was a big stud. He brushed his crew-cut blond hair sides back to his duck-ass. He wore dark levis tucked under at the cuffs so as not to show the seam or the turn-up. In 1959, guys never wore faded Levis. Since Levis faded as soon as they were washed, cool cats rarely washed them. His too-small white t-shirt made him look ridiculous with his baby fat. To cap off his

hard-guy look, he sported a cigarette pack rolled up in one sleeve. He affected the TJ look of Mexico sandals ~~died black and worn over white sweat socks. The sandals came only from Mexico.~~ They consisted of un-dyed leather straps on cheap soles made of rubber from old tires. We called them Huaraches. If you wore them, ostensibly you hung out in Tijuana. Except in Stan's case, his mom probably picked them up during one of her shopping trips. Privileged captain's kids like him filled Coronado. He normally got As and Bs in school. He inherited his parents' brains, not their common sense. Stan's naïveté made him appear plain stupid sometimes.

He usually hung with four other pseudo hoods of privileged backgrounds. Two stood with him now: Del Webber, a slight kid with blond hair, brushed back in a DA, with the standard dark Levis and a white t-shirt, sort of a miniature Stan, and Joe Carlson.

Joe Carlson liked to fight. Anger filled him for some reason. A skinny, greasy bastard, he combed his black hair into a duck-ass pompadour. He carried a knife. He liked to come up behind freshman boys and hit them on the tops of their heads with his knuckle when walking the school's halls. Carlson scared me.

Stan struck a pose in front of me and said, "What are you assholes doing talking to senior chicks?"

A knot of fear-rage tightened my abdomen. I pointed at his feet.

"Bitch'n sandals Stanley. Did your Mommy buy them for you in Mexico?"

I heard Rich mutter, "Huh oh."

The guys sat up at attention. They could see what was coming. They knew that if I had to fight, they would, and they might get into it too. None of us wanted this day at the beach to end in a fight. Flirting with the chicks was more fun, but I refused to let Stan bully us. The big five quietly watched the show.

"Why don't you and your buddies go cruising instead of bugging us? You're not dressed for the beach and we're just having a good time." I said.

Stan looked at the girls. They looked right through him. He shifted his feet. He didn't know how to respond. My comment gave him a way out. If he had any sense he'd have realized that the girls didn't like his hard guy approach. But as I said, he had no common sense.

Jillian pouted and shook her head. "We don't want to see a big fight Stan. We're just having fun at the beach."

Stan faltered. Things weren't going his way.

"Yea Stan, I said. Instead of cruising, you guys ought to go home and get your cutoffs and boards. The surf's great."

"There're red flags all over. Its no good for surf boards," Stan said.

The confrontation sputtered, I thought that he might back off.

~~Then Rich with his warped sense of humor said, "Why don't you and Del go home and wax each other's boards. That'd be fun."~~

I took the brunt of Stan's sudden response. He pushed me down on the sand and glared at me. Carlson stepped forward to join him.

Herman Harris reminded Joe Carlson of his stepbrothers. They could do no wrong according to Loretta, his stepmother. He hated them. Loretta once told Joe that she inherited him from the Colonel's first wife, a drunk. He knew that the Colonel related to all his kids in an authoritative manner. Still, Joe used to try to impress his old man. A few years ago, he gave up. Harris always seemed to do the right thing. He studied hard, doing all the square things, but somehow everyone looked on him as cool. Joe believed he could take Harris. He almost fought him last year when Harris was just a freshman. Joe cared enough about his reputation then not to pick on a freshman. Now he didn't give a shit. Joe touched the knife in his pocket. He wanted to kick Harris's ass for no other reason but that he was popular.

"Let me take this asshole."

"No, I'll pound him," Stan said.

The Idiot forgot that Rich had muttered the inflaming words. Sprawled on my back in the sand, I remembered my old man's advice when I was a little kid in Norfolk. *If another kid picks on you and he's bigger, hit him first and hit him right on the nose. That'll hurt him. Then just keep slugging him. Don't fight fair. Kick him in the nuts; thumb his eyes, whatever it takes until he gives up.* Pop had a tough life growing up. He enlisted as a way to get out of the Brooklyn slums in the early thirties. He knew how to fight.

I rose to a squatting position.

I heard Jillian say, "Knock it off Stan. Don't be a jerk."

I stood up and shot out my right fist, hitting Stan right on the tip of his nose. It was enough. I heard the snap. Blood shot out; he grabbed at his nose and bent down. I stepped back and kicked him in the face. Then I grabbed him, moaning and bent over, and ran him into the water. I threw his ass down in the foam. That got all his hard guy clothes dripping wet including the leather huaraches. Bitch'n, I hope that I ruined the sandals. Let him explain that to his mom.

Carlson headed toward me. I steeled myself for a kicking, hair pulling, kneeing and biting all-out fight.

Joe closed on the two fighters, his adrenaline rising with his anger. He wanted to pound Harris. His anger seemed to well up from nowhere these days, overwhelming him. He didn't care who or why he just wanted to tear someone apart. He tossed his cigarette into the water. He saw the lifeguard approach. Joe wanted to fight them. The image of his old man's wrath stopped him. He didn't want to be beating from that old Marine bastard.

"Hey no fighting on the beach," one of the lifeguards shouted. "We can arrest you both for fighting."

Good, the lifeguards had shut Carlson down. Stan was a blowhard, but Carlson, was dangerous.

"I have to head home now," I said. "This guy started it."

Stan leaned his hands on his knees and spit salt water and blood.

"You better go home and have your mother look at that nose," the lifeguard said to Stan.

I smiled. That infuriated him. Go home and have your mother look at that nose, the lifeguard said. Everyone heard it. Stan stood there speechless holding his nose.

Already a little sunburned, I decided to head home. I knew from experience that I didn't want to spend a week hobbling around in pain with a bunch of blisters. After which, I'd spend a week scratching the itchy, flaking skin. That would cramp my style. I had to fix my motor bike anyway.

I left them standing there at the edge of the foam, grabbed my go-aheads and headed home. I waved to the guys. They gave me the thumbs up sign. The girls acted cool, pretending to ignore the whole thing. I knew that they'd giggle about it later.

3

I heard Jillian as I crossed Orange Avenue.

"Wait Herman."

She strode quickly in her go-aheads, a light white cover-up failing to hide her wiggling breasts in her tight blue swimsuit. Her outspoken manner actually made people like her. She mouthed off to teachers and fellow students alike, but that mouth contained strong white teeth and full lips, which often formed a smile. She was attractive in an overpowering way.

The small town of Coronado allowed few secrets. Her dad was a full Captain and a drunk. The Navy assigned him to some job or another where he couldn't get into trouble until he could retire. Jillian

liked to antagonize her long-suffering mother whose claims to aristocracy paled through the years. Her husband's camaraderie drinking grew to an addiction to alcohol. Jillian brought home the hoods of the school. As if this navy town's high school could be said to have real hoods. Even the black leather jacket types with motorcycles turned out to be officer's kids with too much money and too much time on their hands.

"Cool the way you handled Stan," she said, grinning. "I live on Glorietta Boulevard. Let me walk with you."

"I didn't wanna fight Huffman. He's such an ass," I said.

"Oh, we all know that. Maybe someday he'll grow up. I don't think Joe will. Stan's his last friend at school as far as I know. He's a little crazy, I think. I had a date with him once when we were both freshmen. He was nicer, and cleaner then. I turned him down for a second date. He acted a little too weird. Sometimes in class, he would make a sound, then turn around embarrassed, I guess to see if anyone noticed."

"Sound?"

"Like he was talking to someone. I think he daydreamed. We all do that, but he existed in a different world."

She tossed her head and smiled directly at me.

"Do you live in the enlisted housing area, Herman?"

"Yea, Dad's a Chief Machinist Mate. He enlisted in 1932 during the depression. He and Mom plan to buy a house when he retires. He wants to get a teaching credential and maybe teach vocational courses somewhere in San Diego, in a couple of years."

"You sound proud of your father."

"Yea, how about you Jillian, are you proud of your father?"

"Call me Jill."

"Dad had it a little easier. He comes from the Virginia Hankins family. His line goes way back, so his family is sort of uppity. They have lots of political contacts. He got an appointment to Annapolis. He did a lot of different stuff in the Navy, but now he drinks too much. He's at sea now as Chief of Staff for some Admiral. At least he can't drink aboard ship."

Jill giggled. "Your hand looks raw, Hermie. You skinned it on Stan's nose. Stop at my house, I'll put a bandage on it or something. My mom's off at some wives club meeting."

She touched me as she said it.

What could I say, of course, I agreed - my lucky day. Our pace slowed as we talked. She bumped against me as we walked. Her legs were strong and shapely, her waist trim, and her smile open and

genuine. She chatted incessantly forcing me to look toward her. She was oblivious of the effect of the nearness of her breasts to my concentration. Her swimsuit moved independently of them as she walked, exposing her tan line. My mind drifted from the fight. Finally, she got to her point.

“Do you go to all the beach parties?”

“Most of them,” I said. “There’s one tonight.”

Beach parties happened about every weekend. The kids all spread the word and just showed up. Many brought beer if they could get it. Others just hung out. Usually there was a big bonfire, music from a portable radio, and lots of making out. The parties started at dark and ran until everyone went home or the beach patrol broke it up. When they showed up everybody took off. The beach patrol in this close community chased people, but never seemed to catch anyone. They were content to break things up. They usually didn’t show up unless things got loud.

“I’ve only been to a couple. My mom forbids me go to them, so I sneak out when I can.”

I stopped and grinned at her. “You sneak out. I don’t picture you doing that.”

“If you knew me better, you could. I wanna go tonight. It’s the last one of the summer. I hear it’ll be a blast. Why don’t you take me?”

Bitch’n, this senior chick asked me to take her to the beach party.

Before I got too excited she hurriedly said, “I know guys don’t take dates to beach parties, but it’s the only way I can get out. My mom lets me go on dates, but not to beach parties.”

“I could get Stan or one of those guys to take me, but they’re disgusting.”

“Disgusting, huh.”

“Yea, did you hear what Stan spread all over the school about Liz? He said she was a baby because she wouldn’t pet. Why should he expect her to do anything but neck?”

“Well, aw...”

“Anyway, he has bad breath and he’s fat. He was lucky she even went out with him in the first place. Boys that talk about their dates infuriate me. He still hangs out with that Joe Carlson. That’s a turnoff for any girl. Why date a druggie? There’s no future in that.”

As she laid into him, all I could say was, “yea.”

“I guess I could get one of the other seniors to take me, but I want to go off to college without a boyfriend. I don’t want to start up something right now,” she said.

“Huh, well...”

As she went on, I looked at her pretty mouth and glanced down now and then at her cleavage and her legs...those thighs.

“The only thing to do is to go with a guy who wouldn’t want to be my boyfriend. You’re a sophomore but you’re cool. I don’t think you want to get serious.”

“Huh, yea.” I said.

She finally let me finish a thought.

“So I thought you might take me. I really like the way you handled Stan. He deserved it. I hope Stan goes to the party tonight and sees us. That would put him in his place.”

Nodding encouragement, I took in her whole body, especially the way her tanned thighs disappeared into the tight fitting bottom of her bathing suit. A little red line on her left inner thigh marked the beginning of milky white skin where the suit had slipped upward a bit.

“You’ll have to say we’re going to a movie if Mom asks.”

“Huh, well...” I said as I stumbled on a rise in the sidewalk.

She took my hand firmly in hers, stopping to emphasize her point. I looked into her eyes and saw them soften, then just as quick, turn firm. She continued on, turning slightly to hold my face in her gaze, holding my hand in both of hers. I wondered if Jill intended to control our date so she could drink a little and flirt with the older guys, maybe just use me to get out of the house. Instead of enjoying the party and possibly hitting on some sophomore chick out for a good time, with her I’d be like a dog on a leash. I was thinking along those lines when we got there.

“Come in, my mom’s not home,” she said.

That got my attention again. My mind bounced around images of her milky white thighs, full breasts and white teeth as she told me about her parents’ rules. She couldn’t hang out with anyone that wasn’t from a senior officer’s family or one of the rich families on the island. So why me, I thought as I followed her in. The inside of her place wasn’t that much bigger than my folk’s duplex, but its picture window looked out at a lawn. My folk’s picture window looked out at a parking lot. Our worn carpet covered the whole floor; her family’s oriental carpet accented a hardwood floor. The furniture looked new. The couch didn’t sag in places like ours. Like my mom, her mom kept the place clean and neat. She sat me down next to her in a little love seat, ignoring the full size couch. She took my hand and examined it as if she knew something about nursing or something.

“There’s some ointment I can put on it. I’ll go get it,” she said.

I sat there looking at how the other half lived. A fireplace and a wooden mantel made up most of one wall. Stained wood molding along the wall-to-wall royal blue carpeting and ceiling edges highlighted the pure white walls. White furniture with royal-blue designs on the fabric added to the wealthy look. Jill’s family wasn’t rich but they sure did better than my family. I watched the clock on the mantel. Its ticking made me wonder what Jill was doing. What would I say if her mom suddenly walked in?

~~Then Jill popped into the room from the hall. She had taken off her swimsuit. She wore a terrycloth robe and carried a tube of ointment. Her bare feet highlighted her calves which lead up to the thighs...I pictured her legs and her body under the robe. Stretching her legs out, she wiggled her toes in the thick carpet.~~

“I had to get out of that suit. It gets so scratchy with all that sand.”

She took my hand and gently spread ointment on it. Part of her breast showed when she bent close. Her breasts jiggled unrestrained beneath the terrycloth. Bitch’n.

“Take off your sweat shirt so I won’t get ointment all over it.” She whispered.

I did. That put only her terrycloth robe between my bare chest and her lush tits. She rubbed the ointment into my hand very gently, leaning on my chest to do it. Some wisps of her sun bleached dark blond hair tickled my nose. I felt her warm softness against my bare chest. Trying to figure out if I could start kissing her right there on the love seat, I put one hand on her back as she rubbed in the ointment. She didn’t object. I didn’t feel a bra strap. I moved my hand up to her neck. This was a senior girl, my mind was telling me. Did she realize how she was affecting me? But my body didn’t have to think, it just reacted. I rubbed her neck and touched her cheek to turn her head toward me.

She turned suddenly. Before I could kiss her, she murmured, “Those cutoffs must be full of sand. Why don’t you take a shower here?”

“With you?” just blurted out of me – stupid.

She giggled and pressed against me, watching for my reaction with lidded eyes.

“I hadn’t thought of that.” She said. “I never showered with a sophomore before.”

She turned and peaked out the window as if her mom was due home.

“Let’s do it,” I said, thinking it’s worth a try even if her mom might be home any minute.

She took my hand and pulled me out of the loveseat as if to lead me to the shower.

Then frowning impishly, she said, “Here’s Mom now.”

A yellow 1959 Oldsmobile 98 pulled into the short driveway. I sighed and pulled on my sweatshirt.

Jill squeezed my hand. “Now remember, we’re going to the movies, I think Ben-Hur is playing.”

An important looking woman strode up to the door and opened it with a superior manner. She looked down at me, her head held high and cocked to the side.

“Do I know this young man?” She said.

Jill's mom projected confidence, her figure firm, like an athlete's. Not bad legs either. Her white skin with matching jacket fit impeccably. Standing there in her high heel shoes, she looked like a woman used to getting her way. I could see where Jill got her genes.

"Oh this is Herman Harris, from school," Jill said. "He hurt his hand body surfing so I got him some ointment. We're gonna go to the movies tonight, if you don't have anything planned for me."

She gave Jill a once over look and raised her eyebrow. The brief pause made the room electric. The look said everything. Jill's mom didn't like her daughter wearing only a bathrobe.

"I'm Mrs. Hankins," she said to me extending a hand.

I shook her hand formally. "How do you do, Mrs. Hankins."

"His father's a Commander, mother." Jill said. Another lie.

Mrs. Hankins' expression softened. "I guess that's okay. I must say he looks more clean-cut than some of the unkempt creatures you've brought home, Jillian."

"I'll pick you up at seven, Jill," I said.

I bugged out before Mrs. Hankins could pose any more questions and before Jill could concoct any more lies.

4

The walk home took 15 minutes. I heard a neighbor in the duplex screaming at her husband. Boswell Mate Second Class Deacon Morris was in trouble with his wife again. From the sound of it, he chose watching the Padre Baseball game on TV instead of mowing the little patch of lawn in front of the unit. "Deak" as he preferred to be called, liked sports and beer in that order. He showed an easygoing patience with his wife and treated their two boys well. The screaming stopped, probably because he kidded her or something. Soon enough he would be outside, happily mowing the lawn, his wife placated. The kids attended the first or second grade or something. Little brown bundles of energy they were always getting into trouble. Pop called them the *Katzenjammer Kids*.

Like the Morris', good solid people lived in the housing project. The Navy provided the housing for families of enlisted men on a seniority basis. A petty officer headed most of the families. The units tended to be rundown, housing as they did a series of short-term residents. A screen door swung on a single hinge a few doors down from us. Little kids often ran around the yards in their diapers. The white paint on the units showed wear, peeling off in places and stained with mold in others. The navy tended to neglect their maintenance, something the city fathers criticized.

Chief Petty Officers, Warrant Officers and junior commissioned officers with families lived in homes elsewhere in the San Diego area. Mostly only Lieutenant Commanders and above could afford Coronado homes. Thus, an upper class/lower class thing, with children of senior officers mingling

with the kids like me from enlisted men's housing existed in town. Some mingled freely, like my friends, but some were more conscious of class in their selection of friends.

I opened the front door and found Pop watching the Padres on TV. A Chief with over twenty years service, Pop's head revealed a small but growing bald spot. Like my grandfather's bald spot, it would eventually grow to cover the top of his head. I had the same color hair as he, so I figured I'd be bald when I got older. Pop had an athletic build, which I also inherited, and a big nose, which I had not. He came from sturdy English stock as Mom often said. He and Mom were saving to buy a house after his retirement, so he took advantage of the free Navy housing.

The Padres were playing the Portland Beavers, another oh-hum team in the Pacific Coast League. I don't know why he watched the Padre games. Even major league ball games bored me – too slow. Might as well watch golf on TV, I thought. Pop grew up in Brooklyn watching the Dodgers, who provided heroes for every kid. Baseball was in his blood. A bag of pretzels balanced the rabbit ears on just the right place on the top of the set. They helped to stabilize the picture, which fuzzed up now and then, or so Pop said. Mom didn't like him snacking while watching TV. She thought he needed to watch his weight now that he was over forty, but Pop wasn't over weight. His active job kept him trim.

It was Mom who was slightly overweight, a matter to which I never alluded in her presence. She tended to impute into others little flaws that she herself possessed. She'd take offense if anyone dared insult her by pointing out the very same flaw. Mom was a good egg but sometimes I had to tiptoe around her moods and foibles. You can never figure out women, so don't even try, Pop often said.

"What's the haps," Pop said mimicking the current slang the kids used at school.

"You're so cool Pop," I said.

Pop put his thumbs under his belt and grinned. He liked to razz my brother and me. My brother, a junior at San Diego State, had moved to a small apartment with a couple of other guys. Now Pop had only me to tease.

"Staying out of trouble, chasing the chicks on the beach instead of drinking beer," he said.

"I got in a fight at the beach with a senior, but I kicked his ass."

"Don't use that word around here bub," Mom shouted from the kitchen.

She scurried out of the kitchen with a frown. Her pretty Irish face began to flush. The redness seemed to come up her neck to her face in a wave. The blush actuated her freckles and a perky nose. I had to smile at her. She had a quick, chirpy way of talking that was entertaining when she was bantering with Pop; it became grating when she nagged me.

"Sorry, Mom."

"I thought that stuff stopped after junior high school," she chirped, only half-angry.

She put her hands on her hips.

“You look healthy enough; it must have been a short fight.”

“He started it. I just defended myself. Remember Pop, what you told me when we lived in Norfolk. You said hit him first and hit him on the nose. That will take the fight out of a bigger kid. That’s what I did. It was a short fight. The kid is the son of a Captain and thinks he is hot shit, a real rough, tough creampuff.”

Mom frowned and wagged her finger at me.

Pop smiled a bit and said, “Was he bigger than you?”

“Yep, he’s the full-back on the football team.” I said.

Pop leaned back and smiled broadly.

“What’s that stuff on your hand?” Mom asked. She frowned.

“Oh one of the girls at the beach had some ointment she put on it. I hurt it on Stan’s nose. It’s swollen a bit. Now I have a date with her tonight. We are going to that beach party I told you about Pop.” I said.

I rarely deceived my parents. They were fairly cool, but they insisted on knowing the truth about my activities.

“I don’t know about those parties. Things can happen. I don’t want you to get some girl pregnant like your cousin Norm did. The girls these days just don’t get the moral training they did in my day,” Mom said.

“Oh Mabel let him be a kid. And if you’d had those high standards that you speak of we wouldn’t have fooled around before we got married. As I remember it, we fooled around quite a bit. He won’t do anything stupid. Anyway, as soon as one of those parties gets out of hand the beach patrol breaks them up,” Pop said. He chuckled.

Only Pop called Mom Mabel. Her name is really Mary, Mary Prudence O’Halloran. She fell for Pop in his sailor suit in the spring of 1940 and they’ve been together ever since.

Mom smiled and started chirping, “Your charm swept me off my feet against my upbringing Mabel Harris.”

“That beach patrol breaks up parties nearly every weekend, Harry. I read about them in the *Corona Journal*. They never seem to stop them at the start and they never seem to catch anyone when they break them up. The paper always says everyone scattered and the participants are believed to be college students.”

“That’s the beauty of living in an isolated Navy town. The public officials don’t want to stir up any trouble with the Navy brass by arresting some Admiral’s kid.” Pop said.

~~“Well I’ve gotta go fix that flat on my motor bike.” I said before Mom could start sputtering about the beach party thing again.~~

I changed into some old faded Levis that I wouldn’t be caught dead in at school. They worked great for stuff like fixing my motor bike. It didn’t take long to get the front wheel off and water test it. I used my old bicycle tube repair kit to glue a small piece of rubber over the hole. When I finished, I decided to run it over to the gas station a few blocks away and get some gas for its tiny tank. That would cost fifteen cents. Gas prices were high now; about 23 cents a gallon, the motor bike went a couple of weeks on a tank of gas.

When I pulled up to the gas pump, I noticed Joe Carlson by the front door of the station buying cigarettes from the machine. Stan and his buddies must have dropped him off. As usual, he looked like he wanted to pick a fight with someone, anyone. Then I noticed a dark car pull up and he climbed in. Three hard looking Mexican guys sat in the car. They weren’t townies, probably his drugged buddies from Imperial Beach. They all wore shades. Carlson didn’t notice me and I didn’t want him to. The car pulled out with squealing tires. The jerks tried to look tough by laying rubber. There were some navy families in that town at the other end of the Silver Strand from Coronado, but these guys weren’t navy brats.

Mom had tacos for dinner. I liked the way she made them, extra greasy, with onions, tomatoes and hot sauce.

After dinner, I called Rich and told him not to pick me up. I’d meet him and the guys at the beach with Jill. Rich’s quiet but confident manner combined with a dry sense of humor. His sly smile usually preceded his wry comments. Rich’s old man worked for the city in the mayor’s office – city development or something. Mr. Levesque was also a big shot in the local VFW.

Rich owned a used 1949 Plymouth that functioned as the guys’ transportation. He acted like an old lady with it. He didn’t like getting all greasy playing with its innards, but he spent hours waxing and polishing it. He kept the inside impeccable. We respected his rigidity. If we smoked we cleaned out the ashtray after each ride. We were careful not to spill beer while riding in it. Trash got the heave-ho if there was a trash can around or not. The city streets were better places for trash than inside Rich’s car. You could walk anywhere in Coronado but cruising was cool. We all chipped in for gas and drove down Orange Avenue like big-assed birds playing Rock’n Roll loud on the radio.

My date with Jill surprised Rich.

“So what kind of unnatural act did you promise to perform to get her to go out with you?” He said.

I could picture his smile. He knew my folks were probably in the room so I couldn’t answer him directly.

“I’m just so cool Rich, she asked me on her own. She followed me home from the beach. I guess I impressed her with the way I handled Stan.” I said. But Jill had surprised me too.

“Bitch’n,” Rich said.

Mom and Pop sat there trying to look disinterested as I hung up the phone.

5

I got to her house at seven, wearing a striped shirt over my Levies. My car coat topped off my hothead look. The only thing cooler than a car coat, was a letterman's jacket. I hoped to earn one this year. I rang the doorbell. Jill popped out immediately, avoiding any last minute quizzing from her mom.

"Let's go," she said.

She grabbed my hand to pull me along for the short walk to the beach. She wore short shorts, an Annapolis sweatshirt and little white tennis shoes. Her breasts didn't jiggle as much as they had in the terrycloth robe that afternoon. *Must be wearing a bra.* I hoped that I could change that later in the evening. Her legs looked like they would get cold. I hoped that I could help with that too.

"We'll be meeting my friends at the party. Will sitting with a bunch of sophomores bug you?" I asked.

"No, it's cool."

She held my arm with both hands and looked up with a grin, as she hustled me along. I could feel her soft tits against me. She bounced along, eager to get to the party.

The guys lounged on the sand waiting for us. I guess they were curious about my senior "big five" date. They refrained from spewing forth the typical wise cracks as Jill and I sat down comfortably next to them, a good spot next to the fire. The crowd was growing. Some kids were already drinking. Groups of girls flirted with groups of guys. Later most would pair off, to make out. Someone had a portable radio that was playing *The Battle of New Orleans*. It promised to be a Bitch'n evening.

"Okay, Mo's here. Let's go get a tap," Hampton said.

"Oh that'll be fun, let's do it." Jill said. She stood up bouncing up and down on her tiptoes.

"Let's stay here Jill. The guys will get our beer. Right guys," I said. I hoped to stay at the party with her while my friends got the beer.

"Come on Mo even Larson's going for the tap. You can't be square, come with us. Jill wants to go." Rich said.

Jon gave me a look that said you had better go or I'll razz you the rest of the night. In a couple minutes, I found myself sharing the back seat with Jon and Larson, Jill sitting on my lap. Hampton sat in front, riding shotgun. Rich shifted into gear and let out the clutch smoothly - no burning rubber for Rich.

Jill turned her head and kissed me passionately with an open mouth.

Then she said to the group, “How do you get a tap?”

Hampton said, “We pick up a sailor walking to town from the Amphibious Base. That’s the easiest way.”

Hampton wore his dark brown hair slicked back on the sides into a duck-ass and cut short on top. His old man was a Captain, but Hampton wasn’t much into the class thing. He had something in a cup probably pilfered it out of his father’s liquor cabinet. Hampton got good grades easily with little studying. Teachers liked his shy and polite manner in class. When he got into liquor on weekends, he changed. He seemed to need booze to be sociable. With the guys, he often invented unusual and long swear words. He liked to toss the football or baseball but avoided playing on the school teams. He mostly liked to party, get drunk and chase drunken girls. At the parties, we frequented there were a fair number of drunken girls. By informal consensus, he generally dealt with the sailors, which was targeted as “taps.”

“Why don’t you just pick up sailors walking out of the North Island Gate?” Jill said.

North Island makes up about two thirds of the whole “island” of Coronado. Actually, Coronado is a peninsula with a narrow strip of sand called the Silver Strand, which connects it to the mainland via a long road that goes south to Imperial Beach. There’s a ferryboat service for cars and pedestrians from San Diego directly across the bay. The long drive around the bay keeps it isolated like the island it has once been. North Island is the Naval Airbase. The Amphibious Base is located just south of the village, along the Silver Strand. That’s where the Navy trains its frogmen and practices Marine landings.

“Na, those sailors know they don’t have a long walk to catch the ferry to San Diego so they usually don’t accept rides. The Amphibious base sailors are leery when we stop them, but they know we save them a long walk to the ferry landing, so they’re a lot easier to pick up.” Hampton said.

Coronado had liquor stores, but no real sailor bars, like the ones that proliferated across the bay. Young single sailors wanting to be wooed, screwed and tattooed headed to San Diego. The ten-cent fare fit their budgets and the ferries ran all night.

We headed south, out of town a couple of miles, to the turn for the amphibious base. We made a U-turn there and headed toward the village. We passed by a couple of young sailors that were one seaman. We searched for a Third Class Petty Officer, more likely to be over twenty-one, but not so old as to be wise enough not to mess with a bunch of teenagers. If he appeared alone, it was so much the better. The first time around, we didn’t see any promising taps. We continued back to town, made another U-turn and headed back. Many sailors walked the couple of miles to the ferry landing in town for the trip to San Diego at this time in the early evening.

Then we saw him, tall and lanky, walking alone with the collar of his pea coat turned up against the early evening land breeze from the San Diego mainland. The crow on his shoulder and the single reenlistment stripe lower on his sleeve meant that he was probably over twenty-one. He was white. We wouldn’t ask a Negro sailor. Most Negro sailors would probably run from us anyway. Rich pulled the

car over to the side of the road just ahead of him. Hampton rolled down the window.

“Hey buddy, if we give you a ride will you do us a favor?” He said.

The sailor looked a bit scared when he saw the crowd. His Adam’s apple protruded from his skin neck. When he saw Jill sitting on my lap, he seemed to relax a bit.

“What do ya want me to do?” he said with a Midwestern twang.

Hampton acted upbeat and friendly.

“We want ya to get us some beer, we’ll buy, and throw in a six-pack for you,” he said.

“Okay, I could use a ride.”

The sailor climbed in next to Hampton. We decided to get two cases of Budweiser and give the sailor a six-pack from one of the cases. We figured 42 cans of beer should be enough for the five guys plus Jill. Hampton would probably drink two six packs himself and Jon liked beer. Myself, I figured two cans. I really didn’t like the stuff. Maybe Jill would have enough to get high and really give me a good time making out. I kissed her. Flushed with excitement she responded, opening her mouth again. I filled it with my tongue. She moved and pressed close. She thought it dangerous to get a tap Coronado. That seemed to turn her on. Maybe I wouldn’t even have to get her drunk. Bitch’n.

We stopped on Second Street, near the corner of Orange Avenue, keeping the engine running. Jill stopped the kissing to watch anxiously. She kept her cheek touching my cheek. My hand slipped under her ass. This waiting part always made me nervous. I pictured the sailor coming out with a cop who would then arrest us for underage drinking or something. Jill started wiggling on my lap. Squeezed in the back seat with her weight on me, her squirming aroused another feeling in me that I extended in a manner she must have felt. I endured the discomfort and enjoyed the pleasure. She didn’t move my hand. She kissed me instead. We were communicating without sound, our bodies and tongues saying something words could not. My mental picture of the cop disappeared.

Too soon, the sailor came out with two cases of Bud. Hampton split out a six-pack for him. Rich dropped the grinning sailor, beer in hand, a couple blocks away, at the ferry landing.

Jon and Hampton opened their beers while Larson examined his can and looked furtively out the window. One night we had picked up a tap and everyone gave him an order. Larson didn’t order any beer. He ordered a cigar, not cool at all. It certainly made the sailor feel less intimidated. He actually laughed. The situation made us all look stupid, not like cool cats, but stupid. We sometimes discussed shutting Larson out of the group. But as Jon said, it was fun to tease his sister. Anyway, he was an old friend.

I started a beer and shared it with Jill who cuddled close. Rich cruised to the beach, a ride of about five minutes up 3rd Street to G Avenue then up G to the beach. He parked near a stairway down to the sand. We clambered out of the car. Jill’s excited wiggling and kissing affected me in a prominent way. I had to hunch over to adjust things as a knowing Jill stood casually in front of me with the can of beer. She looked sideways at me and asked, “Everything straightened out.” I nodded my belt and

loose car coat disguising my situation. Then we walked down to the sand, me feeling especially cool with this sophisticated senior chick.

6

The guys wore car coats or letter jackets, go-aheads or huaraches. The girls wore shorts sweat shirts and go-aheads. Couples making out, kids drinking beer, they all crowded around a large bonfire. A portable radio played *Lonely Boy*. Rich and Hampton lugged one case and Larson and Jon carried the other three six-packs. Jill and I strolled between them sharing the single beer. I saw Stan and De along with their other two buddies, Bobby Champ and Jim Nelson lounging on the other side of the fire. They sipped beers and tried to look tough with their huaraches and letter jackets.

Jon nudged me and said, “Mo look, the four school hoods. Let’s go over there and pick a fight.”

Jon a husky Pollock lived with his brother and sister and widowed mother a few blocks away from my house. His neighborhood was as expensive as the Country Club area where all the Navy Captains lived. It was close to the bay. His mom inherited wealth. An active member of the hospital auxiliary she was well known in the village. Jon’s blond hair was long and unruly most times. He claimed that his grandfather had changed the family name from some unpronounceable Polish name when he immigrated to the U.S. He instigated many of our escapades. When Rich first got his car, he suggested that we get sailors to buy us beer. The amphibious base circuit was one Coronado High School kid had used for years before we came along but Jon steered us into the practice.

Jill squeezed my arm and said. “You’d better not.”

As we settled down near the fire, the radio throbbed with *Turn Me Loose*. A couple of freshman boys dared each other to go in skinny-dipping. Several freshman girls laughed and egged them on. The amid cheers, one of the boys jumped up and ran for the water. Near the water, and about thirty yards away from the fire, he stripped off his clothes and ran into the surf. All that could be seen were his bare buttocks in the moonlight. Cheers went up from the crowd. A couple of the girls went sneaking toward his clothes to hide them. He noticed them first and came charging out. They squealed and ran back to the fire. Finally, he dressed and came back. Still dripping wet, he plopped down in the sand.

“He’s gonna regret that tonight. That sand will work in under his clothes and bother all his body parts. I bet he heads home within an hour. He’s a dumb shit.” Hampton said.

One of the girls jumped on the freshman, pinning him in the sand and kissing him. That had apparently been the bet. Now covered in sand, he tried to brush it off, but it was impossible. It stuck to his wet clothes.

Someone said, “Hey why don’t you go back into the water and wash that stuff off.”

The kid said *fuck you* to everyone in general and walked off toward the road.

“What he’ll need tonight is a good douche bag,” Hampton said.

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