



PINBOY

by REB

FaNoRmA
#11

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MAY 1995

GREETINGS FROM IN
HERE. PANORAMA # 11
WAS FOUND IN A
DREAM AND IT HAD TO
GET ON PAPER TO GET
OUT OF MY HEAD.
THANK AND LOVE
TO COLIN FOR
TEACHING ME SO MUCH.

REB

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PLACE
STAMP
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PINBOY

by REB

The seaside resort had seen better days. Sure, the storefronts had received a fresh coat of paint for the Memorial Day weekend but you didn't have to look too hard to see the artifice of it all. Step off Main Street and it was like a ghost town. Boarded up summer rentals with broken shutters and front yards full of weeds slowly became visible as the early morning fog burnt off. It reminded me of Andy Warhol's 1965 film "Poor Little Rich Girl" starring Edie Sedgwick. The first black and white reel is completely out of focus-not unlike this faded summer community in the mist. When Edie suddenly comes into sharp focus in reel two, it's like a revelation.

I'd been heading north to spend the first long weekend of the summer with friends when I got stuck in a traffic jam on the turnpike. Besides the usual holiday traffic heading to Vacationland, I found myself surrounded by pick-ups and beat up Beetles sporting dancing skeletons and tie-dyed occupants. The smell of reefer mixed with car exhaust made my head swim. I turned up Pansy Division to drown out the chorus of "Truckin'" coming from the car of Dead Heads stuck in traffic next to me.

"Dude, ya wanna hit?"

"No thanks."

"Ya goin' to see The Dead?"

"I'm going to the beach."

"Ya got any beer?"

"Nope."

"That's cool..."

The car in front of me pulled over into the breakdown lane so its passenger could get out to take a piss on the side of the road and the conversation with my temporary neighbors ended as I was able to advance an entire car length.

At this pace I was gonna miss my friends. Instead of dropping my car off at their house and the three of us travelling in one car, I'd just have to drive straight through to their cottage. I'd kinda half-expected to get detained at work so we'd made auxillary plans just in case that happened. But it was slow at work and I was able to leave early just to get trapped in this gridlock of pilgrims grateful to worship at the altar of The Perpetual Dead.

I almost missed it. The sign was nearly obscured by trees and shrubs that hadn't been planted when the sign for Ocean Grove was erected. The hand-painted billboard showed a nuclear family frolicking in the surf and the blue lettering had faded to read, " _HIS E_I_." I slowly made my way to the exit ramp past an abandoned van which had been painted to look like an American flag with a peace symbol where the stars should be. The sun was setting as I made this unplanned detour into my past.

When I was a kid my family used to go to Ocean Grove for a week every summer when my dad was on vacation. We'd stay in a rental cottage and spend our days swimming when the weather was nice or taking day trips when it wasn't to see Perry's Nut House or The Desert of Maine. We didn't see my dad too much the rest of the year. He worked two jobs to support the family. We didn't know it then but it was all my parents could do to scrape together enough money for this annual family outing. We'd go to an amusement park but instead of riding the Tilt-O-Whirl and the rollercoaster we'd sit in our car at the curb sharing a box of Karmel Korn and making up silly songs to the rhythm of how the Canadian tourists wearing funny bathing suits walked. We'd pull into a roadside picnic area as the sun set and my mom would cook burgers on the Coleman stove while the five of us dined in the dark-our meal illuminated by the headlights of the family station wagon with wood paneling. We knew we weren't rich but we didn't know we were almost poor.

When I saw the sign for Ocean Grove I forgot about Tim and Pete. I was sure I'd missed our planned rendezvous by now anyway. I decided, on a whim, to visit this place that contained so many childhood memories. I was hungry and getting tired of driving. I feared if I didn't stop soon I'd fall asleep at the wheel. I passed a Dairy Queen and an Eskimo King. I pulled into Apollo Pizza and got a couple of slices of cheese to go. I was surprised that so many of the clam joints and shell shops were closed as I headed down Route 1 toward Ocean Grove. This was Memorial Day weekend after all...the traditional start of the summer tourist season. I passed a few cars heading in the opposite direction and I could begin to smell the ocean and low tide through my open windows.

The Kozy Cottages vacancy sign was not lit but there was a yellow bug light illuminating the door to the office. I pulled into the gravel and clamshell driveway and turned off the ignition. The sign read,

When I was a kid my family used
to go to Ocean Grove for a week

He studied my face for a moment too

long without saying a word.

"After Hours Ring Bell". I pressed the button and saw a light switch on. A male voice grumbled something about "a minute" and a pair of moths danced in the yellow glow over my head.

A screen door separated us. I could see into the back of the office now and a silent black and white tv illuminated his silhouette from behind. He was tall and scrawny and scratched his bum through baggy cut-off fatigues as he made his way to the door. He let out a little yelp as he stubbed his big toe on something in the darkened office. He flicked on the overhead light and opened the door.

"Hi", he yawned. I guessed he'd been sleeping.

"Can I get a room for the night?" I stepped into the office.

"We're not really open yet." He shoved his hands into his pockets and adjusted a lump in the front of his shorts.

"I really need a place to stay tonight. I've been driving for five hours and if I don't find a place soon I'm gonna hafta sleep in my car."

He studied my face for a moment too long without saying a word. A small silver crucifix hung motionlessly between his small brown nipples and a big silver safety pin perforated the top of his left ear.

"I can let ya have #3 for 25 bucks for the night but the electricity ain't on in the cabins yet and there's no hot water."

"That's okay...I really just need a place to crash."

We handled the transaction. I paid him cash like he asked. He found the key to #3 and I followed him outside into the starry night.

He quick-stepped and cursed as he walked barefoot across the jagged clamshells and down the little path to a row of darkened cottages. He stopped at the last one and fumbled with the lock before finally getting the door open.

"Wait a minute", he mumbled. He stepped inside and reached into his pocket. He produced a stainless steel Zippo and lit the hurricane lamp on the little table next to the bed.

I followed him inside. The room smelled musty and mouldy. Besides the bed, the table and the glowing lamp, the room contained a knotty pine bureau, a pair of red wooden chairs and a framed print of a fishing village. It wasn't much but it was all I needed for the night.

He looked around the cabin and asked, as if suddenly embarrassed by the shabby interior, "Is it okay?"

"Sure...all I really need is the bed anyway."

"Okay." He hesitated for a minute as his quick eyes darted around the room. "Just make sure ya kill the light before ya go to sleep. This place'd go up in a second."

"Don't worry. I'll be careful. I'm gonna crash pretty soon anyway."

...gay man on the beach squirting



I slipped a couple of bucks into his sweaty palm. As he left he paused, turned and said, "Lemme know if ya need anything." I closed the door and the room began to stink of cheap lamp oil. I forced open a window and could hear him once again cursing as he made his way back across the gravel and shells to his little room behind the office. Between his expletives I could hear the surf crash on the nearby beach. I remembered my duffel bag was still in my car. As I retrieved it from the trunk, I saw my host, illuminated by the full moon, heading towards the beach. He was carrying something, I couldn't tell what, and I could almost swear I heard him call out to me as he passed behind Cabin #3.

A walk on the beach wasn't such a bad idea. I dropped my bag off in my room, pulled off my t-shirt and, remembering the clamshells, decided to leave my sneakers on. The sound of the surf grew louder and as I got closer to the beach I could hear a transistor radio playing some cheesy pop song. I passed a final sand dune and the ocean shimmered in the moonlight.

My eyes gradually grew accustomed to the night sky and I paused, afraid to breath too loudly, when I saw him on the beach squirting something out of a can onto a pile of driftwood. He lit a rag with his lighter and tossed it onto the deformed wood which immediately burst into flames. I could see him clearly now. His flesh glowed orange in the light of the bonfire. He watched it burn for a minute, as if transfixed, then dropped his shorts and ran naked into the surf.

I couldn't decide whether to join him or leave him to his private revelry and return unseen to my cabin. While I tried to make up my mind, I absent-mindedly pulled my smokes out of my pocket and lit one.

"C'mon!", he shouted from the surf. I looked around half-expecting to see someone else had joined us on the beach but I realized we were still alone and he was calling out to me.

"I know you're there...I saw ya light your cigarette. What are ya waiting for?"

Yeah, what was I waiting for? I figured he was probably just lonely and could use some company. From the looks of things Kozy Kottages hadn't had any in a long time...and neither had I.

I jogged down to the spot on the beach where he'd dropped his shorts and dropped to the sand. The breeze off the water was cool and the heat from the fire felt good. I couldn't imagine how cold the water must be at this time of year. I scanned the surf and caught a glimpse of him as he bobbed to the surface for air. His crumpled up shorts, the radio, a yellow can of lighter fluid and a 40 ounce of Colt

playing some cheesy pop song. I passed
ocean shimmered in the moonlight.



45 were within my reach. I found a stick and poked at the fire. Through the sparks I could see him emerge from the surf.

His shaggy brown hair was plastered to his head. His skin glistened like it had been polished by the waves. The cold water had shrunk his dick and nuts...or maybe they were just always tiny...I tried to avert my eyes but I think he caught me looking. He dragged a piece of driftwood behind him and tossed it on the fire when he was close enough to speak.

"I thought you were goin' to bed", he asked.

"I wanted to see the beach. My family used to come here all the time when I was a kid."

"Kozy Kottages?"

"I'm not sure...it was a long time ago."

He hadn't brought a towel so he used his hands to rub the saltwater off his body. He didn't seem embarrassed to be naked in front of me. The safety pin in his ear glimmered as he sat down next to me on top of his discarded shorts. He shut off the radio and unscrewed the cap on the bottle of malt liquor.

He took a long swig. His Adam's apple bobbed in his throat as he swallowed. Some of the beer dribbled out of the corner of his mouth and I watched it trickle down his neck and chest.

"Want some?", he offered me the bottle.

"Sure...thanks." The cold beer tasted good.

"What brings you to this fuckin' shithole?" His tone was a mix of curiosity and disbelief.

"I was on my way to meet some friends and I got caught in that Dead Head traffic. I figured I'd stop for the night."

"Cool...I've been waiting for you."

Before I could ask him what he meant by that he reached over, grabbed my hand and gave it a little squeeze. A chill ran through me and I thought of Billy. The fire was warm but I shivered and forgot how to breath. He looked at me intensely. His eyebrows knit together until they looked like one. The flames flickered in his dark eyes. He wasn't smiling. He looked dead serious.

"Ya like that doncha." It was more like a statement than a question.

"I saw that bumper sticker on your car...ya ain't married are ya? I didn't see any ring on your finger...", his voice trailed off and his stare resumed. He searched my eyes for an answer when my lips failed to produce one. I wasn't sure I understood the question.

"Nah", I swallowed another mouthful from the bottle I still held. "I was seeing someone for a long time but he's not around anymore." I passed the half-empty bottle back to him.

"Didja leave him?" There was a twinge

"Didja leave him?" There was a twinge of fear in his voice.

"No...he left me." I stared at my sneakers. He died last Christmas." I couldn't believe I was talking about Billy to a total stranger. None of my friends had mentioned his name for months.

"Oh...sorry." He seemed sincere. "That sucks."

"Yeah", I discovered I could breath again, "It's fucked up." I choked on the last word and let out a little whimper. As a renegade tear inched down my cheek, he put his arm around my shoulders and pulled me in close to him.

"That's all right", he whispered, "I've been there too. It's better if ya let it out...go ahead...just let it out."

The tears came quickly. Rage piled up in my throat and a distant foghorn screamed for me in the still night air. He hugged me tight and kissed me tenderly on my forehead when I was too tired to cry anymore. It was funny. I suddenly felt better than I had in five months...in eighteen months. Death hadn't come quickly to Billy. The last year and a half had been hell.

"Hey, what's your name." I remembered I hadn't asked him yet and I suddenly needed to know. He smiled a funny crooked smile.

"Yaro...but my friends call me Pinboy."

"Pinboy?" I looked at the safety pin in his ear and his nickname seemed to fit.

"Yeah...When I'm not here I work at this bowling alley. It's not automated or nuthin'. Ya gotta set the pins by hand...get it? Pinboy."

"That's really weird. My dad used to work as a pinboy when he was like fifteen. I didn't know there were still places like that."

"Just this one as far as I know. Ocean Grove is like the place that time forgot." He stared into the fire. "Wanna split?" He stood up and pulled his oversize shorts on and deftly secured the waistband with a big safety pin.

"Sure. What dya wanna do?"

"I've got some more beer in my room." He tossed the empty bottle into the dying fire. "We can watch tv or something."

He stuck the can of lighter fluid into his back pocket. I looked around and grabbed the radio. He reached for my hand, found it and hummed a little tune to himself as he led me back to his room. I was lost in his gentle grip and thought of Billy and how we used to turn heads wherever we went. His hand in mine...mine in his. Driving in the car. Grocery shopping. In the mall. Sometimes, depending where we were, I'd walk with one hand in his and the other wrapped around a canister of mace in my pocket just in case someone started some shit. I never actually had to use the mace but it always made

"Yaro...but my friends call me Pinboy."

me feel safer. But Billy was gone and there was no one around but Pinboy and me. I felt safe.

This time he managed to avoid most of the clamshells.

"I can walk right across them at the end of the summer without feelin' a thing", he laughed. Gotta toughen 'em up...Wait a minute."

He went in first through a back door I hadn't seen from the front. He pulled out his lighter again-this time he lit a candle and said, "C'mon in."

The room was tiny and unkempt. It smelled like him-dirty boots, stale beer, patchouli and sweat. I inhaled him into my blood and sat down on the edge of the unmade bed. There was a tableau of photos, sea shells, and lit candles on top of the bureau that looked like a little altar or shrine. He walked over to it and lit a stick of incense. He mumbled a few words I couldn't make out.

"Frankincense. It creates sacred space. Ya know about this stuff? Improves vibrations and removes evil spirits. I think we need it tonight."

Emptiness filled his eyes as he sat down on the bed next to me. I wiped away his tear and tasted the tip of my salty finger.

We didn't say anything for a while. We just stared at the candles and read each other's minds. "His name was Nicholas", he began softly. "We met in high school. His folks kicked him out when they found out about us from his fuckin' brother. It was like two months before we were s'posed to graduate. We both just packed up our shit and ended up here."

"What happened to him?"

"He was surfin' one night. It was a full moon like tonight. I told him to wait until I got home from work. At first I thought he'd left me when I couldn't find him but it was weird cos he hadn't taken anything except his board. I found it on the beach two days later. I was losin' it. The fuckin' pigs wouldn't even help me look for him. I figured maybe he'd hit his head and got amnesia...I looked everywhere. I lit bonfires on the beach every night so he could find his way home. But he wasn't lost..."

He dropped back onto the bed and his chest heaved as he covered his leaky eyes with the back of his hand.

"He washed up a week later on Higgen's Beach. Know where that is? It's where all the rich kids hang out for the summer drinking daddy's booze. Some fuckin' cheerleader saw his hand stickin' out of a pile of seaweed. His skull was fractured. They didn't even tell me. Someone left a message on the answering machine in the office cos they knew he used to live here. I told him not to go alone. Why'd he go and do that? Why'd he leave me all alone?"

Emptiness filled his eyes as he sat
down on the bed next to me.

Now it was my turn to gather his tears as they splattered on the pillow. I crawled up beside him and rested my head next to his. My hand grazed a nipple as it tried to soothe his sobbing chest. I fingered the cross that rose and fell with each sigh.

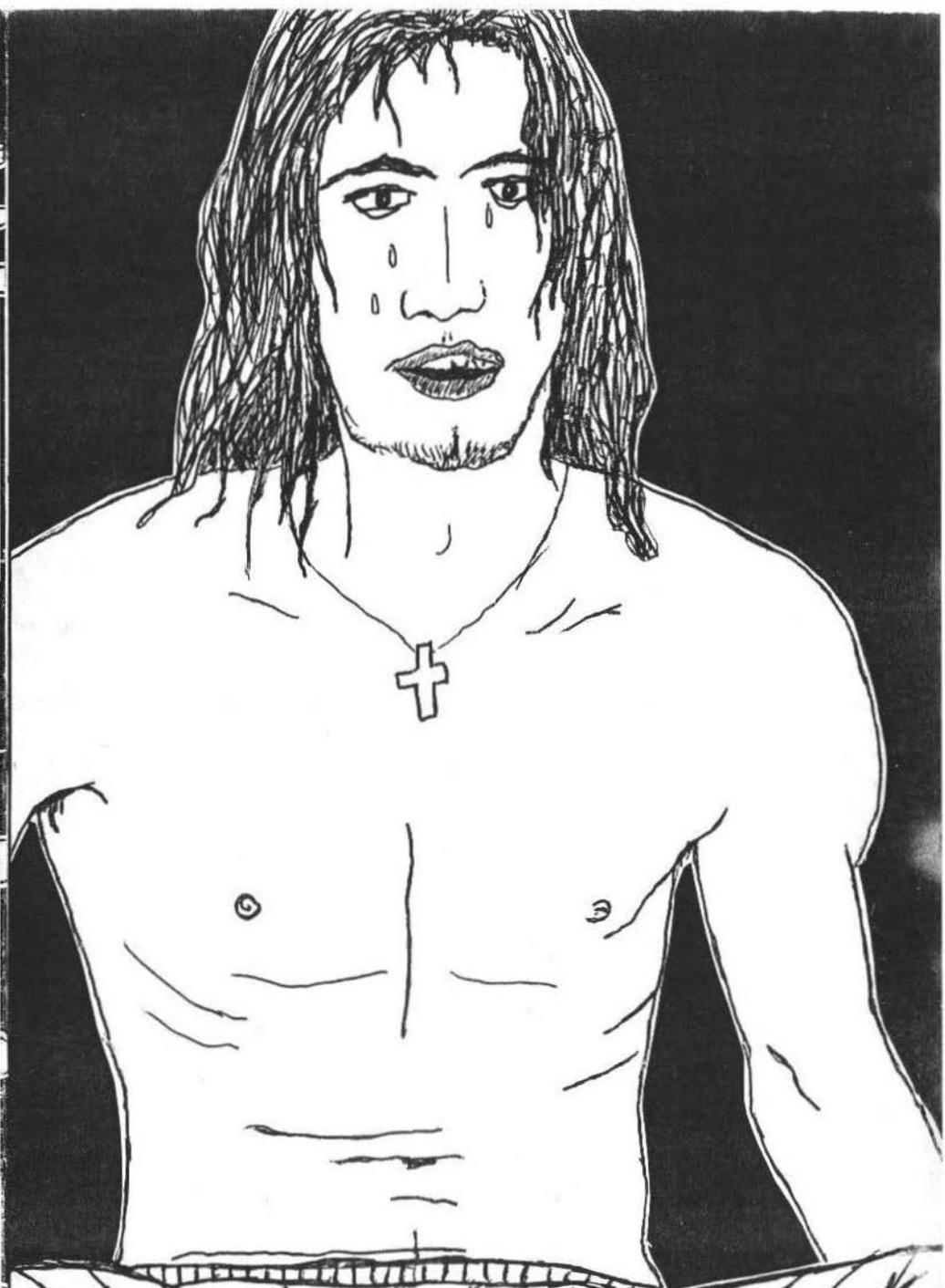
"That was Nick's. I gave it to him on our third date. He was still wearin' it when they found his body. Never took it off. His parents sent for his body. I didn't have any money to even bury him. I hitched a ride back to Portland and found out in the paper where the funeral was gonna be. His brother said, 'Don't bother coming...you'd ruin everything.' Yeah! Like everything wasn't already ruined! I snuck into the funeral home the night before they were gonna bury him to say good-bye. They had him lookin' so stupid! He woulda died if he saw himself in that cheesy polyester suit...he would die!" He laughed and slammed the mattress with a clenched fist. "I had to do something. I messed up his hair, slipped a picture of him 'n me in his pocket, undid the tie-he always said he couldn't breath when he was wearin' one-I unbuttoned his shirt and took the cross. His skin was like marble. It was so cold. His fuckin' parents would kill me if they knew. I just had to have it. I just needed something to hold onto. I smoked a butt and took a piss on the rug. I wanted them to know I had been there. I wanted him to know I had been there. I stayed until the sun came up. I just couldn't say good-bye."

"Yeah, I know. Billy's folks were pretty cool though. I told them what he wanted. He had written stuff down-like what music he wanted played during the service and what he wanted to wear. I think the whole thing kinda freaked them out but they knew it was what he wanted so they let me organize everything. I don't know...we had too much time to say good-bye. We knew it was coming for a long time. He got pneumonia last summer and I was convinced he was gonna die in the hospital. But he didn't and he got better and came home. After that we just decided to stop saying good-bye."

I paused to light a cigarette. Pinboy produced another bottle of Colt 45 and we took turns passing it back and forth.

"But I was afraid it would happen when I was asleep or at work so we made a pact-everytime I'd go out, or he was gonna take a nap, we'd always say 'I love you' just in case it was the last thing we said. It would drive our friends crazy! But we didn't care...One afternoon I was reading to him...he was really sick...he couldn't even see out of one eye anymore. Some nights he couldn't even sleep. Some days all he did was sleep and shit the bed. The hospice guy was coming in everyday to help. People were coming by to say good-bye. It was like we knew it was time. So anyway, I was reading and he started

"That was Nick's. I gave it to him on



our third date. He was still wearin' it w

breathing really strange-like there were chains rattling around in his lungs. I sent the nurse out to get some juice. I just held him in my arms and kept chanting, 'I love you Billy, I love you, I love you', like it was a mantra. The chains started sounding like a chainsaw and then it just stopped. I couldn't even cry. He wasn't in pain anymore. I just cradled him in my arms cos I knew I was never gonna get to hug him again. The nurse came back and took over. It all happened so fast. It was two days before Christmas. We had ten years together, well it woulda been ten years. I haven't talked to his family since the funeral. I think they just wanna forget. All I can do is remember."

"I wasn't even gonna answer the door tonight. We're like not officially open yet. They told me not to let anyone check in until they turn the electricity on in the cabins on Tuesday. But when I saw you I felt something, I dunno what...I just knew I was s'posed to let you in." He took my hand and kissed it softly.

"To the office?"

"No, stupid." He rolled over so that he was on top of me and we were staring into each other's eyes. "In. Period. You're 'in' now." A few drops of salty water from his still damp hair dripped onto my face. He kissed me on the mouth and climbed off the bed. We didn't have anything else to say. I sat up and undid my laces and kicked my sneakers off. He snuffed out all but one candle with his fingertips, released the pin at his waist and let his shorts drop to the floor. I pulled off my pants and remembered I wasn't wearing any underwear. He pulled the patchwork quilt over us as he climbed into bed next to me. I mouthed, "I love you Billy", like I still did every night, and snuggled in close to Pinboy. We slept like spoons, our fingers entwined, serenaded to sleep by the sounds of the surf crashing on the beach.

"Black or regular?"

"Huh?" I don't drink much and my head felt cloudy from the beer we drank last night.

"Um, regular." He was already up. His was wearing a baggy pair of threadbare boxer shorts and pouring hot coffee into a pair of mismatched mugs.

"Is the powdered stuff all right? The milk doesn't smell too good. I take it black and it always goes bad before I get around to using it. Ya hungry?"

"No, coffee's fine." I really wanted a cigarette but remembered they were still in my pants and my pants were somewhere on the floor. I was too prudish to go poking around for them while I was sporting a morning pre-piss hard-on.

"Hmmm...what's this, Boner Boy?!"

"Ya want yer butts?" He read my mind. I nodded and he retrieved them out of my pants, lit one and passed it to me.

"Menthol! How can you smoke these? Even when I smoked if I was out I wouldn't take a menthol if someone gave me one. It's like smokin' gum!" He laughed and jumped on top of me nearly knocking the mug out of my hand.

"Hmmm...what's this, Boner Boy?!" He playfully groped my stiff dick through the quilt. "What dya want to do today?"

"I should get going pretty soon. My friends are gonna be worried." All I really wanted to do was spend the day in bed with him.

"But ya just got here", he protested. "Just give 'em a call and say something...came up."

"No phone. Maybe I can stop to see you on my way back."

"Fuck that...you won't come back." His lower lip trembled ever so slightly. He climbed off the bed and began pacing in tiny circles that made my head swim.

I had an idea. "Why doncha come with me?" I thought it sounded like a plan.

"Come with you!? And do what? Lose my job? My place to live? I just can't take off on a holiday like you rich boys. Some of us gotta work." His words made me feel like a capitalist pig.

"Come here...c'mon." I set my mug down on the table and motioned for him to rejoin me in bed.

"What?" He looked sheepishly at the floor and kicked an old sweat sock under the bed.

"C'mon...I wanna show you something."

The mattress squeaked as he sat down on the edge of the bed. I kicked off the covers and crawled up behind him easily wrapping his skinny body in my arms. I craned my neck and kissed him on the side of the cheek. My dick started to swell again.

"Look at me." I released him from my hug. He swung around and sat legs akimbo on the bed facing me. The head of his cock poked through a rip in his shorts.

"I'll be back. Really. I'll let my friends know I'm all right and I'll come back and spend the rest of the weekend with you." I hesitated. "That's if ya want me to."

He answered me without speaking. His shorts joined mine on the floor. It had been so long. We began tentatively. At first it was awkward but we discovered our own rhythm. He found an old condom under the bed. We took turns. I banged my head sharply on the headboard. We didn't have any KY so we used plenty of spit. It only hurt for a minute. An image of Billy flashed across the insides of my eyelids. He giggled when he came...my finger up his butt. We

All I really wanted to do was spend t

shared a menthol cigarette. He didn't complain about how it tasted. He curled up next to me like a little baby.

"Hey, ya know what?", he asked after a while. "I'm wearin' a smile now instead of a hard-on."

"Yeah, me too...thank you."

"Thank you!? What the fuck! Thank you? For what? For gettin' you off! For not being dead?!" He had a cruel streak.

"Thanks for being you...thanks for letting me be me...thanks for letting me in. I really mean it. I'm really glad we met."

"Sorry", he quieted back down. "It's just that I meet a lot of jerks who just wanna fuck me over. When'll you be back?" He sounded afraid to hear my answer.

"Tonight...tomorrow morning at the latest. Ya workin' at the alley tonight?"

"No. I work every other Saturday and Tuesday and Wednesday nights. I gotta get the cabins ready before the owner comes up next weekend. When can you come back up?"

"Soon, I hope. Work's been really busy lately but I can usually get away on the weekends." I tried to sound hopeful but I really didn't know how soon it would be before I could get away again.

"Okay", he grabbed my nuts and gave them a playful squeeze. "Don't make me hurt you." He laughed and I hoped he was joking.

"I've gotta get my stuff." Most of it was still in Cabin #3. We kissed long and slow. He accidently bit my lower lip. Both of us hesitated to be the first one to stop kissing but finally he relented.

"Go on...get yer stuff. I got things to do anyway."

The morning fog was beginning to lift and I could see Kozy Kottages clearly now. One cabin had a broken window pane. A little bird flew through it as I passed. #3 looked to be the best of the lot and that meant next to nothing. There were weeds growing where there should have been pansies and red, white and blue petunias. A fresh coat of paint would have done little to disguise the disrepair. I gathered up my belongings and took a few minutes to study the directions my friends had sent me.

I stopped by the office to say good-bye to Yaro, but he wasn't there. I went around to the back and looked in his room. Still no trace. I really wanted to get underway but I hesitated for a few minutes to study the photos of Nicholas and him. I searched their smiling and snarling faces for a clue. I wanted to see if there was a hint of the tragedy to come. There was a strip of foto booth photos that reminded me of pictures Billy and I had taken when we were their age and our love was innocent. I decided to leave him a note:

**"Hey, ya know what?", he asked
now instead of a hard-on."**

"Hi,

I looked all over the place for ya...

I'll be back as soon as I can.

I wish you were coming with me.

I'm really glad we met...see ya soon!

XOXO"

I left the note on his pillow, looked around the little room that we'd made love in a short time ago. It still smelled like him but now it also smelled like sex. I smiled, left one of my cigarettes next to the note and wondered where he had disappeared to.

I saw something shiny as I approached my car. At first I thought it was just the reflection of the sun off the windshield. It wasn't. Someone had strung up a chain of safety pins from my rear view mirror to the inside door handle. There were pins stuck haphazardly in the dashboard and in the seat cushions. There was a necklace of different sized pins wrapped around the stick shift. I felt angry, then queasy and sick to my stomach when I saw the big diaper pin piercing my left rear tire. I bent down to extract it and the escaping air hissed and sneered at me. I couldn't believe how stupid I'd been! I couldn't believe we'd had sex...that I'd told him all about Billy and me. Shit! I checked my knapsack for my wallet and realized it was gone. My license...all my credit cards...my money...Fuck!

I saw his shadow approach before I saw him and I fumbled for my keys and the canister of mace.

"Whazzup? Going somewhere?"

I froze when I saw him. He wore a stripe of red on each cheek and his hair was spiked into a sloppy mohawk. Each ear sported a handful of safety pins and a steady stream of blood ran down both sides of his neck. He hid his right hand behind his back. I feared the weapon it held. From a safe distance I might have found him attractive. But he was way too close and I saw no escape from his damaged and ravaged beauty. We stared each other down for a few heart-stopping seconds. Finally, I mustered up the courage to speak.

"I looked for you...I left a note in your room...didja see it?"

"You can't leave", he paused, "me." He took a step closer. I was trapped against my car.

I had always feared getting fag-bashed to death. I'd had a few close calls but I'd always managed to escape with just a few scrapes. I'd carried around the mace for years but had never even used it. Now, when I needed it most, it was out of reach on the ground mixed

and after a while. "I'm wearin' a smile

He

whipped

his

right

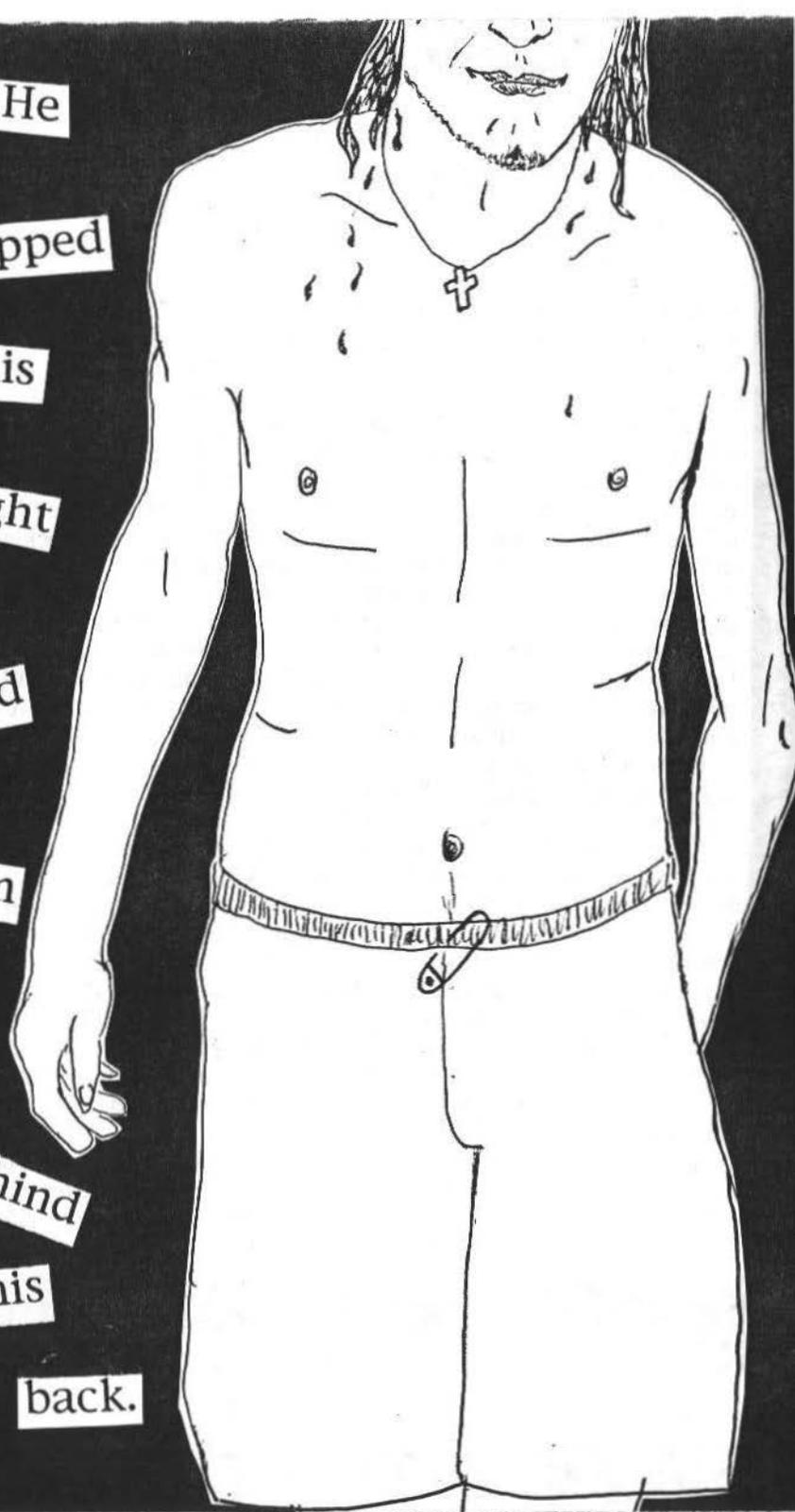
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in with the spilled contents of my knapsack. I decided not to make the first move. Maybe it was time for me to join Billy. Maybe if I could just relax then maybe he would too and everything would be all right. Maybe someone would pull into the driveway. I squatted down, kinda casual, and pulled a cigarette out of my shirt pocket. "Gotta light?" I tried to sound like Jim Stark romancing Plato out of his gun in "Rebel Without A Cause".

His face relaxed for an instant and he automatically stuffed his left hand into his pocket looking for his Zippo. Panic swept across his blood-smearred face and he ordered me to stand up.

"Turn around. Put yer hands on the car where I can see 'em." I did as I was told and heard the clamshells crunch beneath his boots as he approached me from behind. My heart skipped a beat as I quickly spun around to face him. I wanted to see it coming. I didn't want to feel the blade without seeing the expression on his face.

He whipped his right hand from behind his back. It didn't hold a knife but a bouquet of sea roses. Little spots of his blood speckled the pink petals. This weapon pierced my heart more effectively than a thousand arrows.

"Here...for you. I didn't wancha to forget to come back. I didn't wancha to forget", his voice sounded like a little boy, "me."

He pressed the thorny roses into my outstretched hand and pressed me up against the side of the car. He rammed his tongue through my quivering lips and I could taste his blood mix with our spit to create salty pink kisses. I smelled sweat and fear and danger and roses.

