

# Whatever Happened to Sue Ellen?

by Alan Stewart Carl

When she awoke in her yard, she poured what was left of the rum into the dead grass. The man beside her lay with fingers curled, a claw she'd found wedged up her skirt when she woke. Tom, she said, his name nonsense, tongues. Might as well have been any name.

She rose to her knees, picked hopeless bits of grass from the shimmers of her blouse. Tom, she said, searching for more between them than a fast meet, more than puffs of cigarettes, of rum. Of a hard pain between her legs. Let me come inside, he'd said, eyes overflowing with simple hopes. Wait, she'd said, giggling out of his car. I want to lie outside. Like camp. You ever go? All those stars and their futures. And Sue Ellen. Whatever happened to Sue Ellen?

In the morning sun, she let go of the emptied bottle and touched Tom's face. He looked like a boy, like he had confidence in where he was headed. Tom, she said. Did you know I was a girl scout? Years ago. I really was.

Cars hummed down her street. Two kids watched out the window of an SUV. Sue Ellen would have kids by now. Sue Ellen would have kids and SUVs and a husband who kept her yard a glorious green.

She ran a finger through Tom's hair. She flicked her lighter on. The flame burnt orange and calm as she held it over the thatch of dead grass. The spilt rum twinkled. Tom, she said. We used to make campfires. Wonderful campfires. We were going to be friends forever.

