

My Love Affair With The Unknown Comic

by Cami Park

At least, I think it was him. It sure looked like him. Whenever there was any event he was known to be attending, or the Gong Show was on, he was nowhere to be found, as far as any of us ever knew. ? ? My sister had him first, which is probably the only reason I was interested. Well, that, and that he was interested in me. I could tell he was interested by the way he grabbed my ass that day, in the crowded kitchen when he thought no one was looking. I was wearing my new shorts, bought with my own money from detasselling corn that summer. They were super short, and the words "Wild Child" were sewn on front and center, sassy and proud. I liked my new shorts, and I guess The Unknown Comic liked them, too. ? ?

It was usually the other way around-- boyfriends, or potential boyfriends, or boys I hoped to be either friends or boyfriends, seemed to always end up interested in my sister. She was small and blonde and quiet, where I was medium, brown-haired, and not loud exactly, but verbose. I tried to compensate for these mediocrities with other mediocrities, like sneaking the boys beer, or pretending to fall asleep with my hand on their crotch, but I lacked finesse. My gestures were accepted, sometimes even with kindness, but their eyes rarely left my sister when she was in the room. ? ?

The Unknown Comic showed up with my sister at a family reunion on a day when my sister wanted to be defiant. She wasn't especially interested in Unknown-- he had clown breath, she said, and smoked like a fiend-- but he was much older, and she was trying to show our parents something about how she wasn't a baby anymore and could do whatever she wanted, including dating older men with paper

bags over their heads, and coming home drunk on Mad Dog 20/20, which she had done just the night before. ? ?

But this isn't about my sister for once, this is about me. About how after Unknown grabbed my ass-- and I mean really grabbed my 14-year old ass-- in the crowded kitchen where we were all gathered to watch the re-stuffing of the twice-baked potatoes, I stumbled back into him, rustling his bag a little, and we ducked into the tiny bathroom off the kitchen and made out. I remember the crackling of the bag and the musty potato smell and the shrieks and laughter coming from the kitchen as Unknown slipped his hand under my short-cropped top and tweaked my nipple through my polyester-lace padded bra. His tongue poked out through the hole in the bag and I tasted dusty room and stale cigarette as his face crinkled against mine. He backed me up against the shower curtain, pushed me sitting on the edge of the bathtub, and yanked his plaid leisure shorts down around his ankles, so that I was eye level with his Thing. ? That was the first time I had ever seen anything like that. I didn't know what to call it, much less what do with it. I looked up at him for a clue-- the punched out eyes, the damp ring around the hole where his mouth and tongue lurked, the Frankenstein-shaped head—and without thinking, I did it. I reached behind him and plucked one of my aunt's fluffy yellow washcloths from the towel rack and draped it lightly and carefully over the Thing in front of me. It looked like a tipsy baby chick. "There," I said, and stood up. I don't know what would have happened next-- there was a knock at the door, and The Unknown Comic hid in the shower while I brushed stray brown flecks from my face and slipped out. My sister was waiting, and she looked like she was going to throw up. ? ?

That was the last I saw of The Unknown Comic, except for on television. My sister said she saw him the day of the reunion, after the potatoes were stuffed and back in the oven, cutting through the neighbor's yard to the next street over. She didn't care enough to try to stop him, she said, or even wonder why.

