

# Reunion

by Charles Huschle

Rick had fallen into the breezy routine of monogamy and so it was a surprise to him that one kiss from Amy at the reunion would call his bluff so completely, but it did. He hadn't seen Amy in 15 years and he never saw her again; but after she kissed him he felt something rise up and as she walked away he started after her to give her a hug and maybe another kiss. But bad-boy Stan who had ridden a Buell in high school and was therefore untouchable came up to Amy and enfolded her in his boisterous Wall Street way. Rick felt like he was in 10th grade again; he slid behind the bar and tried to disappear. Amy had been an aloof blonde in high school and she remained blonde but no longer aloof.

He had stood against the wall of pennants with a Heineken in his hand, wondering what he was doing here, alone, without his wife (who had gone to another school), at a reunion of the class he had basically despised. He toed the floor with one blue Converse sneaker; he pulled at his t-shirt collar with his free hand; he put the bottle of Heineken in one outside pocket of his brown corduroy jacket — and pulled out a smokeless cigarette. He wasn't even dressed properly, all the other men in suits without ties (a look he never understood, so overtly stupidly casual, pretending to be businesslike) and he in his perennial schoolboy look. Not that he wanted to dress any other way, but it pissed him off that he felt uncomfortable and out of place with the other men and he tried to push away that feeling by using his sneaker to make a squeaking sound on the varnished wood floor. Amy had really been an ice queen in high school, he reflected. There she was across the court — the reunion was in the basketball court, festive with balloons and streamers and their class year in white-stenciled numbers on the hoops. She saw him from over there and like a hunter her gaze never wavered: she started across the room, weaving between other classmates, towards him, a big smile the only fault he could detect in her approach.

He saw she balanced three plastic glasses between her fingers; cubes of ice (the kind that's kind of a tube, with a tunnel through the middle) surged up and down like mini-icebergs in a green ocean swell, sickening and thick. Wherever he went, he had this eye for the smallest detail, which was the hallmark of his work, thank God, but sometimes he felt that his eyes drained him of the energy to do anything else but watch, look, listen and record. Amy: page-boy blonde hair, a Lily Pulitzer dress that was frankly August and not October (the high school always held their reunion in October, who knew why) but whose green tones complemented her eyes so nicely, and high-heeled sandals with thin leather straps wrapping around her ankles, nearly up her calves. An odd outfit, but who cared: she was pretty. And, of course, she wore a slender wedding band and a sapphire plus diamond engagement ring. He wondered if she trimmed her body hair the way he liked. (Jesus, he thought — where did that thought come from?). She was nearly to him and when she finally stepped into close orbit, she handed him a drink — now he had a beer in one hand and whatever she brought him in the other -- and holding the other two drinks she went up on tiptoes and kissed him smartly on the lips. “Rick,” she said, “I always —” but her words were lost in the din of upraised voices and high-fives, and he just looked at her, he couldn't hear anything, his ears were ringing, he wondered if his mouth was hanging open like a fool. Their entire conversation went like that; he assumed later that they had exchanged information about their spouses, their jobs, that she had oohed and ahed at the success he had experienced, confessed she'd had a crush on him in 11th grade, and vice versa (to say the least: it was always the women that appeared unavailable that he loved the most), and that she had three adorable children. Rick, distant, was thinking it was such a cliché of a classic story, two people aware of each other and interested in each other, but doing their best to avoid acknowledging each other out of god knows what stupid adolescent view of how society operated (which even carried into adulthood, would we ever outgrow it?), and now, when it was apparently safe, years later, finally confessing their feelings.

There was a kind of violence to that, Rick thought, a kind of violence they had done to themselves and to each other. On the surface the tone of their lives had been and was “Hail fellow well met” — an eternal life as fraternity brothers and sorority sisters. In ferocious orbit around Rick and Amy swung all their classmates with the important Wall Street jobs, the houses in the suburbs, the Audi wagons and Porsche SUV's, the friendly (translate: cutthroat) competition to get their children into private schools: a kind of desperate chatter generating muteness. Even the eccentricity of his artsy job (of course: there had to be at least one in the bunch who took a different path — but really — who was he fooling?) was a necessary part of this system. You'd think we all would have learned something in our hearts since the towers fell, he thought, as Amy slid away from him. You had to get some perspective on the city, some view from outside, far outside, maybe from space, which would have afforded them all another chance. Instead it was the same as always; they all acted as if they had forever to live.

