

Set Fire To Your House

by Chris Okum



Frog March

After suffering from a debilitating bout of erectile dysfunction, adult film performer Brian Archdale quit the industry and moved back in with his mom, who comforted her son with 'tough love' (which consisted of a daily regimen of menial chores, incl.. walking her dog, vacuuming the entire house, doing the dishes, taking out the trash, changing bed sheets, etc.) before calling in a favor and securing him an entry position at a freight dispatch company run by an old friend of hers. "I know who I am now, mom," said Archdale. "I'm not a performer anymore. That's who I am. For the longest time when I've thought of myself I've thought of myself as a man who has sex for a living. That's who I was. But I'm not that person anymore. And so this is who I really am. Now when I think of myself I think of myself as a man who doesn't have sex for a living. That's my identity. That's my real identity. I am what I'm not." Archdale's mom suggested he see a doctor and get a prescription for an anti-depressant, which he did, but not before losing his job at the freight dispatch company after telling the owner's son that the music he was playing on his desktop radio was "music for mopes." When asked by his mom why he would say this to one of his supervisors, Archdale said, "I can't stand Van Der Graaf Generator. And he wouldn't stop playing it. We're all sitting there trying to do our jobs and this brat keeps playing prog rock, over and over. I couldn't take it anymore. And then he asks me if I like Van Der Graaf Generator. I guess I could've said yes, but I didn't. I was honest. I thought you raised me to be an honest person. I hate the sound of the saxophone." While looking for a new job and adjusting to his medication, Archdale decided to contact his ex-wife, the adult film performer Liz Christian, who, as soon as Archdale quit the business, became extraordinarily in-demand now that she wasn't exclusively working with Archdale anymore. Archdale asked Christian if there was anyway she could come and visit him at his mom's house, a request Christian politely declined due to a very busy schedule. "I'm working with Jon Dough and Buck Adams three times each in the next two weeks and I really

need to get my rest if I'm gonna do my job right," said Christian. Archdale told Christian he understood and ended the conversation by telling Christian that he missed her and that he finally knew who he was, a statement which Christian did not know how to respond to, and which she quickly elided by telling Archdale she missed him as well, even though this was lie. "I know you're lying," said Archdale. "I can tell when you're lying to me." On the day he committed suicide on the front lawn of Christian's house, Archdale spent the morning at Knotts Berry Farm, where he rode the Wacky Soap Box Racers seven times in a row before buying himself a funnel cake and a boysenberry punch. Eating his food on a bench next to the Montezuma's Revenge rollercoaster, Archdale flashed on a memory he had blocked out, a memory from childhood, the time his father took him to Knott's Berry Farm and made a deal with the ten-year old Archdale, telling him he could run around the park by himself as long as he met his father at a designated spot at a designated time, a deal Archdale broke when he did not show up at the designated spot at the designated time, forcing Archdale's father to get the theme park's security involved. When Archdale's father and the security team finally found the little boy he was waiting in line for the Haunted Shack. Archdale's father grabbed Archdale by the throat and lifted him up off the ground in front of everyone, causing Archdale to soil his shorts immediately. Archdale was then frog marched out of the park, a wet brown stain blooming on the back of his tan corduroy OP shorts. Archdale thought about this as he finished his boysenberry punch. It was something he hadn't thought about in almost a quarter century. After leaving Knott's Berry Farm, Archdale drove straight to Christian's house in North Hollywood, where he stood on her lawn with a bottle of Drano in his hand. When Christian came outside to calm him down, Archdale said, "I know who I am now, Liz. I'm not Brian Archdale anymore. That's who I am. Do you understand what I mean? I'm just Sandy Weiss. I'm Sandy Weiss. And for some reason, Sandy Weiss hates Brian Archdale. I don't know why. Do you?" Before Christian could answer "I don't know why either," Archdale chugged the entire

bottle of Drano and ended his life in a paroxsm of choked anguish and chunks of blue foam vomit. In the front pocket of Archdale's shirt was a note that read, "Existence is a stage on which we pass, a sleepwalk trick for mind and heart." These were lyrics from a Van Der Graaf Generator song Archdale had been forced to listen to almost every day of his employment at the Orient Express Trucking Company, but he had thought they were his own words, plucked from the deepest recesses of his mind. Archdale had been so proud of himself when he wrote these words down, unaware that they belonged to someone else. He had even shown what he had written to his mom, who responded, "What does that mean?" Archdale told his mom he had no idea, only that it expressed exactly how he had felt while performing naked underneath hot lights, unable to get it up. "Whatever," said Archdale's mom said before handing him a broom and telling him to sweep the kitchen, especially the space underneath the fridge. Archdale looked at his mother. Her hands were dark white and there was a shine in her eyes he could feel on his face.

Stop Bath

I was 4 years, 7 months, and 12 days old when I saw *The Song Remains the Same*, at the Plitt Theaters in Century City. It was November 9, 1976, 19 days since the movie had been released. My dad took me to see the 10:15 P.M. showing. My dad was wearing jeans, black leather ankle boots, and a burgundy silk button down shirt with a barely visible marinara stain underneath the third button from the top. Accompanying my dad and I was his then girlfriend, the March 1976 Playboy Playmate of the Month, Ann Pennington, who was wearing a knee-length denim skirt, a red striped tube top, and a pair of beige Corkys Tiffanee Wedges. We drove to the Plitt in my dad's white 1976 Mercedes-Benz 450SL convertible. We listened to side one of Steely Dan's *The Royal Scam*. My dad rewound the 8-track so he could listen to 'The Fez' two times in a row. We parked on level three of the parking garage, three spots

from the entrance to the escalator. When we got to the theater there was a line to get in. My dad, Ann and I were the 77th, 78th, and 79th people in line. After we were let in my dad asked me if I wanted something from the concession stand and I told him that I wanted Milk Duds and a Coke. My dad bought himself and Ann a large popcorn to share. He spent a total \$4.25. We sat in the 16th row from the screen, the middle section, the first three seats on the aisle. From the time we sat down in our seats until the time the coming attractions started it was 24 minutes. Sitting behind us were two women, both with red hair, both wearing white peasant blouses. The lights in the theater dimmed at 10:07 P.M. The moment the lights started to dim one of the women sitting behind us let out a sigh and said, "Dinner's not sitting so well with me," to which the other woman responded, "Yeah, what's up with whole wheat pizza?" In the brief moment between the theater being completely dark and screen lighting up Ann put her hand on my dad's crotch and said, "Get your motor started." My dad laughed and then put three pieces of popcorn in his mouth. Ann looked at me and smiled. The first coming attraction was for *A Star is Born*. When Kris Kristofferson came on the screen Ann said "Oh yeah, baby" under her breath, but loud enough for my dad to hear. My dad looked at Ann and grimaced. Ann shrugged. The next coming attraction was for *King Kong*. When Jessica Lange came on the screen my dad said, "Oh yeah, baby" under his breath, but loud enough for Ann to hear. Ann looked at my dad and licked her lips. The final coming attraction was for *The Late Show*. When Art Carney came on the screen both of the women sitting behind us hissed. I ate 7 Milk Duds during the coming attractions and drank 1/3 of my Coke. As soon as the opening riff of 'Rock and Roll' blasted over the speakers the women sitting behind us got up and started singing and dancing. I turned around and looked at the women and the one sitting closest to the aisle leaned down, got right in my face, and said, "Turn around, we're allowed to dance." I finished my Milk Duds at the 6:23 mark of 'Celebration Day.' I finished my Coke at the 4:39 mark of 'The Rain Song.' At the 3:04 mark of 'Dazed and Confused' Ann leaned over and started

making out with my dad. While my dad was making out with Ann he opened his eyes and looked at me. I fell asleep at some point during 'Moby Dick' and woke up as the credits began to roll. My dad leaned over Ann and asked me if I liked the movie. I said, "Is it over?" My dad said he wanted to stay until the credits were done. My dad carried me out of the movie theater. My head was resting on my dad's shoulder as we walked towards the escalator, and as we got on the escalator Ann grabbed my dad's ass. On the way home we listened to side two of *The Royal Scam*. I was sitting in the back seat, without a seat belt. I pretended to sleep. At the 2:35 mark of 'Haitian Divorce' Ann put her hand on my dad's knee and whispered, "Let's make love on Beverly Glen tonight." My dad said, "Hey, sure, why not." My dad carried me to my bedroom and placed me down onto my bed, which was in the shape of a race car. He took off my Tretorn sneakers, but left on my socks, which had Grover from *Sesame Street* all over them, but only Grover's head, not his body. I had three stuffed animals sitting on the pillow above my head. One of the stuffed animals was Grover from *Sesame Street*. The other two were souvenir stuffed animals from Sea World, a walrus dressed like a guard at Buckingham Palace and a penguin dressed like Uncle Sam. The walrus was missing one of his eyes. My dad put the blanket over me and said, "Good night." He turned off my light and shut the door. I heard Ann giggle and then I heard my dad shut his bedroom door. It had been 2 years, 4 months, and 26 days since my mom disappeared. There were no pictures of my mom anywhere in the house. I was in bed for 45 minutes trying to force myself to go to sleep. At the 46 minute mark I opened my eyes and tried to remember what my mom looked like, but I could not. I still can't.

