

# Stinger: a Novel

*by* Cooper Renner

The high-pitched buzz stopped. He unplugged the Russian clippers, still drizzling blood, and packed in the salt before the patient came to.

Amber oil going pink as he cleaned the blades.

"Beers, steers and queers in Texas," he chanted, slipping into his coat.

She prodded, hesitantly, the larger ball, shamed by its weight in the pan. Not much imagination needed to hear his wailing wails. One casual glance at the plump rise in the sheet the doctor had tossed over his neutered 'bull.'

Lipstick on the bolt, she told herself, if it's no good in the slot anymore.

The doorman leapt up at the bell, bored with the partying he only felt through the walls, bitter with daily greeting someone else's whores.

Summer. The prelapsarian littoral: stinger rendered harmless by the empty pouch tucked underneath. If it were visible, if he were somehow, like a noncom, required to shower in a herd, he'd have pumped a couple of shells through the unhealed sutures months ago.

But this is the forest primeval, with private stalls and wet-grip slippers.

Macarthur fellowships.

And the pockets on his swim trunks bulging with a baggy full of breath mints and a plastic tag printed Stemmons Stallions 1967.

