

Who's Calling?

by David Kozatch

"So tell me, is it true you guys just read the first sentence — and after that it either goes in the dung pile or maybe, if the writer's lucky, you'll make it to page twenty?"

"*Slush pile*, you mean. I read everything," she said. "If it's good."

We were in Clarice's small living room-slash-home office surrounded by piles of unread manuscripts. She poured me another drink and eased back down on the sofa, took a sip of her own. I was enjoying this. Her confidence. The enjoyment she displayed in making me feel slightly uncomfortable.

"I'm a sucker for a good first sentence but I won't dismiss the whole work based on a bad one. Besides, anybody with an MFA can write a decent first sentence. You can't judge the whole work based on that."

I leaned behind the sofa, randomly plucked two of the bloated manuscripts from the floor and fingered through each until that banal yet anticipatory heading, "Chapter One," appeared at the top of the page.

"Whaddya know? Both of these have the word 'call' in the first sentence. Let's do a test," I said.

I ignored her mock protestations and began reading from the first one:

"London calling," my tongue and eyebrow pierced Williamsburg-loft-sharing assistant Luna cried out from down the hall knowing full well from having slept at my place one unfortunate marijuana and sixteen-dollar-a-pour martini-soaked evening and having discovered that very CD in my stereo cabinet ("Hey, Jake, what's a stereo cabinet?") that she was referencing one of my favorite songs/albums of all time, a cultural artifact that had the effect of placing my own long lusted-for youth at a particular distance from hers; it was my divorce attorney, Max London, on the phone.

"Meh. I feel like I've read this. Does the world need another 'older guy meets younger hipster who rocks his world' story?" Clarice

asked, without a hint of irony. I fact checked my graying fringe in the curved reflection of her whiskey glass before continuing.

"Okay, how about this?" I read the first line from the other, slimmer volume I had chosen. A little something called *Reanimate Me, Baby*:

"Call me Schwartzy," the girl said, her large breasts peeking through the thin fabric of her sheer top. "That's what all my dead clients call me."

"Oh my God, where did you find that? I could sell that!"

