

FRAT JERK (1960s)

by DeWitt Henry

“Fraternities are the laboratory of democracy.”—Barry Goldwater

* * *

Hey, I said. Wait a minute. You hear that?

Winnie turned down the radio.

Is that him?

I threw my cards on the table. The jerk was playing his classical records again. I could hear that lousy music a mile away and he was the kind of kid that makes your skin crawl. But he had a CD sound system and it was up loud this time so that the house shook with the music, swells of it trembling in the walls.

Gonna put up with it?

What can you do? He's graduating in a month.

I emptied my beer can and bent it back and forth between my hands until it split and then I threw it in the fireplace. I was getting good and mad. We turned the radio up louder and kept on talking over it, cursing, telling jokes. The card game was lousy; I began to lose and before I knew it I was in for fifty dollars. Then I got up, all I could hear was that music coming through the wall.

Hey, what's eating you?

I'm going to knock that kid apart, so help me.

So I went out into the hall-- really mad now. His door was shut; if it was locked I told myself I'd bust it down. Nobody liked him, he was a cringing, worthless little jerk.

I turned the knob and pushed it open.

He sat in the corner, bent forward with his blond head in his left hand and his right balled in a fist shaking near his leg. The big speakers were blaring impossibly loud, unreasonably loud. I swore at him and told him to turn it down or I'd knock it apart, but he couldn't hear me over the blast of the music. I was shaking too, with the sound of it.

Suddenly the music stopped.

He looked up and I saw there were tears in his eyes.

Wasn't that something! he said.

