

Walking To Gibraltar, Chapter 8: In Which Love Is Declared

by Frank Indiana

Astrid hadn't always hated him.

They met at the Beta house in the fall of his junior year. Typical Friday night. Stoned, drinking beer. He and Red Chapman sitting in their room playing guitars. The girls in their blues jeans. The guys from the house hitting on the girls in their blue jeans. Chiming guitars, wood and strings. A public service for the boys in the house, courtesy of Frank and Red.

They played "Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight." "I've Just Seen A Face." "From The Beginning." "After The Goldrush." "Norwegian Wood." Dreamy stuff for the girls in their blue jeans.

Astrid was there with her roommate—a mousy little brunette in a clingy turtleneck. Astrid was the opposite. Tall, blonde. Brown-eyed. Not big-chested, but not bad. She had something else. She seemed—awake. Smart. She was smart pretty.

After they put down the guitars, he and Astrid went for a walk up the row. She was a sophomore transfer from a big state school. Studying computer science. She was from Effingham. She had a sister and a horse. She loved the Beatles and Dan Fogelberg.

(He was a senior journalism major from Lombard. He was going to save the world like Woodward and Bernstein. Little did he know that every third kid in college that year was a journalism major with the same plan. He'd awoken to that fact—rudely—upon graduation.)

"Do you get high?" he asked.

She didn't. "It's illegal," she said. "And nasty."

Nasty? That was a new one. But no matter. In that place, at that time, the world divided neatly into heads and squares, fifty-fifty.

Frank didn't care. He figured she'd come around.

They started seeing each other. She waited for him after class. They studied behind the history stacks at the library and kissed on the back stairs. They made out in the shadows by the back door of Bell Hall. On Friday nights, she'd escort him to her room. They screwed on the bed while *The Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island* flickered on her little black-and-white TV. He snuck out after curfew, three in the morning. Smelling of wine and sex.

She loved his long hair. He smoked pot and played the guitar. He was not the kind of boy she dated in Effingham. He played wing forward on the soccer club. In those days, they didn't have soccer in Effingham.

She loved him. She told him so. They fucked in the Rare Books Room at the library. It smelled of literature and sex.

He loved the sex and the rare books. He loved the curve of her back and the color of her eyes. He loved holding her hand.

But the truth? The truth. The fucking truth. The fucking truth tucked deep behind his heart, hard against his spine.

The truth was, he wasn't sure he loved her.

