

At the Faire

by Jack Swenson

My girlfriend dressed as a buxom wench. I wore the robe of a friar. "Bless you, my child," I said to all the pretty girls, and I made the sign of the cross. I did not want to go to the Renaissance Fair, but my friend did, so we went. Carl and Dolly went, too. I don't remember what costumes they wore. I think it was Robin Hood and Lady Godiva; I'm not sure. Dolly wasn't wearing much, I remember that.

Carl and Dolly were actors. Dolly was offered the lead in a porno film, but she turned it down. Carl later went to Hollywood and made a name for himself in movies and television.

I got separated from the others and sat down in the shade of a tree and popped the top on a beer that I had smuggled in. A weary juggler was lying spread-eagled on the ground taking a snooze. He opened one eye and licked his lips. I had another can of beer, and I handed it to him. He sat up. "Thanks, man," he said. We got to talking, and the juggler told me that he was a musician and he lived in San Francisco. I asked him what kind of music he played, and he said anything.

My girlfriend found me and hauled me off to watch a Punch and Judy show. After that we wandered around some more, and then we found Carl and Dolly and sat down and ate the food that we had scavenged. I was hungry, and I tore into my turkey leg with gusto. My friend was eating something greasy, and she got it all over her face.

Carl and Dolly were sitting about six feet apart. They weren't getting along. Dolly was upset that Carl had quit his job at the college and was moving to L.A. He had asked her to come along, but she said she couldn't just pick up and leave.

I got up and went searching for a stand where they sold beer and brought back four large paper cups. Carl cheered up immediately, although you had to know him to tell. Carl looked like a Mafia hit man, and it was hard to tell if he was happy or sad.

We sat under the umbrella of a spreading oak tree and ate our lunch and drank our beer and watched the parade of jesters, wenches, and men of the clergy like me, and I was content for the moment to be somebody other than who I was. In a way, I thought, this is the story of my life.

I fell asleep sitting there with my back against a tree. My girlfriend snuggled against me. I woke up when she whispered a question into my ear. She wanted to know if I was wearing anything under my robe. Boxer shorts, I said.

