

Breathless

by Jack Swenson

We have a party for our friends the week before Christmas. A few days before the party, I bring Dolly a present. It is a fig leaf and an apple. "Here," I say. "Props." She sighs. She doesn't want to be Eve, she says. She wants to be Cinderella.

Max and Kaia bring a friend to the party. A girl. A violinist. The three of them play trios sometimes on weekends. She is not attractive, but I can see that Max is in love. When he sees me looking her over, he grins. "Pussy hair like a Brillo pad," he whispers.

Lorna and her husband get there late. They come dressed as the Beauty and the Beast. Lorna's husband is a medical student. He is studying to be proctologist. Later I overhear Lorna talking to a fellow who lives down the block. She tells him that she was once a topless dancer. She says that one night one of the boys at the bar gave her twenty bucks to take off the g-string, too.

I sit down next to a youngster on the couch. "Would you like to see?" she asks. "See what?" I reply, the color rising in my face. "My scar," she says. "Would you like to see it?"

One of Dolly's friends is there, a librarian. I guess she is about forty years of age. She isn't married, and she doesn't date, Dolly tells me. Her face shines with hope and suffering.

Later several of us go swimming. The pool lights are on, and the librarian sits at a table by the pool sipping a hot toddy. She is trembling. I tell her to take off her clothes and get into the water. The pool is heated. She shakes her head. "Maybe later," she says.

When everybody has left, I sit on the couch in my tiny living room and listen to music. I put an LP on the turntable and dream about the good, old days. I think about meeting my second wife in the elevator and taking her back to her apartment after our first date. She asked me in, and when the door was closed, we kissed. "Fuck me," she said.

