

The Party

by Jack Swenson

My wife tells me I should marry Pam. "She would be good for you," she says. I don't know. Something bothered me about that woman, and I couldn't put my finger on what it was.

Later, I went into the kitchen to get another drink, and Doc and Joanne were pressed up against the kitchen counter. Doc's big hands were under the young woman's skirt. Her underwear was on the floor.

Cap had showed up by himself. When he left the party, I walked as far as the landing with my old friend, and as he walked down the steps, I saw the slump of his beefy shoulders beneath the fabric of his coat. He was shedding hair like an old tomcat heading home from a lost war.

I remembered when I was in Paris. I would lean on my window sill in the evening and watch the whores. They wore gaudy clothes and too much makeup.

I went back inside and eavesdropped on a conversation that Joe was having with Charley. Joe said the only reason he went to his recovery group was for the pussy. That was like looking for a ham sandwich in a garbage can, Charley said.

A girl I didn't know was in a bathroom off the hallway across from the bedroom where my wife and I slept. She was peering wide eyed into the mirror and using a powdered pad to repair imaginary flaws.

"There you are," I said. "How's the girl of my dreams?"

I took her by the hand, and led her down the hall to another bedroom. We sat on the edge of the bed hugging and kissing. I wanted her to do other things, but she wouldn't.

I told the woman that my wife was not a talker. I said that I was afraid that the silence was going to drive me crazy. I also told her what my wife had said to me earlier that day, which was that when I died, she was going to have me cremated and put my ashes in the cats' litter boxes.

It was after midnight when Cap called. He had an accident, he said, and he was in the hospital. When he got home, he fell down some stairs and hurt his leg. Tore the tendons above one knee. He was talking goofy, and it was hard to understand him. I told him I would call him in the morning.

After I hung up the phone, I went looking for my wife. She was in our bedroom. I stood in the hall with my ear to the door and heard her little song. Oh oh oh. The notes floated in the air like an aria.

