

Trouble

by Jack Swenson

He wore cheap flannel shirts and dirty cords. He had glasses and a scraggly beard.

“What’s the matter with you?” he asked. I was sitting across the desk from him in his office. The sun was shining in my eyes, and I could not see him clearly.

I was sad, I said. “Aren’t we all?” he replied. He leaned forward and scribbled something on a pad of paper.

There were six of us in the group. There were no chairs in the room, just pillows. Sometimes he made us punch the pillows. “Harder!” the shrink would yell. “Harder!”

One day he asked me to stay after the session had ended. He asked one of the women to stay too. He looked at me and nodded at her. Then he looked at her and nodded at me.

“What do you think?” he asked. “I think you two should get together.”

The woman looked at me with big eyes. I blushed and looked at my shoes.

Next session I sat in the doctor’s office and told him my whole story, how my girlfriend ran off with a Berkeley student and his wife. I said I was curious about what they did in bed. Did they do it in pairs or all at the same time?

When I finished I paused. The doctor looked up. The sun through the window made the ends of his wild hair gleam. His glasses flashed. “What?” he said. “I wasn’t listening.”

