Dreaming in Mink

by Jane Hammons

Before Sally Macintyre ran off, she tore a glossy ad from Vogue, folded it into an envelope and mailed it to my mother. A kohl eyed model, aloof in full-length fur that rippled to the ground in luxurious folds, stared seductively from the page. On a piece of plain paper Sally Macintyre wrote, “Last night I dreamed of you in mink.”

I was 12 then, in 1965, and could easily imagine dreaming of my mother—a buttery Marilyn Monroe blonde, not yet 30. Sally Macintyre was even younger, a lean Audrey Hepburn flirt.

Sally Macintyre—forever referred to by her first and last name as if to cement her to Dr. Macintyre (called just Dr. Mac) who filled and pulled my teeth from the time I was seven until I graduated from college—ran off with a cadet, a boy, from the New Mexico Military Institute. She ran off with a black man. She ran off with a woman. She ran.
Off.

The two daughters she left behind were younger than my six-year-old sister. Though we all lived in Roswell and must have ridden the same rides at the Eastern New Mexico County Fair, paddled boats across the same waters at Bottomless Lakes State Park, and cheered at basketball games between the rival Roswell High School Howling Coyotes and the Goddard High Rockets, I can only picture them neatly framed in annually updated studio portraits hung on the wall by the reception desk of Dr. Mac's office.

There sat Godzilla. That's what Dr. Mac called his assistant. She was petite and pretty and seemed old. It might have been the glasses or the stiff nurse's cap, or maybe it was the fact that she worked when most mothers didn't. Godzilla's daughter was my older sister's best friend. Dr. Mac was having an affair with the tiny monster who

handed him pliers and probes. He drilled my teeth, my mother's teeth, my sisters' and brother's teeth. He drilled the whole town's teeth, ripped them out by the roots, packed the bloody sockets in gauze.

Everyone knew. But no one could imagine. Wouldn't imagine. Why.

Handsome Dr. Mac his perfect hair combed neatly over his square box of a head, scrubbed face too clean in the glare of the blinding lamp. Antiseptic smile. Teeth so perfect they might be false. Hands soft as baby mice fit everywhere.

When my 17-year-old pregnant mother married my father, he was a handsome Cherokee boy with a crooked smile and an eye patch. Gored in the head by a bull when he was just a toddler, he'd lost an eye in a dusty corral. I knew him as a sunburned, dry skinned farmer.

He was 30 when my mother divorced him after 13 years of marriage. From my older sister, I would later learn that our father had, in her words, kept a woman. In a cottage downtown near the Petroleum Building, twelve stories tall. Romance in the long shadow. This makes my father interesting to me. After he's gone.

When they talk about Sally Macintyre, my mother and her friends imagine Phoenix Las Vegas Dallas and Denver. Main Street turns into US 285 and goes all the way to Mexico. By the end of the decade, they will all be divorced. They aren't gossiping. They are figuring it out.

Sally Macintyre answers the telephone. With its extra long cord she can walk through the house, the receiver tucked between shoulder and ear, tearing the page from Vogue. She stops in the dining room and scribbles a note. She tells her young black woman boyfriend not to worry, be patient, she'll be there soon. She hangs up and gets into

the car. On her way out of town, Sally Macintyre dashes like a dentist's wife into the Post Office on the ground floor of the Petroleum Building and mails an envelope addressed to Nancy Hammons, Rural Route 2 Box 158-A, Roswell, New Mexico.

Kept in my mother's desk for years, the envelope yellowed. The glossy model went white in the creases. But Sally Macintyre's note never stopped saying, “Last night I dreamed of you in mink.”