Frothing At the Fountain

by Jerry Ratch

When I came back from California the second time, in the summer of 1965, I was the first around our town to wear my hair long, influenced by the Beatles. And I bought a bunch of blue caps that everyone in our gang wore, with the number “69” sown on front and we would run around in a wild bunch doing some crazy things. Like the time we emptied the contents of big bottles of dishwashing suds into the fountain of the shopping mall at, I think, maybe the new Oakbrook Center? And when the fountain pumps sucked in that dishwashing fluid, it churned up an enormous bubble bath spewing out of the fountain, and the store dicks spotted us and chased us all around that huge shopping center and we hopped into my souped-up silver-pine green ‘55 Chevy and took off laughing and drinking from our bottles of Ripple, to which we were all now completely addicted. This was Shel and me and Andy, and maybe others. Even Sharon put on one of our caps and that was when she and I made our date to go out on Fox River in my dad's ski boat and have sex for the first time, the night you and Rick DeMille came swimming up behind us, crying out my name: “Pharaoh … Pharaoh” Well, maybe it was really my own name, and I was being a little bit literary. Just a little.

And I remember Sharon wincing, and she gasped, “Oh, Jesus!” even though she'd been with Fred K before me, I know that much about her previous experience, but probably it was only him. And maybe just once or twice, because that's what it felt like.

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No matter how many times I brought someone home and down into the basement, after awhile there'd come the knocking on the door up at the head of the stair.

“Jerry, what are you doing down there? It's ten o'clock already, for heaven's sake. Dad and I are going to bed… *Jerry?”*

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She'd never go away. She wouldn't stop knocking until I went up the basement stairs and stood on the other side of the door from her. Quietly, firmly, I told her, “Go to bed, Mom. Leave us alone.”

Still she'd ask, “Who are you with down there?”

I never opened the door. I put a finger on the latch to make sure it was locked. I stood stark naked in the cold and dark at the top of the stair.

“Sharon, Mom,” I said.

“Who?” she asked.

“Sharon,” I repeated more loudly. “For God's sake,” through my teeth, “go to bed

and leave — us — a — lone!”

As she went back, I could hear her saying, “Well, *it's late* — for goodness sakes!”

Then I remember hearing their voices in the bedroom right above our heads, while I crawled back under the rough woolen blanket with Sharon.

My dad asking: “Who is it?”

My mom saying: “Oh, he's got *some girl* down there! I don't know what they're doing at this hour!”

Then I heard my father saying, “Get to sleep, babe. Don't worry. He'll be all right”