

It Was the Heart of the Sixties

by Jerry Ratch

I remember Freddie K bringing these fat Thai sticks (known as blunts) back with him from Viet Nam, and just one of those things would get us all so stoned at parties in Jolene's upstairs apartment that we felt as if we could float down the long flight of stairs like we were feathers, weightless, on a puff of air. They were so strong, and dangerous. It smelled like a skunk when you smoked that weed, and felt like your eyeballs were getting pulled from your head.

Rick DeMille was there with his new girlfriend Sue W, and I would rib her about being a prude and tried to get her to take off her top but she wouldn't do it unless the lights were turned out. She was the one he took up with after he left you, or you left him, I never knew which. I think they're still together somewhere out in Phoenix, if you can imagine. I thought all she wanted was a ride on his sleek Ducati, and his family's ski boat, and in his hot-rod Dodge (or Plymouth, I think) with four on the floor and that huge gas-guzzling engine. I thought she was just there for the thrill of the ride, if you want the truth.

This was after I left Terry, that girl from Chicago who wanted to have my baby. Jolene had three children (don't ask what I was thinking) and worked as a waitress at an Italian restaurant on St. Charles Road and wanted to have as much sex as possible all the time, including one time in her car (while I was driving!) on our way up to her in-law's cabin at Fox Lake.

This was probably right around our last time together, when I came over to your little studio apartment in Hillside, and you told me afterwards, *"I guess I'm finally over you!"* I also cheated on her with Terry every now and then, and even Sharon one time, right

in her bed at home. (She'd always fantasized about doing it with me in her own bed!)

Yes, our appetites were immense then and everything was happening at once, Viet Nam not the least of it. And we began to live only for the moment, even if it was on the ceiling of a bedroom in Villa Park, or Hillside, or Lombard, or anywhere else for that matter. It was the heart of the Sixties and we were racy and aggressive, yes, and just a little naïve and idealistic. Did I say naïve? Yes, that too!

Look, that's what it was like then. If I saw a girl massaging her breasts with oil in front of an open window, don't blame me, I took a good look. Maybe it should have been illegal — but thankfully it wasn't!

Maybe all we'll need is a narrator at the end, telling us about our own life, trying to pump life back into us like a bunch of inflatable dummies. All I know right now is the night is young, but we're not. And I don't know how the nights can be so long when life is so short. It's the unopened prize. It's the sadness of the thrift shop.

Why not look the gift horse in the mouth and get it over with? That's what I want to know.

