

last attempt at innocence

by Jerry Ratch

When we were leaving to go to the ice rink, Lynda surprised all of us by saying she wanted to come along. She slid all the way over in the front seat to be next to me, while one of my buddies, Miller, who had his eye on her himself, slid into the passenger side next to her. Lynda straddled the floor shift with one of her legs, so that I had to rub up against the inside of her thighs every time I went to put the car into second and fourth gears. "I like your car," she said. She looked at me and gave one of her weird smiles. She would smile with her mouth held part way open, as if to say: 'Should I have said that?'

We could barely see out of the windshield with so many bodies crammed into my car, breathing hard. The defroster couldn't keep up with the steam we were generating. But the truth is, I was thrilled to be sitting next to this girl who was letting me feel her legs as I shifted through the gears. I did it secretly even as Miller watched me doing it, and she was letting me. And Miller knew it too. I could see him shifting his eyes away every time I looked over toward him. Everybody else bailed out of the car once we got to the little outdoor ice-skating pond. There was an embankment of snow piled up between the parking area and the frozen pond. Big lights were on and people were skating over the pond in one huge crowd going around and around in a circle, sweeping past us in one direction.

Miller lagged behind to help Lynda out of the door. "You go ahead," she said, "I'm going to stay in here for a minute and warm up." She pulled the door shut in Miller's face. Lynda looked over at me and with her breathy voice uttered, "What's with him?" Her mouth remained open in an attempt at innocence.

"Don't you want to go out there with them?" I asked.

"Start up the motor," she said. "It's cold out there." She moved over beside me. "I like your gearshift," she said. Again she

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stared at me with those faintly crossed blue eyes of hers. I was starting to get a feeling I had never experienced before. It was a feeling of excitement, of a wildness, something that was getting slightly out of control. I put my arm up on the back of the seat behind her. My leather jacket squeaked with all the movement against the car seat. She leaned against me and said, "Should we leave them here?"

"I can't just leave them," I said.

"Where can we go then?" she asked.

"Nobody's home at my house for awhile. We could all go there and party."

"Do you have any booze?" Lynda asked.

"Sure, there's always something to drink there."

"I'll be right back," she said, and practically bounced out of the car. She ran out onto the ice and started pulling each of them back to the car by their jackets, herding them along like a sheep dog. "C'mon," I heard her saying, laughing that deep throaty laugh of hers, "we're going to Jerry's house to have a party. C'mon. There's boo. . .oo. . .ooze!"

