

Pharaoh ... Pharaoh

by Jerry Ratch

I was surprised when Judy Ann Mac (aka: JAM) gave me a brandy snifter with our initials etched into it for my birthday. I was only making the rare occasional downstate Illinois visit that summer, like when Andy or Shel and me got the urge to get in the car and just drive, drive just about anywhere.

One time we got in my hopped-up Chevy and drove all the way out to the middle of the Nebraska cornfields, to the farm house of one of Shel's cousins. That was where we found ourselves once we had sobered up. Ne-fuckin-braska! Then we got on his cousin's motorcycle and took a ride down one of those narrow country highways with no shoulders and took a dump off the cycle and nearly ended up dying near a dried-up creek bed. This was in the middle of August, in the middle of Absolutely Nowhere.

I woke up on my back with my face in the sunlight and thought, I guess this must be heaven, it was so bright out. Except for the buzzing of the insects. They will always bring you back to earth.

And that night on a back country road, pulled over and parked with two country girls. One in the back seat with Shel, one in front with me. So drunk. So drunk. Don't recall doing anything.

I remember hearing Shel doing something though.

Then on my birthday in August, making a run downstate to Urbana to see JAM, when she gave me the brandy snifter. And on your birthday, that remark about the snifter when we were in my bedroom at home in Villa Park.

"Who's initials are those?"

I didn't know what to say. I wasn't used to lying, in those days.

Not like I do now.

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Here's that poem I wrote for you once, thinking about you and Rick DeMille swimming up behind me parked still in the water in my Dad's ski boat, my first time with Sharon, on a hot summer night in the middle of Fox River.

When I think I am
in the hands of the right
god

just as I am
entering the new queen

comes the voice of
the last one
calling me from behind
with the endless
blood of memory

Pharaoh, Pharaoh

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So when you think of me next, you'll know who I was talking about.

This time, I mean.

