

Poetry Whores

by Jerry Ratch

Something's been eating at my craw. I'm just going to go ahead and spill it all out. You ever hear about Poetry Whores? Well, let me tell you a little about them, because if I don't, then who will? I'm not going to name names. You can pretty much guess who these people are, if you know anything at all about the poetry scene hereabouts.

Some time ago, this effete fellow named Poindexter ran an underground magazine in the Bay Area called Visible Tittie, and had published some of the Queen's early poems, back when they were very good. This was before she and I and two other writers formed our own little poetry group (quietly called the Gang of Four.) It was obvious to me that Poindexter had slept with the Queen back when he'd published her, and that he absolutely idolized her, as did everyone in the poetry scene around Berkeley. I remember one man, the publisher of another little magazine (I won't say who,) removing her shoe at a party at Poindexter's house and kissing her foot, as if she were Cinderella or something. And I remember Poindexter asking me the question, when he heard we had formed our little group, "So, did she cook you her famous dinner of chicken and spinach for you yet?"

"Well, yes," I said. "How did you know?"

"That's what she makes for everyone." He lifted his nose as far as he could. "It's the only dish she can cook. It's not that good."

Later Poindexter ran off and got married to a professional stripper from Las Vegas, though some said it was just to prove that he was a man. But then again, he never had to lift a finger to support himself either, so who was the wiser, I want to know? I think he was way out in front of the rest of us, in terms of being a fox about life, and how to live it. Whereas I myself was more of an ox, if you had to put your finger on the animal nature behind things.

Only the Queen herself had the ability to one-up him on that score. I'll tell you why I say that.

One day, the very day before she was going to marry this fellow she'd met in the apartment house she lived in, exactly one day, I say, I was sitting in the French Hotel Café on the north side of town, across the street from the infamous Chez Panisse Restaurant (of Alice fame,) when who should come blowing through the lobby of the hotel but the Queen herself arm in arm, drunkenly and giggling like any schoolgirl, with a pretty famous gray-haired balding Bolinas poet who was old enough to be her father. They tripped along the hallway leading to the elevator and disappeared upstairs into a room. Well, not one month later I was reading a new poem about her discarded white panties lying in a pool of lamplight at this same hotel, and yes, it was by this same old Bolinas poet.

The very next day after that incident, there I was at her wedding reception, drinking champagne from a flute in the middle of a crowd of people on her lawn. Her husband made a speech about wanting to provide for her, so she could go on uninterrupted with her writing career.

Well, I just kept looking over at her to see if there was even a hint of, I don't know, how about REMORSE? Or something at least close to a nod of recognition. Nope. Nothing. Everything went off as planned, without a hitch at the wedding reception. Wow, I thought to myself, how do they do it? *How do they do it?*

Well, of course, I knew how they did it, but just the same — *how do they do it?*

