

Wild Dreams of Reality, 10

by Jerry Ratch

I spent the whole day at Oliveira's, writing furiously in my notebooks. The words came pouring out. Just before seven, Darrell picked me up. I grew anxious driving down to Parker's studio because it was in a bad area on the border between Oakland and Berkeley. It was dangerous to be there at night, and her studio was right in the middle of it because the rent was so cheap. I couldn't believe my eyes when we pulled up in front of her building. "You better stay here with the truck," I said.

"Get me her home address," said Darrell.

I got out of the truck, looking all around. Young men were hanging out near a telephone booth next to a liquor store, each drinking from a brown paper bag. One of them stood in the phone booth making a call while the others looked up the street one way, then down the other. A sliver of moon rose above the hills. It was warm out, and I felt an enormous thrill running through my body. The moon had come up serenely through the pink and blue and grayed eastern sky, and a rose mist lay simmering in the left-over heat of the day above the density of civilization.

A black car with dark-tinted windows came screeching around the corner while the small crowd at the phone booth stared at the car, with their paper bags in their hands, frozen in mid-air. They turned with the car as it swung around the corner, turning like iron filings attracted by a magnet. Then the car sped away leaving a cloud of blue smoke issuing up from its tires. I searched frantically for Parker's name beside the buzzers. A tremendous shout arose from the group at the corner, and suddenly one of them flung his paper bag into the street with a crash of breaking glass. I pushed the bell again and again.

"Yes?" said a tinny voice from the speaker.

"Parker, it's Philip! Let me in quick, before I get killed!"

A buzzer rang at the door, and I tugged on the metal handle. Once inside, the door slammed shut and I felt a little safer, but I could barely see as I made my way down a dimly-lit hall. I smelled the ripe odor of cat piss mixed with the smell of oil paints. "God," I muttered, "this place is like a tomb." My voice came echoing back to me.

I stumbled over a motorcycle that was leaking gasoline, and bumped into a shopping cart piled with junk, the ever-present shopping cart that had become the modern packhorse of the poor. This wasn't the kind of art studio I was used to, tucked away safely in a garage or basement in the better neighborhoods of Berkeley, where life was neat and orderly and well-planned. Again I heard a shattering of glass out in the street, and I grew anxious that Darrell was okay in the truck. Then a door swung open, and there stood Parker in a flood of light. Clay was spattered all over her hands, arms, and all over her blue work shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

I looked her up and down. Sweat pants clinging to her thin legs, clay or no clay, she looked terrific. Touching her arm, I took her face in both hands, kissing her full on the mouth for what seemed like a long hungry year. "God, Parker," I said, "I'm so glad I'm here."

"So am I," she responded.

"Listen, I need to give my brother your address so he can go set up his tent."

She gave me her home address, and I ran back outside to give it to Darrell. He pulled away and I jumped back inside the door just as the group from across the street started to come over.

Once I was inside again, Parker ushered me into her studio, closing the door behind me and throwing an extra bolt lock. "Is it safe around here?" I asked.

"Nobody's ever broken into my van," she said.

"So," I breathed out, looking all around, "this is your work?"

"I'm not quite finished with this piece." She pointed at a slab of moist clay.

"What's it going to be?"

She looked me up and down. "Not sure yet. Maybe it'll be you! You want to model for me? I need a nice body."

I laughed. "Sure."

"Then take off your clothes," she said.

"Are you kidding?" I looked around the studio nervously at some of the art hanging on the walls, and walked over to one piece that had a real window frame around it, built in a purposely skewed manner that forced the perspective upward to the right, as though it were heading through time at high speed. "I like this piece," I said. "What's it called?"

"Before She Was My Mother."

"Really? That's a great title."

"It was done from a photograph taken of my mother in pre-War Poland, before Hitler invaded," Parker said. "She was young, still in her teens. In that photo she was seated at a second-story window, looking outward and down over her shoulder, and whoever took the photo was on the ground looking up."

Parker really stared at me now. "You're very attractive," she said. "Take off your clothes and let's see how you look. I need your butt up on that clay there on the table."

"You're joking."

"You said you wanted to model, didn't you?"

"Well . . . yeah. Sure."

"Well, then?" she said, calling my bluff. A smile appeared, and I noticed once more those lovely creases at each corner of her mouth.

"Okay!" I blurted out. I unbuckled my belt, hesitating when we heard a round of semi-automatic gunfire off in the distance, but in the very near distance.

"God, Parker, I'm not so sure about this area. Maybe we should go to your place. That was gunfire."

"Fireworks," she responded.

"I know gunshots when I hear them. Those were gunshots."

"Fireworks," she repeated. "I hear them all the time. Take your clothes off. You're not scared, are you? It's safe once you're inside here. You wouldn't want to go out there. Besides, this clay is drying. Drop your pants."

She could see me hesitating. "Do you need help?"

I laughed quietly. She was very charming. "Yes, I do."

Parker approached me as one would a little boy to undress him. Pulling the zipper down and unbuttoning my pants, she said, "Let's see, what do we have here?"

She yanked my pants down to my knees and patted the bulge in my underwear. "This looks promising. Now, out of these shoes."

She knelt down to untie both shoes. I let her do everything. A thrill leaped through my body.

"First lift this one. There, that's good."

She looked up patting the erection that stood outward now inside my underpants. "Very good. Now, lift this one. That's good. *Good boy!*" she said removing my pants.

"Now let's see what we've got." She pulled my underpants outward, peering in, then down. I heard her suck in her breath. This was a good thing to hear.

Suddenly there was a loud crashing of glass from the street right out in front of the building, and my erection fell.

"Parker, this place is dangerous."

She unbuttoned my shirt, removed it, and pulled my undershirt up over my head. Then I was naked. "Get your butt up on the table." She laughed again.

"I don't believe it," I said.

She cupped her hand under my genitals and hefted them like they were clay. Then she squeezed a little, and I jumped backwards up on the table, landing on the wet clay slab, letting out a yelp: "Parker! This is cold! It's wet!"

Parker pushed me on the chest, making me lie back until I quit squirming. She positioned my body so that I was spread out on the slab the way she wanted me, turning a limb this way then that. She placed her hand under my thigh, lifting me a little until I grew pliable under her touch. Occasionally she stroked me, and I started growing hard once again in the gentle pressure of her hand.

"There," she said, petting me. "You look very good, Philip." She drew a quick outline of my body into the wet clay.

I was just beginning to relax when she yanked me up off the table, saying, "Okay, let's see what we've got."

I found myself standing naked while she examined the impression I had made in the clay.

"Good!" she exclaimed. She grabbed a knife and cut through the clay slab as easily as if she were wielding a pen on paper. "You can put your clothes back on," she said. "I'll be ready to go in ten minutes."

