

Pumpkin Patch

by Katie Norton

Artie invited me to go with him to pick out a Halloween Pumpkin for the house. I had recently moved into a communal living situation and we were still getting to know each other. Artie was the kind of person who made a special occasion out of ordinary life. Why buy a pumpkin at the grocery store when Half Moon Bay, Pumpkin Capital of the World, was just a few miles down the road?

Artie rolled several fat doobies of his finest weed for the trip. Like the characters out of our favorite *Furry Freak Brothers* comic books, nothing in that house took place until the doobies were rolled. Priorities, man.

We drove to Half Moon Bay in Artie's yellow Triumph convertible on a Wednesday, which I had off work. Late October is the best time of year in Northern California, sunny and warm. Our drive down the coast was like a hippie version of Grace Kelly and Gary Grant's drive in *To Catch a Thief*. We bantered wittily as Artie expertly took the hairpin curves. He had a natural feel for the road. The sun shone on the cliffs and ocean below, a blue and gold day.

Artie would say something funny and then laugh uproariously at his own joke. He found the humor in just about every situation. He was an Army officer's son, with old-fashioned good manners—the best sort of friend to have.

When we reached Half Moon Bay and found a pumpkin field, we were the only customers. I pictured it on the weekend, overrun with screaming brats, and shuddered. Thank God we'd come on a Wednesday.

A young man emerged from a trailer parked in the middle of the field; surly, knuckle-dragging white trash. A pretty, young conservatively dressed woman customer arrived. That made four of us in a vast lonely pumpkin field. Artie and I picked out a pumpkin and approached the man to pay for it. The young woman picked out her pumpkin and came over to pay as well. I was pretty stoned.

What happened next had never happened to me before in any retail establishment.

The low life who worked there ogled the young woman, then looked at Artie and me. He jerked his head toward the trailer and said, "What d'ya say we all go in the trailer and have group sex?"

I was stunned. Artie politely declined, handing the man a dollar for the pumpkin. "Uh, no thanks, man." The young woman couldn't get out of there fast enough. She grabbed her pumpkin and peeled out in her car.

The guy at the pumpkin patch was a toad. The run-down trailer was the size of a shoebox. Absurd! Artie and I laughed about it on the drive back to the City.

