

# The Jaws of Life

by Kyle Hemmings

## The Jaws of Life

It's 1972. You're a bell-bottomed freak caught between prisons: June and September. You imagine your Daddy, who's been getting up in the middle of the night, at a bar telling men with grimy hands and combustible tempers, sandwiched between a job and a marriage, how The Jaws of Life once saved him from an overturned car. Maybe next year, your brother will return home from the war with a thousand crimes under his tongue. He'll still bust your head if you touch his Brut 44 or mess with his shoe polish. You have a feeling he won't eat anything cooked with rice for a long time.

For now, you're stuck in the warm belly of summer and you're sitting on her bed. Goldie, the girl with mulatto skin and rainbow smile, that soft tragic cloud of a voice. She's not exactly a flower child, but baby, she's in bloom. She's standing in her too short skirt, in her long and bare and innocent girly legs. Her back is turned and you have this itch to sidle up and undo her halter. You're coming down with island fever.

In her room, there are posters of Dylan, Timothy Leary, psychedelic sun-goddesses. She's putting a new record on the turntable: *Vindicator* by Arthur Lee. You tell her it's great, even though you not exactly digging it. You've known her since grade school and even though you've never copped a feel, it gave you a strange chill when you heard boys talking about her breasts, pressing against madras or chamois with some devilish life force, or how one day she'll fuck like a monsoon. A girl released from her own prison.

You want to tell her how this summer is making you feel suffocated, your bedroom walls closing in. You want to tell her that

you have dreams portending the death of The Beatles. You rise and are tempted to plant your nose in her ponytail, the smell of lilacs and sweet butter. You think of white lies that will one day turn out true and inflict at least one burning casualty. Her body, playful and childlike in its grace/awkwardness, is killing you. Yet it is her body that will save you from the closing walls and your failure to thrive in summer's heat.

And now, turning, with an ironic flash of a smile, she says, You know what? Get this. My brother's lizard escaped! She giggles and doubles over. You don't find it amusing at all. Somewhere in this house, you think, this lizard is getting into places it shouldn't, and someone will find it when they least expect to. It might get crushed, even die of starvation. You sit back and close your eyes. This lizard is chameleon and very clever. You now feel its presence in the room, studying you, crawling under your pants leg, finding a home in your loins. This lizard is one motherfucker.

You now rise and press against the beehive of her body, wishing never to be unstuck. Honey. Honey. Honey. She turns with a queer glint in her soulful island eyes. And before she says how this can't happen, that some variety of love is cooler and safer from a distance-- you've already come in your pants. You cover her lips with your hand and say, It's alright. It's alright. That lizard is safe.

