

Biodegradability

by Larry Strattner

Phil and Mel moved slowly through the murky water. They had waited at the pipe for Pauline more than an hour before Mel announced, "enough is enough." They moved on down river. Hanging around the pipe did serve up some tasty bits now and again. Heaven only knew what the bits were; but they were tasty.

Phil could be quick when inclined. No fry or insect or twisting wormlet escaped. Adept at darting beneath his quarry, keeping it between him and the light, he struck and swallowed. Mel often wondered when Phil's speed and method would serve him up a mouth full of hooks as had happened to others. First hooks, then the knife. Mel was not as fast as Phil but he was attentive. He had eaten the guts of acquaintances pulled out and spilled into the water by the shimmering monsters above.

As they swam Phil kept his eye out for things to eat or females needing eggs inseminated. Mel, as always, hung back cautiously and observed.

"Jesus" Mel said. "Smoking's been banned in the bars and restaurants but there's a huge jar of butts on the slope. You'd think people would be backing off by now."

"No one gives a shit," said Phil. "Besides, butts last up to five years in the water. And forget about the butts. The jar will probably be there for eternity. Some sport probably tossed it before the smoking ban."

"Yeah you're likely right. What the hell is caught on the milk crate to the left?"

Phil lazied over with a small dorsal movement. "A sock. Looks wool. Wool socks hang on for about five years. If they get out in the current, maybe float down by the narrows, the water gets brackish, not so long I'd guess. I don't go down there. I can't stand the taste of that shit."

"They say the water's cleaner these days."

"Might be. Cleans' relative. See that fucking coffee cup over there? With the lid still on?"

"Yeah."

"Fifty years. Those things last for fifty years. There are two of those things in the slow current up below West Point. I use them to mark a good spot to hang for baby eels. I mean fifty years? Then what? Even then they won't be gone. They'll just fall apart into little white pebble shit. It gets all over everything. You swallow those white pebbles, makes it hard to take a crap."

"Jesus Phil. No need to get so graphic."

"I'm not graphic. That's how it is here. Christ, the other day I blew by a Flatfish by the skin of my teeth. Almost chomped it. Broken line caught on some car parts. Looked so real. You know what a Flatfish is? Fishing lure? It was moving on the line in the current. Almost got a mouthful. Goddamn hooks last six hundred years in this water. How's that for graphic? And plastic bottles? Four hundred fifty years."

"Willy goes down to the Verrazano once in a while. Saw a Grouper or guy looked like one from out beyond the bridge, swallowed a plastic bottle. Jammed inside him. He blew a hole in himself. What kind of idiot would swallow a plastic bottle? Fucking out of town guys is who. I mean four hundred and fifty years?"

“Well; these days the water seems cleaner.”

“Cleaner, schmeaner. You catch what you chum for. Fifty years from now one of those assholes on the bank will be bitching because he caught a beer can his father's throwing in the river today. But you know Mel? I don't give a shit. Better a beer can than me.”

