

Jail Bait

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

Roosevelt Avenue, adjacent to the park, one story ranch houses.

Sitting in the backseat at the drive-in, Trudy and Hannah up front. The smell of wood smoke. Twilight. Pink clouds dot the darkening sky. The waitress, black and white checkered uniform, brings a tray of cheeseburgers, French fries, root beer. Loud music, cigarette smoke floats out the window. Hannah passes me a cheeseburger wrapped in waxed paper. Fried onions.

I say, "My English teacher grabbed my tits". Hannah lights a joint, inhales, says, "Whose tits hasn't he grabbed." Trudy's busy twisting the dial on the FM radio, finds a song, turns it up. The car seems to vibrate, but Hannah's right about the tit situation. I draw deeply on the joint in my right hand, the cheeseburger in my lap. Hannah and Trudy argue:

Hannah, big boobs in silhouette behind the wheel, says, "Tank's on empty, got any money?"

Trudy, almost feline, says, "I have a quarter." Then she laughs.

Hannah, taking another hit off the joint, "So give it to me, I bought the weed."

Trudy unzips a black seude bag, pulls out a five, and throws it on the dash. Of course, out of all of us, her family is the richest. Only three kids, two working parents. She doesn't have to steal money, like I do.

Hannah pockets the money in her jeans, "Thaaanks."

Trudy says, "Your pants are so tight I can see your pussy."

I have to admit this is true. She refuses to wear underwear.

Hannah smiles, "You let me worry about my pussy. My pussy's not bothering you, is it?"

They crack up. I sit back, roll down my window, the sound of leaves down the quiet street, now dark, the old Catholic church next to the park. A car pulls up, the headlights momentarily illuminating our faces. Trudy looks so strange tonight, dark eyebrows, smudged lipstick. She's created a character from outerspace, an alien, draws

him constantly, antennae coming out of his head. At first it was funny, but now its unsettling.

And Hannah is sleeping with a tall boy from the south side with long blonde hair, Jessie. Her parents despise him, they call him the Nazi. Her dad, short and dark, immense head of curly hair, wringing his hands in the kitchen,

"Why are you dating a Nazi? Why?"

Hannah laughs at him, "He's not even German."

He yells, "I don't like this boy!"

Jessie and Hannah drop mescaline together, and screw in an abandoned storefront crash pad. We call it the Rock Shop. One night, we found Jessie passed out on a stained mattress. We asked Fingers, the local drug dealer, what happened.

"Horse," he said laughing, "Jessie James is high on his horse.

I whispered in Hannah's ear, "He's not sucking on your titties tonight. "

I looked up, saw the ceiling was splattered with something, and thought, that better not be blood.

Hannah said, "He looks like an angel," and he did--- white hair falling across his face, his arms folded like a pair of wings. And all the other angels slept together on the same mattress in the flickering half light of four candles.

Fingers offered me some cough syrup, "It's got codeine."

"No," I said, "Thanks, I got weed."

"Got horse?" He laughed.

"I don't do needles." Then Hannah and Trudy laughed.

"We can snort it," he insisted, leaning in to me

"No."

But Hannah said yes. He cut a line on a battered coffee table. I left after that. That was a week ago.

I lean forward, ask Trudy, "You stay and do H with Hannah and Fingers?"

She turns to answer, and for a second, she looks like a stranger wearing the mask of Trudy. Trudy but not Trudy. An imposter. I get the chills.

She says, "Don't start that shit."

"What? It's a question. It's not shit."

She twists around, whispers in my ear, "You think I'm crazy, don't you?"

"No," I lie.

Hannah laughs, says, "Both of you are fucking crazy. Let's get a drink and celebrate. "

Trudy says, "If Jimmy comes in tonight, you can show him your pussy. You can say look baby, its smiling for you."

Hannah, says, "My pussy is always smiling."

The last thing Trudy needs is H, like her grip on this earth isn't tenuous enough. Jesus H. Christ. We turn right on 22nd Street, the main drag, going south, but the car still feels like its vibrating. I lean forward, ask,

"That weed wasn't laced with anything, was it?"

Hannah turns to me, "Relax."

"Watch the fucking road," I scream. Hannah swerves and narrowly misses an oncoming truck.

Trudy says, "I'm meeting him tonight."

"Who," I ask, distracted by the near crash.

"The alien."

"Hannah," I say, ignoring Trudy, "either watch the fucking road, or let me out."

We start laughing because we all know I'm too stoned to go anywhere. Time slows down, the light from the stoplights is soft, attenuated, then starts to flicker.

"Stop the car anyway, " I say, sweating.

"The fuck you are," Hannah says, "You are too high. Forget it."

"What's that joint laced with?"

"Nothing," Trudy laughs.

Hannah spells out, "V. A. G.I. N. A."

Jupiter's appears on our right. It's a squat brick building on the corner of nowhere. Neon planets on the façade, the rings of Saturn. We never pay for our drinks. They know we're under-age, jail bait, but good for business. Hannah walks in tits first. The bartender sees her, his jaw drops, says,

"How about a slow screw."

Hannah says, "How about three slow screws for the price of one?"

Bingo. He doesn't even ask to see our fake I.D's. Factory workers and longshoreman stare at us. Trudy leans up against the juke-box, her ass out, her hips shaking. The men shift uncomfortably, it hurts so good. Hannah looks over at Trudy, says,

"She is really out there. And you," she points at me, "You don't let him touch your tits again. Just stay out of his way. He'll get over it. Ask Trudy. She'll tell you."

"Tell me what," I ask.

Hannah ignores this, says to the bartender, "Where's Jimmy?"

He winks and says, "He'll be in later."

I say to her,

"What the fuck do you see in him?"

"Big dick," she says, smiling.

Case closed.

She throws back her drink. Adjusts her bra, her boobs shift right then left. Trudy appears at the bar, picks up an empty shot glass, and throws up in it. Doesn't say a word, doesn't even acknowledge us. Just walks away, and leans over the juke box again.

Hannah grabs me, asks, "Jesus fucking Christ did you just see that?"

"I see it," I say, "but I don't believe it."

A man with a shag hair cut, but almost forty, walks up to Trudy. He puts both his hands on her, as if her ass is a steering wheel.

I poke Hannah, "Look".

She swivels around, says, "Fucking pervert," gets up, walks over to him. Moves his hands from Trudy's ass, tell him to get lost, and walks back,

"You believe that guy?"

Maybe its going to be one of those nights where I sleep with my foot on the floor. Because the room is spinning. Jimmy arrives wearing black leather and Paco Robanne. And then I'm alone. I don't even see Trudy at the juke box. Maybe she decided to walk home. That would be a relief.

Hannah's on her fourth or fifth drink, but it doesn't matter because there's a room over the bar where she'll screw Jimmy. I think Hannah's wrong about the tit situation. I'm just going to walk up to him and say, "Grab somebody else's tits." Its not like I would get detention. But where the hell is Trudy? Don't tell me she left with Shag Hair Cut. I get up to look for her. Ask the other bartender, "Did you see my friend?"

He says, "Crazy girl with nice ass?"

"Yes."

He points, "In the bathroom."

Immediately, I think, Oh shit, she's fucking Shag Haircut in the bathroom, and this has been true in the past. It's ridiculous.

I push open the door, and the first thing I see are her eyes, wide open, almost laughing. And her half smile, as if she might sit up, and say, "What the fuck," but she doesn't. She's perfectly still, draped across the toilet, like the Pieta, her left wrist dangling on the white tiled floor. A needle and syringe. It's not the first time I've seen this either, but it's the first time her lips are blue. I quietly close the door, walk over to Hannah, kiss her on the cheek, and say,

"I'm outa here."

I walk north on 22nd Avenue, cut left over to Roosevelt, and soon I'm walking along the park. As if on a dare, I veer left into the darkened woods, lay down in a grove of maple and ash, and cover myself with dried leaves.

I look up, and the stars are so bright tonight.

