

Sideburns

by Luke Tennis

I worked as a waiter in a restaurant called the Gallery, but I kept screwing up the checks, under-charging, over-charging. Sometimes I brought out the wrong orders, and once I tried to convince a guy that what I'd brought him, pasta, was better for him than the veal he'd ordered. I told him quit being so rigid, open up to the pasta, but that didn't go over.

The owner, Mr. Katz, was nice about firing me. He said I should think about completing my education or maybe work in an office somewhere. He shook my hand and said I had a bright future. I went out and got another restaurant job, except my new manager wasn't as nice. He told me I moved too slow, like I was thinking about something else. He began calling me Dreamy Boy. I'd be standing in the kitchen waiting to pick up an order, and he'd say, "Let's get a move on, Dreamy Boy." After about two weeks, he told me, "I'm gettin' rid of you." That's how he fired me. I walked home angry, wanting to throw a rock through the front window of the restaurant. But it was enough to think about throwing the rock. I lay in bed at night toying with the idea, imagining the crash, the sound of the glass breaking, and it made me tense. I wanted that crash, that breakage, was hungry for it, aching almost. I wanted something, but I didn't know where to start. So I went and worked in another restaurant, a place just opening called Dmitri's. I lasted a whole year, was too scared not to do a good job.

Then one night I had this couple at my table, and the man had bushy sideburns all the way down to his chin. I didn't like him right off, couldn't take those sideburns. Who would wear such sideburns? He started ordering me around, telling me to keep the water glasses full, stuff like that. I'd had about enough of him, and I walked by his table and flicked Russian dressing at him. I'd used Russian dressing--scooped some into the palm of my hand--because

it was the house dressing, thick and creamy, and I figured it would dangle nicely in those sideburns. I missed--I think I hit the back of somebody's chair--but the manager saw the flick, and so I had to say goodbye to Dmitri's.

It was time to move on anyway, but it was too bad, because I liked the people there. I remember one of the waitresses, Stacy, a pudgy, sexy girl. We'd smoke pot together in the back alley and talk about how the rats were taking over the city, and one time she confessed to me that she liked to pee in the shower. About a year after flicking the Russian dressing, I ran into her in a Radio Shack, but she hardly recognized me. I had to remind her about Dmitri's, and she still didn't seem sure. She said, "See you," and was out the door. Maybe she had other stuff on her mind. I went out too and found myself marching along a busy block. Beneath a parked pick-up I spotted a scuffed-up baseball that I carried off into the night. I didn't know what to do.

