

Spilled Milk

by Lynn Beighley

Ed's twiggy legs dangle far, far above the rung on the bar stool underneath him.

"Keep 'em comin', ya big tub," Ed slurs. Kool-Aid Man smiles. He always smiles, he can't help it. The chips around Kool's spout betray his age. He's moving more slowly these days, and sloshes more. But he's such a nice guy, a quiet guy, you try to ignore it. Kool pours more clumpy sour milk in Ed's pint glass. Smiling.

"It started with those fucking singing goddamn Raisins." Ed says. "Everyone thinks it was those movie theater snack guys, but no. Those dudes, I met 'em once, you know? Good guys, all of 'em. They had to do it, back in those days. Cause if they didn't, well." Ed gestures at his mouth, makes chewing motions, takes a deep drink.

"In fact, Popcorn told me that there were a whole bunch of Hot Dogs. Cuz the film crew kept, you know." Ed shudders, polishes off his pint with one long chug. Kool silently refills the pint, smiling.

"No, I blame those California Raisin bastards. Lunatics. What kind of guy sells out his own people like that?" Ed's getting louder, droplets of sour milk spray from his mouth.

Kool wipes down the bar in front of Ed. A shaft of sunlight blinds them both as a blue M&M opens the front door, wanders in. Ed watches as Blue takes a seat two stools down. He's got a big chunk out of one shoulder, covered with frayed duct tape.

"This guy knows what I'm talkin' about." Ed turns. "Hey you, blue fella, you been around aincha? Sure you have. Fuckin' Raisins screwed us all."

Blue looks at Ed, shrugs. Blue turns to Kool and says, "Hey pitcher man, can you make me an Amaretto sour? And you got any peanuts?" Kool seems to smile wider as he gets right to it. He doesn't get much call for mixed drinks these days in this neighborhood.

"So chubs, what's the story? Hold that thought," Ed says. He clammers down the bar stool, climbs up the one next to M&M.

"Story? Oh, this," Blue waves four gloved fingers towards the gouge in his left side. "Not much to tell. Just a stupid mistake."

"You can't leave me hangin', guy. Was it the Man?"

"That's kind of funny." Blue almost smiles and takes a sip of his drink. "No, I can't say it was the Man, not exactly."

"Well what then?" Ed leans as he stares intently at Blue and nearly falls. He rights himself, notices his full glass and takes a long sip. Blue sighs.

"Remember, you asked me to tell you. Okay. This happened maybe four years ago. Almost exactly," Blue says. "I'd been at a party with some friends. You know the actress Green, right? This was her birthday party."

"Green? You know her?" Ed's eyes widen. "I bet she's such a bitch. Sell out, like all of 'em."

"She's my cousin."

"Shit, guy. Sorry."

"No, it's fine. She actually is a bitch. But family and all that." Blue

eats a few peanuts. "So I'm leaving this party. There's a full moon, and I decide to leave my car and walk home. Gorgeous Fall night. I was a little drunk, I guess. But I knew my way home, it was all neighborhoods."

Ed's still shaking his head thinking about Green's fame. "Must have been a hell of a party. Dya meet anyone famous?"

"I don't know, it's not important. You want to hear this?" Blue begins to think this conversation is a big mistake.

"Shit man, yeah. I'll shut up. Go on, nice night, you're walking home." Ed clasps one of his twiggy hands over his mouth.

"Okay, so I go down this street and there's all these Kids. No big deal, it's just Kids, right. Although they're out awfully late, but whatever. I walk past them. I'm looking straight ahead, and I don't even notice that they're dressed in costumes."

"Wait, you mean, costumes, holy..."

"Yeah, Halloween. It's Halloween, I'm an M&M, and I've been spotted by a gang of trick or treaters." Blue's hand shakes a little as he finishes his drink. He waves at Kool, who's already made him another, a stiffer one by the look of it.

"Holy shit, guy. So they did this? How'd you get away?"

"I called 911. Fortunately they weren't big Kids, they couldn't..." Blue gulps, "eat much."

"Damn, I'm so sorry bro." Ed and Blue sit quietly for a moment.

"But you're okay now, I mean, it's mostly cosmetic, right? Couldn't you get it fixed?" Ed says. "It's really not that bad. I can hardly tell."

Maybe you could, I don't know, find some blue duct tape.”

Blue stares at himself in the mirror behind the bar. “No, the thing is, I kind of want to keep it. It reminds me of something.”

“I’d get it fixed. Sue the parents of those little assholes.” Ed shrugs. “Hey, you want to know what’s saved me all these years? Look, look at this.” Ed leans forward and parts some shreds on his stomach. The wheat that’s revealed looks very dark. “Dude, I was from an over-toasted batch. I was one of the lucky ones. The Man, he don’t like burned wheat.” Ed smiles, then looks at Blue and frowns. “Sorry, stupid thing for me to say to you.”

“Don’t sweat it.” Blue stares at Ed intently. “Hey, you want to hear the real reason I haven’t fixed it? I could, I have the money. But it’s not about that.”

“Yeah, sure. I guess.” Ed looks away from Blue’s gaze, and then back. “Yeah, do it. Tell me.”

“Well, I’m there on the ground. Three of them, little Kids, they’re nibbling at me. And it hurts. There’s was a moment there, maybe a lot of moments after I’d called 911 and they were still going at it, where, “ Blue pauses. “You’re going to think I’m crazy. I probably am.”

“Go on.”

“It started to feel good. No, not good, it hurt like hell. But it started to feel right. Like, how can I put this? Like I was finally doing something I was meant to do, being completely true to myself for the first time in my life.” Blue stops.

“That’s ...” Ed looks at Blue but doesn’t continue. The two finish their drinks in silence. A couple of cute Hershey’s kisses hop in, and

Ed whistles quietly. Blue gets up to leave.

“Nice to meet you,” Blue says.

“Yeah, same here,” Ed says, not making eye contact. Blue tosses a twenty on the bar and leaves.

“Yo, love chugs, what's a mini-wheat gotta do around here to get a drink?” Ed asks.

