

Henry's Night

by Michael D. Brown

"Who belongs to these black stilettos?" Arthur asked, "Don't you see there's broken glass over in Section C that needs to be cleaned up? I don't want any feet ripped open or worse, like the other night."

Henry recognized the shoes. "There's a little vampire came in with those on, but I last saw her over by the juice bar." He couldn't be bothered with Arthur's "sections." The club wasn't that big that it had to be defined by sections.

With that, the vampire came forward, obviously high on something. Her eyes were glazed. "Hey, what'er ya doing with my moth-," she began, "with my shoes?"

Arthur said, "Here. Put 'em on, darlin'. We've had a little accident on the other side of the room. We don't want you cutting yourself."

Henry could not help checking her arms to see if there were scars, as the darkly beautiful girl hoisted her legs, and slipped on the heels. A size or two too large, they went on easily, and in a flash, she slipped back into the dancing, raving mob.

"Henry, you wanna keep your job?" Arthur asked. "How old d'you think that kid is?"

"Her ID said she's twenty-two." Henry remembered her unglazed smile when he had let her in with her friends about an hour and a half earlier.

"She's fifteen, if she's a day. Get her out of here."

Henry started to protest, but thought he would only make himself look more foolish.

"Take her home," Arthur said. "Go on, take off. It's gonna be an early night tonight."

He had had a little difficulty extracting the kid from the crowd, at first, but after a wink that said he was coming on to her, and which she seemed to be looking for, he was able to convince her to climb into the passenger seat of his old Camaro. However, they had only gone a few blocks before she started to protest.

"You're not really looking for a blow job, are you?" she said, "Let me out at the corner."

Sometimes Henry surprised himself with a flash of inspiration, and this was one of them. "I was going to take you to my place for a little while." He thought he would help her straighten out a bit before taking her home. He couldn't think how else to get her to tell him where she lived. "How old are you, really, sweetie," he asked.

"Seventeen. But my birthday is next month. I'll be eighteen on the eighteenth." Her face said she didn't believe he was sincere in his offer, but that she believed she could turn him around. She picked at a piece of lint on her black jersey tank top.

"You carry a cousin's ID?"

"Yeah. My cousin Mara is good that way."

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Myra," she said. "You can call me Myra."

When they entered his loft, Humphrey Bogart was on the television screen, and he was saying, "Oh, you're good, sweetheart. You're very good."

"You left your TV on?" Myra asked, running her fingers along his Mexican knick-knacks. She was obviously impressed by his extensive collection of bird gods, but she lingered in front of Pakal.

"It's a DVD of The Maltese Falcon. I put it on repeat and leave it on so people will think someone's home. Can I get you some coffee?"

He went into the kitchen area, surprisingly small in such a spacious loft. "Ever seen it?"

"Of course, I've seen coffee," she said. "I don't drink it. Do you have some Evian?"

"I meant the movie. I think I have some bottled water here, but it's not French." He held up a generic brand, and when she nodded, he uncapped it for her.

"I think so," Myra said, "Is that the one with the big fat man and the little moley type?" She already appeared to be thinking more clearly. With any luck, Henry figured he could have her home in time for breakfast with Mom and Dad, and no one would be any the wiser.

"You know," she said, "If people hear the same movie all the time coming from your place, they're gonna know you're not at home. Or they're gonna think you're some kind of freak."

"Never thought of that," he said.

"Well, are you?" She was pouting, trying to look sexy, but looking like a pouting seventeen-year-old. "Are we gonna get down to business, or what?" She suddenly switched tactics, going for the direct approach. Tactic switching was good. It meant she was coming around. Thinking clearly.

"I got to use the john," Henry said. And this was his test. He figured he would come out and find her gone, and his collection would be minus a bust or two, but he took the chance anyway. He was tired. When he returned to the big space, however, he found her lying on the sofa, and about to doze off.

"Let me take you home, Myra," he said, "Don't fall asleep here."

"You can call me Karen," she said, "I'm so tired, and there won't be anyone home at my place, anyway. Let me just sleep a little bit."

Within a few minutes, she was sound asleep and snoring lightly.

Henry sat in his big armchair and watched her for a while. He closed his eyes and tried sleeping, but it wouldn't come. The girl was in his space. He couldn't hear Bogart if he went over to the other side of the loft and lay in the bed, and he would never be able to fall asleep under those conditions.

