

Sneaker Waves

by Steve Edwards

On the way inside, Peter stopped a moment on the deck and scanned the trees for the raven he and Lottie had seen at lunch. It wasn't there. Of course it wasn't there. He scanned the beach, the rocks and broken shells, the damp stinking rafts of seaweed with their rubbery pods, the dimpled footprint-impressions wind made in the sand. Farther off, cold gray waves swirled over deep tide pools on the headlands and seagulls hovered in hungry flocks. He thought about his mother and father, and Cindi and Michael Berrenger, Deb, Ross, the twins, Lottie, Rich, Rich and Deb's mother, and Soren's mother Lydia, and Soren, and his heart felt crowded and heavy, fraught with contradiction.

Inside, he dialed Rich's cell on the kitchen phone. The line buzzed twice before Rich's garbled voice said hello. "Hello," Peter said. "Hello?" The line went dead. Peter hung up and waited and tried again. The reception was better.

"Hey, old man!" Rich said through crackling static.

"Where are you?"

"What?"

"Where are you?" Peter said again, practically shouting. He pushed a finger into his ear. "You there?"

"I rented a Corvette."

"Oh yeah?"

"A Corvette—"

"That's what Lottie said."

"No, I rented a Corvette," Rich said, as though Peter still misheard him. "Wait till you see this thing, Dad."

"Sure," Peter said. "Sure, sure."

"Everything okay?"

"Well—"

"You gotta speak up," Rich said. "I got the top down and we're doing eighty like it's nothing. This baby's dangerous."

"Who's we?" Peter said.

“Dad?”

“You said ‘we.’”

Through the static Peter heard Rich mumble something—heard a change in his tone—and in the background a woman laughed. “Ah hell,” Rich said, pleased, the line starting to garble his voice again. “You found me out, Dad. Lottie didn't say anything did she? She promised...” And static blared in Peter's ear a second before Rich's voice came back mid-sentence, saying, “—don't you think so, Dad?”

“What?” Peter said. “What?”

“Her name's Anna.”

“Hello?”

“We're outside Eureka—just another couple hours. We may stop and see the redwoods. I don't know.” Rich mumbled something and again Peter heard the woman laugh. “My phone's dying, Dad,” Rich said.

“Sure, Rich.”

“Dad?”

“You still there?”

“We brought her dog, too—”

The line fizzled and this time went dead completely. Peter hung up and looked at the phone a second, as though expecting Rich to call right back. The phone didn't ring. He sat down at the kitchen table, waited. Nothing. The house felt empty. A clock ticked on the wall. Outside, waves lapped the shore. He wished it didn't bother him that Rich had brought a woman—really, after all, he was glad. With a schedule like Rich's, working all week in Chicago and then flying home to Phoenix for the weekend, he and Lottie wondered if he'd ever find love. But he wished he'd come alone, if only so they could talk.

