

Beamers

by WAYNE CRESSER

On the phone from the Cape, Kenny had kept things short. He told my wife Emily that our friend Josie had moved her cosmetics and vitamin catalog business to the Web! And she was making a killing!

She'd come for the weekend, and Kenny was excited for us all to see her. So was Emily. I, on the other hand, felt uninspired. I wondered how middle-aged people like us ever reached the point in our lives when if someone mentions the words "weekend" and "away," we get all tribal again.

Poof! We're floating out of second story dormitory windows in our pajamas and landing on the gentle grass below. Listening to Little Feat and planning summer trips out west from which we vaguely promise one another, we might never return.

Kenny had emphasized, *No kids* either--the phrase intended to cast an incandescent and jazzy light on our empty-nest world.

My wife tells me I can do it, and I've got to promise that I will do it.

"Don't be heavy," she tells me. "You can be so heavy."

"Not only heavy," I tell her, "but deep and real too, just like we all used to say in themmadays."

"See, that's what I mean," she groans. "You're not funny."

I'm thinking about how I'm not funny as I lather my face in one of the scarred mirrors in the men's locker room at the Newman YMCA. I've just run five miles on a treadmill because rain is pounding the pavement outside. The TV weatherman said the front would sweep out to sea by the late afternoon. When afternoon passed into early evening, I changed plans. Now I'm at the Y. I'm rushing and thinking about my wife and about how long I haven't been funny.

I'm going to shower and shave here because I still have to buy wine, a coffee ring at the Handi Bake Shoppe and some martini

glasses because long ago we all drank margaritas together, and Kenny has told my wife, "We'll drink some strawberry margaritas and catch up."

So I'm rushing and as I lather, I splash some of the shaving foam in my eye. It stings like a bastard. I dash over to the paper towel rack where I tear off enough paper to diaper a small child, rub the stuff out and return to the sink, where I have left the water running.

I discover someone else in my space. My razor's still sitting on the shelf above the faucets. A little can of shaving cream and some other personal grooming stuff too, but none of the evidence has deterred him, a little guy, maybe he's four, from washing his hands.

I sidle up next to him. There's room for both of us, but I'm afraid I might drip my crappy mix of stubble and shaving cream on his head, so I point to the next sink over, "You're better off washing your hands over there."

"Isn't there enough water over there?" he asks.

Oh he's a bright one. He's got those kid eyes that shine. Large, bright, wide open, brown irises offset by beaming whites.

"You could stretch out over there, see," I argue weakly. "Have your own place."

He's reluctant but he says okay and moves over. We stand at our sinks, doing our ablutions. I'm running the water, a tepid mixture of hot and cold, at a trickle. My little friend has a gusher going. The spigot is long and curved like a gooseneck. And water blasts out of it, cascading to the hard bottom of the sink, where it bounces out. Some splashes on his Shaq T-shirt, most of it collects in puddles on the floor.

"Hey there," I say, "I'm glad you're wearing that bathing suit because we might be swimming in here soon."

He looks shocked. "Huh?" he says. "We can't swim in the sinks. We're too big."

"Look," I say and gesture with my hands, "turn the water down and cup your hands like this. Then splash it on your face."

He tries but doesn't quite get his hands together. The water slips through.

I demonstrate again. "You can make a big cup by putting your hands and fingers together, see?"

He glares at me. "A giant could make a big cup," he says. "A giant could make a giant cup."

I thought so before, and I'll say it again. A little genius.

"Do you think the giant would let us both swim in his hands?"

He frowns a little. He's skeptical. There's a hang-up.

"If he liked us," he says.

"Why wouldn't he like us?" I ask. "We're nice fellas, aren't we?"

He turns his eyes up, fixes me with those beamers, and says, "He likes his wife."

I laugh.

"He likes his wife more than us, do you think?"

"She cooks for him."

Before he says another word, a man's voice reaches us from the inner sanctum of the locker room. It's deep, husky and sure.

"Finish up, Eric," it calls. "Your mama's waiting for us now."

The boy nods to himself, makes a nice little cup of his hands, splashes his face, turns off the water and begins to retreat into the locker room.

"Nicely done," I tell him.

"See ya," he says and disappears.

"Hope so," I call after him.

While we talked, steam slowly fogged my mirror. I wipe enough of it away to expose my face. I begin to think it might be all right. I mean, it might be a good thing for once, if I didn't sulk, if I cupped my hands together and caught the flow. Then maybe I wouldn't let anybody, but especially my wife, down.

I've made a bit of a mess, and I focus on cleaning it up. I work hard at it because I still have the wine, coffee ring, and margarita glasses to get together, and people are waiting for me.

