

A Summer Night

Saturday night, June 1956, now the sun going down at 7:50 P.M. and the sprinkler swishing in the front yard of our big green house on Green Street, big drops whapping the begonias and lilacs in front of the screened porch where Daddy and I lie reading. A beautiful lawn, new-mown, extends to our borders with the Stenstroms and Andersons. The dog under the porch scootches down, pressing his groin into the cool dirt. A ball of orange behind the Stenstroms' house, flaming orange shining in the windows, as if the Mr. and Mrs. had spontaneously combusted because of a faulty fuse, a frayed electrical cord, or a box of oily rags in the basement. The shadow of their elm reaches to our porch, a wavery branch flickers across my right arm in gray shade. I wish my cousin Kate would come by. She said she would but it doesn't look like she will. I wrote her a poem:



*Kate, Kate,
She's so great
I would wait eight hours straight
To attend a fete
For Kate.*

Daddy lies on the white wicker daybed in his blue suit pants and sleeveless undershirt and black-stockinged feet, exhausted from a long week at the bank. He is the head cashier. Daddy doesn't like dealing with people. They wear him out. Their ridiculous demands. Their utter ignorance of sound fiscal practices. He pretends to be reading C. H. McIntosh's *Commentary on the Ephesians*, but really he's listening to the Minneapolis Millers on the radio. Mother is upstairs lying down with a headache, and the big sister is on the telephone complaining about boys and how dumb they are, and the big brother is at the University, studying math, the big brain of the family. I am taking it easy. Reclining on the porch swing, nestled in four pillows, a bottle of Nesbitt orange pop within easy reach. I am fourteen. In 1958 I will obtain my driver's license and in 1960 graduate from Lake Wobegon High School. In 1963 I can vote. In 1982 I'll be forty. In 1992, fifty. One day, a date that only God knows, I will perish from the earth and no longer be present for roll call, my mail will be returned, my library card canceled, and some other family will occupy this house, this very porch, and not be aware that I ever existed, and if you told them, they wouldn't particularly care. Oh well. What can you do? I hope they appreciate the work I did on the lawn. Here's a little-known fact: *Saturday* contains the world *turd*. How many of you knew that? *Librarian* has a *bra* in it. Words are so interesting. *Breastworks*, for example. *Peccary*. *Pistachio*. *Cockatoo*. *Titular*. *Interred*. *Poop deck*.

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I lie on the white wicker swing, *Foxx's Book of Martyrs* before me, reading about the pesky papists piling huge jagged rocks on the faithful French Huguenots and crushing them, while listening to the Minneapolis Millers on the radio lose to Toledo thanks to atrocious umpiring that killed a rally in the third inning. Eruptions of laughter from the *Jackie Gleason Show* at the Andersons' to the east of us, the Great One glaring at Audrey Meadows. *One of these days, Alice—pow! Right in the kisser!* At the Stenstroms', Perry Como sings about the tables down at Morey's, at the place where Louie dwells. We are Sanctified Brethren and do not own a television, because it does not glorify Christ. I know about these shows only from timely visits to the home of my so-called best friend, Leonard Larsen. Tucked inside my *Martyrs* book is a magazine called *High School Orgies*, lent to me by Leonard, opened to an ad for a cologne made from "love chemicals" that will turn any girl to putty in your hands. You dab some behind your ears and hold her in your arms and suddenly all resistance is gone, she is whispering for you to thrill her, fulfill her, do what you like. Plus a book of surefire pickup lines with a bonus chapter, "Techniques of Effective Kissing." Daddy is also worn out from killing chickens today at Grandma's farm. He and Aunt Eva dispatched forty of them, forty swift downstrokes of the bloody hatchet, forty astonished heads flopping into the dirt, the scalding, the ripping of feathers. The evisceration, the cleaning and wrapping. Usually, my job is to chase the birds and grab them by the ankles with a long wire hook and carry them to the killing block, but I didn't go today, because I wanted to mow the lawn and besides Eva is mad at me. Daddy grew up on that farm. He doesn't

like to visit, because Aunt Eva has weepy spells and Daddy can't bear to be around anyone crying, but he has to kill chickens for Grandma, because the ones sold in stores carry deadly bacteria. The bacteria doesn't seem to bother us, but it would kill her.

Ten eye-popping mouth-watering stories in every issue of *High School Orgies*, and the first is the story of Jack and Laura, tenth-grade teachers at Central City High who have the hots for each other. She is blonde, him too, and common sense is no match for spring fever, no match at all. *She felt his eyes devour her resplendent globes as she bent to squirt mustard on her ham sandwich in the faculty lunchroom—why had she worn this blouse with the plunging neckline??? What was she thinking of??? Whatever it was, he was thinking of the same exact thing, and in no time flat they find themselves in an empty classroom tearing the clothes off each other with trembling fingers.*