

FOURTEEN

What did she say when she kicked me
Out of bed?

"Oh my god, it's four o'clock, I've gotta
Get you out of here!"

I rolled over and tried to kiss
The solitary
Black hair at the edge
Of her right nipple, which my tongue had found
So fascinating,
But she pushed me away, jumped up
And began
To get dressed.

"Please," she said, "Please stop. Maybe
Another time—I don't know.
Please.

This is yours, isn't it? Put it on."

She had lit a cigarette and was pacing, arms
Crossed, back
And forth across
Her little kitchen—which was even smaller
Than mine—when I, tucking in
My shirt,
Found her again.

"I'm sorry," I said. "But before I go—
Well, I have
One more question."

"Oh god," she said. "Mr. Serious."

"Do you have a brother named Gussie?" I said.

"What kind of a question is that?"
She said. "I thought
You had a crush on me, and now you're looking
For some guy..."

"His name is Gussie Mandrigo. He goes
To gay bars.
Do you know him?"

"Oh shit," she said, smoke spilling
From her mouth.
"No I don't know Gussie. You've gotta go now."

It was just as well that work that night
Turned out
To be busy—the store did over
Three hundred
Dollars in real business, which meant, if it kept up,
That Omni Video
Might actually survive
Some day on its own—without the Porno Club. The manager
Would have to work his butt off, though, no more wild
Afternoons, no book
On Toshiro Mifune—just sixty, seventy
Hours a week in the store. Could I transform
My unfocussed
Self
Into that kind of businessman?

I locked up the store at ten-fifteen
And was asleep
By eleven, when my phone rang. It was my smart
Young girlfriend,
Calling from the Pacific Time Zone.

"Happy birthday," she said.

"What do you mean?" I said,
Afraid, in my sleepiness, that somehow
She knew.

"Wow," she said,
"Are you in total denial or what?"

"But it's not my birthday," I said. "It can't
Be *my*
Birthday."

"I don't believe this," she said. "What is it there?"
Ten o'clock?"

"Eleven," I said.

"It's been your birthday all day long
And you didn't
Even know?"

"I've had a strange week," I said.

"Well, you're officially ancient," she said.

"I guess I am," I said,
And I tried to think
Of something funnier to say. You see,
We'd always joked around
About the age difference, but it was usually
Much sexier
Than this...

"Tomas insisted that I call," she said.

"Oh," I said. "Tomas."

"Look, you don't have to worry about him,
He's happily married."

"I thought he was practically, totally—"

"Gay?" she said,

"Well that's the difference between a correlation
And a fact."

"What?" I said.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said, "That's an in-joke.
From our mathematical
Methods class."

For a moment neither of us spoke, and I felt
In the uncomfortable silence,
Her new world
Closing around her, like the tide
Rushing in, cutting off those two islands
In *Mon Oncle D'Amerique*.

"So what does it feel like to be old?" she said.

"Not bad," I said. "I'm not that old."

"Yes you are," she said, and we went on like that

In friendly fashion

For a while, no real cleverness

Or bite

To our teasing, and I think I knew, as I set down

The phone, that she and I

Would never

Sleep together again.