

## 3.

Well! We all know the story where they get hitched and the fun is over. This is not that story.

I did not believe in marriage so I was not. So I was right. Rudy did believe in marriage. So he was. So he was right too.

"For," as I explained, "you are entitled to your own opinions."

"It's not rilly an opinion."

"Rudy!!!"

The fun was just beginning. The lightbulbs were getting screwed in tight and we were seeing old things in a new light. And I tell you, others felt the same.

It was a happy time, for Nixon was out, Agnew was out, and Betty Ford was not so terrible. I did not believe in electoral politics, certainly, yet it existed all the same, so I was wrong.

The truth was, though I would never admit this to Rudy, I had begun to wonder if, while he was wrong to say hippies did not exist, he was right to say I was not one now, for, Nixon being run out of town on a rail, I had given up the fight, for our side had won. And besides that, I was too busy fighting with Rudy.

And I was so glad to be fighting, I cannot tell you. I was so sick of nonviolence. We did fight about Teflon, Tad's Steaks, recycling, corned beef hash, kidneys, and the usual semantical issues. Me: "And speaking of hippies, by the way, I would never have understood you in the first place without drugs."

"You don't have to be a hippie to use drugs!"

Me: "Suck an egg, Rudy!"

Rudy: "!\*#@%\$#."

Well, that did give me pause, as he had never used this tone with me before and I felt it prudent to give no quarter. Me: "Oh, is that the best you can do?"

That seemed to give Rudy pause, too--clearly, all his other women just passed out dead when he resorted to this cheap gimmick. I had seen the example of Ruth, you see. However he did pull himself together and come back for more. "#\$%#@&\*! !\*#@&\$#."

That gave me pause, too. Yet, I did counter, "So?"

"!#@#\$%&\*()!!! ! ! !"

"And? Your point is?"

Rudy did survey me. Then he did fill his chest, which otherwise did resemble a question

mark. Then he did ejaculate as follows: "### &&& \*\*\* @@@."

Here, I was at a loss for words.

And Rudy saw his opening: "!!! {} <<< !! <??\*??> !! >>> < {} !!!"

Me: "...?"

Rudy: "!!! ...!!!"

Me: "...!!!"

Rudy: "\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ \* \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$"

Me: " "

Then (after a long pause) Rudy: ",,, "" \*\*\*\* ,, "" \*\*\* ,, "" \* , ' \*." Then: "Didja \*?"

Me: "(Sigh). \*" Then: "\*\*\*" Then: "!\*!\*! \*\*\*!!!\*\*\* !!!\*\*\*!<\*>!\*\*\*!!!" And finally: "\*"

Later I would say, as we lay on the linoleum, recovering: "It's never been like that before. I believe."

"Yer a real character," said Rudy, which was very gracious, for we both knew the truth was, I was not a real character, I was just real, and sometimes I had my doubts about that, too. Rudy for his part wasn't even real. He was a cartoon. And I preferred it. I was so sick of dimension, I cannot tell you.

Let art be realistic. Let life be a cartoon. And I tell you, many felt the same. These ideas were spreading like garbage. Like flies, like roaches. Like margarine that fooled Mother Nature. We were so sick of nature, I cannot tell you.

We were eating Cheez Whiz, drinking No-Cal soda, looking out the airshaft, listening to the neighbor's radio through the wall. That's how cheap we were.

Freedom! Freedom! I'd had it! Big deal! We were the new pioneers.

I did the cooking, kidneys chiefly, but also hanging pillar of diaphragm. 29 cents a pound! I nailed up shelves and opened jars. Call us old-fashioned, but we were cheap, and I was a bargain--I was free! I drew the line at cleaning, naturally.

Now, Rudy had come into a large quantity of nails at this time from a Mrs. Johnson, who had a weak spot for him. He traded the nails for cough syrup. Louts paid cash for cough syrup. Well, it came to pass that certain louts did introduce us to their comrades, who were loutish youth, having large heads and narrow trunks, and wearing small jackets and trousers with several inches of wrist and ankle showing. Musicians, you see. There was an old Polish bar down the street which did go out of business. And that bar did advertise its product on the glass pane, as, Old Bohemian. And these youths did rent that bar, cross off Old, and write in New. Well! They certainly had come to the right place. For it was the new bohemia. We were seeing old things in a new light. We did not dive into the primitive, like the old bohemians. Our bathroom fixtures were primitive enough. We did not strip down high-gloss paint to free the true grain beneath. We did not peel off tacky green linoleum from our pathetic floors. The green and the gloss, they comforted us. Cheap was something left to lose. We did not save the poor, Rudy and me. We asked ourselves: "Where did they shop?"

And when I did drop a penny in mine haste to reach a cut-rate drugstore before it closed, an old dame did scoop that coin up, and she did marvel: "A penny isn't worth value?"

I had come to the right place, you see. We were everywhere.

Now, it came to pass that mine unemployment did run out, and, speaking of free, mine

rent was not. Mine phone was long since disconnected, whilst electricity came in by means of a series of wires off the hallway lightbulb, nor did I use the three-burner gas stove in 5RC, nor the fridge, but laid certain food items on the window ledge. I continued to bring in \$3/hr from Rudy's heavy work, plus, the Royal was paid off. However, I still came up short. I could have moved in with Rudy, you see, saving rent. We would have had to wait till the tail grew back to trade for a winch to move the Royal back down. Still, we could have done it, and I type in the closet.

Yet at this time a letter did come to Ruth Lebinsky or Resident of 5RC, and speaking of cheap, a routine examination had proved that rent was not even \$77, but \$61. \$61! By the way, I forgot to mention that another robbery had occurred, for rent control was swiped, both from the poor and others who now consequently became poor themselves. So, if I moved in with Rudy, that rent of \$61 would disappear, not merely for mineself, but for all. Technically, of course, mine name must be Ruth Lebinsky or I was an illegal tenant, but this was not such a terrible problem, as Robin Cruet was, as I believe I mentioned, not my real name either.

So. I had a social responsibility to save mine rent status. Moreover, that new cheapness had only endeared the place to me further, and the Royal was there to boot, yet mine unemployment had run out--which, by the way I had been sharing with some other bartender, in whose name the check was written. So. In any case, I was back where I had started with mine old comrades, for in mine enthusiasm for Rudy's fine points, I had forgot to look at the broader picture.

I could work, true, yet what could I do? Tending bar was all I knew.

"But kin you tend bar and not fuck yer customers?"

Lightbulb! "Er--well! Er." I could tend bar, and I could fuck. Wait a minute, since I was no longer free, why not go the whole hog and fuck with Helltor, the realtor, say 3-4 X/month, as, how cheap can you get? Moreover, as I would not actually *wish* to fuck with him this would not necessarily violate my arrangement with Rudy. But Rudy had another plan.

For as it happened, he had found a box of smut on E. 3rd St., which I did carry home, yet as the closet was crowded at this time, I did carry it to mine rooms where I put it on the floor, for there were no closets. I took a fast look, for on the whole I did not believe in smut. Then I climbed down the back stairs, climbed up the front, and climbed on Rudy. Ram! Oof! Z-z-z! However not long after, Rudy did wake up with this idea: "!@#\$\$%^&\*()!"

This was rilly still our first year, and I knew only the barest rudiments of Rudy's language, so, taking his remark to signify blankety-blank, I did mutter, drowsily, "Same to you, buddy." For I had started sleeping again and at this time did so at every possible opportunity.

Yet Rudy did repeat, "!@#\$\$%^&\*()! !@#\$\$%^&\*()!" so adamantly that I thought, maybe this is meaning (2), which we had so profitably explored.

"Look, let us wait an hour or so. For we are not as young as we once were."

But Rudy sat straight up. "!@#\$\$%^&\*()! !@#\$\$%^&\*()! !@#\$\$%^&\*()!!!!!"

And then I sat up, too. For I had seen his point in a flash.

Now, as I believe I mentioned, when I first met Rudy I had had a plan, being a hippie, to eliminate distinctions, except between hippies and everyone else, for everyone else believed in distinctions. Well! This was the new day. We were the new bohemians. We wished to eliminate the distinction between ourselves and everyone else, by believing in distinctions, too.

Thus, whereas in the old day, as I was opposed to art, it had been mine plan to get around this by producing something which anyone could write, though no one could read it--well! With all this cheap/free sleight-of-word in the air, it rilly was only a matter of time till I turned up this combination: write something anyone could read, even if this were something not everyone could do. And this was Rudy's plan: smut. I could write smut. And when I was through with writing? I could sell it. Cheap.

Then I did think I stood on the breast of a new land. Smut. It could resemble art, yet serve a purpose. It would have sales value. And talk about cheap! Moreover, I would do it in mine own rooms, thus be spared the risks of bartending.

Well! I did set out at once! Well! In the morning, certainly.

I did start off in fine spirit, typing merrily, and with good speed. I cannot explain what happened next. Yet happen it did. Nor can I truthfully say that it had never happened before. The words I typed drew me in, as if it were a whirlpool, and on the page filaments bound word to word, increasing in thickness and weight until they held together with a viscosity similar to mucus, only that mucus were in a ball, whose spherical nature became increasingly perfect, and whose consistency thickened and bound until its transparency turned opaque, indeed grayish-white, for it resembled a potato product, glutinous, and somewhat nourishing.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Bad timing. The words were nearly gone, but the mass remained, nor could I hide it, for as I believe I mentioned, I had no closets. "I am busy, Rudy."

BOOM! "Whatchoo doin' in there?"

I was all aflutter. "Come back later."

BOOM!!! "Is somebody in there wichoo?"

I finally was forced to let him in to allay worse fears.

"Wot th'?" Then, "You got some explaining to do."

Well! He certainly had come to the right place! I was so glad to explain, I cannot tell you. I did snivel: "It is not mine fault!" And this was true--it was that mother of mine. For she did act like she brought me up to be so free yet the truth was, I was brought up to save, money chiefly, yet also coupons, rubber bands, unmatched socks, unfinished dresses, unfinished sandwiches, not to mention persons in various stages of reform, hence, not surprisingly, I grew up, as I believe I mentioned, in closets, for in them one could not merely save, but hide. And it is to this childhood habit that I trace mine affliction, for in life there are few closets. And when I set out in the world, where I could neither hide nor save--well! Naturally I did attempt to throw mineself away, repeatedly. Yet some portion always remained, and as I was young and knew no better I had turned to art. Art, you see. Art, art, art, art, art. Stole into mine life like a thief in the night and left nothing behind.

"Oh!" Rudy did reply, once he'd got his bearings, whatever that does signify in Rudy. "Art is some sort of potato product, worth approximately 40 cents!"

Well! As usual, Rudy understood only too well, always considering the alternative explanation that he'd missed the boat altogether.

"Yer a real character," Rudy said. Still, he was taking it better than I'd feared. He did propose selling the product cheap.

"Well, that is not so easy, Rudy. For it is high at any price, as it has no value."

Still, as we had no choice, we agreed on this course.

It happened that I had a contact in the industry, friend of Trix's friend mirna [sic] and I did wrap the thing up, using a layer of waxpaper, naturally, and sent it to her.

mirna [sic]'s friend did return it, commenting, "I'm sorry, but I can't see anything in this."

Rudy: "So. Here is a person who kinnot see potatoes."

Sometimes I thought Rudy's secret was that he had no secrets. At other times I thought his secret was that, due to a peculiarity of genetic structure, he lacked metaphor receptors. And this explained why the compatibility between us never interfered with the mystery, for as Rudy was so literal, and as I was so figurative, well, we spoke the same language but meant different things by it. For I could walk the walk with Rudy but could not talk the talk, you see.

Well! We did go to the library and used a literary reference book, for it was free, and tried again. This time the item was never returned, so we could only assume it had been published under a phony byline, though we never saw it reviewed. I fell into a depression which lasted approximately 3 mos. Then I set to work again.

I forgot to mention that I opposed beauty. Yet as I thought about it, perhaps the problem with the first art product was its extreme sliminess. I had been able to achieve, formally, mucus, which was remarkable in itself and, as it was also suitable to the subject, it might have been an excellent direction to pursue. Yet mirna [sic]'s friend had returned the object with instructions to wrap more properly, as the package was soaked through. Nor had she seen the point. Nor did I. Now I approached the typewriter in a different spirit, air-drying the words and allowing them to form a hard cake which did give off a powerful odor, like asafoetida.

Rudy came in sniffing: "Art, right?"

Well, thinking fast, I did reply that I was eliminating the distinction between art and smut. This seemed credible, and had in fact some truth in it.

Yet when Rudy took a look, he did ask, "Which is which?"

Well! As the reader may well imagine, I gave Rudy a rilly hard time here, but in the end I made a clean breast of it and was glad to do so. For the truth was, there was no smut in it at all.

The bright side was, Rudy finally begun to see what we were dealing with here, though I was not entirely sure he understood the basic premise, as when he set up a Group for mine help in this matter, with certain neighbors as, Raoul, Zizi, and Sirgash, there seemed to have been some misunderstanding, as the problem mine neighbors had was, they were slob. Sometimes I think Rudy selected these others merely because they felt about vaginas roughly the way I felt about Rudy's tail, which was to say that, while they did not wish to hurt anyone's feelings, they preferred the penis. However, as I was a slob in any event, I decided why look a gift horse in the mouth and attended several sessions, at which by the way I was what you may call the star pupil, for I turned the entire thrust of the Group into self-esteem, as what was wrong with filth, etc., and, not all filth is the same, it is clean chauvinism to generalize thusly, etc., etc. I was so good at this I thought, great, give up the art/smut business and do this for \$, yet there rilly was not much market for it at this time.

As far as mine own reform went, the Group was useless. The minute it ended, I was racing upstairs to the Royal, bang, bang, bang. Mine smut was worse than ever, for this accept-er-filth was heady stuff and I had gone overboard in eliminate-distinctions, and in the current

batch of smut, thinking of sex as merging, you see, had accidentally eliminated persons. I begun to think smut was bartending all over again, with the difference that instead of accidentally fucking mine customers I would, despite the best of intentions, turn projects of some recognizable sales value into others of none, namely, art.

And when mine work did return to mine mailbox, addressed to Robin Cruet, it was with this comment, "A bit arty for our readers." Nor could I disagree, for that distinction to which I referred had not been eliminated. Persons without sex was not smut, and a regrettable condition, to boot. Sex without persons was not smut either. It was arguably science fiction but Rudy did say, "There is no science fiction," and speaking of argue, enough was enough, moreover, he was entitled to his opinion, and his opinion was that I was rilly not all that cheap, as at this point he was paying both our rents.

On the whole, he was wonderfully patient through all this, though as I believe I implied, it was hard to understand affect with Rudy, as he lacked dimension. I had fallen into another depression, and Rudy did attempt to tempt me with all manner of sweetmeats from the trash, as, thrillers, for which I did acquire a certain taste. It did no good. I crammed in trash. It came out the other end art. I was so ashamed. For now I began to see, though I would never admit it, that Rudy was right, I wasn't rilly all that cheap. I tried repeatedly to write smut, yet though I was a little cheap, it was in another sense than vulgar, you see. For it was in the sense of saving something, and what I wished to save was you, and you did not wish to be saved, you wished to throw yourself away, and who could blame you, for had I not done the same many times myself, and invariably to mine own benefit? So I attempted to throw the Royal typewriter away, yet could not raise it, even had I been able to pry off the window bars.

Finally Rudy saw mine predicament and said, "Let's see about bartending."

Rudy cut some deal with the louts at the New Bohemian and they did set me up tending bar, and Rudy come in too, to keep an eye on me, for though I had cut way back on discipline, I was still a slut, yet it was not rilly a problem, for they were new bohemians themselves and despised hippies which, while enraging me, did have the advantage of keeping them out of my drawers. These musicians had a band called Junk and sang about clothes. And they did give Rudy work too, for every night he took the mike and said, "Their name is Junk, and they sing about clothes." The new bohemia, you see. We were everywhere. I tell you, these things were in the air. It was the new frontier. We could not afford t' move west, for it cost too much. Yet we were out of space, except between our ears.

Well, there was a bouncer named Cahain, and to make a long story short, the lightbulbs between his ears come from the same lot as Nick's, and when Mrs. Rodriguez's nephew Tad did pass by, Cahain called him a name, and I called Cahain one, we had a fight, and he called me a hippie, which was ironic, as I was so far from nonviolent at this point that I was kicking his shin repeatedly, still, Rudy hit the ceiling, portions of which did fall down on the soundboard, such as it was. They threw us out.

And we had needed the money, you see. For at this time, Rudy could not go the usual trade routes, for the Chevelle needed parts, and parts were there none. It was winter, too. Rudy did trade a few things for a handcart, and we did carry our junk in it through the snow to trade for other junk or cash. I could carry boxes mineself for I was still so strong. Thus, using this handcart and mine strength, we brought our stuff to various illegal merchants, exchanging trash

for records, records for cash, and the like. Then we returned often at dawn, weary, climbing up the stairs to 2C, and climbing on each other. Then I grabbed some z-z-zs, woke, drank some No-Cal, and climbed to mine own rooms and hit the keys. Art, art, art, art. I did not believe in art. It did not matter. I was wrong. It was on paper, and so was I, Robin Crouton. Er, Cruet.

I give up here and went the whole hog. Art, art, art, art, art.

In my mother's day, the artist reached into his soul for truth, and for this he was revered and reviled, you see. I saw you as mine equal. You did not need to be told what was the truth. You were entitled to yer own opinions. You had the right to choose.

I wished to save you the inconvenience of believing art told the truth, then learning otherwise. For from art one expected truth, whereas in life, one never knew, two never knew, none never knew. I would save the reader inevitable disillusionment by recreating this confusion in art. Thus, the true and untrue would lie side by side like the lion and the lamb in paradise, and it would not be me who would say which was which, for who was I to say, the one is true, the one is not? Not this story, by the way. Here if I say it's true, it's true. I say it's not true, it's not true. Take my word. Please.

mirna [sic]'s friend did not. "I appreciate your sincerity here, but I do not really see the point."

I wished to make a product which would serve a purpose. Art served no purpose.

I wished to use art to cure. I wished to construct a product so annoying it would resemble a disease, thus strengthening the immune system. I wished to use art to nourish. I wished to serve you pie from a little stand. I wished you to sit on a stool and eat it. I would have let you have this for 15 cents, for the pleasure of watching you eat.

I would have given it away, for nothing, but you did not believe in charity. As, Mr. Simson's \$15 was a sign of disrespect, yours, no.

I fell into a depression which lasted, I believe, fourteen months.

Then I woke up and said: All my life I had wanted your love. But had I loved you too? Did I wear my hair just for you? Do the things you liked to do?

For I had wished to throw away mine own role. I wished to be the invisible narrator. You did not care. You wished to escape. So. I must create a kind of vehicle, then. A car. A plane. A tugboat. A raft. I worked at this day after day. And I needs must not forget the plot. I needs must not die before it was done. So. I set to work at once.

In mine younger days, I wished to eliminate the middle man. Now I begun to think, if the medium was the message, why not be the middle man mineself. Then I could see you. I would write a thriller, a mystery.

The reader may have guessed by now this was a false subject, for my real subject was you.

Who were you? What would please you? How could I make you want me?

And many did say, they could not see anything in mine work, nor did they see the point, nor could they see mine characters, yet for invisibility I had nothing on you.

Were you pliant? Flat? Squishy? Was there any sense in asking, had you a character at all?

Were you large? Were you individuated? Had you a single character? Had you a common denominator? Was that me?

Were you on paper?

I forgot to mention that the Democrats were back in power, and precious good it did us, for thieves already had come into our homes like thugs in the day and left behind persons claiming to be Mrs. Kvestian's son, for she had died, leaving a rent-controlled room. Remember Forhan? I did sublet mine rooms to Forhan's cousin, and a good tenant he was, moreover, I was forced to keep mine hands off the Royal, yet Forhan's cousin began to let on that he was the real Ruth Lebinsky, and the writing was on the wall, you see. I changed the lock before he thought of it, and the new key was mine, as was the bill, \$32.79.

We were in rilly bad shape here, as the Chevelle was out of the question, and I was bringing in nothing. Rudy had sold his tail so often I begged to sell mine too. This only drove Rudy to new heights of trading, for he evidently cut a deal with Helltor. "He will pay you \$15/wk. You will clean the halls."

Well! This was quite a deal! "Does he know?"

Rudy: "I told him you would keep the hall like your own home." Well, he begun deadpan, but by the end was giggling like a schoolgirl. I was so glad to see him giggle again, I set to work at once. And I was giggling too, you see.

Now, we all know the story where the guy with thwarted ambitions takes a humble task and, through that task, learns discipline and values. This is not that story. I had had it with discipline. I never learned values. I had no quarrel with dirt. I am shoddy to this day. I pushed the dirt in the hall from one end to the other and rushed up to mine rooms.

I did change the typewriter ribbon. I did find the carbon paper. If I wrote the plot down I would be married to the written form, right or wrong, and I did not believe in marriage, so I must keep the plot in mine head till it was finished, and I needs not forget it, and I needs must not die first.

Wild dogs begun to roam the empty lots where women fried snacks in grease pots over open fires. Water trickled from hydrants where men washed fish at dawn, with apologetic smiles.

Sheets of aluminum covered windows, and many were the buildings that were abandoned, for the taxes.

In mine own building, where the Chinese man with the eyepatch had been, no one remained. Mrs. Rodriguez remained, and her nephew Tad. Walter had died. I forgot to mention that the Chevelle had died too, and it began to look like the city would follow suit, for I had been so preoccupied with you that years had passed and I had barely noticed that the Republicans were back, and talk about free. Free enterprise, free trade. Freeloading. Freehanded. Free money!

It was a hoax of course. The line between free and cheap is a thin one. In the sense of lacking guilt, well, they were evidently free. In the sense that services were no longer available, whilst the streets began to fill up with persons who had previously been in homes and nuthouses--well, it takes one to know one. The Republicans were cheap, too. They did not save the poor. They saved the \$ that the poor had cost. They made the poor free, you see. For free was nothing left to lose. So in that sense, the poor were free, but the Republicans were not. They had something left to lose. They were cheap, too.



I did trudge down the front stairs, across the courtyard, up the back stairs, to mine rooms.

I had done those things which I ought to have done. I had left undone those things I ought not to do. I wore my hair just for you. I did the things you liked to do. You still didn't care.

A few blocks east, buildings begun to disappear. You've heard of hole-in-the-wall? These were holes in the block. A few blocks west, large holes began to appear in the ground and fill with rainwater, like wondrous swimming pools. Space had value, you see. In one sense, space was the new frontier, but in another, it was neither free nor cheap, but cost a bundle, you see. Then other buildings did appear, so vast they took years to rise.

And on the streets, too, persons appeared and disappeared. Where no person had been, one or two persons stood, weaving on corners. And some stood still, for they wished to communicate the idea that you could not see them. And others did display extremely picturesque attire, often involving aluminum foil. Others did hold their hands out. They believed in charity, and they were entitled to their opinions. Yet the evidence was scanty.

I was sitting on Rudy's nose, and I was thinking about you. Rudy was sucking on mine rectal tissue, and I was thinking about you. My fingers on the Royal. Over and over. Art, art, art.

I tried to give you up, but mine nerve endings turned to sawdust from the waist down. So Rudy did things from the waist up, though this became a little vague as I was growing older and mine waist was disappearing. Where to begin? Where to end?

In my mother's generation, the girl breaks her heart over Rudy, or some other brute who is not good enough for her. This is not that story. This was the new day. Rudy was good enough for me, as I for Rudy. I broke my heart on you.