

Spring of Hope

By Julie VEINOT

Wednesday, June 11, 1969: Tonight my incense has a practical purpose: masking the scent of burning marijuana.

For as anti-drugs as I am – my mind is screwed up enough without smoking it silly – I'd rather be here, on a shaky-legged cot in my sister's dining room as opposed to being in my own enclosed space, being smacked around by my father over the scent of sandalwood and the ridiculous notion it would burn the farmhouse down. Freedom, you might say, made me come here. A tiny corner of a house is hardly anyone's idea of freedom – a claustrophobe would panic to be squished into a tiny room – but to me it is heaven. I'm not looking over my shoulder as I scrawl in my agenda and I have no desire to go back to the museum of bad memories.

Ever.

And as long as Crude Carl doesn't attack the business college for this last month's pre-paid tuition, I'll be fine. If he knew he could retrieve that money – think of all the beer and chewing tobacco it could buy! – he would. I know he would. Maybe I am wrong and he does know about it, and I'll have to crawl back and be his servant again. Or maybe he will not think about it, and his paycheck will provide him with everything he needs, including gravy and hamburger sandwiches at the Tastee Treat restaurant. (There are two eateries in Privateer Bay, twice the number of post-secondary institutions.)

My domestic drama began at seven.

Dishes washed and dried, I had run upstairs to write. Like I've done for the past two nights (and many more before that) I stuck a cone of incense onto a piece of aluminum foil pilfered from the kitchen, snapped out a BIC lighter, and made the cone glow. Hey, I thought, it was probably of better quality than the incense the wise men presented to Jesus.

Window open, I sat to write, but the peace was not to last, for a bull was charging up the stairs, two hundred pounds doubling.

His eyes were blazing when he came into my room.

"What the fuck are ya doing?"

"Writing. Et toi?"

"Fuck off. And extinguish that goddamned hippy shit. You'll burn the

fuckin' house down. My mother'd roll over in her grave if she smelled this shit in her halls."

"Carl, your mother would hop out of her grave if you stuck your dick out of your pants. I'm not putting out the incense. It frees my mind. Stand here long enough and it might work for you too."

"Leave my mother outta this."

"Fine, but you brought'er up, just like she brought you up and I don't mean your manners."

"Huh?"

"I mean the thing I referred to a few seconds ago. What your mother didn't get enough of. When she told all her friends you still had a few more inches to grow, Jesus, she must've meant it."

None of it is true, but it made my father so angry that I wondered. Mother jokes were was big a part of high school as someone having sex in the locker room. Obviously Carl missed out on this part of the high school diploma. To be truthful, he missed out on all of his diploma. To hear him talk, you'd think education is the biggest scam of the decade. True men are like him – TV in front of him, beer in one hand, tit in the other and a socket set by his feet. True men burp. Adjust their private parts. Know the statistics of Mickey Mantle. Eat meat burned to a crisp. Curse at their daughters for the hippy fumes circulating through the upstairs.

Although my father's temper is tetchy at the best of times, he seemed to snap. Maybe it was the smell of incense. Maybe it was the mother comments. Maybe he just wanted to show me who was the boss.

When he snapped, his thick leg shot out and kicked my chair across the room as though it was made of air.

Sucking in my breath (no mother jokes on my tongue at this point) I waited out the skid and finally exhaled when the back of the chair hit the low, thick windowsill. The fly corpses bounced after the impact. The panes rattled. My neck whipped forward, then back again. Sixty years old or not, Carl still had physical strength, and even with his modest furniture disease – his chest was dropping into his drawers – he still packed a good kick. Being furious seemed to give him more strength.

"Jesus," I whispered, not brave

enough to sound any stronger than a slave being pummeled by her master. "Jesus Christ."

"Having second things about puttin' out that fire, there you, or do you need me to light a bigger fire under ya ass?"

I cowered on the chair, hugged my arms around the lime-green and pink-flowered sheath dress I wore, and watched as Crude Carl, still donned in his work overalls, eyed me the same as a hunter watching a wounded rabbit licking its wounds, wondering if it would be more fun to watch it suffer or finish the entire job so he could go back to the camp and start drinking again.

The incense continued to break into mini-clouds.

"Jesus, Carl. You give me so much choice," I said.

"Ain't that the truth. Now, are

you gonna sit there and piss yourself, or get up and put that fuckin' candle out?"

"Incense, Carl. That's incense, not a candle."

"Whatever the fuck it is, put it out."

"What if I don't?"

Why do I do it, angering his more? Maybe because I cook and clean and rush home to peel his perfect potatoes to be served at five o'clock exactly, and when it comes down to it, I should be able to bask in the smoke of my incense. It is hardly different from smoking a cigarette in the house a la Arlene. Ever since I finished high school – smoking central – my cigarette consumption is down sixty percent. My only allowance is a lunchtime stick. A package of Rothman's lasts nearly a month at the bottom of my crocheted bag, since fifty cents comes hard when I only baby-sit every full moon or so. As a

**GOOD LUCK ON YOUR EXAMS!
AND SEE YOU OVER THE SUMMER!**
Want the best food in town,
and a lot of it???

GEORGE'S GRILL

For only \$20 you can get a
Party Pack... and that includes
taxes and delivery!!!!

A Party Pack **B**

6 BURGERS

4 CHEESE BURGERS

4 SMALL FRIES

3 MOZZA POUTINES

1 XX LARGE GRAVY

1 LARGE ONION RINGS

892-3887

Don't forget George's complete menu!