

BOMB

Three Stories by Joe Andoe

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First Proof Literature



Appreciation at the Door

Mike, his wife June and child moved into a loft next to Richard. Richard and Mike were friends from art school—they both painted. They were on both sides

of 30, Richard being after.

Three years of sharing this place—even though each had a separate entrance and a door in between—and Mike had had it. You see, Richard was a complete alcoholic: his cigarettes and drinks were on the same schedule. And he smoked more than two packs a day. He would sleep with a drink next to his bed. In the morning he would have to drink through a straw because of the shakes. Then there was pot. He sold pounds, held pounds, smoked continually. There were as many pot roaches in his loft as the New York kind. He also bought scales to weigh pot. To buy these kinds of scales you have to give up your identity to the government. He did that because the Massachusetts guy asked him to. In turn, the Mass guy would be very liberal with Richard, hence the pounds. Richard was from Texas, just ask him. He also took karate at some point in the past. Kung Fu—snake style—he would give a demo anytime of day. He often would show Mike how he would kick his ass when the time came.

Mike took note.

Richard was weak with booze; the smell around him was of gin, pot, BO, cigs and beer and oil paint. A sweet sickly mix. He tortured Mike by reminding him how unstable and illegal his living situation was. Mike's side had baby beds, clean dishes, yellow curtains and sometimes flowers. Richard's was sticky. The dishes had mold. Stale, half-eaten ketchup sandwiches and a full-length mirror that made everyone look a lot taller and prettier. There was no door on the bathroom or toilet, and a mirror rigged to reflect the toilet from the kitchen. The bath was in the open. Richard somehow got intimacy mixed with private bathroom and toilet business. Mike wanted out. Even with his cheap rent. Although he didn't like his cold wife much, he loved his baby and liked having a family. He wanted a safer home for them. Mike did get a small art studio outside of the house. He didn't go till after the dishes. He took care of his kid during the day. Eight or nine he would take off.

Richard always thought that Mike's wife was a dish. Maybe you got the best piece of ass, Richard would say, and would take the opportunity to lose his keys when Mike was gone. Same story each time. June, this is Richard, I'm drunk and I lost my keys, can you let me in? This made her uncomfortable. He never lost his keys when Mike was at home. Mike told June not to let him in. "Fuck him," Mike said. So next time it was, Sorry Richard, I'm not coming down. Richard found his keys and shortly was at the door that separated the apartments—calling her a cunt, a bitch and a whore. Mike came home a few hours later and was told this. He walked straight to Richard's side. Richard was naked, some coke whore was there also. "Mike, you better leave," Richard

warned. Mike walked slowly toward him. "Richard you are a lush and a phony." Then Richard started his Kung Fu show complete with sideways walking, fancy hand movements and not looking Mike straight in the eye to psych Mike out. Mike lunged to grab Richard by his long hair. Slammed him facedown to the dirty floor. Sitting on his back, Mike held Richard's face up by his hair. Pounded the right side of his face. Mike pulled Richard's hair hard and asked a question: "Are you gonna whip my ass now, Richard?" Pow, to the side of his face again. Then bounced his face on the floor, pulling it back up hard. "Are you gonna use karate on me, Richard?" Pop, pop to the face, slammed Richard's face down again, then the coke whore jumped over Richard's head. Screaming and naked. Mike couldn't reach Richard's face so he pounded him in the kidneys. Angrily, he tried to reach around her to hit his face again but hit the floor instead. This broke his hand. He left back through the door.

That separated heaven from hell. All kinds of shit hit that door. Words, objects, threats. Then the police came through it. They could see the bitter contrast, they could also see the bottles, the crack vials and the stench. They saw Mike's baby and his toys. But Mike did walk into Richard's home and beat him up, so they were going to arrest him. They started to handcuff him when Mike said, so Richard could hear him through the open door, "Hey Richard," as the police clamped down the cuffs, "when I get downtown I'm going to tell them about how you buy scales for that guy in Massachusetts. And how he fronts you pounds." The police started out the door with Mike when Richard had a sudden change of heart. He told the police that he wouldn't press charges after all.

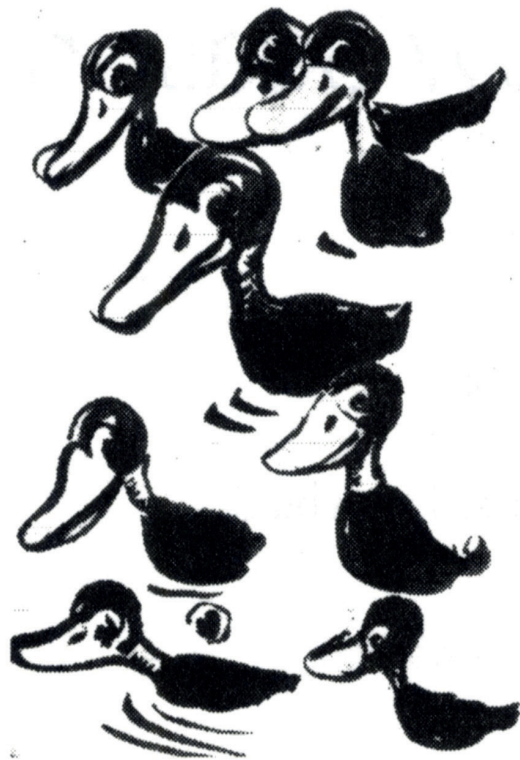
The police let Mike off. His broken hand was swelling up. It was quiet now and Mike felt it was safe to go and get it fixed. In the morning he comes home proudly with a cast and June greets him at the door with, "I wish you hadn't done that."



andoe**The Rundown**

Mike and his girlfriend just met. They were both freshmen at Tulsa Junior College. That meant they both lived at home. Terri was from the right side of the tracks, the south side, and was cute with a little shag cut. Mike was an east-side boy. Terri had never even been out there. It's where Tulsa sort of peters out and starts again. Old Route 66 ran through it. He was kinda redneck, she didn't mind it at first. They met between classes. She was going up the

escalator and he was going down. They found each other. They fucked so much they were raw. She found an apartment behind an old mansion. One room above the garage with a bath. It had a red long shag carpet. The whole place smelled dank and moldy, but it was their love nest. The garage and mansion in the front were owned by an aging rock promoter. His claim to fame was to be Leon Russell's old drummer, real old. His wife was a veteran groupie. Thirty-three and looked a little old to Mike compared to what he was used to. But she was sexy, long brown hair with bangs and capri pants and flats, this was 1976. She was half Cherokee, a real babe who had been around rock and roll for years. She would come up when Terri wasn't there and her hubby was out and talk to Mike about music and things. He liked the way she looked and she liked him too. One night he was playing her the Hendrix record *Axis*. She had met Jimi at a party when he was just getting going. She said that he had a bandanna tied around his thigh and was so cute and shy and was with two girls. Mike was showing her his sketchbook. She sat next to him on the bed. She slipped her hand under the pad and felt his dick. It was already alive. She slid to her knees opened his pants and sucked him with teeth. He had had plenty of sex lately and didn't come. That kept her coming back. He would try to fuck her but she seemed happy giving him oral sex. But he wore her down. They started fucking, getting more daring each time. Once, her hubby was washing their Mercedes in the driveway, it was a beautiful fall day. She came up the stairs, straddled and fucked Mike while they looked out the window at him washing that pretty cream-colored convertible. Mike never came with her, he told her he couldn't—she looked good, but sorta stank and was rough. Plus he fucked Terri all the time and some of Terri's friends and a random run-in here and there. This had been going on for a couple of months when late one night she took the trash out in the dark, ran up the stairs in nothing but her robe, he opened the door, she opened her robe, he pinned her on the bed, fucked her hard and fast, came. He came in her. A full load. She goes, "You didn't come in me, did you, you bastard?" Then moving toward the door she says, "He'll see this. I thought you couldn't come?" Then she ran down.



Keepsake

It was the end of my summer break from art school. I had worked for the last three months for Seismograph in what they call the high deserts of Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. It was hard but fun. We worked way out, at least 12, sometimes 17 hours a day and often over as much as 75 miles of paved roads in Ford four-wheel-drive pickups. We were trying to survey straight lines across mostly closed government land, land that had very little human interaction, mostly wild horses, antelope and sage. I had found a Ford Model-T truck hidden in a deep gully with a tree growing out of it. It had been there for a long time. There was a coffee cup on the dash and there was still paper in the glove box. The door lying off to the side of it said Trapper of Furs and Pelts. I took it. I also had an assortment of antlers and pieces of antlers, old bottles and cool rocks in the trunk of my Delta '88. I was flying home. I took the back roads, the scenic route. I was in the panhandle of Oklahoma when I stopped at a gas station. It was dusty and faded. I was filling my tank when I spotted a hand-painted sign that said Museum of the Plains this way. I paid for the gas and parked, then followed the arrow on the sign. Behind the gas station was a big curved Quonset hut full of old shit—coffins, beauty parlor furniture, old cars,

whiskey bottles, cow and buffalo skulls, a bunch of human skulls with holes on the top, a horse-drawn hearse, old bicycles, Coke machines—so much I don't even remember, but it was full. Then out came a tall, white-haired old man wearing what looked like a fishing hat. He showed me around. We talked about his collection. He said that he had lived out there all his life and this was his museum, but the state refused to grant it status because the aisles were too narrow, there was no wheelchair access and not enough bathrooms. Me and the old man hit it off. I was 22 and he said he was 81. When I asked why those skulls had holes in the top, he said Indians had buried the dead sitting up and left the tops of their heads exposed—when he was a boy he would find them. Vermin would eat through the skull. When he found them like that they were old and that was a long time ago. I asked him if he wanted to see the stuff I had found that summer on my job up there. We walked out to my car. I popped the trunk. His eyes lit up when he saw my door and antlers and things. “Sure would like to have that door,” he said. “No, I like it,” I said, and I told him how I found it. It just made him want it more. I thought it was funny how such an old man still wanted to collect stuff. So I gave him some antlers. I had plenty and they were mostly pieces anyway. We were slumped over my open trunk when I asked him, “Since you're so old, what are you going to do with all this stuff when you die, you got kids or something?” He straightened up tall off the bumper and said in a low, serious voice, “I'm going to take it to Mexico.” I go, “What? What are you going to do with it in Mexico?” He says, “Yep, I'm gonna go down there and build a cinder-block building to put my things in and lock it up.” I go, “Why Mexico, why not here?” Then he says, “Because Mexico is the only place they let you keep your things after you die.”

—Joe Andoe is a painter and a writer who moved to New York from Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1981. His work is held in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, among other major museums. He has published four stories in Open City.