

Impetus Interruptus

LIGHT

Sixty-six began for me much as any summer that came before. It got hot in the midwest following a windy spring. The plains of Kansas were just as boring as the plains of Oklahoma. Human beings ran to and from in their self-important daily lives, much to no event.

Just the year before, I had run away with the carnival that had passed through my hometown. I had returned after the job ended for the season, leaving me high and dry in western Kansas with no money, no vehicle, and no possessions, except for a spare change of clothes in a paper sack. I returned to face my parents who astonishingly did not punish me for having “fled the coop.”

This was another year, and I had already tried my wings the year before. Home life was not any better. My father and I still fought, and I felt just as worthless in ‘66 as I had in ‘65. My best friend, Mike Severt had moved with his family to Wichita, where they held an open invitation for me, should I ever leave and go that way.

I came with a small suitcase when school was out for the year and was allowed to rent a room in the Severt house. They were good people to me and were even kind enough to listen to what I had to say. The Severts were probably the first genuine entire family of friends I ever made on my own. I respected them

and felt that it was mutual on their part.

To fulfill my rental obligations, I immediately went out to seek work, and Mike came along. We walked about five miles that first day, asking for jobs at several places—wherever we thought we could draw fair wages. I had worked at construction sites and grocery stores since I was twelve and knew how to ask for work.

We entered Koch Products, recently replacing Rock Island, at the time. Koch industrially made fiber-glass pipes, mostly for irrigation purposes. Taking applications, Mike and I filled them out and returned them to the secretary who turned to hand them to the hiring boss as he walked up behind her. We stood for a couple of minutes while the man scanned our apps. He looked up at us and asked, “When can you start?”

It was a Friday, the day half over, and looking to Mike, he whispered to me, “Tomorrow?”

I turned quickly back to the boss, hoping he hadn’t heard Mike and said, “Right now. We came dressed to work.”

The hiring boss laughed at our eagerness and said, “Come on, I’ll show you what you will be doing and you can start Monday. You’ll have to buy a linoleum knife and some goggles, but you can buy them here and we’ll take the money out of your first check that you’ll get next Friday.”

We went with the boss, excited at our luck and genuinely interested in the plant. Spun glass fiber strands spooled down to weave onto wax-coated mandrills, mixing with epoxy-resin, forming pipes that were then cooked to hardness against large, standing ovens.

Monday, at work, Mike coated mandrills with wax and wheeled them to the looms where he took the sticky racks full of unhardened pipes to run back to me and the ovens. I hooked them onto the oven faces where they rotated and cooked at about 450 degrees. I checked them periodically for doneness. When finished, I cut them off with a hacksaw as they spun against the ovens' heat.

The work was hot and demanding and the more pipes I cut, the more fiberglass was embedded into my wrists and forearms. Each day, after work I showered and scrubbed, but never could get enough of the glass out of my pores to be able to sleep comfortably, the fiber tufts constantly poking my nerves and keeping me long awake. The bed sheets that Mrs. Sevart starched were like a press that made certain that each and every fiber of the glass made known its prickly

domain in my body.

There was one perk and one perk only to working at Koch. She was so blonde. Long, full hair that bounced just above her low-cut neckline where the competition of bouncing was then excelled. Tapering in at the waist, her full hips ground together as she walked past. She always returned a saucy smile to all of us men who stood at attention as she passed by. She looked closely related to Bridget Bardot, sex goddess of the day. Her daily passing was

the driving force that kept me at Koch, shy as I was, hoping over hope for her to de-virginize my status.

The day came when she didn't pass by. She always came by at lunchtime, just before the break whistle.

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I was dismayed, and looking around saw that many others also seemed distraught, apparently at her absence. I ate lunch gloomily, as did Mike at the apparent loss of benefits at work.

Working into the afternoon, at about 2:17 the boss came walking by, closely followed by the luscious blonde and a fellow worker who had also been missing since just before noon. He grinned as he passed as if he had just been promoted to



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foreman though the truth of the matter was that the blonde and him had just been fired for spending the last two and a half hours in a parked car in the lot.

To this day, I'll never forget the wink that she gave me as she passed by. Her red lips parted in a silent and sultry farewell as if to say, "Silly boy, this could have been you and now you'll never know how much I was worth getting fired from this dump over."

The head boss at Koch reasoned with me to stay and work part time through the coming school year. He said that he hated to lose workers like me and that he would shift a schedule around high school

in Wichita for me. I thanked him and said that I had made up my mind to return to Oklahoma. He shook my hand and wished me well, promising a job, should I ever need one near one of his plants.

A couple of weeks later, I was back in Oklahoma and getting school supplies in order. I got a nice letter of recommendation and a Coleman water cooler from the boss at Koch. I missed Mike and his family and I missed living out of the nest and earning my own way. Mostly though, every day at about 11:30 when the lunch bell rang, I saw, again that sultry wink and part of lips and missed the blonde and all that she implied to me. ✕