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Love In The Afternoon

oldest one, she must be in her forties."

"At least," I said.

"The other are younger. Mid-thirties, maybe," Fred thought.

"They're so ugly, though," Tom said again.

"Who cares if they're ugly," said Fred, settling his elbows along my back.

"Share the weight," I said complainingly to him, "Share the weight," nudging him off me.

"Come on, babe," Fred said airily to the one in blue. He had reached for a cigarette and was beginning to puff on it leisurely. "Let's take it all off."

Then there was the third one. Her hair was quite short, with a tinge of red through it. She was wearing men's jeans, fly and all, cut short where her hips joined her thighs. She had taken off her robe, and for a top part she was wearing a black lace-pattern brassiere.

"Well, hello," Fred said, as they waved up at us, then took to lying on their backs, rolling in the sun. The one in blue seemed somewhat self-conscious. She kept getting her hand in her hair. They laughed and waved again. We were five storeys up. They waved for us to come down. The blonde let loose a fantastic cackle.

"Listen to that," Pete said, with a trace of startled wonder in his voice. "Listen to that."

"Ugly, ugly as hell," Tom sighed, blowing down a cloud of borrowed cigarette smoke.

"Just like three witches in the story, eh?" said Fred. "I wonder what they'd like to brew for us?"

"Fifty cents," spouted Tom, flicking his ashes over the sill. "You're ugly, you bitches, you know that?" The three had stopped to stare up at us. They seemed to be sneering. "Yeah, you know you're ugly, don't you?"

The third one got up abruptly and went inside.

"Maybe she was a model once,"

I pondered.

Tom looked at me with dismay. "You gotta be off your nut, man. The heat must be getting to your head." He put his palm on my forehead.

Meanwhile the blonde had put her arm around and was busily scratching her ass.

"God, will you look at that!" Tom exclaimed. "No respect at all. Would you go to bed with that?"

"No one's asking you to," Fred said drily.

The third one returned with a jar of ointment in her hand. The blonde rolled over on her stomach, propping herself up on her elbows. The other removed her straps from her shoulders, and began to apply the ointment generously all over her back.

"I'd like to see that one in the blue take off," Fred said.

"Maybe they'll put on a show," Tom said. "Queens of the Backyard Burlesque!" He thrust his hand out by way of acknowledgement. "And I shall be your Whore Master!"

Pete turned aside to me. "Haven't they any feeling at all?" He seemed to choke a little. "Do they know they're degraded? God, when I think —" He look-

ed down at them with a stern set in his mouth. "Whores," he hissed with bitterness and anger.

We kept watching them for several minutes, passing a few words back and forth, but on the whole keeping pretty quiet. The wind was nice, and kept blowing in on us. The three prostitutes simply went on their business. Occasionally one or two of them would look up our way. But for the most part they seemed to ignore us. Although I was beginning to feel the need for something cool and wet, nothing could have been nicer than that wind, and I got to thinking the three weren't so bad after all.

Then one of them got up. The third one. She hurried inside while the other two waited for her, sitting up with the support of their hands.

"Where's she gone to?" Tom wondered, and scratched the inside of his neck.

She reappeared shortly on the veranda. She was holding out a pair of shiny black pointed shoes for display. They all started talking at once. The one in blue glanced up at us, then the blonde did, too, and cackled, pointing at us. The shoes were taken back inside.

Twilight Time

As night lies waiting beyond the mountains I sit here alone beside a dying tree. A loathesome, twisted, useless object. No longer fruitful. No longer shade giving. An obstruction in the path of the younger seedlings. Does it long for the woodman's axe? One quick, merciful slash. Or does it too lack the courage to sever the artery prematurely? Patience! I say to the tree. Night will come and with it blessed peace. Meanwhile we wait, and we wait, and we wait.

by JEAN DOHANEY

The Wedding Night

Shimmering she stood, and naked,
Before the long glass mirror.
Sensation of a strange anticipation
Made the lovely maiden unaware
Of her beauty. She only thought
Of him for whom she brushed
Her loose-hung hair, shining softly
In the dusk's dim light. She washed
Her supple body, and clothed it with an air
Of sadness . . . as if this night, she knew, against her will,
She would, with looks, and whispered words of love,
Her heart unbare, and lose her soul's own liberty.

by DINA COATES