

the foot of her bed, grinning. "Awake now, huh?"

"Yes" she said.

"Have some supper?"

"I'm not hungry." She didn't want to get out of bed. She would rather listen to the cars and dogs and airplanes and kids and birds outside.

Darrin crossed over to her desk. He looked at the pictures she had drawn that afternoon. He picked up one of the sheets.

"Who're these goofs?" he asked.

"I drew them this afternoon. Do you like them?"

"Pretty strange. Is this one *mom*? He pointed to the other sheet and laughed.

"Lemme see. Show me." She wanted to know if he liked the one she thought he was laughing at.

"Oh, forget it. I gotta set the table." Without thinking about how she didn't want to get out of bed, she threw back the covers and rushed to Darrin. "Is that the one? She pointed to the chicken named 'mom.'

"Yeah." Darrin laughed again. "It's great."

"Really?" She wasn't even thinking about going back to bed. "It's not *mom*, though. It's just a chair actor. I made her up."

"Character, marble-eyes."

"Yeah, I *meant* carroter."

"So you're gonna be a great cartoonist, huh?"

"I dunno." Amarantha was looking down but smiling to herself.

From downstairs they heard, "Amy! Darrin! Supper's *now* or it's *not*! Come on!"

"Yeah, we're coming!" Darrin bellowed back. He spoke less loudly to his sister. "Let's go. How can you expect to become a cartoonist if you never eat?"

Amarantha realized she was quite hungry. "Okay" she told Darrin. "I have to wash my hands first."



"Yeah. Make it fast." He put the paper he was holding on her desk and ran downstairs. Amarantha put on her dressing gown and washed her hands in the bathroom. She did feel better—but something in her head made everything seem hollow, as if her head was inside a big shell: every noise seemed muffled and there was humming between her ears. She shook her head, but it did not help get rid of that queer feeling.

Darrin's voice, coming up from downstairs, sounded strange. "Hey mom. —thinking of taking in a show tonight. —won't be back 'til late."

"—st *how* late? —did you wash your hands before touching those plates?" Her mother's voice didn't sound right, either.

"Yeah. —dno, maybe twelve. —picking me up at seven."

"Midnight? —what's wrong with the early show? —do your buddies and you have planned between seven and nine-fifteen anyway?"

"Jesuschrist, mom. —Saturday night nobody goes to the early show."

"—your mouth, please." Amarantha's mother was getting too angry because her voice was getting lower and softer, like it did just before she screamed. Amarantha hated it when her mother screamed. It scared her.



Graphics Lisa Trofymow

"Yeah, yeah. —shoot heroin in the alley before the show."

Amarantha could barely hear her mother's voice. "—tough-man to *me*."

"Just remember how old I am, *mother*." (Darrin never called her that.) Amarantha heard a chair drag along the kitchen floor and a fork scrape against a plate. Her mother's voice was too soft, so Amarantha stayed standing in the upstairs hallway.

"Is she coming?"

"Yeah."

"—bring her downstairs with you?"

"Geez, mom! She can walk by herself. She had to wash her hands."

Amarantha knew she could go downstairs for supper right away, but something in her head was echoing and their voices sounded weird and she was too scared to move. And her heart was beating too fast.

"—that she might need some help?" Her mother's voice seemed very tiny.

"—wash her hands? Come on!"

"that she very recently had very serious surg— "but the rest was drowned out in another hollow wave between her ears. She didn't feel very well at all.

"—protection."

"Ding-dong" said the doorbell.

"I'm not her father. Go marry some other jerk, only this time make it a fucking doctor!"

"DAAAAAAARRRRRIIIINN!" There. Her mother had finally screamed.

"Slam!" said the door.

Her mother didn't scream any longer because she was crying, for the third time in a single day. Amarantha wondered if everyone's mother cried as much as hers did. At least her crying didn't scare Amarantha. Now that she wasn't frightened her heartbeat slowed down and she felt much better. She went to her room and grabbed the sheet of dog-people drawings and went downstairs—slowly—to the kitchen.

"Oh—." Her mother looked up with red eyes at Amarantha.

"Sorry I took so long, mom. I was busy."

Her mother looked at the paper in Amarantha's hand and suddenly she smiled, "May I see it?"

"Sure." Amarantha gave the sheet to her mother.

"Oh!" her mother even laughed. "These are wonderful, Amy. Do you have any more?"

"Lots of them."

"They're beautiful. My little girl—so talented, an artist!"

She laughed again. "Why didn't you ever show me your drawings before? Were you too ashamed?"

Amarantha suddenly felt foolish as she stood in the middle of the kitchen while her mother got so excited about her silly dogs. At least her mother look happier.

"I dunno." She wished for some raspberry sherbert. She look at the omelettes on her own plate and her mother's. She hoped they weren't cold.

Then her mother did an embarrassing thing. She stared at the dogs, laughed again, put down the paper and patted her lap. "Come sit down, Amy" she said. And while Amarantha sat on her mother's lap, her mother hugged her and cried for the fourth time that day. She kept saying "My beautiful Amy." Amarantha was very glad she hadn't shown her mother the chickens she had drawn on the other sheet of paper.