

ROOM MATES

i.

It's Friday night at the bar and the women are running like salmon up and down the aisles and the men are running after them.

"Where's John?" Carl asks. "I haven't seen him in months."

"He's probably at church," I say. "He told me he goes every night and every morning at six."

Kathy the barmaid brings us two Heinekens then swishes off.

"What John needs is a woman," Carl says.

"That's for sure," I say. "Maybe that's why he's going to church so much."

"There's where you find them," Carl says.

ii.

The next week Carl and I lean on the bar and watch the salmon spawn again.

Carl says, "I went by John's, but I had to leave because this total jackass was there. First he was sleeping and drooling all over John's couch, then he woke up and started telling us how all the women are after him. He's John's room mate," he says.

"I know," I say. "I met that guy. He's from the Church. A man in need."

Carl says, "John doesn't need a male room mate."

iii.

I drop by John's house. It's nine p.m. but John is red eyed, ready for bed, church at six. Bibles lie open on the coffee table, on the arms of his chairs, on the kitchen table.

In the bath room there are two more open Bibles and books on Why Evolutionists Are in League with Satan, When the Holocaust Will Come, and Why, A Skeleton Key to the Holy Land.

I've seen John's extremes before.

Racquetball, camping, pistol shooting, house renovation, furniture fanatic.

Most flicker after a couple of years, but I don't know about this one.

I ask, "How's the room mate?"

He says, "He always has a cold."

"Is he paying his share?" I ask.

"Not really," John says. "I thought he'd help but he's two months behind, and last night I got home and smelled weed in here."

"No," I say. "A church-going boy who uses weed." He looks at me and smiles. "You're right. I'm just looking for a way to get rid of him."

iv.

The next Friday night Kathy drops off two Heinekens and squeezes through the crowd, then Carl says, "So how's John's room mate?" I tell him the story, then say, "I think he's overstayed his welcome."

v.

When I stop by John's one night he's in his robe and he sits in front of the t.v. and watches an evangelist who wears his wig crooked. John pulls a kleenex from the box and blows his nose.

"How are you besides having a cold? I ask.

"Great," he says. "I kicked my room mate out today."

"Good," I say. "How'd you manage it?"

He says, "The first day that he came here I took him in the kitchen and told him, 'This is my yellow glass. Don't wash it. Don't touch it.'

So the other morning I woke up coughing and blowing my nose, because I had his cold, and I heard water running in the kitchen, but I didn't hear any cupboards open or close.

So I got up and went out and there he was drinking water out of my yellow glass.

I ripped the glass out of his hand and told him, 'I want you out of here today.' I yelled,

'You're a scum bag, a creep.'"

"A jackass," I say.

"He just said, "Gee whiz, John. Don't get violent.'

But I kept yelling at him. I'm a happy man.

Except that he took my keys and I have to change the locks."

"He's a good church-going guy," I say. "You can trust him about as much as some guy from the bar."

John looks at me. Something's cooking in there.

I think that next Friday I can tell Carl that John may soon join us to watch the salmon spawn and have a couple of Heinekens, again.