

punches and missing by a foot, tiring, breathing hard, throwing more errant punches, and finally clinching and dancing over to bounce off the empty dumpster, ringing it like a gong.

Big Ruben took another hit, smiled wide, and watched the two dumb old drunk white motherfuckers shuffle away from the dumpster and then fall back on it again, harder and louder, bringing the little oriental cook away from his wok to watch through the screen. His eyes met Ruben's. Both men smiled. The cook jabbered something and shook his head as the two combatants fell to the ground and rolled into the middle of the alley. Ruben didn't understand a word of it, but he guessed it was something like, "These two silly bastards don't know how to fight, do they?"

BUTCH AND EVELYN: BACK IN THE BEGINNING

Evelyn had a bumper sticker on the back bumper of her Buick that said "LIFE'S TOO SHORT TO DANCE WITH UGLY MEN." Until tonight, that is.

Tonight she met Butch.

Butch is ugly: bald, bulldog-faced, bow-legged and fat. But like Evelyn says, "Lord, that man can dance."

She saw him in action on the dance floor of the Acapulco Club, frugging with No Tits Trudy, his feet gliding like he was on an invisible oil slick, sports coat unbuttoned and flaring with each pirouette, beer belly jiggling, dropping to the floor and doing the splits, pushing up into a handstand, then flipping up onto his feet and moonwalking, first backwards and then forwards.

Moonwalking forwards — nobody, but nobody, moonwalks forwards. Nobody but Butch.

Applause from the spectators. Butch bows, his shirt hanging out in back.

Evelyn staring, gape jawed, "Gonna peel that bumper sticker off, pronto," she says to herself.

Butch wipes the sweat off of his forehead and escorts Trudy back to her table, thinking, "If the band would quit playing this wimp music and break into something like Howlin' Wolf's Little Red Rooster, by God, then I'd really show them my stuff."

Evelyn comes back inside, finished with the bumper, just a sticky patch where the sticker used to be. She freshens her mouth with blood-red lipstick, pats her dirty blonde bouffant, unbuttons the top button on her blouse, moves in for the kill.

SOMETIMES MARRIED GUYS GET PHONE CALLS LIKE THIS LATE AT NIGHT FROM THEIR UNMARRIED FRIENDS

Larry says he's laid up, had his feet operated on, six weeks convalescence, can't pay rent with no money coming in, so he's moved in with his brother Skip out in Victorville who turns out to be a weekend nudist but at least not a fag (he's pretty sure) but probably (almost certainly) a voyeur and maybe a pedophile.

Larry says the girls he's been meeting recently all have tattoos and smoke and look scuzzy and can't put a sentence together so, no, he probably (almost certainly) won't be getting married soon.

Larry says he might go to the colony with Skip because there are a lot of fifteen and sixteen and seventeen year old girls there, naked, and he doesn't think that that can be classified as pedophilia really, just a natural appreciation of feminine beauty at its peak.

PLUMBING PROBLEMS

The steady drip, drip, drip, of the faucet was getting on Ruth's nerves, so she got on Ellis, and Ellis, reluctantly, grabbed a crescent wrench and had a go at playing plumber.

The steady drip, drip, drip, became, within seconds, a soaring geyser. When Ruth stepped into the kitchen to check the progress, Ellis was attempting to stem the gushing water by stuffing his t-shirt into its source.

He wasn't succeeding.

Ruth ran out front and turned the water off. Then she threw a mop and bucket at Ellis and told him she should never have sent a boy to do a man's job.

Ellis bailed the excess water into the sink while Ruth worked on the faucet, and he picked up the debris that had floated out from under the refrigerator, most notably the