

STUNNING

While Clete and Ellis got involved in their Saturday afternoon lawn maintenance, Ruth and Juanita drove on down to the Beauty Nook for the works, two complete make-overs that rendered them, in Beauty Nook owner Susie Park's word, "Stunning!"

There is an aroma that hangs about a woman who has been worked over at the Beauty Nook, an aroma she brings home with her. It seeps out of her painted and powdered face, wafts from the gleaming coiffure. An odor she drags home to fill her house with.

Clete and Ellis talked over the back fence for a while, discussing bugs and fertilizers and mildews and slugs. When Ellis put his lawn mower in the tool shed and stepped inside the house through the sliding door from the patio, he took a couple of sniffs and called out to Ruth, "You been sprayin' for bugs in here, sweetie?" Clete, after he stowed his weed wacker, slipped into his house and wrinkled up his nose and said to Juanita, "Damn, I musta spilled some gasoline on me when I was fillin' the mower," as he pulled his t-shirt up to sniff it.

The guys ended up down at The Red Rooster that night. They watched a baseball game on the big screen T.V. and repeated over and over again the stupid things they had said to their wives, telling everybody in the bar the story, cracking up every time anybody repeated the words, "bug spray," or "gasoline." They would have been able to slink back into their wives' beds that night if the bartender Betty hadn't called Ruth and Juanita and told them what was going down. They ended up sleeping on chaise lounges out on Clete's patio under the white stars, listening to the wavelets lap at the shore. "Been sprayin' for bugs?" Clete would say, inciting another giggle fit. "Musta spilled some gasoline on me," Ellis would reply, eliciting another outburst. And inside Ruth and Juanita would alternate, opening a window or a door and slamming it.

CLETE ENTERS THE SERVICE SECTOR

Clete's temporary incapacitation (stroke) made him lose his job, rolled him onto the dole, then the dole went dry, and the savings dwindled

He took his hobby — lawn maintenance — off on a tangent into the service sector, but the economy was in recession, money was tight. He picked up a couple of customers, but not enough to keep his mortgage paid.

So he hit his pal Ellis up for a part-time job at the Burger 'N' Run, taking advantage of the fast-food industry's neo-proclivity toward hiring near destitute, near desperate older folks, since the younger work force was dwindling, and somewhat less enthusiastic about good honest hard work than previous upcoming batches had been.

The night shift, Clete found, was a killer. Around midnight the old eyeballs just didn't want to stay open on his first night on the job, until an adrenaline rush incited by a fist fight between two Marines out in front of the counter pulled Clete away from his table wiping, got his heart to leaping like a cockroach on a hot griddle.

"Clete, you dumb shit, don't ever try to break up a fight like that," Ellis said after he'd dragged his friend away from the fray and parked him in the swivel chair in the office behind the kitchen. Clete had sidled in between the two men as they barked and pushed their chests out in the pre-fight ritual; he'd tried to talk sense, in a calm tone of voice, the voice of wisdom and experience. His wisdom and experience got his hat snatched off his head and stuffed into his mouth, and then got him stuffed head-first into the trash can, out of the way so the fight could take its course.

A crash of glass reverberating through the walls said that one of those combatants had exited the restaurant without using the door; a Doppler-quick siren said a firm form of mediation was on the way.

Clete plucked a french fry out of his ear and said in a trembling voice: "This type of shit happen every night here?" "Something weird," Ellis replied, "goes down every damned night, partner." He pulled a pint of bourbon out of his desk drawer, took a nip off it and handed it to Clete. "I don't know," Clete mused, as the pulse in his carotids pounded, "if I can handle this." Ellis watched his friend drain three inches out of the bottle, then he said, "You got the mortgage taken care of yet?" Clete shook his head, took another shot. "Then I suggest you hang in there, partner, at least until something better comes along."

ROLLIN' AND TUMBLIN' BLUES

Ginger got ahold of one of Juanita's high heels and gave it a good chewing. Juanita caught her at it and gave her little dog a good spanking with a loosely rolled newspaper, then she checked out the damage to her shoe. The thin part of the heel an inch off the floor had been gnawed a bit ragged, but it didn't seem to Juanita that the struct-