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True Story

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Me & Jim & Jeannie are eating meatloaf stoned when this black dude in a shiny green suit slides into our booth. Right next to Jeannie. Says Hey Kids Wanna make some money? Pulls out this fat green wad & we laugh till he reaches for his armpit like he’s gotta itch & says Wanna see my gun? So we laugh harder & he starts in about his Princess, his wife, his white lady, he loves white ladies. The truth is she’s a saint.
The most beautiful lady in the world.
O.K. So now we know he’s drunk, right?
But the sad part is he don’t know where she is. She won’t tell him. She don’t know how much he loves her. Nobody knows how much he loves that girl. You wanna know how much he loves her? There was this man. He was putting the make on his princess & you know what he did? He bit-off-his-nose. His eyelids roll up & these two bloodshot bullseyes sorta quiver & about then I notice Jeannie’s keys on the table right next to his long pink & brown fingers: a golden horseshoe key ring with two red jewels at the tips—you couldn’t miss’em.
So I get sly, see, I think this dude’s distracting us so he can snatch Jeannie’s keys. So I pretend to listen to his murder record, but slowly, oh so slowly, I edge my hand over the formica. I’m nodding, he’s bragging, & my fingers are crawling slowmotion toward the keys & just-like-that they’re in my fist. I reel’em in slow & slip’em in my pocket. Boom, we’re up, we’re outside, we’re into the snow.
coming down yellow under the streetlamp, 
the sighs curling up over our heads. 
I feel real cocky & show Jeannie my catch. 
Her forehead crinkles & out of the pocket 
of her silver furcoat she pulls a golden 
horseshoe key ring with two red jewels 
at the tips—you could miss’em. 
We stop & stand there in the snow, too afraid 
to turn around, listening for the gunshot. 
Slowly, oh so slowly, I follow our snowprints 
back, clutching the keys in my wet hand. 
I open the door. He’s at the counter, his back 
to me. I say Hey Man, you forgot your keys. 
He turns. He smiles—a big white smile. 
He takes the keys. He says Hey. Thanks. 
He shakes my hand. You Kids are alright. 
When I get back they wait for me to 
say something. I can’t. So Jim says, 
I see you still got your nose.

THE ASTRONAUT

You’d think a hero could complete a sentence. 
Not this one. I couldn’t coax a decent take 
out of him. He’d stutter & stare down the mike 
like the barrel of a gun. Finally, I told the engineer 
to give us an hour & we walked to this Mexican place 
where this round brown woman was hosing down 
the walk under a tattered green canopy. Inside 
we turned down two chairs & she kept an eye 
on us through the kitchen slit. She must have 
recognized him: butch, caved-in eyes, white shirt, 
plastic penholder with 2 bics. He needed to talk. 
I needed him calmed down. I listened.