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Apartment parties: Hiya, how's it goin'??

Although it was raining relentlessly, I pulled back the hood of my jacket to help me pick out the faint strains of "Court and Spark" waiting between the fat, cascading drops. My friend had given me the apartment number of his party, but it was too dark and wet for me to discern anything more than the outline of the squat stucco building, so I had to depend on my ears to guide me through the deepening gloom.

By the time the shrill yodels of "Help Me" had faded into the damp night, I was standing in front of the fiberboard door, watching the sagging weatherstripping sway gently to the music. I was nervous. It sounds silly, I know, but I had never been to an apartment party before, and I didn't know what to expect. The only thing I knew for certain was that apartment dwellers pursued lives that were infinitely more intellectual, sensual and exotic than the immature, let's-go-raid-Boyn-ton, stick-this-beer-under-your-coat, Linda-didn't-leave-till-three-last-night-no-kidding existences that I and my fellow dorm residents eked out. Far beyond such childish pastimes, I was sure that persons who lived in apartments cohabitated with the opposite sex, read Nietzsche voluntarily, and took drugs that helped them see God. With the conviction that I was about to experience a rite of youth that would serve as the first step of my initiation to a higher social order, I twisted the knob and stepped inside.

The dense cloud of smoke that wrapped itself around me as I entered made me suspect arson at first, but a whiff of the drifting stuff told me that a less serious crime was involved. Along with that powerful odor were several more subtle scents: the brawny bouquet of hops and barley, the pungent tang of 10-for-a-buck incense, the saccharine smell of patchouli oil, and the ubiquitous fragrance of decaying shag and dissolving plaster endemic to Eugene apartments, apparently due to an ecological commitment by campus-area builders that restricted them from constructing non-biodegradable student housing.

I could not see the whole apartment, as it was jammed with squatting, sitting, standing, teetering and collapsing people, screaming what I knew must be enlightened opinions over the roar of four refrigerator-sized speakers. No one had approached me yet, so I trotted over to the ice-packed garbage can that held the keg, hoping that if I were seen drinking a beer the stigma of my naivete would be less obvious.

Sure enough no sooner had I filled my plastic cup than a figure floated to me through the swirling mist. It was a male, wearing a caterpillar hat, wire-rim glasses, a large moustache, puka beads glistening around an unseasonable tan neck, a Hawaiian shirt, macramé belt, Cheap Jeans, sweat socks and Roots.

"Hiya, Pal," he said, grinning. "How's it goin'?"

"Great," I said grinning.

"Hey, that's great," he said, grinning. "Hey, can I get you a beer?"

"No, no thanks," I said, lifting mine and grinning. "I've got one."

"Hey, that's great," he said, grinning. "Well, take it easy."

"Yeah," I said, watching him drift away. Almost immediately another shape came into focus. This one was dressed precisely like the one that had just left, but he was slightly taller so I knew it wasn't the same person.

"Hiya, buddy," he said, grinning. "How's it going for you? Can I get you a beer?"

"Hi. Great. No, thanks, I've got one," I replied, grinning with some effort.

"Great. Hey, that Ronnie Lee's really something, isn't he?"

"He sure is," I said. Things weren't going the way I had planned. Perhaps, I reasoned, it

was the newcomer who was expected to bring up the more enlightened topics. "But to tell the truth, I don't follow Duck basketball too closely. Lately I've been getting into some of Nietzsche's works."

"Really?" said the man. "Who does he play for?"

For some reason the haze seemed to be growing thicker.

"Uh, nobody," I sighed. "You see, Nietzsche was a philoso—"

"Well, see you later," the man said dissolving into the smoke.

I sighed again and refilled my cup. Maybe I wasn't approaching this from the right angle. After all, the essence of a party's function is to bring men and women together. Maybe it was the inter-sexual discussions that yielded the most stimulating ideas.

With this in mind I began shuffling around the dim living room until I found a male and female pair who, by their intent expressions, seemed to be discussing something of monumental importance. Trying to remain inconspicuous, I sidled over and turned an ear toward them.

"So then," the woman was saying, "I saw Jim after class 'n stuff, y'know, and I said 'hi' 'n stuff, and he said 'hi' 'n stuff, y'know, and I said... I said..." the conversation was halted here for several seconds as the couple roared with laughter, "How have you been 'n stuff and he said 'fine' 'n stuff, y'know, and I said 'really' 'n stuff..."

"Did you really say that?" her friend inquired.

"I really did, 'n stuff, God, I swear I don't know why, I was just in a crummy mood 'n stuff..."

This party, I decided, had been a total waste of my time, and I resolved to search out

the friend who had invited me and tell him so. I snagged a passing form by the beads to see if he knew where the host was.

"Hiya, pal," he said. "How's it goin': Hey, can I get you a beer? Man, that Ronnie Lee's really something, isn't he? God, I was so drunk last week I asked Deadly Hall for a date."

"Hi. Great. No thanks. He sure is. Wow, that's drunk," I replied evenly. "But tell me, do you know where I could find the host?"

"You're looking at him," replied the man. "Terrific party, huh?"

"But you're not... hey, is this 1464 South 18th?"

"Huh? No, man, this is North 18th. Man, you must be drunk. But you couldn't be as drunk as I was last month when I went to late Mass and took off all of my..."

I didn't wait to hear the rest. Dropping my shredded cup, I zigzagged through the tottering throng, yanked open the cardboard door, charged through the pelting downpour, dived into my four-tone Toyota, roared 28 blocks down the slippery street, skidded into a parking space, jogged once more through cloud-burst, knocked on a carved oak door and stepped into the correct apartment.

The subtle arpeggios of Bach's "Air on the G-String" bounced softly between the mahogany-paneled walls, mingling with the gentle scents of Flying Dutchman and Puligny-Montrachet '73. Scattered about on the flawless Chippendale was a striking contingent of handsome young people, clad in tweed and silk and cashmere, enraptured by the source of the music, a slender, intense-looking young man whose eyes flamed like windows to an incandescent soul. As he alternately caressed and tortured the gleaming Stradivarius he carried his audience from joy

to despair to joy once more, until even the vial of white powder on the mantle behind him seemed to tremble with the changes of emotional atmosphere.

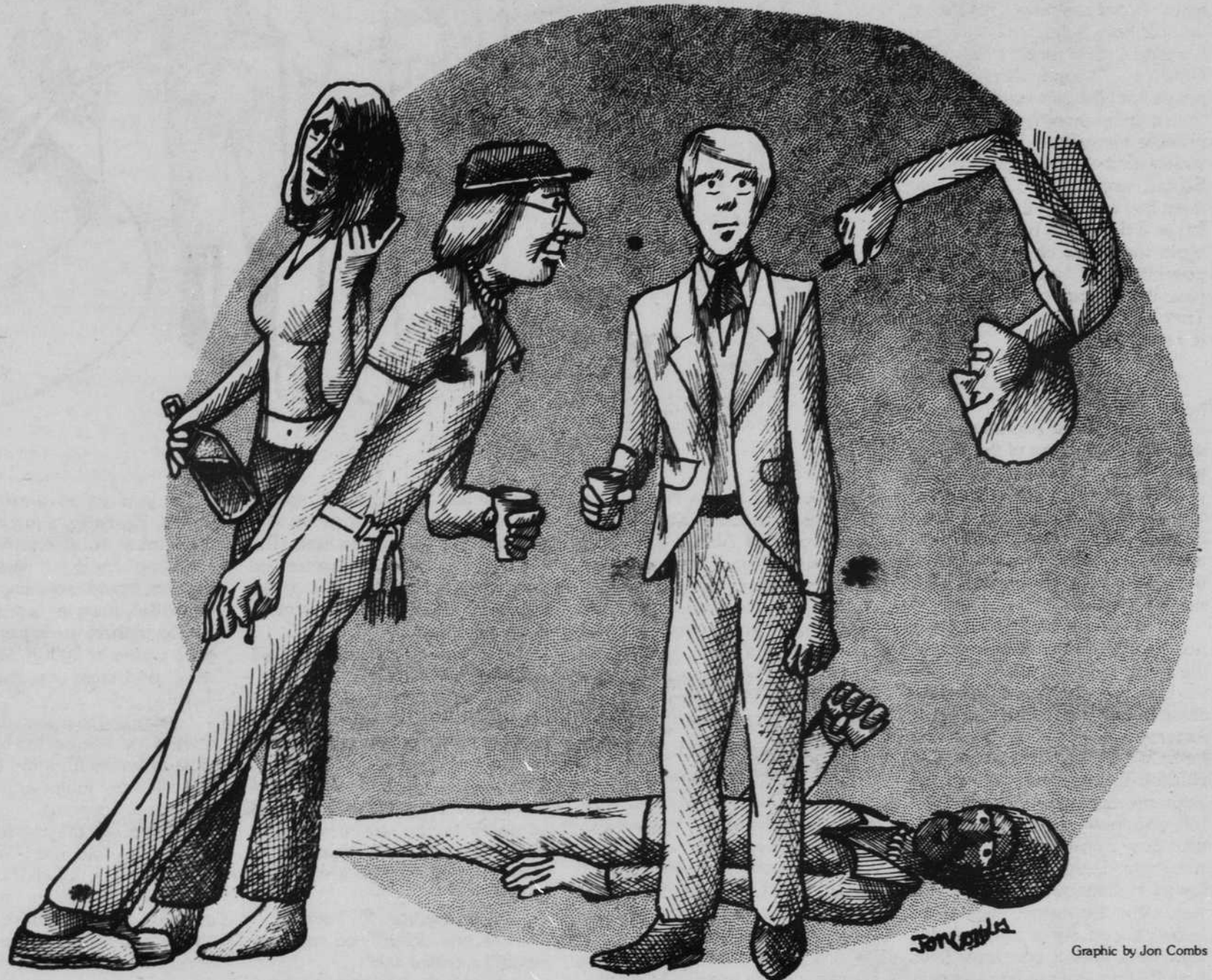
Finally the ethereal performance drew to a close, and after a respectful round of applause a roomful of bright, clear heads turned in my direction. A blonde gentleman arose and shook my hand warmly. I was so dazed by the opulence and exotic aura of the scene that it took me a few moments to recognize him as the friend who had invited me.

"Greetings, citizen and friend," he said in a well-modulated voice, through straight, glistening teeth. "How fortunate that you found time to attend our gathering. My roommate," he indicated a blushing goddess, "and I were discussing whether or not God might justifiably assert that Nietzsche is alive, which I view as a refreshing analytic viewpoint. Now, however, we are in dire need of a new third partner in our discussion, because," his voice took on a discouraged tone, "we seem to have reached an impasse."

Such a visage of failure seemed horribly out of place on my friend's usually happy face.

"Have you tried... everything?" I asked throwing a glance at the vial of white powder.

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Graphic by Jon Combs

This special 12-page edition of the Emerald contains a series of pieces written by ex-Emerald-type Brad Lemley. A young man turned cynic by four years and North Salem High and a meaningless sex life, Lemley is now in Michigan looking for America, but he left us with this 12-part series, a look at the life we all know. ed.