

Head Case

By Warren Florence

Ren arrived home late from a creative meeting across town to find that the guys—with Yukons, Volvos and Suburbans—had already taken up his driveway, making him park along the road by his own mailbox and walk in. He's not surprised on poker night. His buddies always showed up for a night of booze and cigars away from their wives and kids. On the way up to the house he pulled out of the mailbox, along with a check or two and a long-standing Fannie Mae college bill, an unexpected manila envelope.

Ren received a variety of packages every week from creative departments of advertising firms along the East Coast. But this square package was much smaller than the stack of white Fed Ex packets in his home office. Walking up to his coastal house along a driveway made of crushed oyster shells, Ren turned it over and noticed his address was hurriedly hand-written. The guys, he heard, were all laughing inside, unaware that he had arrived home.

When seeing them, they always razzed Ren about his eclectic, bachelor life as an early thirties writer. Once a suit-and-tie guy in New York, Ren rarely showered before lunch these days. He preferred creating to shaving early in the morning. While the furniture he brought with him from New York was nice, very little filled the house. He woke to no kids. No wife. The last serious girlfriend he had, PJ, was back in college. He mentioned to a shrink once that not only was the crazy sort of love he encountered with PJ the last he'd likely experience—because he hasn't been in love since—it was also probably not healthy for a

marriage. Maybe deep, consuming love simply gets in the way. He and PJ had become friends and moved way beyond those years. That is until recently when their conversations were more a matter for *her* record.

Ren was also razzed about his sparse working conditions. A one-man show in a spare bedroom, he worked with nothing more than a long cord connected to his laptop, moving from a modern metal and teak wood desk to the thick, comfy carpet, or to his favorite writing spot: a double-wide chair facing two big windows and a pristine view too many football fields to count, of coastal marsh and river and dolphins, and lots of sky.

After passing quietly through the screened-in sunroom where they played cards every Wednesday, Ren noticed lots of empty Samuel Adams bottles, a sign the guys had sat at the table, waiting for him a half-hour, or more, though they had plenty of booze left. Once a week vicarious exists for this mano e mano group, though his friends have curfews. They will drink. They will smoke. Each plays till about twelve, then tucks and runs to their beautiful wives.

He put the mail and mysterious envelope on the table and peeked in the window to see five guys on two couches watching Sportscenter on an unjustifiable flat screen TV afforded because Ren is responsible only to himself. He pushed open the door slowly, poked only his head in as if he was visiting an office colleague with a quick question, and took like a man obscenities you can only take from your friends. More...