

## **Bubbling with Pleasure**

The inside was dark. It was cool and moist and smelled like fermenting barley and hops. Most people find the sour odor of fermentation unpleasant, but not Dan. For him it brought back fond memories. He knew the smell from the three years he spent working at the Leinenkugel Brewery in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, and that was the happiest time of his life.

His college roommate Nick ó Nick Koslowski ó got them both jobs at the brewery the summer after freshman year at Marquette University. Actually it was Nick's dad, Chuck, a foreman at the brewery, who got them the jobs. At first they worked loading kegs and cases into delivery trucks, and then they moved up to the bottling line. The best job in the brewery was bottle inspection ó a job made famous by the TV show "Laverne and Shirley" ó and man was it good. Back then the foremen would let you keep the defective bottles, and since that was Mr. Koslowski, they took home at least a case every night.

The thing was you could reject a bottle for just about any reason. A chip in the glass or visible residue in the liquid was a definite reason to pull a bottle since the brewery didn't want to harm its customers. But bottles were also rejected for bad labels. If the label was creased, or attached off kilter, or even if an edge was folded, the bottle went into the discard case on the floor at their feet. And when no bad labels were coming down the line it was easy to tear a corner, and put the bottle into the case. Then the case went back to the Koslowski residence and the beer into the growing bellies of Dan Spaulding, Nick Koslowski, and Chuck Koslowski. OK, Mr. Koslowski's belly was already a beautiful thing the guys at the brewery called him the Buddha and rubbed his belly when they walked past and he kept it in shape by spending most evenings with Dan and Nick in the Koslowski basement watching the Brewers play ball and drinking the rejects.

Those were halcyon days, days that both Dan and Nick hoped would go on for ever, so they dropped out of college to work full time at the brewery. Dan moved in with the Koslowski's, occupying Nancy Koslowski's former bedroom, which he shared with posters of every member of Nsync: Joey, Lance, JC, Chris and Justin. But all good things must come to an end, and the salad days ended at the beginning of the summer of the third year, when Dan met Vicky at Ernie's, a quintessential Wisconsin shit-hole tavern populated for most of the year by the local rummies, but taken over in the summer by the college kids who worked at the resorts.

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It was a typical Thursday, and Ernie's was packed. The locals sat on bar stools watching the action in the big mirror behind the liquor bottles. The kids were jammed in between the stools and the booths, and around the pool tables in back. Dan had on his old Marquette t-shirt,

the one with the stains spreading from the pits. A girl in a òBong-Waterö t-shirt pushed past him. She looked at his shirt.

òMarquette sucks,ö she said.

òI know,ö Dan replied. Her hair was pulled back and she had a gold nose ring that shone beautifully against her even brown tan. òWanna dance?ö

òSure.ö

They struggled through the crowd to the area between the pool table and the juke box where a scrum of bodies pulsed to the music. They talked ó screamed over the music ó while they tried to dance. They mostly moved with the crowd, reminding Dan of riding the subway in Chicago at rush hour, everything and everybody swaying and shifting together, leaving no choice but to move with them.

Her name was Vicky, and she was a junior at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater: fondly referred to as bong-water, hence the t-shirt. She was working as a life guard at a resort on Lake Wissota. She had green eyes, long light brown hair streaked golden by the sun, and a taut athletic body. They ended up getting shit faced drunk and dancing horizontally in the back seat of his car parked down the road from Ernieø.

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Though they were coming to an end, Dan thought these were the salad days. He and Vicky spent most evenings dancing and drinking at Ernieø, and the weekends at Lake Wissota floating in inner tubes, drinking purloined Leinies, and screwing in the water.

It was on just such a Saturday in late July when Vicky said something that should have bothered Dan. For most guys the warning signs would have gone off, flashing like a welcoming

beer sign on a crisp November night. But Dan was floating in a post coital glow with Vicky snaked around him in the inner tube and her hand in his trunks.

“You gonna spend the rest of your life up here working in a brewery, getting shit faced drunk every night?”

“I dunno.”

“You need to go back to school. You don’t want to end up like Mr. Koslowski.”

“Mr. Koslowski? What’s wrong with Mr. Koslowski?”

“That’s your future if you stay here, big guy. You gonna hang out with your sons when they flunk out of school too?”

Vicky was pulling on his cord, and the warning sign was temporarily out of order. Dan would have agreed to almost anything to get her to slide her bikini bottoms back down, and calling the admissions office at Whitewater was a small price to pay for a double header.

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He wasn’t sure how to break the news to Nick and Chuck, but the admissions packet that came a few weeks later was an unavoidable icebreaker.

“Bong-water?” Nick asked as he tossed the package onto Dan’s lap.

Dan was on the couch in the basement watching aerobics with the sound off.

“Yeah.”

“That where Vicky goes?” Chuck Koslowski growled from the bottom of the basement stairs.

“Yeah.”

“Whsht, whsht, whsht.” Chuck made the sound of a cracking whip. And in case there was any doubt, he said, “you’re whipped boy.”

“Maybe.”

“Nothing good can come of this,” Chuck said.

Dan wondered what Mrs. Koslowski might think of that, as he heard her padding around in the kitchen above them.

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Dan and Vicky got an apartment in town together. Dan was a sophomore and Vicky was now a senior, and when she graduated she dropped him like an empty beer can. But the year wasn't wasted. Dan discovered a love of literature, and Vicky turned him on to some truly wild sex. She found a book on Tantra at a used book store, and if she decided that he had studied enough she would reward him by opening the book at random and doing whatever was shown in the pictures.

One day he came home early from class. He'd had a test in English Lit., and was so burned out he skipped Anthropology. He sat on the sofa and flipped through the book, wondering what they could do when Vicky got home. He was surprised to discover that Tantra was about a lot more than acrobatic sexual positions. Apparently the idea was that when you were properly open to it, the physical act could lead to a deeper emotional and spiritual connection and even an expanded state of consciousness. The book said that Tantra was an ancient Indian practice, often associated with Buddhism. He found the idea fascinating, and started reading everything he could about the Buddha, including the collected works of Herman Hesse, and former Indian President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

After Vicky dumped him, like the aforementioned empty beer can, he took comfort in the idea that even though all life involves suffering, a person could break the untold chain of events that cause the suffering by satiating the desire for existence. He never totally bought the idea of

reincarnation. He couldn't quite accept that death was merely the nonfunctioning of the body or that the soul transmigrated into another body. But he did like the idea that the soul is a product of will, volition, desire, and thirst to exist, and that the thirst to exist could be quenched by the elimination of all cravings and desire.

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Dan wondered why he was thinking about this now, why thoughts of Chippewa Falls, Lake Wissota, Vicky and Siddhartha were flooding through his mind while he seemed to be in a dark place that smelled of fermenting barley malt. He tried to figure out where he was. All around him was dark and cool, and pleasantly moist.

He tried to feel around, and it was then that he realized he had no arms. In fact he discovered that he had no eyes, yet somehow he could sense that it was dark. The only sensation he had was eating, so he must have a mouth. Despite all of this, he felt surprisingly content, happy even, since he knew from the taste that he was eating a mixture of barley and hops. And it was from the taste he was certain he was in a fermenting vat. Had he not spent those years at the Leinenkugel Brewery, he wouldn't have realized that he was yeast, probably *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*—brewers yeast—nor would he have known that it was the sole purpose of his existence to eat the glucose released from the barley to produce carbon dioxide and alcohol. He knew that all around him millions of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* were also happily munching, peeing out alcohol and farting out bubbles of pleasure. Though the vat was cool, the thought warmed him.

He wondered, as he ate, how it had come to this. He tried to recall, through *vijnana*—the germ of consciousness—what he could of his human form. He vaguely remembered riding his scooter, a used Kawasaki 750, from Madison to Milwaukee, in a vain attempt to reconcile with

Vicky, and somewhere near Waukesha it started to rain. He could hazily recall turning on to an exit ramp to find a place to get out of the rain, when his back wheel started to give way. But that was it.

Thoughts of Vicky, thoughts of Chippewa Falls, thoughts of Siddhartha, began to recede, disappearing like the butterfly tattoo Vicky had just above her vulva, which faded away when she let her pubic hair grow. The memories were pleasant but he had no desire to return to that form.

He was content, his every appetite satiated, his thirst quenched by the liquid he consumed, his desires fulfilled. His only wish was that the contents of this vat be drunk at a Brewers home game against the traitorous Braves. Or better yet, by a horny couple on the shore of some northern lake, the sun warming their skin, the brew cooling their bellies and easing their inhibitions. Now that would be Nirvana.

The End