

*William Hart*

**BOY TOY MANAGEMENT MOLE**

Is taken from the novel, *ROLLER RINK STARLIGHT*.

Our parents began giving my brother and me small allowances around the time John started school. When Mom returned to teaching a few years later our allowances were increased to pay us for taking on the household chores. I washed the dinner dishes, vacuumed the house, carried trash, mowed the yard, and shoveled snow in return for a few dollars a week, more as I got older. My allowance had always been enough to cover my personal expenses but when I began dating Lauren I found myself running a significant weekly deficit. After I drained my savings, I started dipping into the solid silver half dollars my father was pulling out of circulation as an investment. Theft from a parent is bad news, and I did feel guilty, but I'd become dependent on "dating" and like most addicts had loosened my morals to feed the addiction. Condom procurement alone blew a hole in my budget. I was too young to buy them in stores, too shy as well, and the only rubber vending machine I knew about was bolted to the wall of a gas station men's room in Augusta, Kansas twenty miles away. That dispenser, decorated with garish and improbable guarantees of satisfaction and smudged by grubby hands, gouged mercilessly on price. Like most vending machines at that time it took half dollars as well as quarters.

During my financial crisis one of my mother's many younger friends phoned to ask if I'd be interested in a job as stock boy at a pharmacy she managed. I'd be working a few hours after school several evenings a week and the pay was minimum wage. Just when I really needed it, here was the answer to my funding deficit. I grabbed the job and on a cold and dismal winter evening a few days later I drove to the drugstore crunching frozen slush. I'd learned to like Lenora during dinners our families had shared and was happy to see her warm smile as she welcomed me to the store and asked after my parents. My duties, she explained, would be to keep the shelves stocked and the products dusted. She introduced me to the pharmacist, Samuel, a tall, stooped man in his late thirties. Samuel's grizzled brown flat top dipped just perceptibly in my direction as he appraised me with deep-set critical eyes. His mouth seemed permanently turned down on one side, as though he expected to be irritated by whatever came next. Well, I told myself, let Samuel be Samuel. He's the store pharmacist and of minor concern. I'll be working for Lenora.

I didn't see Lenora again for months. Although she was credited with managing three stores, all owned by a certain Mr. Callaghan whom I never met, I wasn't really sure what her job was because she was never around. From my second day on I took orders from Samuel, who communicated with me exclusively in clipped phrases, all job-related. While I restocked the shelves from a plastic basket he watched me closely and with apparent suspicion from behind the counter of his pharmaceutical enclosure. Was he afraid I was going to lift an enema kit or dip into the cold cream? The only items in that store of interest to me were the condoms, and those were locked up safely in Samuel's cage along with him and the narcotics.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 15/3

Aside from Samuel, my job was great. It required so little of my attention I could daydream endlessly.

One warm April evening Lenora reappeared at the store and approached me. She told me to put down my dust rag and come with her. Samuel scowled at us as I followed her out the back door and into the alley, where we climbed into Lenora's late model Chrysler Imperial. Before she started the engine she commended me for doing my job so splendidly, just as she'd known I would, then added, "You'll be getting a small raise." Affecting a breezy manner she said she wanted to show me the other stores she managed — and off we went.

I couldn't help noticing that Lenora was decidedly dolled up. Her hair was bunched behind her head in an interesting manner, exposing two very cute ears, and she wore a thin, glitzy dress that buttoned down the front. When she used the power steering, the top of her dress twisted open so that between its buttons I could see a large black bra cup overflowing with Lenora. In the closed vehicle her subtle but enfeebling scent was doing its deed and her glossy pastel lips were pressed together in an amused smile. My mother's younger friend, by golly, was coming out as a hot number, one apparently looking for attention.

As dusk turned to night she wheeled us around town in an aimless manner and then without our having seen another store (not that I know of) she returned to the one where I worked, pulled into the alley behind it and killed the engine and lights. An incandescent bulb high on the building filled the Chrysler with brightness and shadow as Lenora and I looked at each other. Her large blue liquid eyes seemed excited and expectant behind their oversized tinted lenses. "What are you thinking?" she asked me. As she knew very well, I was thinking how nice it would be to start by kissing those delicious looking lips of hers. But I was also thinking how surprised her husband and daughter would be if they could see us together the way we were. I liked them both, especially the sensitive daughter, and felt I'd be betraying them if I followed Lenora's lead. What if we did it and my parents found out? Not exactly the sort of accomplishment to make them proud of their son. Beyond all that, Lenora's mature sexuality was a bit daunting. I was afraid I might come up short with her and make a fool of myself.

I told her I was thinking about an upcoming math test that had me worried sick. I inflated the test into an improbable threat to my entire future. Her face fell a bit as she absorbed the unwelcome news she'd targeted her seduction on a dud. Then she wished me well on the exam and thanked me for coming with her. We parted on good terms, I think. Anyway, I got the raise.

As I reentered the store trying to remember where I'd left my dust rag I noticed a change in Samuel. Opposite the downturned side of his mouth I saw half a smile, as though he remained generally gloomy but had found a ray of sunshine in having got the goods on his shelf duster. He began being openly snide to me and doubled down on his brooding surveillance. I became convinced he wanted to catch me boosting something so he could report me to Lenora and get me canned. It wasn't pleasant working in that negative atmosphere and when a friend told me about a job with more hours at the fast food restaurant where he worked, I moved along. I rec-

### Wilderness House Literary Review 15/3

commended my buddy John Myer to Lenora as my replacement and before John started I warned him to watch out for Samuel. "Something's wrong with that guy but I don't know what." I didn't bother to warn him about Lenora, figuring he could take care of himself with her.

John and Samuel happened to share the same cynical outlook and soon became thick as thieves. Once Samuel trusted John enough, he revealed to him the dark goings on at the store. Apparently the chain owner, who was considerably older than Lenora, was involved with her in a long-term sexual affair conducted during working hours. The boss was paying her very well for her skill set while at the same time underpaying all his pharmacists, who to keep their jobs had to do double duty by managing their stores. This explained why Samuel was bitter—and probably also why he despised and distrusted me. He must have thought I was not only banging Lenora but spying for her. A boy toy management mole.