

March 2, 1971

TUESDAY

I Don't Help Dwarves

By Kaye Kruger

"Do you want to hear my letter to Ant Emily?"

Ant.

Sally Ann writes to Ant Emily every two weeks, Thursday night at nine o'clock.

"It's really a funny letter!"

"No."

"Just listen. Dear Ant Emily . . ."

Ant.

"Here I am again . . ."

Aren't you though, again and again.

"Since I last wrote . . ."

Two weeks ago at nine o'clock p.m.

" . . . my new roommate and I have become good friends. We get along just great."

Just great

Sally Ann's lips are always an even shade of pink. Mother brought her a tube of Babydoll Pink Ultra - Creme lipstick and a small brush so that the outline would follow perfectly that of her lips. Mother realizes the importance of good grooming.

"Thank you so much for the cocoa colored panty - hose, Ant Emily . . ."

Ant.

As I watched the pink lips lisping through the words, a woman walked slowly out of the bathroom, a freshly laundered pair of cocoa panty - hose dripping through her fingers. She had tall thinness and wore a floor - length red robe.

"Edward liked them, too, though of course I didn't show him the flowered elastic at the top . . ."

She walked up to Sally Ann and began looping the stockings around Sally's short neck. Sally Ann never stopped talking.

"My roommate has said that they are charming too, several times . . ."

Five times, once after each time she asked me.

The women in red tightened her grip on the stockings and pulled at them until Sally Ann's voice diminished into rasping noises punctuated with harsh gasps and rattles as she choked. Smiling now the woman yanked violently on the ends until Sally Ann's pink tongue hung limply down from between her pink lips and dangled along her rounded chin.

Sally Ann looked up. "The funny part is coming now - the funniest thing happened to me yesterday while I was sketching a tree for an art assignment . . ."

Four - hundred caterpillars began writhing their way out of the bank of the ancient oak tree. They are black fuzzies, the flesh - eating variety (Carnivorous Epicurius). They began to form lines

halfway down the tree; rows and rows of black fuzzies snaking their way down the oak, down to Sally Ann. Oblivious to distracting details, little Sally Ann remained sitting beneath the tree, smudging her charcoal and erasing it into an identical copy of the oak. Sally Ann always says that artists are very perceptive people. She's right, of course - her tree is an identical copy of the one above her.

The fuzzies have decided to begin with her toes. This will be the most difficult as Sally Ann never removes her shoes when out of doors. Germs inhabit the out of doors. Fuzzies are very intelligent animals, especially the black kind. Though not as perceptive as artists, they can figure that shoe leather will be tougher to digest than Sally Ann's pale skin.

So, while still in full strength, they began with her fringed brown loafers. Four - hundred cold, furry mouths, gnawing through to the white skin that is seasoned nightly with three different softening creams; gnawing below to the tender pink succulence of her flesh. They eat methodically, stripping the body; bone by bone emerging dry and white. Voraciously the black swarm whirls from her feet through the knees, through ribs and finally through the narrow hollows in her skull. One by one they jumped off the top of her head and in single file, disappeared into another tree.

When she finished her sketch, Sally Ann gathered her drawing equipment back into its neat carrying box, and her naked bones walked off.

" . . . and Anty dear . . ."

Just as caterpillars swarm through

Sally Ann, so do ants inhabit old Emily.

The top of the door began to knock.

Sally Ann looked up at me expectantly.

"Aren't you going to answer it?"

"No," I said. "It's Edward and he wants to see you."

Sally Ann's forehead wrinkled.

"How do you know?"

The door knocked again, six feet off the ground.

"Shall I tell Edward that you're not receiving tonight?"

Sally jumped up and ran to open the door.

"Why, Edward!" she said. "What a surprise."

Edward has been dating Sally Ann for three months. They also get along just great. Sally Ann thinks they'll get engaged in another two or three months - Edward won't be able to afford the diamond before that time. Edward doesn't say much on the topic. He just looks down

through the 6'5" gap between his eyes and his shoes and smiles at the top of Sally Ann's head. Her head reaches midway between the fourth button on his shirt and the buckles of his belt. Edward has never seen Sally Ann in her naked bones.

"I thought I'd come over and help my little Sally Ann with her studies," said Edward. "And I brought a study break with me."

He was carrying two cans of Coke in his left hand.

"Oh, Edward," said Sally Ann. "It's so nice of you. Do you want a glass?"

Edward didn't. They sat together on the couch and 24 ounces of cold, bubbling brown cola vanished down their throats. My throat constricted several times in a sort of vicarious participation, but still it was so dry that not even words of polite conversation would come out. Finally I went into the red woman's bathroom and got a drink of water. When I came out, Edward was looking at an unopened letter on my desk. It was from the computer at my bank. We have no rapport and do not communicate which is why the letter was unopened.

"Why isn't the statement opened?" asked Edward.

Sally Ann stood next to him, beside my desk.

"She has a whole stack of them, unopened," said Sally.

Edward, the Math Major has a passion for numbers. At times it seems to rival his passion for Sally Ann. He turned toward me.

"Let me see your checkbook."

I raised both hands above my head slowly and flattened myself against the wall. Alarms were ringing frantically throughout the bank. One bell was ringing frantically throughout the bank. One bell was ringing two seconds ahead of all the others. Policemen were all running towards me; navy blue human revolvers closing in on me.

I handed Edward my green checkbook with its butterfly embossed cover. He looked down from 10 inches above me and I sank meekly to the couch. Edward sat down at my desk and began to figure in my checkbook. Sally Ann stood peeking over his shoulder and beaming maternally down at his neat rows of figures.

"You didn't subtract the 12 dollars for flowers," said Edward.

"I didn't know you bought any flowers," said Sally Ann. "You never told

(continued on back page)



A Snow Shovel/

Characters:

The Man – about 50

The Woman – his wife, dressed as a supermarket cashier

The Kid – about 20, always sitting in the chair facing upstage; all we see of him are his arms and legs which sometimes swing over an arm of the chair.

Scene: A small kitchen table with two folding chairs, and facing upstage a large overstuffed chair some distance from the table on an otherwise empty stage.

(As the lights come up the KID is in the large chair reading Sports Illustrated and whistling "Cheer, cheer for Old Notre Dame." Woman enters.)

WOM: Where is he? (She sets her bag of groceries on the table.) Where is he?

KID: He was here. For lunch.

WOM: Did he say he was going to the lumber yard? (Silence. KID snuffs.) No, I suppose you wouldn't know. (Starts unloading groceries.) That's where he went probably. The lumber yard. To get another goddam two - by - four. Should we wait supper?

KID: Not hungry.

WOM: No, I suppose you've been eating all day. Well, I guess I can wait. (Sits.) Did you hear the weather?

KID: Snow.

WOM: Ha ha ha ha ha! That weatherman has been saying snow for the last five days. You know, if he was right just once, I believe I would faint. I would fall right over on the floor and faint if that weatherman was right just once. (KID shifts position, snuffs.) Do you know, you can count, really count on it being just the opposite of what he says. Do you remember your birthday party we had when you were six? We were going to have that wienie roast in the yard but the weatherman said fair and mild so we switched to the basement. Ha ha. That was one time my system paid off. Rained so hard that nobody came. Remember? Where is he anyhow? He knows we eat at six - thirty.

KID: It's five to six.

WOM: You'd think he'd call. Did you do anything today?

KID: Read. (Snuffs.)

WOM: Tell him you went to town to look for a job. If he's in here long enough to ask you. Are you sure he didn't say he was going to the lumber yard?

KID: No.

WOM: That's where he went then. For another goddam two - by - four. What the hell is he building out there anyhow?

KID: He doesn't say.

WOM: He won't tell me. Every night he gobbles down his supper, doesn't say I, yes, or no, just gobbles it down and then rushes back out there to work on whatever the hell it is he's building out there. Do you know the last time we had a conversation after supper? I remember. It was fifteen years ago. The night before you started first grade. We ate supper together and did the dishes together and then all sat down and chatted. And you said, "Daddy, what's school like?" And he sort of laughed and said, "Well, it's like going to work," he said, "just like Daddy goes to work every day, you're going to go to school." And then you said, "Can I go to work with you, Daddy? Instead of going to school?" And he laughed and laughed. Like it was the funniest thing he ever heard. But that next day – he came home early, and he wasn't laughing, hasn't hardly laughed since. Something got into him that day. Now he doesn't laugh, hardly talks to me, hardly talks to you. He got something wrong with him, I tell you. He got –

KID: What he got, was fired.

WOM: What?

KID: Fired. That day I started school. He got fired.

WOM: He got laid off. And that's got nothing to do with it. He's always had respectable jobs, paid the bills, put a little away for your college –

KID: – I asked you –

WOM: Okay, I'm sorry. No, there's something wrong.

a play by Ken Pituch

Something really wrong. When you came home from school crying and ran up to him and sobbed, "Daddy, I hate it. I don't want to go to school," he didn't say a word, did he? Just sat you down in that chair and went out there. Christ, I think he flipped his lid! Where is he, for God's sake? (Silence. KID snuffs.) Might as well put these away. Yeah, I'd faint. I'd fall right over and faint if it snows. Ha ha. (Exits with some of the groceries. KID starts whistling 'Notre Dame song' again.)

Man enters, carrying a brand new snow shovel over his arm. The blade is wrapped in brown paper. He sneaks on stage, hides the shovel under the table. KID snuffs. MAN nervously looks at chair, realizes that KID doesn't see him, relaxes. WOM enters.)

WOM: About time. You could have called. Supper's ready. (Exits.)

(MAN turns to KID as if to speak. WOMAN enters with two dishes of Jello 1 - 2 - 3.)

WOM: Your supper's cold.

MAN: You're quite a cook.

WOM: No need to be sarcastic.

MAN: Is he eating?

WOM: He ate downtown. (They start eating)

MAN: (loudly) It's going to snow!

WOM: (laughs) No. He said it would snow. I'd fall over and faint if it did. Ha ha ha.

MAN: (Finishes supper.) It'll snow all right.

WOM: Are you drunk? You know it does just the opposite of what he says.

MAN: (Finishes supper.) It'll snow all right. I'm not drunk.

WOM: Don't tell me you're not drunk. You never talk like that unless you're drunk.

MAN: Ha ha ha ha ha.

WOM: I refuse to eat with a souse! (Exits)

MAN: Ha ha ha ha. Hey, what's for dessert? Ha ha ha ha. No. I'm not drunk. (Rises, picks up snow shovel, balances it with two hands, like a deer rifle.) Son?

KID: You talking to me? (Shifts position, snuffs, doesn't look up from reading the magazine).

MAN: I'd like to.

KID: I'm reading.

MAN: You must think I'm drunk, too.

(KID snuffs) I've got something I want to tell you. No. Something I want to talk over with you . . . (uneasy pause) . . . It's going to snow!

KID: I heard.

(The MAN's next speech begins slowly, hesitantly, but he gradually warms into it.)

MAN: It's really going to snow. Not because the weatherman said so or because the weatherman didn't say so or because there's a cold front running from the northern Rockies to the Texas panhandle and low pressure over Kansas and high pressure over Wisconsin . . . It's going to snow because . . . because . . . because it just is. It's going to snow. Tonight. (KID turns a page)

Tonight. You wait. It'll get cold. Not windy cold. Cold and still. Yeah. Cold and still and dark. The cold'll roll in from the north and blot out the moon and the stars. And even the streetlights and the neon bowling alley signs won't light up that darkness. Dark. Cold. Like the inside of a packing house. The cold and dark'll sneak in under the doors and creep through everybody's house. Through the storm windows. They'll click the heaters up and turn on another light, but it won't help. Colder and colder and darker and darker. Then they'll all crawl into bed and hide themselves between electric blankets and shiver under their flannel pajamas and try and sleep themselves out of the cold and dark.

And then, when everybody's shivering, it'll start. One of the biggest, whitest, lightest flakes you ever seen. From a mile up, it'll float down slow, real slow, like it knows its gonna make it sooner or later, cause their's only one way to go. Until finally it lands. And as soon as it does, 60 million other flakes see it's all right for them to come, too. So they all start floating in. Slow,

like the first one. But that's too slow for some. The ones in back start pushing the ones in front of 'em, so they push the ones in front of them and all that pushing makes such a hell of a wind that now they're all going so fast that they can't see they hit the ground and pile up in the front yards and the driveways and over the school buses on all the roads and the flat roofs cave in but it don't stop. Whiter and whiter piling up in the dark; up to the window sills, higher. All the snow plows get buried in it. But nobody knows it, cause they're all in the flannel pajamas, hiding. But when they get up in the morning they'll look out the window. All white. Oh, they'll think it's just frost, so they'll eat bacon and eggs and a half a grapefruit and put on their ties and kiss the wife and kids good - by and go to the front door - BUT IT WON'T OPEN! They'll be trapped. The snow'll pin them in their split - level, four - bedroom houses, and they'll panic 'cause they only got three more grapefruits and the garbage is already overflowing and it's getting colder, the snow's straining on the storm windows. All that snow. Tonight.

KID: Right.

MAN: Tonight. I know. I been waiting. Fifteen years I been waiting. Yes. It's going to snow. (Walks to the table.) That's why I bought . . . this (Rips off paper, shovel shines) for . . . for you. (Approaches chair.) It's for you.

KID: (Doesn't look up.) Thanks. (Turns another page.)

MAN: Let, let me explain. I finished it today. The business. I finished it. I went to the lumber yard and bought the last two - by - four and finished the business. Today. Just in time. So you just sit there for now. Rest up, son. Tonight it's going to snow, and we'll be out there in our own business, waiting to get to work. Together. You can have this new shovel. I'll use the old one. We'll show 'em tomorrow, we'll show 'em. Oh, it's going to snow. Ha ha ha ha.

(WOM enters, starts clearing the table.)

WOM: What the hell is that for?

MAN: We'll be ready.

(WOM looks at him, sighs, shakes her head, ignores him while she finishes clearing the table.)

MAN: My boy and I. We'll save this town.

(WOM exits.)

Oh, it's a fine business. I painted a sign. With our names on it. (KID snuffs.) You'll like shoveling. It's so white and light the first day. If you don't let it set it's always light and white. Tomorrow we'll be the only ones out there shoveling.

(Lights dim slightly.)

See that. It's starting already. Darker. Colder. Time we moved out to the business.

(KID snuffs.)

Get your coat. An extra sweater. Heavy socks. And a hat. It's time. . . 15 years . . . (He turns quickly to the chair.) It's time. Well, come on.

(Lights dim slightly more.)

Here, take your shovel and get your coat!

(KID shifts position.)

Hurry up son. Hurry. (Offers him the shovel.) It's time! Fifteen years! It's going to snow, it's going to snow! The business! Come on!

(KID turns another page.)

You don't have to go to school. Together, me and you. Take it. (KID snuffs.) Please, take it. Take it. You son of a bitch. Take it! (Strikes KID repeatedly with shovel.) Take it! Take it! Take it! Take it! TAKE IT! (Looks at shovel covered with blood; looks at chair. Lights dim more.) It's going to . . . snow. (Runs off.)

(WOM enters with a cup of coffee, sits at table.)

WOM: Did he go out there again? Do you know what the hell he's building? Is it getting colder in here or is it just me? Is that light bulb getting bad? Why can't I get a straight answer around this place?

BLACKOUT

I Don't Help Dwarves

(continued from front)

me. Were they for your mother or something?"

For the Or Something

"My mother's dead. She can't smell flowers anymore."

"You never told me," said Sally Ann. "We've roomed together for a month and you never told me."

Edward interrupted calmly.

"What did you do with the flowers?"

I ate them. I ate three dozen painted daisies. The pink ones were the best, I think. They have a rare flavor, like the sun on morning clouds before the dew is dry. But the yellow were my favorite. I ate them petal by petal, sepal after sepal, leaf by leaf, and finally the fine curving stem. Yellow were the main course, blue ones for dessert. I ate them, Edward - three gluttonous dozen of them.

"They were a gift," I said. "And I think it was \$12.50, not \$12."

Edward made another careful line through the \$12 entry.

"... now, \$10 to Anthony Althenberg, right?"

"Right."

It must be right if it's in the book.

Sally Ann was sitting across the room now, her foot jerking spasmodically, with wrinkles between her eyebrows and a few beginning to curve down around her mouth. Edward has never balanced her checkbook.

"Who?" asked Sally Ann.

"An-thony Al-then-berg," read Edward. The wrinkles turned toward me.

"I owed it to him," I said.

It was the least I could do after raping him.

"Was it \$10 even?" asked Edward.

"Yes."

I'd read somewhere that 10 was the going rate for prostitutes, so I thought Anthony wouldn't object to it. He looked as if even five would have been a help; his knees poked brazenly out of his jeans, his toes hung awkwardly out the ends of his canvas shoes. Anthony's second toes hanging from his left foot had a twitch. I looked down from the blank glass of the language lab booth late one Tuesday night and there it was, twitching at my right foot. My right foot had no idea that his left foot had a nervous tic and assumed it was some sort of a come-on. My right foot curled and retreated under my chair. But his second hanging toe kept twitching. My foot watched his for a while, but when there was no follow-up to that first overture, mine got braver and began to inch slowly toward him.

"J'ai un chien et un chat," I said. "UN chien et UN chat."

"Frau Schmidt ist gegangen," said Anthony.

My right foot was within four inches of his pulsating left.

"Alle leute sind gegangen," said Anthony. "All the people are gone."

The lab attendant was still there but by now my foot had been aroused beyond control or propriety. It leaped suddenly to Anthony's and smashed down along his naked toes.

"God!" yelled Anthony.

The lab attendant answered.

"Is something wrong, booth seven?"

My foot had retreated with haste and was resting innocently under my chair. Anthony's wire-rimmed glasses looked down at his violated left foot. The second toe hung more limply now, but still it twitched.

"I need a new tape," he mumbled and got up.

It was a deformity, not a come-on. Remorse engulfed my foot.

While he was exchanging his tape, my eyes slipped around the side of the booth partition and found his name on the cover of his German grammar text. Anthony Althenberg. 1518 West Canton Drive. I mailed him the check.

"This next one's all right," said Edward. "You subtracted that one right."

I smiled at him. Sally Ann's wrinkles were contorting again.

"Twenty - three ice cre . . . !"

Edward cut her short.

"You were \$64.83 off - subtracted wrong seven times, didn't record four checks, recorded one twice, and either you forgot to record some deposits or you've been overdrawn for two months."

"Did the letters say that I was overdrawn?"

"No."

"Then I guess I'm not."

Banks don't lie to customers. It's not ethical.

Sally Ann stood up and lifted her history book down from her half of the bookshelf.

"Edward," she said. "Aren't you going to help me with the Romans? I get so confused."

No, Edward told her. I don't help dwarves.

"Sure," he said, unfolding his legs.

"Come on little one."

He rose until his head was above the book shelf.

"Let's go study in the library."

He looked down through the 6'5" gap between his eyes and his shoes and smiled at the top of Sally Ann's head. Sally Ann thinks they'll probably get engaged in another two or three months - Edward won't be able to afford the diamond before then.

