

EXCERPT FROM **P A R A D E ! P A R A D E !** BY ALEXANDER LEE HALLAHAN

The club was on the second floor in the male toilets, I found my friend Nil Johnson standing around so we zipped on hard drink and light conversation while the toilets flushed easily behind us. From behind the bar the radio blazed real music and the dance area was busy, there were some good moves on display by management, but they'd stolen all of the best ones. They seemed happy with the outcome of the war raged and won against my customers, I couldn't care less except that I wished the treasure hunters had swung at least a few good punches. It's no fun knowing that one side won just because they were so well hidden. I could feel my mood careening so I left the club and I made my way to the Cafe on the third level.

I found a table and sat down, the chair was broken and rocked violently from side to side if I moved at all, but I figured that if I fell I'd have a better reason to be angry so I stayed put, also I could see my beloved sweating customer's hunting for their cheap discs if I rocked the chair to one side.

The cafe smelled like burnt pastry and coffee and the waxed wood floor reflected the pallid faces of the shoppers sitting around eating. The room was quietly buzzing from the halogen downlights and everyone was busy pretending to be exactly the same as each other. I was just about to stab myself in the hand with a fork when I picked up on a strange vibe from two women sitting at different tables talking to each other.

"Keep your legs crossed and your thoughts to yourself" said one woman, low in spirits and soft in voice, to another woman who sat tall and was strangely expressive, I liked her instantly. The tall woman smiled at the other lady and said, "I used to be fragile, but now I'm strong, I put two planks of wood crossed and tied tight down my posterior and now no one can bend my self pride."

I sat rigid, gripping the fork too tightly and even found myself chewing on it as the tall woman spoke. The other lady leapt out off her chair and sat on the giant woman's table, she was all at once switched on like a light, pulsing.

"I bet you're happy?" She asked and then continued, "Well, I believe in you, you're not afraid. If I had rope in my bag I'd tie it around your feet and fly you like a kite above us all, for everyone to see!"

She was so switched on that her fingers were clicking from the electric current pulsing through her. My feet were dancing in time beneath the table and I had my chair swinging like I was back in the club.

Then I noticed it, sadness - real sadness, slowly descending like a fog on the tall woman's face while there she was being praised so openly. She got shorter the more I looked at her, I was trying not to stare but I wondered who had hurt her so badly. She took her bag, stood up and said, "Don't be fooled into thinking I've found any answers, this is just what works for me. I still struggle with my own sense of self every time the sun sets." She looked around at the crowd of people staring at her, that goddamn woman's fingers and my goddamn feet had caused such a riot in that crazy wooden room that everyone had stopped talking and were staring at us. The other woman held her bag tight against her and moved slightly away from the table, "Oh, I feel a dark night coming." She said and she began to walk away but stopped and then said: "I can't stay here and talk anymore, I'm off to buy myself a car so that nobody recognises me as being different." She was right, that damn crowd in the Café *had* turned ugly, so I left the scene and headed back for the club where people generally go to have fun and wash up.