

THERE WAS A YOUNG FEMALE CLERK

in the lunchroom telling two much older women about the time she stepped on a garter snake in her grandmother's yard.

"Oh," she said, "it really scared me. I don't like snakes. But I was sorry for killing it. The little thing was so small."

I stared at the young woman's soft, white blouse, worn so tight against her trunk that her nipples pressed impressively outward. The two bumps rode tall and brown and I had a hard-on.

Oh, how I wished I could've been there to comfort her in her moment of trauma. I would have held her close to me and put my mouth to her ear and told her things, how it was all going to be all right, how it was good luck to make love after squashing a snake.

The daydreams of poets are so predictable.

— Robert W. Howington

Fort Worth TX

THE CHALLENGE

In the dream, Joe Louis was still alive but he was an old man and this woman named Patty Dukes wanted him to fight her for the Heavyweight Championship of the World. "Lady, I don't want to fight no prize fight," Joe told her. "I'm ninety-five years old. I ain't been in the ring since World War II." "You're afraid to fight a woman," Patty accused. "I ain't afraid to fight a woman," Joe said. "I don't want to fight no woman."

I'm retired." Patty kept dancing around him with her fists up, snuffling through her nose. "And you call yourself a liberal," she said. "I didn't call myself a liberal," Joe said. "If you was a liberal, you'd fight me," Patty said. "Some of the liberals I know couldn't fight your grandma," Joe told her. "You must know a different kind of liberal than I do. The ones I know they just like to talk." Patty was still dancing around him, throwing punches. Old as he was, Joe Louis would still have made two of her. "Besides," Joe said, dodging a punch, "I couldn't fight you if I wanted to. You too little. You couldn't make the weight." "That's a coward's statement if I ever heard one," Patty said. Joe walked back over to his rocking chair and sat down. "Ain't no coward's statement. That's a boxing commission's statement. You too little." He picked up his newspaper and started reading and Patty stood there a minute with her duked up, then she started to cry. Joe looked up in alarm. "Nobody takes us liberated women seriously," Patty said. "I take you seriously," Joe told her placatingly. "That's why I don't want to get in the ring with you." "That's it, isn't it? Patty said. "You are scared, aren't you?" "Scared to death," Joe admitted. "Well, that's something anyway," Patty said, dancing away, throwing punches. Joe sat scratching his head for a minute, then went back to his paper.

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

I'll tell you what's wrong with a lot of these guys: they use the fuckin f-word too much. It's like every fuckin time they can't think of a fuckin word, they use the fuckin f-word. That shows a distinct fuckin lack of imagination. I mean, Man, that's a fuckin cliché. Now I intend to rise above all that. The next fuckin poem I write isn't going to have a single fuckin f-word in it, not one, I mean no-fuckin-where.

— Albert Huffstickler

Austin TX