

CutBank

Volume 1
Issue 48 *CutBank* 48

Article 7

Fall 1997

She Was So

Frank Groebner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Groebner, Frank (1997) "She Was So," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 48 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss48/7>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

SHE WAS SO

26

Listen. I will tell you two things: the first will be a jumble—but quick—while the second you might not even notice. I want to tell you about *sex* and *death*. It is likely this will not be the first time you have heard this story told this way. Of course, I will use props. You can imagine.

25

Now I am twenty-six. The day I turned ten was the first time I talked with her alone. As I ate some pineapple bundt cake, Mrs. Welsimmons stomped down the stairs of our apartment building, after a phone call from St. Louis, and related to me, because my mother—her Avon Lady—was in the shower, all the ways in which Mr. Welsimmons was, *bar-none*, the dullest man in the world. Do you have any idea how that must be for me? she asked. Yes and no, I told her. She sat down and ate some cake. She touched my shoulder. All at once, Mrs. Welsimmons lit a cigarette and asked me if I wanted one.

24

My mother was an insomniac. To cure herself, she played Albert Collins records at low volumes in the kitchen, at night. Sometimes I danced with her. She drank wine and sashayed in flouncy dresses while my father watched. While I danced with her. You understand, my father was an ugly man, a poor dancer. He sold cigars. Or else he sat in the kitchen chair. He told my mother, you are too pretty for me, Lily. Too pretty for me. Sometimes he clapped along. Before you, she said, I slept with a lot of men, you know. No, he said, I didn't know that. She kissed him. He kissed her. They groped out of sequence. Now I am an insomniac. Safe to say, though, I would have been a poor seller of cigars. My mouth gets dry and I mix up words when I speak. I sweat. Sometimes at night, though, I think I

could sell cars. Mrs. Welsimmons was the Human Razor Blade, so to speak.

23

Didn't my father talk more than most fathers about old American cars: Edsels, Studebaker Hawks, Hudson Hornets, the old Nash Rambler? Certainly he missed spots shaving. He hit his head on things. He got fat. For all I know of my father, he might have sold both cigars and cars. He might have done it secretly, at night.

22

I stole money from my father's wallet and bought a Kodak camera to take pictures of her. I climbed the fire escape through mist. Her bathroom lights were on. On the wet ladder, my hand slipped, my shin slammed the rung, and I dropped the camera, which shattered on the head of a parking meter below. Fuck. I held still. My shin bled through my pant leg.

21

I saw Mrs. Welsimmons with her clothes off every night for two years in a row. It was her idea. She asked me—point blank—if I wanted to see her naked, and I said that I did. She just asked, stepped out of the shower, and showed herself to me. Of course, I memorized parts. She had long sandy-blond pubic hair. Her thighs touched. Her belly-button poked out. Wrapped in a towel, Mrs. Welsimmons told me all the things she wanted to cook me for dinner. She offered a quick tour of her apartment. I said I had to go. She said she would call me later. Wait. No, she didn't. This is all wrong. Mostly wrong. She hemmed my pants. I asked her to undress for me and she said maybe, if I came back around eight o'clock, but maybe not.

20

For years, it seemed, she baited me.

19

He ripped up her favorite dress. He said she would rot in hell.

In retaliation, Mrs. Welsimmons threw his golf clubs at him. He called her a slut. O.K., fine, when was the last time you wanted it? she asked. I have no idea, he answered. Answer *this* she said. She threw the telephone at his head. It missed, broke through a window—the cord jerked tight but held in the wall—and after the pendulum arc of its fall the phone smacked into the side of the building, *exploding*, while the receiver, still swinging from its own cord hooked into the remnants of the phone, smashed through a window in my parents' apartment one floor below. My mother stopped flouncing. What the hell? she said. Then, before she could stop herself, she asked, should we—how do you say it?—call the *phone*? My father sat up. Don't move! he shouted. It might be the police calling us! But I knew and ran upstairs with a knife and kicked at their front door, which didn't open. Hey, it's dark out here, I said. Let me in.

18

The first time we understood each other, we sat in my parents' kitchen and ate soup. The more she slurped, the more I slurped. I remember the way she slid the spoon into her mouth. Would you like some crackers with that soup? I said. A glass of milk? This orange? But she kept tapping her fingernail against her bowl, while I just ate soup and waited for her to stop.

17

Invariably, it was the way her hips swivelled that amazed me.

16

This I overheard, later: Mrs. Welsimmons said to Mr. Welsimmons, Henry, where the hell are my panty hose? You said they were on the radiator, but they're not. They're just not. What Mr. Welsimmons said back sounded like *dench, my neck*. I bumped my head on the door. Mr. Welsimmons called out, it's open! Mrs. Welsimmons said, Jesus, Henry, *Christ*. Who is it? Mr. Welsimmons called out, come in! God-dammit, Henry! Mrs. Welsimmons hissed, whatever you do, don't get up! What? said Mr. Welsimmons. You're fucking deaf, Henry, said Mrs.

Welsimmons, you just stay put! *I'm the bare-naked one! I'll go answer the door!* But I ran downstairs. On the fourth step from the bottom, I jumped.

15

At eight o' clock, Mrs. Welsimmons squeezed into my pants and walked like a duck around the kitchen. We both cracked up. Mrs. Welsimmons looked more like a duck than anyone I had ever seen. I told her so.

14

I stood above her at the apartment pool deck, dripping water on her breasts. Hey, she said, cut it out. I shook my head. She hooted, whooped, grabbed my ankles. I tried to hop. To walk through her apartment it went: hallway, kitchen, hallway, bathroom, bed.

13

Mrs. Welsimmons had the skinniest ankles I had ever seen. Nobody ever understood how she could stand. She was pigeon-toed, too. As a consequence, she swaggered. Yet her kneecaps were perfect circles, her thighs thick. On top, she had heavy, low-slung breasts. In the summer, I made love to her for the first time on the fire escape while my parents watched TV. She licked my ears more than I expected. She said, fuck, fuck. She was so wet. I came. Later I was standing on a chair while she put pins in the cuffs of my favorite pants.

12

Mrs. Welsimmons taught me a card trick where all the jacks and queens end up face to face, all the kings disappear. After that, I always wanted to play twenty-one. She never did. Instead, she liked to turn the TV on loud. We watched game shows together, before noon. After noon, she took naps. In her sleep, she spoke in short bursts of words. *The heels of her boots*, she'd say, or *Eisenhower*, *panty hose*, *shoot*.

11

In August, unexpectedly, Mr. Welsimmons took his own life. With his own hand.

10

While my mother was in the bathtub, Mrs. Welsimmons asked me to undress for her, but I was too shy. My mother *is in the bathtub*, I said. So what? she said, and tugged at my sleeve. She wore a button-up sweater. She tried to unbutton it. I panicked, grabbed the phone, and ran out of the room. That night, we kissed on the love seat.

9

I stood with Mr. Welsimmons on the fire escape, pinched between the brick wall and his belly. I found your underpants in my bed, he said. I asked my wife about it. She said to ask you. No she didn't. She wouldn't have. I knew better. Those are your initials written on the waist-band, right? he said, pointing. Yep, I said, that's me. The F stands for Frank.

8 a.m.

Here is a recurrent dream. Dreams pique only the dreamer, I know this, still: I sit on a toilet, with a tuxedo on, in the middle of my parents' kitchen during a cocktail party. Mrs. Welsimmons—who looks unexpectedly savvy, her hair is done up, she wears black—sort of bursts in through the swinging kitchen doors with a parrot in one hand and a platter of vegetables in the other. The whole thing—the whole dream—somehow takes on the trappings of a bad joke. To stop it, I shout—*Give me that parrot!* or *Give it!* or *Hand it here!* from the toilet. Suddenly, it is only her and me. Can you *imagine* being frozen alive? Mrs. Welsimmons asks me. The *slowness* is what she means. The *calm*. I ask again for the parrot. She ignores me. I can, she says. Every time.

7

Mr. Welsimmons' appendix burst in his sleep. In the emergency

room, Mrs. Welsimmons told me it was a close call, her husband is a heavy sleeper. I trusted her. She had thick, almost purple lips. We stepped into the shadows.

6

You fidget too much, she told me, stop fidgeting.

5

Once every summer there was a heat wave. Everything dripped. In the midst of record-breaking humidity, Mr. Welsimmons' lungs collapsed one night in his sleep and he died soundlessly.

4

Disclaimer number four: In the absence of a good excuse to think otherwise, Mrs. Welsimmons was my lover through the best of my post-pre-pubescent years, even though she told me it was never any good for her. *Is that it?* she would ask me. *Is that all?* I, of course, denied it, and, in turn, now deny my disclaimer. Hurry up, I would tell her. You move too slow.

3

At my parents' anniversary party, Mrs. Welsimmons sat with her legs crossed in an old wicker chair I had never seen before. She spoke and smiled with two fat men who hovered over her, eating pretzels, men I had never met. The heel strap of Mrs. Welsimmons' high-heel shoe had slipped off her foot, the foot that she kept pointing, *on purpose*, I thought, at the two men. But now she bobbed this foot distractedly, and sort of shook it, in order to get the strap to slip back on. And she kept failing. The shoe had no hope, no hope at all, until, I think, everyone in the room expected Mrs. Welsimmons' ankle to snap.

2

Mr. Welsimmons shattered his clavicle in a car crash. Prior to that he spent hours pacing in front of a church wearing a misbuttoned coat. Eventually, he was arrested. In turn the local

paper ran an article. When he read it, Mr. Welsimmons said, good Christ, I look fat.

1

Mr. Welsimmons died, it's a shame to say, after losing a long bout to melancholia and old age. The whole apartment building attended the funeral. We will never forget him, we all said, not ever. Night fell. There was a phone call from St. Louis. Hello? said the preacher, Hello? Hello? My father passed out cigars. After a while, he ran out. My mother went downstairs to find another box. The cigars weren't where she thought they would be. Nine times out of ten, they never were. Hold still a minute, Mr. Welsimmons used to like to grab me by the ears, what we're talking about here is: look at you.