

MY FIRST DIRTY PICTURE

by Susie Bright

Cartoonist Robert Crumb told me that the first dirty picture he ever saw was a ten-second glimpse of something his older brother was circulating on the playground. Big brother was subsequently caught pink-handed and suspended. "It was a naked lady," Robert recalls, "With great big tits."

Female masturbation guru Betty Dodson, who's older than Robert but of the same generation, told me she drew her own first dirty picture. Furthermore, she got away with it. Betty remembers that her girlfriends dared her. They said she didn't know how a man and woman did it. She said, "Do so!" and dashed off a man with an enormous dick entering a woman with an equally huge vagina. She surprised herself.

I grew up in the sixties, so my first dirty picture was a photograph. I discovered it when I was in fifth grade, playing around after school off Baldwin Avenue, a suburban main drag in the San Gabriel Valley.

I was scoping out one of several undeveloped lots. People dumped stuff there; I found all kinds of garbage treasures they'd discarded, and I also used it as a site to hide my best clothes. I left early for school every morning to make a quick change on the road after my mother had approved my attire.

This was 1968, and I had two secret skirts that my mother had thrown away but I had rescued because they were finally short

enough. She wanted my skirts down to my knees. She wanted me to wear saddle shoes, too. But I had a pair of Adidas stashed in one particular tree. I liked to find new places for future stashes.

Those Adidas represented wishful thinking: not only did I have secret clothes, I also had secret friends, girls who would no more want to be seen with me, an unpopular brain, on campus, than I would want to be seen in Oxfords.

Jessie Nelder was a friend like that. She was cool; she had long blond ironed hair and paisley mini-dresses. Her parents were hippies who put marijuana in their spaghetti sauce, and she really liked to hang out with me-after school hours. We were both aficionados of Harriet the Spy, evacuators of vacant lots and garbage dumps.

There was one thicket of bushes on this particular vacant lot that was perfect for hiding, ideal for spying. It was a fort of thick prickles with an empty space inside, a dusty nest. We found it on a spring afternoon, just before the early smog alert days. We loved it. Jessie and I picked through it like expertly, and I said, "I feel like I'm in a mouse cage, this place is filled with shredded Kleenex."

I kicked away at the muddy tissues and then, I found the prize. It was a shoebox-size black patent leather purse. It was shiny and perfect for dress-up, and when I unsnapped the gold buckle, I exposed a soft peach satin lining. Jessie grabbed it from me, and a handful of Polaroids fell out.

"Shit," she said. I didn't say anything. The first photo I looked at was a man's body, overexposed and yellow, wearing a bra, holding his penis. The white straps crossing his jaundice-colored chest

disturbed me right off the bat, and I could only look at his dick out of the corner of my eyes. In contrast to his shiny limbs, it looked like a big red hot dog. I wouldn't eat hot dogs for quite a while after that.

All the pictures had the same man in women's underwear, and some of them had a woman taking his penis in her mouth. I can't be certain what the woman was doing in the photographs because I couldn't hold still to give them a second look.

One glimpse at that skinny man in a brassiere and I was trembling. I was sure he was coming back, he was coming back any minute, he was crazy, he would kill us.

Jessie was absolutely unconcerned about what he was going to do to us, and totally exhilarated about what we were going to do to him. She was the one who claimed the woman was "performing fellatio."

I'd never head that word before, and when she said it, it appeared as a bubble in my head: "filet-show"-some sort of horrible show.

There was also tube of red lipstick in the purse. I remember that shade of lipstick more than anything else; it was flaming. Jessie, the eagle eye, noticed that it was the same color that the man was wearing on his lips in the picture. "We'll show him!" she said, and started to squish the soft red wax into the ground.

"No, no!" I begged her, "What are you doing?" I wanted to leave everything as we had found it, without a trace of our presence.

'What am I doing?' Jessie said, excited even more by my desperation. "What is he doing? He's sick," she said, and with that inspi-

ration she took what was left of the lipstick and scrawled “You’re Sick” on the side of the patent leather purse.

“We’ll never be able to come back here again,” I said. If Jessie had read Harriet the Spy more carefully, she would have known that the whole point is to leave everything as it was, so you can come peek at it over and over again.

I went back to those bushes alone the next day. I was nervous, but I had to see if he had returned. The thicket had been cleared out. I was so angry at Jessie for scaring him away. I wanted to look at the pictures again; I’d somehow crossed from terrified sissy to persistent voyeur overnight. But there were only a few torn-up pieces of Kleenex left behind.

I had, on Baldwin Avenue, all the elements of a pornographic experience. I felt the secrecy, the excess, the fear of violent reactions, the quease of perversion.

“You’re sick, I’m scared, he’s going to pay, and the show is over before you know it.” I think that’s a pretty typical feminine experience of porn. I didn’t look at another dirty picture until I was nineteen years old.

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