

## A DUAL VIEWPOINT STORY

Mike Ellis

Arnold reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out his cigarettes. He took one out of the pack and lit it. Taking a deep puff he looked over to Karen.

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

She dropped her head and began to sob. Her lips curled into her mouth and she quickly shook her head.

"You've been awfully quiet," he said. "Isn't there something that's bothering you?"

Wiping her blue eyes with her fingers, Karen looked at him. Her expression implied a plea for understanding.

"Something must have happened over there in Finland that you ought to tell me about. What is it?"

Arnold took another puff on his cigarette. What could have happened that she's so upset, he thought. He couldn't think what he'd done that was so wrong. Sure he still smoked dope and he'd dropped out of school, but those were things they'd gotten over a long time ago.

"Come on. Can't you talk to me any more?"

Karen looked away. She's getting more distant from me, he thought. Maybe he shouldn't have gone away to work in Iowa. She still said she loved him, even though she'd gone on dates with other guys. That was the agreement they had. He didn't like her going out with other guys, but she didn't care for his smoking dope too much either. Couldn't she understand the difference?

Arnold took one more puff and put the cigarette out.

"Karen, if you would only tell me what's bothering you."

She took a deep breath and looked into his eyes. Reaching for his hand she grasped it and spoke.

"I met this guy in Finland."

"Yeah, so? Did you go out with him?"

"Yeah."

"Much?"

"Uh huh."

"Was he a friend of Erna's?"

"Yes."

"Well, so what? You've gone out with other guys before."

"This was different."

"Why?"

Karen looked away and began to sob again. Arnold released his hand from her grasp and held her shoulders with both his hands. He shook her gently and with one hand moved her face around to look directly at her.

"What did you do, Karen?"

"Arnold, I love you."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't love him. He was just so gentle."

"Karen!"

"Oh Arnold, I'm so sorry."

"You slept with him, didn't you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"How many times?"

She shook her head away from Arnold's hold and sobbed into her hands.

"Twice."

Arnold stood up. He reached up and rubbed his eyes with one hand and began to pace. How could she do it to him? He'd never even been out with another girl, let alone slept with one. He could see it coming, he thought. He knew it would happen once she went away to school. What did her sorority sisters say about him? "Oh what a dud. He doesn't have a job, he's not in school, and all he does is smoke dope." So what? What the hell difference does that make? But god damn! If she was going to dump him why did she have to do it like that? Especially when they were still supposed to be engaged.

"Karen, do you still want to see me?"

She looked up quickly. "Do you?"

"I don't know. I guess what you did means you don't want to see me."

"I thought you didn't want to see me any more when you went away to Iowa."

Sitting back down, Arnold put his arm around her. She turned her head away.

"Karen, that was already after you'd gone out with a few guys at school. And besides, I came back, didn't I?"

"Oh, Arnold."

"Aren't you glad I did?"

"Yes," she said tentatively.

"Well, aren't you?"

"Arnold, what are you going to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean are you going to get a job and quit smoking dope?"

"Oh, god. You're sure one to talk after what you did."

"What difference does it make? You don't love me."

"Of course I do. We're engaged!"

"You're not ready to take any responsibilities. I don't want to live on welfare."

Arnold took his arm from around her. The dumb little bitch. Still the same old line. He couldn't believe it. After what she'd done to him she still wanted him to "settle down."

"What about you? If I were to settle down, would you still go out and sleep with any guy you wanted to?"

"Arnold!"

"Well? I think what you've done to me is a hell of a lot worse than what I ever did to you. Smoking dope never hurt you personally."

Karen began to cry, with mixed sadness and rage. She breathed heavily and lashed out at Arnold.

"You hurt me a long time ago, Arnold."

"What do you mean?"

"You promised me when we first started going out that you'd never ask me to go to bed with you."

"You wanted to as much as I did."

"Sure I did. But I thought it would be better for after we got married."

"We were going to get married anyway."

"I know. So why couldn't you accept the responsibility of marriage?"

So that was it, he thought. She still hadn't forgiven him for that. What difference did it make? They were going to get married. Why not do it right away if they loved each other? That still didn't excuse what she'd done in Finland. Arnold figured that he just couldn't live with that.

"I guess this is it, Karen."

She turned her head to him rapidly.

"What do you mean?"

"Infidelity's the one thing I can't put up with."

Karen's eyes and mouth opened wide. She began to moan as she put both hands to the sides of her head and cried. Arnold fought off



tears as well.

"I hate to do it, Karen. But it was your choice. I'm sorry."

Wiping tears from his eyes, Arnold stood up. He put his hand on Karen who lay on the couch, sobbing uncontrollably.

"I'm sorry, Karen. I'm so sorry."

He picked up his jacket and wiped his eyes off with the sleeve. Putting the jacket on he crossed the floor, opened the door, and left.

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Sitting on the couch, Karen wrung her hands as Arnold lit a cigarette. After he had exhaled the smoke, he spoke.

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

She began to cry. Oh god! What will he say, she thought. Why did he come back? It would have been so much better if he'd stayed in Iowa. She shook her head.

"You've been awfully quiet," he said. "Isn't there something that's bothering you?"

Oh, Arnold, she thought. It seemed like he had left her for good when he went to Iowa. Karen wiped her eyes. If he only knew. If he knew what it was he wouldn't want her to tell him.

Arnold spoke again.

"Something must have happened over there in Finland that you ought to tell me about. What is it?"

Taking another puff on his cigarette, Arnold looked down at the floor. He had made her do it. He'd driven her to it. He had cheapened her. She had given him her virginity and he'd left her like that. Oh god. I'm nothing, she thought.

"Come on. Can't you talk to me any more?" Arnold said.

She looked away. Sure, she'd tell him. It wouldn't make any difference any more. After what he'd done to her, why not?

Putting out his cigarette, Arnold pleaded one more time.

"Karen, if you would only tell me what's bothering you."

She took a deep breath and grasped his hand.

"I met this guy in Finland."

"Yeah, so? Did you go out with him?"

"Yeah."

"Much?"

"Uh huh."

"Was he a friend of Erna's?"

"Yes."

"Well, so what? You've gone out with other guys before."

"This was different."

"Why?"

She turned her head away and began to cry. Did she have to spell it out for him? It should be obvious by now. Taking his hand from hers, Arnold held her shoulders with both hands and shook her gently. He reached for her chin with one hand and brought her face into a direct gaze at his.

"What did you do, Karen?"

"Arnold, I love you."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't love him. He was just so gentle."

"Karen."

"Oh Arnold. I'm so sorry."

"You slept with him, didn't you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"How many times?"

Why was he so mean, she thought. She shook her head from his hold and sobbed into her hands.

"Twice."

Arnold stood up and began to pace. He rubbed his eyes, trying to conceal his tears. She was so sorry. She wished she had never met Arnold. What a mess her life had become. It was great to be in love with him for a while, she thought, but things were so different after they had begun sleeping together. He'd promised her that they'd never do it. And then he started smoking dope and he quit school. She was no better than any whore, she thought. Why did he have to go to Iowa? They were supposed to be engaged.

"Karen, do you still want to see me?"

Looking up quickly, she saw the pain on Arnold's face. What a question to ask, she thought. She had always wondered that about him.

"Do you?"

"I don't know. I guess what you did means you don't want to see me."

"I thought you didn't want to see me any more when you went away to Iowa."

Arnold sat down and put his arm around her.

"Karen, that was already after you'd gone out with a few guys at school. And besides, I came back, didn't I?"

That doesn't matter, she thought. The damage, the hurt, was already done. He should never have left.

"Oh, Arnold."

"Aren't you glad I did?"

"Yes," she said tentatively. He had only made things worse. Now she didn't know what to do.

"Well, aren't you?"

"Arnold, what are you going to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean are you going to get a job and quit smoking dope?"

"Oh, god. You're sure one to talk after what you did."

"What difference does it make? You don't love me."

"Of course I do. We're engaged."

"You're not ready to take on any responsibilities. I don't want to live on welfare."

Quickly he took his arm from around her and scowled. He turned to her again and exploded.

"What about you? If I were to settle down would you still go out and sleep with any guy you wanted to?"

What a thing to say, she thought. It would never have happened if he hadn't left her.

"Arnold!"

"Well? I think what you've done to me is a hell of a lot worse than what I ever did to you. Smoking dope never hurt you personally."

She began to cry with a mixed pain and rage. What a fool, she thought. That wasn't it, Arnold. That wasn't what hurt her. Couldn't he see? If they had never gone to bed like she had begged him, he could still smoke all the dope he wanted. She had given herself to him. That was a responsibility, not to mention the ones that went with it. How could he be so cruel?

"You hurt me a long time ago, Arnold."

"What do you mean?"

"You promised me when we first started going out that you'd never ask me to go to bed with you."

"You wanted to as much as I did."

"Sure I did. But I knew it would be better after we got married."

"We were going to get married any way."

"I know. So why couldn't you learn to accept the responsibility of marriage?"

Arnold looked disgusted. Yes, that's it, she thought. Responsibility.

"I guess this is it, Karen."

She turned her head to him rapidly.

"What do you mean?"

"Infidelity's the one thing I can't put up with."

He had done it to her again. He's leaving and calling me a whore, she thought. She opened her eyes and mouth with hurt and shock and began to cry wildly. If he was going to leave why did he have to come back and torture her?

"I hate to do it, Karen. But it was your choice. I'm sorry."

Her life meant nothing. What would she do? She had slept with two different people now, but no one loved her. A whore. She was a whore. He patted her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Karen. I'm so sorry."

She heard sobbing. Maybe he'll stay, she thought. Maybe he's hurt too. But before she looked up, Arnold had crossed the floor and opened the door. What would she do, she thought. What would she do?

The greatest happiness in the world is the conviction that we are loved, loved for ourselves, or rather loved in spite of ourselves.

Victor Hugo