

## A Short Story by Stephen Alexander Miller

Bicks sat at his computer staring at the screen, listening to the soul of Minnie Riperton flow out of his dual-cassette deck. He turned his head and looked at the door to his room, hoping that someone would come and disturb him.

BAM-BAM-BAM!

He smiled and said, "Yo!"

No reply.

"I said it's open, you dumb shit!" He knew it was Canter.

Canter opened the door and walked through with his long strides. "Yo, wuddup."

"Man, why can't you knock like a normal person? Naw, I guess that's just too much to ask from you."

Canter closed the door, sat on the bed, and examined Bick's room. His eyes focused on the kente cloth draped over the mirror. Bicks leaned back in his chair and let his hands fall in his lap. "Man, what the fuck you want? You see I'm trying to write this paper."

Canter sucked his teeth. "Man, you ain't writin' shit."

"I said I was 'trying' ta write this damn paper. I didn't say I was writin' it." Bicks noticed the expression on Canter's face. It wasn't his normal life-is-pretty-cool-face. "What's goin' on."

"Me and Dana are goin' out."

"Aaawwww, shit! Well go ahead, brotha . . . So why you look so down, man?"

"She's white," Canter said, as he shifted his eyes to the map of Africa.

"Yeah, so."

"I didn't even think about it until we walked into the cafeteria. Man, I walked past some of the black folk and they just kept staring." Canter's face became a frown.

"Yo, you know you gonna have ta put up with that shit from white and black." Malcolm pushed his chair back and stood up. He walked over to the closet, pulled down a package of incense and asked, "Is that gonna bother you?" He lit a match. He held the tip of the stick of incense onto the tip of the match. The flame brightened, happy that it had something else to burn. Bicks, not realizing the happiness of the flame, ripped it in half and blew out the match. He watched the incense get red than killed the flame on the end of the stick.

"Naw, it's not gonna bother me." Canter threw

his arms up. "But why they gotta act like that?"

Bicks tossed the match with the rest of the half-burnt matches, then put the stick in its holder. "You like her?"

"Naw, I'm just going out with her just for the hell of it."

Bicks stared at the swirls of smoke lingering in the air. He tried to imagine Canter and Dana walking through the cafeteria at dinner. This school is so damn small, everybody gotta know your business, he thought.

"Man, when we're in her room, I don't even think about it. But when we're anywhere else, it's on my mind. I'll tell you . . ."

"Yo, man, be cool. You gettin' all hyped up over nothin'."

"I know . . . but that shit gets to me."

"Yeah, and?"

"It's fucked up."

"No. It's life." Bicks walked back to his chair, turned it to face Canter, and put his feet on the desk. "I told you 'bout that girl I went out with last year, right? She was white and nobody said shit."

"Nobody said shit to yo' face."

"Yeah, awright. You got that one."

"Man, you know what's really fucked up is all the black girls goin' round saying that all I want is a white girl."

"Aww, man, fuck that. You know some uh dem petty anyway. Plus, I don't see any of them tryin' ta keep us."

Bicks slid out of his seat. He sauntered over to the dual-cassette deck and changed Minnie Riperton to Bob Marley. "I bet alluh her friends are askin' her, 'Does he really have a big one?' "

"You buggin'."

"Oh, Canter," Bicks said pretending to be Dana, "I'll never go back to a white again. They could never do for me what you can."

"Aw, man, git outta here. You know it ain't like that."

"How you know?"

"That's not right, man."

Canter rose off the bed and went over to the mirror. He put his hands on both sides of his head, touched up his Fade, and said, "Damn, I look good."

Bicks shook his head as he put the empty tape case back in the cassette briefcase. "Man, don't you have homework to do?"

"Nope."

"Get the fuck out. I gotta paper to write."

"Damn. Awright, man, peace."

Bicks watched Canter stride out of his room.

"Later."

"Okay. I'll meet you in the lobby in a few minutes." Canter hung up the phone, threw on his coat, and walked quickly out of his room. Passing through the T.V. room, he saw Sly with his eyes transfixed to the moving pictures in the box. Canter jumped in front of the huge screen T.V. holding his coat open.

Sly looked up. "Man, what the fuck you doin'? Would you get out of my way?"

Canter started dancing to the music from the video.

"Man, would you get your doofy-lookin-Cosby-no-dancin'-ass out of my way."

Canter started dancing to the music from the video.

"You goin' to dinner?"

"Yeah. I'll be there after the Soul Countdown goes off. Now move! This babe is fine!" Canter finally stepped out of Sly's view to reveal a dark-skinned woman in very little black material that covered only the parts that were not allowed to be shown, grinding against the air. Canter backed out of the T.V. room.

He ran up the stairs to the lobby and found Dana waiting for him. "How'd you get down here so fast?"

"My secret," she said, hugging him. "I haven't seen you all day." She held onto Canter, then gave him one of those kisses that makes you totally oblivious to everything around you for a minute or so.

A group of students poured from the doors that led to the rest of the dorm. Some went and checked their mailboxes; some headed straight for the front door, intent on getting to dinner as soon as possible; others just wandered about the lobby, waiting for their friends to join them. Amidst the confusion of students fumbling around the lobby, one stopped and stared at the couple kissing with a disgusted look on his face.

Canter opened his eyes and found this other student, probably an athlete, he thought, looking back at him. The intruder had bulky arms, a bulky neck, a pair of sweats, and that wear-'n-go hair.

"Well . . . gotta problem," asked Canter.

The hair guy didn't say anything.

"Damn, man. People act like they ain't never seen anyone kiss before."

Dana turned to see who her new boyfriend was talking to. "Uh, Canter . . . Canter. Ignore him. I've seen him around before. He's an ass."

"I can't believe you would even be seen with him

in public," said the Hair quietly, but loud enough for Canter to hear.

Canter's eyes opened wide in disbelief. "Naw. Hold up. What the fuck you mean by that," he asked, not really expecting an answer.

"You heard me."

"You got somethin' against black people?"

"Yeah."

Canter walked over to the Hair with his hands pointing at his face. "Man, you fucked up in the head."

The hair shoved Canter. "So what are you going to do about it?"

"Don't fucking touch me."

Dana grabbed Canter's arm and tried to pull him back. She felt the muscles in his arm tighten, then shake from the anger that jetted through him.

Canter glanced at Dana. But before he could tell her to go away, he saw an arm coming at him. In one motion, he blocked the punch that was near his face, pushed Dana back, swung his leg into some ribs, then nailed his fist dead into an eye. Blood and a cry of pain came from the Hair's face.

A crowd appeared around the scene. Some were there holding Canter back, some were attending to the Hair, but most were just being nosey. The security of the school just happened to be in the building when the Hair was laid out, so it took no time for them to show up.

Before Canter knew it, he was being led out of the dorm toward one of the security cars. Still boiling with rage, he tried to free himself of the security guards. A knee found its way into his back. His free leg broke that knee. An elbow slammed into his stomach. Two more pair of dirty hands grabbed, pushed, and pulled him to the snow-covered ground. Canter heard voices yelling around him.

"Canter, stop!"

"Yo! Chill, Money!"

"Get the fuck off him!"

"You get the hell outta here you little shit!"

"Touch me again and you goin' wid him."

"FUCK YOU!"

The Dean sat behind that big wooden desk that most Deans sit behind, protected. Canter sat in a chair against a wall without a desk to shield him. A window to the right, some certificates hung in some cute little design, and a glass wall between him and the Dean. The Dean looked at Canter, then at some papers on his desk, then back at Canter.

"Gene Canter. I have seven affidavits saying that you started the fight."

"WHAT! That's crazy! He threw a punch at me first!"

"I don't think these seven people would lie, do

you?"

"Hell, yeah—That's not what happened. That stupid sonofa—whatever his name is . . ."

"Larry."

"Larry' said how can my girlfriend be seen in public with me."

"That's no reason to get into a fight."

"It's what he meant."

"What did he mean?"

Canter didn't answer. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Only the hum of the building's intestines was heard.

"Larry's family is pressing charges and we have decided to place you on probation."

"For what? Defending myself?"

"We have witnesses saying that you kicked and punched Larry for no reason."

"No reason. That—that boy is a racist!" Canter wanted to scream and tell the Dean about the stares of hatred and fear from other students because of his 'white' girlfriend; about feeling like an alien because of being the only black in a class; about his English professor being suprised that he knew anything about Greek tragedies; about how he walked around mad at the world because of the attitudes of a few; but he said nothing.

Bicks was waiting outside of the Dean's office. He sat on a small leather chair, staring at the door to the big office. He felt that the secretary didn't feel comfortable with him there. When he glanced up, she would shift her eyes back down to her desk and find something to do. She probably thought he was going to steal something.

The heavy block of wood opened and Canter walked out of the Dean's office. Bicks stood up. His friend walked past him without saying a word. He

followed.

After they were outside and a good distance from the office, Bicks asked, "Well . . . What happened?"

"Man, that dick put me on probation."

"What tha fuck does that mean?"

"It means . . . man, I don't even fucking know. He said seven fucking people said that I started the fight."

"But that's bullshit—"

"You tellin' me!"

Canter and Bicks walked over to the cafeteria. The wind snapped across their faces and tried hard to blow their hats off. Bick's voice cut through the wind. "What'cha gonna do?"

"I'm gonna fight this shit. I'm gonna fight it hard. Ain't no way I'm gonna let a racist mothafucka git away wid some some shit like this."

"Hey. Don't do anything stupid to git yo' ass thrown out of school. You know that's what they want." Bicks kicked the snow. "They would looovve to kick a Brotha outta here."

"Yeah, I know. Alluh dem lyin' out they ass. And they know it!"

"What about Dana?"

"What about her?"

"You gonna stay with her?"

"Hell, yeah. I ain't gonna let these Fucks ruin' that. I'll blow their fucking heads off if they try this shit again."

The two young men walked through the cafeteria with hundreds of eyes plastered on them. They both stopped and shot at all of the glares. "WHAT THE FUCK ALL YOU STARIN' AT!" Canter yelled.

"Man, fuck it. Leave 'em."

Within the roar of the cafeteria, Canter and Bicks had a very quiet dinner.