



DOUBLE DIP DEBUTANTE

It was a hot, dry, scramble an egg on the pavement kind of afternoon. Leather jacket melting down my arms leaving a trail behind me for miles. Slow Burn. Oncoming traffic slithered towards me from the Fun House mirrors dancing in the distance. Funny—I don't remember the Circus being in town. I was parched and looking for something a little different to wet that whistle. Pulled off the main drag in a sleepy little town like any other and slid into its local ice cream shop.

“What'll it be?”

The girl behind the counter was a cute little thing. Couldn't have been more than seventeen, eighteen. Nineteen tops.

“How bout a scoop of that Rocky Road there on a sugar cone.”

Long, straight brown hair draped over an almost round freckled face.

“We got a two for one special.” Then, under her breath, “I'm not supposed to offer that without a coupon, but you look like you could use a little extra.”

No, definitely not nineteen—yet. Pushing, but still eighteen. Still has that naïve, innocent sense of optimism about her.

“I don’t wanna get you in any kinda trouble.”

She radiates. Not a girl, but not yet a woman. Still a teenager, but no longer a teen.

“Trouble? Shoot, mister. This is my last summer in this hole. I’m liable to give it all away before I go.”

I sat down under a big old oak in a little park across the street. Yeah, just what I needed. A cold one don’t always have to mean a beer. No, this was just right. I finished up the last bits of cone and was halfway through a smoke when a sweet young shadow was cast upon me.

“Nuthin’ better on a hot afternoon, huh?”

“Nuthin’ better,” I agreed.

“Well... almost.”

A bashful grin spread across that too young face as she looked at the ground, the tree, anywhere but me.

After a long, methodical drag on my cigarette, “Is that right?”

I couldn’t have had more than seven or eight years on her; certainly seemed legal enough in any state I was traveling through. Hell, there’s men out there oiling springs with women half their age.

She asked for a smoke. I obliged.

“You don’t think I’m old enough, do you? Well I am. I’ve already done it—twice.”

“I see. And—so, that makes you a woman.”

“That’s right. I’m eighteen and going off to college in the fall. Old enough to vote and old enough to smoke. And I’m old enough to have sex whenever, wherever and with whoever I want.”

“*Whoever.*”

“*Whatever.*”

I got up and lit another Marlboro.

“Alright, then. Maybe we should get us a room so we can knock us some boots, huh? Pick up a bottle of Jack or Jim so the nite’ll be more of a blur than a memory, and it’ll be easier to forget in the morning. And maybe on our way to the motel we’ll stop into your Dairy Dell there and grab some whip cream and nuts and a handful of cherries. Throw in some hot fudge sauce and we’ll make ourselves a Slickery Slop Sunda. I’ll tie you up, grease you up, then tear you up. Leave you there till you gnaw through the ropes and call your daddy to tell him what a mess you’ve gotten yourself into. Course, by then, I’ll be long gone and just another scar on your psyche.”

She stood there trembling, nervously.

I snatched the stick from her lips and flicked it to the street. Maybe she was scared of the future, or of what didn’t just take place in the present. I walked back over to my bike. Maybe she was tired of guys like me who think they know it all or have all the answers. I watched her in the rearview shrink to a sliver of sky.

Maybe she just didn’t give a damn, and tomorrow was her nineteenth birthday.