

S T O K E D

B Y L E W I S S H I N E R

I'M WAY INTO the music when my dad starts pounding at the door. It's Suicidal Tendencies doing Possessed to Skate. I unlock the door and he goes over first thing to turn it down.

My dad is like losing all his hair in front so he lets it grow out over his collar in back. He has to do it, see, because he wants everybody to know that even though he's a lawyer and has a Mercedes and everything he didn't sell out. As if anybody cared. A hippie is still a hippie, even if he wears ties and drives a Mercedes. Even if he's your dad.

So he says did you take your skateboard to school again.

I tell him NO.

Don't lie to me Bobby, he says. Mister Woodrow called me today and said you and some of those other skate punks were fighting at lunch.

I don't think he's ever called me a skate punk before. I kind of like it. I say we weren't fighting we were thrashing.

He shakes his head. He sits on the edge of the bed and gets real quiet for a second. He says how I'm only fifteen and in a couple more years I can do what I want but right now I have to do what he says. Like him being all reasonable and shit is supposed to make this big difference to me. Then he looks around the room, at the Ratt and Motley Crue posters and the dirty clothes on the floor and the tapes everywhere and the schoolbooks where I threw them in the corner. Then he shakes his head some more and tells me how hard he's trying to relate.

So I just tell him two years is more than I've got to spare. Because in no time at all I'm going to turn into a brain-dead, dick-dead old poser like him. Which he is too stupid to understand on account of his head being so far up his hippie ass, just like that borf Woodrow.

Well, I don't really say that but I'm thinking it, loud and clear.

I know he's not my real father anyway. I was left here by mistake by this time machine from the future. So who cares what he thinks.

After everybody else is asleep including my worthless big brother, another fucking lawyer in the making, I go into the kitchen and get down the Mason jar where the old lady keeps her cash. She does these hand painted T shirts and sells them and keeps all the dinero in the kitchen. We always borrow a buck or two because she never knows what's there. This time I take the whole wad. It's about fifty bills, which is okay. I get my blaster and some tapes, some Painted Willie and some Dead Kennedys and some Suicidals. I put another pair of jams and a clean T shirt and boxers in a plastic Alpha Beta bag. Then I get my stick and stench on out of there for good.

ONCE I GET the skate under me everything is cool. Better than cool. I'm on top of the world and it's turning under me and I'm the only still thing in the universe. This is something skaters know that assholes like my dad never will. Every time there's a new subdivision goes up he's pissing and moaning about all the trees getting cut. He's never slalomed across a floor slab between the little copper tubes or caught air coming up out of a half-pipe where the new sewers are going in. Concrete is radical. Concrete is the future. You don't cry about it, man, you skate on it.

Sean's house is two miles away. I make it in about ten minutes. The lights are off in her room so I go over the chain link, holding the board up over my head like I'm doing an invert on a skatepark ramp. Her asshole dog, some kind of fuzzy white little runt, starts getting all aggro and barking and everything. I make like I'm going to brain the little bastard and it backs away growling.

I knock on her window until she opens it and puts her face up to the screen. She's wearing just this thin T shirt and the cool air makes her nipples get hard, which makes me get hard too. Her hair is all pushed up on one side where she's been sleeping on it. I tell her to come on out.

She says why.

I tell her I'm cutting out.

She says to meet her out front in two minutes.

It's more like ten but it doesn't matter, it's not like I have to be anywhere else. It's March and there's all this stuff blooming all over the place. See? Plenty of trees and gardens and shit to make everybody sneeze and get their hormones all worked up.

She hasn't got her skate when she comes out. There's a lot of streetlights and I can see she's put on lipstick and combed out her hair and drawn stuff around her eyes. She's only like fourteen but she's pretty rad. Her hair is kind of short and bleached out on the ends. She'd spike it but her mom would kill her.

I tell her to go back and get her skate.

She asks am I serious. Am I really cutting out.

I tell her me and this smalltime little town are history.

She says she doesn't know if she's up for anything that heavy.

I tell her to come along for a while and she can make up her mind later.

She decides it's a nice night out so okay.

She has to open the garage to get her stick. It makes some serious noise but her mom doesn't wake up. She just leaves the door open and we skate away.

The streets are really empty. It's like they've dropped the Big One and all the old farts and assholes have blown each other away. There's nothing left but me and Sean and a million miles of concrete. I see a car ahead and I take her hand. We kickturn together into an alley and across to another street. Only mutants have cars after the Big One. They'll kill us if they can or use us in their weird mutie ceremonies, stealing our eyeballs and fingernails. But they can't catch us. We can skate where their fat metal and rubber cars can't go.

THERE'S THIS BIG culvert in a park over by the college. Kids get lost and drown in there sometimes. When it's dry the skaters go there to get

vertical. It's too dark to skate it now but there's light enough to see the top of the pipe fifteen feet overhead. There's a lot of trash on the floor. Busted bottles, an old sleeping bag, beat-up copies of Penthouse and Thrasher, cigarette packs, donut boxes. We clear off some room and lie down on the sleeping bag.

Sean's mouth is warm and wet and tastes like the air outside. She opens it wide and works her tongue around mine. I put my hand up inside her T shirt. She doesn't have very big tits but like I said, she's only fourteen. She's breathing hard and for a second I think she might really do it.

I know she's done it before. She used to hang with this guy Steve, the raddest skater in town. I'm talking Hawk, Caballero, Guerrero, that good. There's this unfinished overpass out on Highway 207, about a twenty-foot drop. Steve's gone off it twice and rode it out both times. The other kids who tried it really slammed. I'm talking busted bones and hospital city.

I think Sean was pretty in love with him. The word is he did her a few times and kind of lost interest. He's seventeen and he's got his own Trans Am and plays guitar in a band. The girls all hang around him and everything. He doesn't care that much though. Between skating and girls, skating is number one with him. Sean was fucked up about it for a long time.

I've got both hands up inside her shirt and I'm wondering what's next when she turns her head and says Bobby don't. She says it's late. Says she has to get back home.

I can't believe she wants to go back. Back to her mom that she hates and her mom's boyfriends that are always getting drunk and trying to grab her ass. I tell her she could stay there with me and not go back to school or her mom or anything.

She asks am I crazy. Am I going to live in a hole in the ground for the rest of my life.

Better than going back, I tell her.

She says I really like you Bobby. But you have this problem with reality. You're underage. There's gonna be cops and truant officers and everybody else looking for you.

Then I'll just have to keep moving, I tell her.

What I'm trying to say is this is like the last time we're going to be together and I think we should really do it this time. But she's already walking away.

She stops at the end of the tunnel and says see you Bobby.

Maybe you will, I say, and maybe you won't.

She just shakes her head and says grow up.

I say what's the point.

She acts like she doesn't hear me and just walks away, carrying her board by the front truck. I hit the concrete wall with my fist. The pain pulls me back in where I can think again. I lie back and listen to the tape. Like the Suicidals say, won't fall in love today.

THE TAPE IS OVER. Suddenly I think maybe the cops are already after me. They could shoot teargas into the tunnel and be waiting with M16s to cut me down. I stash the box and my extra clothes deep in the tunnel where

I can come back for them later. Then I pump up the sides of the pipe a couple of times to get some speed. I come out crouching low, arms up to protect my head. I catch some air as I shoot out into the drainage ditch, climbing high and fast over the concrete embankment, heading for the highway.

There's lights behind me. They must have called in some SWAT teams, probably even the National Guard. I play it fast and loose. I'm not scared at all. This is my town and I see it through skater's eyes. I see things the cops have never looked for. The paved medians and retaining walls, the sidewalks and storm sewers and spillways. I can skate them all. No cop can ever touch me.

I'm all alone when I blast under the Loop on the north end of the city. I'm shredding down the middle of empty four-lane concrete. The moon is up and there are truly gnarly country sounds all around me, insects and owls and wild dogs. It's cold as hell and I'm not paying any attention where I'm going. But I don't care. I'm stoked to the max, wild and free.

Up ahead I can see the barricades for the Highway 207 overpass. And at the same time these lights come up behind me.

At first I think it's Steve's Trans Am. Then I realize they look like ordinary lights but they're not. That's just part of the disguise. What it is is a UFO come to pick me up. There's only one problem, see, which is they can't set it down. That's the thing about UFOs. They want to take me with them but I have to somehow get up to where they are.

I boost off the barricades to get more speed. Speed is the thing. I can see where the ramp ends in twisted rebar. The empty highway is down below it in the dark. The lights are behind me and I can hear voices calling out my name. One of them sounds like Sean. I tell myself it isn't, it's just the whine of the UFO. The approach is downhill and I get way low to cut the air resistance. There's nothing left to think about, only action, the way it should be.

And then I'm flying, and it's just me and the wind.