

The Last Brunette

Algis Budrys

Illustration by Kandis Elliot

*Over the years, I have written any number of stories around illustrations. They serve as convenient objects for the fantasizing part of my mind. Many writers do this, and often develop close relationships with illustrators in part because they find they can cross-flow not ideas, so much, as a spark of creativity which can jump in either direction. Frank Kelly Freas and I did quite a bit of that at one time. He created the art to which I reacted spontaneously with stories called *Who?*, *"The Executioner,"* and *"Despite All Valor,"* among others. I wrote a number of stories--*"The End of Summer," "In Clouds of Glory," "Cage of a Thousand Wings"* (originally *"Priestess of the Witch-Wings"*) for which Kelly produced illustrations that delighted me.*

*This story was written at and for Playboy, around an 8 x 10 Ektachrome of a plywood woman with buzz-saw breasts bolted on. The photo of this assemblage was the best of a series taken while the plywood, soaked in lighter fluid, burned. Having bought the art, from a talented person whose name escapes me, Playboy hung it on my office wall, down in Siberia where I was attempting to do something useful with the book-publishing department. It so happened I was then driving a Sunbeam Rapier--which had both a warning light and an ammeter--and had wound up in Warren, Ohio, under circumstances exactly like those in this story, omitting, I fear, the ladies listed herein. Even the rerun of *Only Angels Have Wings* actually happened. But as to the important events in the story, those are either a phantasie in the classical psychiatric sense or a new kind of ghost story, take your pick.*

The Last Brunette

SHORTLY AFTER HOBBS had crossed the Indiana-Ohio border, headed east, his ammeter needle veered over to the left and lay implacably against the peg. His warning light came on a full, startling red. He cut his radio, his heater fans and finally his dash lights, but his headlights yellowed, and when he shone his flashlight on the dark ammeter, the needle had not moved.

He rolled onto the shoulder, stopped and looked under the hood, but the steady water-temperature gauge had already told him it wasn't anything as simple as a loose or broken fan belt. The generator was out, and that was all there was to it. For luck, he tested the firmness of as many electrical connections as he could reach, but nothing came of that. It was now just a question of driving as far as he could on his battery, which, thank God, was up to full charge from all the mileage since Chicago.

Forty miles down the road, practically groping by now and praying against state troopers, he got into a service plaza and had them give his battery a kick with their quick-charger while he went in and ate a disgusted meal. He already knew nobody was going to do anything

about a foreign generator this side of Toledo and certainly not at this time of night. He made it into Toledo at three, found a motel operated by a motherly woman who hated him on sight, and slept until morning.

In Toledo, he was sold his own generator, rebuilt, and a new voltage regulator. Two hundred miles later, his ammeter began flashing back and forth like a man waving a shin on a life raft and then went dead again. His voltage regulator began to buzz, and that was how he came to be in Warren, Ohio, when he ought to have been in New York. In New York, he often pondered in later years, an otherwise respectably married lady either did or did not spend two whole, entire, positively humiliating hours sitting in a hotel lobby waiting for him. It was his private opinion that she had done no such thing. If she had, he had missed the only occasion in their relationship on which she did not chicken out. He could stand missing her; he regretted missing the occasion.

Meanwhile, in Warren, Ohio, he had fallen in love.

Love in Warren was very much like love everywhere; he had found a motel for himself, since the Toledo stop had arranged his timing to get him into trouble after all the garages were closed, and had asked the desk clerk for the name of a decent place to eat. Directed to a place which was "good but not dressy," he found it was mediocre but dressy; the hostess moved him quickly to a very quiet table in an alcove beside the kitchen doors. He sat there in his printed shirt and green twill slacks, wishing idly that he were dead and in hell, looking forward to a fried steak, and wondering what had ever possessed him to think Ohioans considered anything less than a sports coat and white shirt not dressy. Shortly after he had reached the customary peak of irritation, the next table turned out to be occupied by a stunning, sad-faced, full-mouthed, medium-sized brunette with skin like velvet so golden it was almost visibly tinged with green.

Oh, Christ, he thought, I should have known, and noticed that she was drinking a light Scotch in an old-fashioned glass, with just a hint of bubble in it. Four or five loves ago, this had become established as the drink his loves drank, just as they had developed long legs when he was twenty-two, had acquired sad eyes when he was twenty-seven, had become medium tall at about that same time, but had not really produced high, firm breasts until the time early last year when his engine had burned out on his way to New Orleans. They had always been brunettes, of course. This one had by far the best skin, and it seemed reasonable to suppose that he could look forward to this feature from now on, for each was always like the last but better. Meeting them was becoming more and more of a hammer blow; being with them and then watching himself leave them was costing him more each time. If they improved much more, it would become totally unbearable.

"Sam Hobbs," he said to her, and she raised one eyebrow markedly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"My name is Sam Hobbs, I'm in town overnight with bad electricity in my car, I've got one hundred eighty-seven dollars cash and a checkbook, and a week's time."

"How very interesting." She tapped an ash from her cigarette with quick precision.

"Now, you, on the other hand, are married, engaged or someone's good friend. You have a well-paying job you don't like, a staggering load of debts public and psychic, a taste for quiet good living, few of the common inhibitions but a number of uncommon ones, and a sexy mouth."

"You're insane."

"So are you," he said with the certainty of a man watching a piano fall down a stairwell. "There is no argument between us. If I were king, nothing now could ever part us."

She looked at him as if over the tops of a pair of glasses and said, "I must say, your finesse staggers me."

"Darling, I've been in Ohio--a two-hundred-and-fifty-mile state--for eighteen hours, and I'm only in Warren, but I am also all used up until such time as you renew me. If you don't like it, screw it, but that is the shape of things that are."

"I don't like bad language."

"Neither do I. Let me tell you some. You can always cover your ears. How about 'It's too early,' and 'It's too late,' or 'Not here!?' How's that for obscenity? Want some more?"

She looked at him like a live human being and shook her head. "You may be right," she said.

He conquered the impulse to reply, "And I may be wrong; you know you're gonna miss me when I'm gone." Instead, he said politely, "Join me for dinner?"

She looked startled and glanced around as if every friend and relative she had were packed into the place, instead of the desultory scattering of good, honest faces that were bent over their soup plates hither and thither about the room. "Where are you staying?" she asked.

He told her the name of the motel and she nodded gravely, indicating she had it memorized, or that she approved his taste, or something equally positive. They went back to minding their own business, she being joined in due course by a chap who apologized for leaving her by herself and looked like a rising young man from a larger city, possibly Youngstown.

Hobbs ate his steak, gathered himself up and took his battery-driven car back to the motel, where he decided in favor of a shave and against a shower. He called his partner collect, told him he was in car trouble and would probably be a little late about everything and not to fret.

Sometime later in the evening, his phone rang and he picked it up while killing the volume on a spottily cut run of *Only Angels Have Wings*. Trapped in fog, knowing the Andean pass was a nesting place of stupid condors, Thomas Mitchell was groping for an opening through which to urge his laboring old trimotor mailplane.

"Sam," he said.

The girl said, "How are you, Eleanor?"

"Fine," Sam said. "Thomas Mitchell just got a condor through his windshield."

"Oh, no!" the girl said. "Are you hurt?"

"Lonely."

"Is there anything I can do? Do you want me to come over?"

"I can't run the car more than a mile or two at night."

"Yes. Of course. I'll be there in about half an hour. Is there anything you want me to pick up on the way?"

"I don't have anything drinkable on the premises."

"All right, fine. I'm sure I can find a drugstore open."

"See you."

"Yes. Please don't worry--it's no trouble for me at all. It's a shame about your car. It sounds to me as if it might take days to fix."

"Could be."

"I'm sure I'll be there soon."

On the screen, blinded Thomas Mitchell was spinning to his doom in a cloud of condors.

"Hurry," Hobbs said, thinking that by now his fine, leggy blonde wife was certainly in a saloon with his fretful partner.

"You are my cousin Eleanor," the girl explained gravely, setting a paper bag down on the dressing table and lifting out a bottle of White Label. "You were in a little bitty car accident and I may have to take care of you for a couple of days."

"All right, I got that," Hobbs said with equal solemnity, closing the door, wondering what it felt like to come all the way from Youngstown to hear a story about Cousin Eleanor. "What do you do in this town and what's your name?"

"Well, my name is Norah and I teach dancing. Social dancing." She moved her body in her olive silk sheath with a motion that was neither dramatic nor explicit but summed up what it was she did when she danced.

"Style," Hobbs said. "Fine style." He smiled at her suddenly, feeling the sudden outbreak of pure pleasure at having her to smile at, to move his mouth in a way that nothing else ever moved it. She was resting her weight lightly against the edge of the dressing table, her hands flat on the wood-grained Formica beside her hips, and he was thinking that another woman would have her ankles crossed negligently and her shoulders back, but she did not, and that her eyes were growing larger and larger as he drew nearer.

"I run a little outfit that designs and manufactures custom furniture," he said. "Executive desks at a grand a copy. Stuff like that."

"All right," she was saying. "And you're beautiful."

"Something like that," he said as he reached her.

There had not been much conversation between them. At dawn, he said, "Is somebody going to recognize your car out front?"

She shook her head. "My car is at my cousin Eleanor's," she said with a soft chuckle, warm, sleepy and full of herself. "I switched them," and this seemed to be a full and satisfactory solution to all the possible problems involved.

"What about this Eleanor?" he asked. "How many relatives do you have in this town? How tied up are you?"

She smiled at him like a little jam-faced girl blaming it all on her brother. "Me?" she asked incredulously. "I'm never tied up. When a beautiful man with a bad car came along, how tied up was I?" She closed her teeth lightly on the round of his shoulder. "Why? Do you want to take me somewhere?" she murmured with the tip of her tongue.

"I want--I want," he said, "I want to inhabit faery lands forlorn with you." And he did. He did. He wanted to take her with him through the pass in the Andes and on beyond, to where the Incan roads swept straight and new from way station to way station, innocent of wheel tracks, and at night the torchbearing runners ran lightly, tirelessly, naked and the color of earth, bearing the messages of the emperor.

She was murmuring with pleasure. "Do you say things like that a lot?" she whispered.

"Only to my love."

She turned sleepily, stretching her body, her hair and smooth arms brushing his face and neck. "Am I your love?" she asked lightly.

"My perfect love."

"You are my best."

"And you."

"Mmm!" She turned farther and kissed him, warm and like velvet come alive, light as pale clouds over the face of the full summer moon, her eyes glossy and dark as a river at midnight. Hobbs laughed softly. He was half-asleep, and he had been thinking of her as a princess of the Incas, as the magic woman who had come over the mountains and walked without looking left or right to the palace of the emperor and had found him.

The girl put her mouth lightly against his ear. "Happy?"

"Uh-huh. It's always fun being king." He ran his hand from her shoulder to her hip as if creating her in a dream.

Later he woke up, feeling as if he would live forever and be glad of it. She was drowsing against him, light as a cat. When he moved to slide away carefully off the edge of the bed, she made a soft, mewling, discontented noise and pulled the cover around her shoulders with a lithe, instantaneous twist of her body that left her curled facing him, her breathing once more serene. He looked at her, shaking his head fondly, and went to shower and wake up, making a rumbling, purring sound instead of singing. When he felt adequate, he came back

out, drying his shoulders; and stood looking at her again. She had uncurled and was lying sprawled face down, one leg bent up, her arms outstretched toward the corners of the headboard, her face peeping out of the swirled nest of her hair. She was moving her shoulders and hips uncertainly and whimpering in her sleep. Her fingers flexed against the sheets.

He almost got back into the bed, but instead he went to the telephone book.

He found a Volkswagen dealer who said he knew nothing about Hobbs's kind of car but was willing to learn. Fair enough. Hobbs began walking softly around the room, pulling on his clothes. He couldn't keep himself from sneaking occasional glances at the girl in the bed, though he knew in his belly he was only acting like a man with a fresh, salty hole where a tooth had been. A man with other bad teeth biding their time in his jaw.

When he touched the doorknob, the girl sat up, smiled and arched her eyebrows.

"Car," Hobbs said.

"Oh." She sat warm and glowing, looking softer than the girl he had met in the restaurant last night, as if all her pores had opened. But he had seen something very much like that many times before, he reminded himself. "Do you have to go now?"

He shrugged, but he kept his hand on the doorknob.

"Well," she said uncertainly, "if they tell you it'll be a long thing, please call me here. I'll pick you up and we can come back to wait."

He smiled and nodded.

He went out and found the garage, where, after a certain amount of talking and poking back and forth, it was discovered that the too-slack new wires leading from his generator had burned through against the exhaust manifold on their way to the regulator. The mechanics fixed it in ten minutes.

He stood there watching them do it. It was something he should have been able to find out for himself and repair on the road, but he had been too sick of it to go look. He shrugged sadly, thinking of the girl and how he always met them, and it was obvious to him once again that there was nothing he could do about it. So he went back to the motel with his car in good shape and his mind uneasy.

She was there, sitting with her back against the headboard, wearing her coral-colored bikini panties, her bare heels digging into the spread on the made-up bed. She was reading a paperback of the great plays of the 1950s, which she apparently carried in her purse. The reading light burnished her combed-out hair and her shoulders while filling her eyes with darkness. Hobbs thought of Frankie and how she had ached to be a member of the wedding. But if this girl wanted to talk about plays, he would say he didn't know much about them, because he had had that talk in other times and places. He stood just inside the closed door, feeling uncertain.

The girl said, "Hello." She smiled fondly at him. "That didn't take long. How's the car?"

"All fixed."

"Oh."

"Listen, about this dance teaching. Do you have to be at the studio a certain time or what?"

"Not if I don't want to."

"Do you want to?" he asked, remembering how he had smiled the night before.

She looked at him with her head cocked, alert and suddenly wary. "That's up to you. What's the matter?"

And there it was. She had put the book down and was looking closely at him; it was hard to read her eyes, with the light behind her, but suddenly she was not the same in anything, and he could feel himself groping inside.

"If it's up to me, nothing's the matter," he said and went over to the bed, kissing her, but it was just brave words, and he held the kiss as long as he could, because he did not want them looking at each other's faces any sooner than they had to. He reached out and touched her with every evidence of love and skill.

But at the wane of the sunny afternoon, she finally said, "I'd better go to work. There's somebody important coming in. I forgot."

He lay back on his back, smoking a cigarette and looking up into a corner of the ceiling. "Youngstown?"

"Who?"

"The boy from last night?"

She made a snorting noise through her delicate nostrils and shook her head scornfully. "No, I just have to go." She had good control, but control is not the same as self-, and he reached out to touch her thigh, because he wanted it registered in heaven that he felt compassion for her. And he said, "Please don't."

She looked at him with her neck arched and her eyes turned sideward out of her thoroughbred profile. "Why not?"

"Because I don't want you to," he said to the corner of the ceiling. And he didn't want her to. It seemed to him morally wrong that a girl should be told the things he'd told her and be unwanted in the morning.

"That's bullshit. Your car's fixed and you want to get back on the road. You've wanted to leave since this morning."

And so they were into it, and looking at her he felt the cold fear of discovery, once again, of how vicious they could be, of how the magic woman was more various than the emperor could have guessed when he created her for himself. But what he said, because he was honestly trying to find out why it always went like this, was, "That's not reasonable. You know I'm on my own time. Can there be anything I want in New York that isn't much better here?"

He tried to look at her tenderly, but the fact was that something about her face or his voice made it worse. He thought about the road, about the long, roaring miles between here and New York, the engine and gearbox screaming, the trucks gusting back and forth across the lane markers in crosswinds, the potholes clubbing his tires and suspension, the freeze of his mind and muscles behind the wheel, his burnt eyes locked on whatever was coming toward the windscreen, the narrow, dripping tunnels with their awful lights, the rough asphalt burring him with vibration on the blind downhill mountainside turns before Harrisburg, the cops, the hot rodders out at night in their Chevies with their clinging girls. Always he managed to hit Pennsylvania sleepless and at night, where they were forever trying to patch up their crumbling can track and marking it with burned-out lanterns. Always he finished up on that Jersey Pike with its too-low speed limit and the tar run into the cracks like the stitching on Frankenstein's monster. And then into Manhattan at some hour between two and eight, when the clerks in his kind of hotel hated giving you a single room, and once you had one you couldn't get to sleep, with your body still on the road. And when you finally did wake up, it was some hour you couldn't use for anything and didn't know whom to call, or what you were going to do, and wound up going around the city with your face numb and your eyes defensive.

"What in hell would make you say a thing like that?" he said, realizing that if he got out on the road now, that was exactly how it would be.

"You would, you son of a bitch," she said, pulling the sheet around herself and looking at the bottle and his overnight bag on the dressing table beside her purse. "Ever since you got back. What the hell made you go to that garage this morning, anyway? Didn't you say you had a whole week?"

Well, no, he'd had as long as the car would let him. But--

"Look," he said clumsily, reaching out for her rigid arm. "Look, I want to stay. But I can't. I want to take you with me. I want--"

She said slowly, her arm cold in his hand, "You've had what you want. You've had me--fooled."

He felt the terrible dismay of knowing they were getting smarter, too. Of having it confirmed that his fear was real. He had, once again, an ever-clearer vision of how beautiful and terrible the last one would be. "Listen--it's--"

"I want to get dressed now," she said, looking down at his hand.

He let go reluctantly. He still, with some of himself, wanted to awake her to softness and sleep. But that portion of him was only the part he kept to show to God. "All right, Norah," he said. She got up, pulling the sheet from the bed and holding it around herself as she picked up her things. Even though she moved only for herself now, she moved with grace and pride, and he watched her longingly, though he knew it was past time to long for this one.

"This thing happens with me."

"Don't let it bother you. You're not the only man it happens with."

"I meet you over and over again."

Her mouth pulled sharply at one corner.

"Norah," he said, "I mean it. I wind up driving a lot. To a lot of places. I don't really have a reason. I always have some excuse. I don't *want* to go. I want to stay with you." He always wanted to stay home, too, with the cheated girl he'd married. But in the long afternoons over the drafting table, his hand would stop moving properly and his brain would turn to porridge, and he'd put it all down and in a matter of minutes he'd have a reason for getting out into the rusting, unwashed car, just pouring gas into the tank and maybe checking the oil and maybe not. It was a good thing he had a partner to stay home and take care of things.

And now his own lips seemed to move of their own accord. "Look, I can't explain it; I don't know why it happens, but I do meet you over and over again."

"What you mean is, you make it with bitchy-looking brunettes in safe places."

He looked around the room. "Not safe. No, not safe places. I--"

"Would you mind not talking to me?"

"Norah, I want you to understand--"

"Please." He saw that there were tears starting in her eyes, and when he saw that, he saw that he was through, because there were some things he would not break even to express himself nearer to his heart's desire. He got into his own clothes again and followed her out to her car, which looked new and massive beside his own. She did nothing to stop him, but it was as if he had gone long ago, or as if she had arrived the night before and waited all night and day in the wrong room.

He stood with his hand on the doorframe beside her, leaning in. She started the car and sat waiting, looking out through the windshield, wanting to close her door. Finally she looked at him as he tried to think of exactly the right thing to say, and said, "Would you mind?"

"I want you to understand something. It's something I can't help. It's not your fault."

"I know it's not my fault. Now I have to go tell my cousin why I took her car last night."

He was watching her graceful left hand. He reached out to touch it and she winced away. He watched the closing door swing toward his fingers. It seemed to him he watched it for a great many heartbeats and with detached interest. At the last possible instant, he gasped and pulled his hand out of the way. He had the impression there had actually been very little time between the jerk of her shoulder and the thud of the door closing tight in the frame. He stood now looking at his hand, at the intricate bones moving under the flesh, while she pulled out of the motel lot. Then he went back inside and packed quickly.

He drove the first 200 miles with his face motionless. By then he was well into the mountains and tunnels. At intervals, he said "Look, Norah," softly, only his mouth moving, the words becoming inaudible only inches from his lips. But as the road took hold of him, the spells of thinking about this particular girl became shorter and more widely separated. He began paying attention to things around him: to the readings on the dash, the signs flashing toward him in the nips. He smiled a little, thinking about good moments from the night before.

He was beginning to be like himself again, he thought. He felt accustomed to himself. He

began, with a certain sadness, to think about the first girl, about the crying, intense love of his youth. "Look," he said to her loudly as he cut out around a semitrailer and shifted the wheel a little to take the blow from the wind, automatically registering the slap of his top as he entered the pod of rapidly moving air it carried down the road. "Look, what do you want me to do?"

But he knew what she wanted him to do. She wanted him to go back and change the past, to keep the promises of his youth. He could still remember what it had been like, parked in front of her house that last night and listening to her babble on about how even if he did have to quit school, it didn't matter--they could get married, and both work, and he could finish school at night, and the whole thing going on like that. But the truth of it was, he couldn't think of any way of breaking up with her without quitting school, because the look in her eyes had begun to frighten him.

He remembered looking at her and realizing she wasn't even good-looking, that her waist and legs were too short, and her neck was too thin, and she was going to be coarse-skinned and dough-faced in a few years. That all the virtues and attractions he had seen in her had been judged by too many men before him, and there was a reason why all of them had left her. He remembered the many times she had wept in his arms and named the others, and enumerated the injustices they had done her, and of the thousand petty things she had said and done to get back at them afterward, and he had realized he was actually frightened of what she would do to him. And he had thought that he had a lot to learn about women, but not any more from her.

He had sat there, hunched over, the sick knot growing in his stomach, listening to her run through a dozen plans for them, each wilder and more abject than the last, and each more savagely delivered, and he had realized suddenly that if he let this go on, she would break him. And he had turned toward her quickly and said, "Look--it's over. Thanks for everything, but it's over. I've got all my clothes and stuff in the trunk, and I'm gonna be three hundred miles away from here by breakfast time. So good-bye. Even if I stayed, I wouldn't be any good to you anymore."

"You won't ever be any good," she had cried bitterly. "I'm the only one who knows how to make you feel like a king. I'm warning you, Sam--if you betray me this way, I'll--"

And that had done it. The digging of her fingertips into his arm, drawing blood through the sweater and shirt, or maybe the threat he didn't want to hear.

"Christ Almighty, get out of the car!" he had cried and shoved her door open, reaching across her and, probably on purpose, pushing with his shoulder against her thin rib cage. She had gone sprawling out of the car, onto the sidewalk in front of the sooty brick row house with the chipping limestone steps, and a drunk hanging around a stoop three or four houses down had laughed.

Hobbs had found himself staring deep into her eyes as she sat there with her shocked mouth open, and he had seen something there that had nearly made his heart stop. He was already lunging across the seat to slam the door shut as she scrambled to her knees and reached to grab the doorframe.

Now, as he automatically checked a pair of headlights growing in his rearview mirror, coming up a hell of a lot faster than his own 73 mph, Hobbs felt his arms grow rigid and his fingers lock on the greasy wood of his steering wheel until the flesh was aching against the bones. He was remembering the sound and then her cry, and the sight of her standing rigid,

her back arched, her head thrown back, holding the hand aloft, the blood like ribbons wound around her trembling forearm.

She had gone tottering down the street then, knees stiff, the hand clasped to her stomach, her face white as lightning, and the drunk had come stumbling toward her uttering, "Hey! Hey, Jesus, miss, can I do anythin' for you?"

"Nobody," Hobbs muttered now as the headlights turned into full quads on high beam and made him duck away from his mirrors, "nobody can do anything for us." He was remembering how he had realized that the only thing for him to do was to get the hell out of there. And he was remembering how his brain had turned over the first time he had been down in a strange town with a broken gearbox and had thought it was she behind the magazine counter in the third-rate hotel.

But it had only been a girl like her. Very much like her, but better. Better for an hour or two. And he was remembering other hours and other towns as the big Caddy came booming up behind him and cut out at the last second and hung head and head with him for a moment, the driver staring curiously at Hobbs's infrequently seen kind of car, while Hobbs watched his wheels and waited for the blowout or the dropped tie rod that would send the Caddy into him. He held the wheel steady, staring across, listening to the beating of his wheels across the expansion joints, feeling his car try to pitch back and forth, listening for the sound of breaking metal anywhere in his car, his shoulders hunched against the sudden wrench in his own steering, wondering if he would hold it.

But that was all reflex, just the way it always was. Nothing was going to happen to the Caddy, and nothing was going to happen to him, because the other car's driver was a man, alone. Hobbs smiled reassuringly across at him. Then he turned his vision back to the road ahead of him, feeling all right, feeling that a man couldn't ask for more than to know exactly how it was all going to end. He wondered, as he sometimes did, where she was at this moment--the last brunette of all, moving toward him somewhere in the space and time of this world. He was content to wait; he assumed she was, too, if she had any idea of what they would do to each other.

The Caddy had pulled away and was gone down the road to its own appointments with speed traps and justices of the peace. Hobbs drove on, watching ahead and behind, and to each pair of headlights gaining on him, he thought, I love you, just in case it's you at last. He wondered if, when the metal broke and the gasoline erupted into their marriage bed, she would cry out in answer.

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