

Citizen

My mom has a new boyfriend I call Citizen. I gave him the name one night at the Unicorn's Garden when they were all arguing about some political thing, and somebody says, like, "...As Americans we're responsible," and he says, "...Uh uh, no way, I'm not an American. I consider myself a Citizen of the Universe!"

Citizen is from down in L.A. someplace. He's got a big blond beard like Grizzly Adams and blue eyes and white teeth from never smoking tobacco. He's big and strong, but he's spazzed-out. One day he says to my mom, like, "Oh, I'll go chop some wood," and he grabs the little kindling hatchet from beside the stove and goes out to the woodpile. He's wearing yogi pants and birkenstocks. My mom looks at me, like, "Help," so I go after him. When I get there, he's got the hatchet in a piece of pine, and he's stuck his foot down after it and is trying to pry the wood apart. Then the hatchet slips out, and the log snaps shut on his foot. It was only scraped. Lucky thing. My mom can see what a dork he is -- like when he made her keep the cats in at night because they kept killing gophers and over the next week our garden disappeared -- but she always forgives him. He's from the city, she says, as though that makes it OK. She likes it that he offers to pay for things.

My mom is 40, but she looks young and has boyfriends like Citizen who are younger than her. She became a hippy 10 years ago. Before that she tried to be straight, but it didn't work out. She left my father, and we moved to Truro on Cape Cod, then Stockbridge in western Massachusetts, then Woodstock, New York for three years, then Madison, Wisconsin, Austin, Texas, Missoula, Montana, Cripple Creek, Colorado, Taos, New Mexico and finally here, to Magdalena on the north coast of California. All our moves were to the west, but

now we're up against the Pacific. When she's depressed, Mom says, "Let's think about Hawaii." She can waitress or whatever while she makes her jewelry there. There are all kinds of exotic feathers and shells she can use in her designs. And I can ride my dirt bike into jungles that are like paradise and learn to really surf. It rains a lot in Hawaii, she says, but it's warm rain, you can bathe in it. Imagine that.

I know the real reason my mom puts up with Citizen is he turns her on. I hear them getting it on at night. At first it sounds like big animals fighting -- a lot of thumping and banging and what sounds like growling -- and then they make the bed squeak. At the end my mom starts to scream and Citizen starts to grunt, but by that time I've usually got my headphones on, I'm sucking on a J and grooving to my tunes.

I wish they would just do it in my mom's bedroom though. They're liable to do it anywhere in the house. Like one Saturday I come back from riding my bike on the logging roads out near Comptche, and I'm like really gnarley, covered with red dust and sweat and all. I head straight for the shower, and there they are, groaning away inside this huge cloud of steam. So I went back outside and put new plugs in my bike. But the worst thing was, when I went in later to take a shower? No hot water.

My mom told me once it wasn't till she was 30 that she realized she had been taught to hate her body. Now she goes naked a lot. All her friends do too. Like her whole women's group will sometimes be naked in the living room when I get home, and it's like, "Hi, guy!" No big deal. But I don't like it when she and Citizen hang out naked all over the house and out on the deck. It's like I can't relax. They lie real close together, for one thing, and touch each other all the time. Or they put on the "Sounds of the Forest" tape and burn incense and massage each other with patchouli oil. They get so into it I have the feeling that if I weren't there, they would start getting it on right on the deck.

Usually, I either stay in my room the whole time Citizen is there, or I split.

But I get pissed. Like one morning last week I'm coming down for my breakfast, and Citizen and my mom are sitting naked on the couch in the living room. Citizen is squeezing my mom's neck, and her eyes are half-closed and rolled up into her forehead. He's leaning back and his legs are apart, and his unit is flopped on the couch. I look at it, and I think, I take naps on that couch! I put my face down right where he's sitting! Then my mom opens her eyes and sees me.

"Hi honey," she says. "What can I get you for breakfast?"

"Nothing," I say. "I'm having cornflakes."

She tries to run her hands through my hair, but I'm not in the mood and twist away. Citizen sees this and figures he'll cheer me up. He comes striding into the kitchen.

"What kind of breakfast is that?" he asks.

"Have something healthy with us!"

"My kind, dude," I say.

There must have been something in my voice. Usually at breakfast, my mom goes, like, "Well, what are you planning to do today, sweetie?", but this morning she didn't. Citizen took off right after breakfast, and my mom went to work. I didn't see him for a few days. Mom said it was because he was busy translating, but I think it was because they had a talk about me.

Citizen came up here to translate a book called *The Emerald Tablets of the Pharaoh*. It was first translated from Egyptian to French, supposedly by a French guy who found it in a pyramid. Now Citizen wants to translate it from French to English because he believes certain people in the United States are ready to understand it.

The next time he comes to the house he wants to read it to us. He says he's been having trouble with the part he's working on, but now he thinks he's got it right. My mom goes, like, "Oh, that's wonderful," and asks me if I've got any dope. So I get out my Gualala superbud and mix a little of it

in with some leaf, and I roll a fat one and we all smoke. Then we have to have popcorn, so my mom makes it, and we scarf it up in like four seconds. Finally, we're ready. Citizen gets his fancy, suede-covered notebook out of his pack and turns the pages and clears his throat.

"Listen attentively, my little ones," he starts. He's reading in a big, important voice, the way my mom reads her poems at the Unicorn's Garden. But then he stops and says in a normal voice, "I should tell you that the tablets are actually transcriptions by a Nubian scribe, Kahotep, of the voice of the great Pharaoh, Nunses-Rihotep, speaking through an emerald."

"Whoa, dude," I say. "An emerald?"

Citizen smiles at me, like, How cute. "That's right," he says. "A very large and powerful gem. You see, the Pharaoh's voice had been magically stored in the crystal lattice of that giant emerald for 3,000 years waiting to be activated by the vibrations of someone like Kahotep, a lowly scholar, but also a person on a high plane of consciousness. Do you understand? Good. Now...this is the Pharaoh's voice."

He points his finger at the ceiling. Poetry voice: "I shall speak now of the Mind, which is untrustworthy, and of the foolish, petty Thoughts of human beings, which are like long-eared, fruit-eating bats that swarm and flit in Darkness..."

He stopped because I had looked at my mom and the expression on her face made me crack up. And when I did, she did.

"Sorry, I guess it's because we're stoned," my mom says. She had stopped laughing, but her face was still like twitching into grins, on and off.

"Is there some problem?" Citizen goes, real cold.

"Well, since you ask...", my mom says. "'Long eared fruit eating bats?' Are you sure that's right?"

"Yes, that's correct; the French word is 'les oreillards,'" he tells her. "Do you have some difficulty with the translation?"

"Well, it does kind of sound funny," my mom says. "Especially 'fruit-eating'...There might be another word you could use that would mean the same thing..."

"You mean make up something in The Emerald Tablets?" he yells. "You think the ancient Pharaonic sages didn't know exactly what word they meant to use?"

"OK, OK," my mom says, "I wouldn't want you to make anything up." Then she looks at me and can't keep a straight face. She covers up her mouth and snarkles through her fingers. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she giggles.

Citizen is pissed. He closes his notebook and shoves it in his pack. "I'm leaving," he says. "This work is too important for you...pair of dolts!"

"Dolts?" my mom says. "Dolts?" She's looking at me and her lips are shivering. "Forsooth!" she suddenly yells, and we totally lose it.

Citizen stares at us. We're rolling on the floor, totally cracking up. I think he knows what a dork he's being, but after what he said, he has to split. So he does. When the door slams, my mom shuts up.

"Duane, wait," she yells. (Duane is Citizen's real name.) She gets up to go after him.

"Mom," I say, "he's an asshole."

"I know he is, but I like him," she says.

She has her hand on the doorknob. Citizen's car starts up in the driveway, and he guns it to a roar.

"Don't worry, honey," she says to me. "It probably won't last much longer."

She opens the door and goes out. Through the window I watch her go over to Citizen's car and get in. They sit in the front seat talking for a while and then drive away.

I go get what's left of the joint out of the ashtray and fire it up and smoke it down to a roach, which I eat. Then I go in my room and out on the headphones and load a tape and push Play. I turn the music up real loud.

