



The Cougar Dream

By Kenn Hartmann

I'm in one corner and my adversary's in another, like a boxing ring only it's the flat roof of a Chicago-style 3-flat so close to downtown that the skyline's a backdrop vista, like Wrigleyville on Clark near Cabaret Metro, in fact it is like the Metro scene of some rooftop drunken euphoria or rock-n-roll debauchery, like a faded celebrity's drug-addled rant to a Rolling Stone writer surrounded by a phalanx of Hells Angels security, like some phantasmagorical lightshow conjured out of the thin Chicago night air, and you know I don't care cause the rooftop's empty except for me and this snarling, growling cougar.

I'm not talking about a lipstick rouge mascara Cougar, the ones that Brian Dickey, the tattooed true-blue doorman at Club Neo, refers to as "women of a certain age who stalk men of a certain age have infiltrated the club scene." No, I refer to the fur-ball four-legged cat-clawed kind, sinister snarling saber-toothed and wild-eyes piercing night cougar that you no doubt read about in papers and see on TV news. Like the one police shot within city limits in 2008 had DNA roots in the Black Hills of South Dakota, probably hitched a ride back with some itinerant biker. Apparently the cougars have infil-

trated Sweet Home and "they be predators just like us."

Perhaps it's odd, even surreal to ascend a stairway to a rock-n-roll rooftop for a taste of crepuscular reverie, meaning only to enjoy the twilight, instead wind up all alone, dangerously so, except at my feet is a crying baby swaddled in blankets like Moses in the reeds and from across the roof a cougar attacks and what am I supposed to do, pick up the swaddled babe or fight the cougar? To quote Rostand's Cyrano, "What would you have me do?" I look down and realize it's not actually a crying baby at all but really a talking Svengoolie rubber chicken stuffed into a pillow-sack. I gently kick the pillow-sack and it squawks, "Berwyn?"

The cougar lunges at me and I lunge at it, violently medieval, like Braveheart, so forceful is the collision between man and beast that my body morphs into the cougar and I become the cougar ripping unmercifully at the Svengoolie rubber chicken in the pillow-sack until my wife kicks me and says, "What the hell? Wake up! Are you having that crazy wolf dream again?"

"No," I say dreamily. "It's a cougar dream."

"Well quit jumping around and go to sleep."

Yes dear. How am I going to fall asleep now with my adrenaline pumped? I guess I can count Lon Chaney Junior flicks in my head or try to remember obscure Warren Zevon lyrics. The weather's finally changed, the window's open, I can hear the sport bikes on the 290 Ike Extension screaming in the night.

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