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The Way They Make Guys

BY DENNIS TRUDELL

Four small boys came running down the street, their sneakered feet flashing along the cracked sidewalk. Four t-shirts and dungarees bobbed up and down, four faces; two were white now pink, and two were brown. Noisily they came along the littered sidewalks, dodging garbage cans and bicycles, and bounded up old wooden steps and stopped on a porch, wooden also with gray paint peeling. One of the boys opened a screen door and disappeared inside the frame house, door banging behind him. The others stood cracking bubble gum and arguing back and forth, panting from the two-block run. The one reappeared with an armful of comic books, set them down on the porch, and said,

"Okay, now we'll see who's lyin'."

They started into the pile, soon littering the entire porch with the brightly colored comics and arguing all the while, the whites against the black this time, though only that morning the colors had been mixed in a heated discussion over the property rights to a stray cat they had found.

"Here it is! I told ya, I told ya," cried Tony of the curly dark hair. He held up a comic book and the others grabbed at it.

"He ain't a nigger, see," said ten-year-old Joey, waving the book in the faces of the colored boys.

"Lemme see." And the book moved from white to brown hands. It was a Superman comic featuring a cover picture of that man of steel in combat with an assortment of evil-doers. Two fuzzy heads studied this intently, staring at it with big saucer eyes.

"Can't ya see he's a white guy? Can't ya even see?" Snatching the book again changing hands and again waved in Negro faces.

"Looks kinda orange t'me," in the softer voice of Spits Brown. The colored boys were brothers, sort of, although the exact parentage

of the younger was somewhat in doubt.

"They always draw the white guys like dat!" said Tony.

"Yeh," agreed Joey, "and they draw coons brown color and this ain't no brown color so Superman ain't no coon."

Thus, the whites having stated their case, the comic book was thrown to the porch with the clincher,

"So you guys are liars, that's what!"

"Superman, he's a black man, Tony, an' you know it," this from the other Brown, Jimmy—or Little Spits.

"Ain't a nigger!" shrilly.

"Is! An' he gonna git you white folks fo' segatin' 'ginst us blacks, dat's what he gonna do."

The four were all yelling at once now, each trying to win his point by sheer volume.

"Yeh but can't ya see in the pitcher . . ."

"Ain't no diffrunce. Tell me who's de best runners an' jumpers in de worl'. Niggers, dat's who! And 'feshnal boxers is niggers, an' Superman must be one 'cause he's de best at demm kinda things."

"Yes, an' he gonna git you fo' segatin' us."

"Who's segergatin' anyways? Tony an' me, we're 'sociatin' with ya, ain't we? 'Sides on t.v. you can really see 'm, and he's white on t.v."

"Yeh but—" the speaker paused and slowly blew a large pink bubble. The other quieted also to admire it, Finally it broke, remaining in part all over a smiling Negro face. Suddenly Tony pointed frantically to a ragged animal chasing nothings along the sidewalk.

"Hey look, you guys! There goes that cat!"

"Let's gittim!" cried Spits, and the four boys banged down from the porch and chased the cat up the street in the direction they had come from. Superman lay among the other comics, pages turning gently in the warm breeze. Tony's mother picked them up later that afternoon and she could have seen, if she looked closely, that the great man's skin wasn't really any single color but rather a bunch of tiny dots, which is the way they make guys in comic books.