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## The Guest

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# The Guest

By Dennis Trudell

If one day you are walking along  
and suddenly decide to ring the bell  
of a lower left flat near the center  
of the city, and you do, and a woman  
in a paisley housedress answers, asks  
what you want and you can't think of  
anything to say, just stand there  
until finally she smiles, says you  
must be Margie's friend and Margie  
ain't home yet from whatchacallit,  
beauty school, come inside and wait,  
and you walk into a coffiny parlor,  
nod at a chairbound old crone who  
smells like wet carpets, sit paging  
Life for May 7, 1963 and listening  
to the paisley women wondering from  
the kitchen whether you've ate yet  
and enjoy sauerkraut--and as you  
say no you haven't and yes you do,  
although you hate it, the door opens  
and a girl in white with improbably-  
colored hair, gum, and a rather nice  
figure comes in, says hi and you say  
hi and start to introduce yourself  
when you hear the housedress coming,  
ask instead to use the bathroom,  
and follow the shrug and forefinger  
into the dining room (nodding at  
the paisley on the way), then duck  
into the kitchen, out the back door,  
and into the crowded kitchen across  
the hall--whose door happens to be  
open and where some sort of family  
reunion or something is going on  
and a female NCO-type is urging  
everyone to come in and be seated,  
and so you follow into the adjoining  
room, are seated, and start helping  
yourself from various bowls handed

round, meanwhile making small talk  
with those on each side--a fat man  
with a cold and a woman who suspects  
her son has not married wisely--  
and joining in the general laughter  
at the jokes of a horny-looking man  
spilling food at the far end--which  
proves a mistake because as your  
head is back in mirth, a hard roll  
smotes you on the shoulder and you  
can't decide whether it was thrown  
by the small boy behind the peas  
or the thirtyish woman with slattern  
eyes who keeps looking over at you,  
and who either by design or accident  
slips into the chair on your right  
when dessert is over and everybody  
is herded into an ashtrayed parlor  
to watch slides of the host's recent  
trip to Columbus, Ohio: which slides  
go on and on until you begin losing  
interest and stick your hand up into  
the beam of light and start making  
shadow animal heads while everyone  
either laughs or whispers "Sssh"  
and the host says "Okay, let's knock  
it off", but you don't and he says  
it a couple of more times and you  
hear even the horny-looking fellow  
and the small boy and the woman  
with slattern eyes join in with  
"Hey, enough is enough" and so on,  
but you keep doing it until the host  
moves cursing to a wall and turns  
on the overhead light just as you  
softly click the front door shut  
and hurry across the hallway  
to knock upon its twin.