

Elvis From Hell (*Salon*, 2003)

*He talked about his hair, his one girlfriend who went on to marry a creep, his hair, his painting and plastering career, his hair, journeying to Graceland and, lest we forget, his hair.*

I'd been back about a month from a two-week vacation in Greece, one that had culminated in me slipping on a pile of donkey crap and badly spraining my ankle. I was home for the Fourth of July weekend, and my parents suggested I attend an outdoor concert by a Beatles tribute band. We went to the show, lawn chairs in tow.

It must have been pretty dark because before I knew it I was deep in conversation with a guy who had plopped down next to us. My mother started it by offering him a drink. Soon after that, we were dancing to "All You Need Is Love," my leg dragging behind me. Although he seemed nice, I'd had enough for one night. He ended the evening by asking if he could see me again. I explained to him that I was only in for the weekend and told him that he'd have to ask my father. To my shock, my dad said yes. Mom, for her part, took me to Walgreens for a beige ankle bandage that wouldn't show as much and polish to paint my toenails.

The next day he arrived at the door of my parents' house, driving a beat-up, duct-taped car he'd gotten as payment for a painting job. Yes, he was a painter—not the artistic kind as I'd thought, but the wall-painting type. We sat in the living room and he and my mom talked. I wasn't sure of his age, but he looked at least mid-40s and not aging gracefully at all. In fact, I took him for closer to my mom's age because they seemed to have so much in common. She had all but hired him to paint our house when I yawned and said that we'd better get going. I'd heard enough, and wanted the evening to be over already. Besides, he was giving me the creeps being so buddy-buddy with my mom.

We drove to the restaurant in his incredibly depressing car. Once there, he threw out some of the usual lines ("It looks like there are stars in your eyes" and other such garbage) and finally asked what I thought of his hair. My stomach sank. It was the worst hair I'd ever seen. It was slicked up in a pompadour, and his face was fat and most unattractive. It wasn't Elvis hair, it was Elvis impersonator hair.

"Well," I said, trying to think of something polite, "at least you *have* hair at your age."

Evidently he was very proud of his do. He told me about his love of the Stray Cats (he always wanted a Stray Cats tattoo but feared the pain), his hair, his one girlfriend who went on to marry a creep, his hair, his painting and plastering career, his hair, journeying to Graceland and, lest we forget, his hair.

We ordered, then started eating. Then he dropped the bomb. "I'm 39 and I'll be 40 in November. Last year my old man told me that if I wasn't married with a child on the way by the time I was 40 I'd be disinherited."

I flagged the server. "Check, please," I whispered. We drove home in silence and he left me with a mercifully dry and quick goodnight kiss. Despite my still-swollen ankle, I ran into the house and locked the door.

He never did call my folks about painting their place. The next month, on the anniversary of Elvis' death, my mom called me and asked if I'd heard from "that adorable guy with the hair." I told her he was probably in Memphis, paying his respects.