

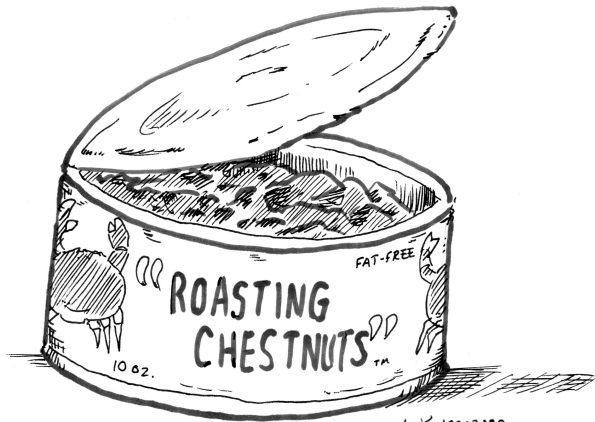
Protoplasm
Press

STUFF FROM REAL ACTUAL LIFE

1

50¢

IMITATION CRAB MEAT



10/1991-2020

This is not a test. This is an experiment in progress. *Imitation Crab Meat* provides a chance for me to prove to myself that I'm able to tell a "straight" story, as well as a decidedly Earth-based one, as opposed to the psuedo-superhero shenanigans that go on in my other title, *Amoeba Adventures*. This has the distinction of being the fastest comic I've ever produced...began January 21 and completed January 23, in a work period of about 24 hours.

The material here is very raw, the story not concise with a happy ending or a moral of any sort...after all, it's based on real life, more or less, and since when has life had a point? If reaction is favorable, I'll probably undertake more of these in the future...hundreds of ideas are waiting to bubble up from the file drawer of memory. There's always more *Imitation Crab Meat* waiting at the cannery.

A handwritten signature in black ink. It begins with a circle containing a peace symbol, followed by a comma. The rest of the signature is a stylized, cursive script that reads "Nik Dirga".

Imitation Crab Meat No. 1, January 1992. Published by Protoplasm Press. All contents C 1992 Nik Dirga. Any resemblances to persons real or imaginary is probably well-founded. Additional copies can be had for 50¢ each from PO Box 2230, University MS 38677.

Introduction:

A FEW YEARS AGO, CHRISTMAS FOR ME STILL HADN'T ENTIRELY LOST THAT PECULIAR GLOW.

IT HAS WHEN YOU'RE

A CHILD. I MEAN, I

KNEW THERE WAS

NO SANTA AND ALL

THAT CRAP, BUT THE

TWINKLY LIGHTS AND

HAUNTING CAROLS

STILL MANAGED TO

SET ME OFF A

BIT, YOU KNOW?

I AM GOING DOWNTOWN TO MEET MY FRIEND KIM FOR AN EVENING OF ROAMING AROUND THE TOWN CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL MERRY-MAKING AND SO FORTH.

DOWNTOWN IS LIT UP LIKE... WELL, LIKE A CHRISTMAS TREE, ALL RIGHT?

ROASTING CHESTNUTS. ©NK 1992

for Nora, again

I SEE A FEW GUYS I KNOW FROM SCHOOL, REAL STONERS, WALKING MY WAY.

ONE OF THEM PUNCHES ME IN THE STOMACH AS I WALKED BY, JUST FOR THE HELL OF IT.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT.



ONCE I GOT DOWNTOWN,
I WAIT FOR KIM ON
THE LIBRARY STEPS. THE
LIBRARY IS CATTY-
CORNER TO THE PART
OF DOWNTOWN THEY
CLOSED OFF FOR THE
FESTIVAL, SO I AM
ON THE BORDER OF
THE FESTIVITIES.



I FEEL LIKE A
WALLFLOWER
WATCHING THE
WHIRLING
KALEIDOSCOPE
OF PEOPLE.



KIM IS DROPPED OFF
BY HER MOM, SINCE
NEITHER OF US CAN
DRIVE YET.



SHE IS BUZZING LIKE A KITE, FULL
OF TEA AND ANTICIPATION.

MY STOMACH STILL
HURTS SO I'M NOT IN
THE BEST OF MOODS.

SHE TAKES MY
ARM AND DRAGS
US ACROSS THE
STREET AND
INTO THE CROWD.

WE PASS THROUGH
A FEW OF THE
GIGGLING CLUSTERS
OF TEENAGE GIRLS
THAT PEPPER THE
STREET LIKE ROGUE
SHEEP HIDING FROM
THE SHEPHERD.

EET
SED

KIM MUTTERS SOMETHING
ABOUT "TRENDIES," THE
- BANE OF HER EXISTENCE.

I DON'T REALLY KNOW
WHAT I AM YET... I DON'T
SEEM TO FIT IN ANY OF
THE CAREFULLY ORGANIZED
CLIQUEES THAT PERVADE
HIGH SCHOOL.



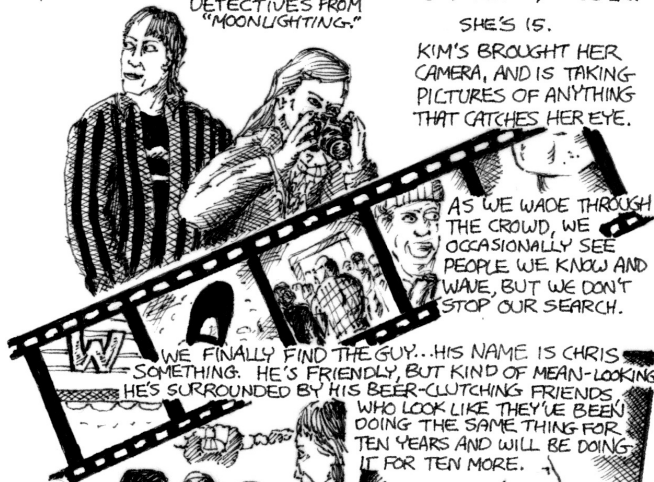
STILL, KIM DOESN'T SEEM TO MIND...
AND OUR FRIENDSHIP HAS LASTED
THROUGH TWO YEARS OF ARGUING
AND BICKERING.

OUR NICKNAMES FOR EACH OTHER
ARE "DAVID ASININE" AND "MAD-AT-ME
HAVES," A PARODY OF THE TWO
DETECTIVES FROM
"MOONLIGHTING."

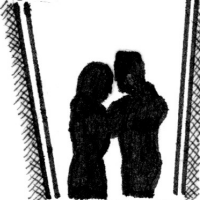
WE'RE OFF ON A HUNT
FOR KIM'S LATEST
BOYFRIEND, WHO'S 22.

SHE'S 15.

KIM'S BROUGHT HER
CAMERA, AND IS TAKING
PICTURES OF ANYTHING
THAT CATCHES HER EYE.



WE BID OUR FAREWELLS
TO CHRIS, WHO'S STAYING
WITH HIS FRIENDS, AND
GO TO GET SOME APPLE
CIDER.

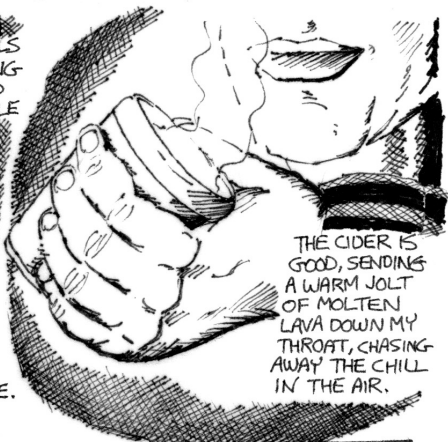


I GRACIOUSLY TURN
MY BACK WHILE HE
AND KIM KISS GOODBYE.

KIM ASKS
ME WHAT
I THOUGHT
OF CHRIS.



I SAY HE
SEEMED
LIKE A
NICE GUY.

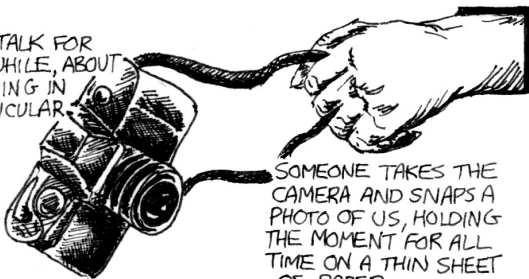


THE CIDER IS
GOOD, SENDING
A WARM JOLT
OF MOLTEN
LAVA DOWN MY
THROAT, CHASING
AWAY THE CHILL
IN THE AIR.

AS WE SIP OUR CIDER ON THE CURB,
SOME GOOD FRIENDS FROM SCHOOL
PASS BY.



WE TALK FOR
A WHILE, ABOUT
NOTHING IN
PARTICULAR.



SOMEONE TAKES THE
CAMERA AND SNAPS A
PHOTO OF US, HOLDING
THE MOMENT FOR ALL
TIME ON A THIN SHEET
OF PAPER.



SOON ENOUGH, KIM EXCUSED
HERSELF, OFF TO FIND CHRIS,
AND I WALKED HOME, KEEPING
MY HANDS BEFORE MY STOMACH.

2020 Bonus Features

My original 'script' notes for the story.

A few years ago, Christmas for me still hadn't entirely lost that cinnamon-scented glow it has when you're a child. I mean, I knew there was no Santa and all that crap, but somehow the twinkly lights and familiar sounds of the carols still managed to set me off a bit, you know?

I was going downtown to meet my friend Kim for an evening of roaming around the town Christmas festival making merry and so forth. Downtown was lit up like...well, like a Christmas tree, all right? And you could vaguely hear the sound of the high school choir singing.

I saw a few people I knew by sight from school, real stoner types, walking my way. One of them punched me in the stomach as he walked by, not hard enough to hurt but enough to piss me off. Christmas. Brings out everyone's inner spirit. Of course, if your inner spirit is that of an asshole...

Once I got downtown, I waited for Kim on the library steps. The library was catty-cornered to the section of downtown they closed off for the festival, so I was on the border of the festivities, like a wallflower at the school prom, watching the whirling kaleidoscope of people.

Kim got dropped off by her mom, since neither of us were old enough to drive yet. She's buzzing like a kite, infected with the chill of the evening. My stomach still hurts so I'm not in the best of moods, but she comes and takes my arm in hers and drags us across the street into the crowd. We break up a couple of the giggling clusters of teenage girls that pepper the street like rogue sheep in our wake. Kim mutters something about "trendies," the bane of her existence. I don't know really what I am yet...I don't seem to fit in any of the carefully organized cliques that pervade high school, but Kim doesn't seem to mind that. She still accepts my friendship, which has lasted through two years of arguing and bickering.

Our nicknames for each other are "David Asinine" and "Mad-At-Me Hayes," parodies of the two main characters from the TV Show "Moonlighting," who seem to share much the same sort of relationship.

We're off on a hunt for Kim's latest boyfriend, who's 22. She's 15. Kim's brought her camera, and is taking pictures left and right of anything that catches her eye.

As we wade through the crowd, we occasionally see people we know and wave at them, although we don't stop, so engrossed are we in our search. We finally find the guy...I am amazed by how short he is. His name is Chris something. He's a kind of sullen fellow...surrounded by his beer-clutching friends, who look like they've been doing the same thing for ten years and will be doing it for ten more.

We bid our farewells to Chris, who's spending the evening with his friends, and go to get some apple cider. I graciously turn my back while he and Kim kiss goodbye. The cider is good, sending a warm jolt of molten lava down my throat to chase away the chill in the air. Kim asks me what I thought of Chris. I say he seemed like a nice guy. As we

0 sip our cider on the curb, some good friends from school
stop by. We talk for a while, and suddenly someone grabs the
camera from Kim's hand and snaps a photograph, freezing the
moment for all time in a thin sheet of paper. Soon enough,
Kim went off to find Chris, and I walked home, keeping both
hands before my stomach.
excused myself off



The actual photo referred to at the end of the story, Christmas 1987.