

**SANA**

by

Willard Thurston

He belonged to a generation that went from embarrassment over a skins-shirts basketball game (if he was one of the semi-nude players) to brisk talk over whether censoring films like *Deep Throat* violated a constitutional right. We’re talking bods here, simple if not so pure.

It seems a very long time ago that ‘beguiling’ meant the airbrushed Sunbathing Magazines he and his cronies in the fifth grade discovered in their archaeological digs at a mouldy dank newsstand run by a Chinese barber who loved tobacco and giving Caucasians uneven bowl cuts. Mr. Chew’s barber shop and confectionary was as exciting and challenging for him then as any Mayan tomb for a modern archaeologist. The Sunbathing Magazines were unquestionably the unambiguous nonesuch. For already he had discovered a tenant of the durably erotic: the full figure doing nothing in particular was the apprehensible object of desire. The narrative possibilities were endless. What the Italians idiomatically call *interra* — unabbreviated, undiminished, unexpurgated; better yet what the Calabrians refer to as *sana* — implicit salutary totality. But the advent of the glossy sex books with their labium minora and secondary papillae erased the intoxicating mystery. What delighted about the early wood nymphs was that you could really tell which ones were worth keeping under the mattress. The legs, arms, chests, haunches, everything was there — the total ensemble — as frank and unassuming as the boy’s shower. You had no difficulty deciding which ones to install on your own Olympus, the proof in ageless often rain-marked black and white — long before stain on monochrome achieved archival celebrity. The part

that wasn't there — giving airbrush art an unpromising debut — you really weren't that interested in at the time. But, with the later slick skin mags, came lurid over-saturated colour, stolid clinical close-ups, slick artificial lighting, peremptory cropping, and you had an awful time deciding. The unposed unedited ensemble had vanished. Even the foldouts looked corny, patently show off, the retouching arrant, the seamless skin always a shade of what he deemed 'turkey umber'. The word travesty took on a new meaning. You never quite 'got off the hook', as Peter De Vries once put it. Neither catharsis nor celebration was possible, the two sturdy human preoccupations. The available full figure shots, when there were some, were usually of some pipe fitter just before he took his pants off.

By then, of course, he had decided he might just be a little weird. Weird in a singularly unflattering sense. If the timeless Sun Bathing beauties, the successors, legatees of Artemis and Athena had fled, the venal show off darlings taking their place looked decidedly banal and mercenary. To give his aberrant perception full frame: Marilyn Monroe was in essence an overly glazed cupcake, and the new Orphic wonder by the name of Presley looked a bit ditsy if not moronic, and later, on reading 'Zeusy' Hefner's Playboy Philosophy — and his shameless exploiting of Milton's (Isocrates's) *Aeopagitica* — he considered writing the Runt Book, the history of Modern Man, who forfeited a wife and a respect and stature as a household head he would never recoup, for endless female tongue, which only became more hectoring and abusive. Actress Catherine Mackinnon became a prodigious Mother Courage and was soon telling smarty pants like him to go get a life or go piss up a hawser in the flies.

Then came the whammy of the silicon retreads — the career obsession of the omnipotent plastic surgeon. To imagine all breasts looking more or less alike is just what that numbskull Michelangelo did

with his ugly mud pie breasts for his female sculptures, and we've been waiting ever since for a rested Apollo to come back from the Hyperboreans\* to say his piece. ('Hyperborean' does not refer to hyperbores, by the way, please see below.) Michelangelo's cool aloof David continues to stand there alone, looking rather preoccupied if not dismayed. Certainly bemused. And God you fear may be transgendered rather than asexual. And that's when you really begin to feel a little gauche. (In the current lexicon: awkward, gawky, inelegant, graceless, ungainly, maladroit, unsophisticated, uncultured, uncultivated, unrefined, raw, inexperienced and unworldly — the short list.) And you return to those little exclamation marks Cadmus gave the Greeks, the incisive glyphs that evolved into our alphabet. And you try again — one word at a time.

\*The Land of the Hyperboreans was the land where Apollo's mother Leto was born and the priests of Apollo descended. It was a luminous, colourful and warm island that was very hard to find, because it lay beyond the point where the North Wind blows. The people of the island lived in harmony with each other and with nature. They never ate meat, only the fruits of the trees, and were immune to aging and disease.