



# THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

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Year 2007

Article 10

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1-1-2007

## The Sensational, Inspirational, Regrettable Life of Ed

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Class of 2008

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McCabe, Alison F. (2015) "The Sensational, Inspirational, Regrettable Life of Ed," *The Mercury*: Year 2007, Article 10.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2007/iss1/10>

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# The Sensational, Inspirational, Regrettable Life of Ed

**Keywords**

creative writing, fiction

**Author Bio**

Alison McCabe is enjoying her junior year at Gettysburg College. She is a Psychology major and Creative Writing minor who hopes to one day fight crime as an investigator or top secret agent, and then come home from a long days work every night to write and unwind and go to bed and have sweet dreams about her work getting published.

## The Sensational, Inspirational, Regrettable Life of Ed

The lady at the counter wanted a cheeseburger. Ed wanted to tell her that she ought to lay off the beef. He could make more burgers out of her meaty middle than those Angus moo blocks they chopped up in Texas and sent his way in neatly stacked quarter pound patties. Really, he just didn't want to give up the cheese. Usually Ed would pretend like he'd forgotten the specifics of their order; cheeseburgers came out as hamburgers, cheese fries as onion rings. Nine out of ten times they'd complain, but every now and then the customers would be in too much of a rush to get the meal right and Ed could pocket their nice thin slice of yellow American. He knew he couldn't botch an order with this woman though. She was a regular and was particular over the food she stuffed into that ball of a body. So Ed would have to smile, welcome her to Burger Blast, take down her order, and get it right. Then he'd step behind the purple swinging doors, grab a lukewarm patty from under the heating light, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, half a slice of cheese, and spit. Spit was a part of every cheese order. He did this for good luck, a tribute to his god, really.

Ed's god was Snake Boy. He had found Snake Boy one morning outside of his apartment in a pizza box with a dirty sock, moldy crust, and pornographic magazine. The box hissed, which was quite an unusual sound for a pizza box to make. Ed knew that it must be something extraordinary. After much hesitation, because Ed generally let his fear rule out most curiosities, he lifted the lid to find the long, scaly creature coiled over a glossy topless school girl and grey fuzzy crust. The animal was spotted, orange with darker orange blotches outlined in black and, when uncoiled, probably measured near twenty five inches from head to tail. Curled up over the blonde beauty's privates, it was no bigger than a fist. The orange lump stayed still for a moment, then the tail moved from between her legs to her outer thigh and Ed blinked, breathed, then snorted. He was grateful for the school girl but unhappy with the smell. Those jerkface neighborhood kids again, got nothing better to do. How gross. He lifted each leg of his royal blue sweatpants as he bent over to remove the box and all of its hideous contents from his front stoop. As he inched the cardboard across the top step with a wary index finger, Ed noticed a piece of paper poking out from underneath and froze. Along the top of the paper in bold it read, "There is but one Lord—a being with a body that is neither plain nor human. He is your God Almighty and he will guide you to salvation." The religious pamphlet was placed on his front stoop an hour before the pizza box by coincidence naturally, but Ed took it as a sign. He lifted the snake atop its magazine and brought it with him inside.

Ed had seen those words before. He had also memorized them and recited them over and over in his mind for the past forty years because, ever since he was old enough to feel lonely and pathetic, Ed longed for a savior. And he had round thick rimmed glasses, a broken home, and no friends by the start of elementary school. Little Edward was a pale boy with a big circular head that sat atop his lanky frame. He wore mismatched socks, picked his nose, and never brushed his hair and seldom his teeth, because his mother was the type of mother that didn't take an interest in raising her son. Edward also never spoke to anyone but himself because his father used to shut him up whenever he would try. He didn't care for much of anything. He'd stopped caring when his father left and stopped caring and then his mother stopped caring too.

When Ed was seven, his mother had answered the door to a Jehovah's Witness. He stood behind her and watched the tall, steady man introduce his cause. He smiled the biggest, brightest smile at the boy as he handed his mother a pamphlet, the same bold print along the top that would make its way onto Ed's front stoop forty years later. The man was the most fantastic man Little Edward had ever seen. He glowed, the boy was sure of it. And if it weren't for the fact that he knew better than to hug a stranger, he would have thrown himself against that suited, freshly-pressed, radiant figure right then and there. His voice melted through Edward's ears and into his soft, impressionable head: "There is but one Lord." How sure he is! the boy had thought. He'd never heard anyone speak with such conviction, not even his mother when she would idly remind him not to play with his nose icks when other mothers were watching, or even his father when he'd told them he was leaving for good. After the beaming Jehovah's Witness had left, Edward had something to say to his mother.

"I found the man I want you to marry."

She only rolled her eyes.

Edward's mother had already found the man she wanted to marry. His mother and the man were close and, although Edward rarely saw them together, he often would accidentally overhear them through the Styrofoam cup against his ear against the wall against their bed. Moans mostly, and Edward wondered if maybe his mother was somehow hurt. But he supposed that she must have welcomed whatever went on behind those thin walls because he never heard any objections, only affirmative screams of yes and don't stop. So he never interfered, never came to her rescue. Still, before he was old enough to grasp the concept of resentment, young Edward worried for his mother as he would accidentally overhear just to make sure she was still breathing when it was all over. His unconditional concern did not last though. By the time he was seven and had developed a displeasure towards his upbringing, Edward had taken a liking to the alleged cries of his mother's pain. Every weekday he'd come home from school, grab the Styrofoam cup, and begin his accidental overhearing. This went on for some years until Edward's guilty eavesdropping pleasure shifted from a satisfaction in his mother's apparent misery to another means of enjoyment. He was eleven, twelve, thirteen, and he was in hormonal heaven.

Edward wondered why his mother and the man could not, even after so many years of sex, get married. He did not particularly like the man because he was covered in naked women, all disproportionately inked, and he was wanted in twelve states, including that of his current residence. But this was not what kept his mother from tying the proverbial knot. She didn't mind his racy tattoos, or that he had robbed thirteen liquor stores, two ice cream parlors, and a Salvation Army shop. What his mother hated about the man, what she really couldn't stand, was his snake.

"Get rid of it," she said one night. "It scares Edward." The boy pressed his ear more firmly into the Styrofoam cup when he'd heard his name.

"It scares you."

"I just don't want it around. Wouldn't it be nice to have a poodle? A snake? It's just not normal to have a snake."

"A snake is special." The man's voice had gotten quiet and breathy. "Enough of this, can we please just fuck?"

Edward was stunned. Those words stung and stuck. There was something about them and how they made a dirty dig at his mother that seemed a satisfying retribution for the time she upchucked bile and booze onto his backpack, or when she

assured him that the mold on the potato salad was just another tasty green vegetable. It felt good to hear those words spoken against her. It felt better to say them over and over in his head. A snake is special. A snake is special.

The man and his mother fucked but they never married because he kept the snake. Edward's mother died a lonely widow a year later in an unfortunate bicycling accident. The man she wanted to marry had her naked silhouette permanently printed on the back of his left thigh. He dropped his pants at the funeral so the young boy could see the tattoo and how much he must have cared for his mother. Edward liked the tattoo because he thought it made his mother look fat. He also liked the man's snake because his mother never did. Edward still didn't like the man because he penciled his phone number on a tissue to hand to a big breasted woman who was crying over his mother's open casket, but he agreed with him that snakes were special.

Snake Boy wasn't Ed's god from the start, though he certainly had given the possibility some serious thought. A being with a body that is neither plain nor human. Well, he'd keep the creature around just in case. The Jehovah's Witness certainly seemed to know what he was talking about forty years ago, and Ed could use the company. Snake Boy was a cheery companion, he was the first thing Ed had really cared about in those forty years. Then the good things started to happen. Ed began to get better at doing his crossword puzzles, Ed made his bed, Ed scrubbed the mildew off of the bathroom tiles, Ed found three dollars in his pocket, Ed learned how to bake muffins, Ed lost his gut, Ed discovered a way to comb his hair over the area where it was balding, Ed met a pretty girl, Ed said more than three words to this pretty girl, Ed got a job, Ed was experiencing his salvation.

But when Snake Boy wouldn't eat his hot dogs or Hot Pockets, Ed feared an apocalypse of his faith. He called the local animal hospital to take his dear friend in, and the lady told him mice. He needed mice to serve his savior.

The pet store couldn't have been any less sacred. Animals in cages, rows and rows of cages, munching on the cardboard of toilet paper tubes and sipping the water they'd relieved themselves in fifteen minutes before. Guinea pigs, rabbits, cats. No snakes. The mice were clumped together against the glass, a wad of white wispy hairs that would have looked dead if it weren't for the rapid quiver of the mound of mini bodies. A wood chip stuck to the forehead of one mouse in particular, and the passive little guy had enough sense to just let it stay put. He was simply listless, not a worry in his glassed-in world. He'd get sex regardless of his sloppy hairdo, Ed noted.

The cage was already overpopulated, but that didn't stop the sex. Mouse on mouse; it was a wonder that they could distinguish between genders clearly enough to match up with a successful mate. They all looked the same through the glass; a magnificent sacrifice, every last one of them. Ed beamed at the nobility of their reproduction. Doing their duty to please their god. Caged, oppressed, ready to meet, to serve, to be served to their savior.

Ed would have had sex too if it were for the sake of Snake Boy. To serve his god? Oh, you bet. But Ed was pretty sure that Snake Boy wouldn't eat human babies, only mice ones. So he'd have to grab a handful and get going.

The lady behind the tropical fish tank stared at Ed, maybe because he was petting his pocket. This probably made her uncomfortable because she didn't know that Snake Boy was in his pocket and that Ed wasn't actually fondling the area around his upper thigh as he watched the mice procreate. Her hair was so long and touchable and her eyes were so beautiful and frightened that Ed didn't want her to misunder-

stand his situation. He took Snake Boy out of his blue sweatpants to clarify the confusion.

Her expression relaxed as disgust fell away from her pink painted lips. "Is that a snake?"

Is that a snake, is that a snake? Think think, is that a snake? Yes, yes it's a snake, I know this! He nodded.

"Why is it in your pocket?"

Ed stuck his left hand in his pants pocket and pressed a dirty fingernail into a ball of lint while he opened and closed and opened and closed and opened his grossly over-chapped lips. Say something! "It's not."

"It was."

"Oh," Ed felt very stupid and bit a flake of skin off his sheepish, unmanageable smirk, "yeah".

"Does he bite?"

I can do this, I'm doing good. "She. She doesn't."

"What's her name?" You, pretty lady, I will call you Lady Ann.

"Snake Boy."

Lady Ann laughed, "Nice."

Ed had named his god before he had it probed. The vet had to stick a pole up Snake Boy's bum to find out she was a girl because it's even harder to distinguish between genders of snakes than it is of mice. Probing is done with a thin stainless steel rod that is approximately one quarter the diameter of the anal plate. The anal plate is the snake's scaly butthole. Vaseline, mineral oil, or K-Y jelly is glopped onto the probe for easy insertion, and the gooey rod is then thrust in a careful, downward motion toward the tail until it can't pack in any further. The probe is then removed and the depth of penetration is measured in terms of scale lengths. Snake Boy could only be penetrated five scale lengths. Males can usually take nine or more.

Ed would have explained this to Lady Ann so she would have understood that he hadn't named his god Snake Boy to be funny, but maybe it was better that she laughed and it could just be left at that. Ed wasn't sure probing was an appropriate topic for the moment. He would have had sex with Lady Ann too right then a there, but it would do no good for Snake Boy so, naturally, he didn't.

Lady Ann made her way around the tropical fish tank to where Ed was standing and he could see that she wore white pointy heels, but he could see nothing above her knees because he couldn't bring his head up. The strangest thing: Ed's chin was stuck against his Adam's apple and it wouldn't come undone. Another strange thing: Ed could hear his heartbeat through his Adam's apple and it was so loud he didn't hear Lady Ann's polite request to pet his snake. He only hoped she couldn't hear his heart's clumsy thud thudding. After much confusion, a bit of laughter, and a failed attempt to get another word out of him, Lady Ann left Ed to go stack bags of kitty litter and price flea collars. Once she was far enough across the store and the feature of mobility crept back into his limbs, Ed put Snake Boy back into his sweatpants and went about his business. His god was hungry, mice were urgent.

So Ed bought a handful and kept them in the recycling bin. The mice mated to give themselves something to do while awaiting their self sacrifice. In a month Ed had so many mice he had to move them to the bathtub. But the mice were kicking their tiny little buckets faster than Ed's god could get an appetite for their fate. Cheese is what they needed, more and more of it.

When Ed saw the black sharpied "Now Hiring" posted on the window of Burger Blast, he took it as a sign. Ed didn't know how to properly assemble the parts of a Burger Blast Thick n' Juicy Quarter Pounder but, after just over three weeks, he quickly caught on. Whole wheat bun, quarter pound pattie, iceberg lettuce, almost ripe tomato, roughly chopped onions. Ed took certain liberties with the menu. For a Burger Blast Cheesy Thick n' Juicy Quarter Pounder: whole wheat bun, quarter pound pattie, iceberg lettuce, almost ripe tomato, roughly chopped onions. For a Burger Blast Cheesy Thick n' Juicy Quarter Pounder after a customer complaint: whole wheat bun, quarter pound pattie, iceberg lettuce, almost ripe tomato, roughly chopped onions, half a slice of cheese, spit.

Ed enjoyed the routine of his work and that the greasy establishment only attracted the unattractive. The clientele was predictable: pimply, solid, one hundred and fifty pound ogres, and picky, gargantuan three hundred pound regulars. Ed liked to stare at their fatty folds because he found he could talk openly to them. He could even hear their orders clear as day without any thud thudding interference. It wasn't that Ed preferred hideous women, he simply operated best with pretty girls when they were spread eagle across a glossy two-page spread.

Ed was sure that he wasn't a virgin, but he had never had sex. He was too old to be a virgin so it just didn't make sense that he could still be one. He couldn't recall when he had lost his virginity, but he was sure it must have happened. And Ed was sure that it must have happened with a topless school girl like the one on the cover of the pornographic magazine. Forty seven was certainly past the age when virginity is lost, so Ed was sure that he had had sex at least ten times. Most likely more. So sex with Lady Ann wasn't all that important to him. Sex with Lady Ann didn't weigh too heavily on his mind. He wasn't at the point or anywhere near it where he'd think about sex with Lady Ann over lettuce, tomatoes, onions, and pocketed cheese in between. He didn't constantly wonder what it might feel like to have sex with Lady Ann, or sex at all, because of course he had already done it at least ten times and naturally knew exactly how it felt to penetrate a woman. Ed spent most of his time thinking about more important things, like his new job, his savior, and his overall wellbeing.

Really, Ed spent most of his time in a mental state of denial. But Snake Boy kept him grounded. Since the goal that was first and foremost in Ed's life was to serve his savior, he never let any but wholesome, religious thoughts run through his carefully gelled-over head. Snake boy was everything, and everything was done for Snake Boy. Every soggy wad of spit that sat atop every cheeseburger, even the school girl thumb-tacked over his bed, they were all a tribute to his god.

For nearly two months, Ed had it made. He kept the cheese coming and he kept his god fed and he kept his socks matched and folded. Things were in order. But every now and then Lady Ann would cross his thoughts, and Ed would put down the Brillo pad and leave the burnt muffin residue on the bottom of the tray to soak in the sink amongst the towers of dirty dishes. And soon every now and then became every other moment.

Ed's bathtub smelled like the toilet that he often forgot to flush. Like Ed, the mice didn't concern themselves with the fecal matter that matted itself to the hairs of their underbellies and pink wrinkly toes. The pistachio green porcelain was littered with brown specks and smears, mice scurrying along as if there was a good reason to rush across the dung laden path. Other than these futile foot races, action stopped. There was the chase, but never the catch. Not one mouse mounted. Ed wondered



about this, and he attributed their lack of sexual energy to the unpleasant olfactory distraction. Ed's armpits smelled like the rest of him, which smelled like the bathtub he'd surrendered to his saviors two months before when their multiplying started to increase exponentially. But now the mouse on mouse had ceased, and their numbers were quickly dwindling. Seven, scuttling through the crusty remains of the once thirty four. Soon to be six, Snake Boy was ready for a meal.

Ed emptied his sweatpants pocket of Snake Boy and the skin he'd shed earlier that day. The skin he tossed in the toilet, Snake boy in the bathtub. The mice went ballistic, they squealed, running up and sliding down and running up the slippery sides of the tub. Snake boy sat still, slithered, then snapped at one whose momentum sent his twitching body coasting towards the god. Jaw unlatched, Snake boy took his tribute in with one big gulp. His scales stretched over a lump that inched its way through his body, shrinking ever so slightly as it moved towards the tail. For this, Ed put the toilet seat down, and took a seat to watch. Snake Boy shut his eyes and remained still, except for the traveling bulge. Ed did the same, except to open one eyelid to peak at the magnificent display. This was always a sacred moment that he and his god had shared. This was always a moment to pray.

Ed generally prayed for a good twenty minutes. He prayed for a blessing because this was certainly the most holy thing to pray for. Ed wasn't sure what form this blessing might take because it hadn't come yet, but he had a slight premonition that it could be curvy and naked and beg to be touched in every place. But lately he spent less of the time on his toilet seat praying for this blessing to come, and more watching and worrying about his god. Two mice left, and Ed prayed that another blessing might bring more.

But the blessing never came and Ed ran out of mice. He had made a terribly awful mistake; Ed had fed the last female to Snake Boy a month and a half earlier. Ed would have gone to the pet store to get more mice, but he supposed that he might run into Lady Ann. He had contented himself with seeing Lady Ann daily, but only in his thoughts, as Ed preferred to never see her in person again. He suspected that if he was persistent enough, Snake Boy would eat his Hot Pockets.

Ed took a bite first to show his god that it could be done. Ham and cheese with a crispy, flakey crust. The drippy orange goo smeared along the corner of Ed's mouth, and it reminded him of Burger Blast which reminded him of the cheese which reminded him of the mice which reminded him of the pet store which reminded him of Lady Ann. Then, of course, his savior. Ed tossed the Hot Pocket in the bathtub with Snake Boy and all that smelled and remained of his thirty four sacrifices. The Hot Pocket didn't move so Snake Boy didn't move. Ed bent down and poked Snake Boy towards the offering, steam rising in continuous twists from the corner he had bit. Now Snake Boy moved, slowly towards it, until the savior was nearly an inch away from what Ed hoped might save him. But the Hot Pocket still didn't move, so Snake Boy kept his jaw latched. He slithered over to the crust and coiled himself around it. Ed found little comfort while he watched, wide eyed, as his god closed his eyes and found comfort in the steaming warmth of his offering.

So Ed's savior started to starve. Snake Boy looked thin, thinner, and he hadn't shed his skin in over three weeks. He scaly shine was turning dull, and the light that Ed used to watch twinkle off every tangerine scale with each swivel or turn now seemed to force his troubled eyes shut. Ed watched and wept as his god grew weaker. But there was nothing he could do. It wasn't his role to be the savior. That was Snake Boy's job.



He is your God Almighty and he will guide you to salvation. Some salvation. Ed had taken to calling it misery. The mildew found its way back onto the bathroom tiles, his gut found its way back under his flabby chest, and Ed let his hair simply lose its way. Life was looking grim, lonely, pathetic if you will. And Ed was sure that his luck had simply run out. He didn't once blame Snake Boy for his demise, as he just settled on the likelihood that all good things must come to an end. It was out of his god's hands, it was certainly out of his. There was nothing, simply nothing he could do.

There was the pet store, but then there was Lady Ann. So Ed couldn't do that, he couldn't go there, even if it meant saving his savior. And since he couldn't go to the pet store, Ed decided that it would be most honorable to concentrate on the littler things he actually could do for his god. So Ed spat in burgers even without cheese and gazed longer at the school girl on his wall, but his homage made no difference.

One evening when Ed was feeling particularly glum and worthless, he answered the door to a Jehovah's Witness. Ed stood in his sweatpants and a pit-stained, thinning undershirt as he watched the tall, steady man introduce his cause. It wasn't the same man that Little Edward had hoped his mommy would marry forty two years before, but he was just as tall and just as steady. Ed supposed that they were always tall and steady and that they always glowed. The man handed Ed a pamphlet, but Ed didn't bother to read the bold print along the top. He needn't the reminder of his creed. There is but one Lo— Ed cut him off. He knew, he said. And that one Lord was dying, almost dead. The man's bright smile faded. Still he spoke with the same conviction as the last, and Ed was just as struck by it as he had been years ago. Our Lord cannot die unless you allow him to die. Unless you lose faith. It is in your power, and yours alone, to keep him alive. Bottom right inside fold of pamphlet, page three. Ed had never read past page two. He blinked, rubbed the naptime crust from the corners of his eyes, and looked up to the sky as the clouds parted and sunlight gathered along the disheveled hairline of his shiny head. Ed was dumbfounded, Ed was blessed and, though he generally knew better than to hug a stranger, Ed threw himself into the man's comforting arms. There he felt in control. And even after their embrace, as Ed stood in the doorway alone, he still felt in control. He knew it was in his power to keep Snake Boy alive. The pet store would close by eight so he'd have to get going. Mice were urgent and Lady Ann was far too little a consequence to stand in his way. He could save his savior. Thank god it was in his power, thank Snake Boy.

Lady Ann stood in front of the gerbil cage which was next to the mice. Ed stood in the doorway, watching her calves tighten as she reached up to brush the woodchips away from the bottom of the metal wheel so that it would be able to spin next time without sending cedar shards flying in every direction. Ten seconds later she walked over to rearrange the dog bones and pig ears, and Ed walked in. He shuffled over to the tank of mice and stood facing the glass. One mouse chased another around the food dish, then cornered it and mounted, digging its pointy little fingers into the mouse's white hairy back. For five seconds the aggressive guy held a good position, an even thrust, a steady pace. Then the mouse underneath leapt forward, leaving her partner for a lick at the water bottle. Ed felt the poor little rodent's rejection in the pit of his stomach, and then felt a tap on his shoulder.

"I remember you." It was Lady Ann.

Ed reached into his pocket to pull out his snake. "Remember Snake Boy?" Of course she does.

"Of course I do." Lady Ann grinned and bit the corner of her bottom lip. "Let

me hold it." Now her lip was wet and shiny.

Ed didn't move, he couldn't move. Lady Ann's hand was a foot away, and Ed couldn't extend his to hand over his god. He noticed that she was wearing the same white pointy heels. He focused on them.

Lady Ann noticed this and squeezed her toes. "Okay," she said. "You need mice. Let's get you mice." She reached into the cage and scooped up the one that sat in the corner, still sulking from its rejection.

That mouse would do no good and Ed knew he had to say something. "I want a girl." And then Ed realized what he had said and felt clever for its double meaning.

She scooped up another, lifted it by its tail, and brought it to dangle at eye level, a few inches from her face. Ed's eyes focused first on the mouse's flailing limbs, and then on Lady Ann's eyelashes curling out from her upper lid. "Got her," she said, dropping the mouse into a cardboard carrying case sitting on the shelf below the tank. Ed watched her face now, her expression and the way her cheeks dimpled with a fleeting satisfaction over her slight accomplishment. She handed the cardboard carrying case to Ed and his fingertip touched the knuckle of her thumb.

Ed cleared his throat. "Do you want to hold my snake?"

Lady Ann smiled. "Sure."

Ed held out his hand with Snake Boy coiled around his fingers and up around his wrist. Lady Ann first petted the god with a tender touch, and he raised his head to hiss. Then, ever so slowly, Lady Ann wedged a finger underneath Snake Boy's chin and extended her arm so that he might slither towards her. Ed so desperately hoped that he would, that his god would bless Lady Ann with his approval. Snake Boy inched forward, wrapped one end of his torso around Lady Ann's index finger, and left the other clinging to Ed's wrist.

"It doesn't want to let go of you." Lady Ann loosened Snake Boy from her finger and led him back towards Ed's hand. "Well, is there anything else I can get you?"

But Ed didn't hear her last words because his heart had begun its thud thudding. He looked down to put Snake Boy back in his pocket and didn't look up again.

"Will that be all?" Lady Ann scratched her elbow and let a moment pass. "Do you need anything else? Excuse me. What's your name?"

Ed couldn't hear anything but his chest pounding. His mouth was dry and he couldn't speak.

"Ok, then I will call you Snake Man." She laughed. "See you later, Snake Man."

Ed heard this and smiled. And you, pretty lady, I will call you Lady Ann.