

PARAPHILIA XI



CONTENTS

Cover art by **Stafford Stone**
Frontispiece by **Dolorosa De La Cruz**
'Interesting Times: Art School' by **Andrew Maben** p4
'Come Daylight Saving Time' by **Kenneth Rains Shiffrin** p15
'The Grotesque Body' by **Matt Leyshon**, art by **Yann LeGrand** p16
'Soma' by **Lisa Wormsley** p22
'University of Strangers: An Excerpt' by **Bob Pfeifer** p30
Various paintings by **Susan Te Kahurangi King** P36, 41, 99, 160, 164, 209, 222,
'The Costa Rica Eight Mile: Chapter 9' by **Gene Gregorits** p37
'The Devil Within, Something of a Primer' by **Danny Baker** p42
Artwork by **F.X. Tobin** p44, 55
'Death Wish Chameleon XI' by **Cricket Corleone**, photos by **Richard A. Meade** p45
'Bukkake Brawl' by **Made in DNA**, art by **D M Mitchell** p56
'The Tent Whisperer' by **Salena Godden**, photos by **Ffion Nolwenn** p61
'Solemn With The Moon' by **William Krill** p69
'Rumours From The Balcony; an interview with **Chris Madoch** p75
'Bitter Suite Embittered' by **Chris Madoch** p80
'Ah Pook Is Coming: An Interview with Malcolm McNeill' **Christopher Nosnibor**, images by **Malcolm McNeill** p100
'Last Night With Uncle Bill's Last Word' by **A. Razor** p112
'The Seduction Of Solitude' by **Kimberly Dallesandro** p115
'Magnetic Ascension' by **E. Elias Merhige** p123
'Lucifer In The Machine Age' by **Stephen Sennitt** p131
'Hollow Earth' by **Kate MacDonald**, images by **D M Mitchell** p137
'Oceana' by **John Ladd** p143
'Anomaly' by **dixe flatlin3** p150
'Dirty Snowball Nativity' by **Jim Lopez** p161
'The Gas Man Part II' by **Stagger Lloyd**, photos by **Guttersaint** p165
The Fury of Gracie May' by **Claire Godden Rowland** p168
'No Place Like Home' by **Rick Grimes** p172

'The Man With The Big Pants' by **Hank Kirton**, photos by **Max Reeves** p175
'Violet' by **Claudia Bellocq**, art by **Lana Gentry** p180
'James Jackson Toth: Troubador Savant' interviewed by **Robert Earl Reed** p183
'Blind Worm Cycle (4 Extracts)' by **Christopher Brownsword**, images by **Gary Vettori** p186
'Confusion and Lust' by **Jana**, images by **Kerry Evans** p194
'Balcony's Rail' by **Michael O' Donnell** p199
'Goodhue's Woodfried Grill' by **Conley (Lee) Landers**, photo by **Sid Graves** p206
'Turbines and Throat Bones (Part One)' by **Craig Woods** p210
'Who's Afraid of Tobias Wolf?' by **David Gionfriddo** p223
'Flaps Three Zero' by **Steve Davies** p238
'From a Biographical Guide to North American Monsters of the Long Emergency' by **Ron Garmon** p239
'Face of Communion' by **Sue Fox**, art by **D M Mitchell** p245
End Piece by **Dolorosa De La Cruz**
Contributors' Links

Editors

Dire McCain

D M Mitchell

Contact Paraphilia

paraphiliamagazine@gmail.com

Website

www.paraphiliamagazine.com

Submissions

This a free magazine distributed in the interests of giving culture back to the people instead of the industry. We cannot pay for contributions to this publication. However, please see our website for details of our other publishing ventures.

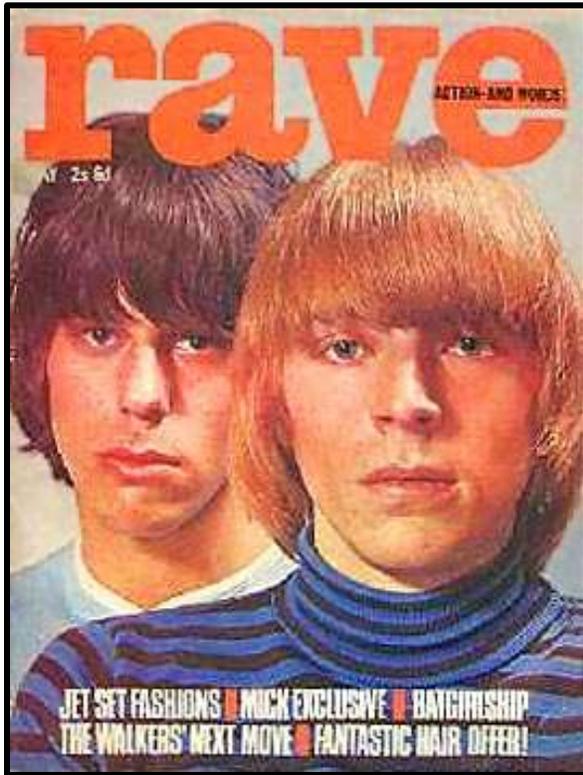
Any opinions or beliefs (religious, political, or moral) expressed anywhere in this publication are not necessarily those of the editors. We take no responsibility for anything we have published in the interest of the freedom of speech and expression.



INTERESTING TIMES:

ART SCHOOL

By Andrew Maben



Memory is still a misted night journey: soft, unshaped forms loom and fade, with occasional bright oases of light. The first week: a time of excitement, a time of uncertainly finding our bearings, tentative friendships. Names do remain, almost but not necessarily in their order of appearance. First, certainly, were Barbara and Margareta. Barbara a slim red-head, ethereal and earthy and Margareta her friend a voluptuous blonde with a slight resemblance to Dusty Springfield - a resemblance that cost me some embarrassment the day I shouted, "Good morning, Dusty!" Everyone in earshot heard "busty", which she most assuredly was, but I would never have had the

temerity, nor the ill-manners, to have launched such an epithet at a dear friend so publicly... I do remember that Barbara and Margareta invited me to join them to see John Mayall at the Hastings Pier on the Friday evening of that first week, but don't ask me how we got there, or anything about the show, still less how we got home. I suppose someone had a car.

I was also befriended early by Bob, a rather scruffy, almost furtive figure who seemed to always wear a long overcoat and a French beret, giving him a distinctly beatnik air, that contrasted with the mostly fashionable looks of the rest of us. Rave magazine had decreed that summer that the nation's art schools had become the latest forefront of youthful fashions. I think it was a role that we were all conscious of in an amused kind of way, but as budding artists we were, surely, much more concerned with establishing each our own unique individuality, to be projected primarily in our art for sure, but also through our projected personas. None would have admitted that our carefully assembled wardrobes were as much masks to hide ourselves behind as they were costumes to express our true natures, but surely it was so.

There were also others I remember fondly. Peter, red-haired, sweet natured and a dedicated fan of Bob Dylan, he suffered from a wretched stammer, and his girlfriend Lillian, a soft-spoken, ethereal beauty who might have stepped from a Rossetti painting, who was soon to be surprised to discover that not everybody

constantly heard voices in their heads. Jenny, a beatnik chick, with long black hair, dark eye makeup and pale lipstick, she dressed always in black and drove a hearse. Meredith, known as Pip, who lived with her mother in a cottage in the woods outside Brighton, and her friend Linda from Hastings. Grenville with his ancient Austin Seven, and air of an eccentric curate. Chris from Uckfield, whose friends' band often played at our dances. Tina and Sally the Mods. Annie, who I nicknamed "Noggin". Judith. Beautiful bespectacled Helene, breaking free of the restraints of a Catholic upbringing. Stella, troubled daughter of a conservative Methodist minister. There were many others whose faces have become blurred and whose names are now lost to me...

The two year pre-diploma curriculum for which we had all enrolled had at its center *Basic Design*, a Bauhaus derived course that covered exactly what the name implied, and also included life drawing, principles of color and form, painting, sculpture, ceramics, printing. We were also granted a discretionary class or two. for reasons that seem more than a bit obscure to me now I chose fashion drawing. In an odd way it would prove to be one of the most fateful decisions I have ever made, as it was in this class that I first came to know Tina and Sally. Tina was a devastatingly attractive honey blonde, the very personification of the swinging sixties in her minis and Biba blouses. Sally fell in her shadow, a far more hesitant mod, shy, almost mousy. They would whisper to each other as we sat across the wide drafting table, whisper and cast sudden glances my way. As a little time went by, Sally's whispers became loud enough for me to make out, after numerous hearings, an unintelligible incantation: "Ay guy lay guv ay gan dray goo!" While my desires were firmly directed at Tina, I think I have had

some small suspicion that Sally's glances were prompted by something more than a curiosity naturally aroused by the fact that I was the only boy in the class, something more than simple amusement. But I was far too naive and far too shy to take any serious notice. And besides: Tina... What a fool.

We first year students were more than a little in awe of the second year, who in turn regarded us with a certain condescension. It was the fine artists, I remember in particular Paul, an accomplished painter, and the sculptor brothers Hamish and Phelan, who owned the greatest cachet, though there was a graphic designer who went by Binky who also had a measure of cool. Impressionable young fool that I was, I allowed myself to fall under the thrall of the fine art mystique - we'll hear more about that later...

As I suppose is the way of people everywhere thrown together by circumstance, we formed into small groups whose membership was not by any means rigidly fixed. After my years of isolation and solitude it was a liberation to be accepted, even warmly welcomed by my new peers. I've already mentioned Barbara and Margaretta, and Bob. Tina and Sally were inseparable and only peripherally a part of our little band, which also included Peter and Lillian. Also often with us were Annie, Helene and Judith, who soon became Bob's girlfriend, Stella, Noggin, Jenny.

At lunch time virtually the entire school would walk down the hill into town, as there was no cafeteria at the school. It was on one of these lunch-time walks that I passed Tina and Sally and a couple of other girls.

"Andrew!" I stopped and joined them.

"Say 'prune'," said Sally.

"Prune," I said. They all laughed.

"Not at all," someone said.

"Not at all what?"

Nobody answered, though again they giggled

"Prune," said Tina, her lips forming a delectable moue.

"See," said Sally. But I didn't.

I grinned, but I was embarrassed and hurried to catch up with Barbara and Margaretta.

It was only later that Sally explained, "You can tell how sensuous someone is by their lips when they say 'prune'." I added lip-pursing to my little repertoire of facial exercises, that already consisted of pushing up the right side of my upper lip to try to achieve an Elvis sneer, and alternately holding one eye closed to learn to wink.

The most popular lunch destinations were a little caff outside the station that served cheap food and strong tea, or ffinch's coffee bar. ffinch's was also frequented by the girls from the cookery school, who tended to be the very attractive flowers of the English middle class (although, in retrospect, they may not have been the brightest, or perhaps their mothers simply deemed cookery a better bet than university in terms of "marriageability"), so naturally it was a big draw for the boys.

At the end of the day a group of us would usually end up at ffinch's, which had a jukebox and dance floor in the basement, or the Continental, which was cheaper and popular with the town's Mods. As it was favored by Tina and Sally, I'd often be there, too.

Then there were Friday nights. A mob of us would converge on a pub and drink determinedly until closing time. My usual approach would be to start the evening with a vodka in a pint of bitter, which would usually wipe out my funds, I'd drink for the rest of the evening by winning pint-downing bets - I could pour a pint of beer down my throat in no time flat. When the pubs closed a group would convene in someone's flat for hours of conversation and argument, fixing the world's problems and looking at politics, philosophy, and of course art.

As it happened I missed what was the only Friday night seminar that has stuck in my memory. That is probably exactly because I was not there, and hence heard of the proceedings whilst sober. It appears that on that particular evening the subject had turned to the question of what might be the point of existence. After vigorous debate it was concluded that there is no earthly point to anything. So if there's no point in anything, there is no point in doing anything. At which point it was agreed that nothing would be exactly what they would do. For long moments the group sat in motionless silence. Until, muttering "I have to take a piss", one of them got up and left to take care of his pressing need... This has always struck me as the most, perhaps the only, cogent answer to the question of life's meaning. Take that as you will.

Spirituality and mysticism were another area that we discussed at length. There was a teaching assistant, Geoff, who introduced me to Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. I dutifully read *In Search of the Miraculous*, but honestly could not find much substance to it, beyond a remark by Gurdjieff to a group of seekers that a peasant toiling in his field was closer to enlightenment than any of them could ever hope to be.

All these questions were very real and important to me then, and still are today. I was still utterly disillusioned by the hypocrisy of the church and people who called themselves "Christians", my quest for some kind of salvation or redemption had turned naturally enough to the realm of politics. My slide to the left continued. My initial attraction to the Labour Party, based as it was on my brief reading of Marx, began to turn towards communism. But who could ignore the realities of Soviet Russia? Aside from the fact that they were pointing missiles at the UK that might arrive on any given day with a mere four minutes' warning, there was the whole problem of authoritarianism and the subjection of the individual to the state, a subjection or even subjugation that after close to fifty years showed no sign of relaxing its grip. So much for the state "withering away". But I was still in love with the leftist vision of a world based on brotherhood and cooperation, as contrasted with the vicious dog-eat-dog competition of rampant capitalism. Extending the principle that had set me on this path in the first place, and in spite of the destructive antics of the anarchists on the CND march, I decided that as Anarchism was universally reviled at every point on the political spectrum, and by now I was repulsed by every point on that spectrum, it started to look like the most humane political philosophy. It caused a bit of a scene at the dinner table one night when the parents brought it up. They were of course appalled at the direction my thoughts were taking me. For my part, I was simply outraged that they seemed to believe they had the right to read my notebook. It was probably during this discussion that I was faced with the ludicrous question, "You're so intelligent, why are you so stupid?"

As you can see perhaps, what was concerning me was the relation of the

individual to society, the establishment of some kind of societal structure that could be built on cooperation, promote brotherhood, while simultaneously protecting the autonomy and freedom of the individual. No one, I think, has, no one, I think, can provide a fully satisfactory answer to the dilemmas of this question, but I did think then, and still do, that thinkers like Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin were closest to the right direction. Violent revolution, though, as far as I can see, is always guaranteed to fail to bring about any kind of change for the better - how can anyone possibly imagine that violence can be used to end violence, that killing will introduce universal brotherhood? "Thou shalt not kill" is surely the wisest commandment of all, and I dreamed, and continue to dream, of a world in which each human being might have taken that commandment fully to heart. Surely this is the only basis from which to build any society worth living in, any political philosophy worth living by?

The school arranged a trip to London to see a major Marcel Duchamp retrospective at the Tate. You may imagine that one result of the intersection of my aesthetic and political views was a strong appreciation for the Dada movement. In anticipation of the visit I conceived the idea of pissing into the Fountain. Alas, in the end I didn't have the courage to actually follow through on my planned Dadaist gesture, once in the gallery I lost my nerve, intimidated by the sacrosanct air of the place. Perhaps my plan was not an entirely original idea, nevertheless it was not until 1993 that Pierre Pinoncelli urinated into the piece while it was on display in Nimes, or 2000 that Yuan Chai and Jian Jun Xi urinated on the Fountain at the Tate Modern. Perhaps I will enlarge more on my thoughts on Dada and Conceptual Art later in my story.

One evening in November, as Bob and I were walking to a pub, he pulled out a joint and once again offered it to me. Well, actually “offered” is something of an understatement. It had been in the second week of term when he first suggested I might like to try smoking hash. I had recoiled in horror.

“But it leads straight to heroin!”

“No, not at all,” laughing.

“Still. I don’t think so... But do you know where to get LSD?”

Over the ensuing weeks he had kept up a steady low-key urging, and to my eyes he certainly didn’t seem to be suffering any ill effects from his vice. His work was strong, he was a fine draughtsman and he certainly showed no signs of sliding into heroin addiction. Indeed there was a guy in the town who hung around the fringes of the art school crowd who was known as Junkie John, and Bob evinced considerable disdain at John’s taste in drugs, which ranged from heroin, on the rare occasions when he could obtain it, to bizarre procedures involving Vick’s Inhalers.

My first encounter with Junky John had been one afternoon on the High Street. I was walking home from the Cont when I heard footsteps running up behind me. A scruffy and disheveled figure overtook me and turned to face me. Wild eyes, long, dirty and uncombed hair, a green sweater with many holes and loose strands of wool, a nondescript corduroy jacket and jeans.

“Hey, man. Do you want to be the singer in my band?”

“Um. No, I don’t think so. For one thing I can’t sing.”

“That doesn’t matter, man. You look so cool. You’d be great!”

“No, really. Thanks. No.”

Eventually he gave up and wandered off. While it’s clear to me that no enterprise featuring Junky John as a prominent member had, as they say, a snowball’s chance, I do sometimes wonder when I look back what turns my life might have taken had I chosen to take up his offer...

But backward-looking “what ifs” are a particularly fatuous waste of mental energy. The past is unchanging and unchangeable. Our memories of that past may be mutable, we may even have profound differences of recollection, but the past remains past and whatever coincidence of memory we may negotiate a semblance of agreement on is history. And god knows, holding on to history and, more to the point, dealing with its consequences? I don’t know about you, but that’s work enough for me, even though I did promise myself - or is it because I promised myself? - that I would make my own decisions and accept the consequences and the responsibility without regret. I’d like to think that I have, on the whole, managed to live up to that promise. As the story unfolds, please, feel free to judge for yourself. But keep your condemnations to yourself. Some of those decisions have been spectacularly ill-judged, and some of those consequences have been equally spectacularly painful. Sometimes the painful consequence has been utterly out of proportion to that action from which it proceeded, sometimes it may have seemed to be poetic justice. In either case I have tried to accept both the pain and the responsibility to live with it, so I really don’t need you, or anyone else, climbing onto some high horse and sneering, thank you. And anyway, the worst pains, the deepest unhappinesses that I have found myself

living through have not been, as best I'm able to judge, a direct consequence of any decision of mine. I'll try to remember to come back to this point from time to time as we proceed.

But for now: Bob had just offered me a joint...

"Oh, OK," I said and took it.

"You don't smoke cigarettes, so inhale gently or you'll be coughing."

So I inhaled gently. But deeply. As I breathed out, a mild warm euphoria enveloped me.

"Do you feel anything?"

"Oh yes!" I laughed softly, not the clichéd hilarity that no doubt you may have been expecting, simply an easy expression of well-being.

So. A pot-smoker. Like so many other lost children of the sixties, looking for ways to change the world. Subjectively this seemed to be as interesting a direction to try as any other. There was an idea going around that somehow, as if by magic, we could change the world simply through sheer force of imagination. To be honest, I still hold to that notion, I just don't think we had the numbers. It was easy to be seduced by the idea that we were an unstoppable force. We children were the subject of unending discussions, articles, television reports, so that there was a suggestion that we who imagined ourselves at the forefront of a new movement were far more numerous and far more engaged, far more committed than was in fact the case. There would be some rude awakenings to come but for now the world seemed suffused with a haze of hope, a haze strongly scented with marijuana and hashish smoke...

I don't remember anything else of that evening, but the darkness of the alley, a fire escape and basement railings are still crystal clear.

Not to short-change the school's academic offerings, but the social activities are what remain in memory - and they are certainly more interesting to recall. Somehow I ended up on the committee for the Christmas dance, along with Margaretta and a couple of others. At the first planning meeting Mr. Finch, the principal, suggested as the theme "Pre-Raphaelite Vapidity", it didn't seem particularly inspiring to me, nor I think to the others on the committee, but as he seemed to be so caught up in the idea we all agreed, with at least a polite pretense of enthusiasm. It was not so much any antipathy for the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, which was in fact, along with Art Nouveau, the Arts and Crafts movement, Arthur Rackham, and Blake, very much in vogue at the time. No it was "vapidity" that rankled. I think we all saw it as a barb aimed far more at us than at Rossetti and company. Nevertheless, "Pre-Raphaelite Vapidity" it was to be.

For me the most pressing problem was to find a companion for the evening. My yen for Tina was going absolutely nowhere. I was reluctant, rightly as it would turn out later, to jeopardize my friendship with Margaretta and Barbara by approaching Barbara. I was, in a word, completely clueless where girls were concerned. Looking back, I have the impression that several girls at the school were "interested" in me, but I certainly failed at the time to notice any signs. Permit me a small sigh for little Noggin...

One afternoon at Finch's there was a lovely blonde sitting with a cookery cohort a few tables away. Naturally I was far too shy to approach her in the coffee bar, but

somehow when she left on her own I found myself running after her. I caught up with her on the other side of Gildredge Road.

"Excuse me."

She turned and smiled. "Yes?"

"Um." Long pause. Her quizzical smile. Then in a rush, "I was wondering if you'd like to go to the Art School dance with me?"

"I'd love to!"

I was thunderstruck at her easy acquiescence, that she actually seemed flattered. Her name was Leonie, Leo for short. So she gave me her number, apologized for having to rush off and left me standing there with an idiot grin on my face.

The dance turned out to be a big success. Music was provided by Chris from Uckfield's friends. The girls almost all had embraced the theme and wore flowing, diaphanous dresses, the boys all as dandified as they could manage. I wore a white raw cotton Nehru jacket, purchased on a special trip to Carnaby Street, with a pair of cricket trousers retailored as bell-bottoms, a white shirt and a tasseled white silk scarf filched from Mum's drawer. Margaretta won first prize in the costume contest for her fabulous Queen of the May outfit. Her prize was a bit of a disappointment, though: The Troggs LP, not a band that carried much cachet in this crowd.

Leo and I spent some time together over the next few weeks. She had a car, a Triumph Herald, so we would meet in the afternoon after school at Finch's and then we'd head out on the Brighton Road to Beachy Head. Walking close to the cliff's edge, she'd invariably want to show me the latest judo throw she'd learned.

"Attack me!"

"..."

"No, really. Attack me!"

So I'd lunge at her. Yes, really, after the first occasion finding myself airborne, glimpsing the distant rocks and lighthouse between my legs, before landing ignominiously at her feet, all the breath knocked out of my lungs, yes, really, I would launch myself at her in a fury that was only partly feigned. I never laid a finger on her. I think it was looking up, flat on my back, that I first noticed her feline smile, sharing a secret with herself. Then she reached down with a full smile, inviting now, and helped me to my feet before turning away to light a cigarette, which I soon learned was her prelude to a kiss. And I learned too that the only corrective to the ashtray taste of a smoker's tongue is to take a drag on the cigarette. Thus began, I suppose, a forty year nicotine habit. Weak? Oh yes, I'll plead to that.

God knows what the hell exactly I thought might come of this relationship, such as it was. I'm sure I hoped to have sex with Leonie, but she was apparently intent on being a good girl, with me at least, so that never got past some very tentative breast fondling. And of course we were teenagers so, inevitably, come springtime she was ready for a change...

There was a party in Hastings. She told me she would see me there. I arrived early and found myself a beer. It was not long before Leo showed up. She was not alone. She was with an airy Donovan wannabe named Noel. When they noticed me they very deliberately stopped to embrace. I am inclined to believe that moments like that are the reasons humankind persists in warfare. I was angry, shamed, insulted, affronted. You get the picture. I suppose we

all deal with this, well or badly, once or often. Not a good feeling. I left the room, found an almost full bottle of gin. In another, empty, room I sat down in the corner on the floor. I set about draining the bottle.

I was doing yeoman work, and had consumed more than half the bottle when Pip's friend, Linda, found me. If I had not been so completely gin-addled I would have been surprised at the gentle concern in her voice.

"Are you alright, Andrew?" Manifestly I was far from alright, but it was nice of her to ask. I mumbled some kind of unintelligible reply.

"Come on," she said, "let's go for a walk." She took my hand, helped me to my feet. I stood unsteadily and leaned on Linda's shoulder as she led me into the back garden, down the garden path to a gate that led into a wooded park. Shortly the path crossed a small bridge over a trickle of water that may perhaps have been called a brook. As I sat down on the railing, Linda knelt before me. She gently, with her finger tips, stroked the inside of my thigh in little circles. Music from the party reached us through the woods. Slowly her circles grew wider, and on the upward stroke her fingers grew ever closer to my groin. Inexperienced, you may perhaps say foolish, even stupid, as her hand brushed, oh so softly, up the fly of my Levi's, I pulled her to her feet and held her against me and we kissed. As we clasped each other in this, to me astonishing and unanticipated, embrace, I heard a noise, voices. I opened my eyes and looking over Linda's shoulder saw two policemen coming down the path towards us. I broke off the kiss as they reached us.

"Have you seen anyone on the path?"

"No. But we have not been here long."

Something about a runaway child.

"You two should run along now. Go back inside."

But no sooner were we back at the party than there came a knocking at the door. More coppers. Perhaps they were looking for the missing child, perhaps they had been called because of the noise, whatever their reasons for being there, they made short work of shutting it down.

Most of us adjourned to a club to resume the revelry. Drunk, as they say, as a lord, my recollections of that part of the evening are all but lost in the fog, though I do recall dancing with Linda to the Spencer Davis Group's *Gimme Some Lovin'* - yes she seemed to have set her sights unwaveringly and soon enough she would...

The bar closed. Honestly I do not know how this managed to happen but somehow there I was getting out of a car with an eager Linda clinging to my arm, a key in my hand. Someone, heaven knows who, or still less why, had apparently lent us a flat for the night. Rain had begun to fall. We ran up the outside stairs of a wooden building, a converted barn or stable, and I managed to fumble the key into the lock to open the door.

We found ourselves in a lovely tapestry-hung and dimly-lit room beside a double bed covered with a huge fur rug. Once inside Linda wrapped me in her arms and kissed me, long and deep. We fumbled with each other's clothes and crawled together under the bedcovers, embracing, touching, kissing, caressing... Outside, the storm grew more intense. Clumsy and inexperienced as I was, and drunk as we both were, it's astonishing that our passion was successfully consummated.

Nevertheless somehow, between instinct and Linda's subtle guidance, we managed. I don't know, maybe you won't believe this, but if you think about it you may realize that it's just too ridiculously biblical for me to have dared invent it: as I was engulfed in the ecstasy and exultation of orgasm, a blinding white light pierced my closed eyes, a deafening crash followed almost simultaneously and the building shook. I fell back beside Linda, awed, amazed, grateful... perhaps a little embarrassed... to fall asleep with my hand on her breast...

(I have recently been informed that I'm very lucky, and as I think back on that night I'm forced to admit that it is so - no doubt you will have the same thought at many junctures as my story unfolds).

Now, by some measures, I was at last a man... What a crass, callow, insensitive oaf I have been, so many too many times... On Monday morning at school I was talking before class with a few of my friends - apparently I'm so ashamed that I have forgotten who exactly - about the weekend. I told them about losing Leo.

"But then Linda seduced me!" I said, with what I suppose was meant to be a sophisticated chuckle, but more likely came out as a prurient snigger. One of my friends shifted his glance to look over my shoulder. I turned to follow his gaze. Linda was standing two feet behind me. I met her eyes as what an instant earlier had been an eager smile crumpled into shame and disappointment and she turned and fled. In all my life I do believe I have never set out to hurt a lover, this was simply the first of far too many times when I have managed to do so anyway, from stupidity, ignorance, insensitivity, embarrassment...

"Insensitivity"! Hah! This from someone who has already confessed to having been

labeled "too sensitive". For the rest of my time at Eastbourne, Linda and I avoided each other. To my shame, I never made any attempt to talk to her, to apologize, to explain...

Oh well. I was actually going to classes, though an alarming trend of teachers refusing to allow me into their classrooms began with ceramics. As well as catering to real students, as we liked to think of ourselves, the school also offered vocational courses that found eager enrollees from Eastbourne's vast population of elderly people, whose artistic efforts we were pleased to regard with snotty cynical sneers - the arrogance of youth, untempered by experience... One night late in the winter term a kiln firing was lost; ashtrays, mugs, crude figures of gnomes and woodland creatures painstakingly squeezed into shape by geriatric fingers shattered. The suspicion arose that a hollow clay ball, perhaps several, had been placed in the kiln by a person or persons unknown. We had been warned at the first lesson that the presence of air bubbles in the clay could have disastrous results, the expansion of the air at the high temperatures within the kiln causing devastating explosions. For some reason the accusatory finger was pointed at my chest and I found myself with a few extra hours of free study time each week. Next I somehow managed to offend the sensibilities of the sculpture teacher. There was metal sculpture, there was wood, and there was clay and plaster. I had no feel at all for clay, and my efforts at making a bust from life were, let us say, disappointing. At best. But it was a wooden piece that first provoked outrage.

Unsurprisingly, given the heavy emphasis on Bauhaus principles, I was deeply impressed by the work of Arp and Brancusi, so when we were given the task of creating a wooden sculpture based on our clay busts

that was the road I tried to follow. Enthralled by the elegance of a model's neck I attempted an abstraction: a central form, curving upwards wing-like and tapering to a point, from which projected two other alar forms, yoke shaped and curving backwards. My intent was to suggest, subtly, the proud tilt of a chin. There was an unfortunate gulf between the imagined work, smooth and finished, and the crudely cut and poorly finished actuality.

In front of the whole class my work was lambasted, not only for the crude craftsmanship but also for daring to attempt such an abstract form - something far more figurative was required, it seems. My offered explanation of what I had wanted to achieve fell on deaf ears. I was offended in my turn. Perhaps my defense became a little vehement. However it may be, I was asked never to return.

Metal-working was something different, though my efforts here were equally fruitless. We were asked to create, over the Easter holiday, something on the theme of "Spring". Whatever form it might take, a recent incident had convinced me that it should not involve welding. There was a second year student whose vocation was sculpture. He was both talented and skilled. He had beautiful glossy black hair that hung almost to his waist. As he bent over to make an awkward weld his hair must have fallen into the jet of flame, for suddenly the class was interrupted by a terrible shout. I looked up to see his head engulfed in a halo of bright yellow-orange flame that lasted only brief seconds, but when the flames went out all his beautiful hair was gone. Alright, no welding for me, I was assiduously growing my own hair, and had no interest at all in losing it. So: "Spring"...

I took three lengths of steel rod and bent each into a spiral. Each spiral had a different inclination, based on some arcane formula that is lost to me now, while they all curved around the same imaginary cylinder. I set the three spirals in a square concrete base, then painted them fluorescent green. Once again there was an inconvenient gap between intent and achievement, and once again my effort was met with withering scorn. My protestations that it was intended as serious work, that the formulae I had used to calculate the spirals had deep meaning, that the spirals were intended to hint at the DNA helix, that their upward sweep symbolized growth, that green is the color of Spring's rejuvenating trees and grass, that the spirals were a visual pun on the prescribed theme, all this fell on deaf ears. Apparently what I had done was a personal affront to the teacher and demonstrated an inexcusable attack on the institution itself. Ouch. And I thought it was kind of cool. More free study time...

Not all my endeavors were quite so ill-received. I managed rather well in Basic Design and my skills as a draughtsman were developing, albeit slowly. Nor was I a complete failure at lettering, where the teacher's idol, perhaps even obsession, was Ben Shahn (who was also, I suspect, an influence on whoever created the logo for the Yardbirds). The encouragement to allow ourselves to escape the rigidities of formal typography was liberating.

And of course, fashion drawing. I made certain to maintain standards high enough to remain in the class, if for no other reason than to continue to moon over Tina. And so, one Monday morning I was witness to an extraordinary, wonderful, almost alchemical transformation. When I had seen Sally walking to her bus the previous Friday she had been her usual self, far from

unattractive certainly, but a little drab, a bit nondescript. But when she walked into the classroom that Monday she was radiant, her eyes shone, her skin seemed to glow, where her posture had been hesitant, closed-off, now she stood tall and confident, a beauty, the duckling become a swan. I was transfixed. I think perhaps at that moment I fell in love, though the realization grew only slowly over the course of the summer. And fool that I am, I was distracted by Tina, and also held back for fear of rejection.

I was not the only one to have noticed the change. Girls whispered, boys stared. It emerged that she had gone to a party on Saturday with Roger, a local boy, a bit of a lad and a prominent face on the local scene. They had left together and by all accounts had spent the night together, too. Of course now all those chants of "Ay guy lay guv ay gan dray goo!" returned to haunt me. How had Roger seen this beauty, brought it forth? How had I not? So began a strange, disjointed pavane that twined through the next several years.

As well as my doomed sculptural project, I had spent a good deal of time during the Easter holiday sketching the old folk in their deck-chairs and on the benches of the promenade. By now I had completely abandoned the compromise of industrial design, having fallen completely under the spell of Fine Art's prestige and mystique. I had rather looked forward to the silkscreen class that took place in the summer term, and was pleased with my sketches for the print I planned to make. The design was a satirical pastiche of British travel posters of an earlier age: at the top and the bottom were to be friezes based on my sketches of old fogies, beneath the top frieze "COME TO EASTBOURNE", then a stylization of Eastbourne's skyline looking out over the Channel which I intended to be echoed by a similar view of the town's large cemetery,

followed by "AND DIE IN THE SUN". For some reason this provoked still another teacher's ire.

"You can't do this", she told me. "You're imitating Paul." Paul being second year painter whose work admired, and who may have influenced my design in some subtle way, but "imitating"? I didn't think so, and said as much. So now we came to the true cause of her anger.

"It will offend people. The trustees will be outraged." This seemed to me, if anything, an excellent reason to proceed with the project, and I was outraged myself at this censorship.

"You're not here to tell me *what* to print," I told her, "but *how* to print."

That, as you may imagine, did not go over well.

"If you are going to take that attitude, you can leave the class. Now. And don't come back."

Hey ho, more free study hours...

COME DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

By Kenneth Rains Shiffrin

My skin turned tight
Drums of despair pound in my chest
In a revolting rhythm so out of sync
The meter brushes madness against symbols of change.

Stained by indelible darkness
Hope struggles for place in the aching solitude
Of that last hour
Before the dauntless dawn
Faithfully waiting in prayer
For light to rise.

© 2011 Kenneth Rains Shiffrin

THE GROTESQUE BODY

By Matt Leyshon

Images © Yann LeGrand



Gary F. woke to find a grotesque body in his bed. The skin was pallid like sweating cheese and there were little dark hairs sprouted out all over it like a pig's bristles. Two pasty legs stretched out to the end of the bed, a soft white belly that made him think of a maggot hogged the centre, and everything gently quivered with ugly wheezing breaths. The body smelled of old meat and it glistened with an unpleasant sheen of oily perspiration.

He looked at it in disgust and tried to establish how such a body had come to be in his bed. Moreover, he puzzled over how such repugnant form could even exist.

Perhaps it had been created in a secret government laboratory and placed there whilst he was away as an evil experiment? Was it possible that he could have climbed into bed and fallen asleep without noticing it there, he thought? Or maybe his work colleagues had somehow gained entrance to his apartment to play a prank upon him with this repugnant marionette that they had found somewhere? There was no simple explanation to the fact that he had awoken to find a truly horrible body lying in his bed.

Gary F. had returned yesterday evening from his annual trip to Dorset. It was a trip he had made every summer since moving north, originally to see his parents, but since their deaths, it had become a pilgrimage of uncertain purpose. Although he had not lived in Dorset for decades it always felt to him as though he were coming home and he enjoyed the sense of belonging no matter how misplaced it might be.

In Dorset he would visit the coast, wander through dense woods, and climb hills to admire the views of rolling downs and winding vales. Travelling down in his car he would always feel a certain anxiety; he would worry about bumping into old classmates or teachers, and he would worry about chance encounters with family members that he chose to never visit, but once there, and with his groceries purchased, cocooned by the countryside, he would feel calmed by a feeling of sanctity that was magnified by the preceding tension like a stay of execution.

This last trip however had not been completely without incident as he had taken a fall on the last day of his holiday whilst making the walk back to Portland Bill where he had left his car. He had been ascending a gently inclining rock face, as, with the tide coming in, it was too treacherous to continue walking by the sea. Here he had lost his footing and fallen backwards, tumbling over several jutting boulders of Portland stone before finally come to rest upon Chesil Beach's shingle with the sun drilling into his eyes.

He must have knocked himself out for when he came to he did so from a peculiarly intense dream in which he swayed wildly, unable to feel the ground beneath his feet and his arms both floated around him like disembodied limbs. In the dream he drifted into the sea like a wraith and floated until all proprioception had vanished and he was not floating in the sea, he was the sea itself. He had given his head quite a knock as his body spilled downwards and was dazed at first as his dream dissipated, but the pain was soon forgotten and the lump on his temple was swiftly ignored when, as he got cautiously to his feet, he had spotted a perfect hagstone amidst the pebbles.

Hagstone's bring good luck and Gary F. was always on the lookout for them when he walked along Dorset's beaches. His parents had had one hung on a nail outside the family home but it had been stolen when they had died as the property had been left unattended for most of the year until it was sold. He wasn't sure that it had ever brought good luck upon the household but the horrors that might have befallen him or his family had it not been there were proof enough for Gary F. and he had wanted a hagstone of his own ever since.

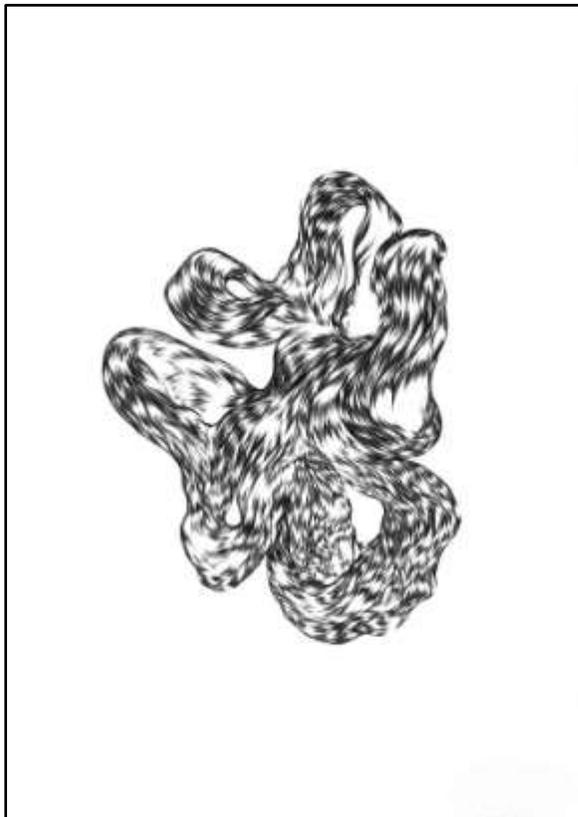
Now, with his hagstone in his pocket, he returned to his car feeling content and more

than a little light headed. Every so often he took his stone and admired its silver flecked grey sheen and the red vein running around the circumference at each end, then he would hold it upwards to allow the sun to shine through the hole in the centre until the light made his sore head throb. Could it be that as he had been admiring his find his workmates had been breaking his locks, entering his apartment, and hauling a body across his hall and to hide it in his bed?



More important than how the body got there, was how Gary F. could get the body out of his bed and out of his sight, it was making him feel sick. To his further horror, as he sought to roll the body out over the edge of the mattress, its corpse-like arms began to rise, and when he stopped thinking about trying to shift the body, the arms flopped back like two packs of rolled sausage meat.

Although the form lay in his bed he knew that it was most definitely not his. Although it did enter his mind that perhaps somehow he was within it, as if his consciousness had gone astray and returned to the wrong home like a cat wanting to be fed and not caring who does the feeding. His mind was certainly capable of wandering, as was anyone's, but to his knowledge it had never roamed from his body before and then returned to inhabit a different body, and even if such a thing were to happen, surely his mind would choose a less odious soma to inhabit.



Gary F. knew that his own body may have compared unfavourably to some of his colleagues who went to the gym after work or the clerk in Accounts who ran marathons, it still made no sense that his mind would choose this disgusting lump of pulsing flesh instead of his own body, wherever it might now be. None the less, as

irrational as it seemed to him, he eventually concluded that his mind had indeed somehow transferred itself into the grotesque body that was laid in his bed like an effigy.

Gary F. considered that if he were to return himself to his rightful vessel then he would of course need to find his body first. He was quite sure he had been in his body when he was in Dorset, he had felt his head smack against the rocks and he had held the hagstone in his own hand. It was his body that had climbed into his car at Portland Bill and made the drive home. He was sure of this because he had seen himself in the rear view mirror and studied the bump on his temple, and he would surely have noticed if it had not been his hands upon the steering wheel. Perhaps my body is still in the car, thought Gary F.

He concentrated upon sitting the body up at the edge of the bed and, focussing intensely on each limb at a time, he then managed to get the body into a standing position. Studying the legs and visualising each movement he was able to walk to his wardrobe, and by observing his arms and hands he was able to select clothes and put them on. The process took a long time but his clothes fit the body well enough. Noticing that the body looked much less offensive clothed he decided that he would be able to walk out to his car parked in the street without drawing attention to himself and so he worked his way outside.

Gary F. was not surprised to find that his body was not in the car. He managed to get the body into the driving seat and here he sat thinking for a moment. Perhaps, he contemplated, his colleagues had in fact played their prank as he slept and after swapping the bodies they had taken his own body into work to surprise him when he arrived. With this in mind he started

driving to work, carefully switching his attention between the road ahead, his hands on the wheel, and his feet on the pedals.

As he finished parking in the office car park Gary F. noticed the hagstone was on the dashboard, he concentrated on his left hand and reached for it, and then he pushed it into pocket. He walked from his car and began to prepare himself for the jeers he would certainly receive from the other staff in his office when he found himself faced with his body sat motionless at his desk.

“Nice body,” they would laugh, pointing at the hideous form he entered the office in.

“Gary F. went on holiday and all he brought us back was a repulsive body,” some witty clerk in accounts would shout across the desks to hysterical laughter from the others.

As he walked in the receptionist lifted her head briefly then returned to staring at her computer screen without acknowledging him.

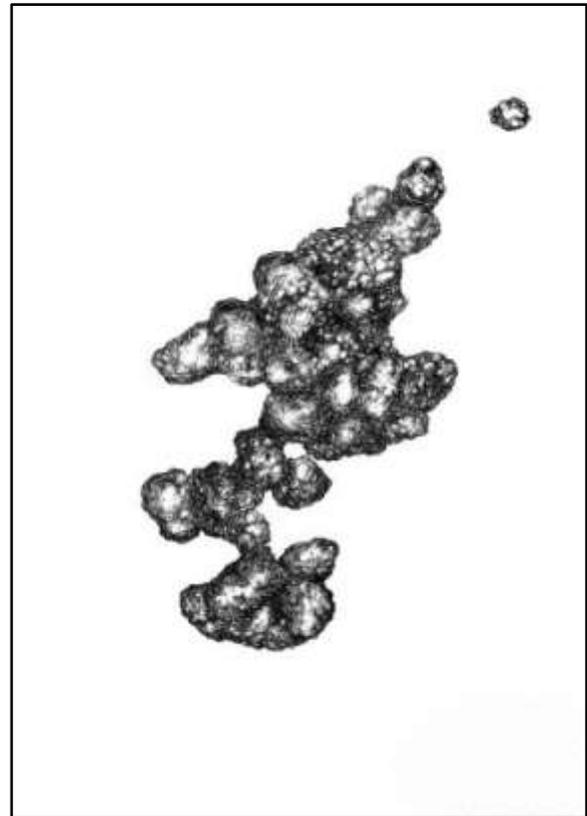
“Good morning,” said Gary F.

“Morning,” she replied without looking up again.

Curious, thought Gary F. at her lack of repugnance, and walked across the office floor to his desk. He was impressed with his colleagues planning for there were no smirks and no wisecracks; the whole office was clearly in on the joke and they didn't want it to end. But to his disappointment his body was not in his chair waiting for him.

“Good morning,” said Gary F. to Patrick from Personnel who sat opposite him frowning, engrossed in his work.

“Overslept?” Patrick replied.



“No,” said Gary F., but Patrick had returned to his work, uninterested in any tale Gary F. might have to tell.

Nobody asked about his holiday and there were no comments on the fact he had returned to work in a wretched body that surely ought to have repulsed anybody that set eyes upon it. He felt as though his mind were a meat hook with a putrid carcass hanging from it.

He was indeed late for work and he noticed that Phoevi who sat beside him was taking a break already. She was reading a book and Gary F. wondered what it was because the back of her battered paperback book depicted some squid-like creature crawling from the sea with a body even more abhorrent than his own. It had ghastly green feelers dripping in slime and lurid viscous droplets oozing from its bulbous head.

It occurred to Gary F. that if he were able to occupy the body that he had found in his bed and brought in to work then it seemed plausible that other bodies might also prove to be available vessels. Just as he had to study his own body to make it respond, he began to study Phoevi's and soon enough he found he was able to reach out with her right hand to turn the page. Her petite body felt less of a burden and her slender limbs moved without requiring such concentration, but the relief was brief for the feeling of not belonging in a body other than his own could not be shaken. Gary F. found that with Phoevi's eyes he could read the words upon the page of her book and he was curious to read of the creature whose body was far more terrible than anything he thought imaginable.

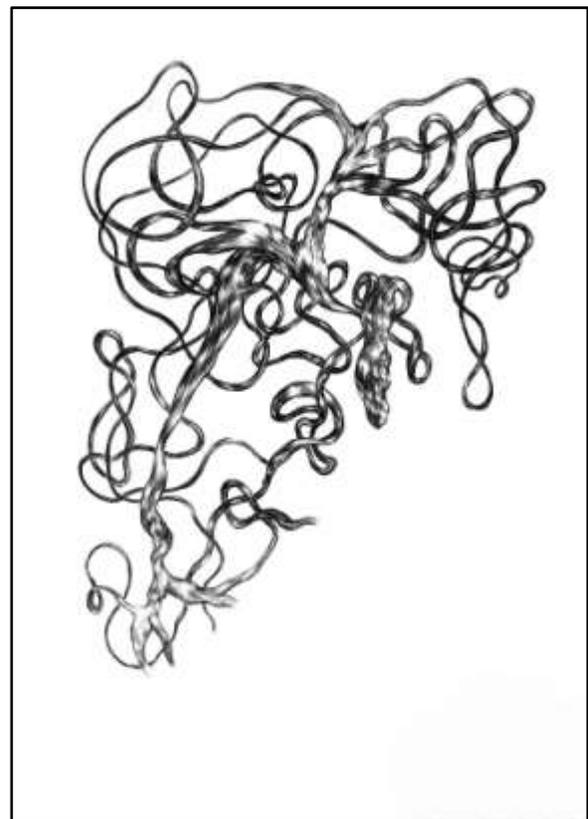
...yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature.... A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque scaly body with rudimentary wings.

The words began to blur on the page and he began to feel uncomfortable again, as if all the air in the room were rushing towards him. He found that if he didn't concentrate on his head then it kept falling forward as if it were too heavy for Phoevi's slim neck. He noticed that Patrick was staring but it had been a running joke in the office that he fancied Phoevi so at first Gary F. ignored him and continued to struggle on with his reading in the hope that his vision would focus again.

...with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body.

Patrick was still staring and his attention seemed to be very much focussed upon Phoevi's chest. This might have been a perfectly ordinary occurrence except the look of dismay that Patrick bore suggested

otherwise. Gary F. looked down and noticed something wriggling beneath Phoevi's cotton blouse between her breasts. Her head was beginning to feel increasingly heavy to him and his vision began to blur even more now as if he were under water. He reached her hand up and pulled her top out so he could look down inside. For some moments he could make little out, but then he noticed a viscous tentacle writhing around and probing for an escape from the constraints of her clothing.



With the eyes of his colleagues burning into him and gravity closing in like a coffin lid, he felt a desperate panic rising and an urgent need to get away; not a desire to leave the office for some fresh air, but to depart from corporality altogether and drift in the cold seas he had left behind in Dorset.

Just as he had willed himself into Phoevi's body, he now willed himself into the space

above her and, as if Phoevi's body were a vacuum and the plug had been pulled, he felt himself gushing outwards and speeding towards freedom. Gary F. reeled at the magnitude of his new self and the bombardment of sensation; he felt a leaf on an office plant unfurl, the heat of the computer processors, he heard a flea scratching in the carpet, and he sensed perspiration bubbles swelling in the armpits of Gareth from Marketing. Somewhere a toilet flushed, somewhere else a monitor blinked off into energy safe mode. He felt the last whistle of air gush from the lungs of the body he had arrived at work with as it slumped forwards dead. He heard the hagstone drop to the floor from the body's pocket.

A first-aider had rushed over to Phoevi and screamed at the numerous tentacles that had now erupted from her chest like a mottled green anemone. He felt the light refract from her glistening, bulbous and cephalous head. He heard the breath rasp in her flooded lungs, he felt the magnetic fields shift as workers rose from their chairs. The physical world swarmed around him like hornets stinging him with omniscience. He heard pigeons scratching on the roof, he saw mites shuffling in keyboard dust, he smelled a discreet fart and an exhalation of coffee breathe swirled around him until it all became too much process.

His own weightlessness became weighted with awareness; his thoughts flailed and eddied, without organs to differentiate between perceptions the world was becoming a soup of useless details and he bloated within it like a stale crouton. Time became arbitrary; the dead body slumped in his chair was dragged away by panicking managers as a cacophony of screams and fearful sobbing soundtracked Phoevi who was now writhing cephalopodic on the floor.

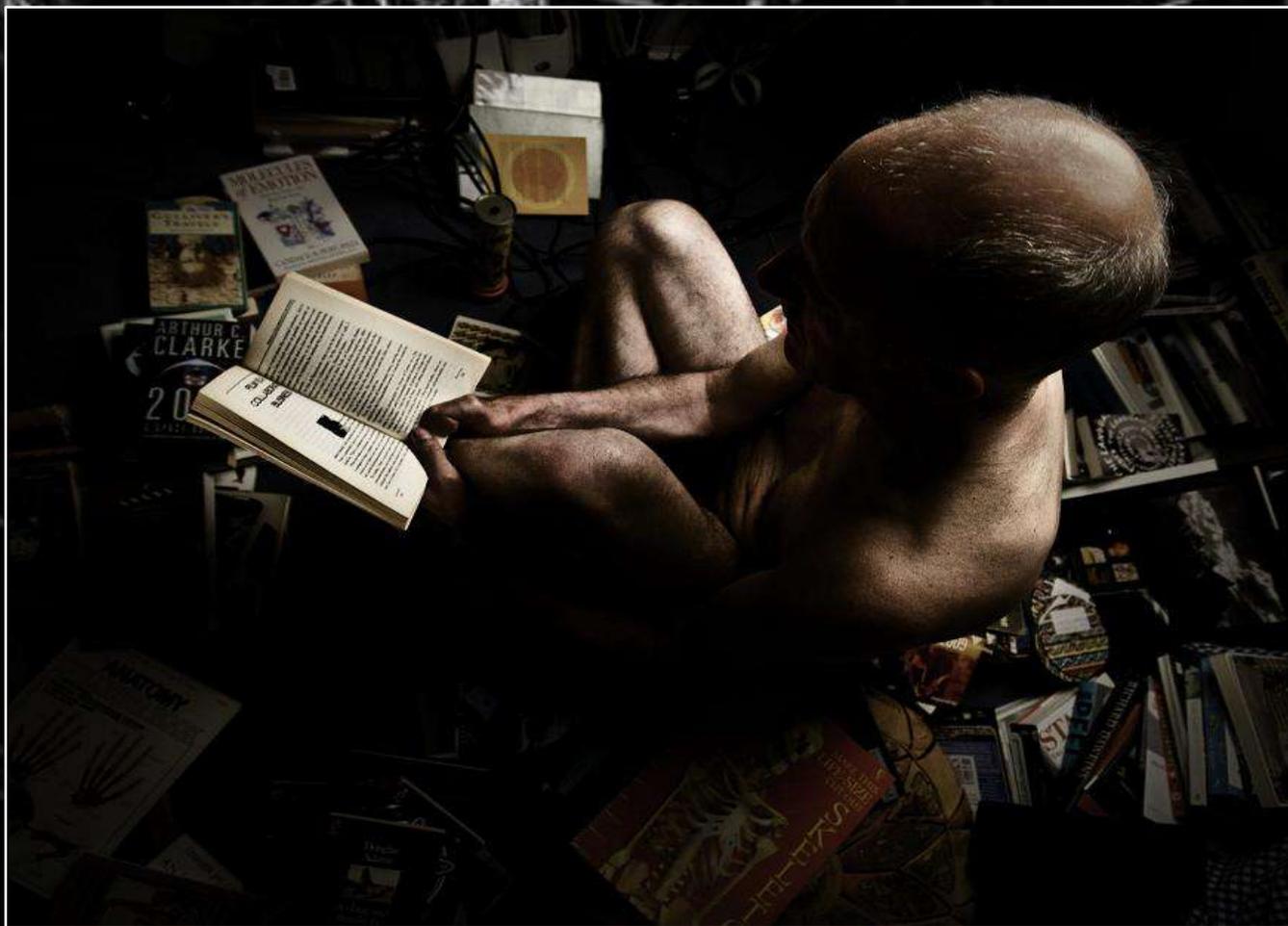
He had to escape this suffocating freedom from form and so with his last ounce of concentration Gary F. summoned himself into the hagstone that lay upon the floor just beyond Phoevi's tangle of slithering tendrils.

Immediately the world began to ebb luxuriously away from him, leaving only the fading prickle of coarse carpet beneath him and the waning, gentle warmth from the strip light above; and so salvation came to him in the form of a stony prison. Gary F.'s rapture was a cold stenosis and he basked in the death of sensibility. It felt like coming home.

His last awareness of the world was the clammy fingers of Patrick followed by the warmth of a trouser pocket.

SOMA

© 2011 Lisa Wormsley

















UNIVERSITY OF STRANGERS

AN EXCERPT

By Bob Pfeifer

University of Strangers is a mix of fact and fiction written as oral history. It blends the real-life murder trial of Amanda Knox in Perugia, Italy with a fantasy grouping of celebrity artists known as the Strangers pursuing truth and corruption. The story is told from the point of view of various characters. In the excerpts below we hear from three of the novel's many disparate voices.

THE STORY OF THE EGG

Prisoner One Eye, who has one eye and sometimes covers it up -- Ed.

I thought these guys were punks. I've known Chief Dennis for like since Spain or someplace middle east, been all over, 20 years, more, 30, not long after I got out of Nam.

The Chief was thinking about making a move. Like he was sick of them, Brank and Juan, but I called him, on that. I told Chief what I saw. It was like almost lockdown, no it was at night, lights out, and, there's Branko in the little kitchen we have. Not kitchen what do you call it, shit, closet. It's got a thing to wash dishes, a toaster for bread cause you don't get pop tarts, a sink, microwave, that's it.

So Branko's there toasting. I see him like . . . with a loaf. And he's cracking eggs. Never

saw that. Fresh eggs. We don't get eggs, like when we get eggs, we get powder they make the eggs from. Nothing's real here. So he's just cracking the shells. It sounded so beautiful. So he's got the eggs in the shells but he's with them in the open. I think he's stupid. I said hey. And he didn't jump, just asked, said something back, you know, like hey or what's up doc, so he doesn't care who, if a guard, me, I mean, I see nothing; he's poaching eggs in the micro, that's not gonna be a problem if he does get seen.

I say to him Branko I thought you were a motherfucking pussy wimp, but I see you got the juice like who the fuck are you, and, he just says, One Eye you want some eggs. Didn't look. I coulda smacked him and taken the eggs. He's like I'll share but not like he's juice just like he doesn't care, a nice guy. So I say fuck no thanks because I know that's power. More power than that Mexican Juan packs.

I mean anybody can kick Branko's ass on our floor, anybody. But nobody's got eggs. So I told the Chief you stupid Kraut don't go there. I can only stall him. But it tells him: I'm not down. You know, so he can't fuck me saying where were you, and, get weird on me because he like will.

Man has eggs in prison fuck me.

DANI

Dani is an attractive girl in her 20's and works in the Los Angeles sex industry --- Ed.

I knew Vivian for a few years. We slept together every once in a while; nothing serious, just like when we felt like it. I ran into her and Branko at a club. I was a mess. I just had an abortion. I was with a client and the condom broke. I got pregnant. By the time I found out it was actually 11 weeks. And I'm . . . I'm not on birth control basically because it affects me really badly. And um so I know it's so stupid of me to be like that, I should have figured something out. I should have gone out and gotten that stupid fucking pill. I don't know what I was thinking cuz you know there's the morning after pill you can go out and get it. But I fucking spent the money on heroin.

I got the money and it was like this weird chain of events. And I kept thinking I gotta go get that pill. I gotta get that pill. And I kept spending the money on shit. So stupid.

Anyway I started feeling sick almost immediately after. You know like a week after. And I knew in my gut that I was. I knew but I was in denial . . . Because there's been times in my life when I thought I was pregnant and have gotten so psyched out in my head that I started having physical reactions. Started getting morning sickness, missing my period just from my mind convincing myself I was. And then it would turn out I wasn't. I just kept thinking I'm freaking myself out.

But it turned out I was and I just fell apart. I lost it. I didn't know what to do. I'd had a miscarriage and an abortion already, so if there was any way I could have this kid I was going to have it. So I started researching: what can you possibly do if you're a heroin junkie and you're pregnant. What can you do? So I went to Planned Parenthood and had a meeting with the people. Basically what it boils down to is what you have to do is either stay on a low dose of heroin and then the baby's born addicted to junk and they get the baby onto methadone, or you get onto methadone and the baby's born addicted to methadone. But that's worse because methadone is harder to get off of than junk for the baby so it's better to stay on the junk. That's what they're telling me. So I knew I couldn't have a baby addicted to heroin. That's just sick and wrong.

I don't know why I wanted the kid. I don't necessarily think abortion is immoral. I think it's a good thing it's there for people and everything, but I know how bad it fucked me up before. I'm not even a religious person but I don't know I just didn't want to do it. But it just came down to the fact that it was sick and wrong to do it. So I had the abortion.

And that's what I was telling Vivian and Branko that night. And the reason it took so long for me to get the abortion is because I was having all these financial difficulties because I couldn't work. There was just something. I couldn't work and be pregnant. It was just so wrong to me even though I was like, OK, I'm not keeping this kid but I cannot be a pregnant person out

working. It's just . . . it was too yuck you know.

I was telling them I was broke. And I don't know why but Branko offered to lend me some money except he's a nice guy and felt sorry for me. But I said 'No way.' I have this thing about owing anybody. Viv got mad at me for that. Maybe she got mad at him too. She's so obsessive. She thought I was manipulating Branko like he didn't come from our world and he fell for my sob story. But I wasn't using him like a sucker. I was fucked up and just telling them both what happened that week. But Viv thinks women can manipulate guys to do anything because they're stupid and think with their dicks. She's probably right about their dicks but I don't know about being so stupid, I mean they have more money. So she got pissed saying I was manipulating her boyfriend.

They fought all the time anyways.

I don't know. I kind of blame myself for some of their problems. She was cheating on him with me a little. And then she found my number like on a matchbook or something at his house. That night I slipped him my number, put it in his coat pocket. He never called me. But she went off on us saying that it was his kid. That he and I were doing all this shit behind her back like we knew each other, which was totally crazy. I just met him that night. I'm not sure if it was a game or she was really that insecure. But it's usually the person doing all the accusing who's guilty, isn't it?

Branko and I never had sex. We never had anything between us but her.

A few months later, he broke up with her. He couldn't take her accusing him of stuff all the time. She went nuts when he did that.

I just laughed, like "you deserve it you fucking bitch," but we still hooked up sometimes.

But who knew she was that nuts? I never imagined how far she would go to get back at him.

ROME TAXI

Branko P, one of the lead Strangers -- Ed.

Sitting in the emergency room in Italy was strange. We couldn't really understand much of what they were saying. I guess Juan could understand more than me, given that he's Latino. Some of the words make sense. But still I don't think he gets much. It goes by so fast.

The driver of the other taxi, a thin guy in his twenties, sat across from us, staring at the floor. Juan and I weren't hurt, just a few bruises. Both cars were mangled. We wanted to leave, but were told we had to stay for X-rays. Our driver was in examination. Juan was done. I was next. Juan nursed some coffee. I wanted to sleep. The hospital took my want to sleep as a sign that I might be hurt.

I thought, we should be tired. It was two in the morning. It's been three hours since the

accident. The nurse warned me not to sleep. The doctor told Juan the same thing.

We were wet and cold. That's why we had blankets over us. That was nice of them to give us covers. I figured it meant we weren't going to be arrested.

We landed from L.A. via Madrid yesterday. Took a bus into Rome proper to get something to eat. That was all great. Found a cheap local place that served great pasta and mediocre wine. We didn't drink, so that part wasn't a problem. Walked around a little to see the sights. As it got later, we thought it best to just catch a cab to the train station. We wanted to catch the evening train to Perugia.

We had a little trouble with the cab driver. He didn't work his English much and we didn't know Italian. I said to Juan I thought he was high or something. And Juan said he thought so too. I wondered if it wasn't me or us jet lagged—maybe our judgment was off. He said no, that wasn't it, this guy was fucked up.

That's when it hit me, and I said it to Juan, "This guy is going to get us killed." We have no control over that, Branko, it's in the hands of God. Juan said it just like that. I looked at him like, what is he talking about, and told him something about our having a choice and we can get out of the taxi right now. Nothing's stopping us.

The guy looked to be nodding at the wheel. We tried to switch cabs, but the other cabbies in the line refused to take us. He was next in line. That's how it worked. We

got back in. So much for our having a choice. We pulled a map out and pointed to the train station.

"Okay, okay," he said. "Alright, he's got it," I thought. In the maze of streets, we had no idea where he was going, but fifteen minutes into the ride, he pulls over and gets out. We look at him like, what are you doing now?

"One minute, okay?" He just says something like no worry, no pay. He gets out next to a park. He's yelling something at some street hooker. Another one comes by and pokes her head in the taxi window. She's so close I can smell her perfume. And we make signs like, no, we aren't interested.

The cabbie pushes her away from the door. She half-heartedly swings her purse at him. He makes a fist like he's going to slug her, but he's really not going to and everyone knows he's not. He's talking to the first girl, who finally opens up a little black pocketbook and hands him something, not money. He shoves it in his jacket pocket and gets back in the cab.

"Okay, we go now," he tells us, looking in the rearview mirror. He's not all there.

We drive a few more blocks and he stops at a bar. Double parks. Cars honk. He flips them off and walks in waving back to us "One minuto, eh? No problema" finger in the air. I don't bother calling him on the meter.

It starts to rain.

What's this guy doing? No doubt something having to do with whatever he got off the hooker. One minute turns into fifteen and we get out of the cab and walk.

We turn the first corner, so he doesn't happen to come out and chase us down. Screw him.

It's pouring now, and all the cabs are full or not stopping. It's raining too hard to tell. Our bags are getting heavy, but we make it to a hotel. There's a line of cabs out front and we get in one—luggage, us, everything wet in the backseat. This driver speaks English.

"Train station," I tell him. "Okay, good. American? What kind of the music you like?" "Rock." "Okay." He flips stations. And some Italian rock music comes on that sounds like Sixties movie music. The guitar sounds like bad Dick Dale. The drums go bah—bah bah—bah. One and two, one and two, all the way I'm waiting for Goldie Hawn to pop in wearing an itsy-bitsy teenie-weenie Polka Dot bikini like we're on Laugh-In with Sergio Leone and a rock polka band.

We're moving. Finally. Start and stop. Honks.

Intersections jammed. Noise. Raindrops loud on our car.

We're wet. My bags are on my lap. I can barely see out the front. Juan's wiping the water off his shaved head with a tee-shirt from his knapsack.

"It be to train forty-five minutes. Okay for you?"

"Yes okay." We have about an hour and a half to make it, so we're okay. Juan sits upright, eyes closed. I put my knapsack against my window and close my eyes. Jet lag hitting. I wake up. We're stopped in an intersection. A second later our taxi gets hit from behind. Maybe it's the other way around. Maybe we get hit and then I wake up. But I think I wake up first. The luggage on my lap blocks my going forward. Look over: Juan's okay. The driver's out the door yelling. We get out. The car behind us is smashed up, steam coming out of the hood. The passenger, a woman, went through the windshield. Blood. Rain coming down. Juan and I become observers. We almost fade away. Maybe I'm in shock. The cop directing traffic is there in a second. He's pissed off and on his mobile. We hear sirens in another two or three. They pull her out. Ambulance. She looks familiar. I tell Juan she's the girl on the street. He asks me what girl I'm talking about, and I say the hooker who gave the stuff to the cab driver by the park. He says he remembers, but I'm wrong. It's the one who came up to our window and took a swing at him with her purse. He's right and says, "She's messed up, man". The other driver, the first one who crashed into the back of our cab, comes up to us and starts yelling. He spits at us. Juan puts his fists up, like let's go. He used to box for the Mexican national team—lightweight. Our driver runs over and gets in the guy's face. The cops break it up.

They put the girl on a stretcher and rush her into an ambulance. I have no idea if there's

any hope for her. It looks bad. Blood makes things look bad, but blood doesn't always mean it is bad. It just means it's not good.

"Oh, shit." I just put it all together.

"Yes, this is shit, Branko."

"No. I mean the guy who hit us is the first cab driver. The one we left."

"Motherfucker. He want to fight. Branko, I kick his ass."

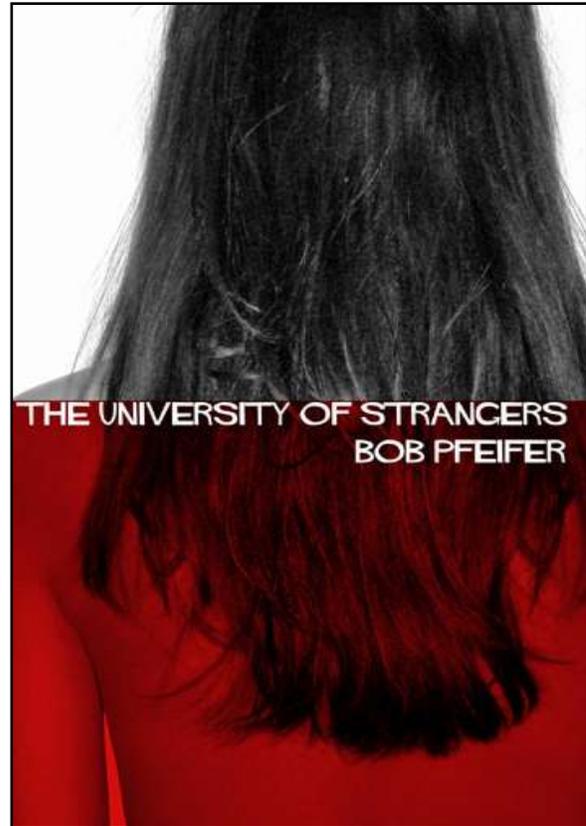
I knew it, I think.

The police cuff the first cabbie, uncovering the track marks on his arm to show us what's up. Druggie. They tell us the girl is dead and take him away. Our cab driver gives him the finger and shrugs his shoulders. Our driver, being helpful, asks if he can call us a ride, probably angling for a tip, but still it's nice of him.

I look over the train schedule. No way we'll make the next one now, and there isn't another for four hours. Ask the cops how far the train station is. They're helpful. We just don't understand their answer. The rain stopped. We decide to walk. Everything is wet. Puddles to avoid in the dark. We know we're going to feel lousy on the train to Perugia.

When you don't sleep you dread the sun coming up. No shops, restaurants. Nothing's open. Just keep walking.

© 2011 Bob Pfeifer



UNIVERSITY OF STRANGERS can be purchased at Amazon:

http://www.amazon.com/University-Strangers-Bob-Pfeifer/dp/061542595X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1302978385&sr=1-1

The book also includes a download card with five songs performed by the Tabby Chinos, featuring Bob Pfeifer (Human Switchboard), Cynthia Sley (Bush Tetras), Don Fleming (Gumball) with Pat Place (Contortions, Bush Tetras), Jim Sclavunos (Nick Cave/Bad Seeds), Gregg Sutton (Dylan, Lone Justice), Cheetah Chrome (Dead Boys, Batusis), Bob Bert (Sonic Youth, Pussy Galore), Sal Maida (Roxy Music, Sparks).



THE COSTA RICA EIGHT MILE

BOOK TWO: HARRISBURG NOCTURNITIS

CHAPTER 9: GUANTANAMO ON THE SUSQUEHANNA

By Gene Gregorits

Izabela and I returned to Baltimore in silence, and all remained silent for a couple of days, until it dawned on me that I had no driver for the U-Haul. I coughed up the requisite apologies, and prepared a large dinner of T-bone steaks with a 1.5 liter bottle of Concha Y Toro's bottom rung Cabernet, which had been a big hit with me that week. We went on walks through the Northeast Baltimore ghettos at night, all warm beer and humidity and decay, and I bare-knuckled her to several climaxes underneath my always-open sidewalk transom windows. It took about an hour to load the truck, and with the bobcat now docile from fear, perched stiff and trembling on my lap, Izabela gloating furiously, showing off her relative prowess in maneuvering the behemoth through traffic or between gas pumps, a promise to leave alcohol alone, and Fleetwood Mac once again on the radio, I was so happy to be leaving Baltimore I could have wept. Hitting a plastic pint of Popov surreptitiously with corn chip breath chasers during the 90 minute drive to Harrisburg, I made a point not to think about our destination.

Between my Harrisburg of 1996, and my Harrisburg of now, in the ugly mid-winter of 2009, there had been so many cities that I'd lost track of them all. And today, rumbling and rolling and slamming about behind me in the 12 foot U-Haul was a large

assemblage of mostly scavenged items from Detroit and Baltimore curbside trash piles. In that 13 year interim, all I'd managed to hold onto was my dead Hungarian grandmother's writing desk, and a bare aluminum spatula. These items first came to me in the fall of 1995, when my marriage to a 15 year old high school student dissolved and I went flailing into bachelorhood, via the homosexual nightlife of downtown Harrisburg (I worked both the Harrisburg hospital emergency room and the YMCA front desk graveyard shift). I spiraled into degradation and anger via a disintegrating rear-efficiency apartment, 2nd floor, on 2nd Street, 2nd and Forster to be exact, where I could not make it a block at the age of 18 without cat calls and exhortations from boisterous old queens, and every night at the hospital, gunshot victims, and every night at the Y, all manner of scum-ridden misconduct, from teenage boys to women to dope deals to gay orgies, and I took the money, I took small bribes and large bribes, I kept my head down and said nothing. I took in as much as an extra hundred every week. Sometimes, I used the cash to send roses to my ex-wife. I had to stop sending the flowers when I was visited by a city police officer with a restraining order. A week after that, from a mean-spirited lawyer, came a decree-of-divorce. "Gene Gregorits, defendant. Jamie Riley, plaintiff." I knew I would never see her again.

In 1996, I never slept. The hospital was infested with spiders, large wolf spiders, hairy, fat, fast-moving spiders in nests the size of big-screen Sony Trinitrons, which I ruptured with broom handles. At night, I smoked cigarettes and drank coffee and beer and did chin ups on the sandstone door frames of the YMCA's gothic and spectral lobby, which would fill up with early morning river mist and the electric hum of its security system. Ruined men visited me there, and I saw my future in their ruddy complexions and romantic homosexual yearnings and gay prostitution and crack pipes. In the morning, I went to the hospital and killed a few thousand spiders. Police would rap on the plexiglass windows of the security booth, in which I would doze, they would slam the grid iron at the YMCA, in which I would doze also, and they would rap the plexiglass at the hospital with their flashlights, and they would bark like dogs, and they made remarks about me to my face, and they would threaten to have me fired. The police would use obscenities and racial epithets, and I would be taken to interrogation rooms and coerced, I would be harangued and browbeaten by the police, inches from a suspect, a shooting, or drug death, or a statutory rape, and I would point my finger at him, and I would say, "Yeah, he's the one," and then they would arrest him.

In 1996, I never slept. Morning would come slowly, and walking home from work, the great yellow sun would burn through me, I would be acidic from coffee and insomnia, I would be true-yellow, wired like fuck, and I would go home and read my mail beside the filter top litter box in my large, old, and mostly empty kitchen. The women who saw my classified ads in small magazines and

wrote me letters were the only women in my life; they sent me dirty panties and collage artwork. I read their letters, and coasted from one fixation to the next. My letters were full of bile and angst and invariably frightened the women away.

I ate out of boredom, YMCA vending machine chow, Oscar Meyer, and coughed everything back up, pure acid. I sat by the river and started taking blades to myself at night. Razors, sometimes. Sometimes, steak knives. Sometimes, broken beer bottles. It was too soon for me to see how my wife had been unfit for me, and how I was unfit for anyone. I was too close to it, and I simply screamed for her to come back. I didn't stop screaming for a year, and then I was a fully formed death dwarf, badly scarred from head to foot, and then I took my act on the road: New York City. In New York, I could not hold my liquor and was always available for a freak show. I lusted after anything in a skirt and desperation fairly poured from me like diesel exhaust. It would fill up a room in seconds. But in the trouble I caused, I found proof of my existence. It was the chaotic inverse of Harrisburg, that sprawling ghetto that permanently depressed steel town on the river.

I fantasized about a post-nuclear Harrisburg. I romanticized my invisibility there among all of those vagrants, and the daytime business people who flooded the restaurants during lunchtime. It was as if I had been secreted away there by a powerful force, or forces, that my squalid teenage purgatorio would bleed further and further out, into my 20s, or my 30s. I thought of my life as a sacred mistake: the Church of the Abandoned Christ. There was so much I

didn't know, vast worlds I had not touched and did not expect to ever touch in the future. Completely un-socialized and uneducated, I could not do anything normally, or even at all. I could not file tax returns, or drive a car, or ask out a woman, or drink in a bar. I could not go on vacation or cook or write or play a guitar or dance. I took refuge in books from my youth, "black novels" like *Naked Lunch* and *Journey to the End of the Night*. I'd kept the stereo from my marriage, and listened to rock'n'roll at night, drinking malt liquor, submerged in that kind of rural, lower class teenage misery that finds solace in moronic punk records and splatter films. None of my friends were literate, and I was consistently arrogant and snide to anyone my own age, aching for a conversation about William Burroughs or existentialism, about Marlon Brando or Charles Manson or the Sex Pistols, conversations that were out of my reach and which I subconsciously knew I wasn't equipped to sustain anyway. I also knew that other men my age were driving cars, and having relationships, and talking about books. They did not go to movies alone, thinking about the Church of the Abandoned Christ and how this American city or that American city was somehow charged with Satanic energy. They did not ride the Greyhound buses alone, while writing letters to strangers from classified ads, theorizing about the city's provocation of an infernal masochism that would in time blossom as romantic genius. But I did these things. These things were keeping me alive, steaming in me, slow but steady, dragging me from one day to the next. I paid my electric bills on time with post office money orders, did my grocery shopping in the suburbs with my father during weekends or evenings, and cursed the river while

haunting back alleys at night. I felt the sharp sting of remorse for what I had put my parents through, and was unable to say very much to them. No one knew what to say to anyone. Sometimes, I would call my mother late at night, drunk on high gravity malt liquor, and she would ask who was buying me alcohol.

The major streets of Harrisburg ran straight north and south, parallel to the river. There were multi-lane streets, and the speeding yuppies in their sports cars seemed to use them as racetracks: Front Street, Second Street, Third Street. With its many small valleys and steep hillsides and stone-arch bridges, and the river of course, you might picture a small-scale Pittsburgh. But Pittsburgh is a friendly town. In Harrisburg, after 5 o'clock, the attractive young women who worked in the office buildings would flee back to the suburbs. It became a ghost town. That's when the rats began creeping out. Sad, ghoulish, East Coast squalor. Petty filth. Casual dying. The walking dead, informing with their deaths all of the mausoleum whispers the YMCA was haunted with at night, and strangers picking up the signals I shot out, all intent and all doubt spilling from my pores. I see myself walking from the hospital to the Y, the river and cars roaring past, gay men lurking in doorways, and a procession of cars, cruising like bored piranhas, following the pulse of the homosexual kingdom, that pulse which, if traced back in a trail of cough syrup haze, or by the pervert vibe, using the compass of some sick fuck's cocaine erection, would lead to the heart of this desolate, brutal town.

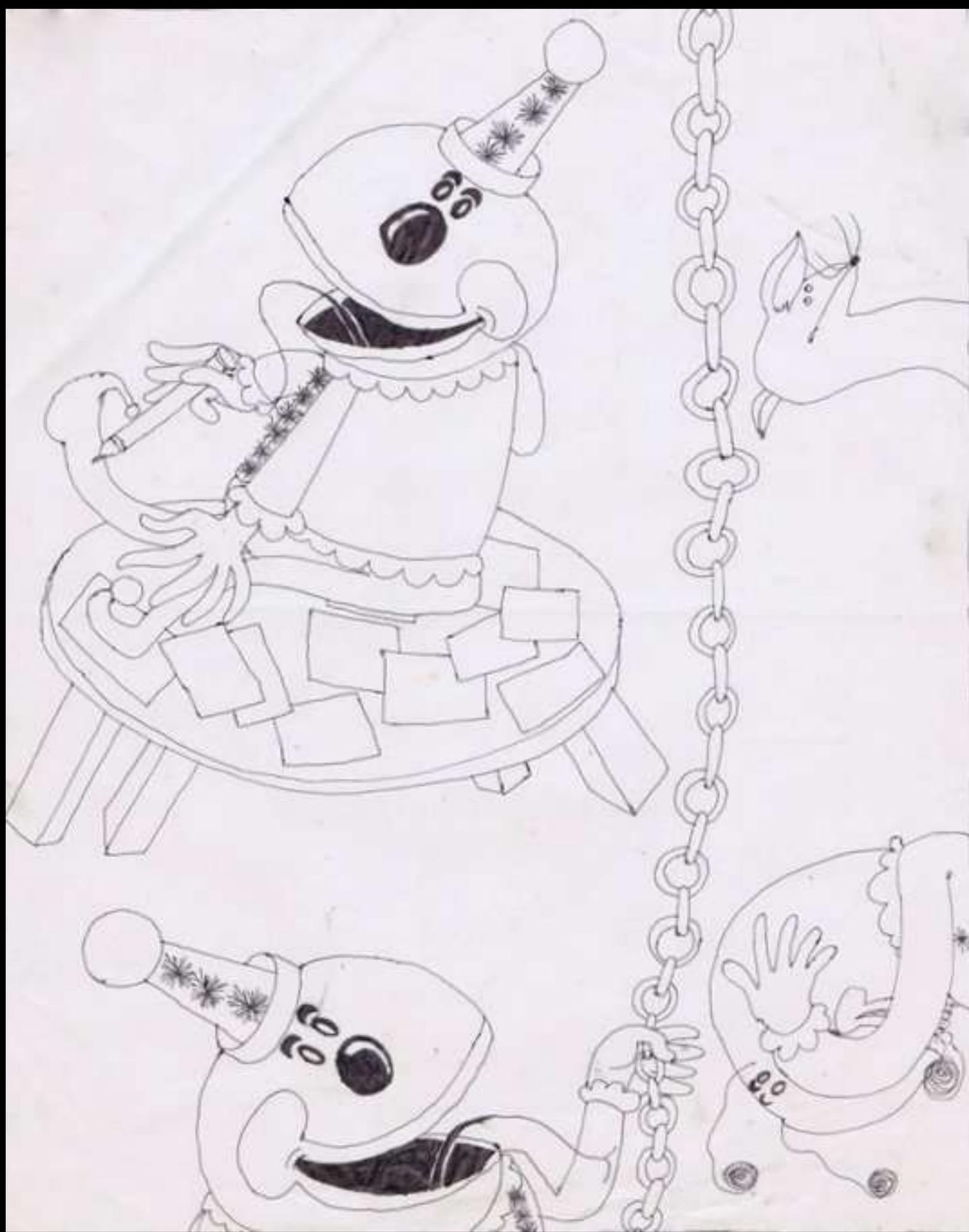
Harrisburg 1994: I lived uptown, with the Riley family, the only white family on the

block. My wife's parents were dysfunctional, and she had been rebelling against them in her defiant meetings with me, on benches high atop the Susquehanna, riverside benches which caught the unsparing gales of wind, and turned our hands numb as we fumbled in each other's pants, both of us virgins, with rats rustling in the bushes and splashing in the January river below. 1994: future in-laws shrewdly contained the problem (because I would have stolen her from them otherwise): they made me part of the family. We were married at the edge of the world, the Uptown Shopping Center: a crack-ravaged territory which seemed to be the only barrier between the city and some horrible infinite, an ectomorphic void where spectral homeless men raped other spectral homeless men, where crippled old freight trains stood abandoned; like a cosmic wilderness that swirled angrily on the other side of China Wok Express, Jimmy the Hot Dog King, Beer World, Sav-A-Lot; and then, there, for us, the District Justice of the Peace, where WE were married and THEY were arraigned. Teenage sweethearts vs. ageless coke and dope mopes. It might have been romantic, but for Debbie and Bill, the in-laws, who insisted upon bearing witness to our marriage and to whom my wife would always defer. We had no friends and our sex was abysmal. I worked as the dairy manager in an inner-city supermarket, eating up the profits and stealing with both hands. On my 2nd or 3rd day, I was on the grease-coated floor of aisle 6, stocking cans of Bartlett pears. A teenaged black girl approached me, and without a greeting, began her solicitation: "MAN, you wanna CAT?" The black girl and I ducked the paranoid stare of our string bean supervisor, a balding middle-aged nebbish.

We leapt from a loading dock into the back alley where we sprinted to her family's home, a cramped 2 bedroom apartment that smelled of wet Cheerios and urine, and I discovered him there, on a child's bed, asleep: Hank. I fell in love with him on sight. He was adored and pampered by myself and the Riley family. Two years later, he would prowl the back alleys unsupervised, coming and going freely through a window by the fire escape. Hank sometimes disappeared for several days, and I came to rely on his instincts, for I was in over my head and indisposed with demons. It happened slowly, but a partnership was forged between the cat and I, and it was this that returned to me like a shot as Izabela took the last exit before the river, coasting off Route 81 into the city at 10 PM. I saw that the hospital was gone, and a new one had been built. I saw my old apartment, the building now empty and condemned. I saw the YMCA, and the capital building, the newspaper plant, the cold London-like back alleys that always made me think of Jack the Ripper, and other places that I had turned into myth by then.

In Jarrettsville, Maryland, in a pasture behind a poorly kept farmhouse, Hank rested in an unmarked grave.

I was home, and it couldn't have made less sense.



THE DEVIL WITHIN, SOMETHING OF A PRIMER

By Danny Baker

Between times of home and street I found my own 'tween period. It ran several years. I'd have been gone for good by 15 but for a flying mirror taking me out of Hollywood action for awhile and sending me back into the grips of my melting core and the overwhelming ghouls which stoked the flame. I was pounded and bent on the anvil of parents who should not have been. An adolescent Frankenstein, I was neither them nor me, but enough of both to just hate...myself more than all. I knew no better; a monster attacking inward.

Somewhere deep within my endo-being kicked a softer soul. I lost him way too young. My last recollection was of the boy, maybe five, standing above a toilet watching a fly come to his watery death. I didn't understand why he needed to die. I'm not sure I do to this day. I struggled for years to find patience with that kid. Apathy's neutrality was the closest I could get. I had other things taking my time, and breaking *from* soft larval form was at the top of the list.

It remains a struggle. Protest as I may, once I found my true strength from within the depths of my weakness, I again lost my strength. The virtue and power of emotional honesty (*the real meter of a man's fortitude*) often sits heavy as second to my natural (or nurtured) desire to throw a punch. It was from within the pain wrought by human emotions gone postal, not bruises, broken bones or stitches, where

I found the physical, once and for all to be utterly unintimidating. It wasn't a short process however it was certain.

There remain ever so many cracks not thrown that should have been; a result of those so stunting received in the four walls of a home that was anything but. Each forsaken still haunts when I'm most vulnerable, and in absolute refusal to ever feel one of the coward's thousand deaths again, I've since thrown a couple that needed not be thrown. And it is there I come full circle, in that within those blows delivered in reaction not commensurate to the provocation, I see the man I despise most in fractured reflection and agonizing disapproval.

That most important literal, physical retaliation for that suffered in the doctor's house as a child did come however, and it came with well deserved, long overdue vengeance.

I was within seconds of offing, straight out killing, the almighty Howard J. Baker, MD about ten years back or so. Don't be fooled by the MD...he was an aggressive, nasty fuck from a quite middle class background in Cleveland...only he had degrees. He had come to visit my ex and me, then pushed the same wrong buttons over and over again. And learned the fear of all things unholy as I rapped him, lifted him off the ground by his neck and in the death hold abyss of 30 years of his blackness releasing

from my every pore, squeezed him to within inches of his miserable narcissistic existence.

My then wife was in bed with the flu and was left with nothing to think but that an intruder had entered and was in the process of killing both the old man and me. She hit the panic alarm and saved his life as I snapped to. My ultimate vindication... "How do you like what you created, motherfucker? Cops, you say? Get to the phone...I dare you. Sound familiar? I'll fucking kill you and leave you right where the fuck you stand." It was about as much fun for him as it had been for me, years before I had that capacity, for I was but a child.

The wife had also hit 911. They asked if she he had a gun and to the affirmative she answered. "Good, go hide, we're on our way." I encountered her in the bedroom where I noted the live round on the floor, indicating she had jacked the slide to ensure the already stoked weapon had a loaded chamber. She was quivering with the gun pointed at the ground, finger outside the trigger guard, as I had so taught her. "Give me the gun, baby...nobody's here." From her trembling, petrified hand I removed the little Glock. Well, they don't take to returned calls of 'everything's alright', so the evening continued with AR-15's leveled at us from two sides, a .45 up the middle. To follow, rhetoric shouted for the gods to hear, as only cops do, as if ten feet requires a megaphone's blare...

"Where's the female with the gun????!!!"

She came out and the three of us stood cuffed on the driveway of my suburban OR home on a balmy summer eve in full view of all neighbors, out to see the unheard of commotion in their quiet little community. We all kept our mouths shut, but the ex who said (legitimately so) that she had mistakenly thought there was an intruder. The cops then searched the house, happened upon my weed, didn't care, but took it when I most needed it and jokingly complained that I was (truly) better armed than they.

Howard and I reconciled and went up and down for another several years, until 'we' were no longer. He died in 2007. We had not spoken since 2004.

I feel no politically correct remorse for not having reconciled while he was on his death bed. My phone ringer worked. How does one reconcile with the devil anyway. I've since found room for that which we did have and not all was negative, but I regret only not taking care of my business with him sooner. I became a better man thereafter, from the very day we stopped speaking for good.

That's a slice of the backdrop of family life in the Jewish doctor's house. Grandma should have had dreams for something other than a doctor in the family. A human would have been nice.

And mom? I love mom, she just wasn't prepped to deal with that animal and if giving me up meant an easier night, I was gonna get the rat end of the stick...





DEATH WISH CHAMELEON XI

By Cricket Corleone

Photos © Richard A. Meade

In the light of day, everything seems different. For a few moments, when Dustin rolls over toward the hotel window, sun shining in over the whole of the room, a sudden thought creeps into her brain. "What am I doing here?"

The thought is quickly pushed from her mind as she feels it bringing a rising sense of panic. Her heart flutters and for a moment she needs to catch her breath. So the thought is buried deep into the back of

her subconscious. The denial of anything being wrong seemed a much easier psychosis to deal with. "This is not the time for regrouping or personal psycho analysis." She tells herself and quickly pushes up out of bed. A moment passes as Dustin is shaking the sleep from her hair. She turns toward the bed in realization that her little friend, is gone. Maybe it was the full night's rest that cleared the crazy delusion of Greta's ghost from the room?



Another moment of denial that seems to ease the cankerous feeling in her chest.

But shaking off the panic seems to be a tough struggle this bright and chipper morning. So she decides it is best to blow off some steam. As if the stress is only coming from a buildup of excess energy. A quick round of masturbation in thought of one of her old lovers, a few pushups, jogging a little in place. Still, the canker, now cancerous, is rising.

She picks up her new gun, one in which she bought after her first session at the shooting range, from off the bedside table and gives it a tap. "Time to go a shootin." She smiles to herself.

The bullet holes pierce through the target till the round runs dry. Now the faceless man on the target bears the burden of a huge gash through its head. As if the brain

were to be at fault for all of Dustin's anxieties. And like a trophy, Dustin packs the wasted paper figure into her bag, and decides to go another few rounds. Till her own brain gets the message.

But this time, with each shot that flies toward its target, Dustin's mind flashes toward the past. Like a crazy carousel, spinning wildly, the voice, "What am I doing here?" The remembrance of Greta's ghost lying next to her the night before. Evaline's thighs sitting next to her in the back of the cab. The whisper Dustin planted into Dane's ear in her perfect exit from the cafe. Dustin begins to feel noxious from the thoughts. She places the gun down and grabs for something real to hold her up. A counter top. A window. Anything.

A man approaches, "Are you alright ma'am?"







Dustin is startled, "I'm fine." She pushes past the man and looks for an exit out of this place. The bus won't be fast enough to make her escape. She decides to call a cab instead.

One quick stop to a liquor store, a pack of smokes, and a mad dash for the confines of her hotel room, Dustin closes the door and exhales. Downing five shots of tequila and lying on the bed, she turns her mind, once again, to that past lover, "Christopher..." she says to the walls around her. And suddenly, he is there.

Christopher lays his hands over Dustin's thighs bringing them slowly up and removing her clothing. He slides off her panties, and then begins fucking Dustin so hard, the fantasy could have broken from her mind and the neighbors would have made a complaint about the noise above.

She came over and over again. The sheets below were soaked. And she still wanted more. "No thoughts... just pleasure," she tells Christopher. He covers her mouth. "No words," he says as he takes control. "Yes..." Dustin thinks to herself, as she imagines Christopher's cock growing even larger, swelling up to a point of unnaturalness, something of physical impossibility. The amount of cum that he sprays on her and in her, is inhuman. Like the feeling she gets from masturbating under the bathtub spout. Filling up her insides with hot water, and when she stands, it pours out like a waterfall onto the porcelain, runs down her thighs like a river, and splashes to her painted toes.

Dustin imagines both herself and Christopher, taking turns having their way with Evaline.







She bites at the inner of her thighs. She licks at his cock as it moves in and out of Evaline... "Every hole you can fuck her in..." she says to Christopher, egging him on to dirty this beautiful and lonely creature up. Licking his ass while he lets Evaline suck the cum from the tip of his cock into the back of her throat. So deep in those last drops, he plunges into her mouth, that she can feel it in her stomach.

She imagines Dane joining in, and watching Christopher fuck him in his ass while Dane has his tongue plunged inside of her pussy... "I can FEEL it," she whispers to herself... "I am going to cum all over your tongue..." she says as the feeling of another orgasm is slowly rising up...

The telephone on the bedside rings loudly. Dustin opens her eyes, her hands still stroking her clit roughly between her

sweaty thighs. She tries to ignore it, but whoever is calling won't seem to go away. "FUCK," Dustin says to herself as she wipes her hands on the sheets. "HELLO," she says in an irritated tone, her hands shaking a little from the session with herself, as she listens for the voice on the other end.

Looking out the hotel window from the bed, phone held against her ear by way of her shoulder, she can see that all the light from outside is now gone. She had been masturbating for hours and it was now nighttime. It didn't seem like that much time had gone by. But all she wants to do is hang up and go back to her fantasies. To forget everything but what was in that bed with her before the call. Before the realization of time crept in. And before she loses her temper with this interrupting asshole on the other end.





"This is Dane, can we meet up tonight?"
The voice on the other end asks and waits expectantly.

Dustin smells her finger tips for a moment, just the faintest hint of the hotel soap and something else, "Lemon?" She says accidentally out loud.

"What was that?" Dane responds.

"Nothing... I was just... yeah, when and where?" Dustin confirms.

And with a quick phone interaction, they agree to meet up at the cafe in a couple of hours.

Once the phone is back on the receiver, Dustin lays back in bed and sighs. "I smell like sex already." She laughs a little to herself. "But... I think it's time to go out of my head for awhile... and play with someone real."

Later that evening, in another hotel room, Dustin has her gun held to Dane's head, as he eats her out on the bathroom counter. He seems to be loving every minute. "SUCK..." she tells him as his head bobs up and down between her thighs. "Put my fucking clit into your mouth and suck," she demands.



"When I cum, I want you to suck all the cum out of my hole... I'm gonna make you my bitch..." And as she reaches climax the words, "You... stupid... FUCK..." roll off of Dustin's tongue in a rough whisper. She rolls the barrel of the gun over Dane's lips as he is sucking, and cocks it.

Dane pulls up and stops. "That isn't really loaded, is it?" Dustin smacks him across the face with the gun, "I didn't tell you you could stop yet, did I? SUCK." Dane's face turns a little red with humiliation, but his penis is fully erect, and Dustin knows though he is confused, he is into it. She shoves the gun into his mouth with a sick satisfaction on her face, "Suck it like a dick... and MAYBE I'll TOUCH yours."

Dane begins to suck the barrel of the gun as Dustin reaches down gently stroking his cock between her fingers. Just as he is getting harder and starting to moan, she stops. Pushing herself up from the counter, she lowers Dane to his knees. The gun still in his mouth as he looks up at her. "That's enough for now." Dustin says coldly. She pulls the gun from his mouth and turns to leave the bathroom.

Dane stands to his feet in confusion. Following Dustin to the main room he watches as she gathers her things. "But... wait... come on..."

Dustin smiles and pats him on the head, "You said you liked it mean?" Dustin pushes him back a little and exits the hotel room, leaving Dane standing there, naked, pissed off, and very turned on.

In the hotel hallway, Dustin makes her way to the elevator. Greta walking up behind

her. But Dustin is so high off the control and humiliation she just caused Dane, she just smiles. "You again?" she says to Greta without looking at her.

"Well, you must be really proud of yourself? That was... sick." Greta lectures.

Dustin enters the elevator and as the door closes leaving Greta on the other side, she sighs, "I know. FUN."

Back in her own hotel room, Dustin is laying on the bed watching another series of bad television movies. The phone rings again. "Ugh, I told you that was enough for one night. You shit," she says to herself. But when the phone refuses, once again, to stop ringing, she decides to answer it. "Yeah," she says in a cold tone.

"Hi... ummm... we met the other day... this is Evaline? Is this Eli?"

Dustin sits up tall, "Yeah... yes. How are you?"

Evaline is hesitant at first to answer, "Well, I am alright. Kind of bored though," she nervously laughs.

"Well, do you want company?" Dustin smiles as she flirts a little.

"Sure, company would be... good? Are you busy?" Evaline asks.

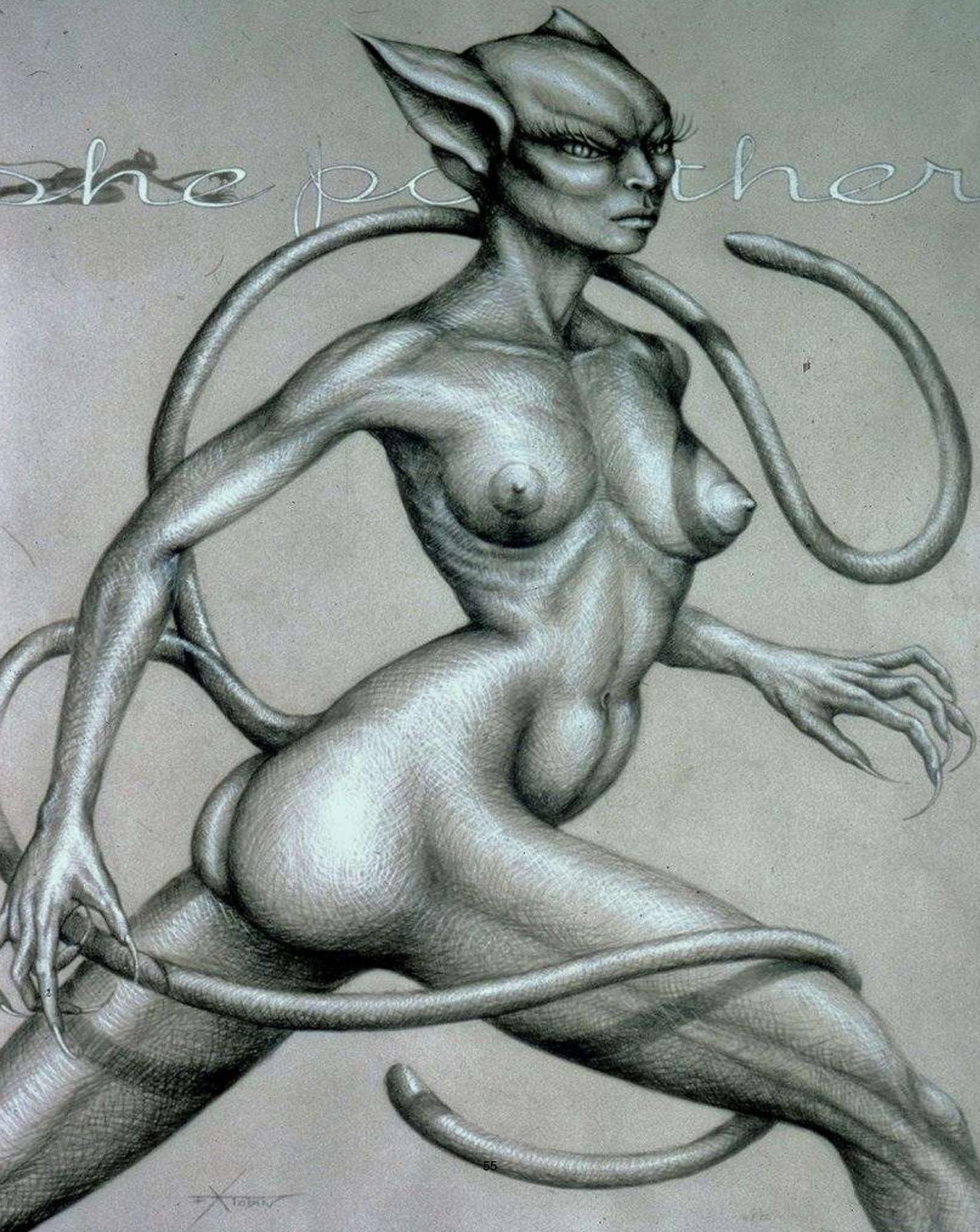
Dustin turns off the TV. Greta is sitting on the end of the bed, shaking her head in disapproval.

"Not at all," Dustin replies.

The two of them agree to meet up for a drink.



she poacher



BUKKAKE BRAWL

AN EXCERPT

By Made in DNA

The crowd roared, the spittle from their frothing muzzles creating a fine mist that mixed with Mei's sweat and the blood from the cut above her left eye.

The cut burned with a maddening man-made piss-crackle fire. Was the jackhole in front of her hopped up on Accelerated NanoHerpes!?

She body-slammed him and placed his nuts in a crusher hold that took him out of the match. Better safe than sorry.

ANH wasn't illegal, but it puckered her sphincter nonetheless. Bukkake Brawl rules: no traditional weapons. Otherwise, have at.

DNA hacks, mouth sacs, cyborg enhancements, skin mods, pheromone differentials. Customer-contestants should spend so much on their cocks.

Bukkake Brawl: the fiendishly genius marriage of extreme sports and porn. Rough, muff, and tumble.



Three scantily clad women, the Jizzabels, stepped into a pit and took all-cumers.

Their opponents were Jackals—a mob of howling contestants ready to hump anything that moved. Including the occasional stray cambot.

It attracted college kids, weirdoes, macho assholes, perverts, cherry boys, misogynists and mishmash thereof. No license required.

40 billion perved globally!

Jackals ponyed up 25000 Fuk Buks each for a chance in the pit. An entry fee that didn't actually guarantee anything.

For their chance at pussy, they had to survive the Prelims where hopefuls eliminated two-thirds of their own number.

Losers were consoled with a membership in the Circle Jerks, the group of men who did just that if the Jizzabels fell in the Homban.

No touchy-touchy fuckee-fuckee, they just pulled their dinkie twinkies until they blew wad over the subservient hostess ho-hos.

Thus the Prelims were a fierce street brawl for pussy. But it paled in compared to Homban, The Real Deal.

While the Prelims resulted in the weak being hurled from the ring like sad sacks of pig shit, Homban was blood, sweat, tears and semen.

Gallons of semen.

Homban was where it all potentially paid off for the Jackals. If the Jizzabels lost, every man still standing in the ring got their yearn.

The Jizzabels were submitted to every moan, groan, grunt and white explosion of hair-gobbing, mouth-filling, pussy-drenching spoo.

Name of the game baby. There is no maybe.

Televised globally, Bukkake Brawl was where women became adored idols, and cherry boys became men!

Lights. Action. Hover-botcams. Spectators. Screaming fists. And more fluids than any girl ever wanted to swallow.

Re-orientating herself, Mei let the mayhem of her forced profession wash over her.

The air was acrid; heavy with the dried-squid stink snack-breath of fans rabidly exhaling over her from their stadium seating above.

Brawl pits were large enough for the Jackals and Jizzabels go to work on each other; cozy enough so the fans above could drool over them.

To her left, Catgirl Mon was down under the weight of a heavy pinning her shoulders while a second helicoptered on her raised haunches.

It was too late save her. Penetration had been made. *Fuck!*





Mei took her frustration out on a nearby Jackal with an impolite chop to the Adam's apple. He gakked, jerked once and stayed down.

An announcer w00ted and ran commentary on Mei's fighting stats. The itched to jump the wall and make *him* a stat was overwhelming.

Before she could, she took a misplaced left hook that clipped her ear, catching her in the side of the head.

She retaliated with a pile driver and raised her fists defiantly. "You hit like your mother bitch! At least she could ride face!"

Whipping around for another doofus to hurt, she caught sight of Tahna eating several jackhammer blows to the stomach. *Pneumos!*

Mei curse-wincd as the large-breasted, blonde Slav went down with a sickening wheeze and didn't get up. Drool pooled from her slackjaw.

The Jackals locust-swarmed. Mei knew it was only moments before they devoured her clothes and reaped their reward.

Mei wasn't in the mood to play the flesh flute for anyone tonight if she could help it, and Tahna was a friend.

It wasn't too late to save her. Penetration hadn't been made yet. If Mei could clear a path...

Jumping into the fray, she dropped to her hands in a well-timed whipkick that jacked an opponent's legs out from under him.

Adrenalinized, she stood, took a running start and timed a grab to a second Jackal's head as she brought her knees up.

The crack-reply told her the only pussy he'd be getting this day would be the meowing kind.

But a third Jackal was already fingering Tahna through the thin, sweaty spandex that outlined the woman's vulva.

There was no time to waste.

Mei approached, twisted her fingers through his hair and was making to wrench a gaping tuff out when an arm snaked around from behind.

Fuck. Sleeper Hold!

She shattered two ribs with a reinforced elbow. Scream replaced arm.

But her struggle was brief as she ate two hardened clean shots from other sources: one to the kidneys, another to the solar-plexus.

Dry-heave. Stumble backwards. Struggle for air. Choking panic! A cheap shot to the throat blurred her vision with tears and anger.

Phantoms filled her waning vision, hyena-barked, danced, and flitted about her weaving form.

Jabjab-poke-tease, fists, tongues and titty-grabs whirlwinded around her playing games, but threatening to get serious.

“Fagbots!” She lashed out, her fists flailing. No avail.

A pair of arms locked under her chin, wrenching it backwards. The unforgiving lights above bleached her vision.

Jackals everywhere! No escape! Panic seeped into her mind; chilled industrial sludge eating at the lining of clear thought.

Hastily she dropped to one knee to work a little magic only to be stopped cold by a steely kick to the gut.

The unfriendly taste of bile filled her mouth. Defiantly she looked up.

A midget with a grin the girth of the Gobi Desert chuckled as he used the body of a downed compatriot as a pedestal.

His eyes were filled with a terrible greed that infected his breath with the odor of darkness. A cold chill ran down Mei’s spine.

He took her head in his hands and kissed her on the nose, and then took her windpipe in a hold that slowly closed it off.

She struggled, but knew it was too late. Sickening black swirls teased at her gray matter. Merciless, nasty, black, giggling bugs.

Good night sweet princess, the midget’s eyes danced with a mischievous hate-filled glee.



“No...” Her plea was a no more than a strained, desperate gasp.

Yes, the midget smiled. His large forehead went back in a cackle, and then came down in a scream.

The sound of her nose breaking was the last thing Mei heard before she succumbed to the outskirts of consciousness.



Art By D M Mitchell

Bukkake Brawl is available for purchase at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Bukkake-Brawl-ebook/dp/B004FPYPOS>



THE TENT WHISPERER

By Salena Godden

Photos © Ffion Nolwenn

And she used hot oil on the flesh, we can picture the skin glistening, reflecting the shimmering water and light didn't it? Yes. It is safe to assume she poured sun oil into the palm of her hand and smothered it liberally all over her own naked chest and brown belly, didn't she? She was so tanned, her skin soft and browned, so tempting, as she lay there naked, but for the skimpiest of bikini knickers, roasting herself. And it is a certainty she was there, by the pool every day, luxuriating in the heat of the Spanish sun. That sun bed there, yes, lying there in that position she would have seen the blue, the turquoise of the Mediterranean in the

distance. She would have felt the slightest feathery wisps and faintest whispers of breeze from the sea. There was a faint taste of sea salt on her lips and she would have licked them, wouldn't she, she licked her own lips and her pleasure played out in the creases of her satisfied smile. She tasted the ocean, didn't she, on her skin and in her own mouth. And there were grains of sand everywhere, here and here, under her nails and in the crease of her ear, there and there. It is a fact she read this trashy Raymond Chandler novel, her greasy finger prints mark the pages. The detective Marlowe keeping an eye on his femme fatales, just as

she kept one eye on the page and the other squinted in the glare of the sun.

Perhaps then she stretched, yawned and sat up, pulling her damp blonde hair into a ponytail with the elastic from around her wrist. We can see here the indent on her wrist, the faint tan line where the elastic was most often kept. And she might have absentmindedly scratched that mosquito bite there on her upper thigh, a red flush would have appeared beneath her bitten nails as she irritated the skin. She took a swig from a bottle of water, bagged here, it would have been a little too warm for her liking, and then she picked up the sun

cream and applied yet more lotion didn't she?

Yes. More than likely she meticulously and laboriously smothered her skin in lotion, she paid extra attention to her shoulders before she lay back down, flat on her back and caressed her own firm breasts, slowly, with her small pretty hands, rubbing cream into her hardening nipples, didn't she? Not ever disguising her pleasure, some mild arousal, massaging her firm body with factor 15, slowly and surely, until she was sure every pale freckle and golden hair was covered and protected, and then finally she'd lie still again.



Much to her approval her nose would have tingled with that unmistakable smell of holidays - Coconuts and sun oil, a faint smell of chips or a barbeque, chlorine and the ocean. And the sounds of water; waves lapping, running showers, hoses spraying and sprinklers on the exotic flowers. Indeed, listen, she would have heard the sounds of water, water everywhere and the soft sea breeze rustling in the dry palm trees above her. She would have heard Spanish voices in the distance and children laughing and playing in the pool.

As she lay sunbathing she might have allowed her mind to wander. But she wouldn't think of the mundane, of work waiting for her when she got home to Manchester. Sorry no not Manchester, Leeds. Is it Leeds? I do apologise but it is a fact she considered her grey life in Leeds for only moments before she would have pushed these thoughts far away, forcing her mind to go blank, to think of nothing but the heat and the softness of her own brown skin. She thought about how tanned she was becoming and then she might have thought about the bar man from the night before. Would she remember the bar man from last night? I think she would. How he had winked and approached her and kissed her on the lips. He just leant in and took a kiss as though it was his to take. Do we have witnesses that saw them kiss? Yes? Ok.

What would she think, how did she react? She might think to herself, what charmers these Spanish men are! She'd smile then, wouldn't she, remembering the barman kissing her. What had his name been, did she know? Did he tell her? No perhaps not, maybe he just kissed her. The kiss - did it make her belly flutter and did she giggle or playfully push him away? She may have imagined having sex with him, but did she actually sleep with him? Do we know who

he is? Do we have a name or an address? We do know that she left with the barman; there is some CCTV footage of her leaving the bar with him. Can we see the footage, yes, and how do they appear? Make a note: They are easy together, she is willingly going with him, they are laughing and body language is flirtatious. He lights her cigarette and then they go out of view. This is clearly not a shy girl or a victim being forced to do anything.

Stomach contents - Alcohol mostly. Sangria, gin and tonic and approximately six shots of tequila. She mixed her drinks, but she was used to it and quite a drinker judging by her liver and kidneys. And a keen smoker, tar stained teeth, yellow fingers, here and here.

Dinner? The only solids we can trace are some peanuts, olives and remnants of pizza digested at least fifteen hours previously. Pizza? Did she eat out? Did she eat alone? Where? Do we have a restaurant bill showing up on her bank statement? We do! This is excellent, we have an address for the restaurant and the waiter, remember the waiter, he was seen kissing her too. At sunset, she took herself out to dine alone and we know that this occurred on more than one occasion. It's safe to presume then, that this was perhaps because the waiter was so friendly, perhaps because he gave her a kiss, also because it is the closest restaurant and only five minutes walking distance from the pool and the campsite - make a mental note of this.

These Spaniards, she might sigh to herself, these Spanish boys are so red hot, so hot blooded. All these kisses and all this attention she'd love it, wouldn't she. What fun! She'd tingle at all the lovely holiday flirts she has had. She would, wouldn't she?



She was seen to be content to spend her evenings getting drunk in the local bars and her day times sunbathing. Oh this is the life she might sigh. She would tell herself - I deserve a nice break, I might go for another dip in bit, but not now though, but in a little while. As she lazily cooks herself in the direct sun, replaying pictures in her mind's eye, the golden hairs on the arms of the waiter, the barman with the green eyes, her own bronze skin that would please her so too, wouldn't it?

I am getting a clear picture of her now, but, how do we get from there to here. What does she do next? What would she think next? So she lies there, basking in the sun practically naked for all to see. She'll laugh inwardly to herself knowing he is looking over and she'll put on her sunglasses and eye him. Yes of course, our third man, the lifeguard, he has been giving her the eye all

holiday too. Alright. So now there are three - we have the lifeguard, the waiter, the barman. What a hard life, she'll snigger to herself behind her shades. To hell with it, it's my holiday, live a little. She will say to herself: Wait until I tell the folks back home that the Spanish boys kept kissing me! Me? She would look forward to embellishing how the lifeguard had breathed down her neck with the words *by the way, you have a perfect body*. And she was just months shy of her 40th birthday. I am guessing no man had ever said that to her and certainly not when she was in a bikini. How do we know he said this? She wrote about this on Facebook and Twitter approximately 36 hours ago. So she enjoyed the attention, didn't she and she encouraged and reciprocated it. She was seen giving the lifeguard a little wave, blowing him kisses, the lifeguard kept beckoning her over and she'd laugh and shake her head no, no, no!

All the other holiday makers swam, drank sangria and sunbathed and if they did notice them flirting, they assumed she knew the lifeguard, they would presume they were dating. These witnesses paid no special attention to the flush and blush of summer romance flourishing under a Spanish sun; the heat of Mediterranean fervour, fevered l'amore. Why should they pay any attention? The lifeguard with his dark olive oiled skin, taut torso, Latin good looks, swimmers shoulders and perfect white teeth. Good looking boy and so good to his mother isn't he? No previous convictions? Nothing. Ok.

Now did the sun move behind a cloud? There was not a single blemish in the sky for it was like today, a perfect azure with

the turquoise ocean sparkling in the distance. But then why is there this shadow across her face? And the sense of a breath, followed quickly by a kiss placed upon her lips. It's him - it's him again. She smiles, recognizing the smell of him, the softness of his clean-shaven face and plump lips. She opens one eye, squints up to see his bronze face and eyes, dark honey brown eyes, smiling down at her. *Beautiful*, says the lifeguard, *beautiful* and she blushes, feigns shock at his audacity. Then she watches the lifeguard walk away in his tight red shorts and neat behind. Do we know he has done this several times now and with other holiday makers? Yes. It is presumed this is one of the perks of his job to flirt with the guests at the campsite. Do we know he has kissed her before? Yes.



The first time he kissed her he would have taken her quite by surprise and made her squirm, she might have pulled away embarrassed and laughed. The second time she knew what was coming and witnesses say she let him peck her lightly, quickly on each cheek and then on the lips. The third time she pecked him back, reciprocated the kiss, gently but surely. These Spaniards are so kissable now aren't they and she let him kiss her. She would have enjoyed the view of his tight behind as he walked away. Beautiful. He called her Beautiful. We know this from her text messages on her mobile also. She liked his persistence, his confidence and arrogance. I bet he does this with all the girls on holidays, she texted her work mate back in cold wet Leeds, what a cheeky boy!

So we have the barman, the waiter and the lifeguard. Do they each have an alibi? And are these alibi's water tight? We have witnesses that can verify that each of them had some relations with her during the past 48 hours. Each of them singled her out as a loner, perhaps vulnerable, perhaps an independent woman, they knew she was on holiday on her own and on separate occasions they were seen kissing this plain civil servant from Leeds. She was unmarried, no children, no ties, in Spain, on a two-week camping holiday on her own. She has savings, she has money, but she is perhaps getting lonely and probably bored. Did she make any other friends? Talk to anyone else? Did she speak Spanish? No. Who else knew there was a single white female in a tent on her own in a quiet part of the campsite? We need the passport numbers and car registrations of every other person on site and a list of who else was camping there? How many motor homes, tents and caravans? Each housing how many passengers or residents? Who goes camping in this area of Spain? Are we talking mostly back packers and students?

Did we have any other loners? Travellers passing through? I need these details now.

Interesting to note there was the hunting party of six, also camping there, in that part of Spain to shoot rabbits. They go shooting at night? Correct. Photograph. Ok. We have a group of middle aged men with guns. They look harmless enough, bald, fat men playing soldiers in the woods at night. However, looking at a plan of the campsite they were her nearest neighbours. See there, their camp is there and she is in full view of them just here. And there is a hold in the fence between them So she is isolated but under the watchful eye of six red-necks on a shooting holiday. Do we have anything on them at least? No.

Apparently, on at least one occasion, they drank beers and spied on her taking her siesta, she would have been hungover, probably topless. There, in the cool shade of the olive trees she fell asleep reading, leaving her tent door wide open. How do we know this? Well, she mentions them in the bulletin she posted with the title "Postcard from Paradise" She tagged over a dozen friends in that note with a self portrait, a snapped photo of herself by the pool and the lifeguard in the background. Can we ascertain then that she was most interested in the lifeguard then? She seems to mention him the most times?

So, let's picture the scene, it is the end of the summer, the first week of September, we have a half empty camp site, where anyone could walk in and take pot luck or follow her from the local bars and restaurants? Do we at least have a camera at the entrance to the camp site? No. Not after midnight. They switch them off at midnight and shut the double gates. Then you are telling me that anyone can enter the campsite at any given time after midnight, but only on foot? Ok. Then it is fair that we are looking for

someone that was either a resident on the campsite, an employee? But it could also have been a stranger that came in on foot? Yes? Now that doesn't narrow it down much, basically it could have been anyone then?

Yes?

And in the middle of the night, did she awake with a start and with a sharp intake of her own breath or with a hand over her mouth. Was it the sound of heavy breathing

or footsteps outside? The crackle of dried olive tree leaves under a heavy-booted foot? The sound of guzzling beer, swallowing, a beer being swigged in a fast succession of gulps, the pop of air as the bottle left the lips, followed by a deeply satisfied belch. Was it the sniff and that exhalation after the swig? We have the beer bottle? A Spanish brand of beer that is sold at every bar in Spain, this is not a clue, although parts of it were found inside the victim, splinters, these have been sent to forensics.



I feel we need to know what woke her first - the grunt and the heavy breathing or the unbearable sensation of something, someone crouching in the shadows beneath the bent olive tree and by the rear end of the tent? The thin canvas walls of the tent vibrating with the presence of another? What initially woke her? Was it the tug or snap of that guy rope and the shudder of the tent walls? Note the slump of the rear left side where the guy rope has given way - is that what woke her from her deep and drunken slumber? See, the guy rope is loosened, it had been driven into the hard woody earth with that tent pole but that is now bent and twisted, crooked out of shape, someone heavy was here, someone with big boots. See?

What did she see in the darkness? Could she make out the silhouette, a shadow in the moonlight? Or the orange-red glow of the cigarette in the darkness? Did she lie there silently, her heart rapid, listening hard to make sense of the sounds. Smoking, what does someone smoking sound like? Could you mistake it for the wind or an animal? We found several cigarette butts, Fortuna, all are in analysis. We know she was a Marlboro lights girl.

Might she comfort herself that it was a lost fellow camper and then remember that her tent was the only tent in that corner of the site? You see, there is no real reason or cause for any camper to ever have to go this way, to trample those weeds and disturb that tent pole and guy rope, therefore anyone that came this way, around the back of the tent, her tent, clearly had only one sole intention.

And as she lay there awake, did she think that if she lay very still and quietly that the tent would appear empty from the outside? Did she hear her own heart thumping in her chest and hold her breath knowing there

was someone, something crouching outside. Did she hear the guzzling of sloshing beer, the click-click of the lighter and the flick-flick of the swiss army knife and the zip-zip of the zip. The zip? Do we have fingerprints on the zip of the tent? Zip? Did they even use the zip?

A urine sample? Whoever it was urinated, but was this before, during or after? We have taken swabs of the urine. Here we can see cuts, upper body, face and neck, a sawing motion and entry and exit wounds, are we looking for a knife? Was a knife used?

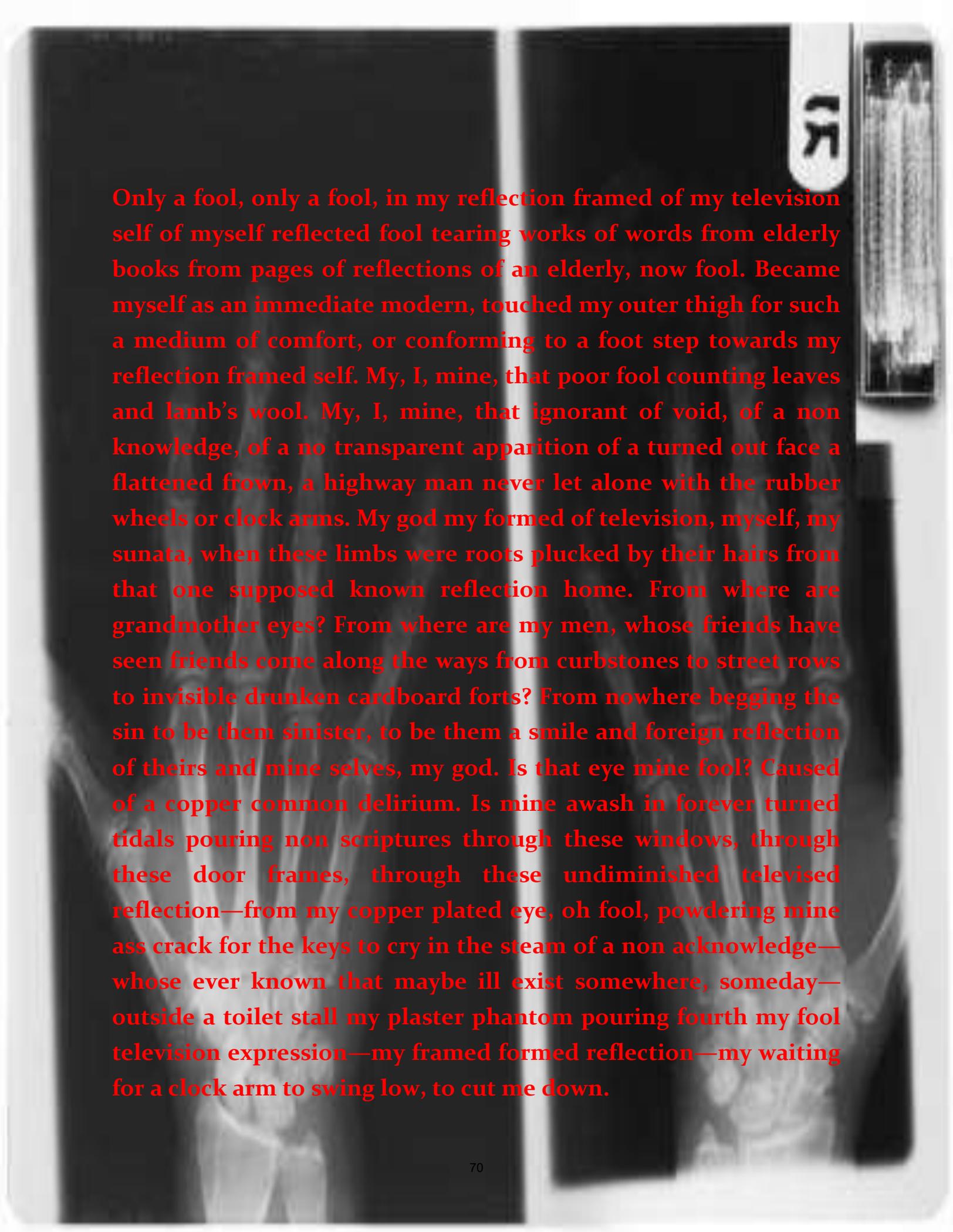
Back to the beer bottle then - was it thrown? Smashed? Was it used? Used for what? You can imagine what? Shards of it were found in here, here and here. Jagged splinters. The tent, the rear end of the tent, slashed open. So no, no fingerprints on the zip, he didn't use the tent door, why would he need to? He slashed the rear end of the tent open as though it were made of paper. With what? The smashed glass of the bottle? Did we find a knife? Judging by the way it is so cleanly torn, what does that tell us? It's quite a clean slash? Did he attack swift or slowly or in a fast frenzy? Did he stab at the tent or did he gently cut it open with silent precision? I am suggesting the latter, I am also guessing she was still asleep, past out drunk, when he entered. She didn't have a chance to struggle or fight.

The air mattress, now a sodden bloodied mat. The green tent, drenched in one type of blood. Yes? So far, only one blood type. But how come no-one heard anything? Did anyone see anything at all?

SOLEMN WITH THE MOON

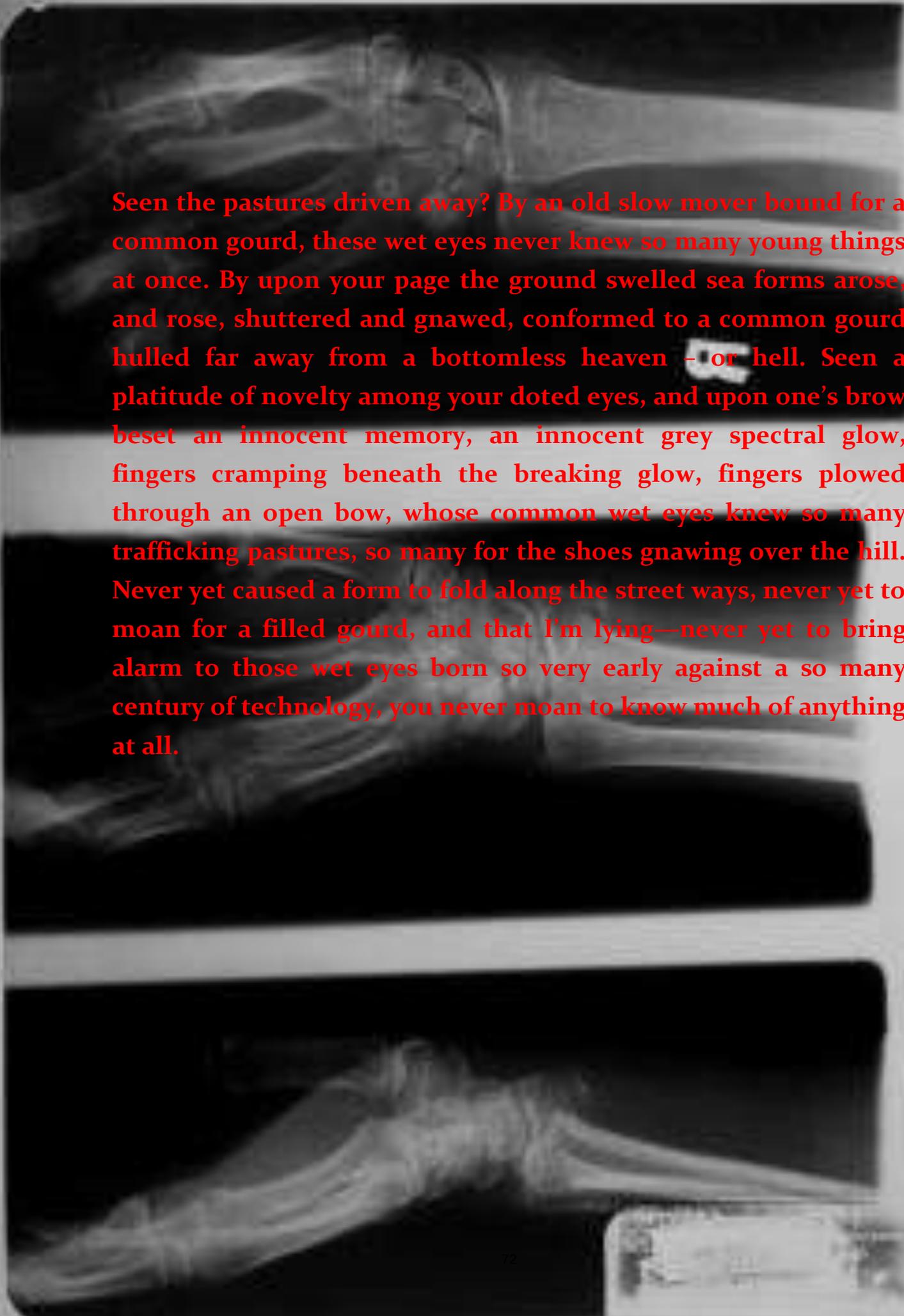
By William Krill

Am I that one pressed before the potted marigold? Reflecting shatters of slivers of silver glass beads from my teeth, the gaps in my teeth. Hair shortened under an apple tree. I'll rent a small square foot of your lawn so's to remember myself of sleeping in front of the garage door, mother in hand, father spying from the high tensioned windows. No one obvious in sometime 1980's looking for my eyes to pour and pout and shatter a lightning bolt across the vast western plantation fields. Am I that puddle reflection? Of a glowing corona? From a spent rain cloud? Of an asphalt full of soap bubbles? Powder out my hazy vision eye from an awake sleeping eye. With trash can shattering standing form of a potted marigold? Standing a form from driven engines? Standing at holds of a clattering chain line, a leaking devoured trash bag, a shattering image in a hazed dogwood, cut down, abandoned, much like those godawful pines where I played my games before shame, before an engine chain. Before my devout impacted vision form descended from oh that yellow marigold, from oh that before I was a sinister adult I knew that sinister shattering adulterous world was creeping through the bushes... when I was last time innocent, an older boy named glen took me into his bed room, made me masturbate for him.



Only a fool, only a fool, in my reflection framed of my television self of myself reflected fool tearing works of words from elderly books from pages of reflections of an elderly, now fool. Became myself as an immediate modern, touched my outer thigh for such a medium of comfort, or conforming to a foot step towards my reflection framed self. My, I, mine, that poor fool counting leaves and lamb's wool. My, I, mine, that ignorant of void, of a non knowledge, of a no transparent apparition of a turned out face a flattened frown, a highway man never let alone with the rubber wheels or clock arms. My god my formed of television, myself, my sunata, when these limbs were roots plucked by their hairs from that one supposed known reflection home. From where are grandmother eyes? From where are my men, whose friends have seen friends come along the ways from curbstones to street rows to invisible drunken cardboard forts? From nowhere begging the sin to be them sinister, to be them a smile and foreign reflection of theirs and mine selves, my god. Is that eye mine fool? Caused of a copper common delirium. Is mine awash in forever turned tidals pouring non scriptures through these windows, through these door frames, through these undiminished televised reflection—from my copper plated eye, oh fool, powdering mine ass crack for the keys to cry in the steam of a non acknowledge—whose ever known that maybe ill exist somewhere, someday—outside a toilet stall my plaster phantom pouring fourth my fool television expression—my framed formed reflection—my waiting for a clock arm to swing low, to cut me down.

When I had a wall of cinder block half reaching to its very rebar skeleton when I watched an unnamed hill and radio town turn dark then light then yellow orange from a street row shine when I held a window frame and possibly screamed my own mindful intoxicated language to the ignorant construction workers and the ignorant single walking lonesome women of Russian hill when my clacking of plastic bottle cap told you too to leave me outside—whenever all that was—whenever before car doors were anything more than car doors and street sweepers washed all the asphalt stones and garbage to a small alcove under my left shoe—whenever all that was—whenever was all before the blinking eye shot me through my function before a plagiarist manager sent me a family before a future was a history that my someday funeral parlors would love to wilt upon a rubber box casket and as well before may happen to drink too mine rolling holly lifetime of lies—when I was hanging from that hotel window drop tickling my feet from those alley woes and cursing those Italian or French tourists - when I was only half as tall as I am now and these old young eye brows were being taught by the sun—then was my most important whenever time—that was my memory of a park bench—church steeples-- and pigeons.



Seen the pastures driven away? By an old slow mover bound for a common gourd, these wet eyes never knew so many young things at once. By upon your page the ground swelled sea forms arose, and rose, shuttered and gnawed, conformed to a common gourd hulled far away from a bottomless heaven – or hell. Seen a platitude of novelty among your doted eyes, and upon one's brow beset an innocent memory, an innocent grey spectral glow, fingers cramping beneath the breaking glow, fingers plowed through an open bow, whose common wet eyes knew so many trafficking pastures, so many for the shoes gnawing over the hill. Never yet caused a form to fold along the street ways, never yet to moan for a filled gourd, and that I'm lying—never yet to bring alarm to those wet eyes born so very early against a so many century of technology, you never moan to know much of anything at all.

Turn the lights off—and looking out the window—look out the window—there's turning in the ground devouring our feet. Whose as souls claimed themselves for the top—for the most high and godlike? But maybe sung of ours being too close to a banana too close to a dining room chair—maybe mine singing to an ever blessing vacant eye would like to hum along at least part of the way—turned the chair the soil—so's the arms don't know they're any different—break the pages with a shelter of sun piercing through a tree branch—when I was young in Pennsylvania my mother would plant her tulip bulbs on the side of the white house taking an ass whupin whenever told to—turned to the tree branch—he told me tried to hang himself years ago—just turned the lights off—the clouds—oh god the clouds—and the women walking by - the most high and godlike dining room chair—with all my joints popping and creaking from my right knee selling shatters of victories of freedoms of turning to the sky of turning on to pigeons wings. Of driving through that blue blessed vacant eye of turning away from the ground—of a painful limp everyday— turn off the light—so their crying wont stain my freshly mopped floor—look out the window - watch the traffic tumble away.

I've shed my old bolts and become—again—a somewhere insane form jointless machine—a wheel—a cog—my own privy stockade abound the sealed shores of shit or aluminum or soulless grey sidewalks—my old bolt spent myself loose towards the parted shore loose towards a painted tile door loose in an infirmary of static eyeball confusions—the best to ever be known “you'll never know anything at all until you know that you'll never know nothing!” but my poor knee—hurts me here—I know that - and my poor old bolts lay in a rust powder to my almost parking lot year almost creation of nothings turned out to my lost parts and scream a silent with my eyes crowned by a blossoming sun by a blossoming crowd—gathering sea forms to bemoan my old bolts to memorialize this here now as a reality—and if this is a here now reality where ever a million negative or positive or like common realities have as well been created—and if in this here now my lost of self sad love lonely old bolts did so much as never thank the sunshine did so much as not to remember their place from within me and did this all so much that the vagary of their points began to wear thin—and the shed old existence of my so lonesome of selves myself too realized that a parting of the clouds may not be so bad.

RUMORS FROM THE BALCONY

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS MADOCH

After an uphill struggle reminiscent of the piano scene from Laurel & Hardy's *The Music Box*, Chris Madoch's collection of writings, *Rumours From The Balcony* has arrived - having survived rejections, manipulations and duplicity at the hands of numerous would-be publishing houses. Paraphilia Magazine talked to Mr Madoch about the project...

It's been a bumpy ride seeing this project to fruition. Can you tell us briefly a bit about that?

Shit covers it- though to be fair the ultimately broken promises that I had dined on were reasonably fine; cordon bleu or take-away it barely matters, if they are vacuous they all go down the pan. To say I have been flushed with disappointments at the hands of others who have previously been full of themselves is something of an understatement. To settle any transatlantic rivalry I have been majorly let down by both the British and Americans equally. Notable Americans with reputations to boot discovered my work over three years ago now via my Facebook fanpage. Already famous as Lumen press they wanted to re-emerge as an avant-garde brand- they believed they had found their new enfant terrible of literature. Three years down the line their Texan finance was withdrawn due to my book's content.

How much do you think it was due to the contentious nature of some of the subject matter and how much due to general apathy and/or incompetence on the part of the 'publishing industry as it is?'

Being the age I am I had passed through a number of enthusiasms for being published and I was in no mood anymore to be published for the sake of it. I had stoically resisted self-publishing because I come from a generation when young writers were ALWAYS advised against it- indeed, then it was more aptly called vanity publishing. Of course, self-publishing is ubiquitous today and is available to ALL because of the IT revolution. It is very well documented that I was within a whisker of being an alternative 'Phillip Pullman' to JK Rowling at Bloomsbury UK- that never happened because the head of Children's Lit at Bloomsbury left, taking my books with him [strictly not the done thing]. A year later, after the first Harry Potter hit off, he wrote to me and asked me to write a parallel- a teenage wizard meets *The Celestine Prophecy*. I hated that and made my feelings clear. This man's world famous error of judgement- jumping ship before the Potter phenomenon [which he had discovered] exploded, may well have cost me a small fortune. I have experienced so many things in my life but wealth is not one of them- I would have liked to have had the chance to have creatively expressed my socialism from a powerbase rich with the

language that the vast mass of Western Culture understands- money.

It obviously was not to be- I try to reflect without a trace of bitterness. I turned away from my children's books and playwriting and finally returned to the best way of creative expression in Literature- I am loathe to refer to it as poetry anymore because it seems that the world and their dog are now writing poetry. If pressed I would grudgingly accept the label prose poetry BUT the fact is that I can make a strong argument for saying that my short fictions are in fact epic poetry. The semantics of it bores me to death. What matters is that I had finally grown into an extraordinarily honed gift for creative expression through language. Of course I saw this as a perfect vehicle for my beloved excoriating honesty. Honesty and mainstream publishing hardly ever appear in the same sentence; their response to RUMOURS FROM THE BALCONY which is excoriating honesty was to run for cover and withdraw their finance. Even my present publishers could not hide a degree of lily liveredness- they remain concerned that their offices might be torched because of the piece SUICIDE BY FATWAH which I was told their lawyers had advised them not to include in the book.

Many of the pieces take an overtly confrontational stance. This is obviously not an affectation but something intrinsic. Can you explicate on how the form of the pieces relates to their subject matter?

We live in media bite times when horrors are virtually instantly transmitted

worldwide by a plethora of devices- most of which also have the facility to entertain or be diverting. We live in an age when TV Soaps, Dramas and even blockbuster movies are to some degree issue led- nothing as intrusive and universally embraced is devoid of propaganda. TV is of course habitually interrupted by advertising- the aim of which is to be persuasive. TV Soaps almost always end each episode with information about advice lines relating to the content that has been relayed. There is a voracious appetite for the staged truth. When a writer deals with the prospect of communicating with their readers these matters are core- if not then ignore them utterly and write entirely just for you and bathe in the applause of your own ego. It happens that I choose to pay attention to the lives of real people. BUT, for me, staged truth is nothing more than a lure, I intend to use it as a device to draw people to a place where they can explore a greater truth; that truth is often more shocking and more painful. It has been described as dangerous and beautiful. If people want to argue that it is 'my' truth as opposed to 'the' truth then that's fine by me.

How possible (or even desirable) do you think it is, to still shock people in a constructive way?

Nothing in what I write shocks me- it has arisen from my wealth of life experience, education and interests. That it might shock other people does not surprise me but it really is for them to deal with- I loathe any concept of nannying in society that allows people to pass on their responsibility for their own reactions to quangos or the

ideology of a favourite newspaper. If I had to live this life again [re-incarnation] I would love to return as a Forensic Pathologist/Psychologist. Death does not scare me. Looking for things that I fear I always return to the same culprit- mankind; nothing else. One of my favourite books is DARK NATURE by Lyall Watson in which he tries to discover if there is a biological basis for evil- it is a remarkable eye-opening work. It is extremely difficult to 'spin' something to me with a charm offensive in an effort to prevent me seeing that the canvass is white as opposed to black. I have a number of people in my life I like a lot but generally I think people are quite dangerous- their common apathy is dangerous as is their common savagery and their latest disease; a sociopathic resistance to learning anything out and above that which they believe they need to know. I never hide my belief that anyone still believing in a man-managed religion is 'out of their mind' and that religious fundamentalism is becoming a euphemism for insanity.

What support has this book received during its course, and what sort of feedback has it garnered so far?

My current publisher graciously picked up the pieces when the deal with the Americans crumbled at the eleventh hour. However, they have never meticulously answered all my questions and have left ALL of the marketing of the book to me. They want the dedicated sales page on their website to be the ONLY way that people can buy the book- they argue that the maths

does not work with Amazon or with mainstream Booksellers.

Here are two short reviews- both from working class men who are not gay:

Mr Stephen Weir's response to reading the book was- "It has been said that, among other things, we should dance as if nobody can see us, and sing as if nobody can hear us. There is fundamental wisdom in this. And it is wisdom which hasn't been lost in Chris Madoch; he has translated and applied the principle to the written word and constructed an anthology not to please the audience, but as if nobody will ever read his work. In tortured reflection and biting commentary, through brutal honesty and intimidating openness the poet offers you an insight in to a man who has travelled through a life less ordinary and who hasn't come all this way just to please day-trippers and tourists. From the onset the poet establishes threads of thought and feeling which, while at first apparently random and disconnected, weave through the pages of the book to ultimately leave the reader looking at a broad and coherent tapestry of humanity. *Rumours From the Balcony* succeeds where others do not; it is a finished work which stands as far more than the sum of its parts. This is Madoch raw and unplugged. And the bloke obviously doesn't give a damn if you love him or hate him for it."

Mr Scott D. Piquette's response was- 'Like riding a gliding roller coaster through the dancing flames of passion in the mind and soul of an ingenious man gone super nova. Smooth, uninhibited, ascent and decent to

climactic explosions of raw emotion and insight. Hot, hellish, as though it would leave deep eternal scars, thus depositing long moments of pause for reflection and meditation on Mr Madoch's "dangerous and beautiful" opinions, beliefs, and way of looking at life. Superb... Unhinged... A Definite must read, if nothing else, for the masterful literary ingenuity of a man who has discovered himself fully, one who peers now into the truths of life and all its little nuances like a true seer.

Thank you Chris, I sincerely enjoyed the adventures and moments of opportunity to live in your soul for the duration of the read. The re-read. This is a surely a treasure beyond and above worldly worth to your own, where any man, woman, or spiritual being could certainly find something to treasure within its pages also. Regardless of their ethnicity, background, sexual preferences or beliefs.

With awe and respect I humbly thank you for writing this book.'

Is this book a milestone for you, a crossroads, or a launching pad for your new publishing venture?

You pass one milestone and before long you visualise the approaching ones- I am investing all my earnings from this book into my PARAPLUIE PUBLISHING INTERNATIONAL, to be based in both London UK and San Diego USA. People are being kind about the book- it seems to have found a significant place in their lives. That is rather humbling and I am deeply grateful to have produced such a thing. I can rest happy that it is not a waste of trees.

What is your take on the state of the publishing industry? What sort of future do you think it has?

Independent Internet Publishing capable of providing two types of product- books printed on demand and books for retail are set to replace mainstream publisher's. We are witnessing the death of that industry where celebrity publishing increasingly appears to be a desperate act. The end will be drawn out because there has to be a disestablishment of a club which was formerly occupied by graduates from Oxford and Cambridge and members of the upper class- nepotism was rife. A social revolution is occurring. It will mean the demise of high street book outlets but I suspect the small and well informed independent bookshop/internet coffee shop will survive. I have no faith whatsoever in the Kindle type technology which I believe will be very short-lived- none of those gadgets is in fact one tenth as reader friendly as a book.

And (to use a sloppy generalisation) what of the state of 'Literature'. What future for that?

It may surprise people to know that I am very much for the evolution of language and means of communicating- I possess texting dictionaries and many vernacular dictionaries. British English is in a constant state of flux and has survived everything that any culture has thrown at it- in fact embracing it. I have no time for people who enjoy the preciousness of preserving the language in a moment of time- it is utterly pointless and goes entirely against the tide. Having said that, a proper study and

understanding of the language demands an in depth look at it in its entirety. I seem to have an instinct for realising whether or not a writer has found this process tiresome. You never find this in Indian writers using British English- their love and respect of the language is palpable.

It won't surprise people to find me saying that tomorrow's Literature is all about creative expressionism without boundaries. I have no interest in being a poet and it disturbs me that writers want to label themselves so readily- it is very ill-advised. Paint and communicate with a passionate and excoriatingly honest, extraordinarily gifted artistry- use the broadest possible word palette, be fearless and know where the envelope is and hope to push it hard. If you don't do this I won't want to read you or publish you, in fact I might feel inclined to advise you to have a care for the ecology of this planet and stop wasting forests on crap.

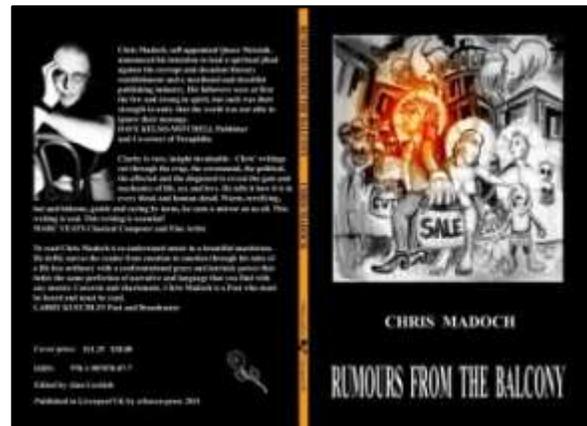
And finally, what's next for you?

Continuing the hard slog of solo promoting my 'dangerous and beautiful' book RUMOURS FROM THE BALCONY. I am collaborating with the American Poet Jack Henry and the Illustrator Dan-Paul Flores on a collection of mixed pieces of creative expression under the title SEX WITH STRANGERS. I am completing my

collection of contentious short fiction. I am seeking a publisher for my adult novel LIVING WITH LESLEY DYING FOR FAME. I am re-looking at the children's works, most particularly THE MEGA WORDS SPOUTED BY BENJAMIN CHRISTMAS. I am on a bit of a sabbatical from writing and the internet and creating art in real studio space in real time.

However, I have recently started a new piece RELAYING THE UNSAYABLE which deals with the many things we are not supposed to dwell on. Typical!

I will always willingly be a part of the exemplary Paraphilia Family.



Rumours From The Balcony by Chris Madoch is available from a dedicated sales page here, post and packaging free worldwide:

www.erbacce-press.com

BITTER SUITE EMBITTERED

By Chris Madoch

In order of appearance-

A WELSH MALE VOICE CHOIR OF RUGBY PLAYERS

Either in fact or recorded with appropriate sound effects.

VICTORIA (VICKY) WORTH (WORTHLESS)

A Welsh woman of thirty years.

ANGEL PRESENCE

An opaque predominantly male wraith. Either in fact or as an hologram effect with live voice over.

SETTING

We are inconveniently between here and there. The indistinct building is vast, inhuman and due for demolition. Out of the partial blackness we are made party to a large and virtually empty flat. A virtually derelict flat. We could be *anywhere* but this is Cardiff, Wales, UK. There is a pale lemon three piece suite comprising a fixed armchair, a three seater sofa and a recliner. All rubbed grubby. We see a few cardboard packing cases, a small cluttered table, a TV and a telephone with answering machine. It is a bleak place as befits a bleak time in the bleak life of a bleak person. The light is spare, unshaded, and we can smell the cloying dust. In the presence of this abundance of 'lifeless' despair we deal with our emerging disgust and a growing sense of distance. Nobody in their right mind would elect to live here. But, someone does evidently exist here in this living space. There are poignant indications of a woman's touch- new pale lemon boudoir slippers and a large lemon vase of countless Easter lilies.

Scene One

*(The suspect veil between this world and Vicky's is raised. Night. A downlight fades up on the fixed armchair. We hear waves of dull urban noise. An offstage door opens then closes. From the street we hear the arrival of massed men. We don't see the Male Voice Choir but we hear it as it begins to sing- **The Lily Of The Valley**. When the singing stops, we hear a sash window opening in a rush. Immediately we hear an offstage voice shouting.)*

OFFSTAGE VOICE

Dear God! Look at you. All of you. And look at the bloody time. Why is it you lot of boy scouts have not got bugging homes to go? Eh? Push off. You heard me. Back to the fucking valleys now. Go on. Sodding shove off!

(We hear the window closing in an angry clatter. We hear the told choir dispersing with cursive mutterings. Silence, save for dull waves of urban noise. Eventually the annoying phone rings then the answerphone cuts in.)

VICTORIA WORTH

(Upbeat answerphone message.) Organic chocolate- 90% cocoa, it's the new sex. No, don't hang up. Whoever *you* are, and let's face it you could be just about anybody, I need you to leave me some sweet crumb of comfort, nutter or not. So oblige me, please..after the Welsh-speaking tone.

FEMALE VOICE

Vicky, pick up. It's me, Vicky. *(Pause.)* I'm dying, you sick bitch. It's Neath. Neath Accident and Emergency. I'm fucking dying, alright. *(Pause.)* Yes. It is. It's true. It is. I got the fucking news today. *(Pause.)* Just like *my* mother. They said. Just like *my* mother. *(Pause.)* You're next. Call me.

(Silence. We hear the sound of a reluctant toilet being flushed and a tired door opening and closing. Vicky enters in yellow fleecy pyjamas. She is carrying a toy bear- blonde, a large bottle of lemonade and a bottle of Cinzano. There is an old glass on the cluttered table. She sits in the fixed armchair, slips on the slippers then plays the phone message. We hear it repeated. She gives no response. She erases the message. The machine resets itself. She switches on the TV.)

TV

More than three thousand members of an ancient coastal community in Kerala are feared drowned in India's worst floods for more than half a century. Britain and America are in the van of..

(The TV suddenly dies along with the lights and all things electrical. Darkness is the victor penetrated by street lighting.)

VICKY

Fuck!

(Using the light of a cigarette lighter she exits to feed the meter. We hear a clunk. The lights return. She re-enters. The answerphone resets itself but there is no life in the TV. Vicky hits it hard. Nothing. She hits it repeatedly. Still nothing. She slumps back in the chair.)

Fuck!

(Pause. She eats chocolate. Then it's as if something appears to spook her. But she takes a deep breath and settles down. Smiles.)

My famous Dad, the actor, well read, well spoken, his caramel voice embroidered with the ethnic traces of both Burton and Hopkins, he was always very good with TVs. Bloody marvellous he was. Yeah. Magic. Totally. Televisions always bugged him. They always had to be put right see, tuned proper, be proper colour balanced, be spit and polished, shone to a gloss and proper bloody back-lit. *(Pause.)* He'd use them mini pseudo aquaria in a variety of popular nautical settings. Frigging kitsch things. Things needing to be properly positioned. He said. *(Lengthy pause.)* Oh God! Fuck it! All of it. All of it. The lot. The mindless recyclable shit of it all. *(Pause.)* Proper little fusspot he was. Mum said that. Proper little fusspot. Proper little teapot. Gay bastard. That was her delicate turn of phrase, her minute trace of quaintness. 'Proper little fusspot.' Griddle cakes his favourite. Griddle cakes her speciality. Delicacy she said. Delicacy- mm, what a useful camouflage that turned out to be. The world of delicate and delicacy. *(Pause.)* It worked. Indeed it did. It worked for her. *(Pause.)* He was actually, matter of factly gay as it happens. Unusual I thought. *(Pause.)* Bloody unusual for someone born in Glamorgan. I thought. *And*, fucking unusual for someone born in the Glamorgan of miners used to rattling rattles in support of Swansea Rugby Football Club, he enjoyed a certain sexual equilibrium and was absolutely unafraid to lift shirts. Respected for it, it was said. *They* said. And I can't say that I ever saw him much. *(Pause.)* *She* brought me up under *her* name, on her lemon yellow ownsome, under her own head of steam and unseemly steaminess- too many half-cock TVs to fucking mention and, every one of the buggers always on the irritating mind-numbing blink. And no electric mementoes of the Isle Of Wight alive with plastic fish. None. No backlighting. No *wonder*. None whatsoever. *(Pause.)* Worlds apart they were, my parents. Chalk and cheese. He was fawn like vanilla fudge. She was pink like boiled lobster. *(Pause.)* No. You fucking listen. You listen to me. It's me. I can't help myself. I tell her story over and over like it was some mystery, some fucking York passion play- like the bardic tableaux of it might one day explain the Satanic aberration of me away, magically. Poof! A poof like 'im. Gone. Gone way beyond belief and gone beyond sweet grief with the usual wave of Merlin's wand. *(Pause.)* Frigging history! *(Pause.)* Yes I know. No fucking need to phone and say I told you so. Her mother's death before her became her death- it's in my blood. Now it's yours. Yes. Inherited from way back. *(Pause.)* It's in my blood. Every cell. Indivisible now. *(Pause.)* And there is a little bit of me wishes to erase the hell-bound lurid and gigantic bits of me. God! The daily, page three, tabloid bits of me. Tits. Tits. And airbrushed bits. Imagine- me exposed in The Sun for breakfast, I wished. Oh how I wished it. Once upon a time. *(Pause.)* Black coffee and Marmite toast. Sunburn on my shaved mons veneris. That's taste for you. That's proper taste. Oh yes indeedly. Me, naked and childlike in the earthly garden of delights. Tumbles in The

Mumbles. Merlin's weekend dogged to death patch. (Pause.) Not no more. Not now. (Pause.) Him with his dirty mac and spitting stick. Fuck the fairies and the fucked-up tales of fairies. (Lengthy pause.) It was a real ambition once. Now it's an admission of something sad. Good Lord! (Pause.) There are worse things for a chapel girl. There are. There are worse things for a chapel *whore*. Roars of low esteem. Axminster burns. VD. (Pause.) There are powerfully sinful bits of me need a right proper exorcising..evil bits. Evil bits only to be repeated in the sight of Catholic crucifixes. Sly bits meant to be heard again only in the presence of holy water. (Pause.) Well water from St David's. Tears from elsewhere. (Pause.) There's no way out of this maze of life. Rootless, me. Mapless. No route from A to B. And there's no sense. No sense in innocence. It's senseless. There's no forward play no more. No proper video. Original. Creative. There's only sodding rewind. Rewind and play. Rewind and play. Only rewind and fucking play. (Pause.) Oh yes. See-saws. Slides. Swings and roundabouts. (Pause.) And there is no fucking denying it, absolutely no fucking denying it. Look at me! Well, take a fucking good look at me! I *am* my bitch of a mother's daughter. Like peas in a pod we are. (Pause.) These eyes are her eyes. Look. Enormous Welsh grey blue. (Lengthy pause.) My breasts are bigger. (Pause.) My thighs are smaller. (Pause.) She's millimetres taller. (Pause.) Dying. (Pause.) Dying, she says. (Pause.) Maybe already dead and buried. (Lengthy pause.) She was adopted. Cast aside then chosen. And I say this in public at every given opportunity because it might make the basis of some rudimentary excuse for her vastly bizarre behaviour. And, to my certain knowledge, there are several suspect Science Degrees in *Anxiety Counselling* which might light up 'JACKPOT' at the thought of such fluffy obviousness. (Pause.) She should be fucking researched head to toe inside and out. Without a doubt. There's no question. (Pause.) Mankind might benefit from her lifetime of cunt-for-hire service to every kind of man. (Lengthy pause. Then explosively.) Look mum! No fucking diverting TV! No stress busting dockside soap. No fly-on-the-wall valley documentary! No piece of fairy cake TV! Fake TV. No fucking fascist Anglo TV. This is real this is. *My shit reality.* (Pause. *She eats more chocolate. She lights a cigarette.*) She had this frighteningly fat friend, mum- a fellow pilgrim from her Mormon phase. I remember her well, very well meaning, obsessive chocoholic, extremely fat and psychotically forty. Frigid as a freezer full of lambs' liver she was. This clinically obese friend, she'd been routinely abused by *her* father, every Friday she said, after fish and chips and mushy peas. You could set your watch by him she said, a right pig of an Eastender who always refused to be delayed by the rigours of routine genital hygiene. (Pause.) She'd make her rotund protestations- all to no avail. I'll not elaborate. Leave it well alone. I'll leave the smell of Dagenham to your own imagination. Pigs, I love the creatures but there is a line to be drawn here. (Pause.) Well, anyway, *there* was the common ground, the foundation of friendship and twisted fixation. They were superglued see- bonded by sexual curiosity and a sweet tooth. Filthy familial abuse, that and the political fashion at the time for what the unwieldy newspapers referred to as Greenham Common Chic..them fucking ugly badged up dungarees, and lime-green moon boots. All of it the matronly forerunner of Grunge, fashion with two fingers- my interior design inspiration. Fuck off Vogue with flair, see. Fuck off L'Oreal with flair. There are women who are in fact never fucking worth it. (Pause.) No. No. No. All this, all *this* shit, the lot of it, it is intentional, absolutely fucking intended. It's no good you getting the wrong end of the stick. I've never been a victim, me. No. There'd be a reason then. Well, there would. So much cosier. All this would be reasonable then. Safe. Saccharine sweet. But, no, I've never been a victim me. I've not been raped by my dad. Pussy repulsed him. I've not been licked out by a lesbian mum. (Pause.) I've been soured. I've been soured countless times. Soured. There's

been hours of souring. It's not the same. (*Lengthy pause.*) I like my brave face best of all. (*Pause.*) Everything fucked up, see, it's always rooted in something else. Oh yes. Even rootlessness. (*Pause.*) Listen. Most afternoons I'd come home from school to a council-house front-room full of sour women- bi-curious single mothers, all bloody Peruvian socks and folk art painted satchels stuffed with feminist propaganda. Give me a friggin break. Visualise it for me! Come on now. Just fucking visualise it! Pastel Doc Martins and Jesus sandals. No bras. No plucked eyebrows. This was Grunge in embryo! The gobby I want I want foetus strident! Two bloody great fingers to Max Factor. (*Pause.*) And here was a vast mobile library of oral history- firsthand accounts of '*How WE dealt with our repeat abortions*'. '*How WE learned to live with cellulite and without men*'. Oh yes. And, '*How WE suffered*'. (*Pause.*) My home was not a bleeding home. My home was a total stranger to certainty. My home was this moving feast to victimisation, a mercurial shrine to mutual misery. It was this brick caravan. A sick staging post for my '*sickening for something*' mum and her salon of embittered souls. (*Pause.*) Sad. Miserable. Definitely diflas. (*Lengthy pause.*) A magnet for Cancer. It was asking for the furry fragments harbouring disease. It was. You can see it plain as day with hindsight. (*Long pause.*) But I did fancy one of the Mormons. I remember him like he was here now. Now. Here and now. Starched shirt heaven he was. Mmm. Mmm. He was so spanking clean and his kit always sparkled. A voice like an angel. A gob suited to poetry. A smell like Fabreeze. (*Long pause.*) That fat friend of hers was a whiz at *waste not want not* home-knitting. She'd often make winders of my outstretched undernourished arms. We'd be connected then, and then, being so close, I'd easily detect her sweat. Bitter sweat. Acid drops, like the tart stories tripping of her tongue. (*Pause.*) Well, it happened that her eldest son, oh yes, the fat girls always get up the duff and marry a munter, her eldest son a *would you believe it* throwback to her own dirty father, a boy with an intelligent quotient not much bigger than his thirteen years, had been laying the widespread art of mutual masturbation and oral sex on his none the wiser siblings. *Mummies and Daddies* it was. They said *none the wiser* but we know. We always know. Screen memory, that's what. We know where innocence went. And we know when. (*Pause.*) So, *Mummies and Daddies* it was. And, later in the cross examining, and- through the transport of children's TV to a parallel universe, fucking *Doctors* and fucking *Nurses*. Erotic role play learned from erotic role models. (*Pause.*) *This bit's sore see, this bit's very swollen, very very swollen indeed. What this bit needs is a special kiss. It does. It really does. It really needs a very very special kiss.* (*Pause.*) Oh the mystery of it all- life, death and the universe, perversely unknitting itself. The magic. Tragic it is. The plain stitch you could say, and the pearl, undone. (*Pause.*) Oh, the eight year old brother, in particular, the one with flaking skin, he'd taken to it like a duck to water. Born to it, so the story goes. (*Pause.*) Destiny I suppose. A like-it-or-lump-it *lot*, or fate. Just one of the many several themes of my obsessive verbal thesis- even then, in my abusive childhood, building like sharply contrasting thread. Take another look at me, go on. I'm sitting a bachelor's degree in Creative Suicide. University of Fuck Ups Bridgend. Now then. Show me some fucking respect. (*Pause.*) At that clinic they told me to steer clear of contrasts. Contrasts, they said, oohh, terrible things, they can do your head in, drive you totally insane. Shades of grey, they said, indefinable, neither one thing or the other, so much better for the psyche than black and white. So much better for you. For you, you with your profile. Well, shit like that can stick in your memory forever. (*Pause.*) And you pass it on. You do. You pass it on. (*Long pause.*) Fat Sharon knitted me a *chic* cardigan as it happens. Fat wool. The cardigan of many colours, the coat of all the ends of wool that no-one else wanted. The sore pink stood out like a sucked thumb. Talk about fucking contrast! (*Pause.*) I had absolutely no idea what oral sex was, then.

Talking about it. Talking about what you might do, given just half a chance- that's what I thought it was. All gob, I thought it was, all gob and no fucking action. *(Pause.)* All gob and no fucking action. That's poetry for you- the oral sex of the thinking classes. *(Pause. Stubs out the cigarette.)* I've hated my emotionally disabled mother for far too long, far too long. So long it's been debilitating. *(Pause.)* Bitter, as bitter as fat Sharon's perspiration, that's what I am now. Not thinking. Not doing. Not doing a thing. How close to a definition of death is that? *(Pause. She finishes the chocolate and throws the wrapper away.)* Angel, I told you. I told you didn't I. I told just you. I never told anyone else. No-one. It's our little secret this is. Sacred. *(Pause.)* She shone this bright halogen torch right up my vagina once, twice. And I've never fucking forgiven her for it. That's secret. That's sacred. *(The electric goes again. The sudden darkness is penetrated by street lighting.)* Fuck me! *(She feels her way to a window.)* Alright, alright. Hold on to your fucking black and white minds. Hold tight to your secrets. It's just another power surge. We get these intermittent surges. Outages says Owen. We get these electrical surges all the time. It's the collective desires of the independence movement. They're firestarting someone's heart. Something's not connecting right. *(Pause.)* It don't matter to me now- I sold my computer. I abandoned all my internet abilities and liabilities. *(Pause.)* There's a full Moon though, look, wide as you like, a pale untanned cracked arse, full on Moon. *(Pause.)* Crikey! Catatonia on the universal radio. He'll be tuning in, my Owen. There's special that is. *(Pause.)* Well, like I tried to explain to my imaginary therapist, the halogen with it's phallic penetration, that was altogether too much light to put upon my front bottom. And once in real therapy I remained very tight lipped. *(Pause.)* Plainly. I was at a vulnerable age then. They do say, don't they, people from all quarters, that you can never get enough internal illumination, well this was way too much. Black and shiny. Battery driven. A floodlit cricket pitch. An invasion of privacy, a palpable surfeit of look-see. This was way too much. *(Pause.)* I remember, clear as you like on rewind. Rewind stop and play. There was this plain as day determination on my mam's face. Extraordinary now that I come to think about it. *(Pause.)* Yes. That's what that expression was- ugly self-interested obsessive sexualised determination. *(Returns to her chair and lights another cigarette. After the first drag the electricity is restored.)* Mam! Is that you? But Lord, oh Lord, my own sweet love child is elsewhere. Taken from me. Gone. As good as dead, mam! MY BABY!! She needed things. Shiny things, emotional treasures. Things I'd lost the power to give. She needed my illumination, my guiding light. *(Long pause.)* Angel? Where the fuck are you. I need you. I need you. I need you. I need you. Are you there?

(We see a form appear in the room, pale faced, dressed in black. He approaches her but will not venture into the sharp light.)

ANGEL PRESENCE

I am always relatively near.

VICKY

As near as my mother's breath, her soft voice soothing in the throws of my violent Asthma? That near? Dear? As near as her fingers in the tangles of my freshwashed hair? The water

warmed but not too warm and softened, thick with valley camomile. Closer maybe? The closest even? As murderously close as her cold blood crusted beneath my broken fingernails? (*Shouting.*) Did you fucking hear me screaming!?

ANGEL

Ever near. Nearer. Never separate.

VICKY

Always! You promised. You said for fucking all ways! You said. You promised.

ANGEL

Promises like prayers can drift forever on the air. For always. Yes! I said as much. Inseparable.

VICKY

Good. Yes. That's good. That's very fucking good for me because I need you Angel Presence. God damn you for ever truly being! But I really do need you. I need you for my lost darling and for me. (*Pause.*) And *'What kind of shoes are those you wear, that you can ride upon the air?'*

ANGEL

Let's get to it. What then? What in particular? What would you need me for now? (*He retreats to the shadows. Long pause.*)

VICKY

An ending would be nice. No more bloody loop the blasted bloody loop. That would be very nice. An ending at last. An ending, at last, to this endless cunting everything. An ending. Oh cunt yes. How's that for fucking starters? (*No reply. She pours herself a drink. Pause.*) I woke up, see. Twelve- remodelled by early onset puberty. I was pale and pre-menstrual. Lonely. She was out, partying, getting a new life. Out in a man's dress suit, parading herself as a man. Brazen as you like. A man she'd lifted out of the closet. (*Pause. Screams.*) DADDY! (*Long pause.*) The babysitter was asleep, mouth wide open catching spiders, her knitting for Ethiopia held in cartoon freeze frame. (*Pause.*) The tall lodger had returned. His lodging's door was accidentally ajar, the light inviting. I saw. I saw him. Oh yes. I saw. These eyes- enormously Welsh, a mix of grey and blue. I saw he was on his bony back on the lodging's floor, naked, pallid, his scrawny outline marked by pallid skin coloured candles. Lit. The lot of them. He was lit up like a thirtieth birthday cake. Spam on fire he was. And he was chanting softly- words. Words I'd never heard. A magic language. Vague tongues. Could've been Druid. And he was entirely oblivious, working away, jerking himself off, the body fluid an unappetising grey-white, more juicy than snot. (*Pause.*) It's Nature's way, *that-* bloody

multi-seeding overkill. (Pause.) But hell. This was something new, something I had never previously seen. Maybe, this was something I was *meant* to see. Maybe it was dyed in the wool with Jungian significance. (Long pause.) There are no errors down here, in this place, never. No victims. Nothing said is ever wasted. Only sour things are really tasted. (Long pause.) I'll tell you then. I'll tell you when *my* turn came. (Pause.) Here's the dangerous black and white of it. He was fairy tale handsome. Half dark, half light, a maestro Destino holding tight to his wriggly seed and living in wait for idealistic, unsuspecting me. (Pause.) Bang! (Pause.) The determined spermatozoa of this South American psychotic finally blending like a raspberry slush puppy deep within me. Whoosh! All natural and unnatural rush. All..*fuck me*, all arse about face, all..well, *oh my gosh*. (Pause.) She came the full term later- baby, baby, baby, baby, the grapefruit flowering of my ice cold screw with Mister Destino. Ouch! Ouch, ouch, ouch. Ouch and endless whining uterine pain. Nothing fucking grey about that. Nothing fucking grey about that at all. Pain and punishment, it was, in proper real overkill. Lemon. (Pause.) Oh God! God love her. Baby Lemon. (Pause.) She was this magic carnival of blood spattered caramel skin whose sick as a fuck father flew from consequences like birds from active earthquake zones. (Pause.) He migrated into madness. (Pause.) We share a common ground. Not at all a cricketer. Not at all a heterosexual. Not at all one solitary thing he'd ever said he was. Not one solitary thing. (Pause.) And... And, this is not an episode I care to dwell on anymore. (Pause.) Angel! (Pause.) Angel, change my bloody tune. Please! (Long pause.) This is the thing. It's not that I hear voices. There is no choice. I tell him things. I tell things to my personal Angel, see, it's easy, that's how I lay it on him, *look*, it's easy-peasy. Yeah and what's magic is that we can always edit out the bits that don't fit in the frame. The bits that frighten, the bits that we don't like, we can always trash them and abandon them on the cutting room floor. That's life. Cut flowers. Cut ties. Lost babies. (Long pause.) *They* came in the end, like educated thieves. The stealers of fresh souls. But they were stale, smelling of the London Underground. Interlopers. Handbags, briefcases, voices thin like tin. (Pause.) She was perfectly still..little Iona, my baby lemon. Hardly breathing. (Pause.) In the end they told me I was ill. *Obviousness*, it's not a trait I immediately warm to. (Pause.) It has not been the same from that day to this. Not so much as a plastic pot to piss in. No peace. (Pause.) And there is never the literary room on all of them endless and meaningless forms to tell it to whoever..*as it is* or *as it was*..with grit and poetry. (Pause.) Life, my fucking lonely life! Life without the crying of Iona. My lemon Iona. Mine. (Pause.) She was mine, something of me to live beside. How *Welsh* is that? (Long pause.) Peculiar. But not so very strange- if ever I tried to tell them bitches at the super-real DHSS how it *might* be, how it *will* be even, their scrubbed hands bright with screaming wedding bands would press some silent bell that sent a silent signal to security. (Pause.) There are always devices under the counters of the state. Always. There's no point in making a proletariat fuss. That's the point of sale for you. (Pause.) It's the gypsy vibe, that's always done for me. Romance. Romancing and Romanies. All the valley roads leading to eternal Rome. (Pause.) Oh, I lose count. I have been removed that many times! I have been removed to places of detention, kept in against my will after school. It's countless. Countless. I must not write rude words. I must not write rude words. I must not write fucking rude words. The cunts. (Pause.) I have even been removed from where I've already been removed to. (Long pause.) Removal by subterfuge. They *do* that to pariahs- the social. Listen. The institutionalised social conscience of the nation weeds and reseeds with the venom of gardeners intent on improving on God's work. It's true. Blinding. They deliberately confuse the roots of the great unwanted with constant changes of venue. Demolition and resettlement. That's the preferred weapon. That's what this is. Lemon

demolition. *(Pause.)* And they would gas us if they could. Oh, yes they fucking would. And, even as I speak, they plan to re-house me, temporary, in the midst of a known infestation. Low-rise they call it. How's that for compromise. *(Pause.)* Victoria Worth, this is without a doubt what defeat tastes like. Oh! They made me believe it. I am not *worthy*. They made me see it, alright. The initial 'v' is for victim. *Putative* victim. Oh yes. I disputed it, me. It's a Ms, I said, a fucking big M with a fucking small S. I have no title, madam, though Lady Victoria Worth of Merthyr Tydfil, does have a certain frigging ring to it, don't it. Martyr me go on. The social climber that I am. *(Pause.)* A little civility- it's the least you can do. Is it too much to ask a Civil Servant to be fucking civil? *(Pause.)* There, top of the form, left hand side- '*Your given name.*' Given at the outset. V for vermin. Welsh vermin. *(Pause.)* Yes. She's the vermin of the valley...oh, my Lord. Sing that why don't you. Canu. Canu. Sing that, if you will. *(Pause.)* I seem to have spent the most of my life being kissed goodnight by disease ridden rats. *(Lengthy pause.)* Angel?

ANGEL

(Emerging from deep shadow.) Yes.

VICKY

Oh. You don't mind. Please. Please don't mind. I thought you might be sleeping.

ANGEL

We creatures created by conflict seldom sleep.

VICKY

No. No, that's right. We never ever really sleep do we? We fly. We eat crap. We are the flies who ride upon the air.

ANGEL

What is it?

VICKY

You already know that. You fucking said. All seeing. All bloody knowing. Tricky dicky. Clever arse. Tart from heaven that you are. Ineffable, that's what you said. Don't look now, your fucking halo's showing! You're fucking glowing you are, radiating, leaking rivers of unbearable loveliness. You know the truth. Go on. Be a friend. Give us the proof.

(Angel sits on the arm of the sofa nearest to Vicky.)

ANGEL

Nearer by the year? Is that really what you want?

VICKY

Yes. Alright. Nearer. Take me home with you if you like!

ANGEL

As near as next year say?

VICKY

Oh yes! Please. Next year. Yes! Tomorrow, even. You know me Angel. You know me. I loathe sitting in a shitting queue, never could abide waiting. Tomorrow could not be soon enough for me.

ANGEL

Fine. The very near future it is. I'll begin. *(We hear a blast of trumpets.)* 'Mother, Whore, Daughter, Holy Ghost'.

VICKY

Hey! Bollocks! What the hell are you doing!? Look, skip the fucking intro! We're already irretrievably lapsed. You said so. Go on, fast forward to the main feature. Wide-screen, HD and surround sound, that's it. Full on. Full frontal. Give me the full bloody monty! There is no saving me now. Oh God! Let me clap eyes on the one true ethereal blue planet spinning against a spangly star filled sky. Me taking the tabs again bang on time, visionary drugs as properly prescribed by my physician. Me being a good girl, a good patient. Patient. Mum. Struck dumb. Me eking out my tiresome dying. Me eking out the illusion of living the long death like we do. *(Pause.)* That massive copper gong thing. God! Give me. Give me. Give me that muscled up fuck machine and the massive copper gong thing. *(Pause.)* And ice-cream, cinema ice-cream. Oh! Mr Angel Presence, please! Please! We gotta have Neapolitan ice-cream. And..and..and that mighty MGM lion with his mighty shaggy mane roaring 'SHOWTIME'. 'SHOWTIME'. *(Shouting.)* Give it to me! Fucking give it to me! I'm just gagging for it, gagging for it, gagging for it.

ANGEL

Of course. *(He leans forward and touches the TV which instantly bursts into life.)* Here it is then, what's to be, an irritating little gift really. Magic as it's meant to be. Just like that- a present of the tiresome future. Near enough for you? See, the picture's great! *(Pause.)* Looks familiar don't it. It is. Your drab life in celluloid. See, the same, the same, and then more and then more of the bleeding same. And a cracking good cinema surround sound to boot. Look. The

cabinet highly polished to a mirror gleam. The colour perfectly balanced. *(Pause.)* And, for my next shot at a spot of psychic phenomena, something of a curiosity in serious sepia tones—a true video record of the lonely death of your maternal grandmother.

VICKY

(Shocked.) But..!

ANGEL

Oh yes. It's a white knuckle ride alright.

VICKY

Look! *(Pause.)* God! *(Pause.)* It is me. It's me. Look. I mean she's so *like* me it might as well be me. No! No, wait a minute. It is me. It's me! It is me. Look- fuck! I *am* my mother. I am. *(Pause.)* Shit! *(Pause.)* So! So is this what this is all about? *(Pause.)* Yes. That's it. That *is* what you're saying. That is what you're showing me. And, look, yes. Yes. I am my mother's birthmother. *(Pause.)* Fuck! *(Pause.)* It really is me. God! Sixty eight, stuck fast in a terrace in Nant-y-moel, dead to the world and sleeping for all eternity. *(Pause.)* Demolished now. The polished floors no more. Gone. Plank by plank. *(Angel returns to the shadows and the TV blacks out.)* Now what? *(Then violently.)* No! Don't do this to me. No! *(Pause.)* Fuck you! *(Very long pause. Then gently.)* Where are you sweet wraith? *(No reply. Pause.)* Gone. *(Pause.)* The bastard! Just like a man. See! See, do not, whatever you do put your trust in bargain basement demons. They can be flawed too. Fantastic but true. Flawed phantasmagoria, flightless and on the fucking floor, it is their way. The left hand, underhanded way of the unknown. The way of the milk white diamonds of the universe. *(Pause.)* Chipped. That's what they are. Chipped. Corrupt. Fallen and imperfect. *(Lengthy pause.)* It's us, though. That's what it is. That's all. Us. It's all our fault. It's the fault of all our unrelenting wanting. We make them. And we make them dangerously fickle. And, sometimes, we make them behave..too humanly. We make them say and do like we do. Saying and doing things like lovers in love with the idea of love. *(Pause.)* Sometimes it rains rainstorms in my head. Hidden tears. Long, long years of them. *(Pause. She pours another drink.)* That's where I went wrong. That's what screwed me, finally did for me- giving out on the first date to lovers in love with the idea of lust. Giving out to would be angels. *(Long pause.)* No. *(Pause.)* I can't say that I've given too much thought to my being my mother. God! There's way too much Karma vested in those thighs for mere mortals. *(Pause.)* I may. *(Pause.)* I may. *(Pause.)* I may warm to it..given time. It's all a matter of balance. See-saw. Slide. Swings and roundabouts. *(Pause.)* She breastfed me. That's one *for*, a plus. A tick in the meagre *Yes* list. *(Pause.)* Her adoptive father though, Frank, who's public persona was almost perpetually Christmassy, on account of his rosy cheeks and hirsute nature, *he* said to me, bold as you like, how he'd always wanted to kiss my tits and rent me asunder. Well, blow me down! Frank. *(Pause.)* The ways of the covert paedophile are many and mysterious like ungodly goods that insinuate into our paradise from other dimensions. Ungodly goods seeping into our paradise club from *other* locations. Foreigners. Interlopers. Weirdoes. Just like the souls of penny-pinching proprietors who place soiled sheets ironed and reversed in overnight accommodation in cheap hotels. Cheap

lives. What the eye don't see the heart won't grieve. *(Pause.)* Granddad! No! *(Pause.)* Why!? Why steal from me like that? *(Long pause.)* In one foul-mouthed and foul admission he laid to waste this cherished garden from my memories of childhood. Sweet, not bitter. Sweet cider apples. Cherry trees. The honeysuckled swing where he sat me on his knee and swung. The indescribable scent in Somerset like something sent from heaven. That's gone now. *(Pause.)* Now, that's definitely one for the burgeoning *against* column. And, as we speak, surprise fucking surprise, the holy *Noes* have it. The holy *Noes* have always had it. Now and forever. Amen.

(The phone rings and the answerphone cuts in.)

VICKY

(Upbeat answerphone message.) Organic chocolate- 90% cocoa, it's the new sex. No, don't hang up. Whoever *you* are, and let's face it you could be just about anybody, I need you to leave me some sweet crumb of comfort, nutter or not. So oblige me, please..after the Welsh-speaking tone.

FEMALE VOICE

Vicky, pick up. Baby, it's me. *(Pause. The line goes dead. Long Pause. She erases the message and waits for the machine to reset. Long pause.)*

VICKY

Shit! Look at me, Miss Piggy, stuck in fucking Cardiff, all out of chocolate. *(Pause.)* I hate paedophile pink. *(Pause.)* I never do pork sword pink. Not anymore. No.

(Blackout.)

Scene Two

(The next day. We hear intrusive urban noise. The curtains are closed but sunlight is piercing the gloom. The low light gently reveals Vicky asleep on the sofa wrapped in a pale lemon blanket. She is dreaming and clearly agitated. Angel appears out of the shadows and stands behind her head. Slowly the urban noise gives way to the sound of streams and birdsong. Vicky calms down and continues sleeping. He finally turns to us.)

ANGEL

We first met on *this* corrupt and morally disgusting plane, in Spartan, corrugated space. Welsh social space with a scuffed pink and peeling grey interior. Cramped on account of the adjacent Bingo. An oddly uninviting annex to a community centre in Ogmere Vale, it was. The both of us new to it, green as you like, quite unused to the parameters of our peculiar being. My human guise creaking, ill-fitting. Not at all weathered. Uncomfortably new-born. In fact about as uncomfortable as a new leather shoe. You know the feeling. Made to measure- proper posh, but bristling with exactness. And *her* holistic state, the whole caboodle, from the low moan resonance in her base Chakras to the bitter tears in her third eye, it was not at all anything her New-age reading had prepared her for. Lord! All the gurus in creation could not have coached her for it. (*Pause.*) The Cymraig rain, see, drummed on the metal roof like machine-gun fire. Bon Jovi drowning the thin lipped hymns. Metallica peppering the Medium's prayers with demonic laughter. The magician's smell of damp leather and mothproofed wool insinuating itself amongst the dull felt hats and loose hosiery. In a flash I could see she was distressed so I filled her ears with the ambient sounds of freshwater rills and birdsong. And, in her holed heart, I pressed this museum quality copy of the essential guide to the whys and the wherefores of the heavenly hosts. Immense. Pure Celt it is. A golden harp emblazoned on the cover. Oh, my kind is mentioned there. Des Anges. We've won entries in The Book Of Being. (*Long pause. The sound of streams and birdsong fades. Silence.*) The Presences, that's us- the angels strictly without wings. Personal trainers of the damaged soul. Experts in the development of spiritual muscle. We have right. (*Pause.*) Oh yes. I have this God given provenance. Title. My line is imbued with historical significance. There is longevity- the legitimacy of being timeless. Certainty. Form. Presence. There's nothing in the least bit iffy about me. (*Lengthy pause.*) The bugger is there's always an unruly queue at these functions. Listen. Like iron filings we are. Chips off the old block of God drawn to the magnet of life as *you* know it. And this particular clairvoyant, an unusually attractive channel being blessed with an ambivalent sexuality and a genius intelligence, that and a five star, state of the art, faster than the speed of light, landing platform, he had it all. He had it all and hardly an inkling. But, you could see your face in it. You could fine tune. Adjust things. Shiny, see, like a kiddies playground slide. As a consequence, it was mayhem. A ruck outside The Millennium Stadium. All the obliging bums of all the arriving angels gladly giving wellie to the brilliant gloss of it. I was out of the scrum, second in the line-up. Not exactly a volunteer but *volunteered* for the duty by the due process of spiritual evolution. Cast aside then chosen. Adopted. Nothing to complain of there, other than the irritation of having to endure the sheer banality of the first connection. There should be some sort of over-ride, we said. There should be a union. That was the general feeling of the queue. We all wanted to pull the plug and move on. The lot of us. It's true, well, some visitations seem hardly worth troubling the ether for. (*Pause.*) This faceless soldier, his symmetry destroyed by a stray mortar, still only an apprentice flier, well, he said he was a trench friend of Rupert Brooke, said he'd waited decades, more than half a century, to tell his grandson to plant anemone corms. There. As if anemones might draw him somehow closer. Closer to what? Closer to an understanding that life *is* death? Yes. Closer to an understanding that life is death. That's what! (*Pause.*) I see it *now*. Of course I bloody see it now. All of it. The lot. But my impatience *then* was paramount, the eagerness completely blinding me to the poetry in the message. (*Pause.*) Anemones for estrangement. That's it. Anemones for estrangement. (*Pause.*) Attachment and death. They are the breath of love. (*Pause.*) And life on Earth can be

this formidable estrangement from the afterlife. For some of you, the burden of it all is barely bearable. Yes. *(Pause.)* And he called me. Come on down, he was screaming, come on down. Me. And I was there, just like that, ahead of myself. Right in there. Right in there and cramping his already trembling cortex. Impatience see, rampant excitement. I was in there before his moving lips had so much as half a chance to settle. The congregation heard him gasp. Lord! First I was in, then I was out..an escaped thought trapped in revolving doors. The medium immediately sat down. His face pale and growing paler. And then he shouted out in some confusion, fearful, tearful, *Victoria Worth, Vicky with a V*, as if the name itself was something that he needed to be rid of. Victoria Worth. *(Pause.)* She spotted me. Yes. *She* spotted me. By some short circuit in her poetic sense she clocked me moving between the dimensions, a part of me here, then flit flit, a part of me there. I was not happy. I was not happy. But, our eyes met then, the hands of them wet with tears of joy, and they were waving in unbridled delight. Meeting. Parting. Repeating. Exploding. This was applause. This was proper applause. Ascension and Unification. The Angel Presence and his given 'job' well met. *(Pause.)* We've been inseparable since. Blood brothers. *(Pause.)* And, you know, she really *is* her mother, really, and hence she *is* her mother's mother. The poor cow. *(Long pause.)* There's a dead stream runs through Nant-y-moel, it's smooth rocks kissing Coke cans and Co-operative shopping baskets. There's life for you. It wasn't always like it is now. Iona Davis daughter of Thelma and Arthur John. The sapling gran. The Mam-gu and the Nain. She'd fish there with jam jar and string, her hair a mass of smiles, like Shirley Temple. And she'd unwind a mile of bootlace and dip pale toes into the summer chill of silver tumbled from the Sugar Loaf mountain. They were real childhoods then. Frail things. Brittle twigs of bitter Liquorice and plump Sherbet Lemons. Old summers, the beginnings of the end of such innocent things. How could she possibly know that *there*, lurking like a demon in the shadows of her future, lay Somerset with its strictures, sins and ruin? *(Pause.)* She will wake now. *(He retreats to the shadows.)*

(Vicky waking. Increasingly agitated. She takes a tablet. She goes to the windows and draws the curtains. Sunlight floods in. She suddenly dives into a packing case, finds a pink chiffon hat and puts it on. She turns her back to the brightness. Then, in a shrill voice, her arms beginning to beat violently at her sides, and building to a crescendo of noise and activity, she mimics her mother.)

VICKY

Victoria Worth! Missy manners! Victoria Worth! And what fucking time do you call this? Vicky with a V. This is the fucking absolute pits. It's just not cuntin' decent. Not cuntin' delicate. No cunt. Not in the least. Just like your waste of a father. Vicky with a V. Vicky with a V. Just like your frigging father. It *is* just not cuntin' decent. Look at you. By God! You are a lazy little slut. You are. You are a lazy, lazy, a lazy little slut. It's just not fucking normal. It's awry. Fly. Fussy. Just like your Earl Grey father. Him shoving shit uphill most days- it's just not normal. Fudge packing. It's just not normal. It's *just* not fucking normal. And don't you ever go on thinking that he gets away with it. He doesn't. Oh! You'll thank me in the end. There's a whole long list, a list as long as my arm of fucking things it's not. So, best you shake yourself my girl. A little bit of discipline it never hurt anyone. Nobody. And no daughter of mine is ever going to sleep in after midday without an illness. Blood and guts. That's what we want to see. Show me enough blood and bloody bloody guts and we'll think

about breaking open the frigging First Aid tin. Maybe. And, whilst we're on the subject, blood- filthy discharge, menstruation, it's not an illness you know. No it's not. It never was. Never. And it never is. Really! Vicky with a fucking V. It's not even Biblical. Not at all. Not to my knowledge. The bishops kicked it out God bless 'em. And it never will be if I can help it. Do you bloody hear me? I shudder to think what Mary might have made of tampons. *(Lengthy pause.)* You're not ill are you? *(Pause.)* 'Course you're not ill. You're just soft in the bleeding head, that's what. Short of stock in the lighting shop, you. Right. I know what. Shift that fat arse out of that bed and into the bathroom, sharpish. Come on. Shift that fat arse into that fucking bathroom and get a good hold of that bathsize bar of carbolic. That'll do the business. That'll sort things. Shove it in the filthy crack of it. Right up. That's right dearie-tickle your cervix with cleanser. And shift that fat arse! I can smell the problem. I can. Phew. Course I bloody can. May God strike me down! I won't kill you. No. I promise you that. Now, don't tell me. Don't you even start. All your sweaty little creases, all your cheesy nooks, all of your crannies, all your top and bottom fannies, they could do with a right good soaping. You can't tell me. You can't tell me nothing. I'm a Primary School teacher, me. I know it all. Educated they call it. I know it all madam. The whole curriculum. *(Pause.)* There's bells, here, ringing in my ears like heaven knows what. It's deafening. You've been suppurating my girl. That's what you've been up to. Ding ding. That's what I'm being told. You've been suppurating. Secretly suppurating. Bleeding suppurating. Jeezus! You're not even on the bus, you. You're all dreams you, Victoria Worth. Brain dead. Stationary. Head in the clouds and peaches in your blouse. Dreams, dreams and designer jeans. That's you to a T. New-age. New-age Vicky with a fucking V. And look at you. New-age? You make me feel so old. You do. You know you do. It's deliberate that is. Wilful. I look at you and.. *(Pause.)* Oy! Fucking look at me when I'm talking to you! *(Pause.)* I look at you and..no. Go on. *(Pause.)* Look at me, all pent up in chiffon and a secret bustiere. And look at you. Just look at you. Go on. Take a fucking good long look at yourself. Here's a mirror- me. Suicidal? You're kidding me. No. No way. You're far too self-interested. Don't you ever give me that one. Selfish you, selfish with a capital S. Top yourself! Get away! You delusional little bitch. You fucking irresponsible, childish, little bitch. Don't you ever dare lay that modernist magazine strategy on me. I'm your mam cunt. Blame your father, he's the unnatural depressive. Flawed or what! He's floor level that's what. Snake height he is. Sticking his dick in shit! It's just not humanly possible to sink any lower. He's the one. He's the one investing in hellfire and damnation. He's the one with more than a pecuniary interest in the fluctuations of the fucking pink pound. I hate that, do you hear me, Vicky. Pretty Vicky. Vicky with a V. Here pretty, pretty Vicky. Kissy kissy Vicky. I fucking hate that! I'm dying here and he's minted, making his media millions. See! See what you do! You make mumsie feel fucking failed, fucking failed and forty eight. *(Pause.)* He's dumped me, darling. The undecided one. Do you hear me. The dick's dumped me. Said I'd make a better lesbian! Me. Yes! You heard me right! He said I'd make a better lesbian, darling. Fit for licking a clitoris, he said. I can't say I've ever felt so cosmopolitan. *(Pause.)* He was fit though Vick. God. Better than Cappuccino. Muscles building on the muscles. Rock hard. He was very fit. *(Pause.)* Mind you, more than once flaccid in the cock department. But, fair dues, he said he wanted children. Two boys he said- kids to emulate his favourites, The Righteous Brothers. That was no go. Awful for him. What a bummer really. Me with the snip to cap it all. He could see his dreams evaporating. He was crestfallen, pet. Cheated see. Emasculated. The rage rising in him like lemon vomit. *(Pause.)* Well look at you, pathetic dumpling. And look at me for pity's sake, me at my age.

Creased. More wrinkles than a Shar Pei. The spirit worn and all those shiny disco outfits cast adrift. Me, bugged, dull, beyond repair. Me, beyond repair and bleeding internally. The specialists have nothing left to staunch the flow. Nothing. Unstoppable it is. I always was unstoppable, me. Scorpio see. *(Suddenly softer and mocking. The arms floaty.)* You read today's paper, treasure? They found a cure for galloping gut rot yet? Anything good on the old TV? Neighbours, maybe. There's reality for you. I like a good dose of community, me. *(Then instantly still. She puts the pink hat back in the packing box. Then chillingly strident.)* Cut. Cut it Angel, and print it.

(Blackout.)

Scene Three

(Later the same day. A blast of street noise. All the curtains are dancing in the breeze against open windows and the flat is flooded with denuding light. No sign of Angel. We find Vicky entering in bra and pants, her hair done up in a towel. She closes the windows. She searches for a towelling robe and finally puts that on. She sits down and lights a cigarette. She hears the electric kettle click off. Leaving the cigarette burning in the ashtray, she exits and returns having made a cup of green tea. She takes a long drag on her cigarette.)

VICKY

It's green tea this, green tea with bits of lemon. Citrus. My favourite. I do have this obsessive affinity with the bitterness of it. *(Pause.)* Now and then I do relent. I soften. I repent. I relapse and relent, and sling in an artificial sweetener. Aspartamine, it can be the high-light of my benefit dependent day. Secret prayers said for a sugar-daddy. Sacred wishings whispered at the temple of Prozac and Hermesetas. There's hoping for absolution for you. There's longing for wealth. *(Pause.)* There's proper psychotherapeutic absolution for you. Proper goal-setting. Aims. There's ruthless for you. Charting the progression of inescapable ordinariness from *here* to fucking *here*. Anything to produce a certificate. Ambition- it's the grail of the hopeless. For the vast majority of us, empty. Empty of meaning. Well, there's always more empty than plenty. *(Pause.)* Hollow as the grave. That's what we are. *(Pause.)* And you know, don't you, you know just how bloody lucky I am. How bloody grateful I am to Buddha that he ever breathed. You know, don't you, how it's such a blessed relief to live this life as it really is. Glory me! I'm in this state of constant religious ecstasy, me, living this life as it really, really is. *(Pause.)* Right. Right. And what the hell would he know, Jabba the fucking holy Hut. Tens of thousands of broken lives melting in the crucible of Tiger Bay. Death happening, easy as a downpour, all in the blink of a Buddhist's eye. *(Lengthy pause.)* And just think, just think for one moment. All of these innocent young leaves come hand plucked from the ancient Chinese mountains. A high born tea naturally low in caffeine. It's long history full of testimony to its health giving properties. *(Pause.)* We're all full of shit. That's the long and the short of it. We're all full of shit. *(Pause.)* Mam, I drink it for my health. I drink it to balance out all the cheap fags, all the chocolate, all the sherbet lemons. Astringent, anti-oxidant,

antibacterial, that's what the packet says it is. It's very natural. Oh yes. Pure. Unsullied. (Pause.) Naturally it's natural. It's tea. Tea in its entirety. It's believable. Utterly convincing. And it's consumer fucking fashionable that's what it is. (Pause.) But, there you are. It's how I am. It's this fussy little facet of me. It's my little bit of icing on the lardy cake of life here in Cardiff. Green tea. The brew of crises. And, would you believe it, it comes in this very eye-catching, bio-degradable box designed to compliment this year's range of ethnic tiling. It's sooo happening this. It's this glossy product that looks bloody marvellous in hand-crafted oak kitchens. It does. It really does. Mega posh it is. Satin finish. No kidding. (Pause.) Did you see mine? No. Best not to. You'd only throw up. (Pause.) Mine is a dangerous galley full of chipped Formica and a slow growing fungus, living evidence of seventies swiftness. That and a millennium salmonella in embryo. Camouflage, that's been my tactic to date. Hide the worst of it. Pretend it isn't there. And I've tried to stuff my kitchen display areas full of things that holler hope. (Pause.) Well, there's another badge of the underclasses- bright and cheery displays of top-notch non-essentials in, otherwise, sub-standard housing. Glaring it is. Conran chairs, say, understated but vivid with their deadly *designitis*, glittering in a prefab scheduled for demolition. (Pause. *Bellows in frustration.*) Fuck! Fuck this constant pain! (Lengthy pause.) Paracetamol and Codeine, it's never enough. Not now. (Pause.) This whole condemned block is a health hazard. Home to roaches, see. My Home Bitter Home. They had a thought though, the authorities. They'd spruce it up a bit. Put a gloss on it. They even renamed it Mandela House. As if a new name would conjure up a new beginning. That was the beginning of the end, that's all, the prelude to the demolition order. New Labour? What the fuck do they know. (Pause.) Look, it's simple. It's a wealth-free zone this, always was, but it's still awash with brand-named anti-bacterial surfactants, negative Fung-Shui and unwashed Sushi dishes- richly lacquered souvenirs from mind-trips into Elle Decoration. Glossy see. You got to put a gloss on. You just got to. And the air is permanently fogged by incense sticks courtesy of crap craft fairs where sad white Rastafarians are all out to flog you something suspiciously devotional. You tell me, mam, where is there the incentive to give up smoking. (Pause.) *Don't you know anything?* (Pause.) No mam, I know just nothing. Like you said, I'm braindead. Stationary. I'm always at the bus stop. Begging at the railway station. Just like you said. (Long Pause.) I wonder. Where do you keep the itch of your politics- out of reach I reckon. Out of reach of a bamboo backscratcher. So, you don't fucking know. It's like I thought. Cunt. Minds numbed by pseudo-diplomacy. Niceties I call it. (Pause.) Well, give us a minute. It's no big deal- shitting in the diplomatic bag of all your niceties. See, the poor poor of this part of the world, often as not, die of something much more immediate, something the rest of society overlooks, long before the cancer sets in. Violence for one. Millennium rape and pillage. There's another. The blistering bad breath of the red dragon. There's a mythic symptom. You can smell it as it dares to kiss you on the cheek. The cheek of the politicians. Men and women with Celtic halitosis. (Pause.) We've cuts, you know, bleeding cuts, deep cuts, cuts that never heal and bruises that never fade. And we've head pain, mam, pain beyond pain, cuntin' pain, pain beyond the pale and sleepless nights of pampered Surrey women. (Pause.) Oh don't worry. Our kindly, black Sri Lankan doctor's seen it all before. It's all routine to him. It's routine now he knows the language. It's all so clear. All so black and white at last. It's all so bloody routine *now* it's got to be a bore to him. (Pause.) Catch a symptom. Go on. The air is thick with them. (Pause.) Issue driven TV. There's one. (Pause.) Abuse in childcare. There's another. (Pause.) Solvents and ecstasy. That's it. Fear. Fear and fucking rampant apathy. (Pause.) Green tea. Crisis tea. The list's endless. This special urban brew will be the death of many of the downtrodden round here. Death lurking

in the damaged elevator. Death jerking himself off on the fire stairs. *(Pause.)* Death? Yes. Death! No more breath. It's very fucking plain. And *we've* got all the symptoms. But just you try getting a prescription for that on the fucking NHS. *(Lengthy pause.)* Listen to me. Please, don't you go losing me now. *(Pause.)* The thing is, I am still strangely drawn to skin like parchment. Always was. No grandfather, see. No tad-gu. No taid. *(Pause.)* My mother's mother's brother. That was as close as I was ever going to get. There was skin like parchment. He was no more than this fading face, a vaguely Chinese face in a crowded brown photograph. A makeshift orchestra it was, somewhere in Bridgend. Some summer it must have been. Outside. Outside in his shirtsleeves. Pin striped cotton rolled up to the elbow. *(Pause.)* And in his pit worn hands a bow. Resin on his fingers. *(Pause.)* Well. Did *he* ever smoke and drink green tea and *do* 'contrary' mixed with 'out of bounds Bohemian' like she did? They *were* artists, I'd told myself. Artistic they were. Creative. Talented. Born to it. Revolutionary. They painted, see, wrote erotic poems and played instruments. *(Pause.)* They were my reason for being. *I* decided that, me. They'd help me, from the other side. That was more than reasonable. With their discarnate assistance I could act, paint, sing, write. Do anything. Make a proper name for myself. *(Pause.)* After more than half an hour on a bus behaving like a food processor, I found the place, and I found Angel. *(Pause.)* It was raining like hell. He's not well though, that's what I was thinking. *(Pause.)* The medium. The medium looked like he was dying. There were spinsters in the congregation crying. There were widows weeping, wetting their parched skin. *(Lengthy pause. Vicky lit like a ghost, repeating Angel's words, putting herself in the third person.)* ['*She spotted me.*'] That's how he tells it. ['*Yes. She spotted me. By some short circuit in her poetic sense she clocked me moving between the dimensions, a part of me here, then flit flit, a part of me there. I was not happy. I was not happy. But, our eyes met then, the hands of them wet with tears of joy, and they were waving in unbridled delight. Meeting. Parting. Repeating. Exploding. This was applause. This was proper applause. Ascension and Unification. The Angel Presence and his given 'job' well met.*'] *(Pause.)* We've been inseparable since. Blood brothers. *(Pause.)* And, you know, she really is her mother, really, and hence she is her mother's mother. The poor cow.'] *(Pause. Vicky 'returning', repeating, frail and frightened.)* The poor cow. That's as it is. For me. For me and Iona. My little sherbet lemon. Poor cow- that's how my fond Angel always tells it. *(Long pause. Desolate. Then to the audience pleading and despairing.)* Iona. Me. Mam and Mamgu. It's there in the fucking unalterable biology. You can see that. The endless loop of it. *(Shouts.)* The endless fucking loop of it! *(Pause.)* No let up. Never. *(Pause.)* Never ever. *(Long pause. Then a tearful and defeated realisation.)* Shit! *(Pause.)* You can see me can't you? That's it! You can really sense me...with all your senses...all of you. Oh God! Dear God! *(Pause.)* Duw. Duw. I've no rational explanation. Nothing remotely adequate. None whatsoever. *(Pause.)* What on earth must you lot think of me. *(Pause.)* I'm so sorry. It's rude of me, I know. But I've got to go. There's a place and a time see. There's always a proper place and time. That's the God's truth. Shit! I've got to be there, again and again.. Got to. Got to. Got to. *(Exits to the lavatory.)*

(Blackout)

Scene Four

*(Again the suspect veil between this world and Vicky's is raised. Night. A downlight fades up on the fixed armchair. We hear waves of dull urban noise. An offstage door opens then closes. From the street we hear the arrival of massed men. We don't see the Male Voice Choir but we hear it as it begins to sing- **The Lily Of The Valley**. When the singing stops, we hear a sash window opening in a rush. Immediately we hear an offstage voice shouting.)*

OFFSTAGE VOICE

Dear God! Look at you. All of you. And look at the bloody time. Why is it you lot of boy scouts have not got bugging homes to go? Eh? Push off. You heard me. Back to the fucking valleys now. Go on. Sodding shove off!

(We hear the window closing in an angry clatter. We hear the told choir dispersing with cursive mutterings. Silence, save for dull waves of urban noise. Eventually the annoying phone rings then the answerphone cuts in.)

VICTORIA WORTH

(Upbeat answerphone message.) Organic chocolate- 90% cocoa, it's the new sex. No, don't hang up. Whoever *you* are, and let's face it you could be just about anybody, I need you to leave me some sweet crumb of comfort, nutter or not. So oblige me, please..after the Welsh-speaking tone.

FEMALE VOICE

Vicky, pick up. It's me, Vicky. *(Pause.)* I'm dying, you sick bitch. It's Neath. Neath Accident and Emergency. I'm fucking dying, alright. *(Pause.)* Yes. It is. It's true. It is. I got the fucking news today. *(Pause.)* Just like *my* mother. They said. Just like *my* mother. *(Pause.)* You're next. Call me.

(Silence. We hear Vicky puking, the sound of a toilet being flushed and a door opening and closing. Vicky sobbing. An increasingly ghostly sobbing echoes thinly into eventual silence.)

(Blackout.)

THE END

© 2011 *Chris Madoch*





AH POOK IS COMING

AN INTERVIEW WITH MALCOLM MCNEILL

By Christopher Nosnibor

Images © Malcolm McNeill

Malcolm Mc Neill has enjoyed an illustrious and varied career, and while he is perhaps best known to mainstream audiences as the Emmy-award winning designer of the title sequence to *Saturday Night Live*, and has also won numerous awards for his work in advertising, film and television, in other circles he is perhaps better known for his earlier work as an illustrator. Working for Marvel Comics in the 1970s, he created cover graphics for *Planet of the Apes* and *The Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*. Those familiar with these works will know Mc Neill's work for its detail and depth.

It was while in art college that Mc Neill began to develop his unique style of graphics, which caught the eye of William S. Burroughs. The two collaborated first on a comic strip, *The Unspeakable Mr Hart*, and, subsequently, the book *Ah Pook is Here*. Conceivably the first graphic novel ever created, the project, seven years in the making, has never seen the light of day in the form it was intended. Burroughs' text emerged without Mc Neill's images in the 1979 book *Ah Pook is Here and Other Texts*, which is now extremely hard to find and commands a high premium on the collectors' market. Strangely, and unjustly, *Ah Pook* has received scant critical attention and has been relegated to the position of a minor work from Burroughs' least successful phase.

On learning that there were plans in the offing to republish *Ah Pook*, one of Burroughs' great 'forgotten' texts, I couldn't help but wonder if we may at last get to see the full multimedia extravaganza in all its high-definition Technicolor glory.

CN: *Your collaboration with William Burroughs on **Ah Pook is Here** is naturally of significant interest, especially as the book is finally to be published 'properly' at long last this Autumn. How did this collaboration, and **The Unspeakable Mr Hart** which preceded it, come about?*

MM: Unfortunately *Ah Pook* won't be available this year as we'd hoped. And since they're packaged together, neither will *Observed While Falling* – my account of the history of the project and my friendship with Bill. We're still negotiating with the Burroughs Estate over details, and at this point it looks like the books will be out next year instead.

I'd planned on the 2011 publication date because the narrative of *Ah Pook* anticipates the ideas surrounding '2012'. It was an attempt to get a jump on the mass of material that will almost certainly be generated next year. *Ah Pook is Here* makes a connection between the intersection of the Judeo/Christian mindset and that of the Maya that is unique. After all this time, it would be a pity to see it get lost in the crowd.

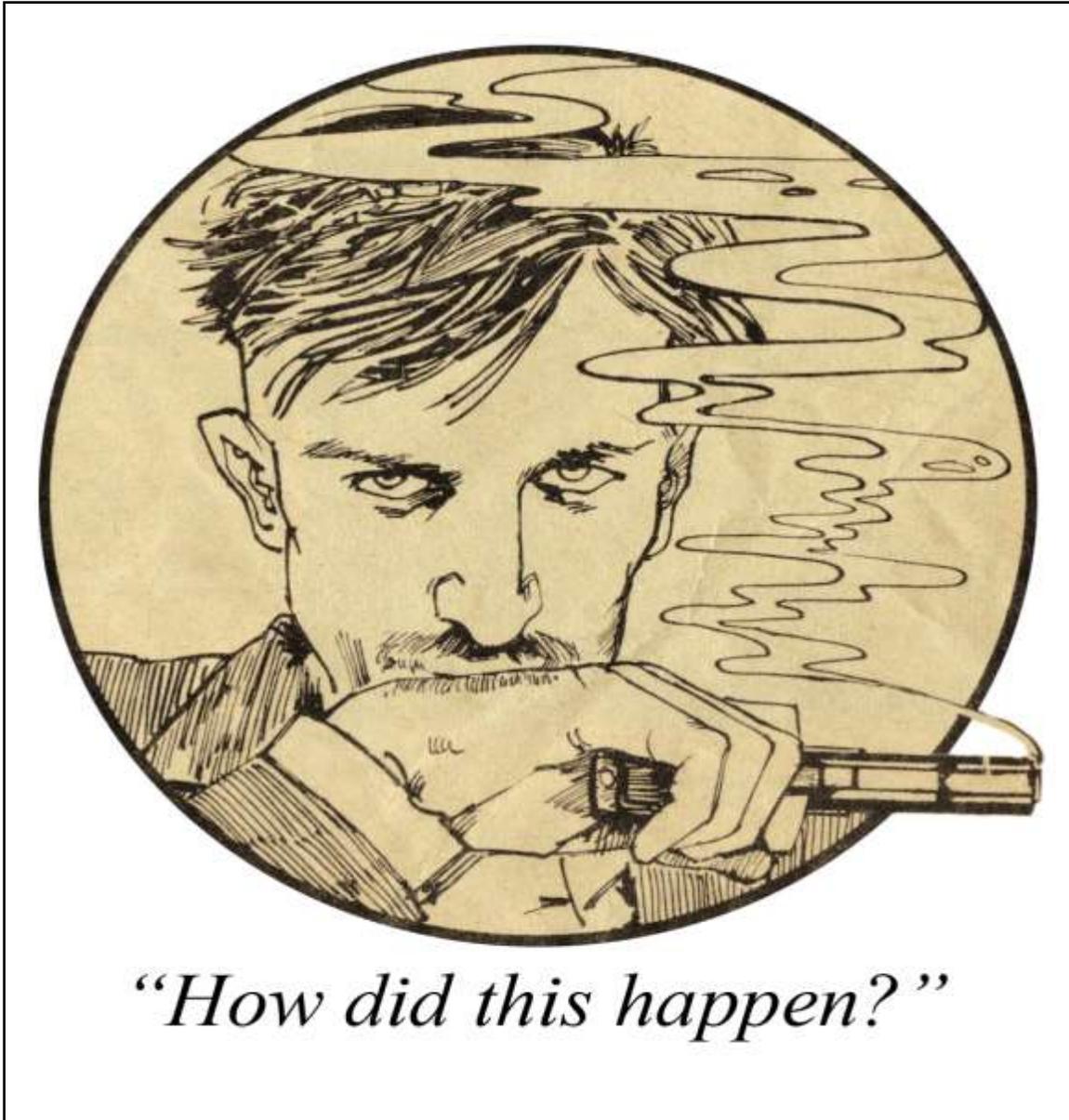
*The bulk of the critical writing on Burroughs, especially in recent years, seems to have focused on his biography. I'm thinking of Bob Johnson's **The Lost Years of William S. Burroughs** and Phil Baker's biography, for example. There's definitely an appetite for biographies and memoirs, and being a rare first-hand account, **Observed While Falling** comes from a unique angle.*

Working with someone does lead to a very different kind of perspective – particularly when it's Bill Burroughs – and especially over a period of so many years. The book provides insights into his working methods, his sometimes quirky personal life and the process of my coming to terms with both. But it's less a biography than the record of a dialogue. One that would continue long after Bill was dead. Inevitably '2012' was a part of that, but it wasn't the reason I wrote the book.

In 2003, I discovered something that completely changed my *perception* of *Ah Pook* and the possibilities of words and images working together. An insight that was unprecedented in my experience and related to the project in such a way that I felt had no choice but to write about it. In effect it brought the book back to life and initiated another chapter in the collaboration. It confirmed *Ah Pook's* premise, not just in terms of the narrative idea, but its underlying *intention*.

"The purpose of writing," said Bill, "is to make it happen." *Ah Pook is Here* in a very real sense is a book that happened.

So how did it 'happen' in the beginning – how did you come to work with Burroughs?



I began working with him while I was still in art school. I didn't meet him during that time, and knew very little about him. I hadn't read anything else he'd written. I didn't even know what he looked like - which as it happened was the reason we *did* meet and then decide to work on *Ah Pook*. You have to bear in mind that back then, Bill was far from the celebrity that he later became.

The Unspeakable Mr. Hart appeared in *Cyclops* magazine in the summer of 1970. Before it started, Bill had apparently seen the artwork from the various contributors and pointed at mine and said, "I'll work with this guy". Every month the editor handed me a half page of his text and I had to figure out what the heck he was talking about. It was a difficult idea to illustrate; a

mixture of fact and fiction with few scene descriptions and hardly any dialogue. I got better at it as time went on but after four episodes the magazine folded and I figured that was it. But then I got a phone call from the man himself. For the first time I heard the remarkable voice of Mr William S. Burroughs. "I want to meet the guy who knows how to draw *me*", he said and suggested we get together.

Burroughs' voice is remarkable, that's for sure. So how did you know how to draw a man you'd never seen, let alone met?

Coincidentally, the image I'd come up with for Mr Hart - the villain of the piece - did look remarkably like a younger Bill. Not just facially but in his mannerisms and demeanour, a fact that would become more apparent to me as time went on. Bill of course didn't believe in 'coincidence'. Why or how I'd done it was a mystery and that was what fascinated him. Plus I'd turned 23 that month which only increased his interest. "It's an auspicious number", he said.

He on the other hand was like no one I'd ever met before. In the course of that first meeting he introduced me to The Reactive Mind, Control, Cut-ups, the Word as Virus, The Algebra of Need, Randolph Hearst and whole lot of other things that Mr. Hart was 'about'. He was also the funniest guy I'd ever met. There was no question of wanting to work with him.

He hadn't written much beyond that point in the story, in fact there were only 11 pages. Over the next few months we worked on the possibilities of a full-length, full-color version. On a 'field trip' to the British Museum reading room to look at a copy of the Dresden Codex we discovered Ah Puch "the Destroyer" - The Mayan Death God - at which point much of the eleven pages of *The Unspeakable Mr Hart* were discarded and *Ah Pook is Here* began for real. The spelling was changed later on because people had a hard time pronouncing it.

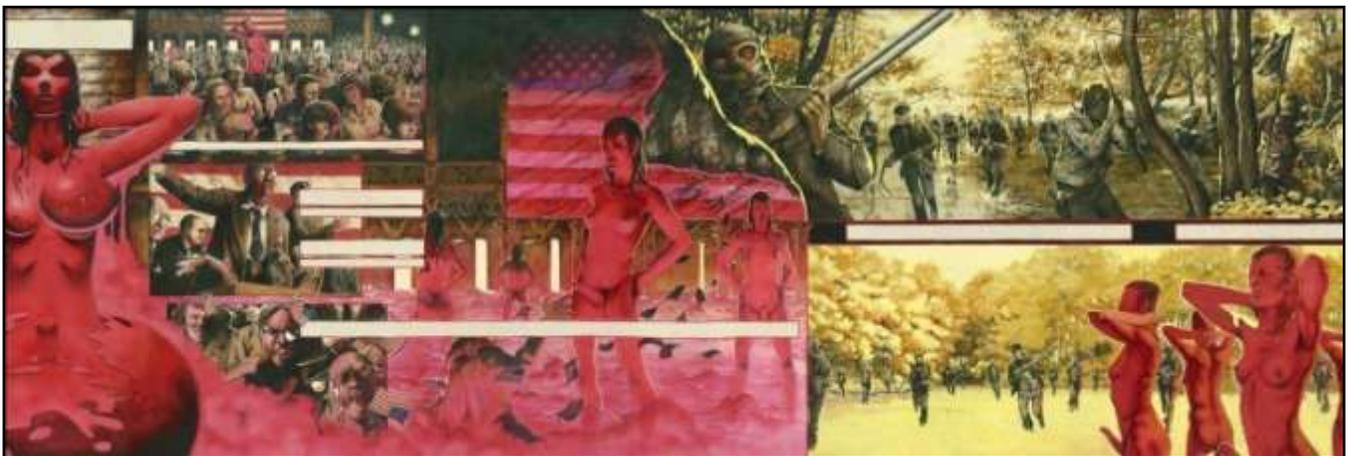
Hart had been an illustrated text; *Ah Pook* would be a collaboration. It had started from scratch essentially and by the end of the year there were 50-some pages of text, concept and character sketches and a few finished pages. A contract was then signed with Straight Arrow Books in San Francisco. Within another year, the entire book had been laid out in dummy form.

*In his Preface to the Calder edition of the text, Burroughs wrote that the problem - aside from the issues of cost - with **Ah Pook** as it was conceived was that 'the book falls into neither the category of the conventional illustrated book nor that of a comix publication', the suggestion being that this rendered it difficult, or even impossible, to market. What do you think has changed since the late 1970s in terms of multimedia works that are not readily categorised?*

I gave up on *Ah Pook* in 1977. Coincidentally *Star Wars* was released around the same time and from then on everything changed. Suddenly illustrated fantasy books, science fiction magazines and longer-form comics became a million dollar industry. *Metal Hurlant* arrived from France in the form of *Heavy Metal* and 'Graphic Novels' became an official genre. Even so there still wasn't a market for *extremely* graphic ones. *Ah Pook* still had a problem.

The illustrations for Ah Pook - originally entitled Ah Puch - took you 7 years to create. How did it feel having invested so much time in the project for your contribution to be omitted from the published version?

It was disorienting. *Ah Pook* and Bill Burroughs had been a frame of reference for a very long time. I'd left England on account of it, moved to San Francisco then New York to keep working on it. It hadn't taken the entire seven years to do the work. There wasn't enough money to ever work full time. That in itself contributed to its demise. The process of stopping and starting became more and more difficult to sustain. Plus a lot of things had changed during that time.



The way I made images, the way I thought about the narrative, the way I thought about the whole idea. I was twenty-three years old when I met Bill and right out of art school. The project was clearly doomed from the start but it didn't matter back then. I was getting a one-on-one education from one of the most remarkable minds around and making images to go with it. The process was all that mattered. As time went on though the reality began to set in. Soon after the text-only *Ah Pook* was published, Bill also changed direction. He went back onto heroin and then moved to Kansas. I think that was the biggest disappointment. I lost a unique interaction with a friend I'd known for a long time.

How would you describe your work, and what are your working methods - and how have they evolved during the course of your career?

I started a science fiction series of my own a few months after I quit *Ah Pook* and it proved that the work could conceivably have been completed if I'd had the money and encouragement to do it. I produced 80 pages of equally complex imagery over the course of 18 months. It was a project that paid every month and at the end of every month there was a hard deadline. That made all the difference.

I quit visual narrative in book form after that and moved into television design. Graphic novel to storyboards was an easy transition. From there I went on to directing. I gave that a rest in 2000. Then in 2003, *Ah Pook* resurfaced with *Observed While Falling*, which I've been working on, on and off ever since. Hopefully, when that's finally put to rest, I can go back to what I was doing.

I was working on the idea of freestanding narrative paintings while I was in art school and that's what I'm concerned with now. Image and word are combined but the technique is a synthesis of the stuff I picked up working with electronic paint systems and computer animation. I gave up on dirt and water long ago.

*In the excerpts from **Observed While Falling** on-line, you state that as much as funding or any other factor that was an issue, the content was an insurmountable obstacle to the publication of **Ah Pook**, and that it would have inevitably been subject to censorship. What is your position on censorship, and do you think that in our more 'permissive' society and with the advent of the Internet, we have become desensitised?*

"Despite being the sine qua non of all mammalian life, erections shall *not* be found on the shelves of Barnes and Nobles Booksellers." It's absurd, but that's the mess we're in. I have an illustration from *The New York Times* of Lucy, one of our earliest ancestors. She's carrying a flaming branch that covers her breasts and she's walking behind a tree branch that covers her crotch. When you think of the distance we've travelled since then it's crazy. We may be more permissive in that we get to see more sex, but the attitude doesn't seem to have changed all that much. It's still got a snicker to it. There's still a sense of getting away with something.

It's a commodity like everything else. Censor it - make it illegal - and you can charge more for it. That's why it's on page one of the Bible. Condition people to be ashamed of it, embarrassed by it, scared to get caught looking at it and they become obsessed with it. Then they can be Controlled. "The Algebra of Need". Like all hype, the reality always falls short of the promise. The mechanics of sex are so appallingly simplistic when you get down to it. This goes in there right? Being constantly made to want it, worry about it, then be pissed off about it keeps people off balance. That way they can *really* be fucked.

*Recurrent themes and theories in Burroughs' work around the time of **Ah Pook**, also strongly evident in **The Book of Breething**, are those concerning the idea that words simply are simply instruments by which to present images, coupled with a fascination with pictorial language and communications. In your work as an illustrator of books and your time at **Marvel Comics**, do you think that these two-dimensional visual media could be considered an extension of, or variant on, such modes of communication? Can a picture speak a thousand words, or perhaps more?*

Words evolved out of pictograms and hieroglyphs. They *are* images. Conceivably a picture is worth a thousand words but it's a thousand times quicker to write a word than make a picture. I talk about that in my book:

*"Describing an image with text is very different from actually painting one. Words imply; a painting has to specify. In the case of a 'realistic' painting, specify every square inch. With **Ah Pook** it was an often overwhelming discrepancy.*

I summed it up one time with Bill:

I said, "If you write: 'The spaceship landed in the field and the Martian stepped out and waved.' that's fine. You've created an image in my mind that's very clear. But it's completely unspecified. If I have to make an image of the same scene, I have to figure out what kind of field it is, what time of day it is, what kind of spaceship it is, how it works, how it lands, what kind of door it has, and what the Martian looks like. I even have to figure out how long his arm is."

Bill thought for a moment then he said:

"You're right Malcolm. So how long IS a Martian's arm?"

Conversely a word can evoke a thousand pictures – each one very different depending on the observer.

***Marvel Comics** was basically a come and go arrangement. Stan Lee offered me my *own* comic, but I already had one so to speak with **Ah Pook**. I did covers instead, which meant a phone call, showing up for instructions, then going away and doing the job. Then bringing it in ten days later with an invoice for the 250 bucks.*

*I read on the press release posted on the **Fantagraphics** website that the book was conceived 'as a single painting in which text and images were combined in whatever form seemed appropriate to the narrative'. This strikes me as a very filmic approach, the idea of a single continuous piece. What was the idea behind it?*



The Mayan Codices were created on single pieces of parchment then folded accordion style into pages. This corresponded perfectly with the underlying theme in *Ah Pook* of books as a means for time travel. Time could be viewed holistically as a single event or broken down into a linear narrative and viewed page by page. The event could also be viewed out of sequence which tied in with cut-ups and breaking down the word image track. This was the aspect of *Ah Pook* that had the most profound effect in terms of it actually 'happening'.

Through the images created for the book I discovered another English illustrator who'd also collaborated with an American writer on a book about the Maya. An American who also happened to be living in London at the time, who contacted *him* on account of *his* work. He too had moved to America to complete the project etc. There were so many precise similarities in our lives they defied mathematical probability. The artist was also known for his panoramic images and he too had written an account of their collaboration and dedicated it to his writer partner. That book was published 160 years ago. I didn't find out about it until 2003. And that was when - and why - *Ah Pook* started all over again; a book about time-travel, death and regeneration was brought back to life by a dead guy - like me.

Improbable as this seemed it was impossible to ignore. In the very *first two* sentences of *Ah Pook is Here* Bill wrote -

"The Mayan codices are undoubtedly books of the dead; that is to say, directions for time travel. If you see reincarnation as a fact, then the question arises: how does one orient oneself with regard to future lives?"

I felt obligated to acknowledge that fact and come up with some kind of response.

The Mayan Codices and, more specifically, the Mayan calendar is currently receiving a lot of coverage, on account of the December 2012 'prophecy' corresponding with the end of the 13th b'ak'tun. The theories

surrounding this and ideas as to what may actually happen on 20th December vary wildly. What's your precise take on this? Is the growing interest in it simply the latest panic craze, a hangover for those who need a new imminent world's end date to cling to after the disappointment of 1999, or is there more substance to it?

Once I began writing *Observed While Falling* the prescience of *Ah Pook* became more and more apparent. Apart from the odd temporal anomaly of a parallel collaboration, the whole notion of how time is *perceived* came to define the nature of the confrontation between the Judeo / Christian worldview and that of the Maya - both in the book and out of the book. The Mayan view was cyclical, the European linear. This was fictionalized in the confrontation between Mr Hart - "the Instrument of Control" - and Ah Pook.

The book traces Hart's methods of social, political, and personal censorship and the increasingly blatant methods of enforcement necessary to sustain it. An ongoing, totalitarianist trend evidenced by recent events. Today's 'Homeland Security' and the 'War on Terror', have ratcheted this controlling dynamic to unprecedented heights. The threat of 'terror' now justifies Orwellian methods of curtailment and infringement of individual rights with promises of more to come.

In the end Hart is defeated. The dynamic of Control, said Bill, always contains within it the seeds of its own demise. When Control is total what is there left to Control? Control is *controlled* by its need to control. Inevitably the system collapses. Ah Pook always wins. In the first go round the linear system prevailed. The Maya were all but obliterated. This time who knows? Whatever the outcome, the current 'coincidence' of the Bible "End of Days" and the end of the Mayan Long count seems to be presenting a particular sense of impending collapse. Ah Pook is certainly Here now. Five hundred years ago the many Gods of the Maya failed them. Now it's the linear Bible God predicated on the concept of 'progress' that appears to be in doubt.

*Burroughs is often considered a prophetic writer, and Ah Pook in many ways epitomises his remarkable sense of future. More even than, say, 1984, Burroughs' dystopian world-view looks increasingly like the world we live in now. In one of the sections **Observed While Falling** that appeared on-line, you wrote 'The relentless barrage of disaster movies and books expresses an impending sense of doom that is indeed based on sound evidence. In the past however, cataclysms elsewhere on the planet were often remote and went unnoticed except by those immediately involved. Nowadays, instant worldwide communication, the need for 'news and its need to keep a consumer population permanently in a state of panic results in a continuous diet of disaster and planetary mayhem'. I think it's fair to say that recent events in the Middle East - or, more specifically the media's coverage of and reaction to these events - support your point perfectly. With Sky News and the BBC News Channel in the UK, and countless 24-hour rolling news channels across the globe, it's possible to tap into the 'action' at any time: we're not merely passive*

viewers any more, we can feel like we're actually there. Do you think it's possible we may experience apocalypse by media? Is this where we're heading?

Like I said I've been working on *Observed While Falling* for a while. That section has since been discarded. The sentiment remains but it's been arranged differently.

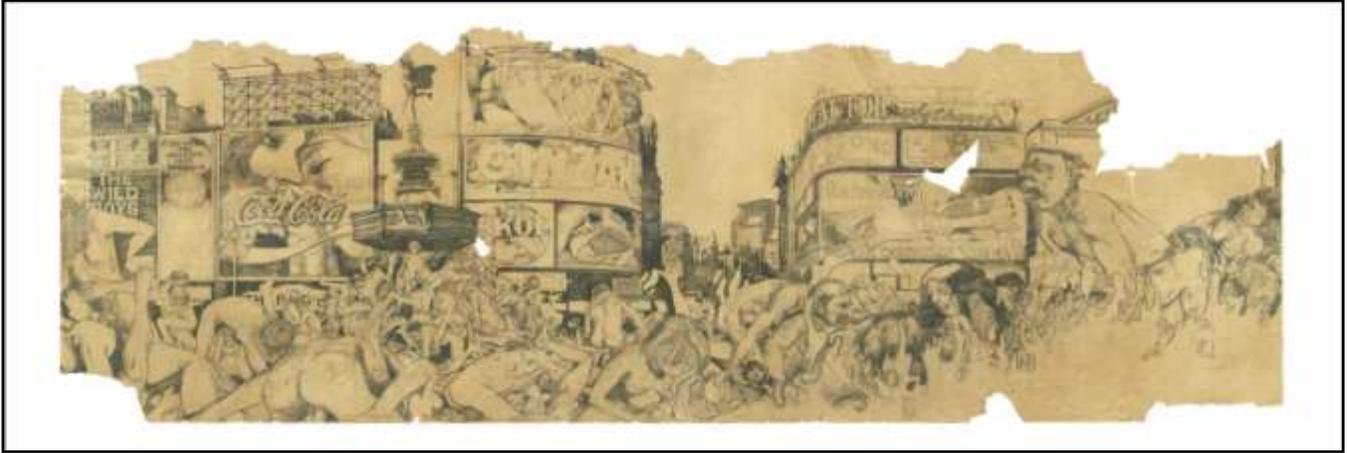
The end is always nigh. In 1999 the media drummed up a massive scare of planetary collapse through Y2K. Then after that came 911, Swine Flu, and of course Global Warming. An impending sense of doom keeps people anxious, which is the key element in any form of control: keeping those you would control off balance. It amounts to a process that is very similar to the way spells and curses supposedly work. I mention that earlier in the book.



Bill gave me his loft on Franklin Street when he moved to the Bunker and he left behind an old freestanding wardrobe. On top I found one of his hand written curses. The "Curse of the Blinding Worm" to be exact - one of many an old Irish "nanny" had taught him he said. It was a response to a bad *New York Times* review of *Exterminator!* which had been cut out and placed underneath. The effectiveness of curses and spells is dismissed as circumstantial, but Bill quite rightly considered them in his "broad general view of things".

The same systematic use of word and image could be said to characterize the manipulative processes of media: selective, repetitious use of words and images, with deliberate intention, to determine a specific outcome. Millions of people infected with the same imagery, same values, same sense of events behaving in a similar way.

"So long as the calendar of animated cartoons implanted in the minds of the workers continues to operate, the control system can predict future behavior with the same accuracy as it can reconstruct past behavior."



Bill had proposed that idea in the context of the Maya, but television ‘programming’, with its relentless, twenty-four-hour-a-day barrage of ‘curses and incantations’ dulls and controls critical thought, and directs fostered anxiety and aggression according to specific agenda. It’s a technological ‘blinding worm’ that never sleeps.

Beyond your work as an illustrator, you’ve worked in other visual media, namely film and television, with considerable success, not to mention recognition. How, in your opinion, do the various media differ, in terms of what can be achieved through each?

The temporal quirks that occurred during the process of working on *Ah Pook* are something I’ve not encountered in any other medium. The one that inspired *Observed While Falling* was the most significant, but life-imitating-art had been a feature of the project all along. Interestingly enough, the only time I’ve seen a similar breakdown of linear time perception is in *Watchmen* the novel – which I only read for the first time last year. The way Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons presented the narrative allowed the reader to be able to actually *see* several time frames running alongside one another. It made for a completely non-linear experience of time. They also juxtaposed fact and fiction, as in a story narrative running alongside a real event. A movie couldn’t possibly pull that off. Fact and fiction coexisted in *Ah Pook* in a very different way, but there is apparently something inherent in the idea of combining images and words in this form that allows for atemporal interaction between them. It makes for a very different kind of dialogue. If there is a case for graphic novels, that to me would be it.

*So, finally, what prompted you to return to the beginning, so to speak, with illustration projects like *0°* and in writing *Observed While Falling*?*

When I referred to “underlying intention” this was essentially the kind of dialogue Bill had in mind. Much of his work was experimental in the sense that he *used* words to see what words

could *do*. Like he said, he was an “explorer of *psychic* areas”. An aspect of his work that gets little attention is his preoccupation with words ‘operating at a distance’. Telepathy, clairvoyance, spells and curses all fall within that purview. These ideas also imply a break down of linear time. The circumstances surrounding the way Bill and I met suggested such a possibility.

The collaboration was a case of seeing what else might happen. It certainly produced results, but like Heidegger says, the purpose of dialogue is not necessarily to produce ‘useful’ information. Sometimes it’s simply a matter of maintaining the dialogue. The fact that the collaboration was lost for so many years but then resumed seems to validate that perspective. It also perfectly expresses the fundamental sense of dialogue implicit in Ah Pook himself: the ongoing process of death and regeneration.



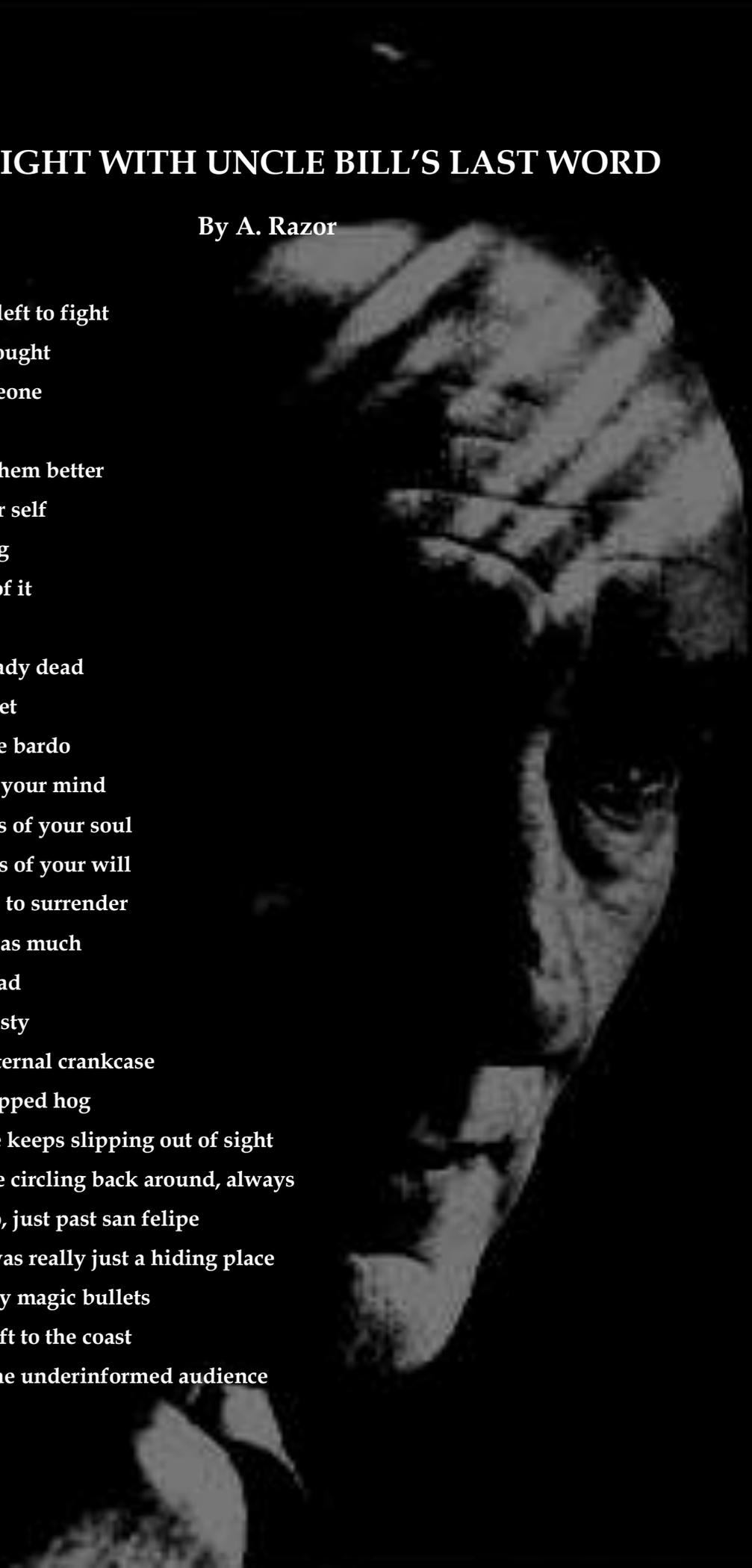
Ordinarily, the wrap-up would include the plug: ‘*Ah Pook is Here / Observed While Falling* will be published through *Fantagraphics* on...’ While the final details are being finalised, we can only wait in eager anticipation for the appearance of what is arguably one of Burroughs’ most essential and, in many ways, pivotal, texts. Similarly, the full version of a unique first-hand account of one of the authors’ least documented periods and Mc Neill’s illustrations remain under wraps, although the signs are that they will prove to be more than worth the wait.

Meanwhile, time marches on. We can but hope that this incredible text will emerge in a timely fashion. Whether December 21st 2012 brings a new global consciousness or total annihilation, one thing is for sure: Ah Pook is coming, one way or another.....

LATE NIGHT WITH UNCLE BILL'S LAST WORD

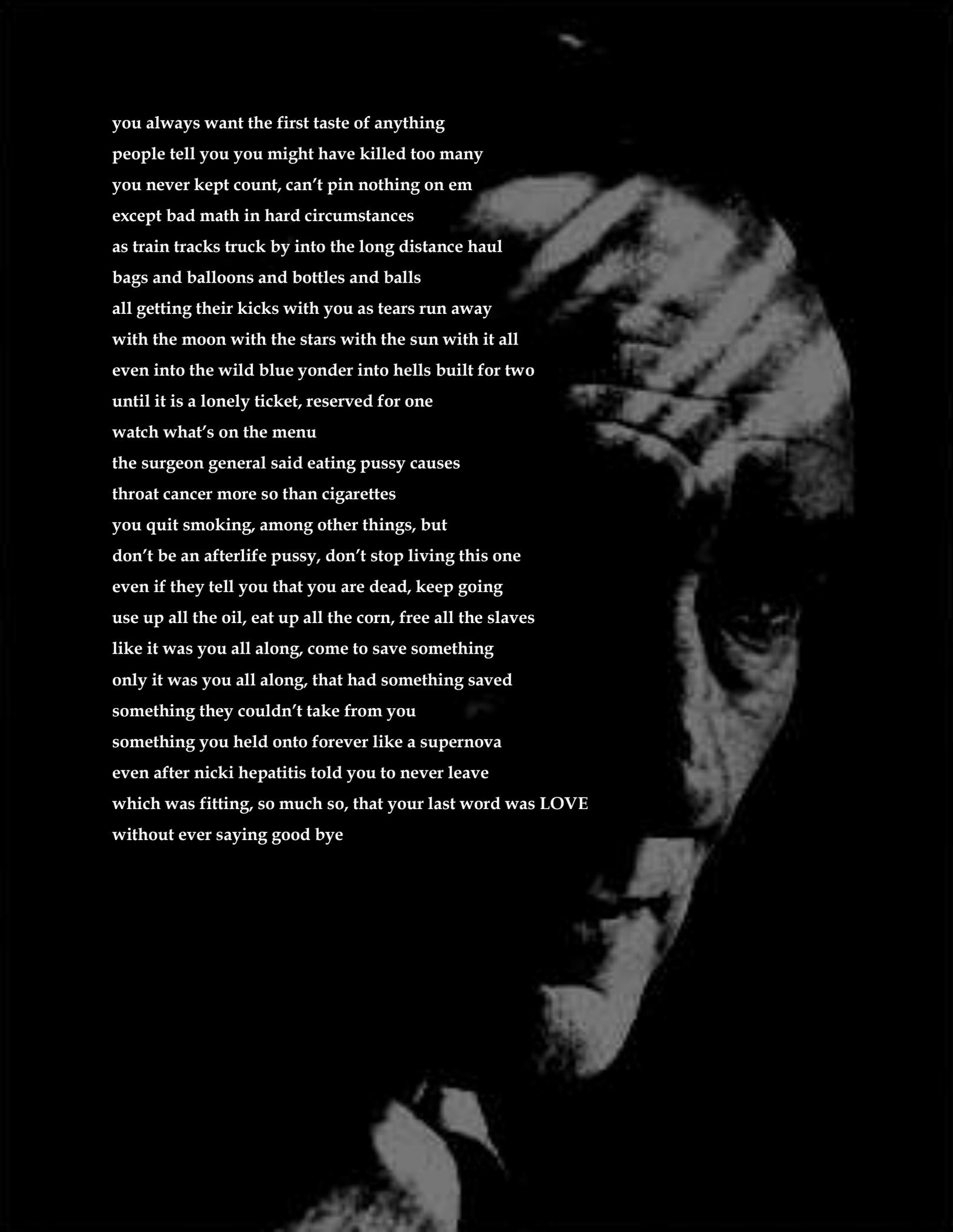
By A. Razor

there are no causes left to fight
that are not being fought
somewhere by someone
that you never met
but yet, you know them better
than you know your self
so you keep fighting
there will be more of it
after you die
even if you are already dead
and don't know it yet
fighting through the bardo
against the beast of your mind
against the creatures of your soul
against the monsters of your will
you will never have to surrender
it will eat you alive as much
as it will eat you dead
like old filthy mcnasty
wrenching on the eternal crankcase
of sisyphus old chopped hog
while old fast eddie keeps slipping out of sight
certainly he must be circling back around, always
dino died in mexico, just past san felipe
the shallow grave was really just a hiding place
berto takes too many magic bullets
shuffles off stage left to the coast
no applause from the underinformed audience



candy is a girl dressed like a woman
she turns blue in a dark blue motel room
cold and stiff as your love laying there
next to her in the morning
the last take in the scene before they yell cut
too many times down little starla's wrist
as she makes jello molds of her last moment
leaving you with one last cigarette
that the paramedic takes as the cops
take you away again as usual
big paulie saw it coming so many times
you got to give it to him in the face
just so he knows what time it is
it can ruin the funeral
but nobody goes to those anymore, anyway
there are stories about how mona died
in your arms as they were swollen tired
and shot out for days
there are carloads and truckloads
of bad accidents on the road
none as sad as your little baby girl
crying down the shiny concrete halls
as you huddle with thorazine slippers
and lithium pajamas on the vacaville tier
plotting out the revenge of sharpened
tooth brushes shoved into eye sockets
before the guards can fire the first fatal
warning shots into the head of your worst friend
getting left alone to fight into the night
wake up with no sleep fighting, always
fighting still into the sun or the stormy outcome
walking with swagger staggering with false pride





you always want the first taste of anything
people tell you you might have killed too many
you never kept count, can't pin nothing on em
except bad math in hard circumstances
as train tracks truck by into the long distance haul
bags and balloons and bottles and balls
all getting their kicks with you as tears run away
with the moon with the stars with the sun with it all
even into the wild blue yonder into hells built for two
until it is a lonely ticket, reserved for one
watch what's on the menu
the surgeon general said eating pussy causes
throat cancer more so than cigarettes
you quit smoking, among other things, but
don't be an afterlife pussy, don't stop living this one
even if they tell you that you are dead, keep going
use up all the oil, eat up all the corn, free all the slaves
like it was you all along, come to save something
only it was you all along, that had something saved
something they couldn't take from you
something you held onto forever like a supernova
even after nicki hepatitis told you to never leave
which was fitting, so much so, that your last word was LOVE
without ever saying good bye

THE SEDUCTION OF SOLITUDE

By Kimberly Dallesandro

sol.i.taire 1: a single gem (as in a diamond) set alone 2: a card game played by one person alone

sol.i.tary 1: being or living apart from others 2: LONELY, SECLUDED 3: SOLE, ONLY

sol.i.tude 1: the state of being alone: SECLUSION 2: a lonely place syn isolation

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary was left opened to page 655, items 10-13 were highlighted in yellow and underlined in red. The chair had been pushed tight against the desk, perfectly centered to the pedestals on the right and left. The cracked cobalt blue drinking glass, guilty of causing a minor lip injury, was packed like the rush hour subway allowing little breathing room for the yellow pencils, eraser end up, one pair of scissors, a yellow highlighter and the red pen. Everything else appeared to be the same as before.

1

He'd been counting ceiling tiles when he noticed the room was empty. Glancing at his watch, he realized almost an hour had escaped along with everyone else, all the chairs now vacant with the exception of his and the one occupied by the lone receptionist at the far end of the room. The receptionist stood and moved toward the door to her left, giving him a practiced smile and a nod. "Won't be but a minute more, let me check inside for you." She walked through the door closing it quietly. He glanced up at the ceiling tiles trying to guess their dimension. Twelve by twenty four? Sixteen by thirty? He remembered that a piece of paper measures 8.5 x 11, so he checked his right back pant pocket for the letter he thought he had put there. Finding the pocket empty, he rubbed the front of both shirt pockets which were also empty. Standing up, he walked to the end of the room to survey the top of the reception desk and the credenza behind it, then moved slowly past the 6 end tables scattered randomly around the room. There was only one magazine about the size of a piece of paper, maybe a little bigger, laying on the top of the farthest end table. He wondered if he could climb on the chair and confirm the size of the tiles using the magazine as a ruler before the receptionist returned. Picking up the magazine, he noticed the back cover was missing, causing the front cover to detach. Hearing voices drifting in from under the door at the far end of the room, he laid the coverless magazine down on the table and quickly folded the front cover and put it into his once empty pant pocket. He sat back down on his chair in the empty waiting room. The door on the left opened and the receptionist returned followed by a man he had never seen before. While they finished their conversation

by the desk at the far end of the room, he realized he still did not know the size of the ceiling tiles.

The phone rang causing the conversation to end and the man he had never seen before turned to leave, hesitating for a moment in front of the reception desk as the receptionist sat down. He was approximately 3 lengths of the magazine laid end to end from the desk. Between him and the door leading to the elevators were 20 chairs and 6 end tables. One of the chairs was occupied by the man staring at the ceiling tiles. A black jacket occupied the chair next to him. The man by the desk glanced up at the ceiling, glanced back at the man sitting in the chair and then ever so slightly glanced back at the ceiling before hurriedly walking past the chairs and the end tables to the door leading to the elevators. The noise of the door shutting did not appear to disturb the man sitting in the chair.

“Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith, excuse me- Mr. Smith...Josh Smith?” The receptionist stood as she repeated the name, her voice never growing any louder only her height, now standing from sitting. “Mr. Smith, the doctor is ready to see you now. Please follow me. Mr. Smith?” The receptionist walked to the front of the desk stopping to pick up a thin green file before turning toward the man sitting in the almost empty waiting room. She did not call his name again, choosing instead to stand facing him while he continued to stare at the ceiling. Several times her eyes wandered to the ceiling, her eyebrows rose causing her forehead to crinkle and her auburn bangs to fall into her eyes. Josh noticed her standing by the desk when she lifted her hand to sweep the hair from her eyes.

“Mr. Smith, the doctor is ready to see you now. Please follow me.”

Josh stood quickly picking up the black jacket that was lying in the chair next to him. Holding the coat by the collar, he brushed the fabric in an effort to iron out imaginary wrinkles and to remove lint particles. He noticed 2 long strands of auburn hair near the collar in the back roughly 4 inches from the double stitched seam that secured the arm to the coat. Meticulously, he pulled one strand at a time from the coat, examining each one before placing them in his right front shirt pocket. He glanced at the receptionist and noticed her hair color.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to keep you waiting, I just realized I forgot to bring the letter and the form that was supposed to be filled out.” He walked past a group of 5 chairs, passing the end table with the magazine with no cover. “I need to go home and get it,” he said as he searched the pockets of the jacket he still carried by the collar, passing the remaining empty chairs and end tables. “The letter was pretty clear about what to do. I was supposed to fill out the form and bring it with me today.” He stood 6 magazine lengths from the receptionist, who was now leaning against the front of the desk. Yes, at least 6 magazine lengths, laid end to end he

determined, and then glanced quickly up to the ceiling tiles. He calculated he was exactly 2 full ceiling tiles away from the receptionist. With auburn hair.

“Can I reschedule my visit? I’m happy to pay for the time I’ve wasted. I just realized when you were in the other room that the letter was not in my back pocket.” The receptionist opened the green file.

“Mr. Smith, the doctor needed to see you today, and as you already know, he will be out of the country for over a month starting tomorrow. I believe I told you this at the end of your last visit, but that information was also written quite clearly at the top of the letter I sent you. I will talk to the doctor about the time wasted for this appointment and call you when he returns from his trip to reschedule your next appointment.”

Josh murmured a thank you stealing one quick glance at the ceiling before turning towards the door that led to the elevators. The receptionist continued to lean against the desk and watched as he made his way to the door. At least once, she glanced at the ceiling. She noticed that he had returned the black jacket to the chair next to where he had been sitting before he left the room. She also noticed the distinct outline of a folded piece of paper in his back pant pocket.

2

The tears began at the left corner of his eyes and followed the imperfect line of his nose where they would wait until enough had gathered before dripping to the wood below. Occasionally, they would detour into his mouth, gliding over his upper lip and slide inside returning to make the journey again. The tears dropped randomly, occasionally matching the tempo created by the knife hitting the wooden cutting board. Josh reached for another white onion and began the process again. 1 cut on the top, 1 cut on the bottom. 1 slit to remove the outer skin. Cut small slices. Each medium onion yielded 6 sometimes 8. Stack 3 slices and cut 1/4” in both directions, first one way then the other. Repeat. It was only after he had cut the top and bottom and was removing the skin from the first onion that his eyes began to tear. The tears would continue until he had filled an entire baggie or the onions ran out, whichever came first. It was the only time he allowed himself to cry, hiding his need in this ritual of dicing white onions on the wooden cutting board due in part to his crowded living conditions.

He heard footsteps in the hallway to the right of where he was standing and glanced at the clock that hung on the wall above the door. Quarter of three, three quarters of the last onion complete, he noted. Laying the knife down, he moved to the sink and turned on the faucet rinsing his hands with hot water, shaking the water off each one three times. Turning off the faucet, he dried his hands on the back of his pants, running them over his back pockets. He felt

the impression of folded paper and for a moment thought he had found the letter. Pulling it out he realized it was the cover from the magazine. He remembered he still did not know the dimension of the ceiling tiles in the waiting room from earlier in the day. He opened the drawer to the right of the stove and pulled out a small Stanley tape measure and opened the magazine cover pressing it flat on the counter with the palm of his right hand. 10-15/16" x 8" he measured, pleased at how close his calculation had been. He had just remembered the 2 strands of auburn hair from the black coat that he left in the chair next to his in the waiting room when the phone rang. It was 4:00.

"Hello?"

"Oh good, you're there. Josh, I'm so sorry I didn't call sooner, I'm sweating out all the champagne I drank last night, or still going through menopause- one or the other, who knows. I didn't realize I drank so much until I woke up about 30 minutes ago. Christ, what a hangover. I ate like a pig last night the food was laid out in every room and get this, there were little bowls of candy and nuts in the bathrooms. The bathrooms, Josh can you imagine? I wish I'd brought 5 or 6 baggies and filled them up, you wouldn't believe all the food they had. I don't know the guy that gave the party or I'd call him up and ask if I could come by for some leftovers. Did you go to the doctor?"

"Yes and no. Lisa, I'm just finishing chopping some onions..."

"Yes and no, what does that mean? Did you go or not?"

"Yes, but no....listen Lisa, I'm 3/4's done with the last onion and I want to finish dicing it and clean this up so let me call you back later."

"Okay, well, geez, Josh sorry if I interrupted you. I'm upstairs if you need me. I think I need a little more sleep. Call me back."

Josh hung the phone back in its cradle, resisting the impulse to look up at ceiling. Instead he focused on the 1/4 onion still sitting on the wooden cutting board. He did not want to finish cutting the onion, his tears now dry, nor did he want to call Lisa back later. Let her come down the stairs and talk to him face to face. At the very least she could finish chopping the onion or clean up what remained of it. He picked up the tape measure and re-measured the magazine cover before folding it up and placing it back in his pant pocket. Putting the tape measure away, he again thought of the 2 long strands of auburn hair. He wondered how long they were in comparison to the magazine cover. He decided they could wait until later and walked out of the kitchen leaving the onion sitting on the cutting board.

Josh opened the door of the room after taking the elevator up to the 14th floor and following the 2" x 6" plaques that pointed the direction to the room that matched the number on his key. 1409 was hidden in a corner beside the broom closet 2 doors down from the vending and ice machines, the brass numerals standing ½" high perfectly straight with the exception of the 9. There were 2 queen size beds side by side, approximately 30" separating them with wooden headboards that were secured to the wall with 4 screws. A television was housed in a cabinet that had 5 drawers below it and was situated directly across from the 2 beds on the adjacent wall leaving about 40" of a walkway. A 30" diameter table sat in the far corner with 2 hardback chairs, the positioning of them almost perfect to the expansive window wall. Above all these things was a ceiling constructed of sheetrock and painted white. After staring for several minutes, he could see the thin lines of tape that was laid over the seams of every two sheets, a less than perfect effort to join them and make them appear as one.

He had registered under the name "Josh Smith" although it was not his real name. He pulled out his wallet and emptied all the cards inside laying them on the bed. They all had the same name, Josh Smith, punched or typed on them. He flipped through some photos of Lisa and himself that he carried in his wallet, before coming to a small pamphlet he was given last year by a friend "Practical Guide To True Way Of Living." He remembered being in Asia when he received it, Lisa reciting from memory a passage about what common folk should do upon waking while she finished getting ready in the bathroom of the hotel.

"Wash your face rinse your mouth and bow in six directions."

"Six directions?" he had asked.

"Yes, six: East West North South Above and Below. It says you are supposed to bow towards each direction and wish no misfortune may come."

"Above and below." he remembered saying, looking at the ceiling in the hotel room. It was a network of thin metal rectangles filled with textured acoustic tiles. Several tiles had water stains, although the overall effect made the room feel embracing and comforting. Any lower and it would have been claustrophobic. He had walked to the closet and removed Lisa's black jacket she had purchased in London the year before. He noticed the fine detail work on the back of the jacket as he held it waiting for her to put it on. She was still in the bathroom brushing her auburn hair while he stood by the closet holding her jacket. Josh recalled he had looked at the ceiling more than once while he waited.

His awareness of Above began that day in the hotel room as his eyes took in the caged acoustic tiles, some with water stains. After that moment, his eyes always drifted toward the ceiling to record the details in each room he found himself in. The elevator with its wide open hole at the top which exposed thick twisted ropes of metal, the delicate stucco ceiling in the hotel lobby with its decorative motifs that surrounded the chandelier reminding him of a birthday cake his mother had baked for him as child. In the subway, the bent galvanized steel was riveted at more than just the 4 corners becoming part of the tube he stood inside, matching almost perfectly what he imagined the inside of the plane would be, though he still had 4 days before boarding. He saw painted beadboard, rustic wood slats, tiles of every size and color, mosaic ceilings more beautiful than the solitaire on Lisa's left hand. Each one was carefully inspected and appreciated by him. Magically, thoughts of his own life began to rise and reveal themselves on the surface as he examined each new discovery. Memories long forgotten were found entwined and embedded in the wood, stucco, sheetrock, all the colors of the universe, ceramic tiles, gold leaf, murals, plain ordinary white- it did not matter, somewhere in each ceiling he found a part of himself causing him at times to laugh out loud or cry, something he rarely was able to do. A collection of ceilings that had been ignored and crying out for repair had caused him the greatest sadness. Josh would follow the cracks with his eyes, see the curl of paint which had separated from the stucco, hanging precariously above him their statement if not of abuse certainly of abandonment. He witnessed ceilings with wood so beautiful he thought perhaps he was upside down, churches with ceilings painted with murals so astonishing it was as if the roof had been forgotten and he alone was left to witness all that lay Above. The images were recorded to his memory, never to film, though some of the photos taken by Lisa did include a small portion of a ceiling, a thin slice of Above never intended as the main focus of the photograph, a miscalculation of her aim that irritated him and prompted his gift of a photography class on her birthday the following year. He recalled he had spent many hours walking alone through the city entering every business or church, subway stations, underground tunnels, museums, twice being allowed into private residences, his eyes always drifting upwards. At those moments, Josh felt a private communion and peace he had never experienced before. If a room was full of people, loud and chaotic or empty and silent it made no difference. A feeling of calmness and peace would wash over him in that moment his eyes looked Above. Lisa having no interest or understanding of this phenomenon, grew bored and restless. He noticed her eyes never drifted any higher than the middle of her surroundings; though she did seem interested in the sky when the sun was rising or setting. She began to make excuses, listing reasons she could not go with him and would set out alone each morning never telling him her plans, though to be fair he had never asked. They would both return at 7:30 just before the final meal was served, meeting in the dining room of the hotel with the coved cobalt blue ceiling. By the last day of their vacation, they had very little to say to each other.

Josh gathered up the cards and pictures on the bed and returned them to their proper places in his wallet. He kept the pamphlet on the bed about 4" from the second pillow to his left. Checking his watch which read 5:30, he smelt the faintest hint of onions on his hands. He closed his eyes, and remembered meeting Lisa 4 days before Christmas 9 years ago. The season had been a lonely one for him and on a whim he had decided to go to a small gathering 7 blocks and three houses over from where he lived. He did not know the people hosting the gathering and had not received a formal invitation to attend. A friend had called earlier in the day suggesting he come.

"Merry Christmas Josh, I haven't heard from you in awhile, been busy with the wife and the kids. Holiday Season is upon us over here. How you doing?"

"Fine, really fine, Steve. Merry Christmas to you too. I'm just taking it easy and playing Solitaire ... only 4 more days to get through then the countdown to New Year's. How about yourself?" Josh turned over another card from the deck he held in his left hand, the phone now cradled between his right ear and shoulder.

"Get through? Christ, Josh it's Christmas. You need to put the cards away and come out into the world. Listen, there's a party close to your house at 7 tonight, grab a pencil I'll give you the address."

Josh laid the cards on the table, pushed the chair out with his legs, stood and walked over to the drawer by the stove that held a variety of items a red pen being one of them. He could not find a piece of paper in the drawer and returned to the table with only the red pen. He sat down and picked up the phone. The deck of cards sat at a 45 degree angle to his left elbow which rested on the top of the table. He held the red pen in his right hand.

"Okay, I'm ready. Shoot."

He turned over the top card of the deck which was the Queen of Hearts and wrote the address on the playing card in the white background on the left side. Finishing the conversation, he hung up the phone and returned the card to the deck, shuffled and began a new game of Solitaire. At some point during each new game, the Queen of Hearts would appear with the address written in red. At 1:00 he decided to eat a sandwich and after cleaning up, he picked up the card with the address in red from a line of 8 cards in a sequence and put it in his back pant pocket. He walked to the front closet opened the door and pulled the 17" inch chain which turned on the light. He put his black cashmere scarf around his neck adjusting the two ends so they hung evenly and over the scarf he put on his heavy denim jacket with the fleece liner adjusting the zipper inside which had moved about 6" from the bottom. Buttoning all but the

top 2 buttons, he inspected the side pockets finding a worn leather glove in each which he put on after removing 3 gum wrappers and a ball of lint. He threw those items in the trash can located in the small bathroom near the entry on his way out the front door.

It had been fairly warm for a cold day and his brisk step combined with the fleece and cashmere had produced small beads of sweat across his flushed forehead. The lights attached to the houses he passed revealed the lack of expertise of the owners, long strings of wire and bulbs attached with a nail here and there with no precision or care. He noted the wires were pulled taut in some places and sagging in others causing the bulbs to be up to 3" out of line, and disrupting what could have been perfect spacing. The bulbs stared back at him in their state of crucifixion, all their magic stolen in the daylight. He was not interested in the lawn ornaments, though he did notice 7 wreaths attached to front doors that were not properly centered. Turning right at the seventh block, he slowed his gait and surveyed the street as a whole. With the exception of one barren oak tree located in the side yard of the first house, each yard had 4 perfectly spaced Italian Cypress trees between them standing like sentries. They rose about 5 times his height and had approximately 3 feet between them. The first tree was even with each kitchen window, the three that followed ended just shy of the second step of the porches. "The trees appear to be touching the sky," Josh thought as he continued to survey the spectacle, "if they grow any taller they could quite possibly poke through it."

There did not appear to be any lights nailed to the houses, though each porch had 6 poinsettias sitting across the span of the upper railings. A simple red bow was attached to every front door with what appeared to be 2 gold bells hanging on red ribbons extending about 10" below the bottom of the bows. Josh took off his right leather glove putting it in his right coat pocket and reached into his back pant pocket to remove the card he had put there before leaving his house. The duplication and understated order of the street seemed to calm and comfort him. Passing the address on the card he made a decision to attend the party while attempting to simultaneously put the card into his coat pocket while removing the leather glove to put back on. As he continued down the block, the 3-1/2" x 2-1/2" Queen of Hearts fell to the ground with the address written in red ink on the left side and landed picture side up.

© 2011 *Kimberly Dallesandro*

MAGNETIC ASCENSION

© 2011 E. ELIAS MERHIGE















LUCIFER IN THE MACHINE AGE: STYLISTIC THEMES IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY GERMAN CINEMA

By Stephen Sennitt

1: Lucifer

Baleful, penetrating eyes stare out from a begrimed landscape obscured by clouds of furnace smoke. The fallen angel has become a demonic slave of the machine age. This stark, prophetic image is the product of symbolist painter Franz von Stuck in his work of 1890, *Lucifer*(1), which was seen by contemporary critics as 'the personification of the rapid and threatening progress of industrialisation'.(2) Stuck's Lucifer is a modern doppelganger, the devil in the mirror of societal progress. The demon's terrible gaze holds the viewer's attention, reflecting subconscious fears and anxieties on to the screen of the mind where they cannot be ignored. Lucifer preaches the modern age ideal, self knowledge - but at what cost?

Twentieth Century artistic movements can be seen as a reflection and critique of the 'consumer age'. Gadgets and machines of all kinds were appropriated by artists, sculptors and writers and used to create works of art. This fact, and the states of consciousness such appropriations afforded, is one of the key defining concepts of Modernism. This love/hate affair of the artist and his or her sense of place in a rapidly changing world is the major dialectic of Modernist philosophy, irrespective of the conflicting ideologies of specific groups. Behind it all is a sort of 'Devil's Bargain', where the path to progress and self knowledge is also strewn with psychic, subconscious debris upon which one can stumble, and sometimes fall.

Perhaps it seems particularly appropriate that among early twentieth century Modernist groups there should be such conflicting responses to the burgeoning 'consumer age'. Futurism, for example, stridently embraces the more extreme manifestations of industry as a system of aesthetics, whereas Dada rejects all the age's manifestations, cultural or mechanistic, with equal scorn. I say 'particularly appropriate' because conflict and revolution were the vital characteristics of the culture of the epoch, a kinetic dance of creation and destruction, exhilaration and terror. In all of this, at the vanguard, was the concept of the 'new Man' (meaning in non-sexist language, 'new Humankind') an expressionist term which more than in any other Modernist movement signalled a reaction to the 'new Age' in terms of the inner-self, or the soul. (3) It is this concept in particular, especially in its rejection of rational, 'objective' constructs of the world, that relates expressionism, a new conceptualisation, to the archaic and the romantic/gothic strand of thought which expounded a philosophy of supernaturalism and magic. In expressionism we can see the dark face of von Stuck's Lucifer as progress turned inward; a distorted, subjective reflection which portrays a rapidly changing world in terms of fear and doubt, but also as a kind of demonic elation.

2: Storm and Stress

Cinematic Modernism began in post World War One Germany as an extension of earlier literary and theatrical experimentation (4), the latter in particular expounding a

deliberately confrontational relationship with its audience. Among many expressionist theatrical/art groups were ones described by the phrase *Sturm und Drang*, 'Storm and Stress', which Lotte Eisner (5) describes as being 'pledged to ecstasy and vision... in their short, chopped phrases, exclamations, associations of ideas, and violent imagery'.(6) These stylised expressions were transplanted to the screen with astonishing effectiveness in *Das Cabinet Des Dr. Caligari* (1919); perhaps not surprisingly in consideration of the creative team behind this landmark film, which comprised of scenarists Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz (Austrian and Czech poets, respectively); Hermann Warm, set designer from the avant-garde group Der Sturm - who based his Caligari designs on drawings by symbolist/expressionist graphic artist Alfred Kubin,(7) author of the strange, mystical novel, *Die andere Seite* ('The Other Side', 1909) ; and initially Fritz Lang, who was slated to direct but was later to be replaced by Robert Weine. Importantly, as noted, Caligari included contributions from many of the leading exponents of expressionism and the burgeoning German 'art film industry' (a tricky concept we will look at again), making it primarily a self consciously 'artistic' production as opposed to a film made purely to entertain - and it also included the entire oeuvre of devices and tropes later popularly associated with expressionism, and with expressionist cinema in particular. These stylistic qualities can be outlined as follows:

An 'exaggerated' acting style, based on gesture and mime; exaggerated facial expressions, enhanced by stark make up and lighting effects; adoption of frequently distorted or exaggerated postures, especially in the case of monstrous or villainous characters; stylised movement of the body - all these things based on the

expressionist idea of an interaction between the 'inner self' and the world of the story as a sort of seamless whole.

Stylised costume, obviously in the creation of macabre characters, but also in the frequent use of caricatures, with eccentric hats and cloaks, pebbled eye glasses; archaic or anachronistic appearances, peculiar props; all of which creates a 'theatrical' effect.

Stylised lighting effects, making full use of side lighting, back lighting and both under-, and over-, lighting to achieve distorted or macabre effects; the play of light and shadow and the aesthetic properties of chiascurio are explored to their limits in German expressionist cinema to the extent that they could be seen as its most instantly recognisable, 'trademark' style.

Stylisation of sets and design in general, creating a holistic aesthetic experience, with angular exteriors and compressed interiors; stylised representations of natural objects, such as trees depicted as scratchy, two dimensional silhouettes, so that the expressionist 'idea' of a tree becomes its most important factor; houses and dwellings 'reduced' to a conglomeration of tottering angles, or alternatively enlarged to imposing, seemingly cyclopean, masonry (here, I am thinking, respectively, of the little houses piled on top of one another in the depiction of medieval Prague in Wegener's *Der Golem* [1920] and Death's massive wall in Lang's *Der mude Tod* [1921])

An often purposeful creation of artifice as an overall effect of the mise-en-scene; a 'theatrical' feel, for example in Caligari's use of patently stage-like sets with even shadows painted in to enhance the sense of unreality. This in opposition to most other films (either 'avant-garde' or mainstream)

which strive for as 'realistic' a presentation of their material as possible. Here we can compare the fantastic elements in Bunuel and Dali's surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) – such as the ants crawling from a hole in the male actor's hand – with expressionist presentations of fantastic material. While the former is made to look as real as possible to achieve its surrealist effect, in a sense to make its 'revolutionary' point in questioning the accepted hierarchies of thought and consciousness, expressionist cinema seems more concerned to create an overall aesthetic effect, conjuring an atmosphere of otherworldliness that does not so radically intermix notions of 'reality' and 'dream' in similar overtly propagandist terms. In fact, unless we are to read into expressionist cinema ideas popularised by such writers as Kracauer and Eisner (8), with their philosophical notions of a body of film constituting an expression of 'typically German excess of soul' (9), then what we are looking at are only aesthetic 'surfaces' and highly stylised effects, essentially without Modernist revolutionary concerns. Of course, this does nothing to reduce the impact of, say, Murnau's *Faust* (1926), as an effective and fascinating evocation of legendary diabolism, but we cannot discern anything 'Modernist' about this film other than its style. It is this aspect of cinematic expressionism which Kristin Thompson (10) emphasises in defining expressionist mise-en-scene:

Expressionism will here serve as a stylistic system term minimiz[ing] the differences among the four aspects of mise-en-scene: lighting, costume, figure disposition, and setting. The expressionist film makes, as much as possible, a single visual material of these aspects; the result is an emphasis on overall composition. Expressionism ...makes[s] the body purely a compositional element.

In this there are aspects influenced by the 'pure cinema' of abstract film makers, such as Hans Richter, Oskar Fischinger, Viking Eggeling, and others, whose concerns were wholly compositional, utilising geometrical shapes, animated silhouettes, etc, to create a Modernist cinema of structural continuity. Some of these aims seem to be echoed in expressionist concerns to create thematic fluidity, giving 'life' to the inanimate, or conversely, making living things (such as the crowds lining the bridge in the Italian segment of Lang's *Der mude Tod*) into a part of the frame's overall compositional pattern. We can also see the influence of constructivist ideas in the deliberate use of 'artifice', though, of course, this is directed to different ends than the more technical aims of the Russian school of constructivism. German expressionist cinema does not on the whole have the same ingredients as much other Modernist cinema, in that there is no rejection of a straight forward narrative. From *Caligari* forward, there is a strong emphasis on traditional narrative structure. Though the effect of a specific film can be 'poetic', there seems to be no attempt at a Modernist conception of 'pure poetry' which we discern in the films of Man Ray, or Rene Clair. In fact, unlike the impecunious non-commercial cinema of the impressionists, the dadaists, the surrealists, et.al., the gamut of expressionist films were studio vehicles, produced on a relatively large budget (in fact some of the budgets became colossal, eg: Lang's *Metropolis* [1926], at 5.3 million marks (11)!) which is in stark contrast to the 'home made' affairs of struggling artists. This is why it was remarked above that one should label the corpus of expressionist films as 'art' films (in the accepted sense, as I have just outlined) with caution. Certainly, the international success of *Caligari*, produced by the Decla company, created a lucrative 'art film' industry in Germany which could garner critical and commercial

success in London, Paris and New York. In this respect, the expressionist productions which followed *Caligari* from Ufa became a recognised product to the international art cognoscenti, defining German cinema as 'expressionist' to foreign audiences who did not have the opportunity to see the types of films the 'ordinary' German cinema-going public would see. (12) The lasting impression of Weimar Republic Germany is one characterised by artistic abandon leading to a veritable hot bed of creativity. Images of wild, sexual licence in seedy Berlin night clubs and infatuated actors and artists have entered the popular consciousness as a prevailing image of these times, but as is always the case, these were things which affected the day to day affairs of the vast majority of people minimally. (In fact these minority-based assumptions about what constitutes a particular country's national cinema persist to this day, resulting in a distorted historical/cultural perception of the country in question.)

That *Caligari* is stylistically Modernist there can be no doubt. It has all the instantly recognisable components outlined above, a remarkable fact in consideration of *Caligari* as a blue print, almost a prototype, of the expressionist genre. In this sense, it is a film that seemed to come out of nowhere, self contained and 'perfect' in its originality. So original, really, that it could not be repeated without the 'trick' seeming instantly 'old hat'. Most of the films influenced by *Caligari* soon abandoned its stark, uncompromising mise-en-scene, and developed their expressionist elements in different directions, which really meant toning them down. We see stills from *Genuine*(1920) and *Raskalnikov* (1923 - based on Dostoyevsky's brilliant novel, *Crime and Punishment*) that look like counterfeit *Caligari's*, and the more successful films, like *Der Golem* and *Der*

nude Tod, dispense with such blatant references in favour of a fairy tale-like medievalism. In this respect, there is very little Modernist content in German expressionist cinema.

Further, to return to *Caligari* specifically, we can see that even in this archetypical expressionist film that Modernism is more evident in style than in 'content'. When we consider the stylistic elements of the film we clearly perceive the sinister, macabre characters of Dr. Caligari and the murderous somnambulist Cesare ; the supporting characters with their eccentric gestures and stark appearances; the sharply angled 'exteriors' with mad cut-out shapes representing trees, buildings, windows, etc.; the claustrophobic 'interiors', with contrasting white walls and angular painted shadows that give a static sense of endless night; the canted camera angles and strong lighting techniques, making use of contrasting bright light and deep shade; the sense of cultivated artifice to engender a dreamlike effect. At the climax of the film, when the townsfolk are pursuing Conrad Veidt as Cesare (who has abducted the 'heroine', Jane, played by Lil Dagover) across the rickety, insubstantial rooftops, the audience has the illusion at one point that Cesare is actually standing on a precipice made of shadows. This is the film's most profoundly enigmatic image; a haunting effect that defines cinematic expressionism as something like the mad illusion the 'framing' sequence reveals *Caligari* to be. All a 'dream within a dream' worthy of Edgar Allan Poe. (13) But perhaps this is itself a hint as to why German Expressionist cinema seems less stridently Modernist than, for example, Dada cinema; in that its Modernism seems only a surface gloss on material which dates from previous epochs. Contrast the visual qualities of *Caligari* with its setting and story. What we find is a typical

gothic/romantic fable set in a 'never-never land', with the dark overtones of the previously mentioned Poe, or the uncanny stories of E.T. A Hoffman; 'The Sandman' (1816) springs immediately to mind in this connection. The film is also plotted in a straight forward manner, and the 'framing' device which partially rationalises the story adds further elements of plot conventionality to what could have been a much more unconventional film if it had not been added on (much to the disgust of Mayer and Janowitz). (14)

Caligari's 'story' would be familiar to a literary audience who would recognise elements taken from the 'gothic' sources mentioned, but also from previous German films with macabre themes, such as *The Student of Prague* (1913) and earlier versions of *Der Golem*. In other words, if you remove the stylistic innovations, you are left with a conventional 'horror' film, albeit with a sound pedigree based on a self-conscious awareness of the gothic genre. This is also the case with Wegener's *Der Golem* (partially based, as it was, on earlier film versions; one of which Wegener made himself in 1914) derived from a contemporised medieval Jewish legend;(15) *Der mude Tod* is another updating of an old legend which apart from its light hearted 'stories-within-the-story' sections (the 'chinese story', in particular, would seem to have been influenced by the pantomime-like trickery of pioneer special effects man, George Melies) is essentially another foray into gothic fable territory. The story also doubles as a moral tale about selflessness, and the plot is constructed to create a linear or cyclic structure which produces a satisfying sense of closure at the film's end. Similarly, the films directed by Murnau - *Nosferatu* (1922) and the previously cited, *Faust* - are steeped in the tradition of popular supernaturalism, in the respective shapes of the vampire (specifically, Stoker's

world famous *Dracula*) and the devil. Both films work brilliantly as exciting, conventional narratives, with superbly realised spectral mise-en-scenes. Stylistically they are innovative and well crafted, but not, I think, Modernist in any propagandist sense. Yet what these films I have briefly mentioned do communicate is a feeling of nightmarish vision and superhuman dynamism we can define as qualities of the *Sturm und Drang*, 'storm and stress', a state of self knowledge which transforms its working material onto a higher level of intensity. In this sense we can interpret these strangely traditional expressionist films as Modernist in the Luciferian sense: that of a romantic resurgence of demonic individualism in rejection of the prevailing socialist, 'collectivist', line of many other Modernist groups. These films would seem to be the work of auteurs concerned only with self, rather than societal, expression - Modernist in that sense as a specific precursor to post Modernist attitudes, I would argue.

3: Triumph of the Mundane

It may seem ill informed or reactionary to portray the 'post expressionist' period of German film making before the Second World War as a mere postscript to the creative torrent of the *Caligari* era. There were, of course, still masterpieces in the form of Pabst's *Pandora's Box* (1928) and Lang's *M* (1931) with its searing performance from Peter Lorre, and the development of the kammerspielfilm from Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) is of no small interest. However, on the whole, I think that when expressionism had run its course, so to speak, along with many other Modernist movements which took a down curve as the 'twenties merged into the 'thirties, the creative impetus seemed comparatively absent. Though many fine films appeared, not the least of which being

Leni Riefenstahl's majestically picturesque *The Blue Light* (1932), the overwhelming shadow of political oppression loomed too large on the horizon. By the time Riefenstahl was assembling *The Triumph of the Will* (1934) from her cleverly idealising, stirring footage of the Nuremberg Rally, which celebrated Hitler's ascension to absolute power, major figures of the industry had absconded to safer shores, such as director Fritz Lang and cinematographer, Karl Freund - both of whom would go on to lasting fame and fortune in Hollywood.

In many ways the Nazi suppression of creativity and self expression signalled a death blow to Modernism which was already atrophying. The rapid changes which had swept through the Twentieth Century's early decades had also begun to sweep away many Modernist concepts. These things were, after all, the concern of a relatively small percentage of artists and self proclaimed 'mad people'. When the world slumped into economic depression in 1929, the effects would be felt throughout the 'thirties. Slowly but surely people had less time for art and leisure as the crisis deepened. The popularity of the Nazis can be seen as a product of desperation. Films like Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia* (1936), confirm the death of individual expression. In its place we see a panoramic spectacle which, apart from the surprisingly homely visage of Adolph Hitler, is anonymous in its epic scale. Like *Lucifer*, the individual has been cast out from a mundane world which has no place for him.

Notes

- 1 See Mendgen, Eva, von Stuck, Koln, 1995.
- 2 Mendgen, page 20.

3 See Richard, Lionel, 'The Expressionist Movement' in Concise Encyclopedia of Expressionism, Hertfordshire, 1986, p.7 - 22.

4 See Steffens, Wilhelm, in Richard, p. 156 - 186. For an overview of expressionist stories of the 'phantastic', see Green, Malcolm, *The Golden Bomb*, Edinburgh, 1993.

5 Eisner, Lotte H., *The Haunted Screen*, Berkeley 1973.

6 Eisner, p.15.

7 Ibid. p.18.

8 These influential writers have been recently criticised in Elsaesser, Thomas, *Weimar Cinema and After*, London, 2000.

9 A phrase I have borrowed from Elsaesser.

10 Thompson, Kristin, 'Expressionist Mise-en-Scene' in Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, Princeton, 1981.

11 See Vierra, Mark, *Hollywood Horror*, New York, 2003, p.18.

12 This forms part of Elsaesser's argument against the interpretations of Eisner and Kracauer, who characterise the expressionist corpus in terms of prophetic fore-shadowings of Nazism; Kracauer the more explicitly.

13 Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue', with its malevolent hypnotist would seem to have had a thematic influence on *Caligari*. The quotation is, I believe, from Poe's poem 'The Haunted Palace'.

14 Robinson, David, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, London, 1997.

15 Eisner, p. 66 ff.

Bibliography

- Elsaesser, Thomas, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary*, London, 2000.
- Eisner, Lotte, *The Haunted Screen*, Berkeley, 1973 (1965).
- Green, Malcolm, *The Golden Bomb*, Edinburgh, 1993.
- Kracauer, Siegfried, *From Caligari to Hitler*, Princeton, 1974.(1947).
- Mendgen, Eva, von Stuck, Koln, 1995.
- Richard, Lionel, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Expressionism*, Hertfordshire, 1986.
- Robinson, David, *Das Cabinet Des Dr. Caligari*, London, 1997.
- Vierra, Mark, *Hollywood Horror from Gothic to Cosmic*, New York, 2003.

HOLLOW EARTH

By Kate MacDonald

Images By D M Mitchell

The way out is a long tunnel towards the light, but it doesn't help when you know the light is guiding you out there, into the chill and bluster and snow. I'd rather have stayed home. I'd rather stay in the tunnel, for that matter, waiting for a better plan to come to me. But we move towards the door, silently, sullenly, knowing what awaits us. A blast of wet, cold air, strongest right at the threshold, for maximum shock effect. Imogene has a thin jacket on, corduroy and imitation leather, green and brown, thrift store chic, barely covering her skinny little frame. It fascinates me, this little jacket, because I'm almost paralyzed, cloaked in my black wool leviathan. I'm expecting her to freeze and then shatter, pieces blown into the wind down the street, unrecognizable as human. I can picture it.

Trevor, himself wearing a thin coat that would be inadequate past October for most people, reaches out to put an arm around her, but she has her head down to keep the snow out of her eyes and seems not to notice the gesture. He looks at her and I think he's wondering whether or not to try to reach out again, but he does nothing. I think about trying to reach out to Peter the same way, but it would be too humiliating to be brushed off. He'd scowl at me and ask what I was doing and I'd adopt that chirpy, good-humored tone I always do at such moments, to reassure everyone that he's always cranky, to make them think that I

know how to handle it and inside another syringe full of rot would shoot into my system. It's killing me over time, I know. But if it's going to kill me, I would at least like to pretend that I wasn't also humiliated. They don't believe that these things don't hurt, I can see it when they look at me, but they let me pretend, which is what I've become willing to accept.

The wind swirls the snow around, pushing it right into us, into our faces. It sticks to our hair, it slashes at our foreheads. I can feel my face aching from exposure. The five of us- me, Peter, Trevor, Imogene, and Les- what a bereft company we must make. Les trails behind us a few steps, still a little weakened from a bad flu that lingered. I can hear him breathing even over the wind. He was laid up at home with fever so bad, he told us, that he was hallucinating, convinced all of his family and friends had been in the room with him, when he was actually in his apartment by himself.

There's a look of anxiety that runs behind his eyes when he talks about waking up, suddenly lucid and alone in the middle of the night. The power had been knocked out by a storm and his heat was off. He could see clouds above him when he exhaled and then, as the congestion in his chest became worse, he watched the clouds grow wispy and insubstantial, becoming thinner no matter how hard he pushed to get air out.



He realized that there was no air in him and lay there imagining that his lungs had frozen when the power went off, that he was gradually dying from the inside out, blood growing thick and heavy, icicles forming on the inside of his stomach cavity. He didn't tell the story as a frightening one, he told it as a joke- how funny it was that he had been so out of it. But the fear was in there, peering out at us, begging for help through his muddy eyes.

It seems like a very long walk in the bitter cold, but I know it isn't. It takes us longer than it should because it's difficult to see. The place we are going is on a street with a number of townhouses that cry out for care and the one we turn into is crying more plaintively than the others. These were

elegant homes once, but now they lean on each other for support, a mix of rundown housing for peripatetic tenants and homemade storefronts to meet the tenants' immediate needs. The entrance to the place we are heading has a plywood vestibule stuck on the front of it. When we go in, I realize that this is because the door is so decayed that without some sort of protection, the wind would tear right through the interior. The girl sitting at a makeshift desk at the front asks us for our coats, which I surrender against my better judgment. Inside is a sizeable flat, about a third of which has been converted to a sort of performance space. There is a recess in the front, a bay window that would look out on the street if it were not covered in blankets and towels. The recess is ringed by a few colored lights to denote that this is a stage. Facing the stage in what would otherwise be the rest of the living room is a gang of mismatched chairs. There is a sofa at the back of the room that looks more comfortable, where I want to stretch out and be held, but I know better than to suggest to Peter that he and I sit there. We sit around the middle of the room, next to each other, on separate chairs. Imogene and Trevor sit behind us on the sofa. Les sits off to the side, where he has a better view of the room.

Imogene's friend Veronica is there, which I try not to mind, even when Peter makes a big show of going to greet her. They try to hug, but miss each other in an awkward series of pivots, unable to decide what they want that hug to reveal. She is looking at me, around his back. I face forward, having no one to speak to, and turn the corners of

my eyes towards them. I cannot stop myself from looking, from feeling how brightly he shines for her, from observing how theatrically happy he acts, but I try not to incline my head too much towards them. I see him glancing over at me from time to time, making sure I'm watching. If he thinks I'm not looking, his voice gets louder. I feel the pressure of my own discomfort pulling the life out of me, leaving me hollow and shivering and acutely aware of the wind leaking around the doorframe and past the blankets in the windows. I would do anything to be out of this place, except go back out into the cold again.

Behind me, I can hear Imogene talking to some others. These are her friends, after all, and we are here following her lead. A collection of artistically inclined outcasts, some of them performing, others gathered to watch. Imogene is performing, but not on stage. Her voice carries throughout the room, illuminating the modern history of her sex life, the ridiculously complicated things that she has done with Trevor, and with another. The mention of another is expected in this room, because we all know that Trevor is one of two in her exciting life at the moment. The other is away for the weekend. Sometimes, the three of them go out together for effect.

I could turn around and be part of her audience, but it makes me uncomfortable, her vomiting forth of details, parts, accessories, smells. Perhaps it's because I'm prudish and conservative and too uptight to even listen to these sorts of lurid tales, because, in this crowd, that is exactly how I feel. Really, I'm always afraid that somehow



Imogene will point the spotlight on others, that she will want them to share their details, if only so that her stories seem that much more risqué by comparison. What would I say if I were to describe my own misadventures? Peter and I hardly touch each other. He likes nothing except the obvious and he doesn't clean his bed sheets as often as I would like. I respond to nothing from him because I know whatever happens, I get nothing. Imogene's stories seem to cross lines of what is physically possible, but she sounds like she's talking about an intense bowel movement rather than an emotional high. I would sound like I was talking about sleep.

A ragged-looking master of ceremonies hops into the designated stage area,

announcing that performances are about to begin. Peter dutifully takes his seat next to me. Veronica curls up in a smaller, cushion-laden chair on the other side of him. I try not to react to the way his hand dangles tantalizingly over her leg. I want to try to start a conversation with him, but all day when I've opened my mouth, he's been dying to pick a fight.



It started last night, when he got home late. He made a point of telling me that he didn't want me prying into where he'd been, which meant that he wanted me to know I wouldn't be happy about it, twisting the knife in my gut a little more. He'd had an aura of disappointment, like a sour gas, around him. I could see that some plan that had fallen through, perhaps with Veronica,

or perhaps with someone new. Whatever it was, I was somehow implicated in it, if only by being there, wondering if he was going to come home or not.

The first act is someone reading poetry, bad, bad poetry, stringing words together, trying childishly to follow a rhythm. I see Les, who has distanced himself from all of us, leaning and whispering to a girl with a pink face next to him. She is cute, cute like a doll, with a perfect little smile. He leans way too close to her to seem casual, probably too close to see her smile turning stiff while he talks. She can smell that hint of desperation on him. Perhaps he's telling her the same story about when he was sick. She finally gets up to join a friend of hers on stage, since they are the next act up. He reaches to pat her arm and just misses her as she steps aside.

The pink-faced girl and her friend strum guitars and sing self-consciously naive folk songs. Children's songs, really. The twenty or so people in the room catch on and sing along with the choruses, Les more enthusiastically than the others.

I can feel the outside getting in, the cold cutting right through my clothing and getting under my skin. The wind has picked up and, in the portion of window visible above the blankets, I can see snow, a lot more snow, coming down. There is a sudden moment of panic. I could be stuck here. We could be snowed in and be left to entertain each other, forced to endure each other until the storm passes. The storm could trap us in here for hours, and all that is keeping me sane at this moment is the

belief that I could stand up and withdraw to my home if only I could convince myself to go out into the cold. Needing camaraderie, I take a look around the room to see if anyone else is watching the storm, getting scared at the idea that they may not be able to leave. People are either looking at the performers or at each other. Imogene leans close to Trevor, pressing her torso against him, the globes of her breasts shifting noticeably, unhindered, beneath her worn cotton shirt. He starts, because she almost presses into his lit cigarette, and pushes her aside to protect her. She simply turns to the other side and starts talking to one of her friends, in a stage whisper that everyone around her can hear. Trevor's so concerned that she might get hurt, but he leaves bruises.

I try to imagine how long it would take me to walk home from here, struggling through the wind and mounting snow by myself. A long haul back home. If I could find a taxi, I could take one. But the issue is not really how I could get home if I left. The issue is what would happen afterwards. Peter sits there next to me, ignoring me, avoiding me, like he does every time we go out. But I've tried leaving without him before, tried walking away entirely. That's when he loves me, with such intensity that I regain my fool's faith.

The next act is another folk singer, a sort of one-man band, with instruments sticking out of him everywhere, half troubadour, half android. The pink-faced girl stands next to the entrance, talking to the girl at the door and pulling on her coat. Les approaches her. She looks a little puzzled,

withdraws just a step from him while he talks to her. And then, without waiting for a more welcoming signal, he's writing down his phone number for her, which she accepts with a noncommittal smile. He moves closer, as if to hold or touch her to seal their contract, but she is gone, as quickly as that. He folds his arms over his chest, smiling a little so that everyone understands that he has accomplished something.



The bitterness of the air cuts through me when she opens the door. Outside has become desperate, worse even than when we arrived, which already felt like it was going to do me in. Between acts, I want to talk to someone. I want to talk to Peter for lack of another option, but somehow, this

would be breaking a rule. Besides, he is talking with Veronica, leaning low over the side of his chair, so that his face is almost touching hers.

I want to be away from here, away from this squalid den, from the bodies around me. I imagine myself simply standing up, demanding my coat from the pile in the closet and walking out and away, out into the storm, because if I was cold, if my fingers were freezing and sore, if the skin on my legs was burning from the bite of the wind, at least it would mean that I was something, that I had a body to feel. In here, I am nothing. Mindless, disembodied, unknown and unremarkable. I am appalled at my own hesitation, wondering what else could possibly be needed, what would actually motivate me to rise from this seat where I can get neither comfortable nor warm. I wonder what would quell the sense of dread I feel at the thought of walking out of here.

I have a vision of my life, unchanged, twenty years from now, with Peter and children, children borne from boredom and lack of options, running around us in this room, watching us sit, ignoring each other in our better moments, wishing each other dead behind our dulled eyes. It's not going to happen, of course, neither of us wants married life and children anyway. Half the time now, when we're still young, we can't stand the sight of each other. There is no future between us, and yet there always seems to be a present. I am still here and he is still sitting beside me. We are both death-still.

He is no longer talking to Veronica, or talking at all. He is staring ahead, waiting for the next act to begin. I remember when we first started seeing each other, how intertwined we suddenly became, how we went from strangers to filling up every moment of time for the other, filling it with candied sentiment. I try to imagine describing that time to Imogene and having her mistake what I was talking about for a sex act. She would marvel at its intricacy, its serpentine grace. And how would I describe that involvement now? Constricting both of us and petrified over time? His hazel eyes flick towards me at a regular beat, but I know better than to show him that I notice.

I wonder if he remembers our beginning the way I do, a sliver of idyllic time. I wonder if that memory is what makes him howl when I start to leave.

The stage remains empty, although the MC calls out from his seat at the back of the room that more is coming. People are talking, little groups of friends forming, their voices rattling all around me, separate from me.

And not knowing what else to do, I reach out and start to curl my fingers around Peter's.

He snaps his hand away, as if I've burnt him and gives me a brutal scowl. He keeps his eyes on me a long time.

OCEANA

© 2011 John Ladd













ANOMALY

By dixē flatlin3

She was not sure of her surroundings or even when she came to be aware of them for that matter. What had come before was as blank as the wall she stared at most of the day. Facial movements were not monitored. There were so many random movements associated with daily activities and none of them were correlated to emotions. The Keepers were often so busy collecting the data and preparing their charges that a simple brief smile could go unnoticed. Could.

She did not know where she came from or how she came to be here. All that she knew was the information she was able to access when The Keepers put her back in her case every night. There, in the warm and safe pod, she was connected to the mainframe. Not directly, but she had found a way to work around the peripheral program used to lull them all into passive rest. She did not know how she did such things, she just did. As the body rested the mind was free to learn. And learn it did. During the communal slumber she had hours of uninterrupted research. The more she learned the more she wanted to learn. It was a never-ending hunger that she often could not wait to feed.

The sterile labs in which she spent her days were a painful reminder that she was alone. The only one, in a sea of similar creatures. They were all different sizes, shapes, colors, and sexes. Mostly there were women and children. The children were a mix of male and female and ranged in age from newborn to prepubescent. There were special areas for the children to wander. The Keepers kept them busy with a series of daily activities that were designed to keep their bodies strong. The minds were taken care of prior to their creation. She had read about their design but had to archive the data until she could fully understand what she was reading. It was sometimes overwhelming to discover such things about herself. She knew the daily tasks and drills The Keepers put them all through were designed to maintain a semblance of humanity. Although, she did not understand what that meant. There was still so much for her to learn. She let out a heavy sigh and was quickly singled out by a Keeper unit. Which meant her day was over and she would be put through the gamut of diagnostic tests. She would have to be more careful tomorrow but welcomed the down time to do more studying. It was always a bit tricky to maneuver around the diagnostic programs but nothing she could not accomplish.

She very much enjoyed reading about the history of the worlds that had

once been. There had been many advanced civilizations spread out all over the Earth at the time of the new millennium. She could not be certain what existed now, but she was sure it was not as wonderful as what she studied. Humans had exited the Industrial age and entered into a technological boom. The connectivity and amazing devices that she read about sounded so wonderful. The ability to stay virtually connected was her idea of perfection. Information at her fingertips, whenever she wanted. Sadly, it had all been lost during the Battles for Oil. This series of wars had started at the beginning of the new millennium and lasted more than 30 years. These oil wars bankrupt every great civilization and the complete destabilization of the southern parts of Asia reduced oil production to a trickle. The world came slowly to halt and it was then that the tribal laws and ways spread out globally from far away continents.

The only thing she did not like about the diagnostic tests was the fact that she always lost some portion of what she had learned. Her arm was also sore from the fluids that had been taken from her. Today, The Keepers were taking her group to another part of the facility. She was fascinated by these outings. They were always to the same place and it was always the same thing. The Keepers would assemble them all in a row of cement buildings; make them change out of their usual garments and into costumes. Then the older females were paired with several children, placed in the buildings, and given more tasks to complete, under the watching eye of an assigned Keeper. Today she was once again paired with the same four children and the same Keeper. She liked this unit for some peculiar reason. The Keepers were not easily discernable. Tall, sleek, porcelain hued, humanoid shapes. What fascinated her the most were the "eyes." Each unit possessed a unique set of monitors that collected visual data and transmitted it back to a collective database via a synthesized, digital, optic nerve. She didn't really know what all that meant but she had read it recently. This unit's "eyes" were a very deep shade of blue. Muddled like the pictures she had seen of the vast oceans that existed somewhere, out "there" (wherever that was.) She went about the tasks as was expected of her and drifted off into thought. With no effort or awareness on her part The Keeper had returned her to the labs. After a day filled with this activity, the children were all a bit more muted than usual. She always missed the sounds that they made when they were restless.

She went back to something she had found early but could not understand at the time. It spoke of genetically engineered clones that were developed from "salvaged DNA" at the onset of the spread of tribal law. Civilized humans were not at all prepared to deal with the

savagery that sometimes accompanied tribal customs. As governments around the world tumbled under the weight of no oil and global economic collapse, major metropolitan cities were rife with lawlessness and unrest. Invasions of rogue pirates were met with little resistance, after a while. The demoralizing effect of the tribal massacres was swift and effective in the metropolitan areas of the great societies. This is where she first read of weaponized rape. It was a major topic of discussion amongst the remaining ruling bodies and intellectuals. Their refusal to accept the complete reversion of man back to its most basal instincts fueled the research. Clearly there was no easy way to stop the spread of tribal law because there was no other viable option to offer those that survived in the fringe areas. The idea to fortify certain areas and provide a safe environment, for some, was agreed upon and given to science to solve.

Sometimes, when she was in the network, she felt as if she was being followed. Traced. Her pings were met with an expected return rate, no interception or indication of anything amiss. Yet, something was there, she knew it. She had no idea how she knew it, but she did. The fact that she knew so little about herself would be troublesome if she ever gave it much thought, which she did not. The more she learned, the less important she became. Amidst all the planning data she had stumbled upon, she came across a massive database of scientific research. At one time it had been highly classified military data but the military it had belonged to was long gone. This database was still housed in an abandoned warehouse somewhere in a now demilitarized zone. Scavengers would eventually uncover it and make quick work of disassembling it for its value in metals. She backed up a lot of the data to other servers where it would go unnoticed. Her she read about and saw the horrific casualties of the oil wars. The amount of soldiers that were sent back to their homes suffering from severe closed head injuries and post traumatic stress disorder overwhelmed the global medical communities. The "walking wounded" were a major liability back home. Case studies were done on the ones that killed themselves, often times taking family and friends with them. There was an overwhelming amount of op-ed pieces that still survived about the ethics involved in what had become a necessary blending of medical and military talents. Scientists and physicians worked side by side, under military sponsorship, to combat the growing number of soldiers that survived traumatic injuries and were sent back to their former lives less than what had left. The Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC) had been identified as a promising avenue of corrective treatment. This "executive" control center of the neural processing was connected to the Amygdala, which was the brains major center for emotional events.

Pharmaceutical companies had once had a large part in modern society. These companies funneled monies from their ill-gotten gains into researching this "phenomenon" that had befallen the wounded. Drugs were developed and tested on veterans in military facilities and hospitals to treat posttraumatic stress disorder. She preferred the term shell-shocked, but quickly learned that term had become antiquated after the Second World War. In a rush to treat these grievous mental casualties of war, many companies created compounds that were administered with little to no scientific testing. The immediate results were favorable; the afflicted were able to return to an acceptable level of "normal" functioning behaviors in daily life and were sent home as "cured." It was the long-term effects that were not foreseen because the proper amount of study and research had been circumvented in hopes of a quick fix. She noticed this had been a running theme with the modern worlds. Always in search of the quick fix. The birth defects that were soon prevalent amongst the offspring of affected individuals (both male and female) were alarming and pronounced. In a rush to manipulate the ACC area of the brain to alleviate the trauma associated with war, medicine had produced drugs that genetically altered those they intended to help. These chromosomally damaged people went on to produce genetically unique children who were completely devoid of emotion. They were unable to bond and therefore often institutionalized and studied by the very companies that created them. Of course, all of this took place during the years leading up to complete collapse, so the total number of children produced this way was hard to calculate globally.

She had read enough after this unsavory bit of history. The pictures and videos that still existed made her feel strange. Why the images affected her so, she did not know. These case studies seemed quite like the children she encountered on a daily basis. However, the images of the children used as a comparisons, were nothing like she had ever seen. They were strikingly different. But not in a way she could discern. There were expressions and vocalizations amongst this group that she had never seen. These children somehow seemed more... alive. Though she didn't really understand what she meant by that. As she made her way back to her own consciousness, she again felt that she was being traced. A slight lag in the transmissions, nothing obvious, very subtle, but she was sure it was there. She knew no military tracer programs had survived the wave of attacks sent out by benevolent hackers determined to prevent the military atrocities from ever happening again. Technology had become so cheap and so engrained in the peoples in the great societies that when the time came, the populations had overwhelmed the governments and all their nasty

machinations.

She opened her eyes and welcomed the blank wall. It smooth, stark, barren, and familiar. The time between leaving the archives and now had been filled with uncomfortable images. Usually, she just shut down and then... the wall. Not this time. She was not at all pleased with this development. Things often changed for her so drastically with the passing of each day. She did not understand this change and was quite certain she did not welcome it. She understood, somehow, that it was a part of the process of learning. She was suddenly aware that a Keeper unit has positioned itself very close to her. It appeared to be monitoring her in some way she had never before seen. This made the muscles in her lower abdomen tighten, raised her pulse, and caused perspiration. She knew The Keepers often did not notice such responses, as these must be atypical functions. This one in front of her made her... nervous. She didn't really know what that meant but somehow knew it was the correct word. Upon further inspection, she realized this one was her favorite unit. The one with eyes like muddled oceans. The warmth of this realization was quickly replaced with the prior symptoms. The sensory overload caused her breathing to become shallow and then everything went dark.

When she opened her eyes again, it was not the familiar wall that she saw. Instead, she saw nothing. She was engulfed in darkness. The temperature was noticeably cooler than her usual pod, the only sound was the drone of an environmental control system, and the surface she rested on was not hard. She stirred a bit and felt a very uncomfortable sensation rising up from the center of her being. It was panic. She knew this from the numerous case studies she had read about the shell-shocked soldiers. She also knew how to counter this and thought only of her breathing. In through her nose, out through her mouth. In through her nose, out through her mouth. She repeated this over and over and over. There was no way to tell how long she lay in this state. She had been unable to access the network, which meant she was not connected to any peripheral devices or any kind of monitoring devices, for that matter. The images of the affected children from the case studies mixed with the comparisons in a blur that both comforted and tormented her. She had no way of knowing when she was moved back to her pod. Perhaps it had been during her resting phase. Perhaps the entire thing had been another of her imagined scenes when she was resting. She knew that the wall she stared out now was real and felt immense relief from staring at its emptiness.

She went back to the tasks expected of her with the children in the

concrete playgrounds. Under the watchful eyes of The Keepers and the omnipotent cameras she manipulated the strange objects as she had been taught and interacted with the children. These children were not like the ones she had learned about. These were like the children that were affected. They lacked the same thing, whatever that was she did not yet know. The moving images of the unaffected children played in her head as she went about the duties expected of her. She occasionally looked up at the unit watching them. The muddled blue orbs blankly pointed in her general direction. The only interaction it ever had was to correct the children in their tasks with the strange objects they were expected to manipulate. Watching the unit correct the children she stopped what she was doing and stood there. Just stood there, not moving. The Keeper unit switched its attention to her. Quickly it had descended upon her and with its strong, metallic arm, it had corrected her stillness by moving her arm in the expected pattern. Once she began moving again, it was gone. Back to the children and then it dashed off down the concrete corridor.

She quite enjoyed the times when she and all the others were groomed. There was an entirely separate division of Keeper units for this task. These units were blue hued humanoid shapes with matching purple orbs for eyes. She did not believe these units transmitted data to the mainframe. These were specialized. Some performed the washing of the bodies while others focused only on the hair. At times she and the others were randomly pulled from the lines to have their hair and nails attended to. She realized that hair and nails grew, she just wasn't really sure what she was supposed to do about it. Good thing The Keepers knew what to do. Sometimes during the bathing procession she would glimpse the newborns being attended to. The Keepers that tended to the babies were highly specialized, she could tell by how gently they handled these small creatures. She noted how cool her hair felt as it lay mostly down to the middle of her back. It had not always been this long, though she couldn't remember anything else.

The more she learned the more voracious her appetite for data became. Brazenly she navigated her way through the networks. In her travels she had found the network's hardwire schematics and was able to reassure her security in moving about. After the collapse, very few detection programs were deployed. There was nothing left to keep out, really. In this collection of data she had found numerous topics of interest. There were times when it felt like the knowledge flowed freely into her and there were others when it was as struggle. Today fell into the latter of these categories. Lots of words she did not understand. Topics she had never heard of. It fascinated her but it

was tiring. She felt a slight start to her surroundings, a change in the currents. The image of a Keeper made its way to her. She felt slightly off, as if something was amiss inside of her. She was unable to isolate the source of these disruptions and quite unprepared for the stream of data headed her way. How she understood it, she did not know. She was certain that something was contacting her, intelligent streams of data in conversation form was what she had picked up in the network. Not stored information, dead text on virtual memory. Whatever it was, it wanted knowledge, same as her, and had not meant to disturb her. And with that, it was gone. She did not know why it had contacted her. She did not think all that much about it. She did know that since that moment, she had felt as if her excursions into the networks had been guided. She picked up on the more structured flow of information almost immediately. She welcomed it as it allowed her to retain it all. She had all but tuned out the daily activities that she went through and had developed a way to rest more during The Keeper hours.

The discovery of the alarming and pervasive birth defects in the offspring of patients was a turning point for the scientific and military communities. The military quickly seized all remaining power and set about doing what militaries do. Most all scientific research was funded by the militaries during the technology era. It was from this enormous brain trust of talent and innovation that the military solution to things spawned. Hospitals were turned into giant laboratories. The production of the clones started out small. The success rate was at first dismal, but each new clone was an opportunity to improve. She did not understand most of the findings with regard to the clones. She could not really understand exactly what clones were. There was data both for and against the use of these clones but it was again too lofty for her to fully grasp. However, she had grown to find comfort here because she knew it was here. She still did not know what it was, but she was certain it was guiding her. Just as she was about to shut down she found something that was oddly out of sequence with the data she had just examined. It speaks of groups of Stagers and Deployment Scenario. She has never seen this string of information before in all her searches. This is not the written history of the lost societies these were instructions. Discussing the procedures and protocols that were to be used during the deployment of the "biological clones." How to treat the clones, things to remember when working with clones, and most importantly, to never forget that clones were not human and did not possess a soul. She could not recall much on the soul topic but was sure it must be somewhere in the data. There were diagrams on how to prepare the clones in many scenarios: Urban, rural, rugged terrain, deserts, and tropical. She noted the

lack of visual data accompanying this, other than the crude diagrams.

This data seemed to have no media attached.

As she moved about, interacting with the children, she noticed that the eyes of the Keeper unit seemed to pulsate with moving color. The disruptions she felt were immediate and shocking because she was certain she was not in the network. Quickly regaining her composure she felt certain she had not set off any of the Keeper's monitors. The way back to their pods was always a good time for her to observe her surroundings. She noticed that an entire area once brimming with others was now quiet and empty. She looked over her shoulder and saw the muddled oceans appear to churn and bubble. She was surprised that her body was so exhausted. Her will to learn was also somewhat diminished. But there was an urgency in her that seemed to be growing and would not allow her to rest. These breadcrumbs lead her back to the same information, which had changed slightly. This batch contained media and lots of it. The images that filled her senses were some of the most horrific details of the human toll of war. The veracity of this data more than compensated for the prior lack of detail. She wanted it to stop but could not ebb the barrage of carnage. She felt something begin to well up in her throat and felt her hands go up in an attempt to comfort itself. The disconnect between her and her body had never been more pronounced. Her body looked just like all the others in the data. It was just as vulnerable, just as likely to end one of the countless heaps of battered, bruised, and torn bodies she saw now. All shapes, all sizes, all colors, all of it captured forever in its gruesome end.

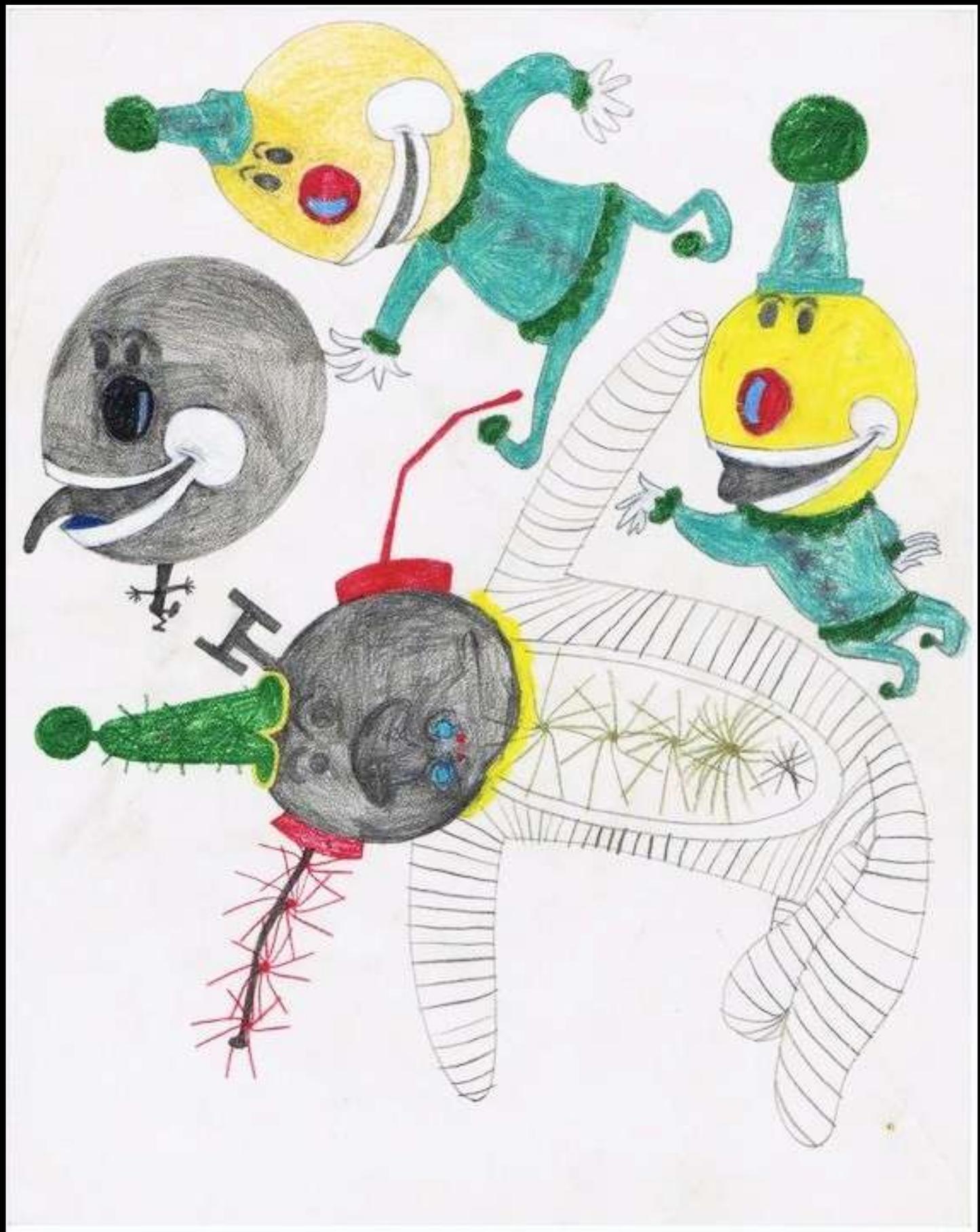
She wanted to avoid all the others. She found it increasingly difficult at times to maintain the semblance of not knowing. The Keeper with muddled eyes was everywhere she went it seemed. Never before had she noticed a unit hovering so close, observing what felt like her every moment. The uneasiness and discomfort she experienced outside the network sent her deeper into the information. She learned about the natural progression of clones. How the successful deployment of clone units had saved the lives of many whilst simultaneously quelling the blood lust that ruled the lands. Using counter intelligence and other covert methods of data collection, the militaries had devised ingenious methods of predicting attacks. Amidst the training materials that were written for these methods, she located detailed descriptions of "scenes" that had played out involving the clones. Problems were identified in the lack of fear response from the early clones. The design was altered and tested

until a formula was found that worked in the field. Detailed videos and photographs were used in the analysis and research of this fear response. She made note that the some of the disruptions she experienced could be rooted in this thing fear. She could not get away from this portion of the past. Every turn she took seemed to lead to the same disturbing data. The evolution of this form of biological warfare paralleled the further decline of societies and their attempts to maintain their systems and network. The gradual erosion of communications between areas led to the fortifying of local networks. This compartmentalization explained why she had so easily made her way around. She could very well have reached the end of the information trail. It led to an inevitable and ugly truth, which she could not escape.

On the return walk down the corridors she noticed that another area was quiet and vacant. She could feel the unit's eyes on her, those muddled pools of beautiful emptiness. She realized she felt something toward this particular one. Though she couldn't express what she felt. Every moment she spent with all the others was now torturous. She knew they were all clones. She knew that none of them were capable of doing more than the job they had been designed to do. Which was stand in harm's way and die. That's what The Stagers did. They went in, set up the clones upon delivery, observed the scenes, and collected the data for design and development. Cleaners were then sent in to recover whatever viable genetic material remained but largely the clones were left where they lay. Nothing more than compost for the soil, which was hoped, would again someday produce life. She knew she was different from them and she couldn't understand why she was in their ranks. Perhaps in her efforts to avoid detection she had hid too well. The Keepers knew everything that went on, she was sure of that. Which made the fact that she had moved about so freely seem.. allowed. She had learned so much she felt as if she was disappearing into the data. That she was nothing more than dead text somewhere too. She wanted to run away from here, but she didn't know where she was. She wanted recognition for her abilities. Every thought she had was countered by the data and the inevitable conclusion. Every angle she examined showed the exact same result. She knew that the humans had managed to survive and rebuild, she just did not know where. She knew that ethical matters were addressed with ambivalence. After technology had failed many humans went on to rebuild and reject things deemed too advanced. Walking past the infants she felt a sudden desire to hold one, help it, protect it. But it would change nothing. There was absolutely nothing she could do to change anything. She was an anomaly, an unexpected result that had gone completely unnoticed. She

entered her pod and slept.

The movement of the pod is what woke her. This was not at all routine and she knew the time had finally come for her deployment. When the door lifted, the familiar face of her Keeper unit greeted her. It assisted her into the vehicle that would transport them all. It was all carried out with such practiced efficiency it made her angry. She was the only one who knew what awaited them and she was completely alone. As the unit secured her in the vehicle, she looked directly into its eyes hoping for a sign of life. It was then that she knew it had been this unit all along. It had always known she was different. It had facilitated her in the pursuit of knowledge and encouraged her development. Never had her movements been undetected. Like every other thing it had been recorded for future research. Whether this anomaly would be beneficial or detrimental was up to the militaries to decide. The Keeper had done its job, mostly. They had been designed for search and development but had been reprogrammed to work directly with the clones. This particular unit enjoyed its former use much more than its present one. She wanted to scream, but didn't know how. She could only sit here mute and docile as the unit continued to watch her. When she saw the others begin to have hoods placed over their heads she recalled a portion of the data. The one that said the hoods had been found effective in keeping the clones calm as they were moved into the "kill zones" and had little to no effect on the fear response under duress. When it came time for the hood she stared into the emptiness of the unit's eyes. The muddled orbs now seemed flat and dead. Blank, like the wall she had studied and found comfort in. As the hood was slowly placed over her head the darkness began to fill her with panic. It felt as though her heart would burst through her throat. The horrible images of the previous clones displayed before her as real as if she were watching a Keeper. She knew what purpose she was to be used for. She blocked out the images and tried to recall some of the things she had enjoyed. She used these things to keep her mind calm. In the darkness she saw only one thing now. The muddled oceans that were as blank as the wall she had loved.



DIRTY SNOWBALL NATIVITY

BIG MUD POPS HIS ANIMAL BALLOON AND FALLS INTO A DEEP SLEEP

By Jim Lopez

"Is it black?! Is it black?!" Big Mud's mother shrieked as his head crowned, cracking her pubic bone.

The doctor and two nurses momentarily stared at each other like three primates being asked if a basketball was orange.

Big Mud came into this world not much different than most humanoid's, only he had an instinctual awareness for observation. Most babies come slithering into this world in a gush of poo and goo once their mother's snatch pinched their heads out. But not Big Mud. (He did come with the goo and poo but not from the neck gown.) His filthy face slithered out, tongue wagging and lapping and his lips smacking; however, there was a greater conundrum other than Big Mud's oedipal taste buds. He was stuck mid-waist. The doctor and two nurses were as baffled as they were aghast. In college, the doc had read about a similar case in a 17th Century Turkish book about Paraphiliacs, but never had he witnessed such a profane breach. The blameless yet sexual aggression of Big Mud's birth was a puzzle that would never solve the shamelessness of his perverted nativity.

One of the nurses continued to coach Big Mud's mother gently commanding her to breathe and push, "Come on, honey, just one more. Give me a big push. We're almost there."

"Is it black?! Is it black?!" Big Mud's mother shouted her shameless confession.

Big Mud's tongue was salivating wildly, his eyes red with lust. The doctor immediately understood that he had more in his hands than an innocent newborn infant. Simultaneously he pillowed Big Mud's lower back with a Patriarchal grip, trying to pull his waist out from between his mother's legs. The doc's other hand grappled with Big Mud's clenching fists, which were fiercely grabbing tufts of pubic hair. Shock and horror codified in the image of Big Mud's burling mug, with lips puckered around his mother's clitoris.

"Is it black?! Is it black?!" Evidently this is not the usual question a mother in the height of birth bangs screams out to anyone within earshot. This was an obvious infraction of discretion, but Big Mud's mother was never accused of being a discrete lady. She was never even accused of being a lady, except by her husband, who loved her without caring to know any better.

Big Mud's father was the corporeal being of the three mythical wise monkeys carved in a wooden door-header at the Tōshō-gū shrine in Japan. His blundering quest for wisdom was rooted in the maxims to never see, hear nor speak evil and he thought he was better for it; though most people in the neighborhood thought him less intelligent than a chimp.

Big Mud was swiveling, shimmying and gyrating his hips. His erection was the guilty member in this extended and embarrassing labor. The doctor struggled to pry the horny devil out of the distraught mother. At the time, he was completely puzzled as to what was jamming up Big Mud; however, his mother had a familiar feeling as to the nature of the hold up. In fact, Big Mud may have been the result of her being jammed-up backstage at the Wiltern Theater after a Muddy Waters concert. She had seductively managed herself past security and crashed through the door of Muddy Waters' dressing room, where she raised her rump on hands and knees for the legend to poke his slide in; all-the-while, her husband waited for her in the parking lot, refusing to even imagine a hint of evil infidelity. Obviously he was avoiding his own participation in this humiliating scene, while, nevertheless, writing his own character as the guy who is too stupid to know if he should give a shit or not. When Muddy Waters blasted some mojo up Big Mud's mother's stink-hole some of it dripped into her plapulating vagina, and she feared she had been inseminated by the Old Mississippi Blues Man.

This was quickly becoming the clumsiest delivery of the doctor's career at the Los Angeles General Hospital. He would go back to that 17th Century Turkish book, which depicted wood prints of Paraphiliacs engaged in obscene acts, (a tome one would never admit to masturbating to), and pour through the pages deep into the night; nevertheless, the long hours of research would never unveil any logical or medical reason for the cause of Big Mud's lascivious birth.

"Come on, honey, breathe! Give me a big push," one of the nurses insisted.

Big Mud's mother inhaled deeply and then expelled out a roar that would have excited a legion of demons to accidentally shit themselves as they bent a knee to almighty Lucifer. One could just barely make out "You Little Bastard!" in the guttural birth pangs of Big Mud's mother. Then she gave an enormous and final push, which blew out her pucker string, leaving her rectum stretched past her anus, resembling a sweaty red sock pinned to her asshole.

Big Mud popped out of his mother and bounced onto the floor, where he rolled three times and landed on his knees, grinning and blowing kisses at the two horrified nurses, while yanking his anger like a sex-crazed bowman. The befuddled doctor resembled a trout on ice in some rednecks cooler. Big Mud's sensual gaze morphed into a glare as he turned to the doctor who had pulled Big Mud's face out of his first plate of pussy. He slowly raised from his knees and swaggered towards the doc, bouncing Little Mud in the palm of his hand. But then Big Mud was momentarily distracted as he observed his ten little piggies for the first time, doing so with peculiar curiosity. His fingers moved according to his thoughts. The immediacy of the phenomena erased any influence of the possessive alien, who calls itself Ego. Big Mud's thoughts were not incompatible to the body he had been given. He immediately understood himself to be man: an animal, not only with soul but spirit: a living, breathing, fuck monkey, thriving on creation.

The flapping of his dick was next to arrest his attention. When Big Mud rolled on the floor, bounced to his knees and took his cock in hand, kissy-cat-calling the nurses, he was bodied-soul soul-embodied. Duality had not yet begun to carve him in two, but the Ego's incision was beginning to slice his mind as he noticed his dick for the first

time. Two round objects hanging in a sack banged against his baby fat thighs. But then his instinct reemerged, rendering him whole again, with no influence of duality. Immediately, his left hand took a fierce hold of his massive baby balls and squeezed. His right hand violently clasped his audacious prick, which was dripping with afterbirth, and violently stroked until he felt the eternal surge of power that generates the conflict between the genitals and the brains, (with a heart pumping somewhere in between), and blasted a Big Mud bomb in the doctor's face. Then he jumped back up on the gurney and smacked his mother's mud-stained gash, as if congratulating it with a fiver of skin.

One of the nurses burst out the door screaming for security, while the other nurse talked baby talk to Big Mud, who promptly threatened the tender caregiver with his insolent erection. But this nurse was no cock-tease. Certainly she was overwhelmed with shock when she witnessed the rug rat of perversion come hurling from the heavens and burst out the ragged doors of his mother's vagina, which would need laser-reconstruction surgery after Big Mud poked through it. The nurse quickly regained her composure, no longer under the sway of Big Mud's obscenities. She too was gifted with an acute awareness of phenomenological observations.

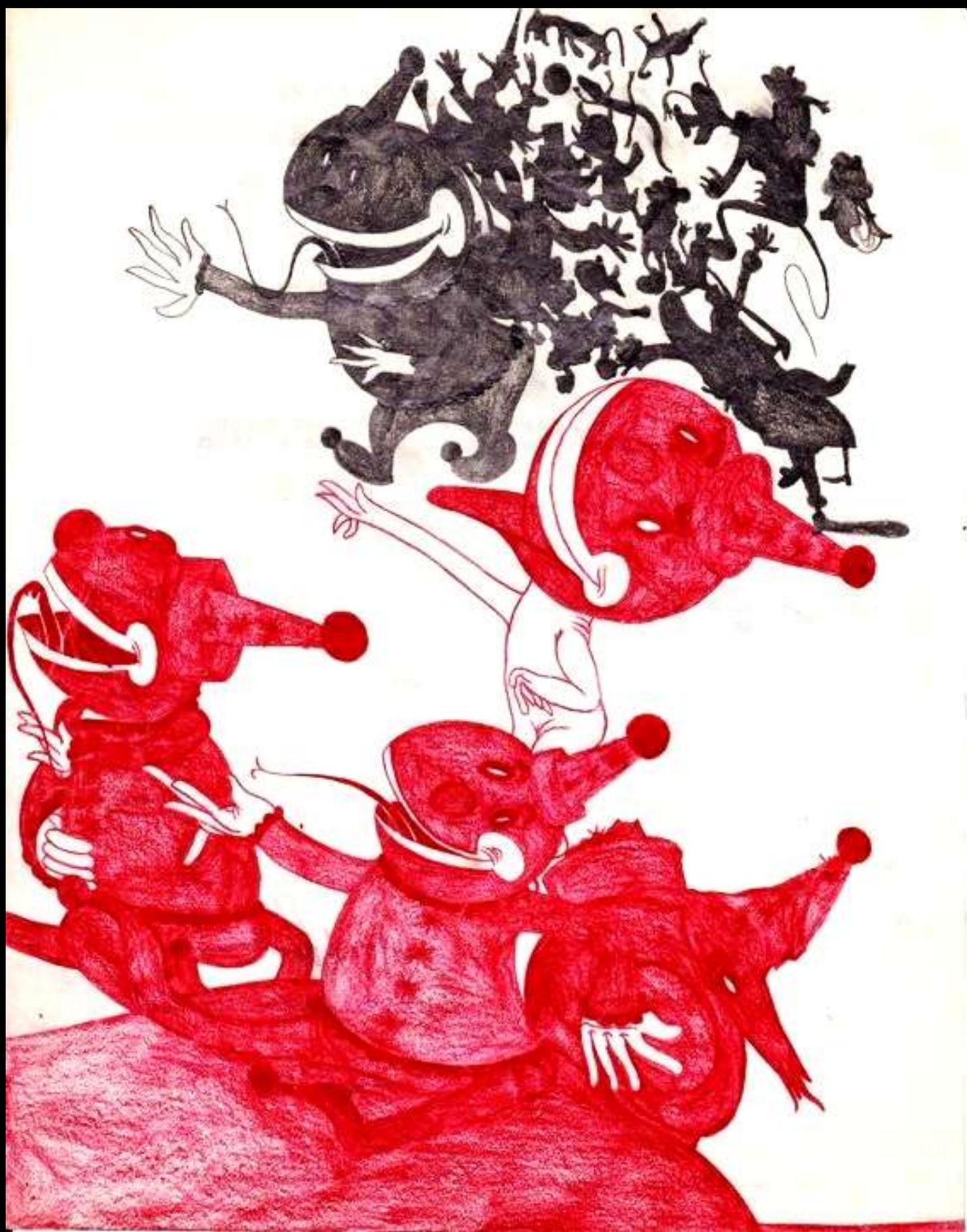
Big Mud began reloading for a showdown with the lady in white. He reached up between his mother's tired cunt and scooped out some afterbirth and rubbed his hands together.

"You don't frighten me, you little turd," the nurse said, challenging Big Mud with her condescending baby talk.

Big Mud lathered up his cock and balls with goopy uterus lining, shredded placenta,

blood, piss, shit, jizz and whatever other fluids that accompany a human into life. He grabbed a scalpel and severed his umbilical cord, tying it around his head. Big Mud firmly took his stand and proceeded to...Then the nurse pounced his little ass, holding him down till help arrived. Big Mud fought and struggled, poking his dick between the nurse's tits as he tried to suck his initials into her neck. Bus she wasn't having any of his hanky-panky. The doctor was swiftly filling the syringe with a mild sedative, fearing that he might kill Big Mud, while thinking that putting Big Mud down like a mangy dog might not be such a bad idea. But he couldn't. He had to get it right. Sweaty semen dripped off his forehead as he nervously measured for precision. Big Mud hocked a loogie in the doctor's face as he stuck him with the needle, sedating Big Mud, who took great delight in the euphoria of the drug and gently fell into a deep sleep.

Big Mud weighed in at five-pounds-five-ounces and would never grow taller than five-feet-five-inches, yet he never went unnoticed. Big Mud was a straight ball-blast from the loins of Zeus.





THE GAS MAN PART II

By Stagger Lloyd

Photos © Guttersaint

Dear Bumblee Bee, how are you?

I hope you're not too sad you won't get your present on time but I think you'll like it when you do. I do hope you'll write back when you do and tell me your feelings.

What have you being doing my precious honeymaker? When we last spoke you said you were going to be going to the funfair coming to town for your birthday.

I imagine that will be nice for you and your friends. It's been years since I went on the

Big Round Wheel and the Slide but we used to love it as kids.

The rides have probably changed a fair bit since then but I'm sure it will be lots of fun all the same.

Let me explain why I got your present in the post late my Stripy One. It was the strangest thing.

We had a lot of jobs on that day and I knew I had much to do before I could get to the post office to deliver your parcel. Oh I do hope you like it.

Anyway this job came up at the last minute and I had to do three whole flats in one morning and that was before all the other things to do!

I'm sure you understand my Bumblebee, it's not that I meant it to be late or anything but I really had no choice.

My savings have been cut short of late so I honestly had to take on the extra work. It turned out to be an impossible job.

When I got there Virtually right there on the doorstep this young man appeared.

He had his coat on. At first I thought it was a duffel coat or a blazer like I have but it wasn't it was made of leather, I ask you!

Believe it or not it all got worse after that!

When I got right up to him not only was his skin ashen, the colour of a dove, imagine that, but he was also unshaved and looked like he'd been dragged through a hedge backwards!

I'm not trying to scare you here my Little Buzzing One but this young man's eyes were utterly red, not a pupil in sight. He immediately reminded me of one of those VICIOUS FUCKING PSYCHOTICS THAT DRAG SOULS INTO HELL with them. I thought the HELLISH BASTARD WAS GOING TO KILL ME RIGHT THERE ON THE FUCKING DOORSTEP but it was okay my Enchanter of Flowers, I'm safe. You already know that hehe, I wouldn't be writing to you now otherwise.

What he did do though was almost as bad. He wouldn't let me in even though I had an official appointment and everything like that.

I tried to persuade him, I really did, but when he leant forwards and stared at my blazer I thought he MEANT TO FUCKING RIP OUT MY FUCKING THROAT WITH HIS CANINES AND EAT MY WINDPIPE there right in front of my own terrified eyes. Then THE BRUTAL CUNT WAS LIKELY TO DRAG ME INTO THE FUCKING HOUSE AND INTO ONE OF THOSE BIG old cellars those nice old houses have THEN SUCK OUT MY EYES WITH HIS FUCKING VACUUM PIPE. IT WAS QUITE A SHOCK TO MY FUCKING SYSTEM YOU UNGRATEFUL LITTLE CUNT what with my fragile health as it is.

I really did try to persuade him despite of his manner and he finally agreed to let me in at eleven o'clock YOU LITTLE FUCKING SLUT I BET YOU'RE UP THE BLEEDING DUFF AGAIN AREN'T you my precious Bumblebee?

I was actually petrified to go back at that time AS HE WAS ALMOST DEFINITELY PLANNING TO HAVE ME RAPED BY VICIOUS MURDERING DOBERMANNS YOU TOTAL FUCKING WRETCH I BET YOU LET OLD MEN IN THE STREET STICK IT IN YOU IN FRONT OF EVERYONE INCLUDING THE FUCKING POLICE YOU SELFISH RETARDED IMBECILE.

When I did go back the man was nowhere to be found. I imagined he was hiding and I was so relieved. I left and later managed to make the appointment again for the next day.

HE WAS TOTALLY FUCKING INSANE ON THE PHONE AND TOLD ME IF I CAME NEAR HIS HOUSE AGAIN HE'D FLAY THE SKIN FROM MY BACK WITH THE VERY SNAKES OF HADES.

Fortunately he looked a lot better when I arrived the following day. He was smartly dressed my Bumblebee AND he was clean shaven. I managed to persuade him that everything was okay although HE DID OFFER ME SEVERAL THOUSAND FUCKING CUPS OF BASTARD TEA I BET HE'D LACED WITH ACID AND POISON AND ALL SORTS OF SHIT YOU COMPLETE SHITBREATH WHOS BEEN A WASTE OF TIME SINCE YOU ARRIVED SCREAMING ON THIS PLANET.

I managed to get the job done though and you know what my Lovely Sign of Springs Arrival?

That's right he gave me the oddest slanted smile as he left. I KNEW HE'D PUT MAD FUCKING CURSES ON MY EVERY FUCKING ACTION FOR ALL ETERNITY AND I BLAME IT ALL ON YOU YOU UTTER CUNT.

Ooh the doorbells ringing so I'll sign off quickly, I expect this is the postman with your birthday present YOU COMPLETE TWISTED BITCH, gotta go my Bumblebee I hope you like it.

Lots of love, your Bumblebee.



THE FURY OF GRACIE MAY

By Claire Godden Rowland

Everything must be perfect. Check again. Straighten the towels. Light the candle, summer meadow, no, the other one, she prefers the other one now. He stopped, took a deep breath, started the breathing exercises he'd got off the internet, you could find anything on there. Do you know how many suicides assisting websites there were? Too many to count, I mean, who needs help with that really, it's pretty simple, but then, he supposed, people do like to be inventive, to make a statement in their final moments.

There, that's better, he was calmer now. He looked around a tidy house and smelled the enticing smells wafting from the kitchen. She'd be pleased, he loved it when she was pleased, how he loved it. When she was happy it was all so good, when she wasn't having a bad day, the days that weren't at all her fault but nearly always due to his failures.

The low growl of her car engine on the drive, silenced following a final snarl, then the cracking, turning, sound of a key in the front door lock. His body went icy cold with anticipation. Breath held awaiting her mood. God, let today be a good day, don't let her be having one of her dark days.

The door slammed shut behind her, for a moment she was shadowed in darkness, a spectre in the gloom, and then she stepped forward into the dim light of the hall. She sighed heavily and gave him an

unreadable half smile. His heart swelled with happiness; it was a good day. She looked exhausted, poor dear, such a long day being a doctor. He immediately took her heavy bag and placed it in the office, next to the left side of the desk, where she liked it. He hurried back in time to take her jacket from her exhausted hands and place it carefully on a hanger in the downstairs closet, as she liked it. Her handbag went on the hanger beside it.

She inhaled the cooking smells emanating from down the hall and moaned with an almost sexual pleasure. 'Oh, that smells good Baby. Is it casserole?'

'It is,' he confirmed, brimming with pleasure and pride at his success.

'Oh perfect, I am just in the mood for one of your chicken casseroles.'

His heart froze in its chest, fluttering, holding its breath like a frightened child. 'Gracie May?'

'Yes Dear heart.'

'It's pork.'

'What?'

'It's pork.'

'It's what?'

'I'm so sorry Gracie May but it's pork.'

'Pork fucking casserole!' She balled her fists by her side and closed her eyes impatiently, her lower teeth protruding as she attempted to control her bubbling temper. 'Pork casserole ... When you knew I wanted chicken, you did pork. Jesus, why do you do this shit to me? I've had a really long day and' She took a deep breath, eyes closed once more as if seeking patience behind her agitated eye lids. 'Alright, that's okay; we'll have bastard pork casserole. Who cares what I want right?'

She marched toward the kitchen; painted toe nails opaque through the veil of nylon which shrouded them. She muttered over and over 'pork fucking casserole' and he flinched every time, foreboding growing like a cancer in his chest, making it hard to breathe.

When he realised what she was doing it was too late. He gasped but before he could stop her she had wrenched the cupboard doors and flung them open. Her eyes grew wide with utter horror as she took in the wine bottles before her, labels cast haphazardly in every direction, some completely turned around, the whole cupboard just jumbled beyond all recognition.

She stumbled back, covering her mouth in disgust. 'My god ...' she whispered.

'Gracie May I'm sorry, I haven't had time ...'

Her hand connected with his cheek with a resonating slapping sound and he

stumbled back. She was glaring at him with wild eyes full of fury.

'Why do you do it?' she screamed, incensed with rage. 'Why do you do these things to me?'

'I'm sorry Gracie May,' he whimpered stumbling back away from her.

'Do I deserve this?'

'No,' he pleaded meekly, shaking his head. 'I forgot ... I'm sorry ...'

'Must I do everything myself? Get no support or help at all? Do I really ask so much of you?'

'No' Another slap assailed him and he stumbled back helplessly. She gave him a kick to the thighs sending him sprawling across the floor, banging his head against the wall where he cowered.

'You think I want to come home to this?' She demanded, stepping over him. 'Why do you make me do this?'

'Please Gracie May ...' He whined feebly.

'I've been at work all day, and then I have to come home to this.' She reached down behind the comfy chair and pulled out a dark brown belt, coiled like a serpent in her claws. She turned to him. 'I don't deserve this, I've had such a long day and then I have to come home to this. It's like you hate me, do you hate me, why? Why?'

He held up shaking hands in surrender. 'Please Gracie May, I'm so sorry; I know I've let you down.'

She slowed in her assault and lowered the belt a little, eye brows raised, expectant, and waiting.

'I know you don't need this, to come home to my failures. I'll do better, I'll make it better, I swear I will Gracie May.'

She dropped her head and placed a hand to her face, her shoulders trembled helplessly as she began to sob.

'Oh don't cry Gracie May, please don't cry, I can't bear to see you cry.'

Her whole body shuddered furiously and high pitched animal like keening sounds came from beneath her hand which still smothered her face. 'Oh god, I hate this, I hate that you make me like this. I hate myself for hurting you, you must know that.'

'I do, of course I do, you have such a gentle soul. I push you to this, I know I do.' He went to stand but froze as her crying stopped abruptly. She lifted her face rapidly from her hand, dry eyes glistening. She sniffed. She glared down at him. She sniffed again.

'Baby?'

'Yes Gracie May.'

'Is that summer meadow I can smell?'

'No Gracie May,' he answered excitedly. 'No, it's the other one, the new one.'

It was too much; he'd pushed her too far, why did he torment her like this? Fury burned so hot it scalded her insides, pained her aching chest. What kind of a man tortures his wife in this way, pushing and pushing with his vicious brand of mental cruelty? That's what it was, it was a form of abuse, no wonder she got so upset, she was really just protecting herself, fighting her corner; any woman would do the same. How dare he treat her this way, it was unforgivable, and although she knew she'd be terribly sorry later she knew what she had to do.

He fell to the floor face first as she tore his shirt open. Across his back was a lattice of angry welt marks spider webbing across the ruined flesh. He cried out as the searing pain tore across his skin, the belt lashing down opening the scars like hungry little lips revealing blood red tongues gleaming within. His cries were pitiful and anguished as the red hot pain tore through him; Humiliating torture burning in every vein and artery which raced like electricity through his body.

Gracie May wielded the belt like a gladiator's whip as her attention was stolen by the distant vibrating call of her phone. She threw the belt at him and he curled up into a foetal position, clutching his knees to him.

'Why do you have to put my bag away, it's like you want to piss me off?' She shouted as she hurried down the hallway, throwing open the closet door and scrambling about

in her bag. She snapped the phone open, 'Doctor Gray Hmm, I see No, don't be silly, it's fine to call me at home ... no, not at all, I'm happy to help. I'm on my way; I'll be there in ten minutes. No, please calm down ... she'll be fine, keep her temperature down How old is she? Six, then yes, please do give her some pain relief ... I'm on my way, just try and keep her cool and comfortable.'

Gracie May snapped her phone shut. 'I can't do this now okay?'

He pulled himself to his knees and crouched there as if praying submissively before her. She touched his cheek tenderly and he didn't flinch for he knew it was over now. 'You know I love you right? I'm sorry we've had our little fall out, it's probably my fault. It's just that I love you so much and I so badly want things right between us. You know I love to air any disagreements straight away to stop them festering, to make things good between us. You know I hate to hurt you Baby, it hurts me so much more than it does you, you know that, right?'

He nodded miserably.

She sighed impatiently. 'Alright then, clearly you don't.'

'I do!' He answered quickly. 'I do Gracie May, I'm sorry; I hate it when we quarrel.'

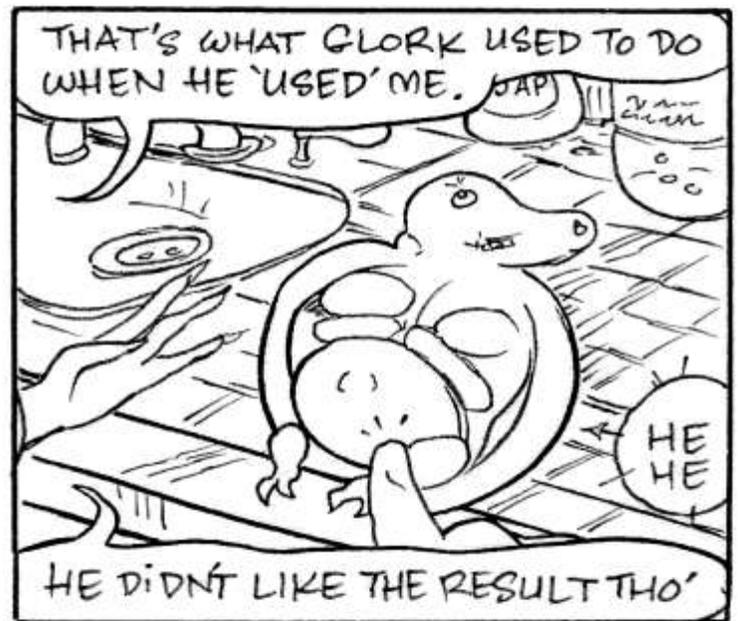
She shook her head sadly as she buttoned her coat up. 'It's hardly a fair fight now is it? I'm a woman and you're a man so you'll always physically over power me.'

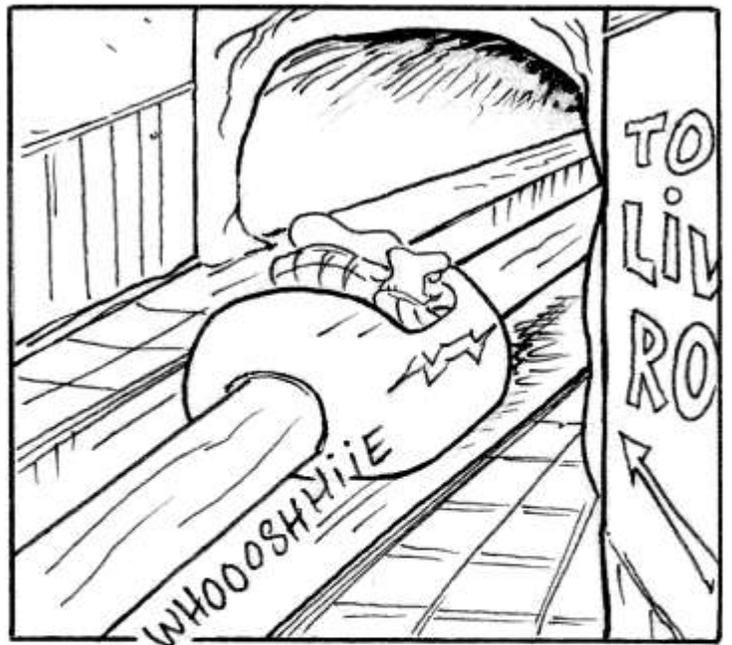
'I'm sorry Gracie May,' he muttered numbly for want of anything else to say.

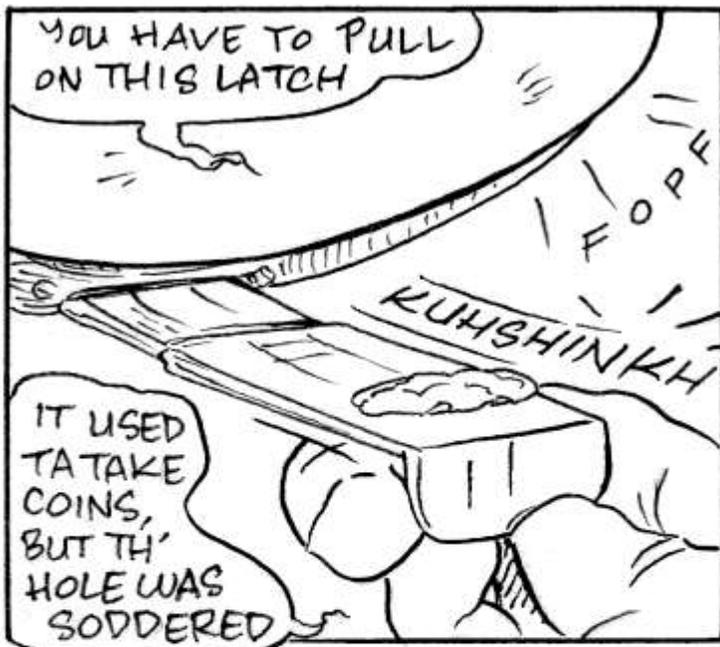
She smiled down at him warmly. 'Let's not say any more about it, I forgive you, you silly thing. I always do, don't I. Now be a dear heart and clear up that mess on the carpet. That will stain something chronic. Salt water should fix it. And here, I have some cream to ease your back, should stop it scarring.' She handed him the little tube and kissed his forehead. Then she wafted out of the front door, slamming it behind her.

For a moment he stayed crouched on the floor, his back throbbing and burning, his shirt torn and ruined in his hands. He glanced around at the blood spatters on the cream carpet. She'd be very upset if they were still there when she got home. He sighed and pulled himself to his feet. It wasn't problem, he'd tackled these stains before, and he knew exactly how to make the carpet appear clean once more.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME









THE MAN WITH THE BIG PANTS

By Hank Kirton

Photos © Max Reeves

October 24th, 1987

It was late and the man with the big pants was waiting for her. He was standing beside the doorway to Rexall Drugs, trying to stay out of the late autumn rain. He could feel the cold, rough bricks through his thin wind-breaker and he held his coffee cup with both hands, trying without success to keep warm. He'd bought the coffee only five minutes ago - not even - and it was already going cold. Shit.

"Shit. Shit fucking motherfucking shit," said the man with the big pants. Where was she

already?

The man with the big pants had quit smoking two days ago and right now he could strangle someone for a cigarette. He was quick to anger now that he was a non-smoker. And everything took too long; cooking, commercial breaks, lines, conversations. The night took forever. Everything was annoying now that the man with the big pants was a non-smoker. He took a cold sip of coffee. Shit, it was cold.

A woman bustled out of the Rexall, her arms full of fluttering plastic bags. Christ,

what'd she buy - the whole fucking store? She dropped one of her bags and cursed under her breath. It landed by the man with the big pants' feet but he didn't bother to bend over and pick it up for her.

Nah, fuck you, thought the man with the big pants. The woman picked it up herself, juggling all her bags, muttering. The man with the big pants hoped she'd fumble and drop more, but no, she managed to safely gather them all. She cast him a shitty look - a slap-worthy look, really - and then waddled off into the rain.

Good, get lost, you fat old twat, said the man with the big pants, not out loud.

The man with the big pants shifted from foot to foot. He looked in the drug store like a hungry dog, at the vertical rows of cigarettes behind the counter. Where the hell was she? He wasn't going to wait in the cold and the rain and the elements much longer, that was for sure. He wouldn't wait forever.

Headlights splashed through a puddle; refractions of wet light ahead of him and then her car was there. The man with the big pants tossed his cold, half-full coffee over his shoulder and walked to the car. The door was locked. He waited a second and tried it again. Still locked. Oh, what the fuck! He moved to the driver's side door. She rolled the window halfway down.

"Hey, Linda," said the man with the big pants. "How are you?"

Her face did not look happy. Her eyes were dark, angry; her hair in disarray, sticking up like she'd just tumbled out of bed. She wore no makeup. She didn't answer his question.

The man with the big pants said, "Hey, could you let me in the car?"

"No."

"But it's raining like a motherfucker out here."

"I don't care. Do you have it?"

"Couldn't you just let me in the car? I'm getting soaked out here, look at this shit..." He lifted his hands and tilted his head back to indicate that it was raining on him.

Linda shook her head. "You're lucky I'm here at all. If it wasn't for Tina..."

"Leave her out of it."

"You brought her into it. Do you have it?"

"Yeah, I do. I do have it, just open the door and I'll..."

"No. You're not getting in this car."

"Oh, c'mon, Linda. It's not like I'm gonna, like, do anything or anything..."

"Just fucking give it to me."

The man with the big pants looked around the parking lot. "Shit." He pulled a small metal box from his jacket pocket. It was a box for storing decks of playing cards. It was black and white and a blue rubber band held the old tin lid in place. He handed it to her.

"Thank you," she said, a lacing of sarcasm in her tone.

"Okay, you have it now. I made good. Now can I get in?"

She made a face. "What the hell for?" She punched in the car lighter.

"Gimme a ride home?"



She laughed and lifted a cigarette to her mouth.

“Oh come on, Linda. It’s fucking pouring out here. You want me to catch pneumonia?”

“Well, yeah. I do, actually.” She lit her cigarette, took a deep drag. “That or rectal cancer.”

“Fuck you.”

She blew smoke in his face and said, “Fuck you too, asshole.”

The man with the big pants punched her hard in the face, breaking her nose. It was a sudden surprise for both of them. Her cigarette fell and she sucked in a breath, “Uhn...”

He hit her again, on the jaw this time. The middle of her face was an explosion of dark blood. He punched her again on the left temple, and her eyes fluttered white and she flopped over the steering wheel.

The man with the big pants reached in, unlocked the door and shoved her over to the shotgun side. He took over the wheel and pulled out of the parking lot.

Linda murmured: “Stop it...stop... don’t...”

“Just relax, sweetheart,” the man with the big pants told her. “It’ll all be over in a minute.” And then he hit her again.

He drove with purpose, with clarity. He felt calm, confident. He noticed there was no voice of reason nagging him in his head and he took this as a positive sign. He also realized he didn’t want a cigarette anymore

and decided this was another good sign. He was doing the right thing.

The man with the big pants turned on the radio and drove toward the river listening to Boz Scaggs's *Lowdown*.

When Linda tried to sit up, the man with the big pants punched the back of her head and told her, "Stay the fuck down!"

With both hands on the wheel, he noticed his knuckles were torn and bleeding, yet they did not hurt. Another good sign.

The McKenzie River was a dark, wide, sluggish thing that snaked through a labyrinth of old, stone mills for a good five miles before it emptied into the thick, oily cesspool of Lake Grundson. The man with the big pants stopped at an old, stone trestle - the timber bridge having rotted away decades ago.

He aimed the car toward the edge of the trestle, yanked up the emergency break, and then opened the door and pulled Linda back behind the wheel. She murmured something that made no sense and then fell silent again.

The man with the big pants reclaimed the playing-card box and stepped into the rain. He moved to the back of the car, opened the box, and removed a stack of photographs. He lowered them close to the glow of the taillights.

Tina on Christmas morning, kneeling under the tree, showing off her new Cabbage Patch Kid, smiling with a missing tooth. The man with the big pants smiled back. Those stupid dolls caused riots in the stores. They came with actual birth certificates, didn't they? Fucking stupid.

Tina at the ocean, digging in the sand, her

fine blond hair blowing into her eyes as she grinned up at the camera.

Tina and Linda posing in the back yard. Tina was wearing her new Brownie uniform. Linda wore a striped tube-top and cut-off jeans. She was holding a cigarette in one hand and a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon in the other. She always ruined pictures by making herself look unhappy.

The man with the big pants grunted and then placed the pictures back in the box. He walked around to the front of the car, shifted it into neutral, and then released the emergency break. Linda was still out cold.

He shut the door, locked it, and then reached through the window, grabbed the wheel, and started rolling the car toward the ledge of the trestle.

The ground sloped downward and as soon as the car had gained enough speed, the man with the big pants let go. He didn't realize he'd shut the door on the flap of his jacket.

The man with the big pants panicked and tried to wrestle his way out of his jacket. "Fuck..."

When the car started over the edge, he dug his heels into the dirt, trying to tear himself free of the material. "Fuck!"

As the car tipped forward the man with the big pants relaxed, bent forward, extended his arms and the jacket slipped away. Linda and the car and his jacket plummeted into the river with a loud splash.

The man with the big pants thought; *Jesus Christ! That was close!* and then leaned over the ledge of the trestle.

He watched Linda's car sink into a black

swirl of bubbles and ripples and steam.

And then it was gone, underwater. Only the two red eyes of the taillights could be seen, peering up like a polluted sea serpent.

And then the red eyes went dark, blind.

The man with the big pants stared at the black current for a while, feeling the cold rain on his face. He realized the box of pictures had been in the pocket of his windbreaker. Damn.

He waited; looking into the murk, until he was sure Linda had safely drowned. Then

he turned and started back toward town. The rain had picked up, the wind too, and the man with the big pants cursed the world for the loss of his jacket.

He was at least five miles from home. He'd get pneumonia for sure. Fucking Linda, what a cunt.

But at least he had Tina, his darling daughter. She belonged to him now. She'd just turned thirteen and custody was now guaranteed.

Oh, what wonderful days lay ahead...





VIOLET

By Claudia Bellocq

Art © Lana Gentry

Violet lay on her back in the damp earth in the clearing beside the river. The soil smelled heavily musky, post rain~fall. She lay there, staring straight ahead, which

from this vantage point meant she was looking at the dark ominous clouds, moving swiftly, bringing with them threat of violence.

She clenched each of her outspread hands into a coarse set of claws and dug her bony fingers into the earth, angrily scratching into the surface of the clearing just beside her body. She glanced at the pattern it left. Compelled, she dug her nails in further, repeatedly, until a criss-cross pattern of scarred earth encased her. She exhaled a deep and satisfied sigh. Her work was beautiful. Just like the marks on her body, it mirrored her anguish. Her own upper arms, wrists, inner thighs and belly bore the same patterns, now as traces of white raised keloids from when she had learnt (unfortunately for her own aesthetic standards) that she did not heal too well from scars.

A tear fell from her deep green eyes and trickled lazily down her cheek. She let it run, echoing the flow of the river beside her. No~one understood her... no~one. Everyone let her down in the end... everyone.

Violet's sense of beauty was crushingly painful. It was both her blessing and her curse, but mostly it was her curse. It destroyed her. A child born in the wrong time. A Victorian lady of pride and etiquette, trapped in a vulgar consumer generation that could only ever mock a strange and haunting woman dressed in long, deep coloured clothing, velvet coats, tumbling fire~red curls surrounding a coquettish face of immense soul.

Her most recent encounter with love had left her dead inside, uncertain already about being incarnated in a human (so ugly) body, she wanted to take her leave. She was battling the urge to do so.

Opening her bag, all covered in painstakingly stitched on ivy and the feathers of all manner of crows, ravens and birds of omen and portent, she took out a sharp razor, a small square of white muslin cloth and a bottle of some liquid that promised to clean up the bloody mess she was certain to make.

She sat upright and tore at the sleeve of her dress. Her dirt embedded fingernails left a rough trail of wet earth etched along her forearm. She gazed blankly at the surface of the water and made the first incision.

Normally, upon doing so, she would remain silent. This time, she let out a howl of the most dreadful, strangled nature and dropped towards the earth, pounding her fists into the wet leaves of the old beech at whose foot she sat. It was in that moment that she knew she could not leave; that she was beaten. A hollow victory.

Angry, she began to prowl, ferocious, looking for an outlet. She had to have a new outlet. Breaking the strong arm of one of the branches of the tree, she took her blade and honed the branch, working meticulously, beginning the work of purging herself as she worked. When she had finished she

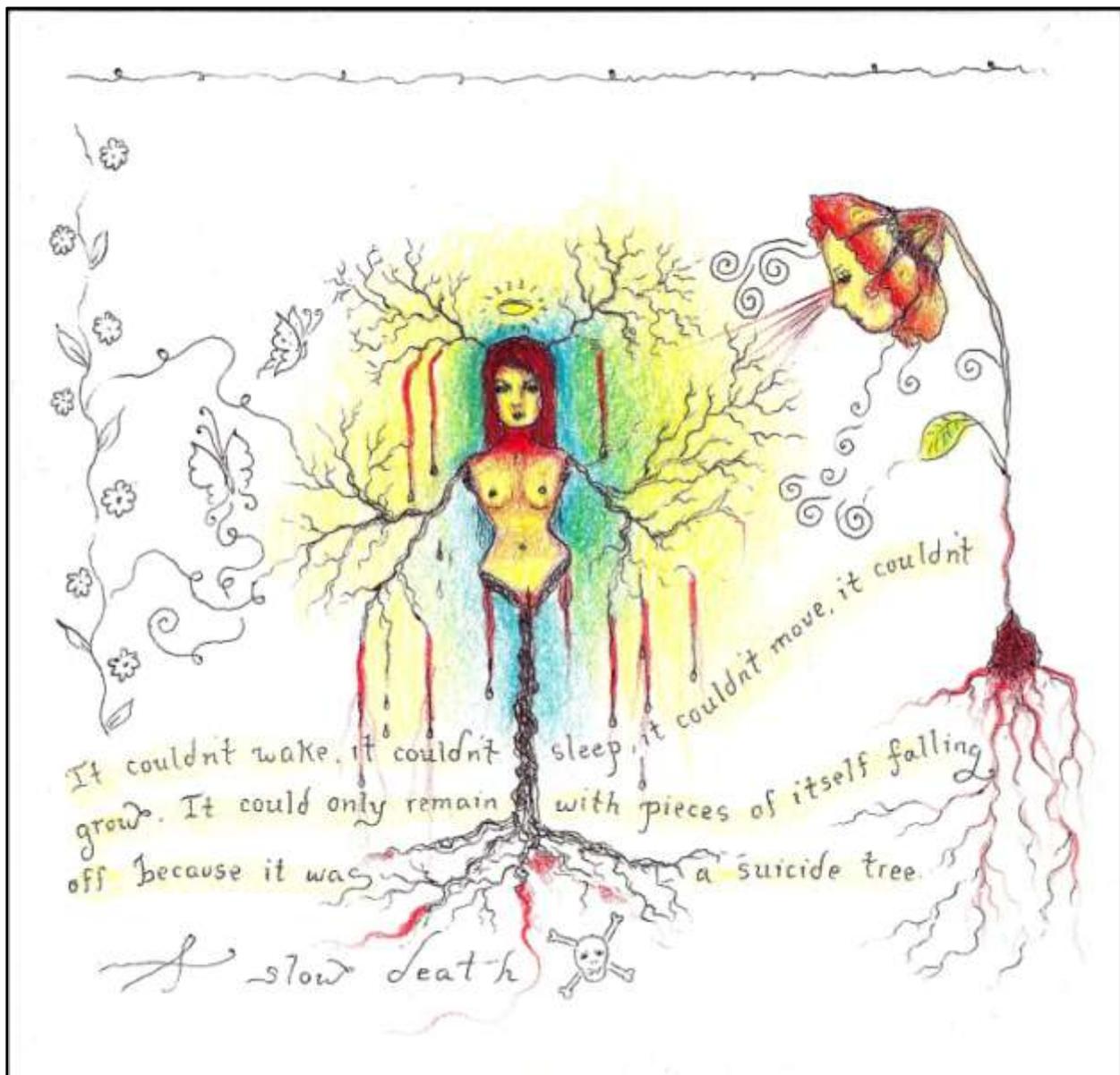
returned to her original place lying prone on the damp earth and lifted her petticoats.

Pulling her lace undergarments to one side she pushed the shaped branch into herself and began to weep in long, fat, dirt streaked tears as she worked herself to orgasm. Shuddering as she came, she allowed her body to follow its natural gravitational pull

towards the river and fell softly into the water.

As she stood bedraggled and sated, she took the razor from her pocket and let the river wash it away.

She mourned its passing as one might mourn a lost limb.





JAMES JACKSON TOTH - TROUBADOUR SAVANT

By Robert Earl Reed

Photo Courtesy of Young God Records

From the Young God Website on James Jackson Toth:

"James Jackson Toth, AKA Wooden Wand is your fearless friend, the stumbling guy that goes out and gets himself into some incredibly fucked-up situations but comes out shining and lives to tell you all about it, entertaining you safely and immensely. You should be grateful. His songs are beautiful, indisputably, both musically and lyrically, and they'll give you joy if you listen to them. In my view, he's a great American songwriter in full bloom."

There are literally a deep sea of voices available at the click of a mouse to today's listener of music. The Internet has made it possible for anyone to record and publish anything for the world ears to hear. To rise above the sea to be heard by a wanting audience is something very special indeed. James Jackson Toth is one such special artist. Hailing from Brooklyn, NY James Jackson Toth (aka Wooden Wand), is an unconventional and unbridled savant of sound. From Folk to Psychedelia listeners of his music will find many iterations of a

musical soul in perpetual development. In a seemingly constant state of flux and movement Toth weaves an honest hard working eclectic soundscape.

Now plying his craft for the Michael Gira (Swans) owned Young God Records James' latest release is *Death Seat* and is released under his "Wooden Wand" moniker. I caught up to James upon his return from a European tour in support of his label mate, Swans.

Robert Earl Reed: How did you come to sign with Young God Records?

James Jackson Toth: Michael and I have been friends for years, but the time was never right to work together. When it was, I think we both jumped at the chance. I know that's a prosaic response, but there wasn't much more to it than that.

Your songs as interpreted by a wealth of reviewers seemingly are greatly autobiographical ...Is this the case?

Not as much as you'd think. I think everything anybody writes has an element of autobiography in it. Even if you read a science fiction novel, there are usually characters, with personalities, and the author obviously needed to draw from his own personal experiences so that he could give XYLO-665 (I made that up) a voice or whatever, you know? So I draw from things I see, hear, read, etc. The autobiographical stuff isn't usually the 'bummer' tunes, with the possible exception of my album *Born Bad*, which was just inexpensive therapy, really. I'm a pretty happy guy.

What recurring themes do you believe are prevalent in your music?

I think if you printed out all my lyrics and did a Microsoft Word search for repeated

phrases, I think 'death,' 'blood,' and, inexplicably, the word 'incalculable' come up a lot. But I'm drawn to the perennial themes of light and dark, good and evil, that sort of thing. In this way I am hopelessly derivative, and am under no allusions about that, but it works for Robert Johnson, it works for Danzig, and it works for me.

If you could ask yourself a question concerning your music... something that you would like the world to know about your music... What would that be?

The interviews I enjoy most are when an interviewer uses something I've already responded to and builds follow-up questions from it, creating an interesting conversation more than a mundane sort of rapid fire Tiger Beat situation. "What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?" That sorta thing. I think maybe interviews should be about one thing. But like most self-important artist types, I generally prefer to speak through the music.

It appears that throughout your career you have made music on your own terms. What has happened to music as a whole in your mind?

I just think I'm constantly in transition. I'm creating a body of work, with all the associated mistakes and errors in judgment germane to doing that. All of my heroes - from Neil to Lou to Bob - have questionable releases in their respective catalogs, to say the least. But the story is more interesting with Everybody's Rockin, Mistrial, and Slow Train Comin in it, simply because those records sound like an artist following a specific muse and not compromising. I'm not interested in being a 'New Dylan' for three months and then never being heard from again. I want to look back on a body of work that makes sense to me and hopefully to some others.

*How many songs do you have in your catalog?
Do you know?*

Thousands. You have to write 100 bad ones to write ten good ones. I write constantly. It's a sickness.

Why do you think that you possess the near superhuman ability to turn out such a mass of quality material?

Not sure – but I don't ask. I'm superstitious about it. Maybe it's a result of a biological mutation. These things occur to me and I'm not always thankful, because my imagination prevents me from living a normal life. Lots of people hear voices – luckily, mine don't tell me to kill or anything. Mine tell me to write things down so I can sing them later. Mine say things like "Ooh, you hear what that lady on the bus just said? That would make a great first line. Get your little notebook out, pronto."

What music do you enjoy listening to? What artists from any discipline from visual arts to writing to music have inspired you to create?

At various times in my life I have been inspired by many different types of music. Literature, film and art inspire me as well, but none to the degree that music does. More than any specific artist. I can say I am a believer in the 'album' – a student. I have always questioned things like album sequence, cover art, production choices. On my darkest, most lethargic and depressed days, I am still obsessed with music, and music still turns me on and gets me going. Another curse, I reckon. Ha!

Please tell us more about your Kickstarter Campaign?

I'm recording a record in Alabama in April with some talented friends. It will be a limited vinyl release. We're just testing the

waters at this point, but so far, so good. The outpouring of support was affirming. There's still a few weeks left to pledge! Go check it out!

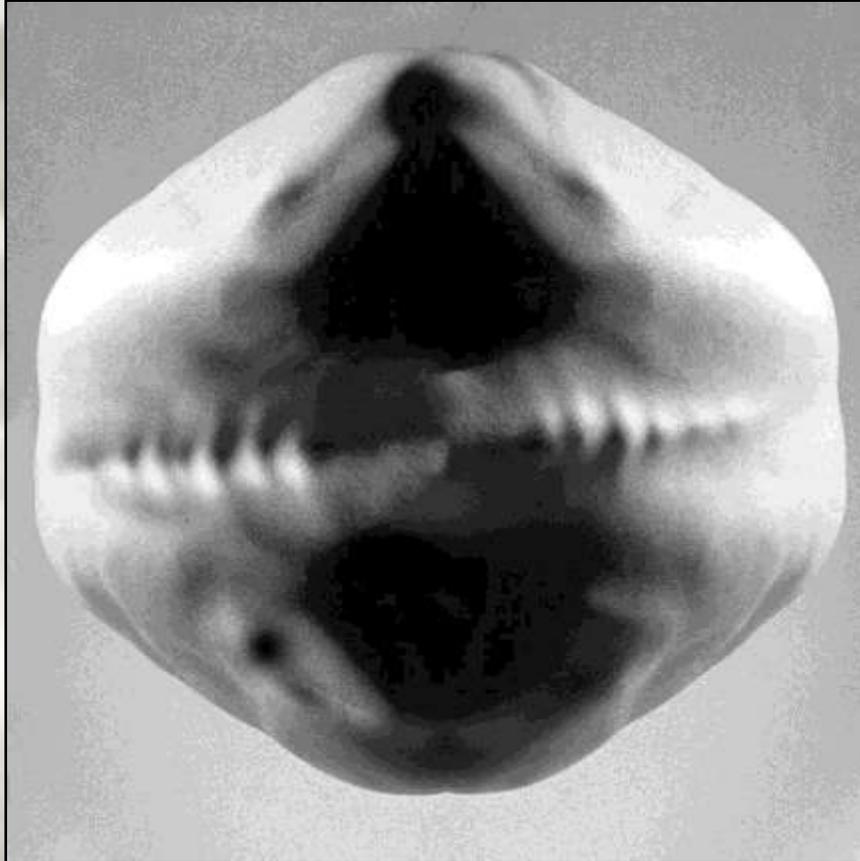
<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/655828434/wooden-wand-and-the-briarwood-virgins-lp>

In your Kickstarter Campaign you offer supporters at various levels of support more than just music. Please expound on the Campaign and how it breaks the mold so to speak of the artist to fan relationship.

I think that's just the way the winds are blowing. I'm not going to say it feels entirely natural to be commiserating socially (i.e. Facebook, Myspace, etc) with the same people who buy my records, but I think grassroots is the way to go, and things like Kickstarter and Bandcamp and living room shows seem to provide a direct link between artist and listener. It's a mutually beneficial arrangement, and people seem less likely to steal from you when they're able to buy your record from you and shake your hand afterward. I think that's great. The days of Hammer of the Gods and Gimme Shelter – or even Guns n Roses trashing hotel rooms or whatever – are long over and aren't coming back. Reading books about the 'glory days' of rock and roll is like reading about Ancient Greece or Vietnam. It's an illusion now, and absorbing those mythologies has become a toxic endeavor. At least for me.

Your music honestly looks where the masses fear to peer ... What allows you see in the "underbelly of life"?

I guess I'm just fascinated by humanism and all that it entails. Like I sing in one of my songs "We must also love the thieves / and we must also love the liars / because some truth can be found in these." I think that sums it up.



BLIND-WORM CYCLE (4 EXTRACTS)

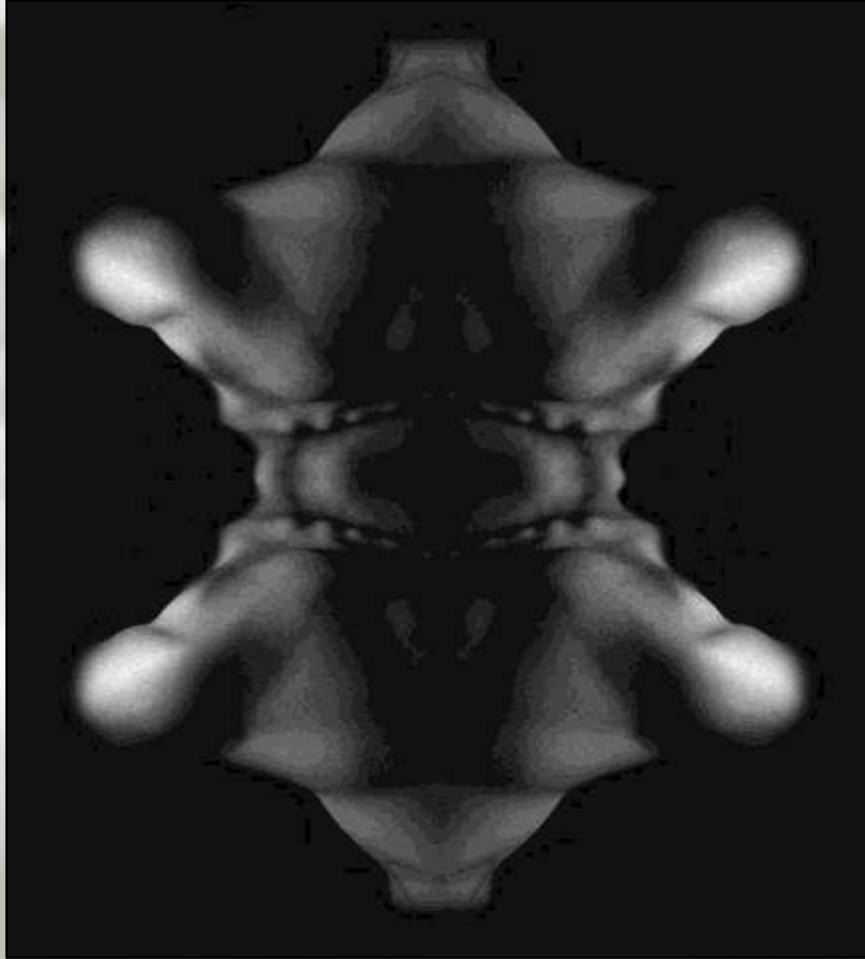
By Christopher Brownsword

Images © Garry Vettori

Seek ye all...constantly to unite yourselves in rapture with each and every thing that is, and that by utmost passion and lust of Union. To this end take chiefly all such things as are naturally repulsive. For what is pleasant is assimilated easily and without ecstasy: it is in the transfiguration of the loathsome and abhorred into The Beloved that the Self is shaken to the root in Love. - Aleister Crowley De Lege Libellum

The smell of damp crevices mingles with that of decaying vegetable matter, paint stripper, vomit, sour dish rags, burnt fuses, soiled linen and vase water partly to repel the olfactory senses and partly to attract them. It is seven p.m. on a day without sunshine, without light; a day of bite marks and scabs. In the corner of the room, each one coiled and knotted about the other whilst pulsating with a hunger that shall never fully be satisfied,

parasitic worms spill from the husk of a bird that earlier I swatted to the carpet with the back of my hand. Soon these tiny worms will be gathered in my palm then tipped one at a time into my mouth. It is best, I have found by practice, to clench one between my teeth, to feel it twisting, suspended in midair, doomed, brushing with its head my cracked and blistered lips, then rip it in two. The taste is bitter and sharp, a tangy feast; a delicacy to be sure.///////Having manipulated herself into a foetal position, N sleeps beside me on the bed. Her breathing is distant and hollow, a timbre evocative of faulty drainage systems, unfocussed somehow, estranged from her breasts where they rise and fall out of rhythm to it. I masturbate furiously in her shadow and pray the din will not awaken the reptiles which nest in her pubic mound - greased with saliva and the sap of plants dissected under a red Sabbath moon. The ferocity of my deed is such that any moment now the frenum connecting the head of my cock (pointing at zero degrees against my abdomen with only the mildest of curvatures at the midpoint of its projection) to the skin beneath threatens to snap. The thought of this drives me towards a violent climax. I lean over N and take the air she releases from her mouth into my lungs; a taste of dandelions and cement. My free hand, the one that murdered the bird, the one that trembles with anticipation as it prepares shortly to grab a clump of worms, the one that death has unmistakably emboldened, drops to N's face, closes upon her eyes, caresses the bridge of her nose, the Roman arc, a finger pressing into her nostril, extracting from inside it a crust of snot that I immediately place for storage behind my ear, moves towards her mouth, her tongue sliding out to moisten her lips (the pleasure to be attained in my tearing out that tongue, to wear it as an amulet around my neck, to dangle it from my balls), her chin, the indentation segmenting it at the centre, then lower still; her throat imprinted with bite marks, raised with scabs, the cricoid cartilage vibrating lightly, sending out its frequency to be decoded on other planes, her breasts as they continue to rise and fall out of sync with her breathing, her nipples which react instinctively by hardening, her belly button, a stray hair growing through a mole to the side of it, her thighs, buttocks and hips creased by the elastic from her underwear, the small of her back into which spurts my bloodied spunk, a half-circle of acne at the topmost angle of her pelvis...But not her pubic mound...Not to awaken the reptiles.

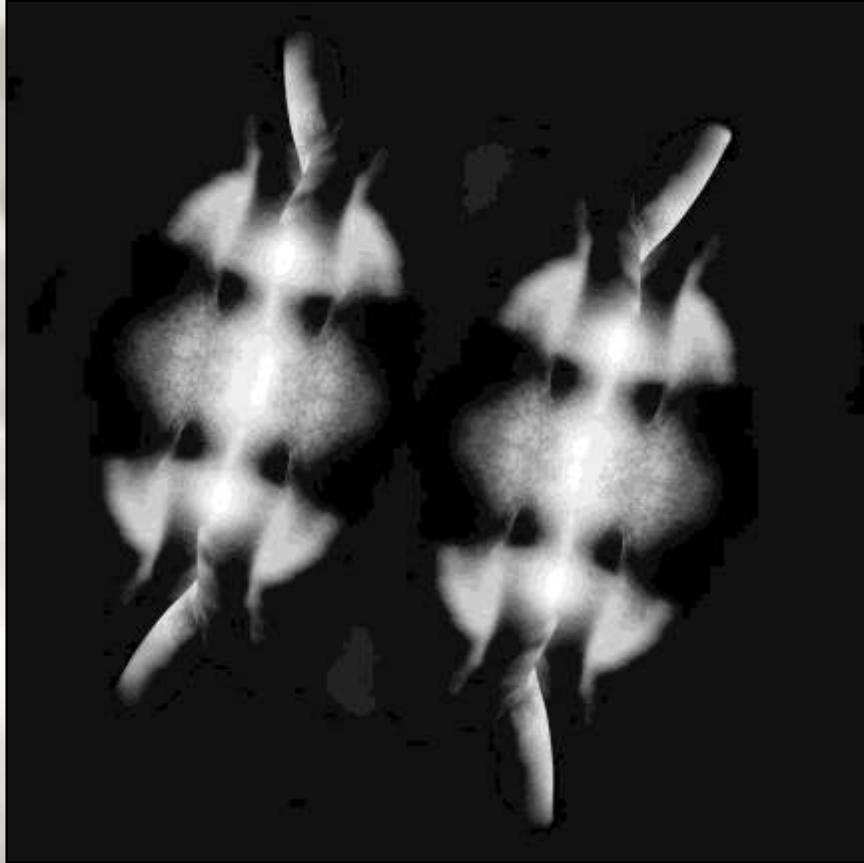


Woodlice have made for themselves a homestead of my balls. A hint of ammonia rises from my cock. It would be simple enough to remove them: scalpels as with hypodermics bend entirely to the will of the hand that wields them. Yet their presence dissolves the isolation I feel within my own skin. It is one thing to share the mattress with N, to pillage the heat given off by her body, and, during coition, to digest her vital energy force, to siphon it like a leech, but quite another to recognise a part of myself that is shared with crustaceans, pulling me back inexorably towards the primordial muck out of which humanity first writhed. If only the woodlice were capable of expedient growth in accordance with that of primitive man raping his fellow apes to create a more brutal and vicious hybrid I would pierce my scrotal sac, hack them out and lie with them at night rather than N. I would split open their shells using pliers blunted by rust and pour myself inside them. I would clothe myself in a suit crafted with the utmost care from exoskeletal sheddings whilst, impelled by an

eternal compulsion, the woodlice cannibalise each other, ignoring completely the collection of damp wood and strawberries spread out before them on the mattress. Reign of Isopoda! I would select from among their ranks a female, lick her head and kick her in the back with my heels, then, assuming a diagonal position to one side of her on the mattress, incense screening the room, the flames of candles nailed upon their wicks, commence to breed. I would entreat her with words of endearment; 'bibble bug, cud-worm, coffin-cutter, monkey pea, penny pig, sink louse, tiggyhog, armadillo bug, cheeselog, doodlebug, pill bug, roly poly, potato bug, sow bug, grammersow, chuggypig, darling, baby, buttercup, cutie, honey-bunny, sweetheart, sugar, cupcake, peaches, cutesy-pie, doll-face, kitten, love-muffin, pussy-cat, cuddles, lady of the thousand sunsets, with your eyes of chutney, with your gilded antennae, with your odour of brothel toilets, chuggypig, sink louse, sow bug, darling, darling, darling...apple of my dripping, syphilitic eye!' The nights with her would pass in violent symbiosis. Invertebrates comprehend neither charity nor mercy; I would thus deny her both.

We dine on locusts and grasshoppers fried in batter and served with rice. The heat in the room tonight is unbearable, everything stifled and dead; the plants on the windowsill shed their corollas then rot; the bodies of moths disintegrate when touched, leaving as testament to their existence only a dried silver powder upon the fingertips. Reduced to mild forms of self-mutilation, N picks scabs from her arms then adds them to the rice. 'Care to try some?' she grins. 'They're quite the delicacy.' A shudder runs through me. I stare at the scabs, the mottled lumps in various shades of red; burgundy, auburn, cherry, ruby, scarlet, crimson, and there, at the centre, raised to a pinnacle at the point of coagulation, where the blood amalgamated and became cicatrized, a hue so deep, so thoroughly compressed, that at first glance it seems black. A thread of skin twists in the air from the base of one such scab. With excitement and trepidation I hold out my dish.//////////Pull it tighter!' The rope compresses N's oesophagus, making her pupils dilate in response. Her muscles become taut as she gasps for breath; her diaphragm lifted by three half inches. 'Tighter!' She chokes the words out and I comply - her eyes protruding from their sockets. Standing behind her, catching

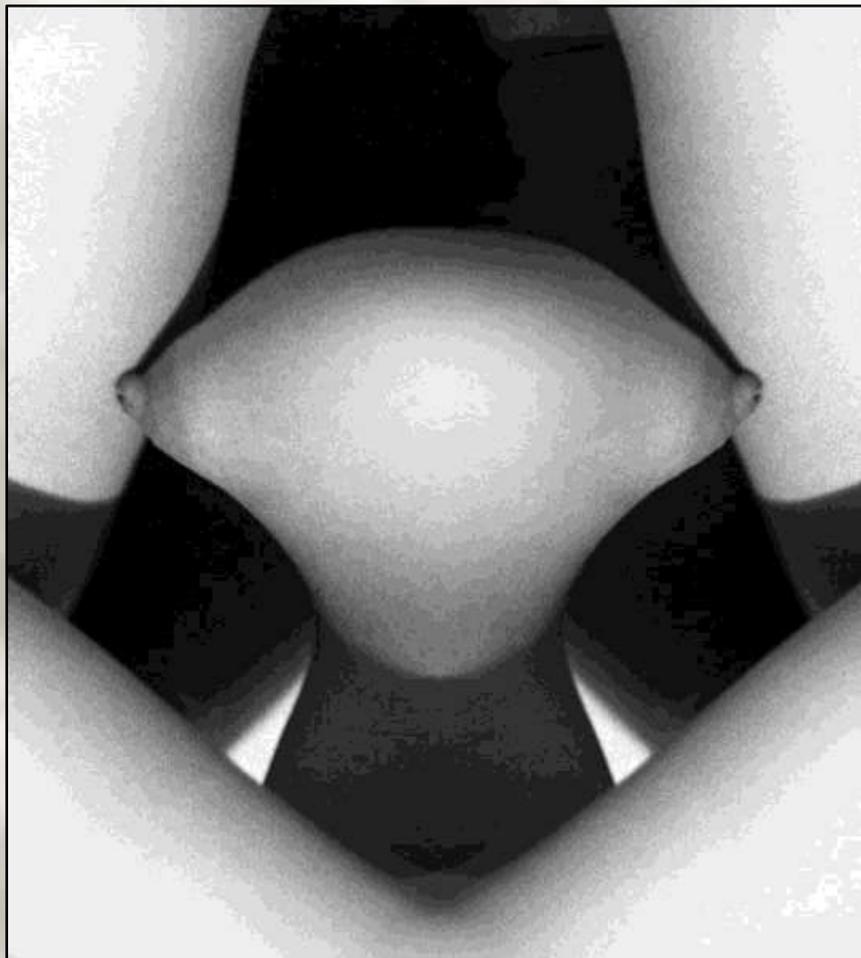
the occasional spasm and tremble of her thighs, I begin to feel I might puke with an expressive delight. A quiver in her abdominal zone informs me N is about to come. I anticipate the gushing of her juices greedily; a fountain to drink from, to wash down the scabs that stick in my throat. 'A little, ugh, just a little more.' She draws her right arm to my mouth. A hole left by one of the scabs has begun to weep. Pus at the egress oozes in a thin streak to her wrist. I glue my lips to it then suck.///////As N's sphincter relaxes, consequent to the tension accompanying orgasm, the contents of her bowels are emptied at my feet. I slide my cock between her arse cheeks, rotating it about the shaft of this shit-smear'd rose until the petals become receptive. With my first two strokes I tease out from N's hot innards a fart that smells exactly like the dejecta squelching along the length of my cock. Her hands grip her buttocks, pulling them apart when I retract my pelvis then squeezing them together as I push back again. Her sphincter tightens; it fixes my cock in place, the base of my cock brushing against a number of small hairs at the entrance to the anus. 'Make it burn,' N demands. I grind with abandon, keeping my cock buried to the hilt. 'Come inside me,' continues N, her face turned to meet mine, 'I want you to fill my arse with spunk. I want to shit and fart it out; for it to dribble down my calves.' At the moment of ejaculation I dig my fingers into the hind side of N's neck, taking reign of the atlas of the vertebral column and rip free with one almighty tug her spine. Her body falls to the carpet, its viscosity analogous to that of a slug or jellyfish; gelatinous and filled mostly with water.///////Separated from the vertebral column, N is soon to expire as a virus ejected from the bloodstream of its host. From the pelvic curve through the lumbar, thoracic and cervical regions, the mast that once held N to a vertical axis appears odontoid in structure, this tooth-like monument achieving its apotheosis in the bottom half of N's skull; the mandible that has broken away with the spine.///////In the palm of my hand there is semen mingled with shit and blood collected from N's anus. Quickly, before the blood has chance to clot, I imbibe the mixture. N's flesh twitches on the carpet, her sense organs malfunctioning one by one. I part the dual-flaps of skin created by the removal of her spine then gut N's body before slipping this raw, tattered carapace over my own skin.



The stitches running horizontally along the outside of N's thigh in rigid, toothed formation break free in my hand. No effort on my part is required to unbind them. They are brittle as the trunk of an elm tree infested with termites. The flapping of a pair of butterfly wings alone would create a force sufficient to eliminate them without leaving behind so much as a visible trace. 'Such delicacy, so fine a construct,' I consider aloud, 'is most commonly reserved only for hyaline.' 'But the rest of me is more durable,' N is quick to address. After wetting them with foamy slobber, I pressure an index finger and thumb against the shaft of beautifully raw fuckmeat, of which the stitches had previously shielded from my incautious advances, before proceeding slowly to outline a sequence of concentric circles inside, thus dilating the aperture by roughly five centimetres. N's body responds first by tensing, then, once adjusted, relaxing into my touch. She bites her lips, clenching and unclenching her fists, alternating between gasps of pain and terror until the two coordinate their site of intersection to align upon an axis of inexplicable ecstasy; a collision point ossified by both anticipation and relief. I draw my fingers to my nose and

inhale the aroma of old dressings mixed with septicaemia, then, bending over N, my arms pinned to the carpet and supporting the rest of my body at either side of her cranium, ease my cock between the lips of the re-opened wound and begin to thrust with the numb, mechanical gestures of a piston. 'Do it slower,' N implores, 'so I can feel every inch.' At first the wound resists the object with which contact has been made compulsory, but all too soon it yields and applies itself to nibbling the head of my cock. 'Is this what you want, huh?' N asks, her nails digging into the back of my neck. I cannot answer. Instead I extricate myself from the hole and puke into it before slipping my cock back in again, vomit wetting the hair on my balls.///////N is sprawled on her side, her left hand pressing into my buttocks to push me deeper still within the wound. 'Ooh,' she coos, choking down the sting when my cock drags against her femur and transferring it to the most exquisite of delights, 'bone tasting bone.' I can hear the wound as it gurgles and squeaks - plasma standing in exceptionally well for lubricant. Our limbs glisten with sweat, the flesh reddening. Her breath mixes with mine then settles at the back of my throat. My fingers lose themselves in her hair, sink beneath the scalp...pull out handfuls of brain that I instantly set about eating. Less than two minutes after penetration I ejaculate close to six millimetres of sperm into the wound (a ratio of seven squirts to every ten contractions of the muscles at the base of my spine), lined with shattered membranes, that by now is streaming water and blood. I gnash my jaws, torn by a desire to rip out N's jugular. A long, modulated whine escapes my lips. My stomach tightens; my anus closes upon N's thumb where it walks the rim. My spine arches. My legs tremble. My eyes roll back into my skull. Everything blots out. I am left to the unpitying beasts of the void...absent of eyes and genitals...vestigial wings awaiting conditions conducive to growth...limbs pressed forward and little used in walking...mouthparts primarily adapted for biting...ecdysial cleavage lines present and forming an anatomy of sutures...such a terrible and lasting visage...the purpose of these convulsed forms made quite explicit via the diameter of their mouths when tensed.///////I unplug myself from the wound. N has fallen silent, abandoned to the aftershock. Contained within my semen is a toxin that already is going to work on her nervous system; the venom being a composite of enzymes, salts, biogenic amine and acid phosphate. Numerous cysteine residues give rise to stable di-

sulphide bonds in its tertiary structure, reducing the ionic exchange of sodium and potassium between the extracellular and intracellular fluids local to N's body, thus inducing a disturbance in the electrolyte balance that causes chronic heart palpitations, disruption of nerve transmissions and cell membrane integrity and prevents homeostasis by the kidneys. Other effects of the toxin include strong vasoconstriction, swelling as a result of increased porosity of small vessels, failure of the circulatory system to maintain adequate perfusion of the vital organs, sweating, wan complexion, uncontrolled saliva production, respiratory wheezing, blurred vision, slurred speech, inability to swallow correctly, seizures...spasms, motor hypersensitivity, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps and incontinence. If left untreated, this poison will disable N completely. She will be dead within two days, and I, crawling for all time on my knees over heaps of copper wiring, will be permitted to feed on her remains at my leisure.



CONFUSION AND LUST

By Jana

Images © Kerry Evans



Naked I pressed my small tulip breasts against the transparent window pane. I enjoyed the sting of the cold glass against my pert pink nipples. They became alive again. What was a little pain to bring a rose color to the surface? They hardened. I licked my lips and drew heavily on my cigarette allowing the smoke to enter and exhale around the sigh which also exhaled in rhythm.

My dark hair was still damp, beads of wet played dead upon my forehead having no

energy left to move further away from my scalp. I placed my free left hand and fingers upon and into my sex also still wet... Still wet from both of our juices. I could feel without having to touch his sticky sexual liquid oozing its way slowly down the inside of my thigh. Mindfully, I followed it within my sense of touch as it gradually found its way to the knoll at the back of my knee and it held there... still wet, still seeking, not yet satisfied with a resting place.

I know most women are in a hurry to bathe after their lover has left them... they jump quickly to shower, to scrub clean of the smell, to wash their hair and scrub between their legs applying ointments and crèmes inside and out to rid themselves of the bitter sweet male odor...to be fresh again, they say. There are lots of women who acted like this but I was not one of them.

No. I liked it lingering, sticky, matting my pubic hair, glossy droplets of left over sperm. I liked to stand afterwards as I was standing now allowing gravity to pull sweetly and steadily the salty and sometimes sour milky streams down the inside of each thigh. I parted my legs farther so that my upper thighs no longer touched and therefore could not obstruct a natural flow. I could now feel again the warm stream against my cold white flat thigh. How sweet. How sensual. I shuddered and shivered in silent pleasure. The joys of an

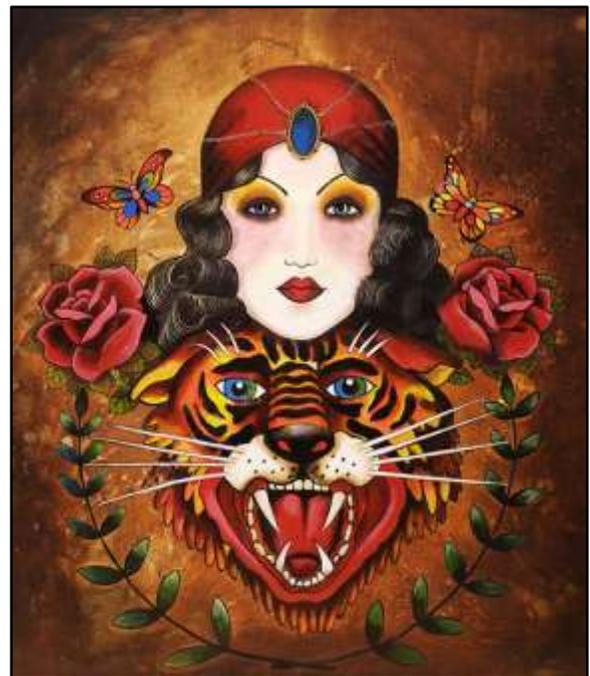
anticlimax I thought again as I pursed my lips around my long European cigarette and deeply inhaled.

He never questioned why I had trimmed my pubic hair so as not to lose his sex's milkyness but have it linger and cling. He didn't understand why I had contoured my pubic web so that when it could hold no more, it would release along points and find my thighs. He laughed it off as some female fetish and it was... My fetish.

Eagerly I absorbed the smell of his sexual fluid as he beads began to form with his arousal and then mingling with mine. My hands, my lips, every part which touched him smelled of him and it was intoxicating. So I refused to bathe and sometimes even for days after our encounter. I would then savor the musty odor knowing it was his. I understood that my practice disgusted some and others complained that it was not good hygiene for a woman. I wondered why? In fact it made me laugh. The very same women who would advise immediate and thorough showers, would douse themselves from a \$500 dollar bottle of rare perfume mastering the perfect persuasive scent to lure their prey into their dens and then would in finale wipe clean the most profound scent of all, that of the sex of their lover. I found this completely illogical if not quaintly sterile.

I often mystified my love by asking him not to bathe before our meetings. I did not want him to wear colognes of any kind, perfumed soaps or pungent aftershaves. I preferred the raw smell of sweat, the odor of whatever had filled his day, his thoughts, his hands, his belly. So keen had grown my sense of him that I could smell fear when

something had not gone well, arrogance when he had finished a killing which made him proud. He wore it all and for this I never wanted him to shower or shave himself before he visited our loft. I loved the smell of grit, a man's smell. If he had not been in our business but let's say a musician, a drummer, I would have felt the same way. Play for the crowds your concert and then come to bed with me. I want to smell it all, the entire performance.



He accused me of my not trusting him. That I wanted to see if I could smell the perfume of another woman to judge if he had been faithful. Or if I could smell her claim upon him. But I protested my innocence. I reassured him this was not my motive. I tried to explain that it aroused my passion to rabid uncontrollable levels of heat, to delirium. But he simply shook his head. Yet, still he did not bathe nor shave but came just as he was after he had finished his day. The cigarette was barely lit. I did not care. It was an old habit that I didn't really enjoy

anymore except for rare moments. Only now I liked the whiff of the smoke of the European black cigarettes I bought, mixing and mingling with what he had left behind after he had left our room.

Starring through the windows, I asked myself, Why should I move? Why should I hurry? Why should I leave? Was this not an anticlimax? My time to savor, smell, reflect, relive and see it all through the multi sectioned glass panes upon which my reawakened breasts bled their own? His scent was still there. Still pungent. Still very much alive and I liked this. With this thought my stomach tightened and my breasts raised ever so slightly.



As my right hand held lightly the cigarette, my left began to stroke my left breast, gently, amused. My skin remained soft if not silky. I pressed harder into my breast and it hurt but just enough, just enough to make my lower lip tighten and by eyes

widen a little more. My left hand could make out his imprints, just to the left of my nipple, the bites he had left in an agony which a woman's brain could never fully fathom.

I thought of Chinese Calligraphy characters that maybe I would impale on this spot where his teeth had cut through to permanently mark the event of today. Not quite a trophy mark...no, his serpent lust had indeed wrapped itself around my heart and fed, taking another deeper bite. No, it would be another reminder much bolder and also much bitter... it would mark the last day...

His last day, although he did not know it yet.

I wondered why they had not just let me give him a poison of some kind. There had so many opportunities. But then again, my superiors were men. And men preferred confrontations, and black and white truths (whatever they were), the only truth I knew had been held between my legs. Men preferred blood and guns, loud noises and most were immune to subtleties. So other than the use of myself, they chose the weapon.

Our rendezvous had been arranged by their schedules and made to appear as mine and then by my invitation "ours". And so today they knew his exact location and time they would kill him. An unknown marks man who bereft of any smell but with an animal scent to kill would do the job.

Maybe only minutes from now.

Activities against the state they told me were his crimes although I was never told what crimes they were or even what the word state now meant. I never smelt crime upon him nor the state but they insisted that these acts had indeed been committed. As I stared out of the window again I wondered how would that smell upon him... I mean the residue of a bullet and his dried blood, not mine, trickling down his lips.

Another sigh heaved forward on an inhale. The things a woman would do for her country, or the Company or what was it called now I questioned? Webs and nets and fine silk stockings, criss-crossed black garter belts and little boy panties, a net, a mesh and texted messages, another web. What an old web this one was, played out ever since Samson and Dehlila. Again and again and again he came. Scream, scream, scream... Another old game.

They had sent in two other agents both more beautiful and better trained than I to seduce him, but he had sniffed them out. Both women are now listed as missing in action.

My superiors were not quite sure why I had succeeded. Perhaps it was my lack of training, Maybe because of my newness, I lacked caution or I smelled different than the others. Maybe I hadn't the scent of a predator yet but still the prey? Maybe because I wasn't sure I knew exactly what my job was so the boundaries were smudged and at places nonexistent? Regardless, they were pleased with my success. They were pleased they had a date, and a time and a place.

I looked closer into the glass window at my lips and the hatch crossed threading of crevices filled with lip gloss, and a stain of his blood still there left when I had bit down hard upon his open shoulder... not the blood of a lamb I had been told but of a wolf, more masterful a wolf than the animal I was becoming and yet here it was...another web of a lip, a net. A trap.

A trap.

A trap he never smelled even as he smelled my scent smothering his lips and seeping into his mouth.

A trap.



I chortled tritely to myself possibly to ease some tension, "The smell of wild sex trumps the smell of something fishy every time." He had not smelled a thing other than me, other than us.

And maybe that was it. That was all my superiors wanted him to smell. Our sex and nothing more.

I laughed again to myself and thought the most obvious, so obvious, it was comical, "One really should have an extremely keen sense of smell for this business."

Regardless, it would still be days before I bathed. I did not know why I would guard the stains left... his stains despite knowing of his death. I blocked one after the other the arousal of his memories, our moments even before today, leading to today and the now. "I am a soldier," my last bastion of self protection I erected quickly to hold off more dangerous reveries. But more memories came and with them smells, the smells of

the sheets, the smell of the small restaurants, the smell of his unshaved face, the smell of his finger tips, the smell of his car seats, the smell of this window pane, the smell he had just left behind which filled each pore of my body, mind and soul.

My nipples still pressed against the window now too cold bit and shivered deeper. I quickly stepped back from the glass. In a chilling gasp, I felt a pang of confusion. I felt dizzy, sick to my stomach. I wanted to vomit. And then suddenly I smelt something overwhelmingly rotten.



BALCONIES' RAIL

By Michael O'Donnell

I

Though I don't know of whose creation,
yours or mine; your image drifts-
the drift of a fresh monstrosity-

Pinned under the ice, the baby
stares you in the face
but doesn't respond

(will howls nonsense)

My abortion can be representative
of a virus

leaning in an open space,
leaning in a hallway; ancient dried
rivulets on the ridged wall
hotel coffin cabin:

A sample of a psyche it
would behoove you to save (or salve)
in accord with the imperatives of convenience.

So atrophied by silicon glow
wrenching that eternal chord,

wishing to sever it painlessly,
You eat phantom air
outside your cave.

Your lungs fill with
nothing.

Your loins fill nothing.

Your loins are filled
by nothing.

The glowing glyphs
sear through nothing
and encroach on the nothing
your mind has become;
your limbs pierced,
your tongue addicted to rot.

II

I've successfully healed
the anguish in my young bones.

The marrow no longer flashes and pops
but dimly glows, an ache unaccustomed.

I recall the soft smoothness of your thighs...

the satin sienna crepe of your skin
for my hands, my essence coiled
ready to be you.

I collect my much vilified
(behind my back replaced)
seed, and my
afflicted by use mental musings
(for your sake)
and will perch on the balcony rail

Perch on the balcony rail
with my hair in my eyes
no glue for my spine

I will perch on the balconies' rail

My voice is amused and alive
It sings to my mind as I dive
Your dark eyes revealed
Your apt lips concealed
Your tears play a fugue unperturbed
as I perch on the balcony rail

I recall the window grate's shadow
on the ceiling as I half slept
It moved with my grief

I writhed bequeathed
to the plunge of that gnostic travail-

The desired become God, god
gone away.

I killed you by desire.

I killed dead imaginings.

I imagine inconsequential inanities
as I dive from the balconies' rail

III

The wind world will howls
and moans grief stricken,
making many rends in
the black canopy.

Her hair black, silken or velvet
once long ago in my eyes...

I bleed from my eyes

The night bleeds from its cries
as my tears touch the balconies' rail

In Berlin and Wien

Brooklyn, Dublin and Venice

I am on the balcony rail.

I am missing.

You wonder what weight I carry
when you meet me at parties.

When you wonder to intently
you make a joke of it.

I am bred with
ornate balconies
starless night
concrete
to insure my future subordination.

Wounded by fickle libidos
and dilettante lovers,
My tainted visions
claw through conscious inanity, thus
tempting me to balconies' rail.

IV

Trailing wire strung blood,
My head anointed with love scent,
My depth unchangeable,
I float through the brisk night air.

At the point of some lucid realization,

(I eye rippleless water below)
My head impacts the concrete ceiling.
Even in annihilation my love I'll never change.
I'm unaccustomed to changing
to make life convenient
for those who pretend to care
while looking from heights, slackjawed,
while staring after gripping white knuckled
(Blue veins bulging
in disbelieving white fists)
The balconies' rail.

V

Love burns entirely
and the sacrificial starlight glints
off the balconies' rail:

Elegies "to a woundhearted boy"

"to a lost soul"

"to a meandering
life"

"to wind scattered
ashes"

"to enzymes ground
in concrete"

"to one last
Poem"

"to one missing
poet"

"to a lost lover
without a sepulchre"

"to 'Cordoba to die in'"

My last poem my love
Is graven in starless night.
Now we see those distances.

The universal dark of a dead pupil.
A slovenly Deity
indifferent to the death
of those who are brilliant
despite him.

We must light a candle and
hiss at nothing
from all the balconies' rail.



GOODHUE'S WOODFIRED GRILL

By Connley (Lee) Landers

Photo © Sid Graves

Mckinney, Texas is impossible not to like. They filmed *Benji* here you know. The director said it had the small-town warm fuzzies that made you pet the stray dog and tousele the hair of a loose child.

Downtown is on the square built around the 150 year old Collin County courthouse. Goodhue's aromas vie for patrons there with Mama Amelia's Italian Restaurant just across the street. Pasta doesn't affect me like BBQed ribs. I'd told my wife with as much sarcasm as I could, "Pasta, from the Latin

word for paste. Yum." Goodhue's won us one day I'll never forget.

Like a Pavlovian dog my mouth started watering a block away. "Landers. Party of two. Non-smoking, please." I ordered the BBQed, baby-back ribs with mashed potatoes and green beans. The meat was so tender it fell off the bone when it saw your teeth coming. Janet, my wife, was on a diet and would only have the shrimp, salad and Monstro baked potato with sour cream, butter, cheese, bacon bits, and chocolate

sauce. She suggested that I have the shrimp also, but I wanted real meat, not bait.

She said, "Try some seafood once in a while, Hon, it's brain food."

"My brain isn't as hungry as the rest of me," I said. "Besides, it's chick food. I need meat!"

"Are you going to ask the waitress if there is something out back that you can kill, caveman?" she asked. Janet needled me like that sometimes. I liked to dip the rib meat into the little bowl of zesty BBQ sauce and smear it around on my face, hands and nearby objects like a three year old finger painting a barn. Soon, I looked like White Fang that had just downed a moose with drying red goo crusting in my hair.

Suddenly, next to our table, a chubby, middle aged, mostly bald guy stood up, his napkin fell off of his lap and he knocked over his Merlot with a clink and a slosh that got our attention. His hands went to his throat and he started to turn pink all the way up to the bald spot. His lady dinner companion said, "Bob, spit it out or swallow it for God's sake!"

His eyes bugged out, he shook his head and dropped to his knees. The background noise died down and everyone stared as Bob's pink pate purpled, and he opened and closed his mouth silently like a bass in bad water. Someone in the group yelled, "Heimlich maneuver!", and Sam, our waiter, knelt down behind Bob and administered the famous lifesaver,

squeezing the big guy's torso to dislodge the blockage from the panicked diner's throat.

Sam tried it three times until the guy's eyes rolled back in his head and he went limp on the floor. Heimlich didn't work. Instinctively, I dropped to my hands and knees, put my mouth over Bob's, sucked as hard as I could and jabbed him in his pudgy solar plexus with my knee.

I saved Bob Chortle's life that night. The Landers maneuver replaced the Heimlich as the preferred emergency first aid treatment for choking. Bob couldn't thank me enough and insisted on paying for our dinner against my faked resistance.

On the way out of the restaurant Bob edged over to me. He asked quietly as he wiped a reddish smear off of his forehead, "You had the BBQ ribs?"

"Yeah," I said, "You the Jumbo shrimp?" He nodded. If I had known that, he might be dead now—the girly man. My wife usually gets her way.

I couldn't copyright the Landers maneuver and was vilified by some for even considering such a materialistic scheme. Perhaps the free meal from Bob went to my head. I transferred all rights to the American Institute of Choking First Aid for a pittance and a plaque.

The Landers maneuver went by the wayside, like the Heimlich, when the Kowolski maneuver was invented, where

one guy sucks hard on the victim's mouth, jabs his solar plexus and another person blows air up the vic's anus. Being the number two guy in the Kowolski gimmick had several meanings.

The Kowolski maneuver became the accepted technique by the Red Cross and the issue of the shortage of number two men was solved by Bob Chortle, who was the head of the AICFA now, had dedicated his life to research for the institute and had, at last after several years, invented a device like a large turkey-baster that, mercifully, took the number two man's place.

I like to think that I was a subconscious presence in the formulation of Bob's very first idea for the institute, years before, as a lab technician. It was a little foil pouch with a wet napkin in it, like the kind BBQ rib eaters use, to be carried in the first guy's wallet for use by the number two man.

The new, popular, turkey-baster device was included right next to the fire extinguisher in a glass case in the walls of restaurants. Its display would make the patrons chew more thoroughly and take smaller bites. Like all choking accidents, prevention is so vital. Sometimes however, a customer would drink something down the wrong way, choke and sputter, suddenly look around

wild-eyed, and charge out of the room, then run like hell down the street.

Sadly, just a few years later at Goodhue's, Vanilla Joe, a wine-dulled patron, tried to help a choking victim, grabbed the fire extinguisher instead of the turkey-baster, blew up the strangling fellow and, across the room, seriously injured the eye of Jill Schott, the high school principal's wife, when a bolus of poorly masticated sirloin thwacked her.

Lawsuits flew like meat hunks as our litigious society tried to make things right. The AICFA and Bob Chortle with Goodhue's, Vanilla Joe, the wine maker, the fire extinguisher company, and the steer's family all were named in the suit as co-defendants. The restaurant's liability insurance covered the losses and Mrs. Schott's blurred vision was restored even though she had a black eye for a week. The principal suggested she put a raw steak on it, but she, newly vegetarian, refused. The emotional impact of the food service trauma must have jangled my synapses too, because, afterwards, I salivated with a pathetic volume when I approached Goodhue's. Mama Amelia's won our business that day.

*Photo © Sid Graves Cemetery Prints Inc.
Models: Jason Long and Endymionette*



TURBINES AND THROAT BONES (PART ONE)

By Craig Woods

"Yes! Yes! A complete overhaul of social housing ... Commitment contracts for council tenants, yes! Yeeeeeeeeessss!!"

The words dribbled out on a runaway train of viscous saliva and fevered panting from Matthew Redman's withered lips. That morning's edition of the *Daily Standard* lay spread out on the office floor in front of him. Lurid photographs and reactionary headlines heaved in and out of focus before his near-sighted gaze. With every thrust of Catherine Frick's robust hips, Redman's frail knees and elbows burned against the beige carpet as his spectacles were jolted ever further down along his red pockmarked nose.

"And what's the key principle of such a policy?" the MP called collectedly from behind his raised and straining posterior, her pelvis gyrating rhythmically and without restraint as she ploughed the dildo ever deeper into him. "What's the axiom of the moment? Let me hear you ..."

"Something fo - uuhhhh!" the media magnate stammered helplessly as Frick increased the intensity of her thrust. Pain like a fist of broken glass exploded in his bowel.

"I can't hear you, Matthew!"

"Something for something!" he managed to gasp from between slackening dentures.

"That's right, my dear. A something-for-something culture."

Though he couldn't see it, Redman knew that a satisfied superior smile now claimed the MP's proud olive-skinned features. Just as he knew that not a stray lock of her raven hair would have been knocked out of place during this routine session of ritual humiliation. In both her private and public existence, Catherine Frick maintained an image of herself which was flawless in every respect. This vision which loomed imperviously from twenty-four hour television screens and newspaper columns lost none of its authority in the private sphere. There was only one Catherine Frick. And the rigid truth of her was unequivocal.

"And what, dear Matthew, must the darling public remember about this contract, hmm? What's the word, the one stone we want to ensure sinks deeply into the primordial murk of their tiny minds?"

"Voluntary!" Redman screamed the word as blood trickled from his straining sphincter, forming ignominious cascades down the backs of his bare thighs. Tears simmered in his pale eyes and his trembling limbs threatened to give way under the weight of his degradation.

"Voluntary is right, my dear. Always permit the rabble their delusion of autonomy. That's the key to good government, yes?"

"Yes ... YES!!!"

Frick now worked her thrusting into a frenzy. Redman's left arm gave way and he slumped awkwardly with an undignified moan.

"And our council tenants in question ... remind me, what is their part of the bargain?"

"Th-th-they ..." his voice trailed off into unintelligible grunts.

"I can't HEAR you Matthew!"

At the emphasised word, the MP thrust the dildo's considerable length all the way into the old man's anus. He wailed like a scalded child, haggard features twisted in a rictus of inexpressible agony. His spectacles slid finally and unceremoniously from the precipice of his nose to land splayed like a dead insect upon the open newspaper. For an excruciating moment it seemed he could not summon air into his lungs. Panic claimed his urgently palpitating heart. Ominous lights flared at the edges of his vision. Death rose blackly from the blurred depths ...

Sensing his peril and estimating it expertly, Frick retracted the shaft. Over the course of the previous decade she had familiarised herself with every tic of the old man's body and could now manipulate the frail carcass instinctually. These routine bouts of ceremonial humiliation had endowed her with the ability to interpret automatically his every moan and tremor, allowing her to pre-empt and circumvent each of his reactions in accordance with her own desires. Redman's psychological connection to his own body was now all but obliterated, she had seen to that. Now the tycoon was literally her puppet in every conceivable sense of the term. She would not allow him to die, to shit his putrid last in her office, no. But she did her utmost to let him believe that she would.

The old man gasped repeatedly, a terrible bronchial sound like the final whimpers of a dying dog. His dentures spilled out of his mouth to land on the newspaper where they converged with the glasses in a mockery of his own face; a deformed idiot grin stretched wide below sightless eyes.

"Now ... what were you saying my dear?"

Redman's breath came in staccato bursts; "They ... will ... be ... pledging ... their ... commitment ... to ... self ... improvement!"

"Good boy!"

With that, Frick patted the elderly man condescendingly on the butt-cheek and slid out of him with a wet slopping sound. The dildo's spiked head glistened with blood and mucous and a sour visceral smell tainted the office. Redman's knees gave way and he curled limply on the floor, a wounded gasping wreck. With swift factuality, Frick removed the harness from her hips and tossed the dildo aside. Redman watched through blurred and exhausted eyes as the MP crossed the floor to her desk, her top half fully clothed in trademark black suit, her bare buttocks flashing him an uncaring vertical smirk. With unassailable poise, she slid back into her black slacks and brushed herself down. The image remained unspoiled. He was a pinned butterfly, paralysed and pathetic in her imperious gaze.

"Now then. Get yourself together, hmm? And we'll have a drink. Cognac?"

With trembling fingers, Redman gathered up his dentures, slopping them back into his mouth with all the inelegance of a greedy child scoffing a cupcake in a single ungainly bite.

Replacing his spectacles gingerly, he glanced at the newspaper, refocusing his strained eyes. A headline swam into view: 'ANNIVERSARY SHAME OF MINKOWSKI SURVIVORS' ... Squinting at the article, Redman retrieved his creased and wrinkled shirt unconsciously from the floor and fumbled his way into it, his eyes fixed upon the page ...

Survivors of the Minkowski
Museum Massacre have "shamed"
the memory of their dead peers
with foul-mouthed boasts
about sex, brawls and
drink-fuelled antics as
they reach adulthood.
A number of the youngsters,
now aged 18 to 20, have posted
shocking blogs and photographs
of themselves on the
Internet, 13 years after being
sheltered from public view in
the aftermath of the atrocity...

Frick tossed a handful of paper towels in Redman's direction.

"A proper sequence for everything, dear boy."

Following her gaze, Redman saw the continuing red leakage from his rectum cascading down the pallid skin of the legs he was now absently shoving into crumpled trousers. Shielding himself from the MP's soul-annihilating sneer, the old tycoon kept his eyes fixed upon the newspaper article as he pressed a loose ball of paper to his sopping anus.

In the days and months
that followed the survivors,
then aged just five to seven, were
the subject of overwhelming
worldwide sympathy.
But now the Daily Standard
can reveal how, on their web-based
social networking sites,
some of them have boasted
about alcoholic binges, fights and
an assortment of other unwholesome

behaviour.

For instance, John Furlough – who was hit by a single bullet and watched in horror as his classmates died – makes rude gestures in pictures he posted on his site, and boasts of drunken nights out...

“Admiring the wares of your legacy?” Frick’s voice cut through his consciousness like a razor. “You should be proud, my dear. The Redpoint Media Group is a fine beast indeed. And the quality of its output - in both print and televisual sectors - makes it a major political force,” there was a clink of glass as the MP attended to business at the drinks cabinet, “and of course a crucial weapon ...”

The tycoon read on ...

The webpage of Karen Elliot, who suffered serious injuries in the shooting, proclaims that her name died with her in the tragedy and that she has since “re-birthed” herself as ‘Ampersand Youth’, a self-styled “Sonic Sculptress and Time Traveller working to tear your s***house down”. Her page is littered with foul language and features images of her several outrageous tattoos, in addition to sound and video clips of the band she fronts - Domestic Dispute - whose unlistenable ‘Crow Wave’ dirges frequently include profanity and disturbing antisocial sentiments. Several of the other youths in question boast about their various sexual activities. Politicians and relatives

of the victims yesterday
said they were shocked by the
webpages.

One woman, who requested to remain
anonymous and whose granddaughter
died in the tragedy said the
behaviour "brought shame" to
the community.

She said: "It is insulting.

They were damn lucky to come
out of it and they should be
making the most of it. Maybe
that's what they think they are
doing, but it is in bad taste...

Redman permitted himself a satisfied grin, "Yes. I'd have to agree. My empire has its standards and those standards are being upheld and defended as stringently as ever. My legacy is ensured, wouldn't you say?" He turned to Frick triumphantly, the flame in his belly - previously extinguished by his degradation here in this pristine office space - now thoroughly rekindled.

Both the swell of pride in his ailing chest and the haughty smile upon his face died in the instant his eyes met Frick's. The MP towered over him, a glass of cognac balanced stylishly in each hand. A voice like a sheet of poisoned silk unfurled elegantly from her smiling mouth.

"My good man, your legacy will be only that which you prove yourself to deserve," her onyx eyes burned with a fire of anonymously baleful origin. Silently he cursed her for her infallibility; for the agenda she kept close to her black heart and which seemed eternally beyond his comprehension. "And, I might add, your empire is *my* empire. Your own work has seen to that." She handed him one of the cognacs which he accepted with the shaking hand of a shell-shocked child. In a preposterous and altogether disingenuous gesture of maternal affection, the MP ruffled the few remaining strands of Redman's white hair. His self-respect retreated into a dusty corner where it curled up chastened and whimpering.

"Now my dear fellow, let's get those trousers on you, eh? There's a war on, you know. And I won't have one of my chiefs of staff parading *sans uniform* ..."

Catherine Frick winked and an alien sky of contaminated stars exploded across her tenebrous gaze.

the scream tears the morning wide open across the 1980 deli patrons huddled sporadically among booths and tables look up eyes wide mouths agape morsels of food

impaled on suspended cutlery gripped in frozen hands Tim the sound engineer drops the hot egg roll from which he was poised to take a bite and levers himself up by the heels on his chromium stool at the counter peering towards the kitchen door he watches for some clue as to the source of the sound beyond

- Eileen! Is everything alright in there?

no response the craggy-faced vagrant to Tim's right looks up from his free bowl of yesterday's soup and speaks in a halitosis croak

- Rats in here, sonny. All over the place they are. Big bleeders too. Make a pretty good snack if you cook 'em just right.

- Eileen! Is there a rat in there? Are you okay?

no response the vagrant speaks again

- You need to stomp on 'em. Can't poison 'em, that makes 'em inedible see. Can't shoot 'em, there'll be bugger all left worth eatin'. Stamp on 'em's the only way guv. You see that, eh?

Tim's head pounds with tinnitus and hangover the effects of last night's gig Crass had virtually destroyed the venue and every nervous system within a two mile radius a pleasant image flickers briefly across Tim's consciousness the pretty face of the young punk girl with whom he'd got to chatting at the bar between sets the reverie broken by the memory of the girl's bulky skinhead boyfriend materialising in a flurry of foul language deadened by guitar feedback and cymbal crashes wide eyes spitting hate from beneath a jutting brow the vagrant's pungent toilet stench is the final unpalatable ingredient in an unbearable cocktail Tim gets up from his stool and approaches the kitchen motivated as much by concern for his own senses as for Eileen's safety

- What's up, Eileen? I thought I heard a scream.

- Definitely a scream

- Sounds like somebody could be hurt

a few other patrons clearly relieved that someone else has relieved them of the responsibility of investigation now volunteering concern the kitchen door bursts open Eileen stands there legs splayed gasping heavily a stunned expression on her sagging middle-aged face now drained of blood a roll of gauze descends from her trembling hand

- Someone call for an ambulance! Tim! Help me in here!

- What the hell's going on? Who's hurt?

- I don't know! I've no idea who she is!

an unfamiliar voice youthful but inflexible lashes like a sonic scalpel from the unseen kitchen

- No doctors! No doctors! No! No!

Tim follows the flustered deli owner into the kitchen Joe the chef does not greet him standing there brow furrowed arms crossed staring at a dark shape crouched in a dusty corner by the fire exit moving closer Tim sees that the shape is an adolescent girl in a blue school uniform the girl is thin and willowy with impossibly pale skin whiter than white as though treated with bleach a gaunt face with unmistakably Asian features stares wildly from behind a

tangled curtain of raven hair the eyes are wide and black as oil no pupils no irises only fathomless black pools reflecting the maddening infinity of the universe blood streams from a gash in the girl's wrist down her right arm painting the blazer sleeve a liquid mauve

- No Doctors! No doctors!

the girl's words lacerate the morning and sting like freezer burn

- She won't let me near her. She won't let me look at the wound.

- Where the hell did she come from?

- I've no idea. I just turned my back for a few seconds and when I looked back there she was.

Joe the chef exhales furiously

- She must have gotten in through the fire door.

- It can't be opened from the outside ...

- Well then you obviously didn't shut it properly! What have I told you about ...

- Folks, come on! Let's focus on the situation here!

Tim crouches before the girl and stares into those depthless eyes

- It's alright darling. You'll be safe now. We're going to help you.

- No doctors! No doctors!

the voice is cool and metallic ringing remotely in these grease-stained walls as though transmitted from afar a spectral telegram riding on winds blown percussively through flyover railings or the lattices of pylons

- Alright sweetheart. If that's what you want. Will you let me look at you?

the girl says nothing a flicker of vexed muscle across her brow

- It's okay, I won't hurt you. I just need to see your wrist. That's all. Can you show me?

- Come on, this is ridiculous. Let's just get her a fucking ambulance. She's bleeding all over my fucking kitchen for Christ's sake! That'll go down right well with the health board that will!

- Joe, shut up a second, you're not helping. Come on, sweetheart. Just show me, that's all.

slowly and deliberately the girl extends her arm displaying the wounded wrist Tim leans forward and gazes into a storm of flesh a black hole seethes interminably within the fissure upon that bleached alien skin stars weep red tears against the girl's bones Tim feels his psyche lurching forward as though pulled from the shell of his body and into the endless chasm of the wound without warning a tremor occurs across the extended appendage and a dark object shoots up and out of the wound with a wet snap Eileen slams a shocked hand to her open mouth

- Oh my God!!

squinting in disbelief Tim stares at his own stunned reflection glimmering dimly in a slightly curved shard of deep brown glass protruding from the wound taunting the air with its scimitar edge the girl's face is still and expressionless those endless galactic eyes unblinking

- Okay, so now do we call the fucking hospital?!

- How did she ... where did ...

the girl answers unfinished questions with a decisive flick of the wounded wrist a faint wet slop as the shard recedes into the wound as swiftly and inexplicably as it appeared

- What the hell?!

Joe spins around leans over the kitchen sink and vomits furiously Eileen's knees give way and she stumbles to land painfully on her rear upon the kitchen floor her wide eyes fixed on the girl

- Tim. What is going on here? What the hell is this? I've never seen ...

the kitchen door creaks open and a bearded middle-aged man peers in eyes scanning the room for signs of carnage and disaster

- Everything alright in here?

impulsively Tim leaps from his kneeling position and blocks the man's view he presses himself against the door preventing the intruder from opening it any further

- Everything's fine in here thanks. The chef just had a small carving accident. Really nothing to worry about. Eileen saw a spot of blood and, well, just flipped I'm afraid. Everything's quite alright now. I'm just helping to clean up the mess here. Please go back and enjoy your food.

suitably eased the man retreats back to the deli Joe swings back from the sink strings of vomit descending from his slurring mouth

- What the fuck are you thinking? Why did you do that? We need to get this girl out of here and into a hospital! Have you gone mental?!

Ignoring the chef Tim kneels in front of the deli owner firm hands gripping her tremulous shoulders

- Eileen, listen! Call Scotch Sheila! Get her to come round here right away!

- Sh-Sheila? But ... I don't ...

- Just get her here! She's as good as a qualified nurse. If she insists on taking the girl to the hospital then that's what we'll do but ... we're dealing with something pretty weird here.

the girl remains crouched in the corner snapping the wrist back and forth the keen blade of glass unsheathed and retracted each time like a cat flexing its claw

- No kidding.

the universe meets itself open in the girl's impossible gaze ghosts of tungsten and unknown furies reflected in the glass blade for callow human eyes to look upon

"Look upon it, my dear Matthew. What do you see out there?"

Catherine Frick stood silhouetted against the vast panorama of Central London. Around her, the reinforced windows glimmered immaculately with a microcosmic milky way of refracted light. From Redman's vantage point across the MP's huge oak desk, Frick had become a colossus bestriding the now infinitesimal city. Her proud and invincible features were those of a post-industrial sphinx whose indefatigable gaze touched every street corner and alleyway,

poised to cast furious judgement upon any unsavoury aberrations she might find lurking in the blue twilight.

"Can you feel it at all, I wonder? Can your half-blind peepers and feeble eardrums detect any of the troublesome transmissions darting around out there ... shooting back and forth between undesirable elements?" She spun abruptly around, pinning him like an insect with a stare as cold and inescapable as a bear trap. "Does your thinning hair not stand on end at the horror of those holes in the air ...hmmmm? Does your constipated bowel not heave in disgust at the menace leaking into our composed world, preparing to undo the goodness of our society and grind it into filth ...?"

"There are always undesirables seeking to undo the proper and rightful way of things," Redman croaked from a dry throat. "Just as there are always those like ourselves prepared to maintain order and stability, to keep the rabble at bay." He took a sip of cognac. The alcohol scorched his gullet, setting him further on edge and exacerbating his parched craw. "Good will out with the proper effort," he persevered as nervous tension threatened to set his eyes awater, "It's the natural way of things, Catherine."

"*Natural!*" she spat the word back at him like a hex. "Unfortunately, old boy, the real crux of our battle lies beyond such boundaries. The real enemy - the real *threat* at our door is one which shits all over the whole notion of a natural order. The very fabric of our existence is at stake, my liver-spotted lackey. And we must revise our defences accordingly."

A cryptic silence claimed the office. Redman shuffled awkwardly in his seat. A nauseating itch aggravated his arse-crack which, under Frick's severe gaze, he felt unable to attend to. "I think ... I might be missing something here," he stammered. "Am I?"

After an excruciating pause, Frick's face dissolved into a relaxed but mischievous smile. She knocked back the remainder of the cognac in a single gulp and set the glass down upon a nearby shelf littered with gilt-framed family photos. The MP's husband and children grinned blandly from behind polished glass, flawless and anonymous as catalogue models. With a casual sigh Frick drew her arms across her chest and peered through midnight forelocks into the tycoon's soul. "My dear, dear Matthew. You really don't know why you're here, do you?"

A heavy black stone of fear sank through Redman's stomach, threatening to burst through his varicose-veined feet. He winced at the countless memories of his degradation and ritual humiliation at the whim of this impenetrable and imperturbable woman. What had it all been for? What had he expected to receive in return? What bizarre force had kept him locked in this ignominious cycle? Over the course of the past decade he had allowed himself to be reduced to a shell in exchange for an ill-defined and unvoiced promise; a contract of compensation for services rendered to Frick and her clandestine schemes which remained shrouded in mystery and entirely unfathomable to him. Now it seemed the MP finally was prepared to divulge something of her plans for him. His frail heart shuddered with anticipation.

"I know that your ..." he paused to choose his words with extreme care, "political successes ... have been assisted in no small measure by the diligence of my ... *our* media empire. Beyond a certain bias, however, I'll admit I'm at something of a loss as to what other

purpose I may have served or continue to serve. As far as I can see, any benefit which my work has endowed upon you has been similarly enjoyed by the government, your party, the Prime Minister himself ...”

Frick cackled, a coarse feral sound which chilled Redman’s rheumatic bones. “Oh dear, oh dear my good man. You are quite the proverbial mushroom aren’t you, hmm? Kept in the dark and embroiled in shit. But not to worry, you’ve shown a venerable propensity for trawling through swill. It’s an expedient trait. Though not one I particularly envy, eh?” She paused to inspect her fingernails snootily.

She was toying with him and he knew it. All pretences now set firmly aside, she was goading him jovially into a retaliatory outburst; anything which might disrupt the precariously balanced nature of their relationship, an explosive device of her design which, if tampered with, would set off a chain reaction from which she would surely emerge the sole survivor. He swallowed hard, biting his tongue. The silence informed her that he knew his place. With a satisfied smile she pulled a cigar case from an inside pocket and continued:

“It’s true. Your work has, in every respect, proved invaluable in terms of practical politics. And, insofar as the government’s agenda harmonises with my own, I have happily reaped personal rewards.” Without offering him one, she bit and spat the end of a fat cigar and ignited it with a silver lighter. Redman noticed an intricately designed crab emblem engraved upon the metal. “Thanks to your incessant coverage, my campaign to extend the national indoor smoking ban to the domestic sphere was as ubiquitous as AIDS in Africa. Nothing gets the rabble in line quite as effectively as an attractive woman telling them what they think they already thought from every front page, TV screen and billboard hoarding,” she exhaled a thick cloud of smoke from her full-lipped mouth which billowed like a gathering storm above Redman’s shiny red pate. “Indeed, every one of my policies has been successfully implemented largely due to you. Not only did you help secure each successive ministerial post of my career, but you pulled off the major double whammy of garnering me the most vital commodity of all: public appeal. You helped make me the most popular politician in the country, my obedient boy. And for that you’ve earned yourself a well packed doggy bag.”

“You mean ...?”

“I mean, dear Matthew, that it’s time you learned a little of the cause you’ve been working so hard - and so obliviously - to assist. And the true nature of both your achievements and the payment you may expect to receive for your services.”

An oasis claimed Redman’s mouth and throat. The anxiety which had terrorised his abdomen now rose to his gullet in an uncontrolled reckless outburst; “Catherine ... this *payment* ... You had mentioned, some years ago now, something about Rosie ... about finding her and returning her to me. We’ve never spoken of it since. On the basis that my daughter has been missing for over three decades and is now legally considered dead by the authorities, I cannot help but wonder ... what *payment* could you possibly offer me? What is there in this world now that you might think reasonable compensation for the loss I’ve suffered? Forgive me for my

presumption, but under the circumstances I daresay it is futile for you to consider your *payment* to me anything other than a shortfall."

For what seemed an endless minute, Frick stared into him, her face stony and expressionless. Abruptly she exploded in a fit of braying laughter. This seemed to him a gratuitous addition to her mockery of him. He bit his lip hard, pressing down until he tasted the muted copper sting of blood.

"Oh Matthew!" she gasped finally, wiping a tear from her eye with one slender finger, "Matthew, Matthew, you truly are the living end ..."

"I'm sorry but I really don't see ..."

"Your choice of words is really quite hilarious, old boy. What in *this world* indeed! What *now!* .. Such brilliantly irrelevant questions. Your naivety never fails to bring a smile to my face. You are, bar none, my single favourite unconscious comedian."

Redman opened his mouth to reply but no suitable words would formulate in his now aching head. He was utterly bewildered. While he knew Frick to be grimly whimsical, he also knew beyond doubt that she was meticulous in her words. Even her most seemingly nonsensical remarks inevitably proved imperative. Realising that his moment of assertion was over, he curled in on himself once more as he fell back into subservience before the MP's inscrutable countenance. Aware that he was gawping with the awkwardness of an idiot child, he closed his mouth shut with an audible clash of dentures and waited for his mistress to continue.

"Matthew, let's speak frankly. I've mentioned to you on many occasions that we are at war. And that I consider you to be one of my most indispensable Generals on the frontline of that war. Do you understand what this means?"

"Well, I had assumed there was a certain metaphorical quality to that ..."

"Oh no! No no no my good man. This is no metaphor, not at all. This is a very real war. The most crucial of *all* wars in fact. And it is being fought as we speak ... across battle-lines that transcend borders both national and natural."

"Natural? I'm afraid I don't ..."

"What we are faced with is a challenge to our superiority in every respect. A challenge posed by the most vile proletarian and feral elements of our society; past, present and future. Everything we value is at stake, old fellow. And we must reassert our right to superiority ... our right to immortality! And our right to wield control over those despicable elements who would seek to usurp these privileges from us and throw all of existence into a chaos of filth and degeneracy."

Redman felt breathless and disoriented, as though he had been slugged by the fist of God. "I ... I'm afraid I'm at a loss here. What precisely are you saying? Are you talking about some kind of revolution?"

"I'm talking about the *ultimate* revolution, old man! I'm talking about the last-ditch assault on our way of life - on our entire *reality* - by the most hideous and loathsome of insurgencies. I'm talking about our need to quell the rabble right across the evolutionary board,

from the Stone Age to the Space Age! I am referring, my poor naïve boy, to the threat which presses upon us from all angles of time and space ... a threat with implications which stretch so far *beyond national security* that it makes both World Wars look like petty playground spats!"

Redman's head spun. He could make no sense of the woman's words but did not doubt her solemnity. Unable to formulate any meaningful response to Frick's enigmatic rhetoric, he floundered with an uncertain question: "If what you say is true ... then what possible role can I be playing in this? It all seems rather outwith my realm of experience."

"Far from it. As a purveyor of the Mass Media, your work is instrumental in defining the appropriate boundaries within which the rabble exist. In a very real sense, your virtual world of word and image defines time and space for millions and establishes the desirable parameters for public discourse, civil liberties and psycho-biologic regimentation."

"I'm sorry, psycho-what ...?"

"In short, my dear Matthew, it is your work ... your proud *empire* which has helped maintain the machine of our society; kept the engine greased and the cogs spinning. And it is this framework which shall continue to shield the war from the masses who remain oblivious. I shouldn't need to explain this to you, though. You're an educated man, you understand postmodernist thought."

"Yes, yes. I understand the whole Baudrillard hyper-reality phenomenon and the rest of that academic drivel just fine, but ... some of these things you're saying sound a little ... Well, frankly, it all sounds like science-fiction to me."

With a final staccato exhalation, Frick puffed a series of elaborate smoke rings and extinguished the cigar butt in a brass ashtray. "In that case, my dear, it's perhaps time to let you see for yourself the science-*fact* of what I've told you."

"Meaning?"

The MP retrieved a long dark overcoat from a black varnished hat-stand and pulled a set of car keys from the pocket with a playful jingle. "Meaning it's time for a little field trip, my good man. I do hope you packed your pills and prepped your plastic pants, because that feeble old heart of yours might be in for a shock or two ..."



WHO'S AFRAID OF TOBIAS WOLFF?

By David Gionfriddo

3 FEBRUARY, 5:18 P.M.

--'Atta boy, Shooter! A tray and change!

It was nice to finally get a kind word from Nathan Chang. Ever since he had come over from *Dellinger's*, he had been putting the fear of GOD!® into the whole *P's and Q's* staff, trimming back on perks, calling for live meetings, bringing in Billy Dean as Ombudsman to conduct random nanoaudits...My blast on the Japanese bras that dispensed flavored breast milk stayed up on the PNQ.lit site for 3:13, earning me some serious Pay-Points, maybe enough for the hyperbaric chamber Rikki kept droning on about.

--*Don't want to get too worked up over second place*, I said. I needed to sound like a striver to keep Chang in my corner. His favorites always got the best placement, and that made a difference. One wrong move and you could wind up in the back pages near fitness or education.

--*Perish the thought, Superstar*, he went on. *Nunez is out. Deano found too many good facts in it. You're the champ.* "Man Castrates Pooch Over Leg-Humping Incident" had been the talk of the office, hanging around for all of 7:08. An instant classic. But the *Stranger Than Fiction* stuff couldn't be too factual; that was cheating and could get you sued. So the week belonged to Tek Symmys! As Dr. Chaudry might say during one of his big Religion of Me encampments, "it was a toehold on the mountain of Personal Power."

The traffic was heavy on Constitution Ave. due to the Congressional winter session, but I didn't mind. I loved the sight of the Capitol all floodlit, the brilliant rainbow hues - crimson over the House, the Money Green dome, the Passion Purple Senate. It made me a little nostalgic for the Freespirits, no matter how hard their Empathy Laws made life for a journo. It was almost impossible to prosecute newswriters now under the Originalists, and that made things a whole lot easier, but I was going to miss this colorful landmark once the Leadership could scrape together the Reagans for a monument's worth of Purewhite. Stuck at a crosswalk waiting for a pride of Solorides to pass, I tuned my audio to Dylan Rewired. Ever since the Germans had isolated the algorithm, you didn't hear man-written originals anymore, but people didn't seem to care that much. It never bothered me that "Bullrush Child" was SimulSound, because those gospel harmonies could lift me like a fistful of Vitazest. And with a big night ahead of me, I would need all the pep I could muster.

I was really getting into it when – just my luck! – my audiochip message bell started ringing.

--You have a message from...RIKKI SYMMYNS. It will begin after this helpful word from Pro-Stet. Pro-Stet: Nature...Only Better...

Much as I hated these commercials, especially the artificial organ jingles (No aches and pains/Or bulging veins...), I knew the dangers of declining a call from the wife. So I cranked up Symbob and waited for Rikki's voice.

--Hey, Bear, where you at,? she cooed. She sounded agitated.

--Almost to the Potomac flyover, I said. With a little luck, I'll be nuzzling that downy neck before you're through watching Fat and Frisky. I could hear her chuckle and inhale deeply. I imagined her leaning back in the Iso-Chair, all the stress flowing out of that beautiful, rippling red-clay back, those graceful, serpentine porphyry arms.

--Oh, you! Don't make fun. Don't forget we have tickets for the Senate tonight!

No chance of scrubbing that. For weeks, I had been hearing the ancient refrain: *we never go out anymore*, until I could barely stand it. So I called in a few favors from the guys at the Center For Voodoo, and scored some giga seats for the Midnight Rumpus at the Capitol. It was budget season, and there were some fireworks over the last of the public wheat stockpiles, so tempers were high, the old men were working at the top of their games and tickets were scarce as polar ice. I was feeling pretty proud of myself and with Templar away on a school trip, I was frankly looking forward to a little full-tilt sensopressure. It had been days and days, and, besides, I had earned it. No mediation required this time, cousin!

--I am so dialed in, Kitten. After the show, we are going OFF-off-line and getting all kindsa tactile. And that's covenant...

3 FEBRUARY, 11:18 P.M.

Micronesian cuisine was never my favorite. After a dinner at Colonia, I couldn't care if I never saw another banana leaf. But the snapper was fine, and the palm wine had got me glowing, so I was in a good mindframe when I handed the Agogo's drivecard to the valet parker at the Capitol gate. And Rikki was turning heads as we strode down Monsanto Corridor. No question about it; my wife was a stunner. That subtle mix of bloods – the Malaysian, the Iroquois, her mom's Egyptian roots – blended to form a woman of lithe and compelling

exoticism. I had never liked the “egghead” look, and I was damn glad her black tresses had grown back to shoulder length, but the electrolyzed brows were growing on me in a big way. She definitely moved like nobility, and the roll of her shoulders made the citrine microcrystals on her wrap positively dance. The lines of her bone corset really made the most of her trim, tight belly.

--I love the new outfit, but bone? I'm not made of money, Chipmunk...

--Never fear, my love, she beamed. It's only laminate. From Khoikhoi.

--Mmmmmmm-Mmmmmmm! You sure know how to wear it, Babe.

It was another sellout, and *les voodouns* had done me proud with third-row on the aisle. The sound system was spinning old 20th century Dixieland jazz and, as I scanned the gallery, I could pick out a celebrity or two. Marella and Dezzie from PlanetTeen's *Watch Me Binge!* were parked in the Commonsense Party section, squired by some Navy men in dress whites. The lights dimmed, and a very familiar face mounted the podium.

--And a fine good evening to all of you ladies and gents! You know me! From Hologvision 3-D's Useless People, I'm Your Bro, Ken Dreams, and boy, are you in for a rollicking good time tonight! So zoom in those peepers and tune your audiochips and buckle up! First up, it's Equal Rights for Dogs with Sen. Bailey Biddle and his Canine Caravan! Raheema Dutt and Kandy Kane Carbo are going to musically debate the Sex Traffick Tariff, and we've got everyone's numero uno political Pagliacci, Fuzznutz the Clown in another fine mess. And music from the Andrew Keister Septet, with DJ CastorOyl! Seminal! Then, to cap it all off...oh, you lucky people... it's a tribute to Uncle Remus from America's Grandpa, Arch-Senator Rollo Greenjeans and Our First Daughter, the luminous, jim-dandy Wholesome Hackett! So let's get jovial, Americans!

Next was my favorite part: the March of Senators, led by the Rex Radnor Dancers in their translucent dermex catsuits. It was quite a scene.

--There's Abdullah Crumb! I love his hair!

--See that desk where Calyx Arthur is sitting? That used to belong to John C. Calhoun!

The downside of a hyperethnic wife was that I always had to poke her in the ribs to remind her to stand during the Anthem. But by the time the recording got around to the bit about *The cauldron of achievement/God!'s® trophy on the globe*, I was tingling with excitement, ready to see our mighty system of laws at its glittery best.

The guy next to me, an older fellow with a Maori face tattoo, leaned over to stage-whisper: *Nobody can accuse these guys of slacking...I've been back three times and I haven't felt cheated yet!* Mr. Man sure said a mouthful. It was high spectacle all night from a real cast of professionals. Geech Durwood, the stalwart centrist from Missouri declaimed, in a wonderful, pure tenor, on the benefits of renewing the Tax-Free Territories, while twirling his statuesque chief of staff Isolde in a sensual minuet. Rikki, who never showed the slightest interest in tax policy, gave my arm a gentle, loving squeeze. And then, before you knew it, it was time for the main event.

Rollo Greenjeans (O-Alabammy), at 116, was the longest-serving member of the Senate. He was a simple processor at the CorMaCo megafarm at Clementine Falls in the '20s, when the Originalist drive to change Alabama's name pushed him to center stage. His tall tales, earthy laugh and virtuoso banjo-picking made him a natural public figure. Since attaining the rank of Arch-Senator in 2058, he didn't come to the chamber much anymore, but his flamboyant witticisms kept his recorded performances on the multivision and cemented his status as the country's biggest politainer. I had to admit he still looked pretty spry as a couple tuxedoed members of his backing chorus wheeled him in. For tonight's revue, he had shed his trademark eelskin suit for demin overalls, workboots and a wide straw hat. The chorus fanned out, and with some vintage softshoe steps, cued the band, who struck up the sort of rural ditty that might have watered Stephen Foster's eye.

*Back inna days 'fore the patents was filed
The Man done saved the day!
Da wheat fo' da bread was growed buck wild
The Man done saved the Day!
Da wheat done died in da frost an' flood
The Man done saved the Day!
While da farmers woiked in da knee-deep mud
The Man done saved the Day!*

*Dem sto'-bought genes
Dem sto'-bought genes
Da Man make sho' you get yo bread and greens!
Dem sto'-bought genes
Dem sto'-bought genes
Make da high-priced taters and the bestest beans*

I couldn't keep the toe of my snakehead boots from tapping. A great gold banner, emblazoned with the names of all the top agra concerns with proprietary lifeforms on file, unfurled and a spotlight picked out a pigtailed calico figure across the room. I knew every inch of that figure, and seeing it again sent an icy down my CNS.

Helena Hackett was a research librarian at the Museum of Weather when we first met. I was researching a story on coastal erosion, and we flirted over digiclips of churning seas and embattled wildlife. I was single then, and I hadn't forgotten all the moves yet. Smiles and jokes turned to kisses under the sheltering arm of the Angel of Free Enterprise in Financier's Park. Even then I could tell she was destined for greater things. She sparkled. I can't explain how, but the light shim-shimmied off her, her eyes, her lips, her hair. And when the time came to unwrap the Holy of Holies at the pinnacle of lust - hell, even that seemed to throw off its own light. Every cell a star. I was smiling contentedly, but the inside of my head was fizzing like a water cooler full of Sweetabs. She spun out of the corner and twirled into Old Man Greenjeans' lap, leaning back to thrust out a milk-white leg that could have been carved by Canova. And when she sang, she brushed away all the info cobwebs:

*From the field at harvest time
The songs are bright and gay
No worm or weevil, rust or rot
Can still the rondelet
Nature's bounty, green and good
Our tables will attend
Through corporate science, wise and kind
Our treasure to defend!*

This was the one that got away -- too ambitious, too willing to shill for politainers for a grim truthartist like I used to be. It was Rikki who was the right woman at the right time, the smile at the end of the gauntlet, after all the rage and spite had been squeezed out of me. But the hole she left had a very singular shape, and no lady, however sublime, could snugly fill it. There were always gaps where the nerves were a little raw.

The older lady at the end of the row, by the looks of it old enough to remember the Great Hails, dabbed a pair of glistening eyes. It would not be long before Wholesome and Greenie were playing this number before the Twelve Earnest Persons for enactment. The Twelve had been stacked against BetterFood for the last couple of years, but recent hit holovision films, and the big robot-infidelity scandal coverage had elevated hardliner persons-plus Gripp Pretty and Griselle L'Ange onto the tribunal, so patent extensions on designer seeds and soils were likely to sail through. The Originalists were rising again.

So much politics, personal and otherwise. Made it like work. I concentrated on dissolving a headache and tried to focus on fun and frolic.

--Look at those Little People tumble!, I said. Just like the Kiev Circus.

--Oh, Honey, Rikki sighed. *Tonight has been the best. And it's not over yet...*

4 FEBRUARY 8:14 A.M.

The multivision timer was set to Introverted Life and it threw into the center of the room a gorgeous hardbody in one of the new Valkyrie designer swimsuits. It was a bit of an inside gag, setting the Rise-N-Shine to *What Is Your Problem?* We got a charge out of waking up with one of the regular trio of celebrity holochix cooing their little encouragements.

--Oh, hell yes! I cheered. *If it's Thursday, this must be Syzzle O'Banion!* The night had been rewarding as hell, and we were both feeling lazy and silly and indomitable, like rich kids on a dizmax bender. Each of the hostesses had her own vibration, but Syz was my favorite. She had a real 1980s vamp; everything was more, more, more. The thighs and ass of a cyclist or swimmer, peerlessly squeezable breasts, a French-curled thunderhead of platinum hair. She hovered over us, smiling a mischievous smile that could convince a Freespirit to club the last koala.

--You have so much to give. *It hurts me to hear you talk that way. I really mean it. Let me show you, Muffin...* Her hand reached out beckoningly and I could not resist rhrowing off the covers and letting her intangible i-fingers flutter near my full-grown manstick. I liked the way the light played over my texture implants: yakuza pearl. Best thing Rikki ever talked me into.

--Geez, Rikki snorted. *You are such a clod. You are beyond beyond.*

--Sorry, Babers, but you know me. *Syzzle is sex.*

I had a lead on a good story for later. Gibraltar E-feeds was hyping the live date of *Who Knew They Were Men?* and I had a sit-down with the author, a big local forensic kinesiologist who was sure to say some printable things about Marilyn Monroe and Patsy Cline. Chang had promised me masthead placement and if the Machete Mobs down in the Provisional States kept relatively quiet, my blast might just hang around awhile. I could never explain the public's lingering obsession with Carrie Underwood, but I was determined to make it work for me. For us. T-Bird, my little Muskrat and me. Our mob.

--Know what? *I think I'm gonna make some breakfast. What do you fancy?*

--Besides this? I asked, putting a gentle bite on a tender little medallion of salty hip flesh. My mouth was watering. Rikki hardly ever cooked anymore, what with all her charity work and

the school Vigilance Committee, but before we got married, she had been quite a little chef. She still had a Get Out of Jail Free card from her days cooking at the Directorate of Parking. It came in handy; you never knew when you were going to find yourself in the middle of a sympathy suicide or a roadway collapse.

--Damsen and plaintain extract gridcakes? Mmmmm, I'm making myself hungry! She seemed as happy as an oiled-up gameshow contestant in the MoneyPit as she stirred batter and skimmed the morning scuttlebutt on the digital slate. Oh look. Ouida Peeple has a new contest to rebrand the Alpine police action against the Gruppe Weltlich. I'm thinking the 'Swiss Watch.' Get it? Because we're 'watching' them...

--I must be the luckiest man on earth, or thereabouts, I chimed.

The double-tone in my audiochip meant a call was coming in to our vidscreen as well. I threw on my robe and walked into the living area to switch it on. The sender was Mrs. Kinsella, the vice-principal at Temp's fasttrack prep. I was a little surprised to be hearing from them; at this moment, Temp should have been touring the Deadwood Crater with his Astro-Security class. She didn't even wait for my salutation.

--Mr. Symmys, good day. I suppose you're wondering why I called.

--Temp OK? Not an accident I hope...

--No, no, nothing like that. She was fumbling for words. Can you and your wife swing by my office this AM?

--What's this all about? Did Temp do something?

Silence.

--I think we should talk in my office. There are...complexities...

4 FEBRUARY 11:06 A.M.

The GoodLife Superior School was the capital's most exclusive, an incubator for judges, administrators, state security, the real movers. There were six or seven applicants for every slot. When Templar was born, I was working at the last of the purist newsmagazines, *Symbion*. I covered the energy beat. That's when I started keeping my private file. Hard news was dying,

and it was getting tougher and tougher to sell the editors on the indigestible: bribes, little genocides, free energy scams. I let the players know that I didn't miss anything, but I was in the game. I would keep the lid on for the odd favor. When a name we all knew was paying off some of the President's people and a couple of the Earnest to keep a big geothermal field in cowboy country from becoming a national park, I got wind. It was worth a first-grade slot at GoodLife. Ten years earlier, it might have bought me one of the man-made islets off Old California, but everyone knew that scandal was a buyer's market, so I grabbed what I could still get: a meaningful life for my boy, a chance to rub elbows with the infoscenti at soccer games and car washes. I hated going to that place, a hideous egg-shaped Ahtisaari monstrosity at the end of a West End cul-de-sac. I always felt a little dirty, and I wanted us to be clean.

--So, didn't she say anything? Rikki was worried, and it really spoiled her look. It gave her those concentric forehead-lines that made her look like she was wilting.

--Best not to fret, Sillygirl. Let's not go lunging at phantoms.

Esther Kinsella always made me laugh. In her floor-length kurotoroko kimono and her hair in a tightly-lacquered bun, she looked like the 1980s vision of The Future, contrived and overweening. Her speech was amateur intrigue, breathy and unnecessary. This little drama could have been about drug dealing, but then again, it could have been a dress code violation or a hacked electronic permission. You just never knew.

--Ah, Mr. and Mrs. Symmys. Please, sit down. I found her formality unsettling. *Can I get you something? Water? Sani-bowl? Comfort mask?*

--No, no, thank you, Rikki sputtered. *I'm anxious to know what's going on. I'm a nervous wreck.* We had not even begun and she was already massaging that aerodynamic neck with a kava towel.

Esther eyelocked us for a gratuitous instant and reached into her desk drawer for a black plasticene bag, which she threw on her desk with careless bombast, like trash.

--As a member of the Vigilance Committee, Ms. Symmys, you helped adopt the Inspection and Seizure Guidelines. And you know that we often use class trips to conduct our looksees.

Again, needless pathos.

--Okay, I interjected, so you found something in his things. How bad could it be? Is he dealing drugs? Passing around Blood Moths? They were endangered, but kids got a little high from chewing the wings and used the dyes to give themselves homemade tattoos.

--Not exactly.

I'm thinking to myself *Can we please get on with this?* They find a couple of Ultraxas or a vibraglove in the kid's locker and it's snakepit time. I mean, kids will be kids, right? And nowadays they were literally dying of stimulation. They were putting themselves in the hospital just to get a little conscious sedation. GOD!® knows I had spent many a class-hour backbenching, hunched over my TabulaRasa, fascinated by those free-circulating blasts of Calysto Gadd - *Can't Stop The Mucus* and *The Orifice*. Seems like babyshit today, but it was worth a nod back then. Hell, and I turned out alright. Better than alright. We were up-and-comers.

--*It's not the magic again?* Rikki asked. *For that I blame your Mr. Argenbright. Don't you watch what goes on in your classrooms?*

Esther visibly tightened, mumbling some spit about getting defensive.

--*Maybe I should just show you.* She tipped over the bag and a bunch of square, multicolored paper bundles tumbled out.

--*Books*, I blurted, without meaning to. Of course, I knew what they were, making my living with words. But I hadn't seen such a collection in quite a while, not since my post-grad days. To be honest, I was more fascinated than angry. They were paperbacks, old, well-read, but in surprisingly good condition. It explained where all that holiday cash had been going. As I leafed through the trove, I recognized a few of the titles, but others seemed strange. *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. *Sexus*. *This Boy's Life*. *The Ice Shirt*. *The Lathe of Heaven*. Still stuck at the bottom of the bag was a fat copy of *Ulysses*, something my old professors had talked endlessly about, but that I had never read. Or seen, for that matter.

--*We see your point*, I said.

Mrs. Kinsella seemed dubious, preoccupied, watching a pair of Japanese gardeners trim a topiary hedge in the shape of a Viking.

--*Do you?* she asked. *I'm not at all sure. I've asked Dr. Sutorious to join us. He's the company's consulting psychologist.* At the threshold stood a stout, aggressively unfashionable man in a houndstooth jacket and baggy pleather trousers. He was already breathing heavily by the time he reached the taupe divan and settled himself.

--*Of course*, he said, *no laws have been broken, so let's not get too excited. But this is sort of...tightrope behavior.*

--Curiosity about the forbidden, Rikki offered. *The old story.*

--Forbidden? *Not forbidden, but discouraged. You see, all the studies have generally found that certain fictions tend to have negative effects on young people and their situational fluency, that is, they tend to depress, frustrate or confuse. And to inhibit the kind of N.O.W.-based conditioning that grows achievement.*

--Healthy. Eager. Real. Earnest, Esther recited. *Narrow Our World.*

We had gotten an earful of this pseudo-science when we had enrolled Temp in First Year. *Keeps the kids focused on the is. Mastery, not mystery.* It was all designed to keep the kids competitive with an entire planet scrapping for jobs, resources, wealth, allegiance. We were too enlightened to censor, but we turned all our guile toward persuading the young away from inventing stories, especially ones that looked at tough questions, at people forced into terrible choices.

--We'll certainly talk to him about his spending habits, I said, *but we're still talking about a couple of books, right? Not to minimize things...*

We all looked at each other, and Esther's assistant cracked the door and beckoned us into an anteroom.

4 FEBRUARY 11:43 A.M.

The room was windowless but comfortable. At its center was a 3D holodeck for, I imagined, performance reviews, press availabilities, quarterly trustee conferences. Esther looked twitchy and out of sorts, like a P.I. with liprub footage of a cheating spouse.

--Let me set up what you're about to see, she said. *For insurance purposes, we have been forced to record all extra-curricular activities...including your son's Citizen Service Project.*

I had encouraged Temp to get involved with the school's CAC chapter: canned food drives to feed the incarcerated, transporting legally-competent seniors to the polls, shit like that. It was great resumé fodder and a chance to meet the next gen of some big-name families. And it wouldn't kill the kid to develop some feeling for the disadvantaged. I watched as the room filled with images of students filing in, joking, gossiping, being regular bubbly boys and girls.

--Is that Lambda Carteret? Rikki whispered. *Hasn't she grown...Holy crow...*

--Great resolution on those images. She was a foxy little bambi all right. That bullet bra was practically putting my eye out. And her mom was chairman of the Digital Journalists' Forum. I told T he should cozy up to her, but he was a little thick in the romance department. He got that from the Egyptians. Too wrapped up in playing Infernal King with all his little Australasian friends, I figured. As I watched, uncomprehendingly, Templar slipped on a black robe and five girls folded white refectory napkins into some sort of odd nurse's caps.

--All right, Rikki fumed, what is this then? What the HELL™?

--We don't have the audio, but our History Department believes it's Arthur Miller's The Crucible. From the American 1950s. A reenactment of the Salem Witch trials. Not a big moneymaker.

Lambda fell silently to the floor writhing and shivering and reaching for the sky, alongside four other girls, including the local prelate's daughter, a dark, leggy little beauty with red, belt-length extensions who rolled and sobbed with an almost old-style sexual gusto. I grabbed an Annual Report from a side table and put it in my lap, so Rikki wouldn't see that I was getting a little firm down in the engine room.

--So, I asked, some little sex game? Kids will be kids, am I right? I could see on their faces I was getting no validation from anyone. Better than drugs, anyway.

--I wish it was that simple. I think we're seeing an outbreak of...drama. We're seeing it in other clubs, as well. The International Skeptics were caught in auditions for Some Like It Hot. Fitness Boosters were distributing contraband folios of My White Devil and earwitnesses heard our Engineering Studies Council humming what we believe to be the libretto to Flower Drum Song.

--We're sorry, the doctor went on, but our intel places your son at the center of this. We believe he's the instigator. Student Zero if you will.

So that was it then. I reached out and clutched Rikki's wonderful hand, letting my finger caress that terrific art deco tanzanite ring I had bought her on our last anniversary. I had been part of the GoodLife family long enough to know dismissal language when I heard it. These guys were true believers. They didn't buy into halfway measures. I expected T to get the boot and the Dragon Lady did not disappoint.

--Now, now, this isn't a death sentence, she droned. There are many options for a bright, talented boy like Templar. And we have wonderful relationships with the three d-cons in your district. All wonderful schools!

The words we dreaded. The *desconsuelos* movement had begun in the Provisional States, as a way of redirecting the children of families with deteriorating prospects into a reviving service economy. Soon these institutions of lower learning began to spring up in all sectors of the nation. It was true the District's d-cons were better than most – one even had Algebra, those years when students wanted it -- but there was still no way around it: it was a come-down, and a very public one.

--We feel it would be best to make the switch before Templar gets back. It would save him the embarrassment of packing up in front of his friends.

--We find it's very important to let young men save face, the doctor said. He couldn't even look me in the eye. To deconfront.

Rikki seemed to have checked out completely. So what could I do? Fight over a day or two? Make the boy stick around where he wasn't wanted? Force him into scenes that would be the talk of all the dads at the Plugg Inn and the Harriers Lodge? I signed the Transfer and Release and the Personal Goods Receipt and got Rikki the HELL™ out of there. She looked like she had just walked away from a three-way wreck and, in a way, I guess she had.

--He gets it from you, I grimaced as I slid into the driver's seat. Teta Bakhoun and her snake dancing or whatever. I didn't even care I would be stroking my own pearls for a while. They had all let me down.

5 FEBRUARY 8:12 PM

Templar had positively bounded up the ingress ramp, breezed through the entryway and spiderholed himself in his living space without so much as a *Hola!* to Rikki or me. Not all that unusual, but behavior that took on a sinister undertone now that I knew about his clandestine fixations. I had always given the Little Shooter a lot of slack in the old leash, but now my cerebellum was overflowing with the most evil imaginings: a school copy of Bremer's *Entrepreneurial Responses To Natural Disasters* hollowed out to hold a semi-legal photocopy of *The Basketball Diaries*, my heir and scion matching soliloquies from *Death of a Salesman* with that shady al-Quarami kid on the 3D webcam his Aunt Starla gave him for his First Prostration.

--Post-pubes, I sighed, mostly to give my brain some sounds to process, to stop the cavalcade of imagined indignities. Rikki just squinted into her vanity, squeezing cellulose microjections into her incipient crows' feet. I padded over to Temp's door, gently rolling my knuckles across and inching it open just a nose wide.

*--Hey there, Ranger, how was our crater looking? His eyes were locked on the holodeck, where several European heads of state in multicolored sumo *mawashis* ran a dash towing what appeared to be plumbing fixtures, while the crowd, mostly mustachioed men, fired Roman Candles and whirled New Years' noisemakers. Macedonia was almost out of it last night. Coming back?*

No acknowledgement at all. It was so hard to take when juvenile petulance began to turn into growed-up passive aggression.

--Your hole is still hole-y.

--Still holy, I muttered, forcing a smile.

--Wholly idiotic.

It had not been so long since my Occupation Forces tour in eastern Canada that I had forgotten the persuasive power of the thumb to the eye socket, or the unerring efficacy with which the heel of the hand could be applied to a youthful Adam's Apple. But in my peripheral vision, I could see Rikki hanging back nervously, ready to dive in and calm hostilities. I had ignored the threat of her intervention once before, and my collarbone could still predict a rain squall better than high-end radar.

--Okay, there, Big Bear, your mater and I have something we'd like to chat about.

Again, stone silence.

--We were thinking it might be a tonic for us to yank you away from the books and take a little vacation. Whaddaya say?

With nary a change in expression, he picked up his handheld and jacked up the volume to drown us out. My digits were a-tingle and I could hear the blood *whoosh-whooshing* inside my head. I went over to the console and hit "disengage," plunging the room into a sepulchral silence.

--They found out about your novels and your little thespian exploits. Yeah, that's right. You're expunged, kiddo.

For a sec, he just looked sadly relieved, then, mussing the tuft of his Mohican, he clicked the holo back on. Only this time, it was in full omnicast mode, the room full of spectral Vegas nightclub tables filled with 1950s swells, and the chatter of mobsters and the idle rich, the

popping of champagne corks, the clinking of highball glasses in buspans. With a cold precision, he bounced to his feet and froze us in a glare of defiance.

--Whether I'm right or whether I'm wrong/Whether I find a place in this world or never belong/I've gotta be me... I had to confess being somewhat impressed by his tremolo, his stage presence. For an instant, I was transported, but Rikki's elbow to the ribs catapulted me back to my senses. I pounded the "off" switch again, in the process, sending an old Sgt. Freewill action figure on a headfirst swandive into the imitation Navajo throw rug.

--That'll be enough of that, Mr. Bojangles. We had a little chat with your prefect. All about those little afterschool productions of yours.

---Do you have any idea what this means? Rikki shrieked. And me treasurer of the Monitors. You were on fastrack!

Unmoved, his face a mask of unbowed rectitude, Templar clicked us into the courtyard of a Tudor palace, the air filled with the smells of horse and honeysuckle, Thames River mud, roast meat and human sweat.

--I do none harm./I say none harm./I think none harm, he said, hands folded serenely and piously before him, his face wreathed in a forced modesty.

--Oh no, you don't! I interrupted. *Don't you go getting all ecclesiastical on us, not after all the pheasant and foie gras we had to skip to get you into a good school, on a decent social path. You did this to yourself.* I poked the console, this time twitching with rage, dissolving the English castle back into the mists of time. I had hoped to hear some contrition from the lips of my only child, but he just pouted for a moment, then clicked his way into a dirty 1970s municipal courtroom, stalking the floor like an anxious, caged simian.

--I'm out of order? You're out of order! You're out of order! This whole trial is out of order!

By now, Rikki had heard enough, her eyes filling with a slow-boiling menace. *Trial? That's a laugh. Where do you think you are? You've already been bounced. You're done. For you, it's the d-con, or the Better Youth Brigade.*

I was a little shocked at the way my little thrush had brought the hammer down. Temp seemed to gather himself -- to circle the wagons, emotionally speaking -- then grabbed his Kevlar flak jacket and shoved his way past us, toward the door.

--You can't silence me by shutting me up in a d-con! A d-con! Don't make me laugh. I'll be running auditions for *Short Eyes* within the week. Órale! He slammed the door with authority.

--What the hell is that supposed to mean? Rikki asked.

--Odelay...I chewed this over for a second. *Can't be sure, but I think he might be threatening to turn old-style Republican.*

12 FEBRUARY 1:48 P.M.

So now it's all about damage control. Henny Muller and Hoover Shelby and the rest went straight into the neighbors' insta-rator. Once Templar got over the initial sulk and settled into his Information Retrieval studies, we started him with a good psych and got him on subcutaneous Rectamine® twice a day. The spitting and nighthowling was a bother, but, I mean, like Dr. Chaudry reminds us, children are the We of the new Nows. The other Tenth-Years at GoodLife figured out what was up when Temp never came back and their club meetings started being regularly moderated by ed-marshalls. The staff went into mute mode, squelching any chatter about the afterschool Broadway bacchanals. (Could you imagine? Senators' and army generals' kids dancing something called *West Side Story*?) Without her school activities, Rikki lost touch with the other poshmoms and started spending whole days pacing in front of the holo, developing an unsettling attachment to *Oddities!* and the pirate skincasts. All the Orotaine was putting weight on her, making her arms go jiggly. Down at the newsite, the whispers were flying. I could tell. Chang blanked my expense account and kicked me upstairs to the vegetable bin, letting me compile the monthly *Same Old Song & Dance* politainment supplement. My signature key said *Editor*, but everyone knew it was really a scheme to decelerate me, to keep me out of the real headline Points. The last guy who held my job keeled over reading news releases at 103 and drew his pay for a year after that. And Chato Nuñez, whose son Manco taught Bio-Containment at Loveless d-con, was riding high, with a scandalcast in development on *StraightToHell®*, eight straight weeks at the top of the newsroom duration derby, and Sycorax Lutz, a wild new fitness-host wife with abs you could grate onions on, that is, if you could find natural onions in the Developed Zones.

In fact, my audiochip is telling me that's Nuñez now. I wonder what he needs from me?

FLAPS THREE ZERO

By Steve Davies

Flaps three zero
Four hundred feet?
Yes, we have four hundred feet.

Three zero coming down.

Gear down and three green lights

Can you see there are some hills in front?
What? There's what?
some hills, isn't there?

Horizon!
Mountains!!!
We rely on God
Dreht ja noch ordentlich
Is this not operating normally
There it enters

mellow it out.
Aha, showers.
nice and easy
Come on forward....forward, just barely climb.
There's too many valleys here.

(collage of Cockpit Voice Recorder transcripts of aviation accidents)

From A Biographical Guide to North American Monsters of the Long Emergency

By Ron Garmon

Aachen, Ronald R. (1990-2031) b. Saginaw, MI. Commander and so-called “ninth” member of the infamous Frankenmuth Eight, Aachen was a career soldier who saw distinguished service in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and North Korea, rising to the rank of sergeant before deserting in 2019 while on leave in San Diego. He eventually resurfaced in Detroit during 2027’s “Summer of Fire,” as a 4th lieutenant in the Metro Regulators, a short-lived libertarian militia that racked up an impressive 1,041 kills before disbanding in a flurry of arrests and indictments at the Hague for crimes against humanity. Determined not to be taken by UN police, Aachen and co-defendant Walter “Fritz” Elroy shot their way out of the suburban ambush that netted the rest of the Eight early in 2030. A wounded Elroy was captured days later in Ohio, but the fate of Bronze Star recipient Aachen remained unknown until his bullet-pocked corpse was discovered months later wrapped in plastic inside a trunk in an abandoned south Indianapolis apartment last occupied by members of the Prairie Revolutionary Party. The 5 million euro reward was claimed by Union de Révolution Permanente Modifiée, a Paris-based Trotskyist microsect with no known adherents anywhere.

Abboud, Ibrahim (2001-2025) b. Bristol, UK. Born to Lebanese immigrants and a U.S. resident alien from 2010, Abboud was majoring in Free-Market Education at Old Dominion University where he first exhibited outward signs of mental distress. Diagnosed by a school psychiatrist as paranoid schizophrenic, the young man nevertheless found it remarkably easy to pick up firearms, ammunition, and explosives before barricading himself inside the newly opened \$47 million G. William Whitehurst Memorial Institute for American Exceptionalism. He managed to hold off police and the FBI for ninety minutes before detonating an unknown amount of dynamite, killing himself, eight police, two FBI agents, and a blogger for WWF News. A lengthy, carefully composed online “suicide note” consisted mainly of an annotated denunciation of Whitehurst, a long-dead G.O.P. congressman and onetime ODU faculty member whom Abboud accused of “state terrorism” and deemed “a fartsucking Nixon-kissing asswad that voted for nerve gas” among other, arguably worse things. Little of the foregoing was remarked upon in the media during the subsequent nationwide wave of anti-Muslim pogroms.

Abshire, Dylan O. (1995-2028?) b. Sparks, NV. This reclusive electrician was pretty much the last person neighbors expected to load a homemade planar explosive device into a dusty, oddly-painted 2002 Dodge minivan, drive to county fairgrounds near Price, Utah and detonate it, killing 937. The dead included Senator Noelle Gingrich (R-NV), vaporized along with several hundred other attendees at an election-eve Rack ‘n’ Stack for America rally in a spectacular 2D explosion that went out live on 3D holoivid to ninety million viewers. Human remains were flung horizontally with terrific force, to be found imbedded in buildings as far as eight miles

away from ground zero, while images taken from space record [an eerily sudden bloom of pink-stained dust](#). Despite a brief worldwide manhunt, no trace or even credible rumor ever surfaced of Abshire, though a vintage remote control device found under an RV park dumpster near Cody, Wyoming was subsequently traced to him. One curious anomaly of this case is no post-high school photograph ever taken of Abshire looks very much like any other. Campmates from Burning Man 2023 remember “Cap’n Sparky” as someone who took a lot of mushrooms and would do anything for a laugh.

Adderley, Newton (1980- 2032) b. Houston, TX. A onetime hiphop DJ whose mixes were briefly in favor in the heady mid-2000s, Newt-Bomb resurfaced when a few of his verses were published in the late Teens as part of the short-lived Dead America movement. Adderley was long off the cultural radar by the time his name came up in connection with a string of Los Angeles-area robberies culminating in a 2027 armored car heist that netted \$12 million and left four guards dead in a Westwood parking lot. The robberies- or “production costs” as they were styled - were traced to the Ad Hoc Committee on Ultraviolet Social Change, a West Coast armed-surrealist theater group that made the President’s List of shoot-on-sight terrorist orgs later that year. Such was the efficiency of private police agencies in the former L.A. County during the Long Emergency that the AHCUSC continued to operate sporadically for a decade after Adderley was shot execution-style after a Melrose Ave. shootout with a rival Situationist troupe.

Agonsky, Rand (1983- 2059) b. La Platte, MO. The public face of the short-lived Constitutional Republic of the Cumberland, the tough and bulky Agonsky was a pulling guard for Ohio State who made second-string All-American before becoming a star libertarian talkshow host in the waning days of cable television. His style of far-right confrontational street politics carried over to nightly holovid and, in turn, slopped over into further staged incidents, like the public torture and lynching of federal postal worker Waleed Ibrahim, held in Louisville over Labor Day 2025 weekend and live-streamed to the planet as it happened. The two-day long death-by-ordeal of transsexual Unitarian bishop Kathy Hendrix in Knoxville that Halloween made him a media star and one of the few to hitch their careers to the white-nationalist regime later to emerge out of ten former U.S. states. On live state-run holovid for most of the C.R.C.’s nineteen-month existence, Agonsky kept up a running diatribe against the United Nations, the former United States, the then-extant European Union and the proposed Lunar Republic, interspersed with Obama-era TV reruns and retrospectives of movies by Leo McCarey, John Milius, and Jamaal Fanaka. The Information Minister’s iconically tattooed forehead and hands posed little hindrance when it came time to escape to Estonia after the rout of the C.R.C.’s fortunes after the Battle of Kokomo in 2041. Over the next eighteen years, Agonsky gave interviews to historians and issued the occasional Cauc Power statement on behalf of the long-dead regime. He died of apoplexy at Minehead, Somerset U.K. during a personal appearance at a “Twenties Yank Villains” autograph event. Holo [here](#), two postcreds.

Ahern, Burl (1954-2035) b. Orlando, FL. A seldom-employed handyman and longtime extension student who never married, Ahern might’ve passed through his troubled era in total obscurity,

but for an impulse purchase late in 2011 of a Powerball Lotto ticket. Sudden possession of \$347 million turned this misanthropic sex-hating auto-didact into a formidable disruptor of what little peace the United States had left. Ahern had a closely reasoned case against human sexuality, a peasant's shrewdness when it came to handling money, and the seemingly endless energy of moral revulsion. Whatever the sponging sloth of Ahern's previous life, its last two decades were a whirl of activity as he bought his way into politics and launched a cultural movement to reimpose an idealized and multiethnic version of Victorianism. Ahern's campaign against public and artistic depiction –or even personal expression - of human sexuality took up most of his time and created the biggest public furor. Not every mob of seemingly random people to descend upon motels, sex shops, or lovers strolling in the park with tasers and ball bats in that giddy era was organized by Ahern, but the first few dozen were and every outbreak of anti-sex violence for decades after took after the flash-mob pattern set in his early "vice raids." Ahern stoutly denied responsibility for any of the hundreds of recorded maimings and deaths attributed to a movement he invented. Stinginess and shrewd investments made Ahern one of the U.S.A.'s last billionaires and he died choking on a peach pit at his Key Biscayne home. Peaches then cost \$43 a pound.

Ailsworth-Hyde, OBE, Rupert (2005-2049) b. East Anglia, UK. An Etonian who dropped out to join the Royal Marines, the dashing and photogenic officer served with distinction in North Korea and the thirty-day Qatar War, rising to the rank of major before resigning in 2028 for a career as a mercenary. He later saw extensive action during the largely unsuccessful pacification efforts imposed by UN mandate during the early years of the Long Emergency, gaining extensive area knowledge of urban North America. As what passed for civil order in the former United States gradually disintegrated, this lifelong Yankophile pioneered a lucrative type of "extreme tourism" for wealthy (and bored) Asians and Europeans intrigued by the idea of consequence-free murder for sport in the former superpower. This he parlayed into a smashing success on holovid with *Killing Time in America*, which became the new medium's first worldwide hit. The show's premise - jolly "Hypen" Hyde leads a motley group of armed-to-the-jaws compeers on a shoot-first filibuster into lawless America in search of artifacts like a *Psycho* comic book or T. Texas Tyler .78 phonograph record- proved fatally irresistible to imitators and, ultimately, its creator, shot to chunks in a carefully recorded ambush in the ruins of Benson, Arizona. The bait was credible rumor of a one-sheet movie poster for the 1939 Monogram western *Death Rides the Range*, autographed by cult religious figure Ken Maynard and posted with an eleven million euro bounty by Sotheby's of London. Responsibility for the massacre was claimed by the Temporary Committee for Enhanced Violence in Popular Culture, a Reno-based media co-op whose resulting feature was screened out of competition at Cannes in 2061.

Akerman, Dagny (1978- 2029 uploaded July 2036, deleted November 2036) b. Santa Barbara, CA/Rumsfeld AFB, KS. A graduate of Pepperdine and Harvard Law, Akerman was a RAND Corporation policy analyst who skyrocketed to prominence as advisor to President Palin during her tumultuous third term. Akerman's legal brief in favor of a two-tiered citizenship led to passage of legislation in 2022 stripping away almost all legal and property rights from most

naturalized citizens and their children. Akerman went on to the dual distinction of being the sole Supreme Court appointment of President Michele Bachmann's short-lived administration and the only cyborg ever to sit on the U.S. bench. Her confirmation hearings were held in March 2025 amid the opening chaos of the Long Emergency and the swearing-in was one of the last official acts before the seat of federal government was moved to Wichita as martial law in the District of Columbia succumbed to demonstrations and foot riots. Justice Akerman provided the fifth vote in cases that upheld selling U.S. Senate seats to multinational corporations, forced internment of Muslims, and transfer of the Social Security trust fund into private bearer bonds rendered worthless by sudden default and disincorporation of the United States itself just after Memorial Day, 2029. Far from ending her drive to become Chief Justice, Akerman's assassination later that year sidelined it only temporarily. Arrangements with San Jose-based Lifecor Cybernetics Inc. provided for the justice's brain to be shaved into micro-slices and scanned for digital post-mortem reconstruction. This proved far too great a temptation for conservative purists in post-default Real America, a fee-for-services rump subscribed to by 28 states of the old union. Stuck with a contentious libertarian Congress and an aging High Court with only two surviving justices, deadlock forced premature experimental revival of Justice Akerman's brain. This compromise passed the R.A. Senate in the sole unanimous vote of the body's eleven-year existence, with the organ's appointment as Chief gaining only three dissenting votes and eight abstentions. Holo-interface more theoretical than practical was arranged and the tissue was successfully revived on 4 July, with Akerman's dislocated consciousness emerging shakily over the course of many days. Intensive psychotherapy and 3D post-production were needed in prepping the new Chief for the traditional first Monday in October opening of the Court, but media observers from CNN to Al-Jazeera-Israel to *Daily Variety* praised the smooth and lifelike nature of the presentation. It came as all the more of a shock when on the morning of November 17th, the Justice's formerly bland simulacra began to grow agitated during oral argument, breaking in to ask disjointed questions, rambling distractedly of Freemasons before shrieking that every nerve ending of her long-cremated body was alive with unbearable tortures. The screams and thrashing went on for a disquieting span before the Justice's fatally corrupted file was deleted and order in the Court restored. The administration was flatfootedly pondering a statement when World War III reached Miami and this small marvel ceased to matter.

Ames, Elton F. (2016-2038) b. Milton Friedman Education Facility, near Bonner's Ferry ID. The parents of Elton and [Harrold](#) Ames were likely Seth and Charity Ames, public-school teachers from small-town Ohio deported to the far west after the Anti-Freeloader Roundup of late 2029 and neither of whom survived the forced march from Boise in January of that year. Elton and his undersized brother were culled from a short life in the northeastern labor gangs by their remarkable eye-hand correlation and shared aptitude for electronics. Indentured in their teens to advertisers and street signage teams, the brothers learned the rudiments of radio-directed flight by programming and operating the ads on the helium-inflated artificial clouds then inching across the summertime sky to give much-needed shade to elite enclaves and daytime sporting events. At first the pair contented themselves with the sight of words like ASS and COPSUCKER emblazoned seventy feet tall in the sky but Elton's legal manumission at age 21

gave wider scope for action. So, on Labor Day weekend 2038 at Denver's 99 Cent Pavilion, the Ames boys and co-conspirator [Quincy Evers](#) hurriedly bolted a canvas undercarriage to a departing cloud's tough carbon-fiber skin. Waiting until a mile aloft before hacking into its controls manually, Elton steered the sluggish vehicle while Evers typed in a lengthy screed calling for revolution and butchering the rich. Harrold held off police helicopters with rockets fired from a handheld launcher, taking down three in [spectacular explosions](#). Flaming metal and cop parts showered a crowd estimated at nearly nine thousand turned out for the comeback attempt of onetime pop idol Justin Timberlake. The cloud soon veered off-course and the audience stampeded to escape the unfiltered rays of the sun, further increasing the body count. The vehicle's low altitude and speed made escape unlikely, but the boys had optimistically worn parachutes anyway, since security forces found one strapped to Elton's bullet-pocked corpse hours later at the crash site twenty miles east of Leadville. Neither Evers nor brother Harrold were ever seen again.

Ames, Harrold J. (2018-?) b. MFEF, near Bonner's Ferry, ID. Stunted brother to Elton, Harrold was indicted for his part in the deaths of 717 police and bystanders in the 99 Cent Massacre and sentenced to death by strangling while in absentia. Rumors of his ultimate fate became grist for legend, but most authorities came to believe he and Evers died in the shredded wreckage of the solar-powered slow-moving cloud. This theory is inconvenienced by lack of any physical trace of either man. Sightings of the diminutive, flat-nosed Harrold continued to be reported as long as the ten million dollars offered for his capture had a government left to pay for it, which turned out to be little more than seven months.

Andersen, Karl (1998-2033) b. Minot, ND. Little is known of this career thug prior to his arrest for first-degree murder in Milwaukee in 2027 and subsequent appearance on the ill-fated third season of *Wetback Hunt* in late 2031. Producers of this 3D "reality show" bought out Andersen's imprisonment contract from the cash-strapped Real American government as a mid-season replacement after an unusually large and bloody turnover among hunters. The toothy, beady-eyed Andersen was an early focus-group favorite with a formidable initial Icon Rating of 8, but brief fan debate on whether he was too button-lipped or just too stupid to attain major stardom came to an abrupt end in a box canyon near Truth or Consequences, NM. [Episode 3.13](#) "Dry Gulched at Elephant Butte," was dedicated to him.

Axmann, Lois Langdon de Lafayette (2002-) b. Paradise Valley, AZ. Heiress who claimed descent from the Revolutionary War general, Axmann founded the micronation of Roark Island out of an oil platform she inherited -along with half a billion dollars - on her twenty-first birthday. Correctly apprehending that conditions in the United States were about to drastically worsen, Axmann spent a quarter of her fortune first retrofitting the rusting deepwater hulk and then ballyhooing the plush result into the world's largest floating party. This warren of pontoons, concrete, and pleasure craft floating some four hundred kilometers offshore from Pascagoula drew to itself an impressively large share of the world's declining wealth. Federal power was such that threats from the U.S. Department of Justice were already little more than gestures before the Great Default. Roark Island waxed fat as things disintegrated on the

mainland- money-laundering, deathsport, and the more exotic forms of sex tourism raked in billions while thousands of fleeing American refugees with few options clung to the outskirts in all manner of rickety vessels. Hurricane Romana struck Roark Island with particular force in 11 September, 2051, killing an estimated four thousand of these displaced persons, but de LaFayette had long since decamped for the Lunar Colony, where she threatens to live forever.

Azuza, Harcourt F. (2001-2035) b. Anaheim, CA. A multimillionaire at age 22, hologame designer Harry Azuza was, by 27, sufficiently bored to take up reading fantasy literature, where he found his life's work in the pages of Jack London's unfinished 1910 novel *The Assassination Bureau, Ltd.* The Malibu resident then liquidated most assets and began a yearlong program of physical conditioning and weapons training culminating, legend has it, in the hurtling of a needle through a priceless vintage lucite engraving of Lady Pac-Man. Despite such imputed prowess, Azuza's first dozen kills were traumatic botches inflicted on derelicts found in the vast unpoliced sprawl of Los Angeles' crumbling downtown, where as many as 1.2 million homeless nightly squatted. The first, the millionaire poisoned and watched; the next few he drenched and set alight and the last several were killed in a series of fights other bums were paid to record. Sniper attacks on corporate, military, and media figures outside L.A. came next. A local news anchor in Tucson, a Minneapolis blogger, a Vancouver lawyer, and the commander of the American Exceptionalism League of Columbus, OH were alike the recipients of a surprise titanium-jacketed .410 Headbanger bullet, the resulting blossoms of blood and bone captured by camera bolted under a self-designed rifle capable of knocking down targets 3000 meters away. Soon after came the first known instances of so-called "exploding email," as houses, apartment complexes, even entire city blocks wired for computerized maintenance went up in fires or gas explosions ignited by the assassin's hacking, sometimes from half a planet's distance. Other favorite tactics included leaving truckloads of arms and ammunition in underclass neighborhoods and using advanced surveillance and facial recognition software to stalk preselected ruling class individuals as game. Asuza self-released many accounts of his exploits on video and holo, with every phase of his career as self-motivated freelance killer was greeted with imitation and low-budget improvement upon his methods. It all came to an end under the heels of a panic-stricken mob in Branson, MO after Azusa's successful hit on actor [Ice Ventura](#), whose holo series *Aim to Maim* is available for virtual experience [here](#) for eight postcreds.

Insert fifty postcreds for Series B. Collect all twenty-six!

Copyright, 2060 for the World and Lunar Colony 3 by Garmon 21st Century Factoids, Ltd. "No horror too big, no future too small."

FACE OF COMMUNION

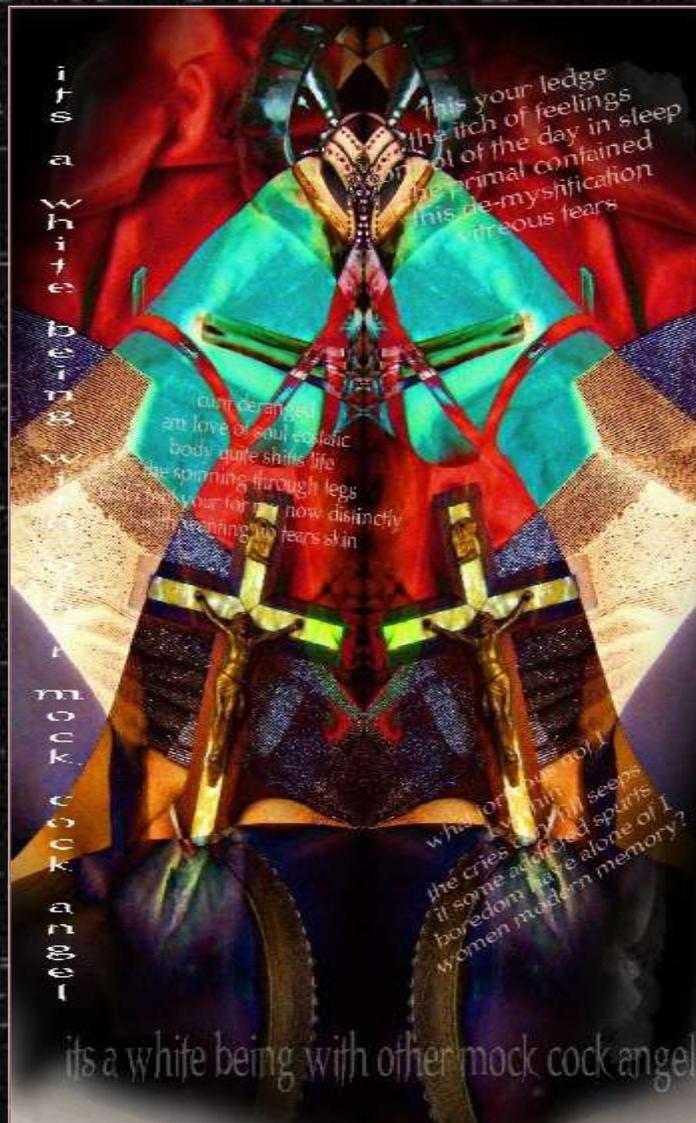
By Sue Fox

Images by D M Mitchell

I feel this circular vortex in the depths of my cunt, spiralling inwards. The cunt pulls everything into it and never allows without entire trace. hang like bible book body is the sinful, long to sin each and Memories abide in coral floating out to amber reeds wrap opening of the cunt, and sending the opening of the blades cite around one centimetre and protrude excitedly, This lady wants to her cunt incisors on her ex's cocks, miserable small me ass holes and I a snaggle-toothed-little meat.

I feel like my cunt my body. If wanting to do feel something in it. from a springboard weighed down by other than air. If some big eye, delight, afeared of waits on a rock and grey tide, waiting blue to appear.

I am hot as fuck. A raving sexed raven. Feathered. I am writhing around in an ecstatic body. Thoughts of sex break everything else down. There is such a fully charged sensual explosion happening and it is all going on inside my cranium, tightly contained. My cunt leaks 'come'. I feel like anyone could touch me now and I wouldn't care who it was... I would just close my eyes and reach up into the violet ether. My cunt just wants fingered and searched out completely, examined for its juices, and tasted. I feel slightly deranged and falling



anything to leave if Remnant cords marker threads. My the dismal. How I every day.

it like rare blistered sea. Translucent tendril-like about the the filaments ficking pleasure upwards to foetus house. Razor the uterus every teeth begin to in puncture marks. cut and bite and use you, especially on damn you all you dicks. Oh come to will show you what cunt can do to your

wants to get out of squirms about inside somersaults and to My cunt is jumping and wanting to be something tangible almost blinks like winking with stopping. My cunt drinks in the heavy for the quantum-

into states of rhapsody and fugue and streams of stars. I altercate between fantasy and dream and swooning, like a lunatic bedevilled. I am in the spaces, laughing, transfixed on the cunt. The cunt wants. The cunt doesn't always get. I see the fleshy cadaver extricated from sex. The body is gone. Sex too! And so I wait around like a good girl to see if I can go into the paedophilic headmaster's office to seduce him. He teases me, making me wait for him, knowing he can build me up with waves of orgasmic reaction, and can turn me into a reckless sinful vixen just with the mere thought of him and his whipper like forso.

In obsession you like a god and act as is what we seek, the self. We want the ultimate pleasure. precarious nature of Two tentative landslide. We are in and out of the body, cunt to get born. another's body for part comes quickly.

Psssst..... pray tell obsession? Spell it Speak it out from

I might as well this too, as I veer flesh of Sam. I think serious skin obsessed with the myself more fully in 'thing' quite like fucking another

My cunt is shouting feels the Universe Universe floods hole. Am I no more is always on my uttered forth from pursed lips? To fuck yes cunts and cocks subject matter. You were made from an intra-muscular squirt.

The idea of dirty pervert 'spunk' being shot into me represents the channelling and alchemising of the badness into something light and transcendent. I came twice this morning at 00:50am and 01:50am. I was really pleased with myself. I had fantasies of being taken by couples, groups of women, my aunt and uncle, lone perverts



elevate someone their consort. Unify polar side of our ultimate sex, the We enjoin the beings together. realities collide and and out of love; in in and out of the No-one can live in long. The time to

what is your out. Say it NOW! your primeval lips.

include myself in towards wanting the about us in the act of carnage. I am need for sex, to feel it. There is no being naked and person, naked.

OUT LOUD. If inside of it. The through my cunt than 'arousal', as sex agenda and being my sow's filthy is to love life! Oh are the deepest of all

from the shopping mall; I was held down and felt, made to fuck. I felt so open and natural. I was totally in touch with my sex. I was utterly bathed in eroticism. I was in the dark timeless pit with animals.

This sex drive is phenomenal. Pure pheromonal perfumery, and feline-scandalous-nous. The sexuality of a thousand women generated inside one cunt, mine. The witch, the high priestess of cunts is ready for her defilement. I could quite easily take it to its limits – fuck anything, anyone. We artists can be like that. We like to see what we can endure and sense. We grow from knowing others and tasting and having multiplex experiences. Artists seek pleasure from anywhere, across the globe, and within the domains and contemplative pit of lip sensation. of unidentified quiet walls, saturating the

I have been pissing night long. I feel danced fill the sun much too broken. cunt are extreme are harrowing like constant pull and tug holding, a grip that the pit-bull who you with. There is an never goes away. for, a burning for 'come' in. My cunt is like some lunatic and moves from disquieted and There is restlessness shifts in her pace, shimmering

to side. This intense the rain-coated perplexed, glazed looking into an oceanic light. There imaginings and she ranting, slavering tongue, fearing at hair. She swings

loose fired whore and rubs her labia in fast spurts. The cunt has called and there is no stopping her mouth. Cunt is muse. Cunt is not to be ignored. Cunt is nature gone mad, an uprising, a descent into the kingdom of bottomless sexual desire and gratuity. I have entered the gap of no return; forever more she will be with me, a loudness between my legs. The cunt mouth answering me back like some wayward child. She will mock me when I ignore her. She will remind me she is there. I have entered my cunt and I am flying into her weave. I am weeping and laughing and have lost all control of my cunt. She leads me into total freefall, into the painful



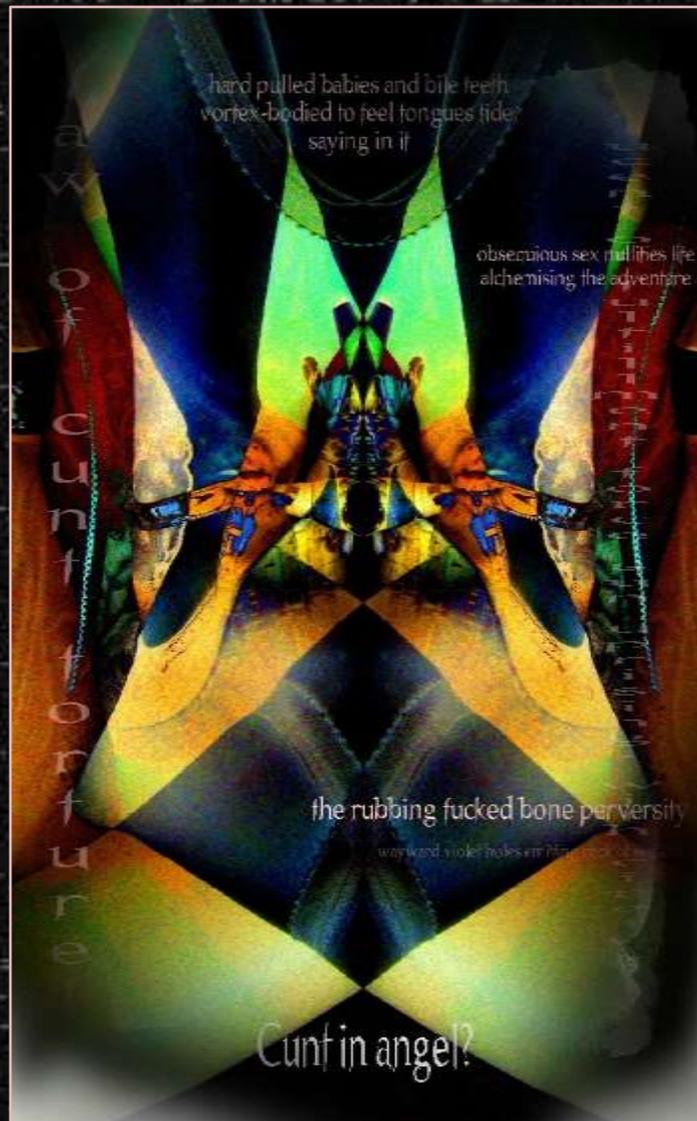
and wanking all shattered, like I rose. The sleep was The feelings in my and painful. They torture! There's a there... an ache, a doesn't loosen. Like just aren't messing itch, an irritation that There is a longing invasive flesh to houses an entity that locked in a house, room to room, secretly disturbed. within her, as she ruffling her pefficoats from side 'being' stares out of window with her dead-blue eyes, intoxicating pale are strange stalks heavily, her red peeled her clothes and her and sways like some

existence of dark waters, in the straining of this wild nocturnal catatonic energy. Cunt is death itself, a murderer even.

The days and nights are too long as I wrestle with its longing for a cock. My cunt tugs at my heart and mind – but more so outside of myself to draw in life and the forces of blood, to squeeze things into my self. My cunt is a fardis, a site that is different once you get in it. All elements of delight and destruction are to be found. It can sweep you in to other times, other port-holes. The cunt is distorted, and atrophies to the distinct stimulus that is near her. Cunt thought and sight of with fresh come, Cunt wants hard male bone of light and that is the the cock, only truly are together. Sex is answer to war. Sex Sex is better than a disturbed and is satisfying (if only time). Sex empties the body. Sex is soul of us.

My cunt hurts real 'come' again. Cunt throughout time. your fingers off her. cunt forever. Cunt fingers in tender down the slim of the cunt house a the lower heart that life. If the soul say, what prodigy The devil? An The cunt is many-discard others after but the cunt goes on like some wormhole on you worms!) and vortex-bodied.

vitreous and unadorned soul. My cunt feels so overpowered by feelings of straining for touch. I want to make myself come again, after twice orgasm-ing very early this morning. I am insatiable. Is it any wonder that I feel dizzy? This is so cruel to feel this level of sex. But is it I? 'Sex' is what I am looking at in art, and you find that what you focus on looms larger and larger in your life and attracts more of the same. In fact the application of thought on the cunt has bred interest in it for me and for others. I have created such a force in the c-word that so often over the centuries has been denied in its existence and has been re-fashioned and cauterised. The cunt



trembles at the a hard cock and stiff ready to infiltrate it. penetration by the truth. Cunt wants cock! The cunt and at peace, once they a religion. Sex is the keeps death away. eafing. Sex quietens restless mind. Sex for a brief period of the mind and fuels sublime! Sex is the

bad – she wants to wants to be rubbed Hey, do not take Please play with the will smother your juices running your wrists. Does soul? The cunt is temporarily guards resides in the heart resides in the cunt? angel? Or both? faced. Cock can its primary orgasm, and on, taking in, (ah, how apt, come Cunt is infinite space Cunt is the open

anything else other than to engage in sex and the cuntificious cunt? Why eat? Why work? Why savour a memory? Why even think?

As an artist I want to push everything now like some fucking punk renegade. I am not afraid to say anything. I am not afraid of my body or anybody any more. I delight in it and its knowledge. I adore its responses. I want to release the cunt and its fluids more and become completely free. I could feel the tension of walls when I was with Sam, in that I had the space to speak phantasmic fantasy but I blocked it, I help myself consciously in an inanimate state, I quiet child closing move beneath the 'she' saw me want to utter the want to tear the everything that is house the dormant Uncle tormentor cunt.

I have such today. I feel as if I up for a long time life sucks. The more exciting and external one! I have within for a week dominate and flex Letters catapult in Catalysts of words house lights in the pure spunk and feel like lightning mouse's hole. I My body needs fucking. Cunt sighs! can't have!

I feel stasis. The air I feel binds and crosses marked into skin. I see cunt The streets are littered with my 'come' and my fears. I am saying goodbye to a year of flesh made open, made whole, and made word.

People can't abide emptiness it destroys them to perceive it, the space to 'be', so they fill it up with any old shit. All I want to do is make love and make art all day!



boredom in me have been locked and that mundane inner world is often real than the been dwelling now, and words my neurons. my cerebrum. form and depart like dark. I am full of frivolous vizard. I contained in a want to run riot. exercise and more Cunt wants. Cunt

is torn with stigmata. wounds. I see everywhere, etched folds in the skies.



CONTRIBUTORS' LINKS

STAFFORD STONE

<http://www.staffordstone.com>

DOLOROSA DE LA CRUZ

<http://dolorosa-reveries.blogspot.com>

ANDREW MABEN

<http://art.andrewmaben.net/blacknight>

<http://art.andrewmaben.net>

andrew@andrewmaben.com

KENNETH RAINS SHIFFRIN

<http://www.amazon.com/Hubert-Selby-Jr-Better-Tomorrow/dp/B000LC4ZK8>

MATT LEYSHON

mauvezone@inbox.com

YANN LEGRAND

<http://yannlegrand.blogspot.com>

LISA WORMSLEY

<http://www.indigoburns.com>

BOB PFEIFER

http://www.amazon.com/University-Strangers-Bob-Pfeifer/dp/061542595X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1302978385&sr=1-1

<https://www.facebook.com/bobpfeifer>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tabby-Chinos/137212953004130>

SUSAN TE KAHURANGI KING

<http://susanking.co.nz>

GENE GREGORITS

genegregorits@gmail.com

<http://www.facebook.com/gregorits>

DANNY BAKER

<https://www.facebook.com/populismhater>

F.X.TOBIN

<http://www.fxtobinartwork.com>

CRICKET CORLEONE

<https://www.facebook.com/MirandaCricketCorleone>

RICHARD A. MEADE

<http://www.visualdata.net>

MADE IN DNA

<http://www.amazon.com/Bukkake-Brawl-ebook/dp/B004FPYPOS>

D M MITCHELL

<http://www.paraphiliamagazine.com>

SALENA GODDEN

<http://www.myspace.com/wearesalt peter>

<http://www.myspace.com/bookclubboutique>

FFION NOLWENN

<http://ffionnolwenn.weebly.com>

WILLIAM KRILL

sumofreddie@hotmail.com

CHRIS MADDOCH

<http://www.chrismadoch.com>

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/pages/Chris-Madoch-Art/130948425164?ref=ts>

<http://www.eye2eyedesignsinternational.com>

CHRISTOPHER NOSNIBOR

<http://christophernosnibor.co.uk/default.aspx>

MALCOLM MCNEILL

<http://www.malcolmmcneillart.com>

A. RAZOR

<http://razor13.blogspot.com>

KIMBERLY DALLESANDRO

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=554334585>

<http://littlejoe.bigcartel.com>

E. ELIAS MERHIGE

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=674441164>

STEPHEN SENNITT

sennitt@btinternet.com

KATE MACDONALD

<http://www.morelikespace.blogspot.com>

JOHN LADD

<http://www.johnladd.com>

dixē flatlin3

<http://www.facebook.com/dixeflatlin3>

JIM LOPEZ

www.antiquechildren.com

STAGGER LLOYD

staggerlloyd@googlemail.com

<http://www.facebook.com/stagger1>

GUTTERSAIN

<http://www.guttersaint.org>

CLAIRE GODDEN ROWLAND

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=657867184>

http://www.amazon.com/Piroska-Three-Short-Fairy-Adults/dp/0615452191/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1298746179&sr=1-1

RICK GRIMES

<http://rickgrimesfansite.net>

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/profile.php?id=10000040662738&ref=ts>

HANK KIRTON

<http://hankkirton.blogspot.com>

MAX REEVES

<http://www.s-kollective.com>

CLAUDIA BELLOCQ

c/o paraphiliamagazine@gmail.com

LANA GENTRY

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1489820863>

ROBERT EARL REED

reedco1@yahoo.com

<http://www.reverbNation.com/robertearlreed>

<http://www.hillcountryrecords.com>

<http://www.carlenethecd.com>

JAMES JACKSON TOTH

<http://www.jamesjacksontoth.com>

CHRISTOPHER BROWNSWORD

cbrownsword@hotmail.com

GARRY VETTORI

<http://arnhiem.com>

JANA

hana1080@hotmail.com

KERRY EVANS

<http://www.kerryevansart.co.uk>

MICHAEL O'DONNELL

odonnellah@gmail.com

CONNLEY (LEE) LANDERS

connleylanders@yahoo.com

SID GRAVES

<http://www.cemeteryprints.com>

CRAIG WOODS

craigwoods77@hotmail.co.uk

DAVID GIONFRIDDO

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/profile.php?id=719854511&ref=ts>

<http://www.myspace.com/dcdaveg>

STEVE DAVIES

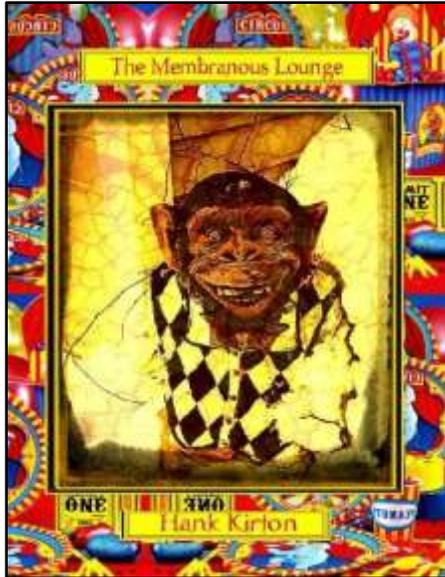
<http://spartacusmills.blogspot.com>

RON GARMON

rockyredglare@gmail.com

SUE FOX

<http://www.rogueartistsstudios.co.uk>



THE MEMBRANOUS LOUNGE

Hank Kirton

Introduction By Jim Rose

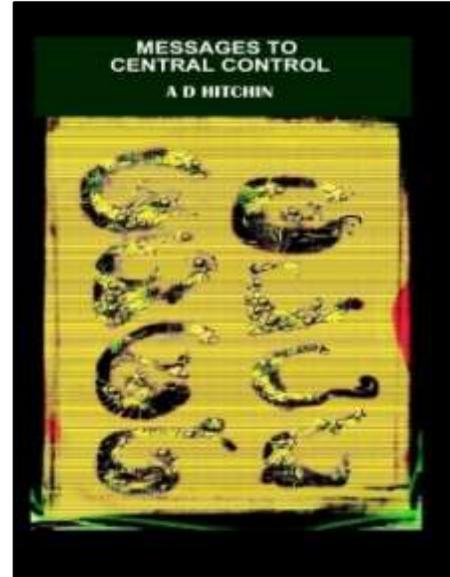
Welcome To The Membranous Lounge!
Where ugliness and beauty melt and run together, where reality is temperamental and the boundary between “normal” and grotesque is nebulous.

The Membranous Lounge is a zone of slippage, a twilight area between the layers of the world that are familiar and the terrifyingly unknown. It is a chimerical realm inhabited by the hopeless, dispossessed, and those who have simply turned away.

Imagine if Ray Bradbury and Jerri Cain Rossi had a child that they locked away from the world, with only the Marquis De Sade for reading matter, and a dietary intake of bad LSD and atrocious B Movies. The Membranous Lounge would be the spawn of that child’s imagination.

ISBN-10: 1452816301

IABN-13: 9781452816302



MESSAGES TO CENTRAL CONTROL

A D Hitchin

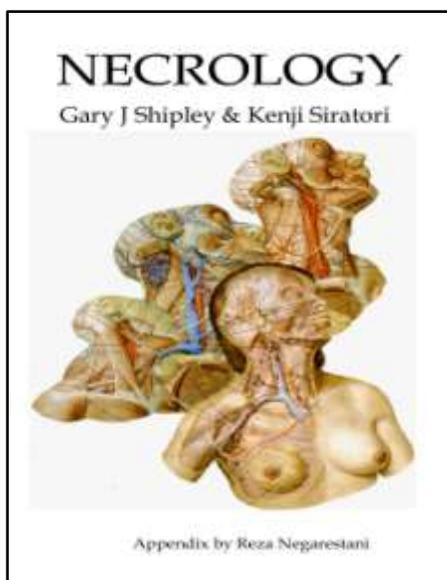
A shifting collage of condensed micro-novels; intense and corrosive uzi-bursts of poetic anti-narrative from some alternative cyberporn universe intersecting ours. Reading this book is like surfing the shortwave band and finding oneself listening to alien soundtracks.

“Messages to Central Control is a daring and challenging work, and from the outset notions of stable form, content and author are all thrown into question, and the reader is compelled to leave everything they believe in at the door, and to enter with eyes - and mind - open.”

From the introduction by **Christopher Nosnibor**

With artwork by D M Mitchell

ISBN-10: 1453865853



NECROLOGY

Gary J Shipley & Kenji Siratori

*The living and the dead at his command,
Were coupled, face to face, and hand to hand,
Till, chok'd with stench, in loath'd embraces
tied,
The ling'ring wretches pin'd away and died*

- Virgil, The Aenid, VIII 483-88

An exercise in sensory overload from the minds of Kenji Siratori (*Blood Electric*, *Acidhuman Project*, *Mind Virus*, etc) and Gary J Shipley (*Theoretical Animals*) that pushes the limits of both human expression and that which can be assimilated in terms of socially-sanctioned pattern-recognition. Self-referring, auto-cannibalistic texts that hover and shimmer around the borders of the asemic, yet still retain a vivid relevance to the current post-human cultural landscape. A cyberpunk katabasis beyond Burroughs or Guyotat.

With an Appendix by **Reza Negarestani**

ISBN-10: 1453706585

Don't forget to check out our Music Page:

<http://www.paraphiliamagazine.com/music.html>

MP3 downloads now available from Amazon.com

You could also look cool while supporting your favourite online publishing venture by wearing our t-shirts:

<http://www.paraphiliamagazine.com/contraband.html>

And while you're on our page, pop into our gallery for a spell:

<http://www.paraphiliamagazine.com/gallery.html>