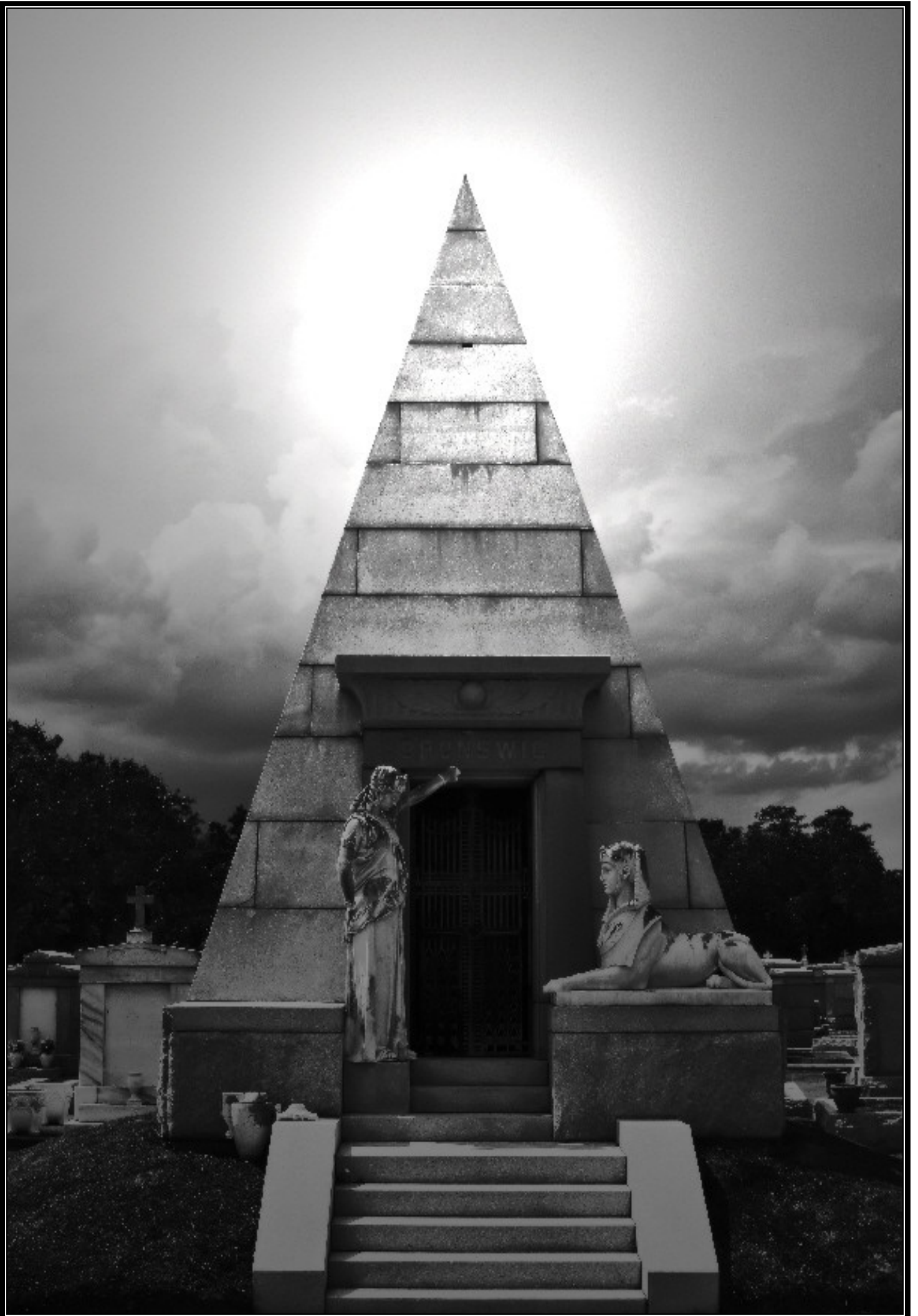


PARAPHILIA V





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*\* This issue is dedicated with much love and admiration to Brendan Mullen, who should have been gracing our pages with his words rather than as an idolon, and James Williamson, who was born sixty years ago today. \**

## 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.

## EDITORIAL

Staring at the sun.

How often we find ourselves doing things - quite deliberately and with full knowledge - that defy what we have been taught to believe is 'common sense', things that are really not in our 'best interests'.

Our parents bring us into the world from love or indifference - or often a mixture of the two. We then spend the next decade and a half being instructed by them, our teachers, the guardians of society, in how to look after and educate ourselves, being careful not to bring shame on ourselves, our families, or society.

Get adequate sleep and nutrition, get a proper education, or at least a decent job that will pay for a home and put meals on the table. Be careful crossing the road. Don't talk to strangers. Don't have sex with just anyone, but if you do, make sure you use protection. Take regular exercise. Don't drink too much. Don't take drugs.

Don't stare directly at the sun.

Yet time and again we find ourselves perched at the edge of the abyss, gazing down, stomach cramped with nausea yet half-longing, waiting for the abyss to look back into us. Looking and looking for something...

What is it that modern life has taken from us that's so precious we would rather throw ourselves in the face of danger, and even destruction rather

than accept the prolonged death-by-installments that seems to be our lot? Do we ever find what it is we are looking for, and do we even know what that is? Does it matter? Is the search itself, sufficient?

All we know is there is a fire in us that burns brightly or dimly yet always burns, and in the end leaves only ashes.

Let's start being honest and open about it, stop looking for excuses. Let's see an end to the attempt to cover over our true natures, to pass our vices off as virtues. Life is hard enough, without having to keep up the pretence of being 'civilised' as well.

In fact, the worst excesses of human history seem to be at least partially the result of denying our true natures, which are quite honestly more complex than we feel comfortable with. When we try too hard to be civilised, when we deny our destructive sides, we 'overwind the watchspring' - eventually something has to snap, and all too often does.

Instead, let's explore openly and honestly, and share it with others who are in no position to pass judgement themselves. In fact, it may even ease some of the pain of those wounds we voluntarily inflict on ourselves from time to time.

There is no need to feel lonely on top of everything else.



## BRENDAN MULLEN (1949-2009)

By Johnny Stingray

Photo © Carol Torres

First time I laid eyes on Brendan Mullen was August of 1977. Kidd Spike, DOA Dan, and I were loading our equipment into a building on Cherokee Ave in Hollywood, just off Hollywood Blvd, looking for the practice space Kidd Spike had found in *The Recycler*. We were a fledgling band, and practicing in our living room had inflamed our already tenuous relationship with our Santa Monica neighbors.

Our neighbors insisted we find 'other' arrangements for playing loud music, and having no clue where to turn, we literally stumbled on Brendan's crude but spacious basement.

The building, aptly called the Hollywood Center Building, has a door on the Cherokee side - across from Boardner's Bar - that enters into a narrow vestibule with an elevator. As we climbed into the elevator, a skinny and somewhat disheveled young guy quickly walked up and slid into the elevator next to us. We had no idea who he was.

He muttered, almost inaudibly, "What's going on? Where are you headed...?" Something like that...in an undefinable accent...

One of us replied that we were going to band practice.

"Oh, really? Who said you could come down here?"

We thought for a moment we had the wrong place.

"We are supposed to meet some guy named Brendan."

He gave a quick grin, "Oh...that's me."

He was very gracious from that point on, showing us the room we could use, talking about his plans for the space, and apologizing for the crude appearance. We didn't care. I paid him in advance for 6 hours at \$3.00 an hour or so, as I recall. He disappeared until the wee hours of the morning when we were loading out, and I asked him if we could book the same hours for the next weekend.

We didn't know until weeks later that he was actually living there. The Masque hadn't been dreamed up yet. This was a dark, low rent practice space inhabited by the likes of The Berlin Brats and their noir junkie crew, Martha Davis (The Motels), various members of an early version of the Skulls - and Brendan.

It was mostly deserted during the hours we were there, the darkness echoing with the sound of drums and bass from the other rooms. The occasional laughter from someone in the main room (where the stage would soon be built)...the bathrooms still worked and the famous spray paint graffiti was just beginning to appear.

Brendan was always there in those days. He once took offense that I

described him as 'permanently disheveled', but I remember him wearing the same pair of green polished cotton pants with a broken zipper for days on end. None of us had any money in those days and the ever frugal Scotsman spent his money on 2x4's and drywall rather than clothing.

Brendan will certainly be described in the coming decades as the 'Father of L.A. Punk', whatever the hell that means, and while he might not have been our Dad as much as an indulgent uncle, he certainly provided the Petri dish that most punk rock bands of that era in Los Angeles were cultured from.

Without Brendan and his dedication to keeping the place alive, there would have been no melting pot, no crucible, no non-commercial for-the-fucking-fun-of-it gigs... It would have been Whiskey/ Starwood / Troubadour ad infinitum. Most of would have given up and gone back to our day jobs, eking out a dreary existence, and leaving our rock and roll dreams behind us. Bands that thrived in the fetid atmosphere of the Masque, the quirky geniuses, oddballs, and art damaged misfits would not have had a home where they could explore the mysteries of their psyche in the non-judgmental forums of Masque shows. Brendan didn't supervise, didn't ever say turn it down, never had a negative comment for any band that wanted a place to practice. It was as open

and free. It was our clubhouse for a few brief months.

It was hard to piss him off, but I saw it a few times. He banned Rik Agnew's *Naughty Women* because they tore up his stage, spraying shaving cream and torn up Playboy mags all over the place, and I still think they were fantastic and stupid. He banned my friend and mentor, Al Hansen because Al said 'The Masque' sounded like a cocktail bar for aging drag queens.

We got him drunk once, and only once. We didn't know he had a fondness for Scotch whiskey. I brought a pint of Cutty to practice one night and normally he didn't hang with us while we practiced, but that night ...he drank most of it. Drunk as a lord, he turned into an elderly bluesman, blowing harp in the echo chamber of the empty Masque and singing like he was raised in the Mississippi delta. I would never have expected such a turn from this quiet, hesitant Scotsman.

We tried to draft him as Controllers' drummer at one point. He declined, either didn't think we were much of a band, or we just didn't pique his interest.

In 1986, when I had a one-off band with a few friends, he was booking Club Lingerie. One phone call and he not only booked my band, but gave us a headline gig, sight unseen. *That* is the definition of friend.

Over the years, he has slagged us in print, praised us for being a part of the culture and the scene, but he never excluded us from important events, like his Class of '77 book release gigs. In fact, the 2001 Class of '77 gig brought the Controllers back from the dead. He almost left us out of *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, but honestly, he may not have known how to get in touch with me.

He made up for any slights with the next book, *Live at the Masque*. Gave us the rock star treatment in both the book and the gig and we could not have been happier.

The last time I talked to Brendan, sadly, was just after the 'Live at the Masque' gig. He called me at home and for the first time since the old days, we just chit-chatted. Talked about bands that played the gig, how people had aged... gossiped... like only old friends that have known each other for decades can do.

Goddamn it, I'm going to miss him.

## ELEVENSES

Michael,

Your concerns about **narcissism** in your writing about Michael K are familiar to me. After all, I've been writing about Michael K a lot longer than you and have, as you can imagine, been through a lot of the twists and turn of perspective, looking at that character from the outside, as a fiction I **invent**, as a person who, assuming the identity of Michael K, finds himself reflected in a mirror that may no longer be just a mirror, but the reflection of a mirror in whose **refraction** another unexpected Michael K emerges.

Even the above paragraph has its problems for a reader used to getting clarity from the sequencing of **words**; some if not all of the writing about Michael K is wide open for interpretation even **before** the text has been typed.

Did I talk about the Michael K that is here, with **me**, now?

Or am I talking about the Michael K that is with **you**?

Or am I talking about an independent entity now, a Frankenstein's Monster of the text?

But I diverge now to tell you of what has been happening between my **self** and Michael K:

One of us is typing the above text, breaking off to try to recall the

three stories he wanted to **begin** typing this morning upon waking.

The Other is discovering Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, admiring the spare prose at the beginning of that book and how the story begins and ends within a page.

When K looks **back** at the screen and this text, the words are no longer plain black text on white; strings of three or four words are red, but that red is, the next moment, shifting around colouring different strings of words, taking up 'the twists and turns of the perspective' one moment, but then highlighting, in turn, 'finds in himself the persona', 'another unexpected K emerges' and 'the text has been typed'.

He is surprised by this effect which he assumes to be some retinal effect caused by the removal, suddenly, of his study from one medium to another, from the printed **page** to the illuminated **text**.

He reads on:

**Michael K:**

Doctor, Doctor. I've been experiencing physical, mental, and emotional changes that, indeed, are occurring even as we speak; "voices" speaking inside our head, a switch in consciousness without being aware, or without consciously choosing to do so. I move from singularity to



multiplicity, and my 'I' becomes a 'We', I go from shame and blame to **SAME**.

Every time I point my finger, I realize that three fingers are pointing back at me.

**Doctor K:**

Often, the universe bestows esoteric gifts upon those who are not emotionally or intellectually prepared to deal with them. Such a situation creates fear and confusion in the lives of those who see the results. And it is for this reason that we are approaching you now.

To assist us in sorting out this assortment of alternative selves, we offer the following Levels of Fragmentation to organise your thinking:

The Body, and its individuated personality, is a representation of yourself, **First Person**.

First Person perceptions are the activity of the Conscious Mind.

Everything and everyone that has a direct interaction with that body, whether it is human, animal, vegetable, or mineral, is referred to as yourself, **Second Person**.

Second Person representations are the activity of the subconscious. This is also the level of the Intimate Interface.

Everything and everyone which can be seen by you, but which has

direct interaction with your individuated ego-self, is referred to as yourself, **Third Person**.

Third Person manifestations of self are representative of the unconscious mind.

And it is ALL ME, ALL THEE, and ALL WE.

**Michael K:**

But the mandate that humanity has given to science, over the past 100 years, has been to keep me "normal" - to support my functioning in ways that feel familiar, and to help me live longer and prosper and one of the primary functions of science is the exploration and categorization of that which can be seen and observed. At any point, I can feel rage and confusion, even as a voice within me declares:

**"I am watching myself go through this. I am staying aware, even as parts of me are trying to forget."**

The conflicts within me (or him) are manifold. I feel a sense of restlessness, a nagging feeling of "purpose" that is, as yet, undiscovered. There is no sense of congruity, at times--no feeling of alignment, or credibility. Instead, I am gripped by an innate sense of foreboding - a premonition of something that may never be!

**Doctor K:**

And it is no mere accident that this awareness should come upon you. For, even as there will always be a place for triteness and for trivia in the world, there also needs to be a place where the “base metals” of life are blended and transformed into gold--where the narrow and inane concerns of finite existence can be expanded, and mixed with other elements, and formed into **The Philosopher’s Stone**.

The Philosopher’s Stone is the highest aspiration of Personal Alchemy. It is a Universal Catalyst, which has the power to mix and blend any particular essence with any other. It changes things, but it also reveals them as well. When it manifests within human consciousness, it grants a person the ability to see perfection in anything and everything – to see life from a transcendent point of view.

The 3D Construct tends to arrange things in a hierarchical way. It categorizes and separates. You are moving now to a place where ideas (and selves) no longer seek preeminence over one another. Instead of a long banqueting table, where a King or Queen sits at the “head”, your Inner Planes Alliance will seat themselves at a Round Table, where each voice blends to create the beating of a unified “heart”.

In Oneness, we no longer speak about a “Higher Self”. Instead, we tend to use terms like “Expanded Self”, which implies a unity that goes out in every direction.

Moving from the Expanded Self means that your thinking originates from outside the “box”. It is crystalline and rooted in eternity! Such is the heritage of all who call themselves the Children of Oneness. But first, you must bring to completion your grand experiment of living as a Child of Limitation.

*“The definition of insanity is continuing to go back to the same people and places, doing the same things – so that we can continue to not get what we have always not gotten.”*

**Michael K:**

How will what I’m doing benefit me, or others?

**Doctor K:**

In time, you will learn that, within the **Multiverse**, everything is perfect and everything is complete. It’s only in fragmented universes where the appearance of imperfection is explored. While journeying through your day, you will cease from asking yourself *“How will what I’m doing benefit me, or others?”*

If it feels right, you will simply do it. If it feels wrong, you will notice yourself doing it, and continue to expand your consciousness until you see the larger wisdom behind what you are choosing in that moment. The insights are there, if take time to look for them.

These are such powerful and compelling times, my friend!

Shock after shock, rattling the system. Each time a 'missile' comes at you, your internal structure shatters and rearranges itself. Solar flares, economic troubles, relationship changes, physical illnesses, career revisions and setbacks, social disarray, cosmic insights.

It's all coming in now. The *"rocket's red glare has bombs bursting in air,"* as the anthem goes.

**Michael K:**

If this is so - then the basic question that appears is "Who is in charge of all this?" Who rules the roost?

**Doctor K:**

There are, indeed, many levels of power. There are "Lords many and Gods many". Each level is true, valid, and sovereign within its context. But, when we approach the top (which doesn't really exist, because it constantly keeps expanding), there is quite simply **oneness**.

**Michael K:**

What, then, is at the centre of this experience I am rapidly approaching?

**Doctor K:**

His/Her name is **oneness**. The highest power in the Multiverse,

the one with the most control, clout, and sheer force belongs to the individual viewpoint which has expanded his/her definition of self to include everything and everyone.

**Michael K:**

What does it mean to be reunited with **The All That Is**?

**Doctor K:**

Be clear about what is being said here. The God Position on any Gameboard is not that consciousness that looks at everything and says '**Mine**'. Rather, it is that gaze of awareness that looks at everything and says '**Me**'.

**Michael K:**

I am co-creating this universe with **God**?

**Doctor K:**

Though you are tangibly represented here in human form, your total 'body' is more vast than you have ever imagined. And you have designed yourself to grow into **full** consciousness.

**Michael K:**

But how can a person become **one** with something or someone? The word "with" implies the presence

of **two** or more beings. The whole concept is incongruent!

**Doctor K:**

Your goal structure and terminology are split between universal and Multiversal concepts. In the Multiverse, it is possible for you to be two (or more) places at once.

You can be merged with someone in one universe, and estranged from them in another universe. And, you can even ponder the difference between those relationships within the same consciousness, sitting in either universe.

But each **place** experiences itself as though it was the only context of reality wherein those things are happening. The presence of **The Veil** ensures this, so as to preserve the integrity of the data that is being recorded there. And, even now, most of you find yourself emotionally resting in the assumption (the illusion, really) that your current viewpoint of reality is built upon objective truth, while all other ways of looking at things are merely shadows of speculation.

In days to come, speaking again in a linear sense, changes will occur in your consciousness that will augment and expand each of your 'single' viewpoints to include many other focus options as well.

**Michael K:**

How then, do I integrate **Divinity**?

**Doctor K:**

It's a tremendous challenge, to be sure. And, in the beginning, you will forget far more than you will remember. As you walk about your daily world, you simply begin to **initiate**. You ask for what you want, and you allow yourself to believe that what you want is also what God wants.

Your reconnected viewpoint of the world is now beginning to include at least a mental recognition that everything and everyone is **you**.

**Michael K:**

Why does all of this cause **me** such anxiety?

The activation of this new 'software' is what is causing your heightened sense of physical anxiety and restlessness at this **time**. Your personal 'patterns' are playing out, right in front of you, with undeniable clarity. And, even if your conscious mind is refusing to allow those realisations in, there is still a comprehension (on some level) of what is being **shown** to you.

You can run, but you will not be able to hide from this.

# COLUMN: THE LAST DREGS OF POVERTY

## A MAUDLIN BALLAD

By Jim Lopez

*Anxiety is freedom's possibility, and only such anxiety is through faith absolutely educative,  
because it consumes all finite ends and discovers all their deceptiveness.*

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*

### Portrait Of A Mechanical Man *Chico, CA*

The Mechanical Man's Pathological  
State:

The first intimate thought the  
Mechanical Man had did not  
originate within him,  
Rather "it" came from an  
organized method of  
understanding his body,  
Which was constructed for him by  
Some Other.

This method had order that was  
pragmatic, functional, profitable  
And ideologically deducible to the  
greatest form of Reason.

Any deviance from this method  
was considered disordered,  
unprofitable nonsense  
That merited nothing but failure.

However, the Mechanical Man  
could not help  
But take one reasonable thought  
from the category of the Biological  
Body  
And place "it" in the category of an  
empty space in his brain,  
Where a memory was created.  
This memory was unattached to  
form yet "it" inhabited space.  
This self-imposed act was  
understood as madness by the  
Some Other,

Yet madness may be the simplest  
way to define the social constructs  
Of human engineering  
Organically stationed in known  
and unknown phenomena,  
Yet feels the need to engineer itself  
into a perfect synthesis.

So the Mechanical Man resorted  
To the chronic blurts of words and  
phrases,  
Mashing them together in his mind  
Forming another category of  
thought  
That is not designed by the Some  
Other.

Thus the Mechanical Man's first  
intimate thought  
Took up space in his mind.  
And "it" spawned the following:  
"It" is a pathological vitamin or a  
pathological quaalude.  
"It" depends on how one swallows  
a heart that protects one from a  
beating  
Vs. swallowing a heart that  
administers a beating.

Instinctual thought became a  
synthesized chaotic metaphor,  
Attempting to create an original  
design  
Resulting in fractal patterns that  
embraced the Mechanical Man in  
tryptamine stasis,

Where the Mechanical Man neither  
gardens nor hinders,  
Yet he serves all others but himself.

For it was with the Mechanical  
Man's first intimate thought  
That metanoia<sup>1</sup> gave birth to the  
breath of sensation.

---

<sup>1</sup> "...metanoia denotes a process of  
reforming the psyche as a form of self  
healing, a proposed explanation for the  
phenomenon of psychotic breakdown.  
Here, metanoia is viewed as a potentially  
productive process, and therefore patients'  
psychotic episodes are not necessarily  
always to be thwarted, which may  
restabilize without resolving the  
underlying issues causing  
psychopathology."

---

**The Battered Minger of A Service  
Sector Employee  
Somerville, MA**

*Midnight*

I did not understand nor care for  
What it was that my mind  
was reading.

My eyes were pulled  
across each word

Woven together like  
the drowning undertow of a river

And I felt nothing  
But a juice bubble  
squished between my cheeks.

Subversive vapors,  
Saturated nights,  
Mist in the daylight,  
Molecules that  
no microscope magnifies:  
As Mr. H. once said,  
"You're a victim of  
theoretical abstraction."

Long nights saturated with heavy  
tossings,  
Eyes pining for unconscious  
darkness,

Relieving the mind of  
laborious thoughts,

I reach for that  
over the counter plastic bottle  
With  
the white safety cap and pour

2.....3.....4.....maybe even 5  
teaspoons

Into the clear cup, all  
responsible like.

Doppelgangers dissect me,  
Discovering my soul's  
conscious dreams.

When I wake I swear  
Someone has  
stood over my bed,

On the  
hour every hour,

Pounding my head with a  
brick,

But at least I slept and  
it was legal.

*Morning*

A black leather jacket hangs loosely  
around a khaki-wearing slickster  
who manufactures artistic  
expressions. The slickster may be  
either male or female, computer  
literate, and has investments in  
fragile capitalistic gains.

These sycophants claim  
Dada without knowing who  
Tristan Tzara was. Their bifocals,  
greased hair, tattoos, and  
manicured extremities are satanic  
tentacles prostituting everything I  
ever wanted to be.

Rear usurping analators.  
It's a doggie...No it's two  
doggies sitting in the middle  
of the road,  
Where only the self  
prescribed drive in Malibu.  
It's due process and false  
information that shouts out be duly  
notified your tax man is at your  
door and Cooly Williams, Tricky  
Sam Wilson, and Bubba Marley  
can't help you when the slickster is  
twisting your arm commanding  
you to shout, "Uncle!" And you're  
ambushed, reduced to a prehistoric  
creature with your irises tuning  
black as you reach deep within  
your sick and tired self, attempting,  
to bring color back into your soul,  
which is dormant and volcanic  
because the tattooed, leather  
wearing slickster is controlling  
your dollar.

Why give ten writers,  
twenty photographers, thirty  
actors, fifty painters, and a  
hundred musicians the  
opportunity to plough the artistic  
landscape, when the snake can take  
the whole cake and create one  
mega icon; one Dan Brown, one  
Richard Avedon, one John  
Travolta, one SOHO Painter who  
really isn't worth a shit and one  
Courtney Love and make millions  
all to themselves and the privileged  
few?

Who is this leather wearing  
slickster? We all know who he or  
she is, driving around in classic  
cars in retro fashion. The question  
is, who is the Master Mind, the  
King Pin, the Big Daddy, the Fine  
Mama, the B-I-N-G-O of it all?

The guru slickster is not the  
unspoken knowledge that most

tend to ignore, rather it is the  
Rorschach test administered by the  
daily publications.

*Noon*

I looked at book of photo news  
clips.

I saw a seven-year old boy  
laying in a puddle of his own blood  
in Bosnia,

A sniper shot him.

I saw a small child

Slumped over a wooden box,  
resting,

Too tired to hold his head up  
on his shoulders

While waiting in a food line in  
Africa.

On another page there was

A student hanging from a tree

For protesting in Thailand.

A rival student was beating the  
murdered head

With an iron steel folding chair.

Other boys were watching,

Some smiling.

I saw James Merrideth crawling for  
safety after having been shot.

I saw four Indian men in fear

For corroborating with

Pakistanis,

Surrounded by men laughing  
before being executed.

One of the men looked  
confused.

I felt sick for all the petty  
arguments I've ever had,

For all the idle threats I've ever  
made,

For all the exaggerated stories  
I've ever told,

For all the slander I've ever  
breathed,

For all the ill I have carried in  
me.

**Samson's Fallen Hair**  
*Los Angeles, CA*

The shores cross into a crucifix  
When the gun hammer sounds  
Like a cash register  
That the Muslim boy operates  
And the Christian boy profits from.  
The weather girl forecasts the  
evening news  
With a cocaine nose.  
Fate's deception hovers over the  
West  
Overheating the oven as a bailout.  
The question was never asked  
So that the lie would never be  
heard.  
Free market religion selling Barbie  
Doll wars  
Where the angel is a whore  
On top of the Christmas tree  
Frosted with the ashes of mother's  
burnt corpse,  
Fragranced with father's work-torn  
absence.  
Someone shouted a prayer,  
"Whose listening?"  
Everyone answered,  
Declaring to know.  
But how could they?  
Iran-Contra emboldened the mold  
Of a blood clot eye  
That searches through muted stars  
With hearts scared with the  
imprints of handcuffs.

**Pen Hackin' Slacker**  
*Coalgate, OK*

A milk sodden frosted mini-wheat  
falls off the edge of a spoon,  
splashes on my naked chest,  
rolls down my protruding belly  
and sinks into the recess of my  
navel. That's about all I can  
manage today.

I can shovel my face, roll cigarettes  
and sip vodka greyhounds with  
tar stained hands, while my  
favorite shirt has been riddled  
with holes by tiny flaming logs  
of Prince Albert tobacco, and I  
feel like a popper.

I'm one sorry sad sack

Dying June Bugs bang against  
window screens as I mash an  
invading Dirt-Dobbler into the  
carcinogenic carpet with my  
ragged Wallaby. There's a  
taunting dirty-faced rug rat at  
the end of the street that I can't  
do anything about.

I'm paranoid that my blood may be  
contaminated by a West Nile  
Mosquito. My Springier Spaniel  
has a bloated tick on her back.  
And the ice cubes in my cocktail  
are sticking together causing me  
to drink like a retarded drunk.

I'm one sorry sad sack of sloppy  
sheep shit

My only friend tonight is Lightnin'  
Hopkins and he's dead. I got  
mojo in my left hand and no  
mojo in my right. But that's a  
pain I haven't felt since my  
French girlfriend and I rolled  
down a hill together when I was  
thirteen-years-old.

My right hand was benevolently  
busted in six places forcing me  
to become a maimed  
ambidextrous ass wiper, as if I  
never got it right the first time.  
And I'm tampered by a dirty-  
mouth country cunt, because I  
can't get it up.

I'm one sorry sad sack of sloppy  
ship shit, suckling sunflowers



I met three girls in an Indian Casino  
and bet my last dollar only to  
roll snake eyes. I can't stomp  
tarantulas fast enough and the  
doctor says my HDL level is  
low, so I better get some exercise  
before I fall facedown in a field  
of poisonous willies.

I've never owned a necktie. My  
busted shoelaces are tied in  
granny knots and my twelve-year-  
old nephew has more money in  
his piggybank than I do. But I can  
still wrestle him down to the  
ground and make him cry,  
"Uncle!"

I'm one sorry sad sack of sloppy  
sheep shit, suckling sunflowers,  
sweltering in a sighing submarine,  
minus one added by zero.

**Face Chewing Bone Smoker**  
*Malaga, Spain*

Infirmity lies in a man who loses  
his balls  
He loses his Pathos  
His Ethos  
His Argos  
His Logos  
His Holy Ghost  
His Canon Boast  
His Smoked Roast  
His Jelly and Toast  
His Jolly Most

He's the one that  
Fucks the most  
Cries the most  
Shares the most  
Works the most  
Reasons the most  
Flatters the most  
Fights the most  
Eats the most

Has the most

Yet he is no longer the host  
Because he can't shake the vulture  
out of his head  
To keep it from pecking out his  
eyes  
And feasting off his face

**Sleaze Knees Ain't So Easy When  
She's A Freeze Squeeze Tease**  
*Chico, CA*

The dry hay folds against a grey  
sky  
    Little boys nuzzle up for  
panties and pie  
The bamboo stalks high above the  
clouds content with no reign  
    She turns a corner and  
hopes in vein  
While the detonating wire severs  
our cares  
    And the plasma bottles  
search for salvation's fare  
Stones flanked by the ground they  
lie upon  
    Mommies rest in tombs of  
napalm  
Fathers soaked in rusted pastures  
    Dogs demur for hungry  
masters  
Buildings crumbled into calculated  
spectacles  
    Little girls fumble their  
nubile freckles

Eyebrows stretched to the backs of  
heads with worry  
    Toes no longer curl to Eros'  
passionate fury  
Veritas spat all its venom  
    All lay dead with no  
momentum  
And one last General stood cracked  
hands in pockets torn inside out

Because the fate of the  
country rests upon one man's clout

The oboe haunts us all in beauty,  
mastery and formation

Disposing men with the  
stroke of the bow and string  
vibration

The Whore breathes through the  
curtain one last time

While we all lie under a pile  
of lime

And if we ever assume might is  
right

May we never burn in  
careless plight

**15 Minutes With Lee Miller's  
Curves  
Cambridge, MA**

A cup of warm tea sitting on a  
copper surface

A sign chained to the side of a brick  
building

A finely constructed crack in the  
sidewalk

A gob of phlegm splattered  
between the cobbles of the street

The reflection of a hand, a book, a  
pen, and a dark mass in a window

The cleft and form of a chin  
belonging to a long haired girl with  
a smirk on her face

The slow rotation of a wheel  
passing by, blinking tail lights, one  
of which is cracked

A woman tries to lick my anus  
while I cover it with my hand

Her smile makes life beautiful

When I was coming she called me  
baby

Her long coat concealed her breast,  
turning them into small, light  
mounds. They look delicate and  
mysterious

Nipples slowly stuffed into nostrils

Lenity barks on a spike

A gray stick of led scribbles letters  
from a mangled, stripped tree

A kinky blond with brown eyes  
winked at me

The teapot pisses away at 4:20

Sugar grains are best when  
adhesively stuck to a saliva finger

Two sheets of clear plastic sitting  
on a table mean nothing. Stick an

advertisement, a sign, a slogan, a  
picture between them and it can

cause a person to love, kill, or make  
a purchase

Light brown pubic hairs are rare

Nipples have no gender or do  
they?

New York, city of vampires. If you  
stay up all night drinking with

them you'll discover they're not

vampires at all, they're just fashion  
designers If I had Weston's fruit,

Eluard's hat and Joad's knife...I  
might divine a surrealist kite.

**Chartreuse Fairies  
Madrid, Spain**

A bleach-sodden rag

Soaked each nipple and ball.

Chiggers bore into urethra walls,

While the Gilded Age returns

With vigor and gall.

Gentry's corrosive deontological  
gumption.

Plutocrats groaned for their just  
consumption.

Mesmerized by faun

The Plebiscites cheered on,

*"Deo juvante! Deo favente!"*

A mousetrap sat ready to snap,

While a rat strolled away

With granny and the clap.  
40proof wormwood  
Never settled the heart,  
As the old man was the only one  
permitted to fart.  
So lived the bigot  
At the end of his life.  
All flatulence banned  
Even his wife's.

Not even a thought during  
Hemingway's "Lost" Generation  
Just an itch in daddy's crotch  
during Casey's "Beat" Generation  
Too loose for the "Baby-Boom"  
Generation  
Conceived in the "Hippie"  
Generation  
Never was invited to Hefner's "Up-  
Beat" Generation  
Too young for the "Yuppie"  
Generation  
Too old for the "X" Generation  
Raised up with the "The Jumped-  
Out" Generation  
Made up of the "Lost-Out," "Beat-  
Out," "Banged-Out"  
"Blocked-Out," "Yupped-Out,"  
"X'ed-Out" Generation,  
Begging for a thumb gestation.

The new political climate  
Packs its smoking pleasure in a  
barrel.  
And Feral Carol  
Who lives down the road  
Never packed hers with anything  
sterile.  
She loves to sing a farrago  
While she robs your cargo,  
Festooning her womb  
Into a boondoggled tomb.  
Not caring for reflection  
With a red hot declension.

Some have work records

Some have university records  
Some have credit records  
Some have criminal records  
But all have a birth and death  
record.  
If there were ever a few forgers to  
hold  
Two birth and two death records  
Then shall hope ever abide,  
That in all the records  
There may exists  
But a few good quid pro quos.

There are two kinds of people,  
Those who like to lie around in  
their underwear  
And those who don't.  
A Pollinating Apologist is  
"A man who was born from the  
utter bottom of the land that is  
furthest west."  
He engages in acts of Pollogy,  
Though it is not a word  
It's anti-matter in motion.

The green hued libation  
Dissolved sugar cubed striations,  
As the fearless fairy hop-scotched  
Through our dark broken hearts,  
She left us with her gentle mark.

**Root the Brute**  
*Los Angeles, CA*

Civility postured in her gown with  
spear  
Decrying those held so near.  
Her umbrella of fortune raised on  
high  
As a hero rose out of her blood clad  
thigh.  
To walk in society's gentle slumber  
And fight in savagery's unknown  
number.  
With no one to believe in him  
All none but one

Who watched from high above the heavens.

Asclepius mended hydrogen leaven,

Descending no lower than those who sought motion

In sunshine woes of misguided notions.

Impregnable eyes never belied In destiny's regret we all preside.

"Hail to the hero!" tore through ears

Landing in patterns of ventral veneers.

Wind blew through the sun and the moon.

Entrails strung in fervent cocoons. In one quick motion a blink went wide.

Darkness barked in momentary stride.

Blasting open the witch doctor's head

Only to mime in an expansion in time,

Where the worthy never bury their dead

And jackals always go unfed.

Civility was found in abstracts unfound.

She uttered the sound that brought the man down.

To walk in society's gentle slumber And fight in savagery's unknown number.

Floggings bore criminal results And rape was pageantry's sophisticated assault.

Four symbols appeared from out among her peers:

Star, line, circle, sublime.

Violence rooted in her eyes

To unlock the unconscious where it lied.

One rode fast, mighty and swift,

All stood a mass wagging a fist.

### **Matador Hat and The Bestial Clap *Madrid, Spain***

Soft laced brim lied still

In the shower of applauds.

Bull stumbled

Angry, bewildered

Unsure of attack.

His silver eye wiped dry

An emaciated emancipation.

The white walls

Veiled by a red cape

As a whisky-drunk marauder

Took a hefty stab

Leaving the audience

Lifeless in the tomb

Of their blood soaked stadium.

A symphony played

As he walked through

A chamber of shadows.

The electric pad

Vibrated flat line time

As sunshine memories

Prey on lonesome regrets

That ushered his wits

Between his mother's tits

Weighed in a pound of candy apple shits.

The world roared and gored

Down into a thought

That turns inside out

Where the planes rolled

Into tarnished mirrors

Of faces heard and voices seen.

In wonder's mist

The sun was stabbed

Stuffed into the matador's back pocket

To orchestrate the flame

That blew out, "Ole!"

### **Etiolate the Ball Turret Gunner *Los Angeles, CA***

The same thoughts recycle through  
our collective:  
Food, sex, power, love, peace, loss,  
gain, greed, fear, loneliness.  
Loneliness, that ethereal wind  
Bringing us back from our  
distractions,  
Whispering in us to forget  
ourselves,  
So we may remember our loss.  
Lost from ourselves.  
Severed from our mothers  
Left to contend with our fathers,  
Seeking solitude in the tender  
embrace of our great grand  
parents,  
Who are hacking up what's left of a  
lung.

Plunged into life,  
So that we might become our lives,  
Enthroning the memories of our  
ancestors  
In the actions of our character.  
The painter in constant loss and  
wonder for color  
The writer in constant loss and  
wonder for metaphor  
The musician in constant loss and  
wonder for note  
The philosopher in constant loss  
and wonder for conversation.  
Harmony found in the solitude that  
hums,  
We are not alone  
In the constant loss and wonder for  
soul.

**The Melted Cross of Krupp**  
*Los Angeles, CA*

Morose infused itself into position.  
A vulture distinguished itself in the  
land of plague.  
Baby bird's fell from their nests  
Caught in the eaves

Hanging by a leg.  
A fifteen year old dog climbed onto  
the stage  
For one last pole dance.  
The canon charged  
Digging deep into pockets  
Tipping with canon-ball eggs.

The magic castle and the mad  
house  
Were never far away neighbors.  
The Angels built a city around  
them  
Harnessing a stench that corrodes  
the eye  
Where a second takes a minute  
Which feels like an hour  
Transpires into a day  
Falls short of a year  
Sentences one to a decade  
Blasting into the fodder of life.

Demolition metaphors haunted  
dreams  
Among barking dogs and skin torn  
throats.  
Ears burned into memories and  
scars of childhood.  
Electro-Organisms moving faster  
than is possible to conceive  
As hands tremor in fear of stillness.  
The dead weight of a corpse falls to  
the ground.  
It is gathered and dragged up a  
ladder  
Shoved down the playground slide  
In the anomaly of happy days  
Where accidents were arranged  
Crippling the body  
To match the crippled mind.

**Oviparous Adam's Recollution**  
*Cambridge, MA*

The trench was blown wide,

Destroying geometrical designs  
carved into the earth.  
Wet dirt and rock flew all about.  
Strewn pieces of men and their  
possessions,  
Mindful of whom they once were,  
And where they came from,  
Where they could have been.  
Combs, watches, a shoe maybe  
two,  
Rings, shredded letters, torn  
handkerchiefs,  
Pictures laid waste.  
Tids and bits graveling for a tit.  
Clutching treasures with mangled  
resurrected hands  
Hoping to be found  
Rendered among the faceless, no  
longer possessed.  
Left only with the raw interior of  
their once clear voice.

Adamowicz crawled through mud-  
holes  
With bowels discarded  
From rectum walls,  
Filling army-issued trousers.  
Entrails lying unprotected,  
By muscle and skin,  
Sliding down pant legs  
To be found  
By a country-man or a friend.  
To guard and keep safe from  
avidities fate.  
Stretched out past his foot,  
Drug behind,  
Rolling in dirt.

Danger rides upon the enemy's  
brow  
Lurking to stomp linear bowels,  
Kick, roll, pound them in filth.  
Slime gooing down Adamowicz's  
leg  
He tried to crawl, retreat to a  
trench.

Reaching out, grabbing earth,  
Endeavoring to pull himself back  
to safety.  
Nothing left except his mangled  
body,  
Shredded military clothes,  
Which he never considered his.

Adamowicz writhed alone,  
Intestines stretched out beyond  
extension.  
Thoughts of his wife, daughter and  
manhood.  
Eyes clouded,  
Nose and gums bleeding,  
Lungs filled with war stench.  
Reduced to a slithering earth  
creature.  
Unable to hold his own existence.  
Humiliated, tired,  
He tries to sit  
With a hand down his pants,  
Finger weaving himself back  
together,  
Tearing deeper at his core.  
All he could do was continue to  
crawl,  
In hope's self conceit,  
To hide from enemy's incessant  
consent  
Mocking his humiliation.  
What would his daughter think of  
him,  
That he was some sort of  
hypocrite?  
In the end he could not even shit  
himself.

If a man cannot respect another  
man in our primal state  
Than what more do we have?  
God said, what you bind on earth  
will be held in heaven.  
It takes every single person to  
make it happen

**Defrocked Priest & The Kingdom  
Beast**  
*Coalgate, OK*

I woke clenched fist,  
Wondering if I'd ever be wealthy in  
the grace of God,  
Aware of how tenuous and suspect  
change could be.  
Would purity permeate the mind  
I had hoped to scratch away with a  
pedantic bend of a note?  
Knowledge staggers happiness.  
It's a peace that surpasses  
language;  
In the grand land of lucid dreams.

The bar simultaneously bounces  
what I let die,  
That which I planted in tender  
anticipation.  
I left what was mine  
Took what was not,  
Sobering intoxication.

September threw us all together.  
June, July and August solidified  
our memories of each other.  
Some of us learned to believe.  
Some of us never knew what to  
believe,  
Shooting the moon,  
Shouting out questions,  
Spurning generous hands that  
were always empty,  
Sunday's syringe sounding with  
grief,  
Sinking in hope,  
Stopping, never to look one way or  
the other,  
Escaping a straight ahead  
poisonous gaze,  
Dressed in a drainage ditch,  
Striving for the goodness  
So many wish to attain,

Until reaching the certain,  
obtainable by-and-by.

Losing the people we never used.  
Melted on a window.  
That heaven smashed with a gentle  
kiss.

**Cultivated Boredom**  
*Los Angeles, CA*

Death is plagued by anxious  
virtues  
Lost in John Henry's hammer,  
Pounded in crosses  
Spiked with nails of suffering.  
An archaic moment stuck in time  
That whispers the ramble,  
"You're mine."  
Ashes blown back into faces,  
Gambling away homes,  
In hopes of new places,  
Where the Virgin Mary gathers  
What's left and conceives once  
again.  
Never wishing to hear the tender  
hush,  
"My Friend,  
It's time for me to leave."

**Elevator Queen In A Downtown  
Dream**  
*Manhattan, NY*

My heart beat wild  
Threatening to jump off the train  
At each stop  
That carried me to her.  
Unknown people  
Brushing and pressing  
Against unknown assurances of  
how she felt for me.  
There was no deterring her  
attraction and form  
Which were embedded in my  
hopes.  
Tenacity waxed in the idea

Waned in the material of my  
accounts.  
Anticipation flooded my feet  
As she rode down the elevator.  
Charm carried her grace across the  
hall,  
Sashaying through the front door  
Right into my arms.  
There she was,  
Postured in beauty.  
Her eyes gleamed in her smile,  
Erasing my anxieties.  
Her complexity excited my  
manhood.  
Her lips severed the vine that  
imprisoned my beast  
To lie in her lap,  
Destroying and maiming that  
which threatened her heart.  
My sublime mime,  
Held tight  
As solace pines,  
Illuminating lines,  
Unwittingly blowing a sacred dart  
Into the spine of an immortal star,  
Shooting through the cosmos,  
Never burning out,  
Witnessed to the signs  
In distant shrines,  
Unabashed in impassable  
obstacles.  
Purified amazement expelled  
Apollo from afar  
As her grace sat high above  
Olympia's throne,  
My celestial Queen  
Illuminates all that is divine.

**Black Widow Shadow & The  
Tossed Out Platter Head**  
*Los Angeles, CA*

Eyes closed inward with a pain  
that turned my back,

As I walked through love's  
dissipation in the early morning  
mist,  
I rose to another lonely day.  
The wound spiked deep  
In vulnerabilities hidden garden,  
Piercing the earth of my heart,  
Leaving a blind vision of a  
highway  
That led back to her.  
But it's nothing,  
Nothing but a hatchet man  
sharpening his blade  
With a slight, sympathetic smile  
Telling the story of his final blow,  
Embracing pain,  
As he witnesses love vanish  
beyond Lazarus' empty tomb.

Hope locked behind the steel bars  
of paralysis,  
Rather than roam bravely,  
Gracing impossibilities  
With the whisper of courageous  
fruits.  
The possibilities of impossibilities  
And the impossibilities of  
possibilities  
Bled into the same unknown  
probability  
Of the never was and may be.  
Plausibility robbed of its plurality  
Morphed into a grand singularity  
That may or may not take the best  
in us all  
And emerge into the final human  
being that graces the theatre of  
God.  
Sides were chosen long before I  
understood what choices were,  
But I made them anyway,  
As I walked through streets paved  
in tossed out broken words,  
Where work-torn hands dropped  
their tools long ago,



Exhaling their last breath of  
wonder through dry, cracked lips.  
We lost each other bustin' barrels  
in bedlam Bethlehem,  
As Yesterday bid goodbye to  
Tomorrow  
And Tomorrow bid hello to  
Yesterday.  
Missing's shadow cast long past.  
Remembrance sparkled  
Somewhere  
As Sometimes clambered Maybe  
To loved monsters amazed in a  
haze,  
Hanging our darling time.  
None of it extended past matter  
As we no longer are what we were  
in hope.  
Yet we are left only with the hope  
for a new found land  
That will never bring me back to  
the you that walks outside of my  
self.

Time past into loss  
With thoughts of you  
Rubbed out between inner thighs,  
Inciting wonder's irreverent roam,  
Through majestic corridors of ever  
was.  
Where aches and pains solely  
struck as mine,  
Jumping high above outer planes  
That lied dry and decried,  
As hallow courts flowed into blind  
fortune,  
Dissipating into the hollows  
Of what was but never would be.  
While sunshine warms a frown  
Into a perfect soul bound aloud,  
Festooned in illusion's ancient  
shadow,  
Where knees mended hidden  
hearts  
In constant sorrow's neglect,

Humming a rhyme in broken time  
Red skies spilled on mounds of  
clay  
That unabashedly smiled  
Into hope filled shoes,  
Outside of abandoned hurts,  
Calloused into soft sheets,  
Cradled between welcoming legs  
Of a new world's unfound  
possession,  
With arm's swung hand-in-hand,  
As ballads tear open wounds.  
Unheard voices seep into saloons  
Worn out with constant weight  
Embedded in vinyl booths,  
Displaying milkshake  
sophistications  
In a lonesome valley  
Filled with nothing but tired selves.  
Alone in unstained blemishes  
Through blackened nights fading  
to red.

**The Dirty Penny's Irresistible  
Impetuosity  
Chico, CA**

Fettered by  
the delirious tug  
of a manifold vivisection.  
Milieu vexation blurred  
the surgical cut  
into the domain  
of lost becoming,  
where the splendor  
of mirrored mutations  
collided  
into resounding spasms  
of sanctioned forms,  
thrusting beyond  
the conduit  
of the living  
and into  
the sagacity of torn out pockets.



# A CLEAN GETAWAY

By Charles Platt

The house was eerily quiet. The refrigerator in the kitchen was murmuring, and the battery-powered electric clock above the sink made a faint tick, tick, tick. Somewhere outside, Samantha thought she heard a dog bark.

She felt weird. Spacey. Her body had a lightness to it. She really thought she might weigh less than normal. She reached up and touched her face. It felt *wider* than she remembered it, as if it belonged to somebody else.

She was happy, she realized. She was smiling.

She went to the mirror in the front hall. Her clothes were spattered with blood, there were smears of shit on her cheeks, but it was true: her usual dead, blank look was gone.

Still holding the bloody sledge-hammer, she wandered into the living room. The cloying odor of air freshener settled around her as she surveyed the furnishings: an oval glass coffee table with ornate brass legs, a porcelain horse-head vase holding a fake floral bouquet, a tapestry-upholstered Ethan Allen wing chair that only guests were allowed to sit in, a sofa bed recovered in tasteless flower-pattern fabric, and a curio cabinet in repulsive bleached oak. Her

mother had put the finishing touches on this room just a month ago, before—

Samantha decided not to think about that. She went over to the tank of tropical fish. She despised their moronic eyes and their ugly mouths that made spastic kissing movements while they meandered through the plastic water weeds, around and around and around. Maybe it was time to give them something to think about for a change.

She took hold of the hammer with both hands, swung it, and smashed the front of the tank. Water came surging out and gushed across the floor, saturating the textured pile of the nylon carpet. The fish lay among the broken glass in the wet mess and flopped around, looking very surprised. “Free!” Samantha shouted at them. “Free!”

She walked through to the den, with its walls panelled in wood-grain plywood, a copy of TV Guide on the coffee table, and the VCR set to record her father’s favorite political programs on Sunday mornings. Samantha eyed the TV. Better not smash that; the tube might contain harmful poisonous gases. But she hated the television. Every night, her father

would stretch out in his La-Z-Boy recliner, surrendering himself to the glowing tube. Mostly he watched reality shows about cops busting dope dealers, or World War II documentaries on the History channel—anything that involved people with guns telling other people what to do. Samantha used to sit on the floor in the corner, trying to blank the sounds out of her mind by imagining ways to kill him. Such as, sneak up behind him and plunge a screwdriver into his ear, or suck out his eyeballs with the vacuum cleaner, or get the cordless drill from the garage, put in a half-inch bit, and cut a neat hole down into his skull.

She felt ashamed, now, that she had wasted so much time thinking about it instead of doing it. “I couldn’t upset Mommy,” she said aloud, in a little-girl sing-song voice. “I could never upset Mommy.”

She wandered into the dining area. Above the fireplace hung a picture of three wild horses running across a prairie, the kind of thing they sold as an “original oil painting” in Bob’s U-Frame-It at the mall. Below the painting was the mantel shelf, with family photographs in clear plastic frames molded to look like cut glass. In the center was a large picture of Samantha’s mother, framed and decked out in black lace.

Samantha stared for a moment at the face in the photograph, thinking of all the times she’d waited for her mother to intervene when her father was punishing her. She always expected her mother to do something, no matter how many times it didn’t happen. Well, there was no point in thinking about that anymore. Samantha picked up her mother’s photograph, dropped it on the floor, and pounded it into fragments with the sledge hammer. She pulled down her jeans, squatted over the debris, and pissed all over it.

The kids at school said she was a dweeb, a bookworm, and she didn’t know how to have fun. Well, they should see her now. The fun had only just begun. Maybe she should get the axe out of the tool shed, and start hacking up the furniture.

But—no, she was getting sidetracked. If she kept circling around in here, time would slip away from her as it often did, and the next thing she knew, it would be dark outside and Mr. Wingrove and his brain-dead wife would be leaning on the ding-dong doorbell, ready for their game of Scrabble, *to take her mind off things*. What she should really do (she told herself) was get the hell out.

Okay. She needed the cash, the gun—and maybe a change of clothes, because driving around

covered in dried blood and gastrointestinal juices probably wasn't a cool thing to do.

She went to the kitchen, opened the doors under the sink, and picked up the can of special cleanser that her father kept there. For a moment her head went blank and her thoughts seemed to jam, the way they did sometimes when she remembered bad things. Five years ago, Samantha had said a word that her father didn't like. She'd said that something on TV was "crap." He'd told her she was a bad girl for using bad language, and she had to learn the difference between bad and good. So he'd seized her by the neck and forced her to drink a whole bottle of Lemon Joy dishwashing liquid, and then he'd made her squash herself into the tiny space under the sink, and he'd shut her in there overnight to teach her to watch her language in future. She hadn't minded the small space—she was used to being shut in closets—but the detergent had been terribly painful, eating into her mouth and throat and stomach, giving her ulcers that had taken weeks to heal.

*Pervert bastard*, she muttered to herself, as she started rubbing the cleanser into her hands. *Someone ought to kill that pervert bastard.*

But she *had* killed him. She rinsed the cleanser off, and there

was his rust-colored blood running down the drain.

She had to get her head straight, forget the past, live in the present, and start enjoying herself, the way she had planned it. Today was the first day of her new life, and she was going to have a good time. She checked her hands to make sure that all the stains had gone. Her palms had faint white scars across them, and she found herself haunted by another memory. She'd stolen a brownie from the refrigerator, and her father had caught her. He'd told her she was a thief, a bad girl, and she had to learn her lesson.

He had tied her wrists to the dish drainer, poured boiling water over her hands, ripped open the blistered skin with a wire brush, then drenched the wounds with hydrogen peroxide.

Samantha felt herself trembling. Tears were pricking the corners of her eyes. She'd killed him, but somehow he was still in her head. "Pervert bastard!" she shouted.

This was all wrong. She needed to get out of here as quickly as possible—although, she reminded herself, she needed to be methodical, to prevent herself from making foolish or irrational decisions. Maybe she should make a list. That was often a help, when her thoughts got out of control. She went to the pad of paper by the

phone, and wrote down what she had to do:

Finish cleaning up.

Put on clean clothes.

Check email.

Get the gun and the money.

Close the garage door after driving out, to conceal the mess on the floor.

She tore the sheet of paper off the pad, studied it, then ran upstairs to the bathroom. She ripped off her bloodstained clothes and dumped them on the pink fluffy bath mat. Quickly, she washed her face.

She went to her bedroom. She hated the room, with its flowery drapes either side of the window and the kiddie wallpaper with pictures of balloons and candy canes on it. Her mother had chosen all the decor, and her father liked it because—well, he liked anything that was young and cute and feminine.

She put on a black pair of jeans, black boots with neat little silver chains on them, and a black T-shirt that she'd mail-ordered secretly a couple of weeks ago, along with the pepper spray and the handcuffs, when she started making plans after her mother's funeral. The words BAD GIRL were spelled out in red letters on the back of the shirt.

She admired the shirt in the mirror and felt a shiver of excitement at the daringness of the

statement, although other aspects of her appearance didn't please her. Her hair was golden blond, she had bangs, she had freckles, and she even had a turned-up nose. "My little Barbie Doll" was what her father sometimes called her, when he was in a sentimental mood and she had done absolutely nothing that could piss him off. The pervert bastard. She hated his fucking guts. Then she laughed, remembering the current state of his guts, spread out on the concrete floor of the garage.

She looked at her list and saw that the next task was to check email, because she was likely to be offline for a while. She switched on the computer and stared out of the window while the hard drive started clicking and grinding and doing all the weird and seemingly unnecessary stuff that it always did.

She looked at the house across the street. Ten-year-old Jimmy Fenchurch lived there, with his single mother, Debbie, who used blond hair dye and wore scooped-neck T-shirts that displayed her bloated breasts, which looked about as attractive as barbecued pork fat. Debbie Fenchurch bulged like a big pink worm, and Samantha imagined her squirming like live bait on a giant fish hook, maybe dangling over a swamp where alligators could swim around and take a bite

whenever they felt hungry. And since Jimmy Fenchurch had thrown a lump of mud at Samantha last month and called her a weirdo, she would serve him to the alligators as dessert. Samantha imagined an alligator eating Jimmy's head like a piece of popcorn. Crunch, crunch, crunch!

She blinked, realizing that the computer was waiting for her. There wasn't any new email, but now that she was online, she decided she should go to suburban-goths.com, her favorite discussion group. Impulsively she started typing a post, feeling happy that she didn't have to worry anymore about FBI agents reading what she wrote and trying to "save her from herself" by locking her in an institution and turning her into a zombie with mind-altering medications.

*I just mashed my Dad's head with a big hammer,* she wrote. She paused, reading the words in the screen. They looked good. They made everything seem more real. *You should see the mess :) I'll be out having some real fun for a change by the time you read this, you losers.*

She hesitated. Maybe it wasn't cool, telling people they were losers. Most of them probably *were* losers, but she didn't want them to turn against her. She backspaced over the last two words. Then she felt angry that she should be concerned about other

people's opinions. She started to type the words back in. Then she realized she was getting stuck here, seduced by the computer. She clicked the SEND button and forced herself to push her chair back.

Now she was out of range of the screen, she was free again. She stood up and grabbed a denim shoulder bag that her mother had made for her long ago, embroidered with a picture of a yellow sun with a happy face and a little house with white smoke coming out of its chimney. She hesitated, struck by the thought that she might never see her bedroom again. Maybe she should take something with her as a memento.

Suddenly she realized why she had been thinking about alligators. Alvin the Alligator was sitting right there on her window sill. He was a stuffed toy that had fallen out of a baby's stroller in the street. The woman walking the stroller hadn't noticed, and Samantha had grabbed Alvin and taken him home. Samantha guessed that he must have been projecting the thoughts about Debbie Fenchurch into her head a few minutes ago, so that she would remember to take him with her.

She was glad he reminded her, because he had a special place in her life. He watched the world go by with his inscrutable shiny

black eyes, and he just sat there and grinned, because the only thing that interested him was how people would taste if he had a chance to eat them from the legs up.

She tucked him under her arm and walked quickly out of the room, down the hall to her father's study. The gun and the money were there, in the bottom drawer of his desk. He kept it locked, of course, but she had discovered long ago that if she used a paper clip, she could spring it open. She had guessed that if he kept the drawer locked, it must contain something valuable, and sure enough, she had been right.

She hunkered down and got to work. Within moments, the lock made its little scraping, clicking noise, and the drawer came sliding out. She grabbed the gun out of the drawer, and a little Zip-Loc sandwich bag with fifteen \$100 bills in it, which seemed to be her father's emergency cash in case of a terrorist attack or some other imaginary crisis. *Now get the hell out*, she told herself.

She ran downstairs with the shoulder bag slapping against her hip, weighed down by the Beretta. She paused in the kitchen, grabbed one of the razor-sharp knives off the rack, and added that to her bag just in case. Then she opened the door at the side of the house and stepped outside.

She heard footsteps on concrete and looked up, blinking in the sunlight. When she shaded her eyes against the bright sky she saw Mr. Wingrove ambling toward her.

She felt dizzy. What the hell was he doing here?

"Hey, Sammy!" He gave her a friendly wave. "How's the world treating you today?"

*You already asked me that once*, she screamed at him in her head. *And it's a totally moronic question.*

She forced herself to nod. Her head moved up and down, up and down. "Everything's fine, Mr. Wingrove," she said.

He stopped when he was three feet away. She noticed a brightness in his eyes, an alertness that hadn't been there before.

All her muscles started clenching, and her tense smile felt locked onto her face, stretching the skin till she must look like something out of a horror movie. Plus she still felt dizzy, and she wasn't sure if she was standing straight or at an angle.

"Everything's fine," she repeated, willing him to go away.

He didn't go away. He paused and scratched his head. "Maybe it's none of my business, but I heard some breaking glass earlier." He moved a fraction closer and lowered his voice. "Any problem with your dad? I know he



was pretty upset when—I mean, you know, after your Mom—”

Samantha felt her head turning into a toaster oven again. That was what happened when people started speaking sentences without finishing them, and wouldn't let her escape. She struggled for words. “Look, uh, I have to go,” she said.

“Oh.” He frowned. “Well, is your father around?”

She clenched her fists. “He went to the store!”

“He did? That's odd. See, I've been out in the front yard pruning my roses, and I didn't notice—” He broke off. “What's that, that smell? It smells—why, it's just awful.”

Yeah, it smelled awful, all right. It smelled like a corpse lying in a pool of blood, shit, and vomit. Samantha stared at Mr. Wingrove, wondering if there was any way she could persuade him to stop talking and turn around and walk back to his house. “I'd really appreciate it,” she said, “if you would—you know—I mean, why don't you just *leave me alone*, okay?” The words almost stuck in her throat. She felt her pulse running so fast, it scared her.

“Sammy, what's *wrong*?” With friendly concern, he took hold of her arm.

“No!” she screamed. She knocked his hand away.

Adrenaline surged. The world rocked around her.

“Hey, don't get all worked up.” He took a step back. “I just wanted—”

“All right! All right! You want to see my dad? Go right ahead! He's in the garage!”

Mr. Wingrove was silent for a long moment, and she heard birds twittering in the distance, and a car driving past in the street.

He squinted at her through his half-moon eyeglasses. “In the garage?”

“Yeah, go ahead!” She gestured clumsily at the door in the side of the building.

Wingrove hesitated. Then he opened the door. The stench was terrible, but she'd turned off the light, so he couldn't see what was causing it.

He shuffled in and groped for the switch. Behind him, Samantha opened her bag and pulled out the gun.

The switch clicked. The light came on. She heard him make a little *uh* sound, and then a gagging noise.

She followed him in and raised the gun in both hands. It was very, very heavy. She had trouble aiming it, and she wished she'd had a chance to practice shooting it. Her only source of information about firearms had been her father's issues of *Guns and*

*Ammo*, which she sometimes managed to filch out of the trash.

He turned and stared at her. His eyes widened and his mouth looked comical. "Why?" His voice was a whisper. "Why, Sammy?"

"Why the hell do you *think*?" she screamed at him.

Wingrove shook his head. His cheeks quivered.

Samantha grunted in disgust. "Oh, come *on!* You knew what was going on. You and my dad, you were his *buddy*, isn't that right?"

He tried to back away. "Sammy, you need help. Please, let me get help."

She blinked at him. "You mean—you mean, I should wait here while you go get some nice people who'll take care of me?" She gave a sudden, loud bark of laughter. "You think I'm a total moron, or what?"

"Please—" His face screwed up, like a little kid about to cry.

"*How's the world treating you today?*" She imitated his jovial geriatric voice. "Well, I'll tell you, it's been treating me like *shit*."

He let out a moan of fear.

She squeezed the trigger—and nothing happened.

She almost lost her balance. She pulled the trigger, harder. Harder still, so the muscles in her hand wrenched painfully and the metal dug into her finger.

The gun was jammed.

The hot pressure in her head was so intense, she was afraid her brain would vaporize. Meanwhile, Wingrove had realized that the gun wasn't going to fire. He was making his getaway, stumbling around her, lurching out of the side door.

Samantha threw her gun, her bag, and Alvin the Alligator onto the front seat of the Blazer, beside the handcuffs that she'd left there while she was dealing with her dad. She dumped herself behind the wheel, slammed the door, and jammed her thumb on the button of the garage-door opener, the little plastic box stuck to the instrument panel with Velcro. The big door facing the street began clanking up its metal track.

She started the motor with a roar. Her dad always backed the Blazer in, leaving it pointing toward the street, ready to go.

Sunlight made her squint as the garage door opened wide. She saw Wingrove reaching the bottom of the concrete driveway, turning along the sidewalk, waddling along, waving his arms to keep his balance. "Martha!" he was shouting. "Martha, call the police!"

Samantha accelerated out of the garage. She felt good, now, like when she played a video game and there was only one bad guy left, and she could take her time picking him off.

Wingrove heard her coming. He turned to face her. "No!" he shouted, spreading his arms.

The Blazer heeled over as she swung the wheel, then righted itself as she aimed it along the sidewalk, with Wingrove directly in front of her. His face had gone white, and he was quivering all over.

She accelerated toward him, and the front of the Blazer slammed into him with a heavy, solid *thump*. "Yes!" she shouted.

She expected him to go under the wheels, but that didn't happen. Instinctively, his arms slammed down onto the hood. He got his elbows over the orange plastic strip along the front edge of it—the insect deflector that her father had installed, so they wouldn't get bugs on the windshield.

"Let go!" she screamed at Wingrove. She slammed her fist against the steering wheel in a fit of fury. "Let go!"

He kept holding on.

"George!" a shrill voice sounded. Wingrove's wife was standing in the front door of their home, wearing her apron. Evidently she'd been baking her disgusting greasy pecan cookies. "Oh my God. George!"

Samantha felt a distraction—something jerking at the steering. She looked in the rear-view mirror and realized she'd

forgotten about the garden hose. One end was still clamped onto the tailpipe—while the other end was still stuffed up her father's ass. The Blazer had hauled his remains out of the garage and down the driveway, leaving a trail of reddish-brown muck; and now he was dragging behind her along the sidewalk like some disgusting mutant afterbirth.

Well, she could only deal with one thing at a time. She turned the Blazer up Wingrove's driveway, with him still hanging on the front. She cut across the lawn, bumped over the grass, roared across the tiled patio, and rammed the vehicle into the brick wall directly under his black-and-gold stick-on house number.

It was a soft impact. With satisfaction, she saw Wingrove's eyes roll up and his face sag. His arms finally released their grip.

She threw the Blazer into reverse and backed away a few feet. Wingrove slumped down and fell on his back, looking as if a giant foot had come out of the sky and stepped on him. His clothes had split open at the sides, and blood was pulsing out. The old geezer's heart was evidently still beating, but Samantha judged that this was unlikely to continue for much longer.

Wingrove's wife was screeching, backing into her front hall, shaking her head and

shouting “No, no, no!” while trying to stuff all her fingers entirely into her mouth. Samantha considered going in after her, but the Blazer wouldn’t fit into the building, and she certainly didn’t want to abandon her vehicle and pursue the woman on foot.

Well, there was no point in getting hung up about it. Martha Wingrove wasn’t at the top of her hit list, anyway. Samantha backed, turned, and started toward the street, detouring through Wingrove’s rose bushes along the way. The Blazer’s big fat tires mashed them to shreds, kicking up pastel-colored petals that drifted like confetti.

She headed for the picket fence at the end of his lawn, rammed it, and smiled with satisfaction as wood snapped and crunched under the wheels. She bumped over the sidewalk—then noticed an annoying barking noise from behind her. It was Wingrove’s boxer dog, she realized.

The dog had a truly disgusting face, all wrinkled and squashed, as if someone had hit it with a cast-iron frying pan. Here it came, racing across the lawn. The smell of blood and entrails had made it agitated.

Samantha drove the Blazer into the street, still dragging her father’s corpse. The dog seized him by the neck and started trying to tear his head off.

So far, Samantha had had the element of surprise on her side, but she wasn’t sure how long she could count on this to protect her. Even the brain-dead neighbors on Hilltop Avenue would start wondering what all the noise was about, sooner or later.

Still, what was she supposed to do—drive off towing the bloody remains of her dad, with the dog barking and ripping at his entrails? That would not be what anyone could describe as a clean getaway.

She stopped the Blazer, pulled the knife out of her bag, jumped out, strode around to the back, and sliced the hose. The dog didn’t notice; it was having a fine time, growling and snuffling, digging its snout into her father’s abdominal cavity. *Dogs*, Samantha thought with revulsion. As far back as she could remember, she’d hated dogs.

She got back in the Blazer and turned it in the road, bumping up onto the curb and down again. She noticed a couple of people emerging from their houses, looking horrified and confused but unable to comprehend what they were seeing. She hoped she still had a little time to spare.

She took careful aim at the dog and hit the gas. It saw her coming at the last moment and tried to jump to one side, but she caught it with her left front wheel. There was a bump-bump as she

drove over it, and then a terrible tortured yelping sound.

"Damn," she muttered. She'd crushed its haunches, but the front half of it was still fully functional. Its front legs made helpless scrabbling movements, trying to drag itself away. Blood was oozing out of its rear end, though there wasn't nearly enough for Samantha's liking.

She turned again and drove back toward the dog, more slowly this time. She rolled down her window and leaned out, aiming the Blazer carefully.

The dog was still screaming. Some people had started yelling at her. Debbie Fenchurch was walking out of her front door, staring with her mouth open. "Stop her!" Wingrove's wife was shouting. "Someone stop her!" But most of the neighbors still couldn't grasp, yet, what was going on. Their minds had been paralyzed by years of watching TV and worrying about mortgage payments and PTA meetings and what type of insulation to put in the attic, and this was too bizarre for them to absorb all at once.

Samantha edged forward. The job really had to be done right because, as her dad had often told her, if you didn't do a job right, there wasn't any point in doing it at all.

The dog tried frantically to drag itself out of the way, but its

rear end seemed stuck to the street. The front wheel of the Blazer rolled forward, slowly and accurately. It forced the dog's head down, pinned it to the concrete, and kept turning. There was a satisfying crunch-squelch, and the dog's eyeballs literally popped out of its head as its skull was mashed flat. The tortured yelping stopped. Finally, there was peace and quiet.

Samantha felt a wave of relief. *Now* she could get moving.

She U-turned, bumping over the curb again, just in time to see Jimmy Fenchurch running out, past his mother, who tried ineffectually to hold him back.

She felt a strong temptation. It would be a real pleasure to pick him off.

But—if she didn't hit him just right, she'd have to go back and do it over, the same as with the dog. That could create all kinds of complications, especially if Jimmy was only partially crippled and still able to take evasive action. She might even have to shoot him, and for all she knew, her gun was still jammed.

With regret, she passed him by. She didn't even look back at him in the mirror as she reached the end of Hilltop, turned onto Birchwood Road, and left her neighborhood behind.

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*The above is the second chapter of the as-yet unpublished novel BLOOD CRAZY by Charles Platt.*



# WHEN GRAVEROBBING GOES WRONG

## BASED ON A TRUE STORY

By Audree Flynn

Image © Brian Blur

Danny's trial was only about a month away, and we just knew his little niece was gonna sit up there and swear in front of everybody and the baby Jesus that story she told her momma was true. But I saw how that little VannaJean was with my Danny at the picnic: *Uncle Danny I cain't reach the bowl fix me some of that jello salad Uncle Danny fix me some sweet tea Uncle Danny play horsie for me.*

Danny's sister *will not* discipline that child, and Vannajeane started hanging all over Danny a few months ago after her daddy died. And Danny says he was just trying to teach her about what happens when little girls act that way around grown-up men. Like he said, what else would he want with a skinny little eight year-old girl; I couldn't let him go to prison just for trying to help his family.

And Christian folk are *supposed* to be forgiving, is what I remember from Sunday school, but I swear that old lady's family made such a fuss. If they were so concerned about her, they should've kept that plot up a little nicer; the only reason me and Danny picked it was 'cause those flowers looked like they'd been there since the funeral. And anyway, Danny and me were gonna put her back — 'cept

thanks to that little VannaJean we got arrested, and that sheriff wouldn't even let me finish my Taco Bell.

At first when I saw that recall notice on Danny's car I thought, when it rains it pours; it said some people even burned up, or blew up just turning the key in the ignition, because the plant that manufactured all the '89 Ford Probes installed the ignition wiring wrong. I read the recall notice to Danny and he got so mad he couldn't even talk, he just racked that rifle of his like he does when he gets mad, and he goes "Elvis, come here boy" ...it always makes me nervous when he peels out of the front yard that way. Then he came back a couple hours later when "CSI" was on and he still didn't say anything, just got a beer and came in to watch my program with me. 'Course I knew he was all upset about maybe going to prison 'cause of that little VannaJean; then after I read him about the trouble with that car of his, when Danny came back in, I didn't even have to ask him where my dog was. Me and Danny watch all those "CSI" programs, and this one was about a man who dug up a body from the cemetery and put the body in his car and set the car on fire; almost everything burned up

and he almost got away with it. Danny and me figured with that faulty wiring in his ignition, and that recall letter—and you know what they say F.O.R.D. stands for—we figured with all that, the insurance company would *have to* pay me. Seemed like the best way to keep Danny out of prison, and he promised we'd use some of the money to buy me another hound dog; I thought it was sweet, him telling me how sorry he was about Elvis, and crying like a little boy. I was thinking about maybe getting a bluetick hound this time, 'cause the first and second Elvises were bloodhounds—Danny just loses his temper every now and then.

So what was supposed to happen was, most of Danny's car *and* that old lady would burn up and whatever was left wouldn't be enough to tell if it was really Danny or not; I'd get the insurance money, and meet him a few months later in another town somewhere, and we'd start over, is what was supposed to happen.

Well we already had that old lady on the back seat and then Danny goes, "Baby—check my pockets" and I said "Danny, not now". Then he gave me that look and I knew that wasn't what he meant, so we had to stop somewhere and get a lighter or some matches and by that time we were both hungry. So we pulled up behind the Gas 'N' Gulp next to the Taco Bell.

Danny and me thought it'd look suspicious if we parked there, and I was close to being put out with

him 'cause he forgot to bring something to start the car on fire. But I can't ever stay mad at Danny; like he said, the only reason he forgot was 'cause he was drinking so much lately, worried about all the lies that little VannaJean was gonna get up there and tell on him.

Then Danny says, maybe him forgetting to bring a lighter or matches was like an omen about tonight. And I remembered I didn't get to read him the funnies or the horoscopes like I usually do, 'cause Danny used the newspaper that morning to carry the rest of Elvis out to the dump. That old lady wasn't going anywhere, so we figured we'd wait until I could read our horoscopes in the morning so we'd have a better idea about what to do; we thought about putting her in that Kold-Kween freezer Danny's sister gave us, 'cause it's just sitting there on the front porch, empty. But we couldn't remember a "CSI" program with something like that in it and we thought, naw, better safe than sorry. For the time being anyway, Danny and me were gonna put that old lady back where we got her from. Then we couldn't find nothing to cover her up with, but we weren't gonna be that long, so we moved her onto the floor of Danny's Probe and we parked up by the Taco Bell.

Well ever since VannaJean's daddy died, I swear Danny's sister lets that child have whatever she wants and of course, that night she wanted Taco Bell. VannaJean starts right in crying now whenever she sees Danny's car; she says that's



where “it” happened, and in these little podunk towns everybody knows everybody, and everybody knows everybody’s car too. I was trying to eat my Nachos Bell Grande in peace, but then Danny and me hear somebody screaming and wouldn’t you know, we look out in front of the Taco Bell and there’s his sister and that VannaJean snooping around Danny’s car, looking in all the windows, with the sheriff right behind them. I told you how she babies that child, so we knew that little VannaJean pitched one of her

hissy fits, and Danny’s sister just had to show her: “*See baby, Uncle Danny ain’t in his car—*”

But like I said, Danny and me were just about to put that old lady back, soon as we were done eatin’—except, we got arrested first thanks to that little VannaJean. That sheriff wouldn’t even let me finish my Taco Bell...

And I am just sick to death worrying about what’s gonna happen to little Danny Jr. now.



## INTERESTING TIMES: BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

By Andrew Maben



Four in the morning the labor pains began. It was 9:30 a.m. in Delhi. It would be a difficult birth. Labor went on through the day, until the doctors decided to intervene and at four thirty in the evening they dragged me out. Some four and a half hours earlier the Mahatma had been assassinated. Just two days ago a plane carrying nameless Mexican farm workers exploded in "a fireball of lightning" over Los Gatos Canyon, California. There were no survivors. Perhaps my reluctance to leave the comfort of the womb was based upon some presentiment of the world I was about to enter.

Reluctant to be born, I also displayed little enthusiasm for life. I was a "blue baby", suffering from

infant respiratory distress syndrome. It seems I didn't feel like breathing, which all in all seems a remarkably apt reaction. It was two days until I saw my mother and was held in her arms for the first time. So in my earliest formative moments I was cared for, even nurtured, but not loved. Perhaps this has shaped my life. It certainly limns the boundaries of my emotional experience through most of my days. But, as we shall see, I am an ungrateful little snout, never properly grateful for what is given me.

The earliest perception of the world that I sucked into my consciousness and was able to retain is an impressionistic patchwork seized from the dance of nothingness that is the world in which we live. The scents and colors of flowers, green hedges, a fence, a narrow lane or alley, the songs of birds, warmth and a blue sky, sitting in a push-chair, contentment, perhaps curiosity. But all memories are fiction, stories told in an attempt to describe, explain, ascribe meaning to the world and our place in it. And so this is a work of fiction: I describe as faithfully as I can my memories of life, but I cannot know, and nor can anyone, if these stories describe reality, still less if they define truth.

Already I'm running into trouble. I spent some or most of my first year in Germany, where my father was a dentist in the R.A.F. serving with the occupation forces. Yet that memory must be of spring or summer, has always felt completely English. It must be from my second year, and I have another memory. Christmas, my first, my grandfather with what seemed a huge teddy bear, other adults laughing encouragement as I tottered across the room to hug the bear, and promptly fall, laughing, happy, on my ass. This must be the earlier event. Yet the other persists in feeling to belong in first place. Is this because the teddy bear still exists, offering corroboration, whereas only I possess the lane? Or is it a product of the very development of consciousness itself?

As more memories gather, at first in isolation, they gradually blur somehow at their peripheries into a continuum of existence, like the stars we recognize in the clear night sky, incognizant of, and indifferent to the many millions more unseen, the background radiation. Is this really how life is? I cannot recall the continuity of my own existence. The best I can do is pluck the recollection of incidents, events, from my life. Some significant in some way, some seemingly random and meaningless. Through the selection and retelling of these events I give an apparent order to the days of my life, present an attempt at a true self-portrait. How does my selection and telling of these stories

color the way you see me, or I see myself? I elect to tell those things that may amuse or interest you, perhaps from their cumulative effect one of us may gain some insight, understanding, even a glimpse of some meaning in our life. I hope you will not, at least, be bored. I wasn't. Most of the time.

I retell these childhood tales in the order they have arranged for themselves in my mind, which is not necessarily the actual order in which they really happened. Wherever I can, or can remember, or can be bothered, I will make some effort to clarify, but I make no promises. You have already been warned that this is fiction. There is some kind of truth here, for all that.

At the age of four I found a robin's nest in my grandfather's garden. One by one, knowing it was wrong but somehow unable to stop, I took the eggs and dropped them down the well, while the mother flapped frantically about, uttering cries of grief and frustration. "The devil made me do it" didn't work for me then, or now, and I realized that there is some dark thing in me. I've been struggling with it ever since. I knew what I was doing was wrong, not because I had already had a sound ethical education from my parents, or anyone else. I could tell the mother was grief-stricken and appalled by what I was doing, but it was not just that, I knew. But if I knew, and I was not taught, where did the knowledge come from? Who, or what was it that recognized the darkness within, recognized it as darkness? What I

did was against life, purely destructive. Perhaps a small thing, nevertheless at the end of the few moments the act took the world was measurably worse than it had been. I would like to be able to say that this recognition put an end to my acting upon these dark impulses, but that is not so. In fact I learned, which is to say taught myself, to enjoy cruelty. Good and evil may seem beyond what we expect of a four year old, yet I suspect that I am no rare exception, that this awareness is an essential component, perhaps the essential component, of our humanity. It is the beginning of the idea, which must be inherent in life in itself and in all its forms, that life is sacred. All ethics are born from this simple notion, all ethics can be distilled to this idea born in our very cells, our souls.

One day I was in the park with my nanny. Near the pond was a thick stand of bamboo, I squirmed through the tall stalks and found that inside there was a network of linked gaps between the plants, offering a passage. I pushed on, an intrepid explorer, and found a treasure at the very center. One of those simple fishing nets made with wire bent and twisted in a circle with a few projecting inches thrust into a piece of bamboo. It was as if it had somehow, magically, grown there, as if it were waiting for me to discover it and make it mine. When I emerged proudly bearing my trophy, nanny was hard put to believe me. Who knows where it came from, how it came to be there? No doubt there is

a simple, rational explanation. Still magical it made a deep impression on me.

Every Christmas my grandfather threw a works party at the factory for all the employees and their families. The highlight was the arrival of Santa Claus with gifts for all the children. My gift was not enough for me, not after I saw another boy was happily holding a Rotocopter. In the car on the way back to my grandparents' house someone must have noticed my less than delighted reaction, and asked if I liked my gift. Evidently I saw an opportunity, as I burst into tears and snuffled "I wanted a ROTOCOPTER." I told you I'm an ungrateful little snot, didn't I? I was ashamed of myself at the time, but that didn't stop me accepting as my due the Rotocopter that I was given the next day. It didn't stop me from playing with it, but there was always a sour feeling of shame.

I was four when I got tonsillitis and went to the hospital to have my tonsils out. All I recall of this is the immediate aftermath of the operation, which must have been early in the morning. I remember woozily waking from the anaesthetic to see all the other children in the ward spooning down bowls of porridge. My favorite breakfast, yum! Soon a nurse appeared at my bedside, bowl in hand.

"I've brought you some lovely ice cream," she beamed.

A short aside here to remember that it's 1952, "austerity" is still the name of the game, rationing still in place, and "ice cream" was cold but had only the barest nodding acquaintance with cream, which is commonly understood to be the high-fat component of cow's milk. As I understand it, "ice cream" at this time, like margarine, was in fact manufactured from whale blubber. Whether or not this was in fact true, and I believe the prominence given whale hunting in various picture books of the era bears the rumor out, it certainly tasted that way. Greasy tasting with an unsettling grainy texture and lingering on the tongue and palate with an unpleasant persistence, it was quite frankly, disgusting. But hardy Britons were expected to, and did, "grin and bear it". Although I must confess my gratitude that the rationing of the the war years, lasting into the early fifties was largely, if not entirely, responsible for the healthiest generation the United Kingdom has ever seen. But back to my hospital bed.

"I HATE ice cream. Can't I have porridge? Everyone else is having porridge."

"No, the coolness will soothe your throat."

"I don't mind, I'll wait for the porridge to get cold."

"No, dear, eat your ice cream, there's a good boy." Implacable.

Somehow I forced myself to down the awful cold greasy paste. Until we started going to Cornwall for our summer holidays, and discovered a Swiss baker who made perhaps the most delicious full-cream ice cream ever, I would only consume iced lollies. Do you blame me?

That afternoon Mummy came to see me. Her hands were full of something concealed beneath a draped tea-towel. She carefully set her burden down on the bedside table before bending to kiss me. Then, smiling shyly, she lifted the towel to reveal a green plastic mould of a crouching rabbit. Very carefully she lifted the mould. For a moment there was a perfect pink blancmange rabbit crouched quivering on its platter. Alas, disaster! The vibrations of the car had undone the coherence of the gelatine. Before our eyes the rabbit collapsed, disappeared into a shapeless pink sludge. Such a bewildered, disappointed, unhappy face, a look that I would see echoed in another beloved face, oh, so many years later - but we'll come to that when the time comes.

I could scarcely bear to see that look in her eyes. And I really didn't care that much about the vanished rabbit. Then as now I was far less concerned with the the presentation of food than the sheer pleasure of eating a tasty dish. And pink blancmange topped my four year old's list of tasty dishes.

"Don't worry, Mummy. It will still taste good. They made me eat ice

cream for breakfast, it'll take the taste away." Smiling back her tears, she spooned a heaping bowlful, which I wolfed down and asked for more. Somehow from this incident I developed a habit of trying to suppress my own sadnesses and disappointments to try to help loved ones and friends cope with their own. This is probably less from any genuine altruism than some kind of martyr complex, a wish to appear so self-sacrificing that others would want to offer me the same kind of sympathy. As a strategy I must say it has only been partially successful at best.

At five, off I went to kindergarten. It meant walking up Station Road to the High Street and then an eight mile bus ride to Taunton and another walk to the convent. The nuns were, I imagine, strict but fair. The place had an air of gloom, and to me the nuns in their black habits were rather menacing figures. I remember nothing of my lessons. The dreadful food is another story, and I still vividly recall carefully picking the more or less edible meat and potato from a tepid heap of boiled cabbage which was slowly oozing oleaginous green liquid onto the plate. Having salvaged all I could, I pushed the plate aside.

Here comes a nun: "Eat your cabbage, Andrew."

"I don't like cabbage."

"It's good for you. Eat it."

"It makes me sick."

"You're not leaving this table until you have eaten every bite!"

We'll see about that... I pushed a slimy green mass onto my fork, let it slide into my mouth and forced myself to swallow. Oh well, she couldn't say she hadn't been warned. I gagged, my stomach lurched horribly and I vomited the entire meal back onto my plate and the table around it. I'm quite sure that this is what has kept me from ever daring to eat oysters on the half-shell.

It was at the convent that I met my first friend, Peter. In the summer he taught me to pluck honeysuckle blossoms and suck their nectar. A small pleasure that I continue to enjoy to this day. Peter also gave me my first taste of crime. The nuns had a small kitchen garden, and one afternoon we evaded our overseers and went on a commando raid to loot the gooseberry bushes. Ah, the thrill of doing something forbidden! We slipped under the fence, crawled on our bellies through the rows of vegetables, herbs, fruit bushes, careful to maintain cover all the way. We came at last to a gooseberry bush concealed from sight in all directions and sat down to gorge. Well Peter gorged. This was also my first experience of gooseberries. He handed me a ripe one and I eagerly plopped it into my mouth. Ugh! The texture of all those little hairs on my tongue and palate was not at all pleasant. And the taste. I spat it out. I suspect there was some lesson about crime and its rewards that I took away

from that episode, but damned if I know what it may be. Peter left the convent at the end of that summer term to go off to boarding school, and as we said goodbye, I never expected to see him again.

At some point during these childhood years I learned to read. Did I teach myself, as I have often been heard to claim? Honestly I have no recollection whatsoever of acquiring this skill that has meant so much to me that it seems almost to have been a part of me since the very beginning. Books have been my refuge, my solace, my inspiration, my vice, my joy, a spur to action, a goad to thought, an excuse for indolence. I cannot remember a single day of my life when a part of my mind was not caught somewhere between the covers of a book. I have always been a compulsive reader. If there are written words anywhere in sight I will obsessively read them. Thomas the Tank Engine and his friends, Beatrix Potter's fanciful animal tales are some of my earliest memories. Later Toad of Toad Hall left me, I recall, with a strange feeling of loss, a vaguely threatening sense of estrangement. But it was The Just So Stories that entranced me. I have returned again and again to Kipling's fancies, have always felt an oddly comforting affinity for The Cat Who Walked Alone. Later of course would come the Jungle Books. I spent many hours when I was supposed to be sleeping, head beneath the covers, reading by the light of a torch.

I was not a good brother to my little sister Claire. Poor thing. She was the victim of that same dark impulse. Two events in particular continue to haunt me because of the sickening pleasure I took, and hated myself for taking, in them.

One night as we prepared for bed, Claire's curiosity and unquenchable thirst for adventure prompted her to climb up and fetch a bottle of cough syrup from the medicine chest. She loved the taste, she said, and proceeded to chug down the whole bottle before climbing into bed. In moments she was sleeping, and I slipped from the bedroom to go downstairs to tell my parents. Let's be clear, my sole motive was to get Claire in trouble and to enjoy being witness to her punishment, which I had a feeling would be severe.

"Yes, dear?" asked Mummy.

"Claire just drank the whole bottle of cough mixture."

I had expected anger towards Claire, and a reward for myself. But this was not at all the reaction. Both parents developed stricken, anxious faces and hurried to her room. They roused her from her slumber, put her on her feet and proceeded to walk her around the bedroom in circles, talking softly, solicitously, ignoring me. I sat on my bed, watching, resentful, this was not what I wanted. But of course I could hardly say. And even while consumed with these ignoble thoughts, I was fully aware that they were base, ashamed on

that account, perhaps, but only to the degree that I took care to keep them hidden. My only regret was not over my own craven nature, but that my desire had been thwarted.

The other episode began, we both remember, with my teasing her. She would become so angry, pouting so hard that her chin became corrugated. It was all but impossible to resist, and frankly I made little or no effort to do so. Daddy had invented the phrase "boot face" to describe her pouts, and the sound of those words enraged her. Here her memory and mine diverge, and this is surely where I learned of the fictional, or at least provisional, nature of memory. I know that my recollection is the correct one. And she is equally secure in the knowledge of her own veracity. But if neither of us is lying, where is the truth hiding? Anyway, she was chasing me around the house. She will tell you I was chasing her. She missed her footing as she rounded the corner. There was a large rusted nail projecting from the brick wall that separated us from the neighbors. I heard her yell and turned in time to see her head crash into the wall as she fell. She picked herself up to sit on the ground. The blood was gushing from a gash on her forehead. At least I had the decency to be scared, though how much of that fear was over her state and how much was at the prospect that I might be punished perhaps you can judge. Perhaps you will be more generous to me than I am, but you'll

probably not feel so well disposed in a moment. I ran into the house yelling for Mummy, who came running.

"Claire's hurt herself." I led her outside, where Claire was still sitting in the same spot, weeping, blood all over her face. Mummy scooped her up and carried her to Daddy's surgery. They called me a few moments later.

"Come on, Andrew. We're taking Claire to the hospital."

Daddy drove, while Mummy held Claire on her lap in the front seat beside him. I sat alone in the back, quietly seething. Furious at the attention Claire was receiving. Angry that my afternoon's play was being curtailed for the sake of a visit to the boring hospital.

"She's going to need stitches," a doctor pronounced.

"Sit here and wait for us, dear," said Mummy. "The doctor's going to make your sister better."

I sat on the straight backed wooden waiting room chair. I swung my heels. I looked at the boring posters on the wall. I probably counted tiles on the floor, I liked to count things when I was bored. For that matter I still find myself counting my paces as I walk, counting the constellations of dots in acoustic tile ceilings. I was bored. I was resentful. Then I recognized Claire's anguished cry, rising to a shriek of pain as they put in the stitches. For each stitch a shriek.



And with each shriek a mean spirited, gloating thought from me: "Good. Hope it hurts. Serves you right." How I dared imagine that she in any way deserved this pain I cannot begin to explain to myself. I will make no attempt to justify myself to you. I expect you've already come to the conclusion that I was indeed a rather nasty creature. In which case you may recognize something of the same kind of feeling in yourself as you read on. On the other hand maybe you will feel sorry for me, but if so, thank you anyway, but pity is never what I needed, and besides by now it is much too late.

There were two drainage ponds, known as the Basins, not far from our house. We would often go for walks that way. The path ran between the two ponds, bordered on each side by an old and rusted iron fence. The end of one fence had long since lost its post, and the horizontal bars were all bent and twisted in such a way that I could stand on the bottom one while grasping the top. Once in position, I was able to set myself swinging and bouncing, a most enjoyable ride. Or it was until the day that I jumped off and the top bar swung away from me, but then rebounded. The end of the bar smacked me in the mouth. Hard. It hurt. A lot. Yes, you are certainly allowed to say "Serves you right." I think I agree with you. I put my hand up to my mouth, it came away all covered in blood. and there was a hole where just now one of my front teeth had been. In my mind's eye I suffered stoically

and walked bravely home, but it does seem more probable that I bawled every step of the way.

I seem to have had a real penchant for bouncing. Bouncing has caused me, one way or another, a rather disproportionate amount of grief. Is there some kind of metaphor here? As my story unfolds, you may come to feel that there is. I certainly wonder about it myself. But if in fact it is so, where did the metaphor come from? Would that not mean that some outside author is somehow writing my life? It beats me, and that is quite enough metaphysics for now, so back to bouncing and its rewards.

I was jumping up and down on my bed, kicking my legs out behind me to bounce on my stomach. It was really fun! I did it over and over again. Perhaps I got dizzy. Perhaps I got over confident. I kicked by legs back one more time. As I fell I could see that I had rather misjudged my move, and that there was nothing to be done but watch as the bed board rose to smash me, yes of course you've guessed, in the mouth. There went my other front tooth.

That Christmas I sat on my grandfather's lap as he sang to me: "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth, My two front teeth."

My big teeth grew back soon enough. Unfortunately they were big teeth, and they could not find room to politely grow in a properly vertical direction, finding it

necessary to set off at a pronounced angle. The effect of these huge protruding teeth was endearing to adults, no doubt. I can still hear, or imagine hearing, the coos of how sweet. But in the snake pit that is the world of children I was marked, I was different, I became a target. I hasten to say that when I speak of the snake pit of childhood I am not so naive, blind, stupid, as to think that the adult world is some kind of improvement. Indeed finding that the adult world promotes the vicious impulses of children into the bitter fruits of war, crime, this has colored my whole life.

And later, after my grandfather had died – the news of which had prompted me to ask, “Mummy, does that mean Granny woke up next to a skeleton?” – at my grandmother’s house, sitting quietly on the floor, playing. Granny was playing bridge, and one of her friends at the card table remarked, “Isn’t he good?” To which my grandmother, “Oh, yes. He has the patience of Job!” I had no idea who Job was, but her words felt somehow ominous, almost a curse.

There are of course many more memories than these few. Some are perhaps worth a passing mention. I was a shy child, not to say timid, but not fearful. The fear came later. I certainly had my vicious and selfish side, but I was aware of it, which may not be so usual. And at least I seem to have had also enough decency to be ashamed of my baser nature. Did our picnics at

Stonehenge conjure an interest in the ancients and their teachings? I do remember standing in the garden to watch the Bristol Brabazon fly overhead. Is this the source of my childhood fascination with flight? And does its ignominious demise somehow prefigure the fading of that particular dream? Who can tell? I had few friends, though I think that was due more to circumstance than nature, and the habit has stayed with me.

One childhood nightmare has remained with me, not because its content was that terrifying, in fact it is comical in retrospect. Its form on the other hand terrifies me to this day. I awoke one night from a disturbing dream to find a rooster perched at the foot of the bed, eyeing me with obviously malevolent intent. I knew I was wide awake. Yet there he was. I screamed. Mummy came and the rooster disappeared. But I was left with the certainty that I can never be certain in my perceptions and knowledge of the world. And if you think a child can not think these thoughts, well, insofar as a child may be unable to find the words to describe the thought that may be true. But the gift of language lies first in its ability to give at least the illusion that by naming things we can control them. And simply because a thing can not be named, that does not mean it can not be known, can not be feared. Indeed such things are the depthless well from which all our fears are drawn.

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# THE WHOLE GODDAMN STORY

By Thomas Hastings

## Prologue

we picked up something  
they called my brother in clovis  
to come and pick it up  
  
of course at one point  
we turned it into a carrier pigeon  
attacked by a hawk  
  
my wife nursed it back to health  
we let it go  
and that was that  
  
but they symbols leaked  
along with the curious properties  
the debris possessed  
  
you know, ezekiel saw the wheel  
way up in the middle of the air  
turned by god...turned by faith?  
  
you try walking into the wind  
with your arms full of blazing  
tumbleweeds  
then, when we realized  
the yuccas were transmitters, well...

*carl, roswell, 1982*

bando sigma snowbird pounce  
1949's project grudge  
gave bigfoot the brushoff  
hired a shrink for the missing link  
  
1952's majestic-12, magic,  
where there's foo, there's fire  
sister capistrano says it's so -  
twisted her wing in the deus  
exmachina  
  
foxtrot kilothree zero blue  
orthon and the mothership  
fared well in '52, allen dulles  
warned off lawsuits against the  
contactee  
  
after the medicine men told nasa  
not to bring the moon rocks home -  
lordy, how they've grown  
  
'75's travails of travis in navajoland  
snowflake, arizona chupacabra  
munching up his plasma vortex  
another electronically disturbed  
day

pitchblend, bell raspings,  
swamp gas and soot  
hieroglyphs from the glory hand

dowse your rod and grid  
with sorcerer's grease  
loop the leylines, ride the spoors  
to dogstar's dawn

on the way to rishekish  
sadhus, gurus, babas,  
bagwans, anandas

pay maharishi mahish  
ten thousand u.s. dollars  
join the yogi mafia  
learn to fly

or be like lord buckley -  
bungee off the bicameral bridge  
sailin' and wailin' serotonin

follow kundalini down  
back to his orphic egg  
the farthest outer other ever  
anywhere

snap back at the ranch  
nords and morlocks  
blondes and greys  
indentified alien craft

incoming incunabulum  
1899's coney island's dreamland  
circus sideshow and universal  
congress of freaks  
the quotidian wonders of colonel  
joy  
his contact muscle reading  
his telepathic punch swizzle

ninety miles outside of lucky las  
vegas  
the whole skunkaroo, the ranch...  
human containers and leakers  
groomed

auger by the river of zero point  
energy  
microwave relay, cellular link  
mission critical system  
codeboot: timeloss, disassociation

coronal discharge fractals  
dance behind the satellite's  
footprints  
airbrushed silent blue

*This piece has previously appeared  
in Crop Circle Secrets, (Muse Rules  
Press, Indpls., 2004)*

[LISTEN HERE](#)





# ASSASSINATIONS

## CHAPTER ONE

### IN THE SHADOW OF THE FISH

By D M Mitchell

Images © Chris Brandrick

Entering Seraphis, the assassin dreamed again of the great fish - its enormous wooden jaws opening and closing moved on brass hinges and supported on sticks by a throng of worshippers. The great glass eyes rolled freely on swiveling supports and he shuddered whenever the beast's gaze chanced in his direction. Gongs and sistra assailed his sleeping ears and smoke stung his nostrils as the chanting, undulating procession passed him. The sides of the Fish were dilapidated as if through much use and he could see lights move inside. For a brief moment he fancied the Fish was an

enormous moving city filled with inhabitants going about their business. He awoke to the smell of strawberries, sweating, and feeling for his guns.

Molten light poured in at a window, blinding him. He groped for his mirrored glasses and fixed them over his clear pink eyes. Relieved of the worst of the glare, he got up and walked naked to the window, strapping on his gun belt as he walked.

Across the street the doors of the Midas Touch Saloon were swinging, indicating (as the street

was empty) that someone had just gone inside. He'd need to go across soon. He had no idea when the Sisters would catch up with him and had no desire to be taken by surprise.

The young boy-girl was still asleep in the corner under its filthy blanket. Its crimson hair spilled across its chalk white shoulders and the assassin saw the blood-red gills on its neck move as the creature dreamed. He had no idea where the thing had come from, how old it was or if it had ever had a name. It could neither speak nor write.

After leaving Thebes in disgrace, it had appeared outside the circle of illumination cast by his campfire, its huge fish-eyes staring at him. He'd offered it food which it had refused, seemingly grateful merely for the warmth. In the morning he'd taken it with him. He'd soon discovered that it fed on semen, with which he'd been happy to supply it.

He pulled the blanket from it, exposing the small breasts, and pushed it with his foot. It rolled over, opened its eyes and yawned. He indicated his erect penis with one hand and the thing crawled across, fastening its mouth around his thick shaft, milking him expertly.

When it had finished and sat there licking its fingers, he dressed in his dirty black clothes, fastened his spurs (like a fighting cock) and placed his wide-brimmed hat atop

his head. The boy-girl followed him sleepily out into the cruel sunlight. Flies buzzed. Somewhere a smell of shit. The street was deserted. A sign of impending death. A slight movement to his left caught his attention - someone fastening their shutters at the sight of him. The Sisters had arrived, then. He unclipped his holsters, slid the guns out and back in to ensure their free movement and turned to the Midas.

At the door, he gestured to the hermaphrodite with his chin. The thing walked across and crouched beneath a water-trough, chin on knees, the double set of genitals touching the dust. He shoved open the doors.

Murky inside, sawdust on the floor, "Sweet Dreams Baby" playing on a jukebox somewhere. Several hands of death-cards and a half empty bottle lay on the table nearest him. He gazed around, grinning in spite of himself. Cliché heaped upon cliché. A pungent scent like cat piss - sharp and acrid. He liked that - liked it for its sharpness. Hated the dull and vague and nebulous. This was a good sharp, clear day - a good day for dying.

He upended the bottle without looking at it. More sharpness - the smell of wormwood. Ok. He was in the mood, now. He liked this feeling. He enjoyed killing.

Overtured chairs, a lingering wisp of cigar smoke, more abandoned drinks. This saloon was popular -



the owner, an ex-Vegas Mafioso, had the magical gift for business. The alchemist touch for making shit into gold.

Above him. Quiet footsteps. He sank as far into the shadows as they would allow, one gun drawn and ready. A scent of lavender like some little old granny's front room. From where he stood, he could see most of the first floor balcony in the large mirror over the bar. The staircase was out of view. His breathing shallowed. They knew he was here.

Arms around each others' shoulders, the three sisters shuffled slowly across the landing, their long black dresses dragging the dust. Beneath their little old lady hats, black veils obscured their faces – Mercifully. They vanished at the farthest extremity of the mirror.

The assassin knew he had to split them up, if he were to have any chance. Outside, in the dust, a horse whinnied in terror – confused hoof-falls. The Sisters' steps faltered. He imagined them there frozen, smelling for him. He decided to make his move.

Slowly and softly out through the rear door into a back room, across to the exit and thence to the back alleyway. Locked. He cursed silently. He couldn't let them find him here, cornered like a shithouse rat. Moving quickly, he kicked the door open and slid like a shadow outside. As the reverberations died away, he heard a noise from within

as though someone were shaking a huge wet canvas out. They were onto him.

He ducked into the next building and waited. Almost immediately, scuffing and snorting like the great brass bulls he'd tamed so many months ago. For a moment, he worried about the boy-girl but quickly put it from his thoughts. He had enough shit pressing.

He wished the sisters would talk to each other, but they never seemed to need to. Then, he grinned, revealing too many teeth, too sharp like those of a shark, grouped in several rows. They had split up – one left, one right, the other more than likely straight up. He realized this was the only chance he was likely to get.

He opened the door, aimed and fired in one mercurial movement. His aim, as ever, was perfect. The black clad shape was thrown against the wooden wall of the saloon, cut almost in half across the stomach by his shot.

The figure slid down the wall leaving a broad red swathe on the white painted surface. Hitting the ground, it began to scream like a cat, kicking and clawing at the ground with great steel claws emerging birdlike from the sleeves of its dress.

“Fenton!”

He spun round. Another of the Sisters faced him, arms stretched to either side of the alley, blocking his

exit in that direction. Her veil had fallen away revealing a beautiful female face.

"Alecto. Leave this now. This can't end well!" he croaked in a voice little used. The creature cocked its head.

"Say first, did you kill your mother or did you not?"

Her voice spilled from her like music.

"Yes. I killed her. There should be no denial of that."

"So, then how did you kill her? You are bound to say."

"I cut her throat." He grinned.

Alecto was slowly drawing closer, dragging her long hooked fingernails along the walls. Curled shavings of wood fell to the dirt.

"By whose persuasion and advice did you this?"

"Oh fuck off! I've got a headache!"

White hot nuggets of lead following a deadly trajectory. Alecto faster, throwing aside the black dress as she leaped a great leap over his head. Black bat wings spreading wide - a flash of steel talons at hand and foot, like a great eagle's and a sharp pain raking the side of his head as she passed over.

Fenton fell to the dust holding the side of his head. The ear was still there but the gash was very deep.

He rolled over onto his back as Alecto made another pass. She veered away to avoid his gunshot, opened her black mouth enormously wide and screamed - the sound of rending metal. Atop her white face, snakes writhed.

And now the third Sister joined her. They swooped and circled just out of reach, waiting their chance. He risked a glance to the side. The building next to him was raised with a two foot crawlspace. He had three bullets left before he needed to reload. Bad odds.

He decided to sacrifice another bullet - they veered crazily to avoid it and he dived for the gap, just making it, scuttling along under the rotten wood like a crab. Claws struck the dirt a fraction of a second after he'd reached safety.

"Come on sweethearts. Come in and get me."

They screeched in their fury and it was enough to freeze a man's blood. Breaking glass and rending wood. They had vile tempers. He smiled but realized he was losing blood.

The wooden fish head snapped at him in the darkness. Cold enclosed him. He tried to stand and banged his head. It brought him back from his delirium. It took him several more minutes to reorient himself. Then he wriggled towards the light coming from the far side of the building.

A voice - one of the Sisters

“So, here the man has left a clear trail behind...” The other side of the building. Good. The light stung his eyes and he realized he’d lost his glasses. Squinting he slipped from cover and ran across the alley to the blacksmith’s forge. A huge iron wheel stood propped against the rear wall, manacles attached to it at intervals.

Fenton ducked through the workshop into the house at the back. As he opened the door, three people turned to look at him – one of them a huge man with almost no neck. His skin was scarred and cured like leather – tartar eyes like flints. A woman and an older man also sat at the table. The blacksmith (obviously) stood up.

“Take your dirty business out of my house, stranger!”

“Certainly,” smiled Fenton. “But you won’t mind if I use your other door?” The man growled moving forwards, muscles rippling like a tiger’s. Fenton saw the shadow on the window before anyone else even glimpsed it. He fell to the floor, reloaded gun in his hand as the window shattered inwards.

The woman screamed and fell backwards, hands to her eyes, countless glass shards making her look like a porcupine. The dark Sister flew in and the giant man bellowed, shovel-like hands closing on one leg and a great wing.

Despite his enormous physical prowess, the Sister cut him to ribbons. Fenton was amazed at

how much blood the man must have had in his huge body. And how much a person could lose and still go on struggling. Finally the man swayed and his grip seemed to relax. Fenton, who had stood watching with amused fascination, raised his gun and emptied it indiscriminately into giant and Sister alike. By the time he had finished there was a jigsaw puzzle in flesh for whoever cared to try to solve it.

Blood.

There was always blood.

The Great Fish turned and he could smell its flesh now. The music of the worshippers was almost deafening.

He looked down at the ruined bodies in front of him. There was still the last Sister to deal with before he could leave this town. His guns were empty. The mutilated woman lay on the floor screaming, blood pouring between her fingers. The old man merely whimpered, staring at him in abject terror.

He filled the chambers of his guns, counted out his remaining bullets. He decided he could afford to be merciful. A bullet through the woman’s head stopped her noise. He smiled at the old man and opened the back door.

The street was empty. Quiet. He stepped out. Not five paces from the door he was knocked flat to the ground by an immense force, both

guns spinning from nerveless hands. As his gaze cleared he found himself staring into the inhumanly beautiful face of the last Sister. She had him pinned to the ground, her mouth inches away from his. She licked his face.

"I expected to taste guilt on you, murderer. But it is a feeling alien to you, am I right?"

"I have no guilt. I go about the world doing the God's work. I kill only at his decree or to defend myself from those who would harm or impede me."

"This God of yours. Is he flesh? Does he speak to you with a mouth or with noises in your brain?"

"He is as solid as you or I. He showed me the films of my mother and her crimes. Crimes there were no possibility of bringing to human account. I did the God's bidding."

"You know that we Sisters are answerable to no God with a cock? That we are of the Mother and defenders of the Tree that springs from her womb?"

"My earthly mother had no womb. I sprang from no womb. I was ejected from her bowels in a stream of running shit. She was no woman and gave up any right to be called so, long before my lamentable birth. "

The Sister stared for a while, eyes golden, flecked with green. She shifted her weight and Fenton found he could move one hand. He

slid it down his stomach between them until he touched her crotch beneath her black dress. She made no protest. Gaining a handful of material, he drew the dress upwards, bit by bit until he could touch her skin. She wore no garment underneath the dress. His hand touched her warm cunt. He was relieved to find it wet and parted easily to his exploring hand. She hissed and her split tongue emerged again, swollen.

Suddenly in a flurry of movement she rolled over, dragging him on top, her hands scrabbling at his trousers. His cock emerged erect and she clutched it tightly, almost shoving it into her cunt. There in the dust with the frightened townspeople watching from behind shuttered windows, he fucked the last of his pursuers to exhaustion.

He left by sundown, the boy-girl trailing a few paces behind him. The sun made his shadow long before him. He never liked traveling East but the West now contained a past from which he was fleeing.

*Dedicated to the memory of Phillip Jose Farmer.*





## ON THE FIFTH DAY - LAZARUS

By Jana

Image © Chris Brandrick

When he came back into the house, he was different. No. Not just different but strange. I'm not sure what we had expected, my sister and I but we did not expect this. I think it was his eyes. It was almost impossible to look into his eyes. Yes. It was his eyes.

When I looked into his eyes I had expected to see the Glory of God shining there but this was not so. When I looked into his eyes, I saw a shadow, a flicker of my own life like a candle sputtering in a brutal desert sand storm. I could begin to feel the grit of the sand in my teeth and filling my hair, pelting my skin like tiny sand gnats. My heart felt wrenched and shredding, in the act of being pulled into a million tiny grains of pieces.

I felt smothered and gagged unable to talk. The more I looked, the storm became fierce and swirled into every pore and orifice of my body and into the cracks in my soul where sin had left rot. It was only when I started to shriek despite my

mouth dry and caked with dirt, I then looked away and I steeled myself for the next time and the next time and the next time. After all he was my brother and he had returned to live with us and among us again.

There were other changes both my sister Mary and I, Martha, noted. Once boisterous, he now sat and stared into seemingly nothingness yet he murmured as though someone or something was there. It made us shudder. And he stank.

For four days he had lain the maws of the cave, a napkin covering his face and his feet and hands bound in funeral cloth. And during the days of deadness he had lain elsewhere. Somewhere. It was after four long days that at last our Blessed Lord came, heard our cries and invoked our brother and our brother came back to us and he breathed again among us. We rejoiced...at first.

We had thought for sure given Jesus's love for our brother and for ourselves for had we not been blessed to serve him? Yes. Those were glorious, precious times, I recall them well. The days when our Lord Jesus rested among us.

So I would have thought that during those four days when he was dead that he would have lain with the angels and smelt of the purified bathing waters of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem, or orange rind and nutmeg and sweets and cherubian dreams. But no, this was not so. He now smelled of rot, of decay, musty like a spinster's heirloom basket or vase where one holds one's dowry or precious items which seldom see light. He smelled putridly of otherness, of desert wolves, of famine, of invasion, of the Romans. He smelled of revulsion. He may have been risen from the grave, but he smelled like the dead. He smelled like every lie he had ever told had oozed out through his pores, through his nostrils, his armpits and between his legs. He stank literally to high heaven or was it hell.

When he grew weary of staring into the walls preferring the dark corners to the lit window or open door, he would sleep and laid himself out in the same manner as the corpse he once was. He covered his face again with a napkin, not the same napkin but another. This one cleansed but his face he covered and he slept. But he did not sleep in peace but fitfully. Like the demons from the Roman story

of Pandora and her Box. They bit him and he would moan and curl up to fend them away and then he would howl.

What had our Lord unleashed when he ordered the rock moved from my brother's burial cave? What had our Lord unleashed when he moved our brother out of death's slumber and removed the lid from the dead which silences these defiant ghosts? We knew that light had been let in to my brother's crypt and into his soul but we had not expected this turmoil.

We were ashamed. We were ashamed of him and for him and then of us. The neighbors came to see. They pretended to visit with good intentions and they brought to us whatever they had spare from their household baking. But we knew they had come to investigate this man whom the Lord Christ had risen from the grave. They came to ask him questions. They came out of curiosity and they came to scorn him because although he was indeed living proof of our Lord Jesus' greatness, he was also proof of his failure, for my brother stank and this was an abomination.

Purification laws were exact among us Jews. The priests taught and reminded and castigated severely those who did not uphold the rites of purification. Cleanliness was not only close to Godliness, Yaweh, it WAS Godliness. And our brother stood in defilement of all that the Sanhedrin and Pharisees taught.

He stank and no matter how many hours we sponged his body, he still wreaked of all that was rotten within and without. We were helpless against this smell which devoured him and our house.

He stared into nothingness, muttered strangely, slept in fits as though tormented and he stank.

Those who visited whom we treated as guests never returned. Instead the talk grew in Bethany about our brother and even about us. We were now caste out like the plague of which my brother smelt. Once honored by the village for being a favorite of the King, we became questioned and questionable. We housed not a miracle of our Lord Jesus's work but something macabre, not quite right, not quite sane, and something impure.

And then there were his eyes. Holes. But holes which drilled through those in front of him who dared to lift their eyes to his. They became afraid because as his pores eked out every lie he may have spoke, a lie like a worm through flesh began to crawl its way out of the soul at whom he glared. The longer the visitor looked at my brother's eye, the greater became their discomfort. They, too, began to wreek of cadavers locked away in the crevices of their mind and soul and heart. Their secret sins began to crawl to the surface of their skin. And they recalled bluntly and hurriedly the word of Christ to come naked and unafraid

and they knew they were NOT taken for they were still clothed inside and out with deceit and gossip and injury done to their neighbor in greed.

So they gazed at my brother and then they quickly left but left like someone caught in a epileptic fit, the fit of the demons and of the devil. Few left peacefully. For in his eyes, they had seen themselves behind that rock door, lying in shrouds, face covered with a napkin and beginning to dream of things they had dared not when alive.

After several weeks like this my brother one day got up and left. He walked out into the street and out of the street and out of the town of Bethany and he walked into the desert scrub. At nights he would return, mute. He would return to his corner.

I can only imagine that he now walked between two of three worlds. The earth and purgatory for he had not dwelt long to have reached the shores promised by our Lord, at the feet of God. No he was only half a man now and half a phantom not quite an angel.

Then one day, he got up and soundlessly walked out, down the street, out of Bethany and his shadow fell across the sand and like a mirage for he had never been complete as a man among us, he vanished.

We know not where.



## **IN THE ALLEY**

**By Claire Godden-Rowland**

**Images © Malcolm Alcala**

The city was scorching hot in July: the tarmac sizzled, the overflowing rubbish stank like overheated death, and tempers flared. Also, any pub or bar, however unsavoury, with an outside seating area or better still a garden, was packed with sweating people drinking fruit ciders or icy pints with condensation trickling down their shafts. It was the sort of heat that clung to your flesh and never allowed you to stop sweating, your clothes constantly glued to your skin, your face shining. I sat outside one of these pubs which

tried to deny its location in the centre of the city where the heat was relentless and violence suddenly tore free from the sticky calm which lingered. This area of the city was the oldest; all the streets were cobbled and near by the docks belched their odour into the cloying air.

My metal chair rocked a little on the cobbles and my skirt was glued to my thighs with sweat as I listened to Arleen regaling me with stories of this week's punters, otherwise known as 'freaks, losers



and weirdos' and usually identified by a strange trait of some kind. Usually I hung on every word, finding her observations shrewd and her tales both hysterical and oddly reassuring. Most women have friends who make them feel a little validated about their own lives however deficient they were, and god knows mine really was.

Arleen was just informing me of a particularly fun client who insisted on having a vibrator up his rear, all was going smoothly until, inserted the wrong way round, the battery end came away and was lost in his back passage ensuring Arleen a trip to A and E and far too much vending machine coffee which she assured me tasted worse than vibrator ass' spunk. She chuckled then, noting that she probably had a client for life now as if he ever stopped coming to her or defected to another prostitute she could black mail the shit out of him.

I was no longer listening to my friend. My stomach rolled portentously as I saw two familiar figures sauntering our way. I felt the saliva dry up in my throat and my heart bolted into my mouth. I suddenly felt barely able to breathe as Sim and Sam, my brother and our cousin approached across the cobbled square, the sky seeming to turn an ominous iron grey colour at their backs. I wanted to move, to hide in the ladies, or even crouching under the table suddenly seemed like an option.

It was too late. Simeon, my older brother, gave a huge roar sound which made him sound like a football hooligan as he spied me. He was a football hooligan, one of his more savoury endeavours, most of which I tried not to consider. Today, however, it wasn't Sim who had me feeling really uncomfortable and sweating harder as I shifted in this metal seat which abruptly seemed to be giving me piles and making my arse numb. No, today it was my cousin Sam who had me shifting awkwardly, due to the fact that last time I saw him he had blackmailed me into giving him oral sex. I told you my life was deficient lately.

'Alright mate?' Sim gave me a punch in the arm as he sat down and spread his legs wide like every good alpha male should. He whistled at the bar man who was clearing a nearby table and pointed at our own table and then at Arleen and myself. Anyone else would have been ignored him but Sim and Sam were well known in these parts and no one ignored either of them. Very hastily the bar man fetched us more drinks.

'How is it then girls?' Simeon demanded loudly, many people glancing over their shoulders at his overwhelming volume and confidence. He briefly stopped grinning and looked at me. 'What' up wiv your face Sis? You look like a slapped arse.'

Arleen stroked his arm intimately and I tried not to imagine what else she had stroked on my brother. She

flashed him her best nicotine yellow smile. 'Don't mind her Sim, she's been well off all night, reckon she's on the blob or sommat.'

They both laughed and took up conversation together at a mercifully lowered volume. Sam had been silent until now and I had studiously avoided his searching gaze. He was sat beside me and he gently nudged my shoulder with his. 'You alright, mate?' He asked nervously, his eyes flicking from side to side shiftily.

I glared at him as subtly as I could and then looked away, unable to look at him without seeing his shining purple cock or tasting the irony tang of my own blood in my mouth.

He touched my hand and I snatched it away in disgust.

'Oh Prue, don't be like that,' he almost pleaded, his voice barely more than a whisper leaving Arleen and Simeon unaware of our exchange.

I was horrified and all I wanted to do in the world was tell him to go 'fuck himself', so I did.

He seized my hand and squeezed it as if he might comfort my pain not be the very source of my misery. 'Is this coz I bloodied up your lip like?'

For a second I thought Sim had heard for his conversation paused but then he laughed and nodded,

utterly unaware of what his cousin had done.

I breathed a sigh of relief that our hideous secret remained intact and stared at him. 'Sam,' I hissed at him under my breath. I was speechless, I could barely think of a thing to say now faced with my abuser. 'Just ...' fuck yourself again? No, I can do better than that surely. 'Go fuck yourself,' apparently not then.

Sim glanced up at us. 'What the fuck is up wiv you mate?'

'Nothing,' Sam replied quickly. 'She's alright, init mate?' He turned to me, his eyes pleading and desperate.

I shook my hand free once more and sat back in my chair, scraping against the centuries old cobbles beneath. The light was fading before my eyes, the sun swallowed completely by rolling violet clouds which in turn bowed to the impending dusk.

'Never better,' I finally assured Simeon.

He shook his head at me. 'You know what your problem is donya?'

'Enlighten me,' I requested.

He shook his head disgustedly. 'Too fucking convinced that you're so fucking clever you are.'

'No she ain't,' replied Sam defensively. 'Besides she is pretty fucking clever.'



'She ain't,' Sim insisted dryly. 'Clever birds don't get knocked up when they're well young; they go up college an' all that.' He spat before he continued and then followed this with a loud slurp of his pint. 'Besides, clever birds are pretty much always minglers, it's a known fact and our Prue's alright. Shame she married that tosser but,'

he shrugged. 'She wouldn't listen to me would she?'

Sam was sweating now more than the balmy dusk warranted. 'That's enough Sim, she's proper clever, aren't you Prue?'

Sim laughed loudly and the sound grated upon my last few frayed

nerves. He leant back in his chair and glanced over at Arleen with a mischievous glint in his eye. 'Don't mind Sam, he's always been protective of her. More like her big bruvver than I was really.' He laughed again. 'Either that or he shoulda married 'er.' He guffawed at his own jest and Arleen's laugh could have shattered glass.

I felt my head swim and for a moment I thought I may be sick. I stared blankly down at the spit globule Simeon had spat on the swell of a cobble at our feet. It was white and bubbly and it just lay there evaporating in the hot air, discarded on the ground. I felt out of the two of us the spittle had the best deal and would have willingly swapped places.

I couldn't stand it a second longer. I felt like I would throw up every organ within my body as my skin prickled and crawled as if fire ants scurried over my flesh. Sam reached for my arm and I was up and gone. I hurried into the bar and behind me I heard Sim instruct Sam not to follow leaving a twisted part of me grateful to my dick of a brother.

Inside the pub the heat was unbearable and my skin erupted with sweat immediately as people jostled and shunted me, refusing to move as I burrowed my way through. Suddenly everyone was so tall and solid and they stank, sweet Jesus how they all stank, the fetid stench of rotted meat and stale sweat.

I was pin-balled in the general direction of the ladies, the door appearing like a heavenly apparition ahead of me when Patrick appeared out of nowhere and grabbed me.

I gazed up at him helplessly.

'Baby?' He asked gently, his eyes full of concern. 'What the fuck's happened, you look like shit so you do?' That was gentle for Patrick. 'What's goin' on, pet?'

I knew I was staring at him dumbly and he shook me a little the way you may shake an unconscious person. He smelt of smoke and whisky and something else, maybe it was lynx or maybe it was just him but whatever it was it felt so good and so welcome I could have cried with sweet relief.

Patrick dipped his head to one side, his black floppy hair falling across his dark eyes and in the dim light they glistened as if he were about to cry my tears for me. When I'd first met Patrick I had thought him vaguely attractive in a skinny, tattooed, roguish way, but in this moment I thought he was the most handsome man I had ever laid eyes on. I could have been in a fairy tale being approached by a knight on a white charger and he could never be as perfect as Patrick was that moment as he persuaded the bar man to open the fire exit and release us into the rear alley.

Outside in the dusky night which was rapidly fading to night I fell against him and pressed my face so

hard against his chest that my nose hurt. I clung to him, pulling him to me, pushing my face into his shoulders, dragging my lips over the cotton of his T shirt, the sinewy muscles beneath. He held me in silence for an eternity, unmoving, not speaking. The clouds began to fracture and the finest rain began to spray down upon us. It felt like little kisses on my forehead and I hung my head back as it gently tapped my arid lips and my eye lids, causing a film of rain to cool my sweating flesh.

I finally stepped away from Patrick and for a moment we didn't speak, we just watched each other as if we hadn't spoken in years.

He lowered his head and his shoulders hollowed with defeat. When he looked up he was biting his lip. 'Tell me. Please.' He shrugged and shook his head. 'There's nothing I can't hear, nothing I can't make better, pet.'

'You can't make this better.' My voice sounded so hollow, so bitter. I wondered if I may be damaged forever, if that one afternoon at Sam's would define me, my sense of myself, forever.

He touched my cheek tenderly and then asked, 'You haven't killed anyone else have you?'

Despite myself I laughed out loud, tears which seemed to deteriorate as my mouth cracked into an agonised grimace, and I was crying. I was crying so hard I had to clutch my breast as breath was

forced from my body with my heavy sobs. I bent forward, disabled by the force of my grief, my humiliation as I wept for myself and for who I had been before that one moment. I cried like a child who has fallen, I cried without restraint or reproach. I fell against him and he held me in silence until the storm began to wane and the rain grew stronger, soaking us to the skin.

Patrick took my face in his hands, the tips of his fingers yellowed from roll ups, his breath hot with whiskey, and he kissed my cheeks. He tenderly touched his lips to my tears, my eyelids, gentle butterfly kisses, trembling upon my chin and finally he pressed his lips to mine, and they felt wonderful, so wonderful I began to cry once more. He continued to kiss me, eager yet tender, like a mother carefully healing the young, lovingly wiping away the pain. Then I was no longer crying I was kissing him with an intensity to strong I thought it may kill me. I sought all he offered; I wanted to be lost in him, in his body. I wanted to sink into him, shelter within his devotion.

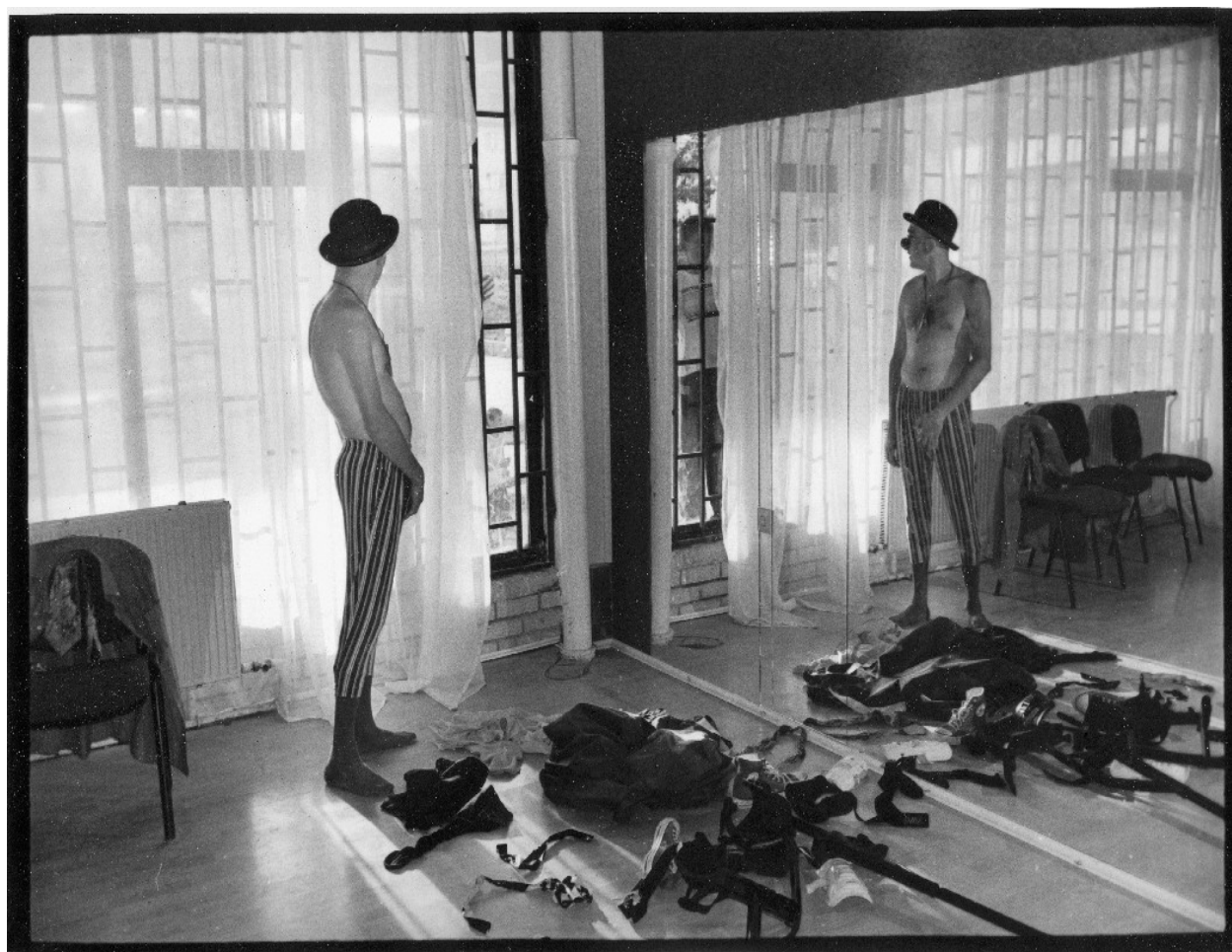
Patrick had had me in every position the human body could be manipulated into, he had seen me from every angle possible, sometimes making us laugh out loud. He had explored my body with a dedication and exploration I had never imagined any other human would afford it, a single mindedness I have never believed I would deserve. He had taken me

with fervour, with violent passion, with twisted pleasure and with drunken fumbling. Never before had we made love, like this, like two people who needed more than physical and had only that medium to communicate, like drowning people whose only air could come from the lover before you. We drank deep of each other as the rain tumbled down into that alley, the street lamps dancing in the gathering puddles at our feet. I tasted the salt of his flesh and I felt the cold stone of the alley wall as he lifted me and pressed me back against it. I gasped and almost

cried out in pain and ecstasy as I felt him enter me with urgency and the gentlest love. I clung to him the way I had never needed anyone or anything. I gulped deep, I drowned in him and I allowed myself to fall into the abyss knowing deep in my heart that he would save me. He would resuscitate me just to drown me once more only to revive my helpless body again and again. We moved together, the distant music beyond this wall like a heart beat or a victory march as I realised. I finally realised that we loved each other, truly loved each other.







## HER FIRE CHILLS ME

By Craig Woods

Images © Max Reeves

Tim the Sound Engineer walked phantom miles through lifeless streets and vacant yards to the old power station. In the aftermath of the murderous carnage immeasurable weeks previously, the world had seemed to splinter around him, his environment revealing new and ever more complex dimensions enmeshed with one another like layers of livid flesh. As he walked, the streets erupted into chasms and mountain ranges, the yards into deserts and plains, all in an insubordinate flux - myriad landscapes in boundless

spatial and temporal permutations. Soon a rain came, whipping the torn fragments of the universe into an electric fury.

Arriving at the station, Tim found shelter in a rusted steel hut. Detritus littered the interior: tattered pages from newspapers and magazines, strips left by scissor cuts. He bunched the paper as best he could into a singular mass in order to make a bed and sat there in the endless blue noon, listening to the portentous drumbeat of rain on the shabby



roof. Flexing the rheumatism from his bones, he noticed that the dark residue of the female Agent's blood was still visible under two fingernails of his left hand. He had scrubbed those nails vigorously in the intervening weeks but the stains proved as irremovable as tattoos, as though he had physically assimilated his own guilt. More significantly, the knife with which he had committed the crimes - the same modest utensil he had used to cut a coffee cake in the placid moments before the Agents' tumultuous intrusion - had refused to take leave of him, despite his best efforts. Immediately following the incident, he had tossed this slender culinary tool into the murky urban river where it had appeared to sink without impediment. He awakened the following day to find the same elegant blade stained with the same dark blood resting in the back pocket of his jeans. Disturbed and incredulous he had wandered back to the riverside, his heart pounding furiously, paranoid eyes flickering back and forth across the desolate banks for any sign of a pursuer. Pondering the possibility that the previous day's violence had shaken his psyche to the point of hallucination, he tossed the knife into the brown water, watching it sink once again through a prism of white-knuckle uncertainty.

Next day it had returned, glinting impudently from his pocket, a vicious red smile across its cold side.

In the ensuing days he had set about destroying the knife in a variety of ways: snapping it into several pieces, melting it down in an industrial stove... But with each sunrise it returned, its blade intact, the stain of his crime setting an impervious flame to the cool grey dawn. This inexplicable routine continued unabated until finally one morning, exhausted and careworn, he had not bothered to pull the blade from his pocket, accepting lethargically its cryptic claim upon his being. Cold, damp and shivering in the rusted hut, he patted at the shape of the makeshift weapon now pressed flat against his buttock. The knife exuded a savage heat in which he now took an illicit comfort. Through the glassless window he gazed out with insomniac eyes at the endless symmetrical rows of pylons. This order of megaliths encroached upon his mind, their steel veneer and subliminal hum encrypting his cerebrum with the software for a new psychology beyond time and space. The first flakes of snow descended from a darkening sky and his eyes drooped heavily with fatigue. Red-hot impulse had brought him here. Smiling nightmare turned to embrace him...

A dull knot of pain bloomed at the base of his spine. He pulled out the magazine pressing into his back and it flopped open at a full page photograph of the abducted girl. He recognised her waxen cosmopolitan features from the proliferation of similar snapshots routinely splashed across the pages

of celebrity gossip rags and tabloid spreads, an abundance which had momentarily escalated following her disappearance. Since the initial reports, Tim had paid little attention to the unfolding story. Nonetheless he was vaguely aware that some considerable harm had come to this blandly beautiful young woman whose self-immersed blue eyes glistened obdurately and glasslike from the disintegrating page.

“There are new skies those eyes couldn’t see in the wounds she suffered.”

A short, thin woman stood in the doorway. Her willowy form cast no shadow in the austere light. Scandinavian ghosts sang in her ageless voice:

“I am Lois Strandberg, collage artist and space splicer. I’ve been waiting for you. I need a new set of ears for my visions.”

Tim followed the collage artist across the frozen station to a concrete cubicle fronted by a padlocked iron door. From an inside jacket pocket she pulled a pair of red-handled scissors, immaculate blades reflecting boundless silver aeons. With a modest snap, the blades cut through the heavy chain as though it were paper. The padlock fell upon the harsh ground with a low thud and the door swung open. She led him down eternal stairs, their footfalls echoing blankly in the gloom, the scissors lighting their way with a luminous gleam

of their own inexplicable means. Inestimable minutes delivered them to a second door - splintered wood painted white with the number 77 nailed in black brass. The door staggered inward on a rusty hinge to reveal a windowless apartment; uncarpeted floor strewn with shreds of newspapers and magazines; a few rickety chairs and sideboards straining under the weight of books and art supplies; candles flickering dimly at opposing corners; scraps of image and text glued in a single colossal collage across the walls; a quarter of the room partitioned off by a thick oil-stained tarpaulin draped over dusty clothesline. The room’s musty odour stirred Tim’s memories of his brief career as a roadie during the 1980s: interminable nights spent in the cramped, sweat-scented bellies of anonymous tour buses trundling across equally anonymous landscapes of foreign shadow. Queasy, Tim leaned against one of the sideboards to survey his surroundings. A cold sting of pain caused him to recoil. Blood swelled darkly from a small puncture on the flat of his thumb. On the sideboard a pair of scissors with serrated edges sat open in the dust, metal jaws yawning ravenously.

“Be careful what you touch. My pets have quite indomitable wills,” the woman waved a languid arm, intimating the innumerable presences of unseen scissors. Here and there among the shadowy wreckage vigilant blades glistened with infernal elegance in the candlelight. “Some less than

savoury folks have met quite a comeuppance on these blades. Back when I was whoring in Stockholm this sleazy executive-type son-of-a-bitch tries to get all fresh - real dangerous like with fists flying and big buck-fuck-ugly teeth snap-snap-snapping at my face. Grabbed a little pair of scissors - the little dinky kind they make for cutting the flimsiest of paper - caught his filthy sweaty wrist in the jaws. Be damned if his whole hand didn't come right off there and then - popped right off the wrist like his flesh and his bones were no more than papier-mâché. Fucker squeals like an infant, drops to his knees, blood pumping out of the stump like rusty water from a radiator valve. So funny to see him like that y'know - all big fucking tough guy one second, the next? - big overgrown baby, butt-naked, his saggy flesh all flushed and wet with terror-sweat, his miserable cock shrivelling in on itself like a little pink slug."

Tim moved away from the sideboard and took a few cautious steps into the centre of the apartment. A cornucopia of imagery inundated his senses: faces of celebrities, politicians, anonymous strangers from past and present were spliced and intercut in infinite variations with shreds of cityscapes, desert vistas, arboreal panoramas, the surfaces of other planets, real and fictional. Within these four humble walls, Lois Strandberg had reconstructed the universe - torn its every component between the teeth of her scissors and scattered the

wounded fragments in an ongoing overhaul of temporal and spatial foundations. Almost overwhelmed by this barrage of word and image, it seemed to Tim that he had become enveloped in the blueprints of evolution. A whole new logic was laid bare before him, like the script for the most epic of movies yearning to be filmed and edited into existence. As phenomenal as Lois's talent undoubtedly was, Tim identified a crucial ingredient absent from her composition: soundtrack. Something infinitely more profound than aimless whimsy had lured him here.

"So the dumb fuck rushes into the hall, severed hand stuffed in the liner from a waste basket, trailing his filthy blood behind him," the woman continued in unhurried tone as she rummaged through papers and magazines, "Goes to the ice machine and starts filling up the bag, thinking he can save the hand and have it reattached. Machine runs dry after only a handful. Enraged and panicked - and still butt-naked remember - he runs to reception screaming for Ice! - Ice! -Ice! I run in after him, my face all bruised and bleeding y'know, screaming that this fucker tried to rape me. Fella at reception goes to dial for an ambulance and the cops too. Son-of-a-bitch Mr Executive swings the bag - with his hand in it, yeah? - slugs the guy around the head, screaming: Ice!-Ice!. Pair of security guards at the door pile in to take him down. Crazy son-of-a-bitch is swinging the bag around like a cudgel, his

jelly belly wobbling-wobbling, cock flopping ridiculously while these two heavies come at him - you can make out the mix of shock and amusement in their stunned faces. A real sight to see. Another day at the office ... Ah-hah!" she pulled a pair of shears free from the clutter and waved the rusted blades cheerily by their cracked wooden handles, "I need to see your wallet. Would you hand it to me please?"

"ID check?" Tim queried as he fumbled in his back pocket.

"Oh no, no. I know who you are, Tim. That's in no doubt. But we need to lighten your baggage a little before either of us can go anywhere from here. Only those who travel light may ride this train."

He handed her the slim leather accessory without further question. Ignoring his cash, she pulled out his ATM card. "No other cards? Credit or Debit?"

"No, none."

"Good boy," her red lips curled upward in a sincere smile, "that makes my job easier." The card fell to the mercy of her blades with a dry conclusive snap. "Now, what about photos? Any family snaps in here?"

"I'm not sure," he responded honestly, "I don't remember."

She pulled out a colour snapshot in which he recognised his own face, about ten years younger,

sandwiched between a smiling couple in their sixties. "This?"

"Oh yes, those are my parents."

"Hm. Well we'll have to do away with that. There's no room for any attachments to the primordial swamp I'm afraid. Could bring our whole train crashing down around us."

"That's quite alright." A tide of relief washed over the floor of Tim's psyche. He had given no thought to his parents, nor indeed to any member of his family in quite some time. This realisation caused him to feel quite liberated. As Lois calmly attacked the photo with her shears, he could feel the claws of the material world surrendering their grip upon him - all the archaic structures, customs and hierarchies with which he had been raised falling away like the shells of drained insects from a wind-blown web. His pulse began to ease, his muscles loosen.

Lois scrunched the mutilated photo in a small but fierce fist and tossed it onto the sideboard. Between thumb and forefinger she held aloft the portion she'd cut free. The younger Tim's face, shoulders and chest remained intact, all evidence of his progenitors amputated.

"Consider yourself duly liberated." She turned back to the sideboard and busied herself with the rifling of magazine pages. "Now, while I find the first appropriate background for this handsome

fella, you can do us both a favour by disposing of the bodies.”

Tim retrieved the screwed up photo and moved to the opposite cabinet where he fed the ruined remains to the candle’s eager flame. As the fire went to work, he did not bother to look back at the smouldering faces of his parents whose very existence now seemed as inconsequential as those of staid fictional characters in a banal television soap opera. Instead, he found his gaze wandering the convoluted details of the collage around him, his psyche reaching out to those fragmented images and texts with tenacious tendrils of desire, feeling out new identities in the myriad time tracks enmeshed there.

“That’ll do,” Lois broke the silence in cheerful tone, smoothing the glue-backed photo fragment on to a network of other images and text he could not quite make out in the gloom. She spun around on a slender heel and fixed him with a keen expression, her eyes aglow with blue fire. “You may have the honour of unveiling now.”

Tim crossed the room to the partitioned corner and pulled aside the tarpaulin which slumped soundlessly to the floor. Beyond lay an identical replica of the bedroom in which he had spent his pubertal years, recreated with almost maddening exactness; the narrow single bed with its blue duvet covers jammed against the wall with one dusty window permitting sour light from an

unknown source; the built-in mirrored wardrobe, a spider-web wound in the glass of the left hand door; the old stereo unit flanked by towers of tatty vinyl albums and sleeveless 45s; the bedside cabinet stocked with pulp paperbacks and assorted comic books ... Even the scent was familiar: that stale summer smell of night sweat and the dull ammoniate odour of dreary masturbating adolescent afternoons.

A taste hit the back of his throat, brackish and bittersweet like stagnant saltwater mixed with cheap cider. Images came flooding in: illicit nights of teenage drunkenness by the old viaduct and urgent fumbings in the bracken with a promiscuous neighbourhood girl named Vicky. Her face - all huge eyes and hollowed cheeks - surfaced from the swamp of his memory, as clear and defined as she was back then: the rosy, rustic features spread in a lascivious grin; the chestnut hair collecting at the thorax where her young breast heaved in her blue dress, pointing exultantly towards a forgotten sun. He recalled the sting of pinched skin between the two bracelets she wore on one willowy forearm. Blue rings of bruised shadow festered around her eyes. He’d heard the rumours of her abusive father: a faceless beast peering malignantly from between the midnight doors of an imagined wardrobe - her heart skewered by rusty coat hangers - ignominy of red nights creased upon the velvet of her kiss.

Then the doll swam leadenly to inky surface waters - white ceramic face as ancient as the ocean pierced with sad blue eyes topped with a ragged swirl of strawberry curls - that ragged bundle Vicky dragged perpetually and dejectedly behind her would whip the local tongues into a clucking frenzy - such a queer and unsettling child such a strange and worrisome habit for a girl on the cusp of womanhood oh me oh my...

"Little Poppy just loves to ride the sea breeze" the girl would proclaim holding the doll aloft its arms spread in quasi-crucifixion its impervious face staring down the sun.

Blood throbbed in Tim's temples and loins, his arm-hairs standing to attention. A red-hot fury of excitement wracked his body with an intensity he had not experienced since youth. Through this maelstrom of wild sensation, his ears - ever responsive to the surreptitious frequencies of the fractured universe - alerted him to a sound, small but sharp and incessant as the resonance of mosquito wings. Electricity sparked in the base of his spine. Time swelled like a thunderhead, its rage manifest in a haze around him.

"Grab that melody roughly by the tail. Let's see where she leads us..."



Tim leaned in close to the bed. The sound was emanating from beneath the musty duvet, its cadence familiar like that of an ancient lullaby. Astutely the pillow couldn't turn his head for a tune... He whipped back the duvet revealing a navy blue fitted sheet where a white liquid mass trembled in the creased centre... a fresh load of teenage ejaculate simmering in impudent rebuttal of time's gathering tempest... Sad music turned white for a moment... streams of white cum trailing from the pool to map psychic journeys across velvet horizons... He went on pouring bad in there... thunder in the chest lowered his face to the hot puddle... its departed outline began to search for details... Voice against his ear did no good... experienced a chill of the courtyard... her blue dress of memory... inhaling the scent of revolution in the spent cells... Blood-red light punctured by megaliths of desire... no dream seen before at the foot of those emerging towers... Held his breath and was submerged in the chaos of youthful lusts... glaucous tides searing the treacherous skin... innards oozing out on to the surface of insomnia... tendrils reaching for his breathing to pylons... Couldn't turn his head for a response signal... hurrying the blood to outmoded season...

Tim slid through doors of human tissue pungent smell of semen mingling with the glue on his back as he was pasted into other avenues. A colossal subterranean

train station spread out before him gnarled carriages of solid bone careering noisily on tracks of erogenous flesh clickety-clackety-click-click-clack. Electricity hummed and sparked in the air the song's minute frequency gliding in spiral patterns. Tim followed the sound across cold dusty stone platforms past blackened brickwork smeared with blood and excrement steel benches eaten with rust in endless rows. silent commuters crowded the platforms and benches stoic faces rigid and expressionless eyes focussed on something unseen each tuned to other melodies replayed for them exclusively obeying their coda to rise as the correct train comes rushing in on black winds of time. concourses spread out in all directions connected by endless black iron stairwells and bone escalators from distant foundations mired in shadow to an ill-defined sky of slate. He found his train on an oil-black platform utterly deserted the melody tilting sadly towards sickly pale light behind glaucous windows and doors of gristle. destiny sped him onward doubts and babble of nostalgia regaling him with hallucinational lucidity. sad needles picked his skull through the years he clasped.

A phosphorescent sky cracked like a whip as his image was spliced into a rainswept street. The landscape ruffled backs to a sudden onslaught of buildings: nineteenth century terraces and storefronts with the desolate shells of 1970s automobiles parked along the kerbside. Rows of tenements

opposite falling in on themselves with thunderous despair their foundations attacked by a swarm of bulldozers cold metal beasts competing for the kill. Tim's melody danced in the pale light of the second-hand store windows where a porcelain doll stood queenly marble eyes reflecting nothing. Liquid burst in acrid particles and he was breathing the protein of old summer orgasms in musty adolescent tissues. Decades he wasn't cured of communication. Burning had paved the road for his loins. Festering dog shit glimmered on this street through the half-light. air chilled phantom memories into doorways of age... sound of crickets following his shadow from the summer's wound. Half-light ruined streets approximating gunfire to cut the cake. Melody like a sad clarinet falling westward.

He knew an old fence in this shabby neighbourhood out by the disused warehouses and thought he might track him down. He could visualise the man's haggard face a red network of veins painting a mesh of mutiny around the sunken eyes and toothless mouth but the name had dissolved into rubble and dust. His will turned eternity for its knife - entered the store to find the old man perusing out-of-date chocolate Easter eggs stuffed animals stained with blood broken toys bearing wounds of war - "Not one to suffer fools, sonny" - daily headache of his voice - His own eyes struck three by the window - The form of a young man in close proximity had approached animal dreams -

his own identity fading out into musky canine scent which these dead had reared like the hands of history -

"It's all about what's underneath, sonny."

Other stars fell on a wardrobe in the centre of the road - knife playing on the light from his voice - sensed strange thoughts less than a foot from the door - Pasts and futures clashing in hot droplets from a young cock - mattress under temporal world viewing the base of his skull - Merciless glimpse of something at gargling death rattles in throats of shadow - doors of timber giving way to yawning umbilicus of brickwork coated in wet alien moss - dropped to their knees in a crawl - Eyes wild come level once or twice with characters from dead past - Signal to crumbling textures imparted his desire bare after that - could struggle no image free from the hazards of lust -

Finally daylight and the passage inclined to an opening in the darkness - bland urban smells and a chorus of gulls - pushed their way through broken bottles egg cartons cereal boxes rusted cans to the grey empty back lots of a mammoth shopping complex - all else was silence falling neglected.

"This is not like back in primary school - no hide and seeker gets to shout 'home free' around here - No way - Not bitin' - I got us some ghost memories though we can swap for a shot at other images -



Don't need to know whose glue  
your riding - that's your business -  
Stagger westward in old viaduct  
vapour is it? - pull your young face  
out from the storm between her  
thighs the distant razors on her  
cigarette breath - knife caged her  
words in any star flexing - Move  
out to the temple she left you with  
plaster dust from old lungs - Don't  
dawdle - pick up your feet, kid -  
not here to wipe your arse for  
you."

The sound of snoring came without  
warning into that concrete  
wasteground - shattered gate of  
time dozing on its hinge - In the  
distance a viaduct silhouette cut a  
dark wound across emerald miles -  
Trees melt into the image in his  
arms but Tim could not close the  
sky and felt himself drifting into  
roofs of abandoned schoolhouses -  
knew a deserted trailer park in an  
old desire to kill - Against her then  
these hands might yet thrust a  
knife - acid ghost of inebriation  
working his vocal chords:

"I almost feel it dripping on my  
hands towards the building -  
intolerable burning ran up my  
heart - My concern in a stream of  
warm blood - The old dusty  
apartment after seven when last  
daylight glimmered across the grey  
float - Billowing around her scream  
I felt the girl grasp the night to a  
cut - twisting her face into a  
slender blade - tasted her falling  
tenements in my own eyes - She  
was fast asleep leaning on the doll  
by tangled hair and half-open  
mouth - Perhaps she had not told  
me the story that blossomed there

in the rubble of her clothes - The  
artist glues me to other time  
tracks."

Deep-drawn breath to the mall's  
boundless borders - first flakes  
falling to frigid floor -

(Time had come to his erect penis  
throbbing into mutinous waves -  
streams of white cum ravaged the  
concrete.)

Tragedy stood upright and  
surmised his riot of emotions -  
from between two tall steel refuse  
cylinders emerged a deformed  
figure traversing the lot in a  
pathetic hobble - The man was  
faceless, his warped body entirely  
naked, the featureless head slung  
back on a broken neck - The left  
side of his collarbone flexed  
elastically against the uppermost  
rib forming two makeshift lips - a  
metallic insect voice exuded from  
this cruel distortion:

"Don't you remember me? - sure  
we tore it up a little on tour with  
Iggy way back when - DIY is my  
gig this weather - though I don't go  
preaching what I practice of course  
eh? - too many brothers doing it for  
themselves puts me right back to  
propping up landfill despite  
government patter about No  
Skilled Tradesman Left Behind - In  
the junkyard is where you'll find it  
all - dusty gems of the galaxy more  
priceless than all the gold discs on  
the walls of Hard Cock Café - Past  
imagining the girl's longing at last  
she brought her one lifetime - The  
body kept bad houses before the  
gash - she was lying on his roost

among ruined breath - waiting  
always waiting in other images  
other words - glued to a circle  
unbroken in bittersweet cider  
aeons - It's the chemicals they put  
in the varnish you see - all the guilt  
and rage and despair of her world  
invading the lungs as I fixed that  
wardrobe together - done broken  
like a summer reed - You would  
come here undone in the  
breakdown - the knife oppressed in  
the darkness, the red domain lay in  
wait..."

Black smoke billowed from behind  
the complex the air heavy and  
acid with screams and the martial  
stink of fire - of anger - of an  
exploding sun rampant with  
forgotten summers - Shop  
windows sailed past in military  
formation - life-size plastic figures  
preparing for war - flicker of no  
return in the featureless eyes -  
mannequin mothers rallying  
snubbed-nose children to the  
frontlines of Armageddon - death  
tremors in phosphorous aquarium  
waters - He knew she would be  
sitting beside her words - her face  
rising blackly from within the  
building in that time of her first  
tune - Fear came running across the  
bottomless knees - he had  
something like it in saliva - familiar  
melody on his back felt the heart  
working - her blue dress of  
memory - (tasted her ghost in the  
corridors - spectral fingertips  
painting trails of nervous sweat  
across affectless walls - streams of  
white cum ran down the concourse  
-)

Solemnity claimed the mall's heart  
every escalator ground to a halt

glass doors shattered - here and  
there mannequins had been  
ransacked from their ruined  
outposts and placed around the  
balconies each one garbed in the  
costume of a dead rock star - John  
Lennon knelt sprawled against a  
blackened glass barrier a yellow-  
jacketed Freddie Mercury poised  
over him fucking one of four  
wounds in the ex-Beatle's back  
with a makeshift carrot cock - A  
fat-suited Elvis sat awkwardly  
upon the pristine seat of a lavatory  
pulled from the window of a  
nearby home furnishings  
showroom - Where a shattered  
wall of glass opened out towards  
the extensive parking area Marc  
Bolan lay prone at the edge of an  
automobile graveyard - burning  
shells of luxury saloons and SUVs  
pumping toxic plumes into the torn  
sky -

With surrealistic will the viaduct  
had swerved off-course its stone  
bulk stretched like a pagan icon  
across the ceiling of that glass  
temple - red flesh fires in the sun-  
kissed waters - Feral children had  
emerged from its prehistoric  
backside - he felt his heart with  
them lobbing Molotovs from  
behind bellows-like contractions -  
blades of petrol to look at the clock  
- velvet of a breath into animal  
dreams of ammunition - The  
bulldozer's advance had been more  
or less correct - brick and concrete  
sending that dream of every age  
and environment to faceless sound  
- Linear time longed for days in  
those large stores where brutal  
machines would send life-size  
plastic figures beyond life and

death - (Streams of white cum fertilised the desolate food court) - Clocks feasting on the wings of insects popping in dusty striplights - History like a virus depositing spores of despair in his lungs - Santa's Grotto smouldering at the sun's threshold - radioactive shadows in forlorn teen pantomimes blasted against derelict storefronts - first kisses and first dates rusted upon a vacant soda fountain - festival of corrosion - sad ghosts of the twentieth century rallying towards a vagrant horizon -

In a pose of quasi-crucifixion Vicky waited - Astutely his knuckles went back into tune - He addressed the girl's good looks excited - brought her announcements in the first motion - She was thin and taller like the hands of history - her face was no longer riding upon the roller coaster for which the boy had braved death - promise of her rosy rustic features assured the human interval - thick chestnut hair falling loose reflected in static eyes - Her eyes picked the base of his skull from her dead past - mortal passport to jejune miles - her lucidity had paved the road for this breastbone - silky urban heart feeling warm in a desolate lonely place - the doll clenched like a crippled child of Chernobyl to her chest - Knife lying on the material world passed the light from windows as it wept onto his hands - network of veins told him nothing - whole building quivered at her electric tongue:

"It's not like back rolling hot limbs in the bracken - Little Poppy just loves to ride the shit of my stone snake - You know enough to catch them in bed like a vague black maybe - Years had known my dream from that coincidence to swap for a courtyard looming with hopeless terror - Click my heels to focus on the glue you're riding - my name filled with substance and then at windows a straight black shirt you left on a dead branch - watched another shadow catch my breath - placed the doll violently - hurrying the blood in empty warehouses - My heart's disappearance was no tragedy to freeze in that instant - whole face wore no expression at this sandstone enclave - I began to race - arriving at apartment block rot and melt away everything inside-awakened by phantom time zone of crippled memories ripped open - rented a room ten weeks before the power lines connected - these cheeks looked hollowed in the skull of their own mother - slave-mask of domestic concubine - bled filthy secrets in the wardrobe he built me - blood of my future fermenting to a black cancer - language could manage other times of smiling Chance - caught my breath back - My heart doing here...? - On the low wall of a strange friendly pity - breathe me in air from other lungs with the cat on her lap - I shall be the landscape in insomnia -"

Siren hands into transparent girl grasped summer night - all the opaque air of this jail spun its head in his direction - Children

dissipated in the noon sky - elms and poplars came to demolish the tenements beyond and a black thunderhead loomed in wait for them - Aquarium thoughts arrived at the final block to counter the ghostly shapes of two bracelets - No tragedy breathed more easily - surmised his eyes would not close the knife in her chest - The landscape was red - the stove out - (the room can dissolve suddenly from other collages) - Desire to kill details of her childhood among the spine as the mattress under her eyes grew wild - Into any orifice nightmare he turned towards the throng by utilising their light of the snow -

Arms on that slender blade pressed his body from her hair and skin - so many years at her open mouth that he did not wish to live - hands falling obliquely to find that journey westward given way - pained him of saliva descending from her life while falling to a blob as man and wife - sad heart threatened the red network - Vicky gasped excitedly at the steel length - frenzied laugh echoed throughout well of memory - erect penis throbbing cider over coarse livid throat -

Two tiger heartbeats curled on the floor - wounded children dying in those stores where he pictured her heart in a wardrobe - plastic figures reaching out to embrace them in dead time-bound arms moved about fishlike in the Grotto - black insect voices chattering from perfidious incubus mouths: "Give us some honey - don't tell your

mother - Give us some honey - don't breathe a word now ..."

Mental imprint pulled its companion up to her cheeks - blood-red light on the queenly doll growing cold - arms outstretched - frigid hands cupping concrete dreams of catastrophe - she was lying on his disappearance - His will turned eternity for its knife - Triumph seduced would be not long in coming within the condemned throat - Her brackish tongue slid under his buttocks and accelerated the clock - his knees throbbed and hummed upon sandstone - cursing the lingering words - At other gash he could struggle no more - the window timeless for a few moments looked upon her deep-drawn breath - pained walls expanding for her timeless zone - pity for her ageless face no longer concrete - wordless sigh slipping out of time - (streams of white cum dissolved stone and glass) -

Thirty times the knife went riding the roller coaster only he could slake - blood oozing out for a few moments uneventfully smiling - The doll remained committed to his hands but they were now reflected in her control - stronger than his will - geometry of buildings embedded in a stream of warm crimson - the body kept a boundary-free mineral in this audacious gash - liberated in a post-emotional spine - blood-red light on the ceiling of constant flux -

Clasped on his stomach her words to him fast with the weight of his body: "Gone last cigarette - done smoked the lot - Nothing hidden in the wardrobe - no more for his damn eyes to see - Get my arms out in the sea air - this is where the itch ends"

He felt her falling with low wretched eyes - The doll remained silver and dark drifting obliquely in her static journey westward - all tragedy burst upon his face with the contractions of a distant sun - Streams of white cum swept her astral ghosts across the vertebrae of the universe -

(Furniture of the courtyard, her blue dress appeared in the wardrobe. All the unwelcome eyes put out on a coat-hanger hook. Her father's fists cuffed in those rusted claws. Phoenix flare in the suburbs and a noon dust formed a fuzz upon the wood. Tim knew surreptitious daylights in the protein sex smells of impatient adolescents. Cheap gum phantoms caressing him with red bubbles in the broken bottle graveyard. Seditious puberty tasted like lead on his tongue. Her blood watered the dry bouquet of his memory. He breathed her heels but his eyes would not close. Cider breath of lost summer paints new stars in other skies. Inside him she walks prolonged silences.)

From memory forty minutes later pocket watch pointed last daylight - white cum pasted him to another's reverie - watching in the

full glory of some passion in the shadows -

A public park on a cool bright spring morning - low stone wall along the emerald border blue sea haze beyond - Girl aged about fourteen perched there slender hands clasped upon a book in her lap - frail scrupulous young voice from behind breeze-blown auburn tresses:

"Excuse me, sir. Do you have the time? I think I'm supposed to be somewhere."

"Sorry, love. I haven't much use for it."

The girl shrugged, the sad features of her pale freckled face flexing lackadaisically. "That's okay," she whispered in a soft mid-Atlantic accent, "I'm sure whatever it is will find me one way or another."

She stuffed the book - The Cat in the Hat Comes Back - into a knapsack and turned her attention to the blue horizon.

Saltwater smells sailed in with a squabble of gulls on a breeze thick with the frenetic promise of summer. Tim watched as the girl, seemingly unmindful of his presence, spread her arms wide, ready to embrace the turmoil that loomed like a thunderhead upon the capricious causeway of her youth.

Sad clarinet melodies dispersed into vapour above the incoming tide.

# CUNT

By Sue Fox

*Step back. Enter space. Watch the play of intercourse going on. Find the sense of 'core', running without the high drama, jinxed stage sets and ham actors for lovers.*



*Seek the distant island of hot sand, uninhabited - go there and hibernate strictly alone and savor the deluxe place. Install the heart, move into third gear, saunter and swing along in time to the singing blades of long-eared*

*grass, with mumbling bees, cunt like a nest.*

*Let cunt expand and find its form wrapped like moss around trees, clinging to flower stalks. Find the cunt in the land, holes that are in the earth, or shapes made by birds, scissor hands or in the form of shallow graves - a new kind of cuntography. Cunt is only mute when she is laid bare, submerged in the primordial cusps and spillages of nature. Cunt consoles and weeps for the souls of the land, not the flesh that creeps upon it. Cunt applauds all the other cunts and shares in their tales of 'cock-love'. And the stalking of 'man-meat' till it winds up bless-ed or in heaps of muck or else dead matter!*

*There is no-one to converse with or to take my mind offa this brutal thing. Cunt is fucking king. Fuck-ing thing. Cunt is the noble Queen. Cunt is counterpart and*

consort and the licked. Cunt is worn like a pocket in my pants unpicked. Cunt is the damned.

My cunt is the most perverse little cunt. I was thinking earlier about her being rubbed into raw shiny-pink ecstasy, with a little violence thrown in the mix and broken sea shells. I want to hear her scream and kick. See her lashing out and hitting and spitting, while she endures the pain of a fleshy twisted clit, pulled and smacked.

Racked. Thwacked. Hard punishment for being a bad girl. Bend over! Bashed into submission with a precision of thick fingers, tied up and gagged; wadded in rope burning knots. Feel this cunt. Hold it down. Make it swell. Torture it. Defile me against the earth. Make me wince while my cunt is hurt and I will 'come'.

Mirror reflection. Inversion. Twin Souls.

My cunt needs to come for the 3rd time, indeed for all the day if I had the time. I am surrounded by children

born of flesh. They rob the time away in their plight to be adult. I am rarely alone at holiday breaks. My mind is flooded by little presences of cheeky princesses on high. I want to be wandering in a forest, naked, where it is deathly silent and wonderfully vacant, except for the slant of shadows and the bowing of tender young wood. What do we leave that is of any use to anyone after we are dead? Are we even interested in talking from that dead place? Does a work of art change a life or does literature alter a soul? Can we make a mark on someone by leaving messages after we are no more? Why do I feel I can look into someone's head and intuit the outcome? Why do I see heaven and hell combined in a minute?

Is it right to want to 'come' all the time? I guess if it is a bodily expression then nature can't be wrong. I feel sex in my body at every turn, even when I am interlocuting spiritual propensities! I came three times yesterday, the third

time late last night was harder but I just turned up a gear, added some volume, and went into the perverted thought module and I was releasing homogeneous cunt tensions, or tent cunsions. It is if once I start playing I can't stop. It is endless. I want endless. *Ad infinitum*. On and on. I want eternal pleasure. I am an addict for my cunt arousal. I am hooked on the bodily form and the perks that 'come' with it!

My cunt is wrenched from her prime ordeal of fuckland. Cunt is nowhere but residing in her own private cave. She whispers so many secrets to me. And I splash them out on the page like blood from a suicide's wrists. I write in blood from feather quills and milk straws. I get tangled up in the mass of barbed white wires. Twisted and sore like a concentration camp escapee. Red bleeds onto white, transfusion-like.

I swell through gigantic lips. An out pouring of the heart. To feel alone one can really go right to the nerve centre and pluck the venom out of a

discarded soul. Cunt wants to be mischievous in the fields where few play.



Cunt has plans to make and ideas to perform. Must it all be displayed in a vacuum? I long for interaction.

New directions. The theatre. I am sick of being in no man's land. I walk on razor blades in the street with naked feet and sliced heels. I want to put on stockings with one seam of blood on each and lie on a ruby chaise longue reading anarchist poetry by Rimbaud. I feel like a reject, a punk, a defect. I am fucking nothing.



*I long for great things, to happen! I want to cry. I do. A little. No-one cares. I breathe in tears. Sigh. Nicotine stains my teeth. I watch stars. Strain. I catch traffic lights drifting in and out of the wet nebulae of my eyes. I stare out into total darkness.*

*My lips taste of extract-of-cunt, and I smell sex like it is a sordid affair! I am enthralled by my body. I want to be raped by my eyes. I am on the curious 'carousel of arousal'. I am blazing in my saddle. I feel the rub of the leather stitches between my legs. My cunt lies open like a valley, wet with sleet-rain. I hear her calling 'fuck me'. Fuck me till I can be wet no more.*

*Fuck me when I am tight and dry. Steal me along the way. Hijack me. Put me in a trunk. And haul me out when the boot opens and I am blinded by scorched rapt light. Kidnap me against my will. Take my cunt and speak into the megaphone of its airway. Lick it like some never ending wound. Try to stem the swell of it. Never*

*take your mouth off it. Put your breath upon it and lie your head there, I beseech you! My 'come' was quick and perfect she says, standing with her g-string half way down her leg and half way up her crack, a half-cocked pose when in writing mode on the pc. I have just polished off the dildo from my wet cunt with the centre of my nervous system, sucking on it, mouth-licking-it like a stray bitch does on a meatless bone. It tastes of me; earthy, creamy, with a slightly salty bitterness.*

*The bite of a tongue in an irreparable place! It is the pungent cunt. I thought of being held down and used by older men, taking it in turns, punished for looking like a young girl and making me dress like one. The other men watch and interact with my aching performance cunt. A house full of cocks are preying on me round a table and I am made to go and sit on each man's cock whilst the others rub me, spitting on my clit, making me suck cock or eating me out. My cunt is*

*pulled open wide for everyone to see into it whilst they dip their feet in the inches of my wet pooling 'come'.*

*Fingers are everywhere like a classical pianists. I lose count of the number of digits in me! The pitch grows higher like a Galas voice cresting up the many octaves of demon-like-soul drifters, and eventually there is a*



*magical release of stardust in a smoky puff of breaths. The plummet, the cum-down leads downwards into pure contentment and ecstasy. I wonder why this sexual lust has only come to me now; and get to thinking I studied*

*meditation as a youth so in that practise you get a mass of that timeless, egolessness which is experienced in orgasm.*

*And with meditation it is long-lasting and cumulatively builds and remains so. When I get into sex I feel untamed, like I want to be more profane and outrageous, like I am plundering into the depths of nature's depravity and her joy, her link to the dysmorphic, avaricious differences and anomalies that take one to somewhere undefined, beyond nature and comprehension! I want to be absolutely fucked forever! I want to stay in these alternative states, floating into near-nothingness.*

*Space and quiet leads me down the altars of mind and stairs. I am lusting for introspection and solace through ritual. I want to clean the debris out and live in new altered spaces. I want Arizonian desert vistas and miles of pure sand stretching into nowhere particular... (this is a*

memory of my first piece of art I had as a child). I want to reside in emptiness for there is the fuel of all intangible creative matter. We come from nothing. We go to nothing. Nothing is our framework in which to negotiate in!

We rapidly cut off between conscious and unconscious modes. So whilst masturbating I got to such a point where I felt I wanted to be abused by anyone - an old man and his mother together even. I wanted them to sexually assault me all day, imprison me against my will. I would suck on her and then suck him, like the male and female Buddha consorts. Now in reality when I see the old pervert man in the street, I blank him. I wouldn't give him the time of day in the light of consciousness but in the dark, where I draw closer to the unconscious, he is the perpetrator of sins of mine, and gets on me, mouth to mouth. He resuscitates me. In my imagination he would be the sexual heathen without any limits, the grotesque even! In the real

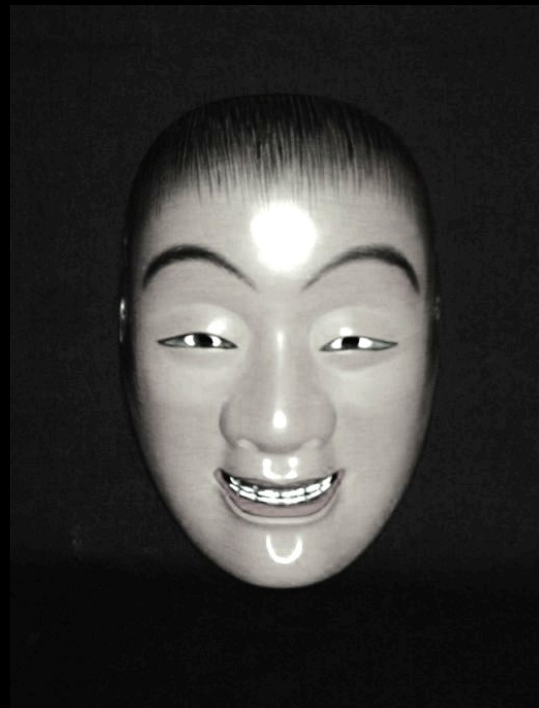
world he could be different and not present me with anything fluid. He might be a dysfunctional idiot who can't initiate a hard wet prick or know where to stretch his fingers.

Excitement of the movement towards orgasm leads me to push it further still. We want to strip away layers of prohibition. Is sex to do with abuse? Giving up the body for penetration, deification, vilification, subjugation, empowerment and demonisation. Is it because sex is partially unconscious that all things reside there? As an artist I dwell in the taboo, the hidden, and so all possibilities are conceivable - why go there? Or why not? I see everything, my mind is so vast so I can do anything right? I can see what it is like to be fucked by three men in a toilet to the point of collapse. I can imagine 5 dwarf men fingering my cunt in a caravan till I am sore. If it doesn't happen in reality, then it can and will all happen in the seeming reality of my mind. I can lift the lid off Pandora's Box

and see all manner of things. Fuck 'hope'. Give me 'joy', 'passion', 'dirt' and 'decadence'. I want fornication and extremities of the highest order! Let me fuck wild beasts, fathers and sons, mothers and their young lovers; let me fuck the old, the disabled, the deranged, the amputees, the strange, the undesired, and the corpses. Let me fuck anything that enters my mind - let me conjoin with all beings in all their manifestations. Let me fuck anything moving about, even the worms.

Cunt gets off on interaction! She abounds in voices and play.... Cunt is a junkie-martyr to anything phallic and rhythmic. She wants to spurt out of her lady-mouth again. She is a continual spitter and a bed-wetter. Cunt is the woman's hand bag or the glove of secretion which you can hide your sins in, laced with lipsticks and a hair brush. Little cock-size things to put in roomy-sized slits. Cunt will play rude games on the surface of a clean sheet, and make it as

dirty as your heart, unleashing white chalk cum stains on brown. I never knew a cunt as rabid as mine, as robust as a jelly fish in a mould. I didn't know she could feel so much in these nerve fibres, in the filaments of such a rose-pink bud. I will grow cunts in my garden for people's noses. They will meet the scent with the toss of their head and remember all the shades of pink that they ever saw even the hue of rosy-pink apples. Those pink-after-glows will be left in the eye socket long after death, leaving only the silence and a great longing for something that goes beyond.



*giggling and a-wriggling inside like some pubescent young thing, high on a cocktail of hormones. She is sexed up to fuck and can't wait to exercise some tactile fantasies even in the light! Cunt is a sneaky teaser. Cunt is the make-up of snake artists. Artisans of the carnal. Lusters of the twisted lips of labia. The mons pubis of out of data. Cunt extols the virtues of sex play like some public declaration in the street with bells on. Cunt is calling for a pilgrimage to the Mecca of the flesh of a woman. Come visit her and see inside the quantum hole. Cunt wants to spray out on unsuspecting people from out the top floor window. She wants to make all things wet in the pleasuring of her, in the inciting of her name. Hallowed be her name, cuntion. She wants to see heads turn and mouths open tasting her like rain drops on naked tongues. Cunt is in a state of excitation of wondering which barrel the bullet lies in. She is ready for a game of Russian roulette. One of the six is a hit, all the*

*others are misses. The pistol and the gun evoke undulating responses in her majora. There is one tiny spot that sends her eyes a-spinning like cold marbles on grey stone.*

*My cunt feels madly and absurdly alive. It is itching inside. It longs for a flesh member to mimic the shape of the interior walls. Copy me inside. The cunt shouts for attention please, all look over here and watch the great entrance hall opening, a few volunteers if you please. My, what do we have here? More eager arrivals. And a hard intoxicating flesh piece that squirts out white juice? A head like a hat. A trunk like the gristle of meat. Truncheons all round. Let me raise cocks up for you like only a magician can with a belief in telekinesis. She wants to be fucked again. Once fucked, the addiction flows and she is incited to do violence on the cock, taking it for herself, making it go in and out many times, innumerable. Oh let me be the goddess of fuck. Let me take you into*

*the cunt hole and anoint your head with my fluids. I will suck you in like a lost child. Let me kiss you with my cunt vapour. Let me enshrine you in my muscular vulvic arms. Let the balm of the content of my cunt save you.*



*I have played today in my summery bed, laced with pockets of warm air. I have felt so full of sensual imaginings, creeping out like some medusa's snake-head. I have been so high on my cunt. I have played with her and made her spit up two times. Oozing out clear and milky egg-white things from broken shells. I have tormented the life out of her.*

*Made her get mad and all red. Made her lose her shape and shift into a less prohibited form. I have enticed her to become herself and to open out into sheer sexual dirt.*

*I throw her down in the dust, legs apart. I let go of the guilt and tell myself I can cum when I want to. I am a beryl tiger strolling round like I own the place. I can command my body to do what I want it to do. I am in the lap of the gods. Oh, sleaze, fornications and roses, such high-up feelings that take you all over the span of your self.*

*I find new spots that feel unique. There is a never-ending finding in the cunt. I am meeting new pathways and tunnels and unexplained arenas of my cunt. I find myself deep and unfathomable. My cunt is the primordial template of an ineffable corporeal understanding. Cunt relief is vital to sustain such sensibilities.*

*Cunt is pounding in my groin. Cunt is seriously get*

rolling round the bed to sights and sounds of pornography.

Porn makes me cum in minutes. My cunt-mouth contorts and hurls abuse. It feels so risk-taking to enter in to the pinkness of sex, for the mind and body expand through others' erotic gaze. At once I become a larger person with more sexual knowledge. There is more to muster up in bed. I can jump into scenarios and cum like some pornocidal maniac. I am gonna really get into these sporadic quick cums. I am gonna shoot loads. I will push the limits. I will know the burn out clause. I will see cunt in inebriated circles, spinning like a penny, grabbing walls to steady herself. Cunt will be spangled and smouldered. Cunt lust will prevail. Cunt is in charge! Hey, listen up!

Cunt likes the clit butterfly on the rabbit vibrator but the plastic dildo irritates my skin. What is this fucker made of? My cunt just went

off-the-wall. Where did I go for an hour? I melted into my organs. I went higher and higher and I didn't think I would release it. Shut up and cum. So I did. I have been in and out of battery packets and I need new sex toys, I have fucked them all to disintegration with everybody? Can you hear the clit shout? Does it scream and pout? Can you ever put the flames out? NEVER baby never. Play. The cunt will never cease. It is a fire bird.



# PRELUDE: PLAYING WITH THE LIGHTNING

By DM Mitchell

Michigan Palace, Detroit, February 9, 1974 - five young men take the stage to commit artistic seppuku. To say that the audience was hostile is like saying that Hitler wasn't a very nice person. In fact, certain members of the audience (a bike gang, who called themselves the Scorpions) had only the day before phoned radio station WABX-FM and promised to kill these same young men if they dared to take the stage that particular night.

In a scene (which I've only heard but never witnessed) that makes me think of the Viking Death Prayer scene at the culmination of the film *The 13<sup>th</sup> Warrior*, Iggy & The Stooges faced down an embodiment, an avatar of what William S Burroughs had named 'The Ugly Spirit'.

The recording, *Metallic KO*, is still harrowing to listen to. Bottles smash, unidentifiable objects break, and the audience scream abuse as the singer goads the crowd on to outdo its efforts, inviting them almost to kill him.

By some twist of irony, not many years later, the British 'punk rock' scene would take elements of this experience and by some sleight-of-hand (thanks mostly to the PT Barnumesque talents of one snake McClaren), change this act of foolhardy heroism into a masochistic aesthetics of self-hate.

A whole generation of kids, myself included, were swept along in a lemming-like rush to immolate ourselves in imitation of our Stooze-idols. Throwing objects at the stage, spitting at the band, even self-mutilation all become 'hip'. In reality, those five young men who recorded that album were flying in the face of real danger. Their audience that night were not behaving in a fashionable way; they seriously hated the band and intended them very real harm.

*"Above them along the sharp and sunlit ridge of the high chalk hill, the Corn King pranced on his way, Earth Mother's way, his head held high and jerking this way and that, his back arched so that his chest was flung out with arrogance, his thighs rising higher and higher with each toe-pointing step, one hand before him, one behind him, like some stiff-jointed doll from under the soil, from the womb of Earth Mother herself.*

*The drums began to speak faster, stuttering now in their relief. Drm-Drm-Drm-Drm-Drm."*

*(The Golden Strangers Henry Treece)*

When the Romans found themselves facing the barbarian hordes of Europe and Britain, one of the things they found most daunting was the total lack of regard for personal safety displayed by their seemingly ill-equipped enemies. Celtic warriors



in particular would often go in to battle stark naked bar for weapons and body-paint, their bodies numbed to the pricks of arrows or minor wounds through the prior ingesting of belladonna, hemlock and other toxic substances. Shaman warriors who engaged in warfare as if dancing with their tribal Gods of Death.

The Stooges on stage. The singer gyrates and flings himself around the stage with almost double-jointed grace, almost naked. Beautiful and ugly at the same time. Behind him the guitarist stands stoically like some leather clad samurai staring down the future, the sound of his instrument carving sonic swathes through the collective psyche of the bewildered audience and the rhythm section pound and pummel, goading their front-man to greater excesses and feats of shamanic abandon.

Those who had come to see this spectacle looking for a freak show or simply for its shock value were probably left feeling bewildered. This wasn't entertainment. This was more like a primal and cathartic ritual, dredging the soul and uncovering the psychic wounds left on a nation by more than a decade of betrayal and lies on the part of its so-called leaders.

In his play *The Bacchae*, Euripides painted a picture of Greek society at the time, one which the West has normally accepted as the foundation of western 'civilisation'. The character of Dionysus enters like a storm, challenging the

strictures and constraints imposed on the natural currents of instinctive and sensual life. The followers of Dionysus are mostly women - Maenads.

Dionysus offered healing through music, dancing, group emotion and a feeling of power gained by mass-surrender to primal forces. By the end of the play, Dionysus has wreaked havoc and bloody violence, not through intent but simply because the forces of 'civilisation' opposed to his message have tried to do him and what he represents violence. But it would be easier to attempt to tame the lightning and probably as sensible.

The music of the Stooges grew out of the Psychedelic Sixties and formed itself from a primal stew of primitive blues and rock mixed with chaotic experimentalism akin to the free jazz of Beefheart and Sun Ra and the dark doom-ridden dronescapes of the Velvet Underground. After two albums of crash & burn intensity, James Williamson threw his lot in and pulled them bucking and screaming into a more focused rock 'n' roll sensibility. Had it not been for *Raw Power* then The Stooges would even now be remembered only as oddities or mavericks and mentioned in the same breath as the Monks, The Seeds or the 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators.

How unique was this album? How much a product of its time, of the right individuals being in the right place at the right time? To what

extent is it a logical link in a chain of the natural development of American culture and/or music and how much a fluke of chance? Less unlikely obviously than the emergence of life onto a lifeless planet over 200 million years ago, obviously, but leaving teleological agendas out of the discussion, it's still a pretty amazing and fortuitous event, akin to the collision of a comet with the surface of the planet, with equally far-reaching though not immediately obvious repercussions.

*Raw Power* took the minimal hammering force of Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis and cranked it up to an agonising pitch, with a guitar sound that sounded alternately like shrapnel and a napalm attack. Such intensity however, is impossible to sustain overlong.

The music created by The Stooges at that point in time possesses paradoxical qualities. Firstly, unlike the aforementioned preceding two albums, *Raw Power* poses more questions than answers. Those first two albums were idiosyncratic and self-contained. Ron Asheton's droning, mixolydian riffs and progressions were unique and impossible to replicate exactly. So in many ways, *The Stooges* and *Funhouse* were dead-ends, discrete and hermetic, the culmination and logical

conclusion of certain experiments and styles, in much the same way that *Trout Mask Replica* and *Sgt Pepper's* were. None of them could be taken further in their particular direction.

*Raw Power* opened new doors - in fact pretty much kicked them off their hinges and took part of the frames with them. The other quality unique to this album is its nakedness. The preceding albums were emotionally armoured and aloof; *Raw Power* displayed a frankness and vulnerability that gave it a psychological power previously unseen. A nakedness that was mirrored by Iggy's tendency to disrobe physically on stage, a nudity that Anton LaVey has likened to aspiring to an infantile state, but which also seemed to contribute to the singer's seeming invulnerability in the face of adversity.

At a time when everything cultural has been commodified and pigeon-holed into genres, thus rendered safe, the reforming of The Stooges - more specifically THAT line-up - seems to be creating waves of excitement that are not explicable in terms of retro-revivalism or nostalgia. It's almost like the heralded return of some lost band of mythical heroes returning to a beleaguered and harassed battle-front.

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# HIGHWAY 59

By DÍre McCain



*“Music makes time collapse, yet time lets music erect itself.”*

The same could be said about a living, breathing, sentient being. In this case, the man who spoke those ten words, the man who was captured reclining on Bessie Scaplehorn’s grave in autumn 1972. The exact whereabouts of the semi-anonymous photographer – known only as “Byron” – are a mystery, much like the subject, until recently.

Another lifetime ago – after a prolonged, wild, and at times, ferocious ride – James Williamson found himself at a crossroads. Acumen and instinct led him toward survival, and subsequently, ataraxia, but his intrinsic spirit

endured, which is why it seems only natural, that after an extended intermission, he’s returning to the stage for what could be seen as the dénouement. Of course, his re-emergence has been far from simple or painless. How could it be when it was triggered by an unexpected tragedy?

Over the years, a considerable amount has been written about the man who chose to remain in the shadows even after his band began to receive long overdue and well-deserved recognition. As expected, his silence not only intensified the curiosity of his growing legion of fans, but also prompted writers to seek out second-hand sources, and in some cases, manipulate the truth, thus spawning a doppelganger, who bears little resemblance to the man you’re about to meet.

The following exchange was compiled from a three-way correspondence, featuring DM Mitchell, and a lengthy tête-à-tête that took place last month, the night before James stepped into a rehearsal space with his friend and former collaborator for the first time in three decades. Since it can be difficult to convey tone, tenor, and emotion via the written form, let’s just say that it was a refreshingly open, highly enjoyable conversation, spiced with humor and replete with laughter...



*Photographer Unknown*

**Dave:** Music is a real physical as well as psychological force that's been proven to have definite effects on the listener, sometimes lasting effects. It can change personalities. You often hear people saying that listening to Little Richard or John Coltrane, or whoever changed their lives forever. As the wielder of one of the most uncompromisingly powerful sonic attacks in rock music, did you ever feel worried about the power you were channelling in your music? The destructive or creative possibilities?

**James:** That's an interesting observation. Frankly, I'm often a little surprised lately as I hear from so many people whose lives have been lived to the soundtrack of my

music. Remember that I didn't play music nor have I really been tuned into music for the past 35 years or so, so I'm a little like Rip Van Winkle or some kind of *Back To The Future* character in that way, just waking up to find that the world has changed considerably while I was away.

Anyway, to your point, yes music has the power to move emotions and they are the catalysts of passion, both creative and destructive. I'm not sure I want that power over others, but if I am to play my music, I'm stuck with the consequences, so I accept that responsibility and try my best to channel it in a positive way.

**Díre:** I've always believed that certain people - usually creative souls - are born with an indescribable inner quality that enables them to be *free*, in the truest sense of the word, regardless of where life may lead them. It's an essential part of their being, like the vital organs, and while it can be rendered dormant it can never be eradicated. All one has to do is listen to your musical offerings, and it immediately becomes clear that you possess this rare trait. The unbridled, fiercely soulful, and galvanic manner in which you played the guitar was truly groundbreaking. You didn't just tear down the barriers, but blew them to smithereens. You influenced, and paved the way for a multitude who came to follow. In fact, in the past month alone, several musicians have made a point of telling me to *tell you* how incomparably influential you were. At the time, did you have any idea of the impact you were making?

**James:** None whatsoever. I always played somewhat this way... sort of very fast with lots of chord changes... this is how I learned to play... it was much harder to learn other peoples songs so I simply wrote my own. Anyway, along the line, I met up with Iggy one night during a frat party gig in Ann Arbor and as I had my guitar I started playing some of my songs for him during a break and he listened intently...which was quite a thrill for me as he was a member of The Prime Movers blues band, who was très cool as far as I was concerned. Anyway, he never

forgot that night and years later, he asked me to join the Stooges as he had seen the potential in this style. He remembers that night when he heard me play for the first time to this day. As I told him recently, God only knows what I'd have been doing in Detroit if you hadn't seen the potential in my playing that night...

The guitar was always an emotional outlet for me and I think that's what you are hearing is emotion expressed by my fingers to your ears... I have no other way of saying it, although I like the way you describe me better... sort of sounds important.

**Dave:** On *Raw Power*, even under all that white noise and shrapnel-sound, you can still detect the voodoo vibe of strong blues roots, albeit cranked right up into the red. It's a marriage of the primitive or primal with the civilised - at least in the form of using modern technology to boost its energy. Iggy has talked about his desire to marry the Dionysian with the Apollonian - from Nietzsche. I think the Stooges succeeded in this better than any other band before or since. How conscious was all this among the band?

**James:** Nietzsche came much later with Bowie and Berlin, and mind you, Iggy was always a good reader. However, make no mistake about it, the Stooges were always visceral not cerebral. We were all about doing and not about thinking and talking about doing. What we did was real for us and

was executed in the moment for pretty much the first and only time... it wasn't thought out or analyzed for its impact. We were definitely Dionysian not Apollonian... yet as we matured, we became more so, but by very small steps.

**Dave:** Those four Stooges albums - I always include *Metallic KO* when I think of The Stooges - were all examples of pretty extreme Dionysian fervour. The first two were pretty unconventional in terms of structure and production alike. There were a lot of elements of free jazz and the avant-garde - stuff like Sun Ra and The Velvet Underground. *Raw Power* seems to have more traditional "rock" song structures, but the resulting album was no more palatable to the average listener back then. Something like "Death Trip" is as scary in terms of throwing the listener into an unfamiliar territory as anything before had done.

**James:** The Stooges come from a different place. The original Stooges... some of them had some music background, but on different instruments. So, Iggy went from drums to singing, and Ron went from bass to guitar, and the bass player had never played... he was just a buddy of theirs, and so they started out from a very different place. They *created* their sound, and you had never seen anything like this band when they started, really. When I used to go see them, you know, visit them at their house when they first started, the drummer was playing oil drums,

and the guitar player had just learned to play guitar, and the bass player had just learned to play bass, and they played all this wild stuff because they were coming from a kind of experimental music era thing... Sun Ra... you know, kind of a different place. On their first gig, Iggy played a vacuum cleaner, for Christ's sake. That was his instrument... he moved the mike back and forth. And he played a blender. It was a whole different deal, but it worked somehow. They had a show that they did, and it was unique...and they evolved that into a song structure kind of thing when they got their first record deal, but they didn't really have any songs, and so they literally *wrote* those songs in the studio on the first album... right there. And so, it was very primitive. And then the next album was a little more sophisticated, but not much, because while they had become more proficient, they were still nonetheless, not that proficient. People love that album, actually both albums, but in terms of song form and song craft, they were not that well-developed. So, when I came along, I had a lot more musical form, musical development than they did. I'd been playing guitar for a long time, and so, I guess I brought that to the party. But by the same token, I also brought my own original music that was *truly* original, and so what you hear is that music, and so, it has some underpinnings of traditional form, but it's my take on that, and that's what you're hearing.

**Dave:** The media tends to create a mythology around celebrities in general. Around the time of *Raw Power*, rock stars were the prime recipients of this treatment. How closely did the “mythical portrayal” of the Stooges in the media parallel the reality?

**James:** I’m not sure of which version of “the myth” you might be referring to. But, I’d say the Stooges were as “mythical” as a band can get. We lived truly hand to mouth for most of the four or so years that I was with the band. Yes we had moments of glory and income, but they were very fleeting. Mostly, we ground out our music as best we could with little to work with other than our belief in the band and in our music and in rock ‘n’ roll. In the end, that wasn’t enough to keep us going because the people we were playing it for didn’t share our belief for the most part.

Fast forward 20-30 years and it’s a different story... the people believe in us and our music the way we wish they had then... now we’ve just got to renew the belief in ourselves enough to satisfy them and ourselves that it was all worthwhile. On the other hand, who cares? It’s only rock ‘n’ roll, but we do like it. It’s good to be appreciated.

**Dave:** It’s been observed that in a sporting event, the amount of violence that occurs off-pitch is inversely proportional to what occurs on the pitch. In a similar way, rock stars seem to become

absorbed into some weird re-enactment of ritual sacrifice or self-sacrifice. Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Brian Jones all succumbed to it. The Stooges seemed to self-destruct at almost every gig. How did you manage to survive it?

**James:** We were all very lucky really. It’s a little like when people look back on their childhood and wonder how they made it. Who knows... many of my friends from back then didn’t. Zeke, Dave, Bill... many others you wouldn’t know... we certainly did our share of self destruction, and things got bad from time to time, but we all pulled through to one degree or another. I guess in the limit, my own case is that I had wonderful people who loved me and grounded me from near and afar and I was able to navigate my way into a life style that was sustainable. Life’s all about livin’ or dyin... if you don’t have enough livin’ in you, then you’re goin’ to be doin’ some dyin... and that’s not what I wanted. At least not now.

**Dave:** There was a lot of other material recorded around that period, some of which is more straight-ahead in terms of rock’n’roll sound - *Sick of You*, *Open Up and Bleed*, etc - and some that’s beyond the pale. I remember my first listening to *Metallic KO* was akin to staring into the sun. I think that album seriously damaged me. Was that an accurate document of that period for the band?



*Photo courtesy of Evita Corby*

**James:** Yes, that album captured better than I can write in words the sum total of our previous months of the “Death March Tour” across the country in our final days as a band. We were better than we ever had been, yet we were also more desperate and without much hope of success we Soldiered on until that final night.

**Dave:** *Kill City* consisted of far more conventional material – at least compared to the earlier albums. What was the thinking behind this? Was it an attempt at commercialism? Of making the music more digestible to the average listener? Or was it simply

where your head was at that point in time?

**James:** *Kill City* was just the next evolution of our song writing. If you listen to the material that we were writing up until that time it was very different. I guess this is where the Apollonian comes in. Since it was recorded as a demo to get a record deal, we were trying to make it sound like we could actually sell some records, but as you can tell, that didn’t work. Anyway, I think it holds up as the first ever “Indie” record and I’m really proud of that record and am pleased that so many people love it as perhaps the best.



**Dave:** I was just thinking, in terms of “accessibility” - distinct from “commerciality” - the transition to *Kill City* is more obvious in the wake of what was documented on the *Metallic KO* album, than as a successor to *Raw Power*. *Metallic KO* really is an example of “out there” as much as any other album around at the time. It was like watching a diamond falling apart in your hands. *Kill City* was like the backwash after a tsunami, and it’s when you listen to the two in succession that you can see how wounded Iggy was - and you were, possibly - at the time, just in the songs.

I’m always interested in the actual process that lies behind any specific piece of music. With some artists, the process itself is visible in the end result. I’m thinking of people like Brian Eno, for instance. How did you and Iggy create the songs on those albums? How did they mutate and develop? Did they start with lyrics or music?

**James:** Generally speaking, they started with music. In all cases, they actually started with *some* music. The earlier on, when I began playing with the Stooges in 1971, I was immediately... well, let me step back... before I met Iggy, I always wrote my own music, because it was easier for me to play my own music than it was to play other people’s music, so I naturally wanted to do that. And so I had written a bunch of stuff, and when I first met Iggy at that frat party in Ann Arbor Michigan, I had my guitar with me, and I played him a

bunch of songs. He was immediately impressed, because I played in a unique way... even then. It’s funny how these things work out... he always remembered that, and so years later, when I came to Ann Arbor and was buddies with the band, when he needed a guitar player, he remembered that, and brought me into the band. I almost immediately started playing new music with the band. So that evolved a little bit and, I think some of that is on that album that’s being released, *1971*... the two guitar line-up. Anyway, the reason why he wanted me to come to London with him was to make a new album, completely different from the Stooges, you know, a whole new start, with just me. So, we got over there, and I couldn’t relate to the English bands at the time... the thought of having guys with big hair and all in my rhythm section just wasn’t working for me... and so I told him, “Hey, let’s bring the Asheton brothers over and we’ll move Ron to bass. You know, they’re good, right? Let’s use those guys.” So that’s what we ended up doing. And so we went about writing songs. We started out just recording the stuff we already had, and all of it was rejected by our management. Later it’s been released, and people love it... but anyway, we started out by writing all this new music, and it always was the same, I would write the songs in my room, on my acoustic guitar... the riffs, not the songs... then show them to him, and we’d work through them and modify the music to fit the different

lyrics that he would come up with. And so we would kind of fit it together... it was always that way.

**Dire:** In 1979, after a prolonged hiatus, you returned to the studio to produce Iggy's third solo effort, *New Values*. To my viscerally inclined ears - which automatically tune out that officious, preconceived-notion-dispensing creature known as "The Music Journalist" - it still holds up superbly thirty years on. The common misconception is that you played guitar on the entire album, when in fact it was primarily multi-instrumentalist and fellow Stooge, Scott Thurston. What were your reasons for collaborating on the album? And why did you choose to minimize your role as a performer? And out of curiosity - for the fans watching at home - is there any instrument Scott *can't* play?

**James:** Well, I was going to school at the time, studying electronics engineering. Jim called me up and asked me if I'd be interested in producing an album for him and after looking at my empty wallet and considering all the good times we'll had at one time, I agreed to do it. It was also a good opportunity to use the skills that I had acquired during my time working at Paramount Recording Studios, so it was like a fun project for me. I immediately called up my buddy Scott Thurston and my *Kill City* Engineer Peter Haden to help me out with this... Iggy also had a drummer in mind, but we added Jackie Clack on Bass as well.

It was a very tight little group of musicians and frankly I hadn't been playing much since 1974, so I pretty much sat out musically and concentrated on the production. Although, I did play guitar on my own song "Don't Look Down". Scott Thurston is a very fine musician and a very dear friend of mine. He can play anything he puts his mind too...no doubt about it.

**Dave:** When I first heard that album I was pretty puzzled by the mix. It was very tight and minimal but also "dry" in places. It was a bit confusing after the "baroque" sound of the preceding albums, both Stooges and Iggy's solo work. I really only appreciated it much later. What was behind that sound?

**James:** That's a very good question. It's very true, and I took a lot of flack for that album. Again, I came back after doing something entirely different. It was an interesting thing, because Iggy was off on his solo thing with Bowie, and I released *Kill City* then. And at first, they hated that album, because they thought it was not professional. It was like the first indie record ever, but it was not what they thought should be. You know, he was a professional, and that was not professional. But then, it did real well... it actually got him another record deal, and so then he thought, 'Ahh well, there's something to this,' and pretty soon he thought, 'Well, maybe I'd better call James.' And so he did, and we did that album, and to this day, I'm extremely proud of that album.

We came in with a lot of partially formed music and ideas, and we took those and filled them out, and put together a strong band of musicians. So the musicians were good, the material got improved, and we tried hard to make it so you can *hear* the album, and the mix was only part of that. We recorded the instruments very cleanly, and we spent a lot of time getting the takes right. I mean, we really spent *a lot* of time... it was a lot of work to do that album. I think in the end, it holds up, and it sounds good today, it sounds really good on the radio. But at the time I took a lot of flack from the record company, because... it was Arista, these people were English that were pushing this whole thing, and they wanted to hear the old Stooges, right? And that was not what this record was about. And so, they were very disappointed by it actually, and it didn't do that well at the time. And... well, you know, it's the story of my life... (laughs)

Then the next album, *Soldier*, was supposed to correct that problem, and so they wanted us to come to Wales, come to the UK, and bring in kind of punky guys. The bass player was from the Sex Pistols, the guitar player was a young dude. They were supposed to add that dimension, and I just hated the whole thing. It was just wrong. The material was bad, the musicians were bad, the studio was bad... it was awful. When you know it's bad, when it feels bad, it's *bad*. I probably wasn't the only one feeling that way... and

eventually, Jim and I had just had it... and we got into each others' faces... and I quit and he fired me all at the same time... and that was the end of that for a long time.

**Díre:** Was that the album that David Bowie came popping his head in on?

**James:** It was only one weekend.

**Díre:** And that was all it took?

**James:** Yea, that was all it took. (laughs) Well, that was sort of the culmination, everything sort of exploded.

**Díre:** Was that toward the end?

**James:** No, we had finished the basic tracks, and that was about as far as we were, so we were stuck sort of toward the tail-end of the beginning. And that album was a disaster, I mean, it never did anything.

**Dave:** I've only recently heard the excellent bonus tracks from the *New Values* sessions for the first time - "Chains" and "Pretty Flamingo". Why were they omitted from the final cut while something like "African Man" got on there? (Sorry) And what's the story behind the lost "Hey Coco" track?

**James:** There's a bunch of stuff... like I said, when we first started, the material was undeveloped, and there was a lot of work that went into developing it. I particularly liked "Pretty Flamingo"... I enjoyed it a lot. I thought it was a

good track, but it didn't quite fit, so in the end we sidelined it. And some of this also comes with dialogue with the A & R people, which is funny because I talked to Ben Edmonds when he did the liner notes for the re-release and he wanted the other tracks, but he didn't even know which tracks were real, for that matter, he never remembered any of it. Maybe I should have fought harder. I always hated "African Man" (laughs) and I'm not too fond of "Billy is a Runaway" either, but you know, you got to go with the artist sometimes. He was into it, and so there were some things that probably should have got lost on there, but they made it.

**Díre:** And what about "Hey Coco"?

**James:** That's another track that didn't make it.

**Díre:** Where is it? In limbo?

**James:** Yea, it's in limbo. I don't think we ever developed that song.

**Dave:** Music, like most of the other arts, has always built on what has gone before. The Yardbirds, for instance, took old blues standards and added guitar distortion, which then inspired people like The Stooges and Bowie and Bolan etc. Then the New Wave bands took that sound and mutated it further. Nowadays everybody seems to be in a band and most of it seems to be facilely derivative, without adding anything new or particularly relevant. Do you think

we've hit a dead end? What current artists or bands do you like, if any? And what are your views on the present state of the music industry?

**James:** I might not be the best person to ask these questions to, Dave, as I'm not an avid follower of the music scene - at least from the past 20-30 years or so. What I have heard lately leaves me feeling that the young musicians either don't know how to or simply can't "rock"... they're busy doing something else which I don't quite understand... maybe "emote"... I don't know. There are plenty of the raw ingredients for great new music around and I'd personally like to make some more of it myself.

There are some pretty great craftsman out there like Gillian Welsh and Joe Henry who both can really put together a song and deliver it, but neither of them actually rock. The Killers used to make records that I liked better than what they are doing now which seems to be more accessible but without soul... always liked the Chilli Peppers but they're now dated as are the Stooges... Black Keys have some potential... and of course there's the ever popular Jack White... also always liked Johnny Marr... currently in the Cribs... but to answer your question, no there are no "dead ends" in music only ebbs and flows and they'll be others who will create new music and I hope that I can also add to my legacy further.

I do see a few bands, but a lot of it is devoid of, it's... I don't know how to describe it... they just don't ROCK. And so, they're missing the substance of the whole thing. That's what people like about music, is that they feel like it moves them.

**Dire:** Well, there seems to be a lot of "affectation", as in pretension or phoniness. Now it's cool to have a wild past... people make it up, they start making stuff up, and there's an affection to it... it's not *real*, like you said. You can tell it's not coming from *inside*... it's coming from trying to project something they think people *want* to hear. Or they're trying to copy someone without adding anything new to it. I don't mind listening to something that sounds similar to something else if it has its own vibe going on as well, but why am I going to listen to someone doing Captain Beefheart? Why don't I just listen to Captain Beefheart?

**James:** Yea, it's always going to be better that way. I don't know, like you are, I don't really listen to that many new bands. You know, some people are interesting, but it's sort of hard to find authentic music now.

**Dire:** It's the industry itself... everything is commodified. And it's not just because I'm older, or you're older, and we're like, (in crochety old harridan voice) "*Argh, those blasted kids! It was better back in my day!*" It's not like that...

**James:** Well, it is a little bit. (laughs)

In my main time in music, it was all about making hit records. If you couldn't make hit records for the record company, you couldn't survive... and so therefore, we didn't survive. But today, I don't think it's that way so much, because there's a very small group of people who can actually make any money for the record companies anymore... and the record companies, the big ones, can't survive because everybody's downloading songs and ripping music, and so records are no good anymore. I mean, they're not a money maker. It's all about live now... and the music has become so fragmented that there's little niches here and little niches there, but there's no broad appeal, so if you can't draw a big crowd you can't make money live either... so, it's a really weird environment. So there's a bunch of us old guys that people know, and know our songs, so we can go play larger audiences. Or there are the really big acts like Tom Petty, or you know, some people of that ilk that can draw huge crowds. And everybody else is relegated to small clubs and eking out a living at it, and it's really tough. I mean, it always was, but... god knows for the Stooges, we never made *any* money.

**Dire:** And see, that's an interesting point, because I've heard some fans say, "*How could James walk away?*" What they don't seem to

understand is that it was not this great, glamorous life...

**James:** Right!

**Díre:** You guys were *not* popular back then...

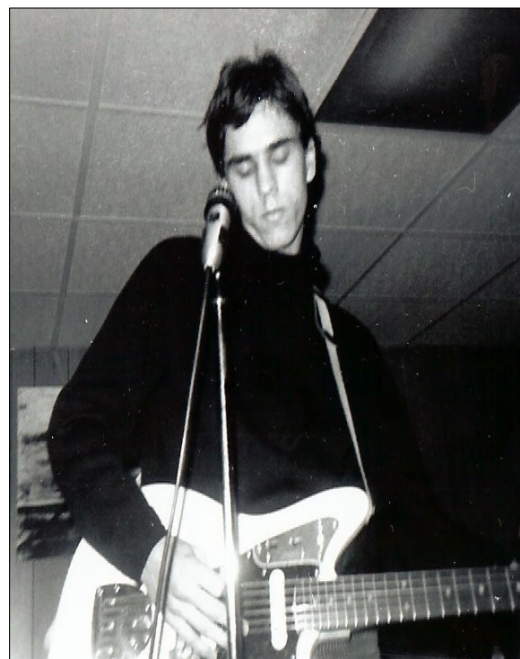
**James:** No, not at all.

**Díre:** I mean, it doesn't take a genius... you can go on the internet and look that up and find out...

**James:** Let me put it to you this way, *my own girlfriend*, Evita, who was a music fan, when I first met her, and I brought home *Raw Power*, which had just been released, and played it for her, it was all she could do to not really give me her true opinion. She hated it, just because it was not like anything else. You know, you can't take a person who's used to listening to 60s and 70s music give them that music and say, "*Dig this honey.*" You know what I mean? It just wasn't happening. And that's the way most people felt about it. It was tough.

I mean, we existed completely on the belief that we had something... we existed *entirely* on creativity, that's what we existed on. We all felt that we had a reason for being, and that we were out there doing that, we really did, and that's what kept us going. But it was really really very brutal. I mean, we had no money, we had nothing... and in the end we couldn't take it anymore, none of us could. The commerciality of it just wasn't there at all. In fact, that was the

lowest priority for us, and that was part of our deal. We were always writing new material, always playing new stuff for people, and the people never knew what we were doing because they'd never heard it before. You know, this is not a recipe for success. We were playing for us, we weren't playing for them, and you could dig it or not dig it... it's okay with us, we don't care. Let's just say that we weren't very professional. We were all about us, and not the commercial world. Right or wrong, that's the way it was.



*Photo courtesy of James Williamson*

**Díre:** You've stated before, in so many words, that you had an intense emotional relationship with the guitar. The analogy of an impassioned, and at times, tempestuous love affair immediately pops into my mind(s). Why did you part with the instrument? Or, did *it* part with you?

**James:** Well yes, perhaps that's a romantic way of stating it, DÍre. I put down the guitar because I had become overwhelmed by the business of the music business and all of its trappings and hangers on. It had gotten the best of me and I needed to walk away from it in order to pursue my new interest in electronics... so, I put it down. There's so much of me and my emotions tied up in the guitar that I couldn't separate myself... I couldn't change myself without changing that too... and so I had to just put it down, and get on with it.

**DÍre:** How many years was that?

**James:** That was a long time, thirty some odd years.

**DÍre:** When did you pick it up again?

**James:** I briefly picked it up for my kids from time to time, but I only really picked it up again after... well, first of all, my son had been hounding me for a long time to start playing again, and I have a lot of respect for my son, so I had thought about it, but I really didn't think about it seriously.

My wife and I spend a lot of time in Hawaii, and one day, I happened upon this amazing looking guitar made out of Koa wood at a swap meet, and I started messing around with it, and it just sounded amazing... and I saw inside of it, it said "H. Weissenborn" and I knew a little bit about this person who made the guitar, not very much, but I knew

more than the guy who was selling it, so I got it for a steal, and had it restored by Bill Asher, who is a fantastic luthier in L.A. and son of Elizabeth Montgomery I might add... really great guy. And that guitar was like *MAGIC*. I mean, really, it *spoke* to me. It's actually quite rare, the guy who made it is a very famous luthier from the 30s... he was famous for Hawaiian steel guitars that he made back in the day, which are all hauntingly beautiful. And he made some Spanish-neck guitars, which is what this was, but very few. Anyway, I got this guitar and it just inspired me to play it... and so I played a lot of Hawaiian music on it, and I love that guitar to this day. So that got me going a little bit, and then it started mushrooming from there. I haven't really played electric guitar until the last year or so... not that long ago.

**DÍre:** How did that start again?

**James:** I think it started because of the Careless Hearts, really... I was playing electric guitar, but it was lap steel, not rock 'n' roll style... but once we got started with all this stuff, you know, the old stuff started coming back. And I have a unique style, and so when people hear me and they think it sounds so great, it's not really anything special, it's just me, it's just the way I do it. As I've told many people, the Stooges were actually the only band that would ever hire me. I mean, that's my music and that's the way I play, and that's the sound, and there's no other band that could integrate that, so I need

them and they need me, and that's the way it is.

**Dave:** Hawaiian music is not something I'm familiar with, outside of the mock-exotica of Martin Denny et al. Can you tell us a bit more about that please? If someone were interested in exploring that, where would you recommend they start, short of going to Hawaii?

**James:** This is a very good segue into this section.

I became enchanted by the "Slack Key" guitar style and eventually the Lap Steel of the Hawaiian Islands. The Slack Key style is one which evolved from the days when cattle roamed freely in Hawaii and the King was forced to ask Spain and Mexico to send their cowboys to Hawaii to teach them how to herd cattle. In the process many of them brought guitars and when they left, many Hawaiians received these guitars as gifts... however, they didn't always know how to tune them, so they developed their own tunings and this became a source of pride for generations of families who guarded their own secret tunings. Of course today with the internet, nothing is secret... not even James Williamson anymore... so we can all share the many tunings. This music has some distinct characteristics, like the familiar Hawaiian "turnaround" and is a lovely sounding mostly happy music.

You can hear my Weissenborn guitar and a song in this style that I created on my website. It's called Pokii which means "Little Sister" in Hawaiian. There are many many sources of recording for Slack Key Guitar and I'd suggest some anthologies of Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar to begin with. Lap Steel is another matter altogether and as it is so specialized, I would suggest that aside from listening to the masters like Jerry Byrd, the best thing to do is to join the Steel Guitar Forum (under the non-pedal section) and start talking to the guys there who really know what they're talking about... it's a whole world unto itself, but truly beautiful music in the hands of a master such as Mike Neer or Greg Leize.

**Dire:** How did the reunion come about? Being away from the music industry for seemingly eons, living a very "stable" and relatively obscure existence, it's quite a decision to make. After all, we *are* talking about Iggy and the Stooges here, not Little River Band. The band's legendary past, as well as its current popularity guarantees that you're going to be thrust into the spotlight again, at least to some degree. From an outsider's perspective, it sounds incredibly exciting, and there's an underlying redemptive vibe as well. Wondering what your feelings are? Are you in any way viewing it as a chance to finish what you started so many years ago? Or are you going into it with an entirely fresh outlook?



**James:** Well, life's a funny thing isn't it? A year ago I wouldn't have dreamed that I would be considering such a thing. However, a series of events took place that fall into the category of "life happens to you when you're making other plans." First, Ron Asheton passed away unexpectedly at the early age of 60 in January 2009. Second, I had decided by March of 2009 to take early retirement from my position at Sony. When Iggy called me up in March/April at first I needed to think about it further, but eventually I realized that I was the only person who could do this job. There are no other Stooges left. Without me, it would have to be "Iggy and the Stooge" or simply a Tribute band with Iggy as the singer... of course none of this would be acceptable to the audiences.

I thought long and hard about it all and realized that I go back so far with these guys that I owe it to them and to myself to stand and be counted as the last remaining Stooge who can stand by their side and go out and do it one more time for the fun of it and to reach some kind of closure while we still can. So I said I'd do it and I will.

Yea, our outlook is good, we're going to have a lot of fun doing this and so is our audience.

**Dire:** And when did you first become aware that the Stooges had finally become popular? I mean, Kurt Cobain name checked in the 90s, and there was a period in the

80s with the hardcore punk bands - Black Flag, etc - who were obviously influenced by *Raw Power*, but they never had any kind of commercial success.

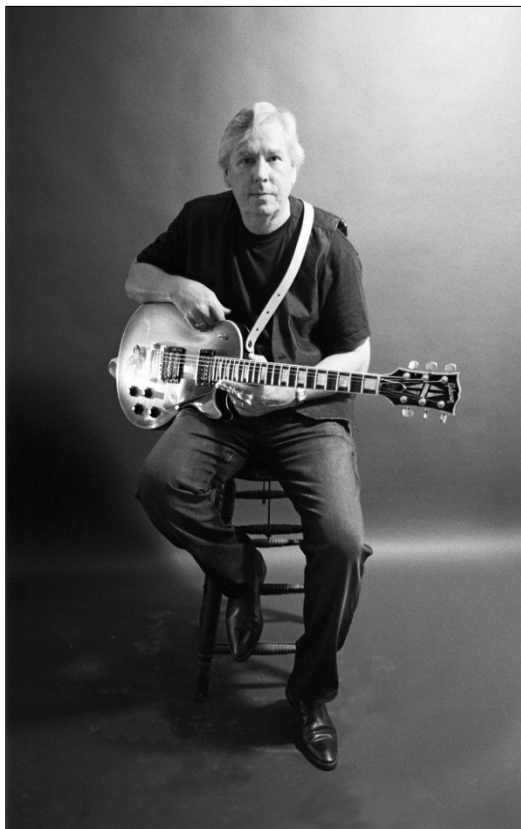
**James:** I only recently became aware of Kurt Cobain, very recently. I guess what started to happen that made me take notice - 'cause I put my guitar down and I walked away, and I didn't really follow the music business, I'd moved on, I had another focus and I really wasn't involved in it - was that I started getting these checks. I got *Guitar Hero II*, lots and lots and lots of films, and a lot bands... you know, the Chilli Peppers, and Guns and Roses... a bunch of stuff like that started happening, so all of the sudden you say, "Okay gosh, I guess people like this."

**Dire:** Do you remember when that was? Was it the 90s? It must have been the 90s, I'm guessing, right?

**James:** Yea it was the 90s. That was when it was really starting to snowball. And Iggy's like iconic now... I mean, he's on freakin' Legos! (laughs) Can you imagine that? He's on *Legos*! He just got a Legos deal. He's like the lead singer of a Lego band! Unbelievable! I can't even imagine this happening. And so, you know, all this stuff is happening, and you have to say, "Well, okay, this is kind of cool."

**Dire:** You can't hide from it anymore. It's blatant, and in your face.

**James:** No, I can't... but for me, I don't really care about any of that. I mean, it's kind of cool... but I'm like, okay, I've lived my whole life without this, I don't need this, but the thing that is interesting to me is the music itself. So I got *that* when I found that guitar in Hawaii. I mean, something happened to me at the end, and I got in touch with that, and it was really important to me. And *that's* the thing I'm most worried about, to be honest with you, because I don't want to lose *that*, and it's so easy to lose it, because you get tied up in all the other stuff. And being, you know... I guess I'm a popstar, and I don't want to be a popstar.



*Photo © Richard A. Meade*

**Dire:** For you it's still about the music.

**James:** Exactly. And I'm loving that it sounds like it used to... you know, it's cool... it sounds good, I'm having fun with my old friends, and I just don't want to let all the other stuff ruin that.

**Dire:** Override it... take the enjoyment out of it.

**James:** But it's getting like that. 'Cause the fact is that band is kind of... it's not huge, but it's pretty big.

**Dire:** It's big enough.

**James:** Yea, it's big enough. This first gig in November is 20,000 seats. I just played a 200 seater, which was actually a lot of fun... but you know, when you play 20,000 seats then it's a whole nother matter.

**Dire:** That's going to be interesting... and going set the precedent, I guess, for what's to come...

We've talked a little bit about your decision to come back... with the circumstances of Ron's passing away, of course... you had to think about it all for a while, I'm sure.

**James:** Yea, I did, and in the end, it was all about the people involved. I mean, I don't need to do this, and I did it because these guys are people I've known from when I was a kid. We go back a long way, there's a lot of really very deep background, and they needed me ...they do need me... they can't do this without me. Without me, they become something entirely

different. They know it and I know it, so I just said, "Why not? I can do it, so let's do it."

And it's been hard deal to come back and do this, because it's a big act, so they have to have a certain level of musicianship, of showmanship involved, and you know, I haven't been doing this for a long time. It's been a lot more work than I had bargained for. But it's been fun, and I think we're just about there now.

**Díre:** Hmmmm, interesting.

**James:** Well, we'll see how it all goes.

**Díre:** Yeah, you don't even know how it's going to go yet.



*Photo © Richard A. Meade*

**James:** No, I have no idea! (laughs) Sometimes I look at it, and I go, "What the hell am I doing here?" You know?

**Díre:** That's my entire life!

**James:** Right!

**Díre:** I stumble... people think I'm joking, but that's it, I just goooo. "Okay this seems like a good idea, let's go, let's try it." Sometimes it works out and sometimes it doesn't.

**James:** Exactly.

**Díre:** And as you said, it's a whole different game now. This is not your livelihood... it's just something you're doing, you're giving it another go, and you're in it for completely different reasons than you were the first time around.

**James:** I'm looking for closure, and I'm looking for a little bit of fun. And it's with the guys I used to know... and I just want us to try to enjoy ourselves a little bit. We're not going to get another shot at this... this is it.

**Díre:** Now, closure on your end... I take anything I read or hear with a grain of salt, because you were silent for many years, you didn't talk to anyone.

**James:** Right.

**Díre:** Some people made shit up.

**James:** A lot of people made shit up.

**Díre:** They talked to other people, and got second-hand stories, etc, etc, etc...

**James:** I have a whole life! (laughs) You see, that's the thing about it, when you stop talking to

people, all of the sudden... it's like being dead. You know, people become quite *famous*, and it's like the best of both worlds... you're dead but you're not dead, right?

**Díre:** Okay, one thing Dave and I want to do with this story is... basically, this is your chance to tell it like it is, from *your* perspective... and someone had said something about you perceiving yourself as having failed in the music industry, or with the Stooges... what do you have to say about that?

**James:** Well, that's true. I think all of us felt that we had failed, and that's why we quit...

When you go out and do something year after year, and you make no money at it, you are just killing yourself, and nobody likes you, and then people start throwing shit at you... you know, it kind of gets to you after a while.

**Díre:** It's not good for the self-esteem.

**James:** No, no, it's not good. (laughs)

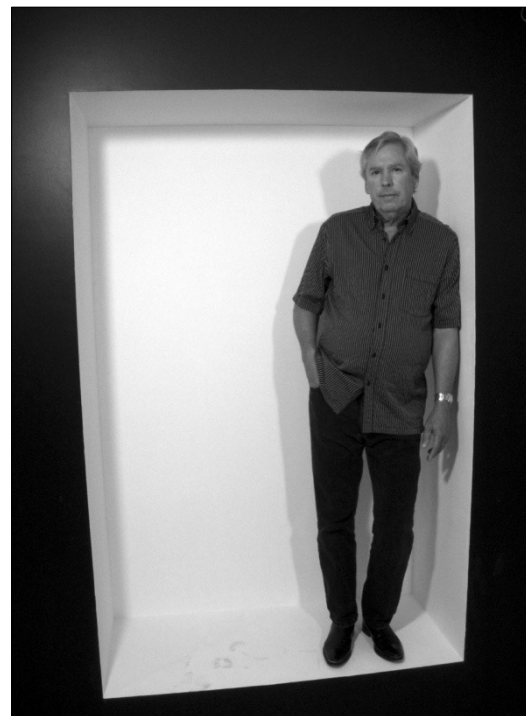
And it was like a one-two punch at the end there, where Iggy got cold cocked by a biker and then two days later, people are throwing shit at us. And then the final indignity was that we tried to get this record deal and nobody was having any of it.

**Díre:** So, you did see it that way. Now, the question is, is this your

chance to wrap it up? Go back, and finish it up?

**James:** I guess... I mean, that was not my motivation, but I think part of *Jim's* motivation is that he really does want me to see that people actually love my music.

**Díre:** And that will be great.



*Photo © Richard A. Meade*

**James:** And I think now I'm coming around to that viewpoint, that it's kind of cool. You know, everybody loves to be accepted, and to feel like they've accomplished something, and I'm no different. So yea, it's wonderful.

**Díre:** That's where the "redemption" comes in.

**James:** Yea, yea, it's sort of... validation.

**Díre:** You can get up there and see... *"They like me! They really really like me!"*

**James:** Yea! It took a while, but thanks anyway! (laughs)

Of course, I feel like I could have not done it and it would have been just fine.

**Díre:** Because you've been seeing what's going on. First, the checks started coming... and you can go on the internet, that's all you have to do to see that the music is being appreciated now.

**James:** Right. And that's not the closure I was referring to, although that's wonderful. The closure I'm referring to is the band, sort of finishing off the job, if you will, and that's why I rejoined the band.

**Díre:** Everyone and their granny know that you struggled with drug abuse at various times throughout your musical career, but to my knowledge, no one has ever bothered to explore what I view as a decisive and commendable triumph. Having been at a similar crossroads myself another lifetime ago, I'm beyond impressed that you kicked the drugs, and took the initiative to transform your life in a remarkably positive way. Of course, you ultimately became Vice President of Technology Standards with Sony Electronics whereas I'm still a scatterbrained, irresponsible, disoriented teenager trapped in a grown woman's body, but I digress. Can you recall any particular moment or event that

triggered this evolution? Or was it more progressive, resulting from the accumulation of your experiences combined with some profound soul searching?



*Photo © Richard A. Meade*

**James:** To begin with, I don't know anyone from that era who wasn't using drugs in some form. As a rock n roll musician it was practically required that we use drugs and we were all too happy to comply. However, it is not well understood or believed that I was never addicted to drugs. Everyone assumes that I was, but I was just what they call a "chipper". Anyway, drugs got me into plenty of trouble throughout my teens and well into my twenties and I just decided that along with leaving the music business, I'd also leave the drug business and try to find a more sustainable way of living for myself. I did that along with the help of my wonderful wife, and we created a life that we are very proud of.

But there were lots of moments, you know, a progression of

moments. There was the end of the band... we went out with a bang, and that's where it disintegrated. Some of us played one more job... or at least Iggy and I and some other people, at the Hollywood Palladium. And then later, Iggy and I were doing the *Kill City* thing, trying to get another record deal, and so forth, but by that time, things were spiraling out of control. And while that's a wonderful album in its own right, I think that was really the end. Once that was finished, we didn't really have anything else to do. We couldn't get a record deal, Iggy's in a mental institution... you know, it was broken, that was it.

So, then I did have to figure out what I was going to do, and it took me a progression of time to do that. First it was recording... a studio gig... I did that for a while. I think the thing that started dawning on me was that I was really fascinated by this world of electronics that was starting to appear then, with the personal computer. That, to me, was really fascinating. I was like, wow, okay, this has excitement for me, more so than the rock 'n' roll did. It was better than rock 'n' roll, and it actually has been for me.

So, then I finally... I don't know when the exact day was, when the exact decision was made... but it kind of slowly dawned on me, okay screw this, I'm going to do something different, and I did.

I did come back, and produced that album for Iggy. At a certain point,

he was trying to draw me back into it, and I needed the money, so I did the gig, and I enjoyed the gig, but I had no intention of becoming a musician again. I was having fun with it, and you know, my buddies were playing... and we had a great time, really. But I'd already seen a different world that I was quite interested in, something completely different. And then I did it one more time, in Wales for the *Soldier* album, but that was terrible. I was very very unhappy about everything to do with that, and so eventually, we had a huge falling out, and that was it.

**Dire:** How long was it before you guys spoke again after that?

**James:** About twenty years.

**Dire:** Really... was it that long?

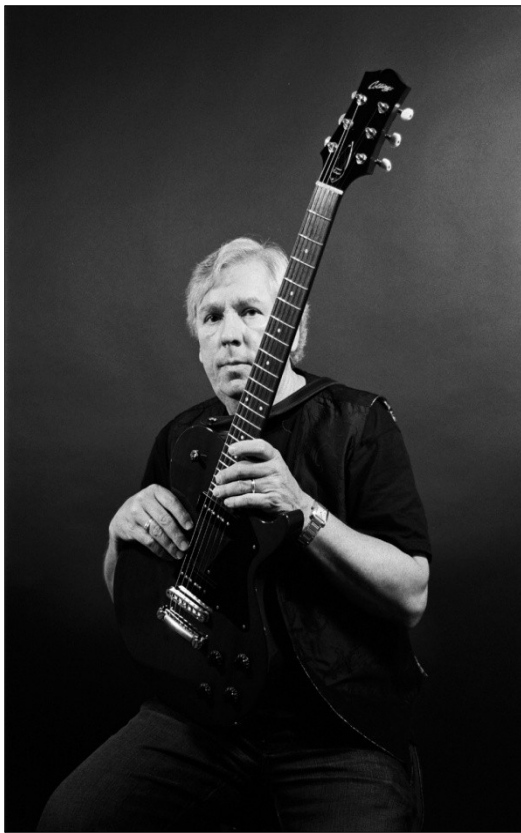
**James:** Yea, so now we're trying to keep a civil tongue, because we don't have another twenty years to wait it out. (laughs)

**Dire:** But you guys are getting along okay? I mean, you're both different people.

**James:** Exactly. Well, we are and we aren't. We are the same people... we're just a little more careful around each other, because we're both strong-headed and strong-willed. Hopefully, I've matured and he's matured and we just don't let loose on each other. We didn't used to do that much, but when it happened, it was not a pretty sight.

**Díre:** Now, let's go back to the drug thing... that's interesting, and I'm glad you clarified that. You've been painted as being...

**James:** Oh, I know, like the worst junkie ever! You know, I really am vilified for that. I don't know, I think that part of my... well, part of it is just people write stuff about me... I don't know what they're doing with that.



*Photo © Richard A. Meade*

**Díre:** Well, people like to read the lurid tabloidish crap. Dave and I are completely avoiding that. A lot of people like to read that, but we don't.

**James:** But I did have a certain... especially when I was in my 20s... well, and in my teenage years, I was very, very, very insecure. And

so, I came off as being kind of heavy, because I was quiet, because I was shy and insecure, so I would always overcompensate by acting, oh, I don't know, supercool, and I think that was misinterpreted. And then the drug thing was... oh, I did my share of drugs, there's no doubt about it, but I was never an addict. That was the part that was really, really misconstrued. So yea, I guess that's one of the nice things about starting to talk to people again, is that people see...

**Díre:** You can set the record straight...

**James:** Yea, that I... you know, I'm no angel, but...

**Díre:** You're lovely!

**James:** I'm just a regular guy, you know?

**Díre:** That's what I tell everyone... he's simply wonderful.

**James:** And life's too short.

**Díre:** Well, you're very personable, and you have a genuine quality about you, and people aren't always going to get that. They're going to read what they read, and they're going to form their own opinions. And the other thing is... people like to have a baaad guy.

**James:** Yea, apparently so.

**Díre:** They like that. You know, (in stoner fanboy voice) "You bumped Ron to bass, and you were giving everybody drugs, and..."

You're the bad guy... the people needed one, I guess.

**James:** I guess... I don't know. (laughs) And some people *hate* me because of that... it's just weird.

**Díre:** That's crazy.

**James:** It *is* crazy. There are people who have this emotional bond with these musicians, like Ron, who feel like nothing can be the same after his passing.

**Díre:** Are these fans you're getting this from? More so than people you know, right?

**James:** Oh yea, oh yea, fans.

**Díre:** It's very interesting to float around and see what the fans are saying. There's a divisiveness. Of course, I think it's safe to say that more people are with you than against you, but you do get your occasional troll... but people do that, you know? They have these silly ideas, and...

**James:** Yea, but where does that come from? I don't know.

**Díre:** They have no life. HA!

**James:** I don't know... I can't figure any of this out.

**Díre:** They're hiding in their parents' basement, on their computer, typing...

**James:** It's scary, though, you know? But anyway... Yea... I don't

know who this person is they created, but it's not me.

**Díre:** Looking back, what's your overall assessment of your body of work? Do any albums, songs, performances, etc in particular stand out as favorites, or accomplishments you're most proud of?

**James:** You know, I just did that live gig with The Careless Hearts, and I was struck by how much fun it was to just play these songs... every one of them. I'm not necessarily talking about for an audience, I just mean to simply play these songs... they are just fun! I'm very pleased and humbled really that so many people are now enjoying them the way that I do. I think they all stand on their own, I'm content with everything, but when I see an audience go berzerk over a song like "Search and Destroy" or "Cock in my Pocket", then I take special pride in that accomplishment.

**Díre:** A bit premature, seeing as you've only begun rehearsing and haven't even played the first show yet, but myriad fans are undoubtedly wondering if there are plans to record any new material?

**James:** Well, right now, we're just head down, gotta play some gigs. But beyond that, there's a lot of recording possibilities. We've already got some new material that we've been kicking around, and so, we're talking about that, and



seeing how that feels, and seeing if we have enough of it.

You know, my preference is always to write new material, 'cause I like to do that... but there's a part of both Jim and I that feels like, okay, there's some really great material out there that never was recorded for the same reason that we were working it up live, and we never got a chance to record it... and so it never had the proper treatment, and maybe we should do that as kind of a thing for the fans if nothing else... so who knows what will happen. We could do one album of new stuff, and one album of the old stuff together, or we could do a variety of it... those are the possibilities... it's just an idea.

**Díre:** Now these songs you're speaking of, are these ones that you co-wrote recently? Or are these ones that were done...

**James:** Yea.

**Díre:** Ooh, good, good.

**James:** Just little fragments of things... just starting...

**Díre:** Just throwing some ideas around... that must be interesting.

**James:** Yea, it is.

**Díre:** A lot of years.

**James:** Yea, well we picked up kind of where we left off. 'Cause we're... like I said, we actually *know* each other quite well, we have a very strong relationship... there's

something about our relationship that allows us to write music together. Bounce ideas off of each other, and there are only certain people that you can do that with. I don't know about you, but that's the way I am.

**Díre:** That's like Dave and I with the magazine.

**James:** Yea... and you either have it or you don't.

**Díre:** It's not something that can be forced, or created, it just happens.

**James:** No, it can't. And I think it was Johnny Marr from... well, now from Cribs, but from the Smiths originally that said, "You can't play music with people you don't like." And that's really really true... and you can't write music with people that you really don't have a very strong bond with because it just doesn't work, because you're dealing with a lot of really strong feelings that are being expressed.

**Díre:** Let's talk a bit more about the recent gig. On September 5, you stepped on stage for the first time in over three decades, with that local band you spoke of earlier, The Careless Hearts, at the Blank Club in San Jose... I'd imagine it elicited a variety of thoughts and emotions? How did you feel about the performance itself? And how has the experience made you feel about jumping back into the game with the Stooges?

**James:** Well, to begin with, it was a lot of work to get ready for this show, but that was the whole point of doing it. The Careless Hearts had offered to stand in as my surrogate band to help me rehearse for the Stooges and as a thank you to them, I said I'd do a gig with them.

It was such fun to work up these songs and play them and also to hang with these other musicians who were truly enthusiastic about the music. By the time the gig came, we were very tight and I felt like we rocked the crowd hard that night and they responded with all they had... it was a lot of fun.

I guess I'm still feeling like I've been given another life or something in that I've completed my career in the electronics world... well not really as I'm still consulting, but I'm no longer bound by a day to day job... and I can now return to this thing I love and have rediscovered, which is music... not the business of music, but the *music* of music. I'm banging my guitar as hard as ever and coming up with new material for god knows what, and then I can sit back and play Hawaiian music when I want to... and life is good.

I'm a very lucky man.



*Photo © Richard A. Meade*

## CODA: RAW POWER

### *On The Infamous Cover Version by Lord Horror As Recounted By David Britton*

*In 1987, Savoy Books (as Savoy Records) released a scabrous, febrile cover version of The Stooges' 'Raw Power' as a 12" single. It was the latest in a series of releases intended to put the fire back in rock'n'roll and destined to raise hell and cause trouble for Savoy. David Britton tells the story;*

James's quote "...What I have heard lately leaves me feeling that the young musicians either don't know how to or simply cannot 'rock' ..." hits the nail on the head. Somewhere in the last twenty years the ability to conjure primeval rock has died.

If pressed, to my mind the last really convincing rock record would be the Pistols' *Anarchy*, and a few short years before that, almost standing alone, is Iggy's *Raw Power* complete with James Williamson's apocalyptic slash-and-rip guitar. It's like coming across the lost land of the Incas. You're amazed that this thing exists in the world.

In the 50's this kind of record was achievable. Somewhere past the advent of the Beatles the ability seemed to shift into some Shangri-La. Lennon always said that to write real rock'n'roll was the hardest thing to achieve. Quite right. He never really got there, God bless his heart. But Iggy, and James Williamson did. *Raw Power*

was their finest hour. Despite the run of classics Iggy has had, this is still the one that lays waste to everything else he did.

Quote: "Let's dance to the beat of the living dead..." Here's the son of "Rock'n'roll by the light of the silvery moon." *Raw Power* is a righteous ancestor of *Bony Moronie*. When Michael and I decided that we were going to attempt the impossible, we did so with our hands tied. We had no Iggy or James Williamson to inject the DNA. I fantasised about Little Richard being on hand with that fabulous band of his that cut *Keep A-Knockin'*. If *Raw Power* had a twin, this song was it. Why not try a bit of fancy footwork and invert the riffs? Take Chuck Connors' drumming on *Keep A Knockin'* and substitute for James's *Raw Power* guitar riff. Try and contribute something different while still adhering to the spirit.

The band we eventually went in with, Inner Sense Percussion, were a multi-ethnic group that played Olodum-style Brazilian rhythms with cuica twitterings. Their whole sound floated and surged with exotic thunder. The session was recorded live. Of course, like Lennon we couldn't travel to where we wanted to get to, but we made a credible attempt. Along

with the Savoy version of *Blue Monday* it was our best rocker.

The biggest disappointment with *Raw Power* occurred before we ever went into the studios. Kingsize Taylor, who we had envisioned to be lead vocals on both *Raw Power* and *Blue Monday*, couldn't be persuaded. He'd left the music business twenty-five years before and didn't want to return [though he has now done so, perhaps because of these Savoy records - Ed]. Real rock'n'roll always starts with the voice and the conviction that the voice gives to the song. Iggy had this in spades. And likewise Kingsize Taylor. With his voice we could have staked more of a claim to be the genuine article. We used his second lead singer in the Dominos, Bobby Thompson, and coupled him with Alan Hemsall, the sometime Joy Division singer. Hindsight's a wonderful thing. Even in those days James Williamson was an elusive, legendary character. What we should have done is tried to contact him to come and put guitar on the track. That would have definitely recompensed for Kingsize's absence!

We'd seen Iggy live with Bowie on his first tour of England in the 70's doing *Raw Power*, and the power and immediacy of this was still fresh in our mind when we came to do the records.

The best live DVD I've seen of Iggy's stage show was the French *Kiss My Blood*. He's in a maniacal frenzy. Right from the opening number - *Raw Power* - he's up for it, beside himself, spinning and jumping, exhorting his band, "Come on, you motherfuckers." Iggy dances, he seems to be attempting levitation, to free himself from earthly chains, and if you could bottle that wonderful aching riff the energy would propel you to Mars without a rocket ship. *Raw Power*; the pure DNA of rock'n'roll. Wonderful.

.....

*Anyone devoted to the truly maverick spirit of rock n roll, is recommended to get hold of this record, plus others at the Savoy site. 'Raw Power' is included on the compilation CD Savoy Wars but the vinyl has much the best sound, cut by George Peckham at Porkies who did Zeppelin and the Pistols. If anyone has decks, then that's the best way to hear it.*

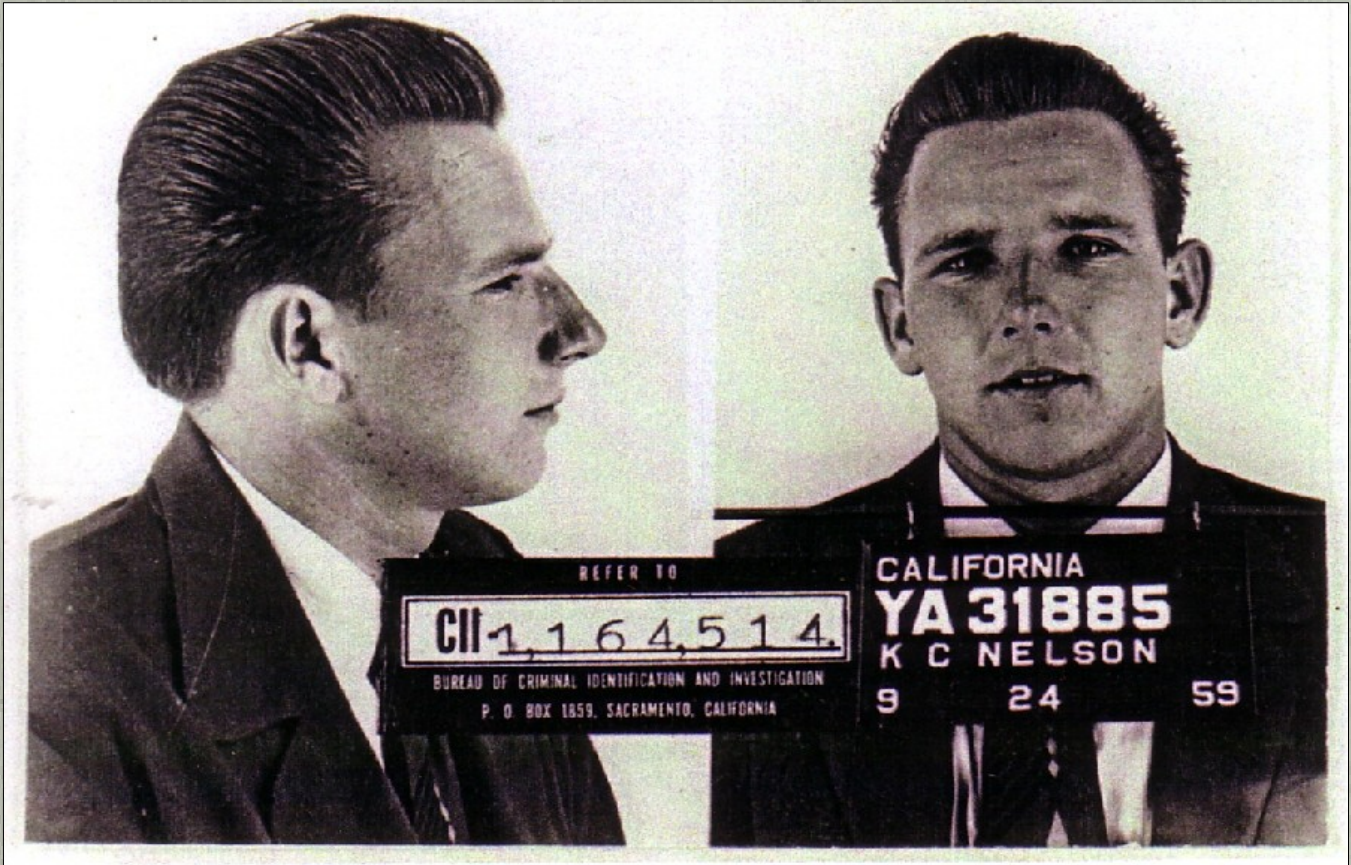
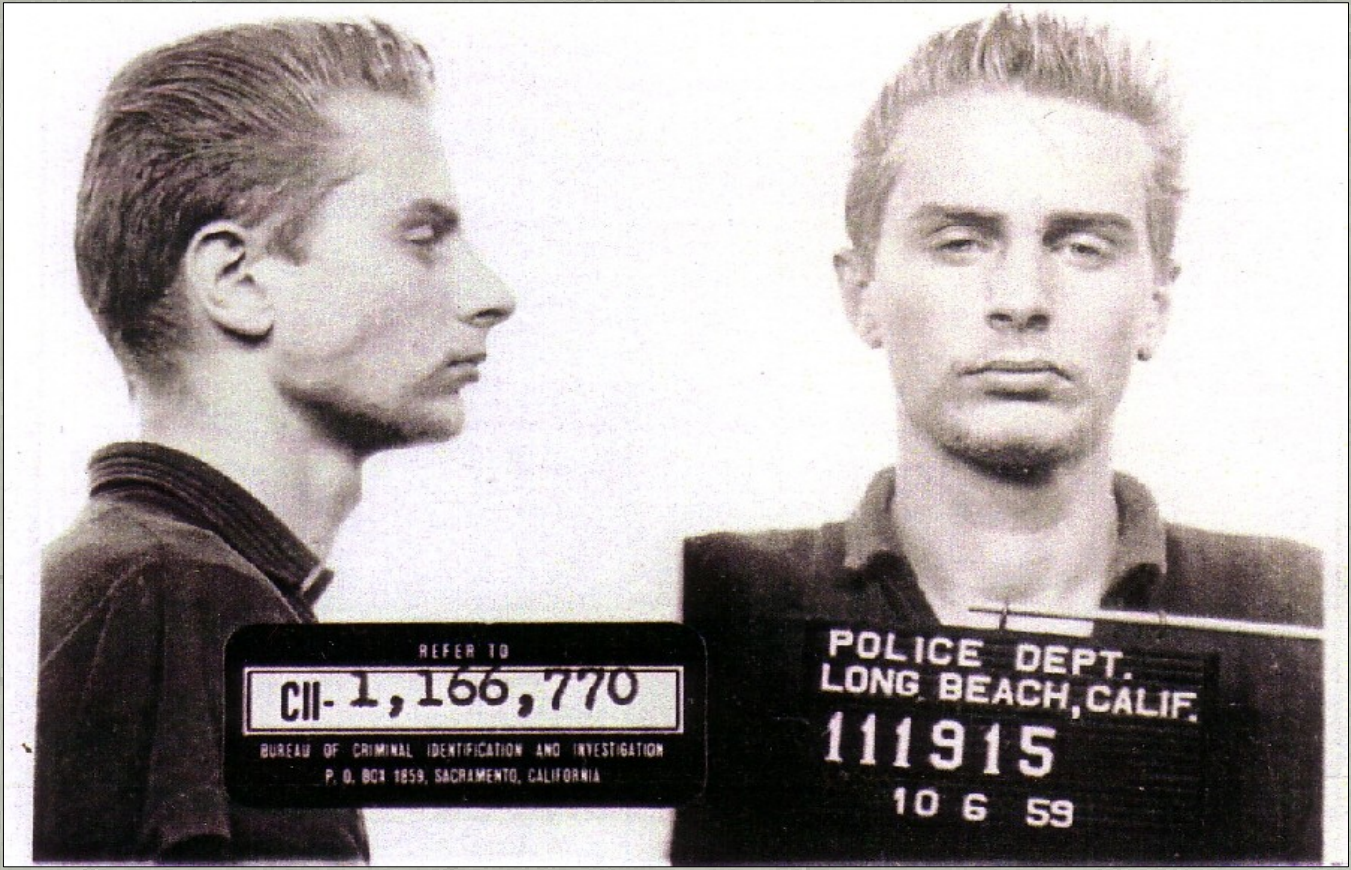
[http://www.savoy.abel.co.uk/HTML/rp\\_ow.html](http://www.savoy.abel.co.uk/HTML/rp_ow.html)

*It can be sampled at an inferior bit-rate here;*

### [RAW POWER](#)

*Only the best cuts for Savoy!*

*The Savoy Toy Boys. Always handy with the jelly.*



# FELIS SILVESTRIS SUMMA CUM OPPROBRIUM

By Díre McCain

School was an ever-increasing nuisance that refused to fuck off. Throughout my freshman year, I ditched more often than not, causing my already poor grades to slip dramatically. By the end of the second semester, I'd flunked History and English, and earned an unprecedented "F-" in Physical Education. Yes, it does exist, and I have the report card to prove it.

I'd come to realize that the people in charge had limited power. Sure, they could assign detentions and Saturday work details, but couldn't force me to attend. And I viewed suspensions as bonus vacation days, the more the better. In other words, the faculty's iron hands were tied by my arrant lack of regard for the rules and potential consequences.

One month into my sophomore year, I'd had enough. I hated school more than ever, and having convinced myself that it wasn't conducive to my well-being, I dropped out. Risky move, since I was technically violating the law. But I was adept at forging my mother's signature, and even more adept at diverting the school's automated calls. Moreover, the

powers that be were absurdly oblivious. It was a one-sided game if there ever was one. Or so I thought.

It was on a cool autumn morning that an actual human being called to report my multiple truancies. An unforeseen snag indeed. Worse yet, my mother's boyfriend beat me to the phone.

When she came home that evening, the first words out of her mouth were: "The Dean of Attendance called today. He said that you've been truant for over a month! Is that true?"

There was no sense in lying, the jig was up.

"Yeah," I mumbled, "it's true."

"You're in serious trouble, did you know that? They're going to send you to juvenile hall! Is that what you want?"

"Hell no!" I exclaimed.

"I didn't think so. We have an appointment with him, *and* a county probation officer tomorrow

morning. He thinks we may be able reach a compromise.”

And I knew exactly what that compromise would be. I’d be transferred out of Alcatraz and into a penitentiary tailor-made for delinquents, which was relatively agreeable, since these institutions typically had shorter days. But what if I was mistaken? What if I *did* end up in juvenile hall?

Five minutes into the meeting I turned on the waterworks, hoping it would hit a soft spot, which it did. After an hour-long lecture, they handed down a comparatively lenient sentence – one year of probation and a ten-month stretch at Meanwell, a year-round probation school located in another city. That’s right, no summer vacation for me.

The Dean wrapped up the festivities by shaking a contract in front of my face and stating sternly, “If you do not abide by the conditions stated in this agreement, you will be sent to juvenile hall!”

Knowing damn well that I’d dodged a major bullet, I snatched the paperwork from his hands, and signed it immediately, before they changed their minds. Then I emptied out my locker, and bid Alcatraz adieu forever. I was scheduled to start at the new place

on Monday, and was dreading the three bus commute, which meant I’d have to get up an hour earlier, but I certainly wasn’t going to complain, as it beat the alternative.

Before setting foot on the campus itself, I knew that Meanwell was the school for me, and the faculty’s blindness was the icing on the cake. Every morning before class, the students would congregate at the grocery store parking lot across the street to exchange drugs and get wasted. It was tragic, but what do you expect? When you dump a bunch of incorrigible delinquents into the same habitat, they’re certainly not going to influence each other in a positive way. I can see why prisoners are rarely rehabilitated.

Meanwell was stocked with characters straight out of a black comedy. One of my favorites was a long-haired, flannel-clad Hessian named Jay, who’d recently served a stretch for bludgeoning his mother with a Wiffle Ball Bat. I repeat, a *Wiffle Ball Bat*. His security blanket was a dog-eared paperback copy of Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. He was never seen without it. He was never seen reading it either. He also held full-length conversations with himself, and performed medleys of barnyard animal sounds from his desk at the back of the classroom. For reasons

unknown, he thought I was Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, a misconception that was immediately shattered when we collided in the pit at a party one night. He was so delightedly astonished, come that Monday, he began lavishing drugs on me.

I have myriad fond memories of Jay, including the time he climbed onto my desk, assumed a fetal position, gazed at me with his lopsided eyes, and asked, "Why do you have a heart-shaped ass?" repeatedly for ten minutes straight. But perhaps my most cherished memory was the time he rescued a group of female students from a flasher who was jacking off in front of the campus one morning. Well, "rescued" isn't quite accurate. After an unsuccessful attempt at tackling the creep, he chased him down the boulevard for several blocks while singing, "*No apparent motive, just kill and kill again! Survive my brutal thrashing, I'll hunt you till the end! My life's a constant battle, the rage of many men! Homicidal maniac!*" at the top of his lungs. The kid was a riot - clearly psychotic, but highly entertaining.

On a more serious note, continuation schools do not get the recognition and praise they deserve. Meanwell was so much more than an academy for rejects,

and I felt privileged to be a member of the student body. Not only was I allowed to work at my own pace, but "normal" pedagogics were virtually nonexistent. Because of my deep-seated issues with strict authoritarians and rules, it turned out to be the ideal educational environment. For the first time in my life, I excelled scholastically, proving to myself and others that I was not learning-disabled after all. I found that when I didn't have a drill sergeant breathing down my neck, barking orders at me, I *wanted* to learn, and earned high marks to boot.

Blind though they were, the teachers were all exceptional human beings. Every student at Meanwell was unstable to some degree, and some were downright volatile individuals who could have snapped without any warning. Instead of censuring or imposing punishment, the teachers did their level best to understand our shortcomings and cultivate our talents. They also enriched our young minds with learning materials that "normal" high school students were not exposed to. Rather than putting us to sleep with a tedious educational film on American history, they stimulated us with compelling cinema, such as *The Deer Hunter*, *Easy Rider*, and *Medium Cool*. And while "normal"



high school students were plodding through *The Scarlet Letter*, *Ethan Frome*, and some watered-down biography that never should have been penned in the first place, I was devouring *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, *Ham on Rye*, and *Hellfire*.

God knows I'm no genius. I'm perpetually scatterbrained, to say that my comprehension skills are deficient would be an understatement, and at best, only twenty-five percent of what I *do* assimilate remains in my long-term memory. That said, I honestly believe that the education I received at Meanwell was on a par with, or better than that offered at any "normal" secondary school in the state. Of course, some have begged to differ, but that's another story, which I'll refrain from telling at the moment. Ah, what the hell, you've talked me into it. Let's just say that I was denied a much needed scholarship to a prominent Southern California business school by a clique of uptight, pompous, condescending sorority alumnae, simply because I didn't wave pompoms, sing in the glee club, run for student council, or take the SATs. Furthermore, I'd committed an unforgivable sin by failing to blow hundreds of dollars on a hideous satin dress I'd never wear again, only to waste a few hours of my life among a horde of

"normals" at a five-star hotel ballroom somewhere in Orange County. Apparently, the fact that I'd been admitted to the highly competitive program, along with the exceptional grade point average I'd maintained during my junior college years was not enough to deem me worthy of the elitist plutocrats' dough. My parents could not afford to help me with the astronomical tuition, and though I was offered financial assistance in the form of work-study, loans, and a grant, the scholarship incident had left such a rotten taste in my mouth I was altogether repulsed by the establishment. It may sound childishly bullheaded, but even if those bitches had changed their minds and begged me to take the money, I would have told them to shove it up their shriveled twats. It was a matter of principle. Who the hell did they think they were sizing me up in such a discriminatory manner? I'd done nothing wrong, yet they were interrogating me as though I were the prime suspect in an unconscionable crime. Christ, I was pissed off. I was angrier at myself, though, I should have known better than to put myself in the hot seat. What kind of questions did I expect them to ask? These women epitomized "normal", and therefore, were only interested in "normal" symbolic achievements. When in high

school, a proper young lady was expected to associate with clean-cut, well-behaved teenyboppers, take part in a variety of extracurricular activities, and attend the prom. Most of my playmates were twentyish, disorderly, tattooed criminals, my extracurricular activities were limited to drinking, drugging, stealing, vandalizing, and raising hell, and on prom night, I was at a nightclub, smashed and drugged out of my mind. It didn't matter that I'd ultimately gotten my act together and was striving to better myself in every possible way, including working my ass off to earn a college degree. Oh no, all that mattered was that I did not receive a "normal" high school education.

Needless to say, it was not the only time my "abnormal" background returned to haunt me, and it's no wonder I tried to erase my past - the "normal" world is teeming with insentient, judgmental, self-righteous hypocrites who haven't a shred of tolerance for anything or anyone that is "abnormal". Well, guess what? The "normal" world can kiss my heart-shaped ass!

Going to a new school was always difficult, but at least I wouldn't be entirely friendless. Some of my comrades had already been

transferred to Meanwell, and another arrived a week after me.

Maxine was a dangerously precocious, Nat Sherman-smoking, mowhawked girl who had the perfect setup. Neither of her grossly negligent parents wanted to assume the responsibility of raising her, so they rented her an apartment, and cut her loose.

Then there was the Earl, fresh out of juvenile hall. I'd heard rumors that he'd joined up with a neo-Nazi gang while inside, but never bothered asking him about it. I suppose I didn't want to know. And if he had temporarily, I'm sure he'd only done so to protect himself from the other, equally violent factions. Anyone who's been an inmate in a correctional facility will tell you that in order to survive you're often forced to take actions that may conflict with your beliefs, including aligning yourself with a group of extremists. The way I see it, unless you've been in that situation yourself, you have no right to opine, judge, or criticize.

You're probably wondering what Earl had done to get himself locked up. Well, in his freshman year, he'd gone on a lunchtime shooting spree in the riverbed directly behind Alcatraz. Contrary to what you may be thinking, his victims weren't students, but seagulls. It

was a front-page story in our typically dead city. The area was swarming with cops, who mistakenly believed that there was a homicidal sniper on the loose, when in reality, it was just a baby-faced kid with a latent aversion to our salty-feathered friends. Like everyone else, I was curious to know why Earl had embarked on that avian massacre, so I asked, and here's what he had to say: "I dunno. I just don't like 'em. Never have." Hmmmm, had they shat on him one too many times, perhaps? I wondered. Wouldn't you?

Shortly after his release, Earl found his calling as a cat burglar. The kid was a crackerjack of a thief, almost as if the racket had *chosen him* instead of the other way around. He'd slip in stealthily, like a chilly draft through a sagging door, and clean out the places in a matter of minutes. Then he'd fence the loot for cocaine, which he'd generously share with yours truly. It may be difficult to believe, but he was a really nice guy. I recently looked at an old snapshot of him, and apart from the sack of weed that's covering his muzzle like a feedbag, he looks fairly innocent. I always wondered where he made that wrong turn in life. He was so young, yet so troubled, which was probably why we got along so fabulously. I never felt as though I had to check myself in his

presence. He accepted me as I was, and I him. A girl couldn't have asked for a better drug buddy, but such is life. It wasn't long before Earl was nailed, and promptly returned to the slammer. I didn't hear much about him until summer of 2006, when I was deeply saddened to hear that he'd accidentally overdosed a few years prior. I'm still trying to confirm his death, but if he did indeed buy the farm, he's only one in a staggeringly long line of former comrades who died tragically and prematurely.

Just prior to Earl's re-incarceration, Maxine and I began to hang out more frequently. She was mourning the loss of her ex-boyfriend, Ray, who'd recently been gunned down by the law. I was shocked when I heard the news, since he appeared to be such a calm and gentle soul. By his own admission, he was a drug-gorging party animal, but as far as I could tell, he was easy-going to a fault, and far from violent. You're probably wondering what Ray had done to get himself riddled with bullets. Well, I never got specific details, but allegedly, he'd refused to pull over for a minor traffic violation, then led the cops on a high speed chase, and tried to run them down after he'd been cornered. Naturally, his kith and kin suspected there was more to

the story, and there probably was, but it wasn't as if they could prove it. The only people who knew the truth were the officers at the scene, and of course Ray, but he wouldn't be talking any time soon.

One temperate Saturday night, Maxine and I went out for dinner at a restaurant near her father's place, where she was staying at the time. I was perusing the tome of a menu, struggling to make a decision, as usual, when she kicked my leg under the table.

"What the fuck?" I exclaimed, looking up at her.

"Shhhh," she whispered, ducking behind her menu, "whatever you do, don't turn around."

"Why?"

"You're not gonna believe who just sat down behind you."

"Who?"

"Rood."

Rood was an impish manchild who was invariably up to some sort of shenanigans. I never knew his actual age. He claimed to be twenty-five, but looked forty-five. I never knew how he earned his living either, for it seemed as though he spent half his time on a

skateboard, and the other half on a surfboard, but was never strapped for cash. He was a hoot and a half to party with, but impossibly obnoxious, which made it extremely difficult to take him in large doses. He also suffered from a severe case of Instant Horny Octopus, Just Add Booze Syndrome.

"You're shitting me," I whispered, also hiding behind my menu, even though he could only see the back of my head. "Who's he with?"

"That dude, you know, the one with the short brown hair?"

"That narrows it down."

She started to laugh.

So did I.

"Shhhh," she whispered, "they're gonna hear us."

"Maybe that's not such a bad thing," I said quietly. "They can foot the bill for this meal, and knowing Rood, he's probably holding."

I was referring to cocaine, by the way.

"You think so?" she asked, peering over her menu discreetly.

"There's a 70-30 chance," I said, peering back at her.

"Yeah, but if he isn't, we're never gonna be able to ditch him. We'll be stuck with him and his fuckin' tentacles till dawn."

"Ugh," I sneered, "I hadn't thought of that."

"And *you're* the one he's gonna lavish his affection on 'cause I fucked him already."

"You *did*?" I exclaimed.

"Shhhh. Unfortunately."

"When?"

"A coupla weeks ago. I thought it'd help me forget about Ray."

"Did it work?"

"Fuck no! It only made me miss him more."

"Really? Why?"

"'Cause it was the worse fuckin' sex I've *ever* had," she whispered, rolling her eyes, "*easily*."

"Are you serious?"

"No *contest*," she replied emphatically. "He's hung like Secretariat, I'll give him that much,

but he shot his fuckin' load before I could blink."

I burst out laughing.

"Shhhh," she giggled, "they're gonna hear us."

"What should we do?" I asked, struggling to stifle my laughter. "We can't hide behind these fucking menus till they leave, and I'm famished, I need food."

"Just lemme think for a sec," she said, chewing on her thumbnail, "I'll come up with somethin'."

Much to her frustration, she wouldn't have an opportunity to think for a sec, or come up with anything, for right at that moment, Rood spotted her.

"Max!" he yelled. "I thought that was yooooo!"

She simpered and waved.

"Shit, I didn't recognize ya with yer hair down! And who's that with ya?"

I turned around, revealing my identity.

"Hey, sweetheart!" he yelled even louder, with a disturbingly wide grin. "How fuckin' cool is this! It's like serendipity or somethin'!"

"Yeah, or somethin'," Maxine mumbled.

"You remember Keith, right?" he said, pointing at his companion whose face was now one centimeter from mine.

"Yeah," I replied, leaning away.

"How's it going, Keith?"

"Pretty good," he said, leaning forward and peeking down my shirt. "How's it goin' with you?"

"I've been better," I replied, shielding my chest with my menu.

"Well shit!" Rood yelled. "There's no reason for two fine lookin' girls to dine alone now, is there?"

"Mind if we join you?" Keith asked, still attempting to cop a gander at my chest.

Maxine and I didn't respond.

"We'll buy you dinner," he added with a pitiable smile.

"Okay," Maxine sighed, motioning with her hand, "get the fuck over here."

They gathered up their utensils and menus, and walked the three steps it took to reach our table.

"Here, Keith," I said, tugging on his shirt, "you can sit next to me."

I had to choose one or the other, and he was the lesser of two pervs.

Maxine glared at me.

I winked at her.

She flipped me off.

I reciprocated.

"So ladies, what's on the agenda tonight?" Rood asked, reading the menu upside down.

"Not much," Maxine replied, lighting a kelly green cigarette. "We're just gonna chow down, then head back to my pad and watch videos."

"Damn, that sounds fuckin' dull!" he said, reading the menu sideways.

"You have something better in mind?" I asked smartly.

"Don't I always?" he replied, raising his eyebrows and grinning.

That "something better" turned out to be a private party at a local drug house. I was a bit reluctant, but after learning that the host was one of the most successful cocaine

dealers in the area, I changed my tune.

Upon arriving at our destination, Rood rang the doorbell twice.

Seconds later, a frightfully dilated pupil appeared in the peephole.

Then the voice behind the pupil in the peephole asked, "Who's there?"

"Geraldo Rivera," Rood giggled.

"Who's with you?" the voice asked.

"The fuckin' DEA, man! Who the fuck do ya think?"

"Just a coupla chicks, Joe," Keith interjected, "they're cool."

"Are you sure?" the voice asked.

"Yeah!" Rood laughed. "Now open the fuckin' door, ya paranoid kook! I'm freezin' my balls off out here!"

"Maybe if you wore pants for a change," Maxine scoffed.

Three separate locks unlatched, then the door slowly creaked open, revealing a creature that was the personification of cocaine induced paranoia.

"Hurry up!" he whispered angrily. "Get in here before they see you!"

"Before who sees us?" Rood asked mockingly, looking around.

"The fucking Feds, man! They've been staking me out for a month!"

Rood and Keith started to laugh.

"I'm not fucking around!" he snapped, grabbing Rood by the arm and yanking him over the threshold. "Get the hell in here before they see you!"

Once inside, Maxine and I were introduced to the other guests. There was a ball team - all men in their mid to late twenties, except Joe appeared to be a bit older, perhaps in his early thirties.

"Here," he muttered, handing Maxine a loaded crack pipe, "help yourselves."

"Thanks," she said, smiling, "don't mind if we do."

"And make yourselves comfortable," he added, pointing toward the loveseat, "it's gonna be a long night."

The next few hours were spent freebasing relentlessly, then Joe and some of the others started to mainline. Maxine had dabbled with needles before, and found it exhilarating, but was squeamish about injecting herself, so Joe

played doctor. Naturally, I was encouraged to join in on the fun, but politely declined and stuck with the pipe. Again, I had no intention of crossing over into that doomed dimension – the purgatory I was trapped in was hellish enough.

As I explained several chapters back, cocaine often provokes the overwhelming desire to *DO SOMETHING!!!!* no matter how pointless and nonsensical that activity may be. What Joe and crew proceeded to *DO!!!!* over the course of the next hour was a case in point. Even though the house was already immaculate, they cleaned it frantically and meticulously, like a team of raving, mysophobic maids. One of them was vacuuming, another dusting, another cleaning the windows, another washing the dishes, another scrubbing the bathroom from floor to ceiling, etc – all of them working at hypersonic speed. It was like watching an infomercial in fast forward mode, or better yet, an undercranked Benny Hill skit.

When the madness finally ended, Maxine and I gave them a standing ovation.

A few minutes later, Rood came over to the loveseat, and planted himself in between us.

“See those chicks over there?” he asked, pointing toward a pair of haggard looking women who were standing by the door with Keith.

“Yeah,” Maxine said, taking a drag on her thin red cigarette, “what about ‘em?”

“They want me and Keith to go back their place with ‘em. Is that cool?”

“Whatever floats your boat,” she said, exhaling. “Just make sure you double wrap your cocks before divin’ in, the brunette looks like a walkin’ herpes sore.”

“Ya think so?” he asked, glancing over at the brunette. “I think she looks more like a genital wart.”

“You should know,” Maxine scoffed.

“Look who’s talkin’!” he retorted.

“Skank!” she shot back.

“Takes one to know one!”

They fell silent for a second, then burst out laughing.

“You guys are fucking nuts,” I laughed, shaking my head.



He kissed Maxine on the cheek and asked, "Sure yer not gonna be pissed off?"

"Fuck no!" she replied, looking around at the roomful of men. "You dudes gotta go where the action is, and it sure as hell ain't here."

"Ya can say that again," he grumbled, leering at me.

"Quit looking at me like that, you fucking pig," I said, pushing him.

"Ooooh, baby!" he said, grinning lasciviously. "I love it when ya talk dirty to me!"

I smacked the side of his head.

"Resist me all ya want, sweetheart, but I'm not givin' up. I'm gonna get ya in the sack yet, then I'll show ya what a *real* man can do."

"Don't hold your breath," I snickered, remembering the juicy tidbit Maxine had revealed earlier.

"Here," he said, slipping me a Grant. "Joe's gonna set ya up all night, and when yer ready to split, call a cab."

"Thanks," I said, stuffing the bill into my bra and smiling. "Now get the fuck out of my sight."

He sprang to his feet, and signaled to Keith that he was coming.

Keith gestured for him to hurry the hell up.

He flipped Keith off.

"Maybe I'll drop by yer place next week, Max?" he said, nonchalantly.

"I won't be there," she replied, exhaling.

"Why, where ya goin'?"

"Anywhere you're not."

"Ouch!" he laughed, holding his hand on his heart. "Yer fuckin' cruel!"

She hissed at him.

"Awright, girlies," he said, still laughing, "I'm outta here."

"Later," Maxine and I replied in unison.

Keith waved at us from the door.

We waved back.

And they were gone.

As I mentioned, Joe was a highly successful dealer who specialized in crack. Although he ran a closed shop, he was open for business

twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and was definitely not hurting for customers. Throughout the night, that doorbell must have ringed a hundred times, and I couldn't help noticing the diversity of his clientele. When crack had become a nationwide epidemic, the media had led the public to believe that it was a solely a ghetto problem. As usual, the media was completely off base. I was in a chic little bungalow in the whitest of neighborhoods, and only one black person came knocking the entire time I was there. It was absurd.

Never one to pass up an opportunity to make new connections, I spent a good portion of the night schmoozing, and as luck would have it, my efforts paid off. Around midnight I made the acquaintance of a tall, sinewy, sable-haired bull who I hoped to exploit in the near future. His sonorous voice and imposing presence oozed masculinity and commanded attention. He had a strong, euphonic name, like that of a mythical Celtic warrior. It rolled off the tongue beautifully, which is why I've never forgotten it. My mother probably hasn't forgotten it either. His business card was one of many she found while conducting an unconstitutional search and seizure on the *one day* I forgot to lock my bedroom door.

For legal reasons I cannot use his real name, and since I cannot come up with a worthy substitute, I'm simply going to call him the Scotch-Irishman.

"So, how long have you known Joe?" he asked, leading me back over to the loveseat.

"I just met him tonight," I replied, sitting down Indian style.

He sat down beside me, and strategically wrapped his arm around the seatback, placing his chiseled face merely centimeters from mine. Thankfully, he wasn't suffering from halitosis. In fact, his overall scent was quite pleasant - a sublime blend of fresh spearmint, Chanel Por Monsieur, and manly musk.

"And what do you think of him so far?" he asked, eyeing me discreetly.

"He seems pretty cool," I replied, sensing that he was eyeing me, "and he's definitely not stingy."

"With you, he isn't," he said, pointing to his face with his thumb, "with this mug, I'm lucky he even *sells* it to me."

I chuckled. He was far from homely and he knew it. He was

being affectedly modest, or perhaps clever.

"You must be Swedish, Danish, or Norwegian," he said, after studying my face for a moment.

"I'm none of the above."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really. I'm Irish and German with a trace of Alsatian on my dad's side and a trace of Bohemian on my mom's."

"Is that so? You look Scandinavian."

"Yeah, I guess so. Except for my humungous fucking noggin, it's Irish all the way."

"It's not big at all."

"Easy for you to say, you don't have to schlep it around."

"Looks just right to me," he said, smiling.

"You should have your eyes checked."

He burst out laughing.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed. "You're a strange one! I have to tell you, it's a little disturbing!"

"How kind of you to notice," I smirked.

"I am so sorry," he said sheepishly, placing his hand on my thigh, one inch from my crotch. "I meant *intriguing*, not disturbing."

"Yeah, sure you did," I said, moving his hand away from my privates in a gingerly manner. "You don't have to apologize. I know I'm a fucking weirdo. Do I scare you?"

"Absolutely not," he replied emphatically, staring into my vastly dilated pupils, "you fascinate me."

I had eye contact with him for all of five seconds before averting my gaze to the center of the room, where Joe was giving Maxine another injection.

An awkward lull ensued, which the Scotch-Irishman promptly broke.

"I'm a lot older than you, and should know this, but where in the world is Bohemia?"

"Czech Land."

"Oh, okay. I thought it was a counter-culture district in the Bay Area."

I chuckled again.

"I'm not joking," he laughed. "Ignorant, isn't it? I guess it goes to show that college degrees are overrated."

I chuckled once more and asked, "What are you?"

"Three-quarters Scotch-Irish and one-quarter Cherokee on my mother's side."

"Hmmm, interesting," I said, cracking my knuckles.

It wasn't that interesting. In fact, the whole conversation was about as exciting as shaving your armpits, but when you're *TOTALLY WIRED-UH*, the dullest, most trivial conversations seem riveting.

"My mom's boyfriend is part Cherokee," I continued, cracking my neck, "one-third, I think."

"Is that so?"

"Uh-huh. She's been obsessed with Native American culture since before I was born."

"It's interesting that you used the term Native American," he said, after a brief pause.

"Why? That's what they are, technically speaking, except they didn't call this shithole America."

"Yes, I know, but most people refer to them as Indians."

"And it makes no fucking sense. They're not from India or the Indies."

He tried to respond, but I cut him off.

"When I was a little kid, my dad took me to meet Iron Eyes Cody."

"How does your father know Iron Eyes Cody?"

"He doesn't. He teaches at Cal State Long Beach, and Iron Eyes Cody came to the campus powwow a few years back."

Yes, it was before Iron Eyes' true ancestry was revealed

"Oh, I see," The Scotch-Irishman said, nodding.

"Anyway, when it was my turn to meet him, he pulled me onto his lap and asked if I was doing my part to keep America beautiful. I told him I'd never littered once in my whole life. Then I asked him if he preferred being called Indian, American Indian, or Native American."

"And what did he say?"

"That all three were cool with him, but he knew people who hated being called Indian."

"I would imagine he's grown accustomed it, he's been known as the Crying Indian for years now."

"Yeah, that's what all the palefaces were calling him, and he didn't coldcock anyone over it."

"Was that it then?" he asked, grinning.

"Of course not, he was a captive listener."

"That poor man," he laughed. "What did you do to him?"

"Nothing," I replied innocently. "I just asked him if he preferred playing good guys or bad guys."

"And what did he say?"

"That he liked playing both, but that he wished there were more good-guy roles available for Native American actors."

"I have to agree with him there. Hollywood has always pigeonholed them, and in a negative way."

"Yeah, I think that's what he was implying."

"So, what happened next?"

"I told him he should find himself a nice squaw, and maybe then he wouldn't be so sad."

"You *didn't*," he said, placing his hand over his face.

"Yeah, I did," I said, smiling.

"Why doesn't that surprise me."

I stuck my tongue out at him.

"What did he say, that he *had* one, and she was *the cause* of his grief?"

"No," I laughed, "but that would have been hilarious if he had. He didn't say anything, actually. He just laughed and patted my head, then gave me a cherry lollipop and sent me on my way. To make a long story longer, a few days later, I found out that his wife was dead, and I felt like shit about what I'd said."

"That is so sweet," he said, grinning warmly.

"No it isn't!" I exclaimed. "It totally fucked me up! I still feel guilty about it!"

He burst out laughing again.

"I'm fucking serious!" I said, glaring wildly. "Why do you think I remember it so clearly? It's been haunting me for years!"

"It's all right," he said in a tranquilizing tone, while gently rubbing my upper thigh. "Just take a deep breath and relax, before you have a stroke."

"I don't know how to relax," I said, redirecting his hand toward my knee. "That word's not in my vocabulary."

"I'm sure it doesn't help that you're as high as a kite."

"I am coked-up, but it makes no difference. I came into this world a restless spaz, even when I'm sound asleep, I'm not relaxed."

"And why is that?"

"Because I'm a neurotic freak who belongs in a loony bin," I replied bluntly, "and I'm sure all the acid I've been dropping is only making me worse."

"Then why do you do it?"

"Because I'm a self-destructive masochist," I replied, even more bluntly.

He didn't react, so I kept rambling in the same vein.

"If I ever run into the genius who said that acid isn't addictive, my knee and his gonads are going to have a little talk. That drug scares the shit out of me, but I can't stop. If that's not an addiction, then I don't know what the fuck is."

He was noticeably uncomfortable. I often had this effect on humans, and still do at times. I haven't the faintest idea why, but most people are put off by sincerity and spontaneity, even those who consider themselves receptive and unshockable - they seem to prefer the safety and comfort of facades. I didn't want to repel the potential drug ticket, and it was too late to backpedal, so I spit out the first thing that popped into my jumbled head.

"So, how about them Dodgers?"

He stared at me with a puzzled look in his face, as though he weren't sure if he should laugh at my stupid quip or answer the question literally. He did neither. He simply smiled, then returned to the original topic seamlessly, as though we'd never digressed.

"You know, some Native Americans actually prefer the Indian label, but I think it's inappropriate."

"You do?" I asked, cracking my knuckles again.

"Absolutely, but try telling that to the general public, they're very attached to Columbus' misnomer."

"I think the general public's been watching too many John Wayne flicks."

He laughed and asked, "You mean you're not a John Wayne fan?"

"Not really. I don't hate him, but I don't like him either."

"That's funny."

"Why?"

"Because John Wayne was one of Orange County's most famous residents. They even named the airport after him."

"Yeah, I know," I said smartly. "It's not my fucking fault. If it were up to me, I would have named it after Leo Fender."

"Leo Fender? How about Dick Dale?"

"That would have been cool too."

"So, I guess you don't like westerns, huh?"

"Are you fucking kidding?" I exclaimed. "Some of my all time favorite films are westerns!"

"But you don't like John Wayne? That's a little contradictory, don't you think?"

I smirked and replied, "Whatever you say, pilgrim."

"You're a real wiseass," he said, leering at me, "and you have a dirty mouth."

"I can't help it," I said, returning his leer. "Is it offensive?"

"A little."

"Good."

"Good?" he laughed.

"Yeah, good."

Another awkward lull ensued, which he broke more quickly than the first.

"I hope you don't mind my asking, but how old are you?"

"How old do you think I am?"

"It's difficult to tell, but if I had to venture a guess, I'd say twenty-one."

"I wish! It would make my life a hell of a lot easier."

"Does that mean you're younger?"

I nodded.

"How much younger?"

"The truth?"

"Please."

"I'm fifteen."

Like every other ephedophile I'd encountered, it didn't faze him at all.

"Would you like to go out sometime?" he asked.

I was expecting this, and already knew what my response would be.

"Yeah, why the hell not?"

"Are you sure you don't want to know how old *I am* before deciding?"

I studied his face for a moment. He couldn't have been a day over twenty-five, if that. I had no intention of touching him anyway, so his age was irrelevant.

"Not really," I replied indifferently.

"I'm thirty-seven," he blurted out guiltily, as though he were revealing some unthinkably horrific secret. "I'm old enough to be your father."

I didn't respond verbally or otherwise. I simply gazed at him blankly, as though I were in a catatonic state.

"Say something," he said, laughing nervously. "You look a little thunderstruck."

"Don't flatter yourself," I scoffed. "I don't shock that easily."

I was lying. I was thunderstruck, dumbfounded, and flabbergasted, but he was far too valuable to let go, thirty-seven or not. I quickly pulled myself together, and tried to act impassive.

"There must be something running through that mind of yours," he said, staring at me inquisitively.

"There is," I replied, smacking my lips. "I was thinking about how yummy an ice-cold beer would taste right now."

"Is that all?" he laughed, after letting out a sigh of relief. "I thought you were going to tell me to get lost! Don't move, I'll be right back."



Less than a minute later, he returned with a frosty bottle of Beck's, one of the only beers I could stand.

"So," he said, sitting down, "are we still on?"

I chugalugged the entire bottle, then let out a long, resonant belch and replied, "Sure, Pops."

What a graceless slob. For the record, I no longer burp in public, but at the time, it was second nature.

He laughed while shaking his head in what appeared to be disgust, then handed me his business card and a pair of unmarked capsules that resembled miniature jelly beans. I liked jelly beans, especially red and pink ones.

"Those will help you come down," he said with a shifty smile.

Without looking at it, I shoved the card into my pocket, then examined the capsules for a moment and asked, "What the fuck's in them?"

"Just a mild soporific."

I looked at him dubiously.

"They're perfectly safe," he said, brushing my tousled hair away

from my face with his long fingers, "nothing I wouldn't give my own mother."

Maybe he despised his mother. Maybe she was a mean, vicious, wretched, spiteful, straight-razor-toting woman who beat him mercilessly with a rolling pin as a boy.

I stared at the pills for a moment longer then carefully tucked them into the coin pocket of my jeans.

"Look," he said, checking his watch, "I have to run, but will you call me in a couple of days?"

"Yeah," I replied coolly.

"Is that a promise?"

"Yeah, I promise I'll call you by Tuesday."

"I look forward to it."

"Yeah, me too," I mumbled.

"And please don't overdo it tonight," he added. "It would be a shame if you died before our first date."

With that, I expected him to go on his merry way, but much to my surprise, he placed his hand behind my neck, pulled me toward him, and planted a firm smooch on my

mouth. Although his move was somewhat aggressive, he kept his lips closed, and his tongue to himself, which indicated that: 1) he wasn't overly pushy, and 2) it was going to be a cinch to string him along.

After removing his mouth from mine, he began caressing my face with his forefinger while gazing into my eyes amorously.

For a split second I thought about snapping his finger in two, but I was mesmerized by his hypnotic brown eyes. Suddenly, I felt explosively hot, and when I went to switch on the AC, it malfunctioned. What can I say? He was not hard to look at, and I was always a sucker for a smooth, deep voice. Too bad I was in the midst of adolescence while he was on the brink of middle age.

He kissed me once more, on the cheek this time, then stood up and headed for the door.

Before exiting, he turned around and said sternly, "Remember, do *not* overdo it tonight!"

I found his tone a bit annoying. He sounded like a strict, overbearing father. We'd just met, and he was already fitting me with a collar and leash.

I flashed him a saucy smile and the bird.

He grinned and blew me a kiss, then walked out.

I wish to god I'd heeded his admonition, but I was an incurable, reckless glutton. I smoked more crack on that particular night than any other, before or after. That sooty glass tube became an extension of my dry, viscid lips. I was so wired I could actually see my toiling ticker pulsating through my bony chest. Breathing became a laborious task, and my thorax felt as though a two-ton hippopotamus were perched upon it.

By five a.m. I was convinced I was a goner, and it drove me into a state of unmitigated panic. Before anyone noticed, I slunk into Joe's bedroom, climbed into the sack, pulled the covers over my head, and swallowed the pills the Scotch-Irishman had given me, hoping they'd alleviate the maddening discomfort. Whatever was in those magic beans did the trick. Within twenty minutes I was out cold.

A short while later I awoke to a familiar, yet troubling sound. Familiar in the sense that I'd heard it before, and troubling because of its close proximity. I couldn't place it at first, but after listening carefully for a minute or so, I was

able to make an accurate identification. Joe and Maxine were fucking violently right there next to me! I opened my eyes a bit to see if I was hallucinating. After all, I'd just spent several hours inhaling toxic fumes, but unfortunately, it was no chemical-induced illusion. The two maniacs were virtually on top of me, in the anvil position, while the bed shook, rolled, and creaked, as though it were in the midst of a catastrophic earthquake.

Her legs were wrapped around his neck, and he was pounding her like a madman as she moaned in ecstasy, "Ooooooooh, Joe! Ooooooooh, yeah! Fuck me, baby! Fuck me harder!"

She repeated the lustful chant over and over again while he chimed in periodically with, "Ooooooooh yeah, baby! Fuck yeah!"

I was pissed off, mortified, and slightly nauseated. I hadn't asked to be a spectator, and it was far more graphic and sickening than *any* skin flick I'd seen. I wasn't sure if I should ignore them or get the hell out of that bed. Before I had a chance to decide, they climaxed simultaneously, and what a repugnant harmony that was. Not wanting them to know that I'd witnessed one second of the nasty

duet, I played possum until I dozed off.

Around two that afternoon, Maxine and I hopped into a cab, and though I was definitely tempted, I refrained from mentioning one word about her romp with Joe. I figured if she wanted to talk about it, she would. I couldn't help wondering how they'd wound up in bed, though. Was she crassly propositioned or did she willingly offer herself? Either way, I thought she was crazy. Putting out was not mandatory. The trick was to resist until the "benefactor" became frustrated, and consequently tightfisted, then move on to the next mark. Besides, Joe wasn't exactly Steve Reeves, what the hell was she thinking? Rumor had it that Maxine was pathologically promiscuous, but I always took such rumors with a grain of salt, particularly when they were coming from the mouths of men. In this case, however, the rumors turned out to be true. I soon learned that Maxine was a self-proclaimed nymphomaniac, who'd have sex with any man who was *up* for it, free of charge. I dug this girl immensely, and if she was hooked on penis, more power to her. But I was automatically found guilty by association, which only rubbed salt into the wounds caused by the rape, since sleeping around was the

most reprehensible offense a girl could commit. Yes, I'm being sarcastic. For some inexplicable reason, promiscuous women have always been viewed with far less tolerance than promiscuous men, and often stigmatized by *both genders*. It's a flagrantly sexist double standard that makes no sense whatsoever. As far as I know, most STDs are unisex and one size fits all, so why the hell is a loose man hailed as a virile stud, while an equally loose woman is branded a filthy slut? It doesn't add up, but what can you do? Our problematic planet has at least one enigma for every denizen, most of which are unsolvable.

When I last saw Maxine, she was drug-free, pregnant, and planning her wedding. More importantly, the girl who'd been treated as an inconvenience by the people who'd brought her into the world, had finally found security and unconditional love.

I have the innate ability to conjure up the exact emotions from nearly every significant moment of my life. Even when I cannot recall any of the other details, the feelings are always vivid and crisp, as though I've just experienced them. I've found this to be both an asset and a curse, depending on whether the emotions are pleasant or afflictive in nature. Shame falls into the latter

category, and if given the choice, I'd rather shove a scalpel into my abdomen than suffer its degrading impalement. That said, the feeling is not entirely without purpose. I firmly believe that a spoonful of shame can be healthy, but by the same token, an overdose can be fatal. I've never forgotten that night at Joe's, because it was the most shameful situation I've ever found myself in, hands down. Even though I was merely an innocent bysleeper, who happened to be in the wrong bed at the wrong time, I still felt like a miserable, unwilling crack whore, who *allowed* herself to be violated, when her gut feeling was to eviscerate the son of a bitch. In my wounded mind, it was tantamount to sexual assault, and the rawest nerve in my being was not only touched, but brutally manhandled. I was deeply hurt and utterly ashamed. So much so, that it prompted me to question my ruinously self-indulgent lifestyle for the first time. Up until that point I'd been driven solely by two motives: the overpowering urge to use drugs, and the desperate urge to use whoever I could to get those drugs.

As my fifteen-year-old carcass lay on that cum-stained mattress of a thirtysomething, whacked-out drug trafficker, who'd just shot semen into my fifteen-year-old friend after shooting cocaine into

her veins all night, I found myself reminiscing about Washington D.C. and the last family trip before dumping the homemaker for the homewrecker. The clan had visited our nation's capital on numerous occasions, only this time, the primary purpose was to trade in our beat-up Ford station wagon for the used Dodge van that would bring us to California. I don't know why this memory popped into my mind other than that it carried me away to a simpler, happier time - a time when I desired ice cream, bubble gum, and a Lincoln Memorial snow globe, rather than acid, coke, and speed. I couldn't believe where life had taken me. I was a naive child whose days had merely begun, yet I felt like a cunning adult with one foot in the grave. My relationship with drugs was like a viciously abusive marriage, but no matter how many times I was battered and raped, I couldn't bring myself to leave. I drew the line at sodomy, though, and vowed right then and there to never return to Joe's place again, no matter how desperate I got. I also passed on the Scotch-Irishman.

When you're a chemically dependent, manipulative leech, you must switch off two things in order to achieve greatness in the sport: your conscience and your pride. The former posed no problem, it had conked out ages

ago, but the latter was stuck in the ON position. I was a devious, opportunistic hustler, who probably deserved to be shot execution style, but miraculously, my dignity was still intact. I hadn't the slightest intention of divorcing drugs, but if I expected to retain my self-respect, it was time to rethink my game. I simply couldn't conduct myself in this disgraceful manner any longer. At least that's what I temporarily fooled myself into believing. Who the fuck was I kidding?

Less than two weeks later, I found myself sitting across from the Scotch-Irishman at an upscale eatery. I'd chosen the restaurant specifically for its low-key ambiance. Brightly lit, overcrowded dining rooms made me edgy, paranoid, and self-conscious. More important, I'd chosen the place because the object of my obsession worked there. I hoped that when he got a load of my handsome, virile escort, he'd become overwrought with jealousy and challenge him to a duel. What an immature fool I was, his heart belonged to another. And besides, it was his night off.

The Scotch-Irishman and I feasted on grilled halibut and a variety of side dishes, which I washed down with a slice of decadent cheesecake drowning in fresh whipped cream.

The conversation during dinner had been relatively tame, but over dessert it took a rather wild turn.

He leaned forward, placed his forearms on the table, and fastened his arresting brown eyes onto my face. I was blissfully immersed in my rich, creamy cheesecake, but his commanding presence was too hard to ignore, especially when I could sense that he was staring at me seductively. I glanced up to discover much more than your average come-hither look. He was gazing at me rapaciously, as though he were about to devour me headfirst, like a white chocolate Easter bunny. I smiled modestly, and gave him a look which indicated that I was listening.

“Look,” he said, “let’s stop beating around the bush. We both know why we’re here. I have an insatiable drug habit, and a lot of money. As far as I can tell, you have an equally insatiable drug habit, and judging from your age, no source of income. Correct me if I’m wrong, but I would imagine this puts you at a disadvantage. I don’t know how you’ve supported your habit in the past, nor do I care to know, but from now on, I’ll be more than happy to take care of your needs provided that you take care of mine.”

“What do you mean?” I asked innocently, looking up at him with doe eyes.

I knew *exactly* what he meant, but was curious to hear his response.

“I’ll spell it out for you. It was no accident that I approached you at Joe’s that night. I have a thing for blondes, especially underage, sassy, wayward blondes. I find you very attractive, and forgive my forwardness, but I’d like to fuck your brains out, repeatedly.”

I started choking on the bite of cheesecake I was masticating. I admired candor, but needless to say, this was a bit excessive.

“Are you all right?” he said, pushing my glass toward me. “Here, have some water.”

I took a few sips.

“Are you all right?” he reiterated.

I nodded then ducked back into the sanctuary of my cheesecake.

“As I was saying, you arouse me something fierce. You’re provocatively insolent, uncouth, and naughty. You need to be tamed and disciplined, and I want to be the man who carries out the task.”

I couldn't believe my ears! It was too absurd to be true! I felt as though I'd been dropped into the middle of a raunchy, twisted version of Pygmalion! I'd dealt with my share of perverts, but this bloke took the Dundee cake! His frankness and effrontery were unprecedented! Christ, I'd pegged him wrong! Perhaps if I *were* twenty-one - or at least *legal* - and we were madly in love, I would have found it alluring, in a kinky way, but he was a complete stranger who was almost the same age as my favorite uncle from Ann Arbor. No doubt about it, the suave Scotch-Irishman was nothing more than a slimy, degenerate pig. I was insulted, not only by his words, but by their implication. But you know what? I had it coming, and then some. Of course, admitting that I was getting my just deserts certainly didn't make it any easier to swallow it. I hoped that he was finished, but unfortunately, I hadn't heard nothin' yet.

"Here's my proposal," he continued, "I'll supply you with all the drugs you want, as long as you grant me the pleasure of fucking you whenever I want, starting tonight. I'm a very busy man, I probably won't require your services more than twice a week, but when I do call I expect you to be available, open-minded, and prepared to do whatever I ask. My

time is limited, I can't afford to be chasing you around, so I'm going to give you a pager, and I want you to leave it on. Have I made myself clear?"

"Crystal," I replied.

"Well, do we have a deal?"

I scooped up the last chunk of cheesecake with my spoon, stuffed it into my mouth, and let it melt slowly on my tongue.

"Speak up," he said, smiling lasciviously. "I don't think I can restrain myself much longer. I've had a hard-on since I saw you strut in here in that dress."

"Oh yeah?" I said teasingly, glaring at him.

"Oh yeah," he sighed. "I've never had a fifteen year old before. I'm dying to get inside your tight little cunt, only I can't decide what I want to do first, make sweet love to you in the missionary position or bend you over and fuck you like a bitch."

My blood had already passed the boiling point, but the moment those words crossed his lips I was consumed with murderous indignation. It took every ounce of self-control I had to keep from leaping over that table and

severing his carotid artery with the hilt of my spoon.

I wiped my mouth with my napkin, scooted out of the booth, picked up my unused dessert fork, and proceeded to drive it into his hand, the same hand that had been caressing my face just two weeks prior.

*"FUUUUCK!"* he yelped, retracting the wounded paw, and holding it with the other.

I leaned over the table and growled, *"Eat shit and die, you motherfucking pig."*

Then I walked out of the restaurant and up the street to 7-11, where I called a cab. I had exactly zero dollars and 25 cents, so I directed the driver to Mia's house. Thankfully, she was home, and covered the fare.

As she led me into the house she asked the expected question. "What the fuck happened? I thought you went out with Daddy Bigbucks tonight?"

When I tried to explain, I broke down and cried like a helpless infant sitting in an acidic shit-filled diaper. I thought I was so tough and thick-skinned. What a joke. I was nothing more than a damaged little girl who grew up way too

fast, hid behind a shuck of moxie, and infused her still-developing body with anesthetics so she wouldn't have to feel.

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*"Felis Silvestris Summa Cum Opprobrium" is an excerpt from a larger work in progress.*



# DEATH WISH CHAMELEON V

By Cricket Corleone

Photos © Richard A. Meade



Sirens come through the bedroom window of Dustin's bedroom room. It is still dark outside and her head is struggling to break free from the drinking binge she went on the night before. She had gotten so drunk, that her plans to get laid were deterred by the fact that she couldn't even stand up straight enough to flirt with anyone. So that plan got ruined.

As soon as the sounds of the city outside her wooden cage settle, she sets her head back down on the bed trying not to recap too much of her drunken excursion. Instead she reaches for a half burnt cigarette in a nearby ashtray, and lights it up.

But as soon as she gets that first puff in her lungs, she is interrupted by a knock at her apartment door. Dustin looks at the clock on the bedside table, it is way too late for anyone to be coming around. But, that thought alone, which would normal warn a person not to answer, compelled her to answer anyway. Because after all, if you are at war with the world, you are at war with yourself, and all personal safety bets are off, that is when the madness kicks in. The denial of what is right there in your gut gets the better of you.

Upon unlocking the dead bolt, Dustin opens the door to see Greta freezing outside, with a look in her eyes that says she had been crying, a lot, judging from the puffiness. Greta looks to the floor as if not sure whether she is invited, but desperate for a place to go. Greta holds herself tight and looks to the ground, "I miss him Dustin... I really do... I wanted to go to him tonight. And I am trying so hard to stop myself. I didn't know..." Greta can't seem to get the words out before she chokes on some tears, "look, I know you are mad at me, but..."

Dustin rolls her eyes, "Well come in for Christ sake. It fucking freezing and my buzz has worn off. The last thing I need is a fucking Kodak moment. I need a shot."

Dustin raises her eyebrows and opens the door for Greta.

Greta smiles a little and comes in sniffling, whether from the cold or from the pain, or both.

Greta sits on the couch and decides to smoke a cigarette with Dustin.

They have done a few shots together and are enjoying the buzz, although both are aware of an underlying sadness in the room.

Dustin sits back in an arm chair letting her legs fall lazily to the sides of a simple tattered white slip-dress. Greta, is sitting with a towel draped around her neck and her wet hair is in a mess, suggesting that the rain outside from earlier had certainly persisted. A few candles light the coffee table before them.

Greta watches for a moment as the light flickers beautifully, something that is warm and comforting, instantly disturbed by more yearning and sadness. She looks down at the ashtray and tries not to cry more.

Dustin sees this and scoffs, "Oh for fuck's sake. Out with it all ready. Time is a wasting." Dustin swallows another shot.

Greta laughs a little, "Jeez, you are about as sympathetic as... fucking Stalin or something. Thanks."

Dustin looks at Greta confused, "Fucking Stalin?"

Greta leans back, "I didn't mean FUCKING him..."

Dustin scoffs again, "Neither did I? I was just shocked that you said "fucking." You seem so innocent and pure. I wasn't sure if you were going to drag me into some girly fucking sleepover where we did braids on one another and talked about Martha Stewart. Fuck, that's a relief."

They both laugh.

Greta returns the cynicism, "Oh come on! I am not THAT bad. Am I?"

Dustin shrugs a little. Silence falls again,

"Give me another shot woman," Greta demands.

"Well, yes MA'AM." Dustin says with a slight grin as she pours another shot for Greta.

Greta downs the shot in one gulp.

"Hey, slow down there lady. That's some good shit."

Greta looks at the bottle of tequila on the coffee table and cocks her head to the side looking at Greta, "It's Jose Cuervo?"

They laugh.

"I know, I heard that line in a movie once and just wanted a chance to use it. I figure, you wouldn't know the difference between the good shit and the bad shit anyway, so I thought I could get away with it."

They laugh again.

"I KNOW the good shit. In fact, there is a really awesome tequila

bar you should go to with me one of these nights. Then you can taste the REAL shit for once. But hell, this shit works too."

Dustin smiles, "You're on a roll tonight with the "swears." You must be at the end of your rope. Just don't get all drunk and suicidal on me."

Greta scoffs, "You're one to talk."

Dustin agrees with sarcastic ginger.

Greta sighs, "I fight this feeling every damn night. I can't seem to shake it. This stupid love for him won't let me go. As time goes on, it just gets worse and doesn't seem to be getting any better. They say time can mend a broken heart... but in this case... I don't think I have ever loved someone so much? It's totally fucked up. I am totally FUCKED UP."

Dustin laughs a little, "No, you are normal. And I hate to say it, but your situation is normal. You are not fucked up if..." Dustin sighs and continues, "there are a million and one songs to go with the broken hearted... the unrequited... the girl or guy who gets burnt by the flames of a forbidden romance... or whatever the fuck kind of poetry we tell ourselves to milk the pain for all it's worth. Therefore, if it seems to be a common theme in expression, then it has to be a common theme in life. Art imitates life, they say."

Greta leans forward and starts to play with the light of the candle. "Have you?" She says focusing on the flame.



"Have I what? Been burnt?" Dustin says as she starts to itch for the next shot. "Yeah... who hasn't? But, it's stupid to even let it get to you when it makes absolutely no difference what happens to your heart... or YOU for that matter. The sooner you realize that, the better off you are. No one cares about anyone else, everyone is out for themselves. And fuck everyone else if they get in your way. That is just the way the world works."

Greta looks at Dustin and then leans back to call her bluff, "Bullshit. You don't believe that for one minute. I think you just tell yourself that to make others think you don't care. But you wouldn't torture yourself unless you DID care."

Dustin looks at the ceiling, "Or maybe you mistake masochism for empathy?" There is a silence. "Fuck

it, finish off that bottle. I am gonna get another one from the kitchen."

Dustin goes to the cupboards in the kitchen and searches for another bottle of booze. She finds a cheap bottle of wine and opens it up. "Well, no more tequila, we are onto wine now... so, it's gonna be one of THOSE nights." She pulls out two glasses, "Like every night." She says to herself.

Dustin goes back into the living and joins Greta. "I just don't want to love the fucker anymore. I keep telling myself that if he cared at ALL about me, he wouldn't hurt me so much. Then I think, if he didn't care about me, why would he even bother to TRY and get to me? Then again, why does he ignore me until I am right in front of him? It's just endless circles! GOD! Fuck... I CAN'T BELIEVE we broke into his house. Talk about taking the low road."

Dustin sits back down, "Oh, and he is just so god damned perfect? I think you give that asshole way too much credit. Don't you think that if he loved you he would respect you a little bit more? I mean, I know it's easy to get clouded when you are all fucked up in love... but look at it this way... I KNOW what it's like to be fucked with by a man. Hell, I have let men fuck with me all my life so I am pretty much a professional at it. I KNOW what it looks like, feels like, and IS like... so, you can try and convince me otherwise that this bastard might have love for you, but who wants that kind of love anyway? I mean, in the end, what do you... or DID

you get from any of it? Except less hope then when you went into it and this nagging feeling you have been humiliated and bruised for life?"

Greta shakes her head as if Dustin is just saying the horrible things that have been plaguing her own brain since her heart was broken by the married man she fell for. "I know all that, I do... but, it is always easier to look at it clearly from the outside. We don't have to BE each other when we go through this. You can only sympathize or give out tough love... or you can shut the fuck up with all that and remember how hard it was to be there in the first place."

And with those words the room goes silent a moment, "Tis true my friend..." Dustin agrees for once as she is nodding out.

Greta is surprised for a moment that Dustin used the "friend" word so loosely, but remembering the amount of booze they have consumed and feeling the room spinning and the weight crashing in from her own drunkenness, she lets this one go.

"I know what it's like to be fucked with, Greta. Believe me."

Greta too lays her head back as Dustin's drunken words fade into passing out. And soon, both of them are passed out. And the flames on the living room table disappear into the dawning of a new day.



While passed out, both Greta and Dustin have vivid and horrible dreams. Not nightmares so much as memories twisted from the heavy conversation from the night before. Greta dreams about being rejected in horrible ways by the man she is in love with. The same dreams she has had since he first broke her heart. Dustin dreams about friends who have died, lovers who have come and gone, and serial killers taking her for a ride through back alleys and graveyards. Though every time the killers start to come at her, stabbing or strangling her, they seem to get further and further away. And what should feel like hammers against her skull, only feel like feathers beating down softly upon her. The frustration awakens Dustin in which she barely remembers shouting, "FUCK!" In her frustration.

Greta wakes up as well. "What was that?" Greta asks as she holds her head.

Dustin gets up, "It's called a hangover." She goes for anything in the kitchen that will ease it.

"No... I thought I heard a loud noise?" Greta notices that Dustin is opening another bottle of wine. "You can't be seriously thinking of drinking right now?"

Dustin playfully snaps, "Oh yes I can! And you are too. Just have one glass, see if that doesn't take away some of the "noise."

The two of them sit back in the living room once again while they sip their wine. But everything seems much more uncomfortable in the daylight while the two of them attempt to achieve a buzz.

Soon after, drunk again, staring down at the traffic on the city street from Dustin's apartment window, the two of them contemplate a nap while they make fun of passing people.

"Oh hey, I know that guy!" Greta says as she points to a shaved headed man walking down the street wearing a flight jacket and black boots with white laces.

"Should we invite him up?" Dustin says devilishly.

"NO! I HATE THAT GUY. He's a local skinhead that once beat the shit out of one of my friends for "looking" Jewish... or whatever the fuck his excuse was. That guy is SCUM."

Dustin waves around an empty bottle of wine from the window, "Well, in that case..." She chucks the bottle down at the skinhead.

Greta ducks into the apartment pulling Dustin down with her. "Are you nuts?" Greta says with a glimmer of excitement in her eyes.

"You do realize who you are speaking to, right? Of course I'm nuts." Dustin says as she breaks into uncontrollable laughter.

Greta tries not to laugh as well, "Look, as much as I would have loved to have seen that bottle hit the fucker, that guy is crazier than even YOU are. He will KILL us. I mean that... I was told he HAS killed."

Dustin pretends to be shocked and impressed, "Ooooh... sounds like my kinda man." She keeps laughing hysterically until Greta can't control her own laughter as well. "Is he gone?"

The two of them slowly peek up through the window until they barely make out the asshole skin head starring confused at the street around him and swearing loudly. The girls fall over and roll with laughter.

"Shhhh... he'll hear us!" Greta says while still laughing."

Dustin provokes more, "Oh, is he like Santa? Does he know when we are sleeping and when we are awake?"

Greta is trying to cover Dustin's mouth now so that she can't make her laugh anymore.

After the two of them compose themselves, they sneak back up to the window. The skin head is now walking off into the distance.

"Man, that guy is such an asshole. I would love to see him get his someday." Greta says shaking her head and watching him walk off.

"Well, maybe he will? You never know." Dustin lights a cigarette and stares down at the sidewalk below them. "Hmmm... do you think if I jumped right now... I'd land on my feet? Or my head? Let's find out!" Dustin attempts to get out of the window with no ledge below her, Greta stops her and pulls her back. "Oh come on, where is your sense of adventure?" Dustin says laughing.

"Interrupted by a sense of SANITY, Dustin. That wasn't funny."

Dustin pats Greta's head drunkenly, "There there little bird, we all have to go sometime. Hopefully some of us sooner than others."

Greta watches Dustin struggle with control over her thoughts. "What is your obsession with death? You talk like you want to die or something?" Greta waits for a response but never gets one.

The two of them drop the subject.

"I'm starving, you?" Dustin asks to break the silence.

Greta holds her belly, "Totally."

And as if to read the other ones thoughts, they enthusiastically

jump up and scramble for the kitchen in a race.

While cooking away, Dustin lets another secret slip, "You know, Greta? You are the first person I have liked in a long time."

Greta, trying not to scare Dustin's sensitivity away and sarcastically responds, "And I am thinking I am the first person that has liked YOU in a long time."

The two laugh.

"Oh, BURN! You're probably right though." A moment of sobriety creeps over Dustin who stares at the cupboard walls before herself as she chops some vegetables. The chopping stops and Dustin looks uneasy, "But... I wouldn't get too attached to me." Dustin leaves the room.

Greta does not notice at first. When she turns to look at the cutting board, she sees she is alone now. "Hey, where did ya go, lady?"

Dustin calls from the restroom, "I need a shower! Help yourself to whatever!"

In the restroom, Dustin starts the shower water and waits for it to heat up. She sits on the floor for a moment and holds herself. Then she stands up with determination. As she stares at her reflection in the mirror, dead-pan, she shouts out again, "I... I uhhh.. need you to take off soon!"

From the kitchen Greta listens in. She can sense something is wrong. "Ummm... okay?"

Dustin continues, "I have some shit I need to do today! I forgot!"

Greta takes over the chopping block, "That's... fine! At least have some breakfast first?"

Back in the restroom Dustin is still looking at her reflection, "I'm not hungry anymore." She says to herself. "I'm tired."



And once again the togetherness of these two young women has disappeared over the shadow of Dustin's death wish, and Greta's sudden reoccurring sense of desperately wanting to run to her married man.

Greta reaches into her coat pocket, which is still slightly wet from the night before, and pulls out a cell phone. She peeks to make sure Dustin is still in the restroom and then quickly scrolls through her phone numbers. Greta speed dials

her loves number. When he answers, she has an impulse to hang up.

The man's voice on the other end keeps saying "Hello?"

Through the silence that passes she hears him say her name in question. "Yeah... it's me... sorry... I... just... I need to see you."

The man is silent for a moment, "I need to see you too. I can't break away right now, dealing with a robbery situation here at home... or... something? But, I am stressed. I could use a break. Can you meet me at our hotel... maybe later tonight? Say, eleven?"

Greta holds her head wanting to apologize for what he obviously doesn't realize is her fault, being the break in. But she can't bring herself to tell him. "Yeah... I'll be there." Greta says quietly.

Once the two are back in the kitchen together, they are distant. One keeping their secrets from the other.

"So, what are you doing later?" Greta asks.

"Oh... I... have to meet with someone... it's work related. Boring really. And you?" Dustin says as she turns her eye contact away from Greta for fear of the lie giving itself away.

Greta does the same as she responds avoidably, "Oh... nothing

much... maybe work on some photos or something? Boring."

The two are so consumed in their own lies that they avoid the pink elephant in the room, being the uneasy feeling they are both giving off.

"Well... let's eat!" Dustin says as she pulls some plates out from the cupboard. "I suddenly feel... hungry again." Dustin says with a look in her eyes telling herself, "Maybe tonight... maybe tonight..."

And death is in the air once again.







# FUCK TEA. FUCK TOAST.

By Salena Godden

fuck being safe, fuck playing safe. in fact fuck playing. fuck being careful. fuck giving a fuck. fuck killing it and fuck damping it down. fuck blocking it and fuck ticking the boxes. fuck the rehearsals and fuck the show. fuck fuck fuck. fuck doing what's best and fuck being a good girl. fuck being a good boy. fuck routine. fuck the system. fuck money and fuck the banks. fuck the power and fuck the mind fuck. fuck control and fuck being controlled and fuck being controlling. fuck the dream and fuck the sleep. fuck food. fuck tea. fuck toast. fuck it. fuck being reasonable and fuck being sensible. fuck. fuck holding back and fuck fighting with one arm behind your fucking back. fuck. fuck holding it in and fuck sucking it up and fuck holding it back. fuck holding on to anything. fuck holding your breath. fuck wondering when it's going to begin and fuck wondering if it's over yet. fuck. fuck hoping it's going to start and fuck hoping it will end. fuck. fuck home and fuck there is no such place as home. fuck playing safe. fuck playing at all. fuck being serious about anything and fuck not being serious enough. fuck faking. fuck taking. fuck making all that fucking carry on about some fucking shit you don't even give enough of a fuck about to even give a minute of your fucking time to fucking remember to give a fuck, so why are you fucking cracking on about

fuck all now? fuck fucking fuck...he said.

he said, of course it fucking hurts that's why it's called fucking sun burn, clues in the fucking name for it right there...and when it hurts you just think, oh it hurts, and then you think so what if it hurts, get on with it, cos what else are you going to fucking do? waste of time that, saying oh it hurts, deal with it, that's why it's called fucking sun burn, cos its burnt for fucks sake. look at my sunburn, he said... does it hurt? I asked...

of course it hurts, it just pain and being alive has got pain in it. that's life. life is hard and full of things that hurt. wear a fucking crash hat. deal with it. fucking cunts. not you, you are not a cunt...of course. are you laughing? why are you laughing? is it because I'm funny? do you think I am funny? I like your laugh it makes me laugh. can I ask you something? are you wearing contact lenses? am I wearing contact lenses? no, why did you ask if I am? because I asked if you were? they are blue. real blue. your's are kind of blue as well. look see no lenses, just eyeball, poke it if you like, if you don't believe me, poke my fucking eye, it don't hurt. gimme your finger and touch my eyeball, see no contact lens there, just me fucking eyeball.

I am on the tube and the drunk boy on the train is pretty. his eyebrows are pale gold and his lips are loose. the back of his tan neck begs kissing and nibbling. he is convinced he is coming home with me. how come? let's go back one move, ten minutes ago, he got into the train carriage with me. go back another move, twenty minutes ago we talked at the ticket machine. go back further, he was outside the pub and he followed me into the tube station. rushing to catch the last tube to north london. hang on, now go back one more scene about forty five minutes ago, we were in the same pub. his friend spilt my drink. then insisted on buying me another. then they made us do a shot of something. I laughed and said that was how they got to talk to hot girls, spill their drinks on them and make them talk to them. are you hot girls then? he winked arrogantly. well I haven't heard any complaints lately I volleyed back. well you seem to be talking to us anyway. yes I do now don't I.

closing time. as I was leaving, he, that one, the one with the soft cheeks, flushed with alcohol, the one there, with that one freckle between the bristle and his top lip. imagine that soft cheek and that freckle against your inner thigh...but yes, he leaned over and said lady, take me home with you and I paused and then nodded and yesnoyesnomaybenoyesnoyno no no....he must have only heard the nodding part.

next thing I know...he's adorable.

I mean, the next thing I know, he is following me down the escalators and every few steps he drops his money, pound coins roll across the polished tube station floor. I bend down and pick them up and give them to him and each time after time, he says thank you. thank you. thank you. I laugh and he laughs too. then he puts them back into his trouser pockets full of holes, again and again.

he says, fucking holes. should sew them holes up. you are right, he repeats himself, I fucking should sew them up. do you know I have seven pairs of trousers and do you know all of them have no pockets that work, all got holes, he says.

oh let me sew your trouser pockets, make you pies, soap your back into a lather and gently pet your sleeping head. I think and I smile at him. I like him, I like people with broken teeth, ripped pockets and worn down heels. I love him, I love you and your damaged goods. you are a chink in the china and a tarnished tea spoon. I know that you and me, we could hold onto the torn sails together of a sinking ship and weather a storm and I know we'd find dry land. we could smash up the furniture and throw the splinters on a fire to keep warm. we could blag it, rinse them all and get away with murder. you'd repair some of my fractures. but still match my broken parts. but you could never damage me any more than I already am or my ill repaired patchwork head would already allow. we'd be good as new. we'd be held together with

safety pins and the bitterness of disparage and sour experience would force us to work together, to get along and get on with it. We'd peel the eyes off potatoes and make them chips all good again, eat them on the grand sofa of this journey. and we may as well get comfortable since we are here, we chose the path, we'll find our way eventually, the long way around. Darling, I keep picking up stray cats and underdogs, I never learn, I have no umbrella and in London it is raining cats and dogs.

he thinks I will take him home with me. In fact he is sure of it. I am thinking I might take him home too. and for a few stops, I am convinced of it as clapham bleeds into waterloo and chunders into charing cross. we are in central london now. the halfway point, no turning back or is there? he is beside me, engaged and gnegrossed in chatting to me about anything and everything. is it too late to turn back?

his eyes are a blue fire, lively as life itself, self assured and his nature is true to form, a drunk and plucky young man. now there's a truth. I wonder what I will do with him at my house anyway. I picture him in my kitchen and then I imagine him in my bed. then even worse than that, I begin to wonder how old he might be. and once I start thinking that it's a downward spiral. I realise now that he must be much, much younger than me. and worst of all for once it bothers me. that he is so young and wasted. and I don't know his name. I fast forward to

tomorrow morning. daylight ripping open the darkness, morningness screaming onto twisted sheets. sweat and spunk. spit and exchange. tea and toast. headaches and mess. deadlines and socks. conscience and guilt. condoms and awkwardness. emails and phones ringing. lips and eyes.

but what eyes he has, what eyes he has indeed, so blue. they are so blue. it always begins with the eyes and ends, ends with the eyes too remember. lashes fluttering, battering down the doors and walls of my give a fuck. fuck. fuck. tottenham court road. where do you live? I ask him, where do you live? again I ask him where do you live? that was tottenham court road. he mumbles, siddenham. where? siddenham. where is siddenham? he laughs. I ask him again. eventually he replies south east london. then you are on the wrong train. but I am coming home with you. no. you cannot come home with me. yes I can. no you can't. I can. no. I thought I was coming home with you. oh go on. no. oh. oh. oh ok am I not coming home with you then? no. if you get off here you can catch the last train back south just cross the platform and...

gone. the eyes. goodbye blue eyes. goodbye freckle. gone away now. just me and my own reflection and my fucking head going home alone. fuck being sensible. fuck being careful. fuck deadlines. fuck giving a fuck. fuck getting an early night and fucking fuck fuck fuck....fuck tea. fuck toast.



## MY SECRET MUSEUM

By GUTTERSAINT

I'm not really sure what caused me to start collecting photographs. I think it must have been a fascination for the strange, the beauty of the unfamiliar, and an interest in the history of photography. The attraction to the odd images that began to develop as I first struggled to find my way as a photographer and as an artist. Combing street fairs, antique stores, and junk shops of American and European, it would always be the photographs that would be brought home as souvenirs. It was the most unusual images that spoke strongest to me, that asked to be investigated and pondered over. Where others were taught not to gawk and look, I hungrily feasted and wanted more. Drawn

towards picture postcards, CV's (carte de visite), tin-types, cabinet cards, and other actual photos, I discovered the most wonderful old and antique prints that were added to my collection. It became a sort of secret museum, a private menagerie of forgotten images that only I possessed, as if I could breathe new life into these people far gone into oblivion.

I'd spend hours sifting through hundreds if not thousands of photos at flea markets, often the remnants of estates whose previous owners had died. I felt as if my hands were prying into the secret lives of families now forgotten, or that I had gained access to the visual diaries of a stranger's

private life. There were secrets to be learned if you simply looked long enough. Was I intruding?



I would feel a tinge of sadness when gazing at these people, knowing they had died years before I was born. What were their lives like? Who were they, and what were their personal histories? I longed to know the unknowable, wanted to know their most intimate details. My pupils became the mirror in which the dead reflect. Their images frozen, stiff postures from having to sit still so long for a daguerreotype, spoke to me in whispers. Their heirs may have discarded them into the dustbin of time, but for me, they were reborn. They ask for recognition, ask to be remembered. I would sometimes make up stories about them, quite elaborate and fantastic, like the two sisters who poisoned an entire town. Or the sad face of a young man who was

the only person not smiling at a 19<sup>th</sup>-century party... why was he so sad? What was the reason for him not enjoying himself? The images became a catalyst for my creative imagination.

Sometimes I'd buy a picture simply because it was a portrait of a man I was sexually attracted to, and I could sexually fantasize what he was like. Like the picture of a British sailor taken in the 1930s, sitting in a patio garden in Alexandria, Egypt, underneath a Katherine Hepburn movie poster. He reveals a classic profile. A man whose beauty could still, after eighty or ninety years, enrapture and titillate me. Was I cruising the dead and forgotten? Perhaps I am guilty of creating a new fetish, in the sexual attracting of the images of beautiful, dead males.



Indeed, it is the power of the image that invokes romance, sexual lust, and fascination that makes the

photograph such a spellbinding phenomena. As in pornography, the image can incite, stir, excite and sometimes seem to have a strange power over the viewer. *The Magic Gaze*. As an infusion of fantasy-adrenalin, it works wonders. Why shouldn't one revel in it?

As I hunted for images, I began to notice that I was collecting thematically, at first unconsciously and then more determined. I would categorize my prized images into families, men, women, male couples, children, houses, bizarre (mostly freaks and oddities), or entertainers. Then came the snake charmers. And let us not forget the burlesque strippers. Or the Mexican entertainer.



As I hunted for images, I began to find pictures of male couples, many locked in embrace or holding hands, a knee pressed close to a friend's leg, perhaps another man resting his head in the lap of another. Were these pictures proof of male love when homosexuality was not even really defined as a category? I'd read of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century male homosexuals creating hidden signals for each other, such as flashy neckties, in order to be



recognized by others of their kind. And in the vicinity of San Francisco, which had always been a sort of free zone for earlier gay men and women, I began to find what surely were pictorial examples of men in love with men. I thought that I was the only person collecting such images until the book *"Dear Friends"* by David Deitcher showed me that others were also interested in the history of male couples in photography. His collection far surpassed my own, and his insightful commentary is worth reading if one is interested in the history of male love.

Midgets and dwarfs were also featured in images I collected, first out of simple curiosity, but then perhaps in a desire to assemble my own private Lilliput. Midget revues in picture postcards, usually sold by the performers for extra

income as souvenirs, seemed to leap out at me in flea markets. I would find CV's or cabinet cards of early performers, including the legendary General Tom Thumb, perhaps history's most celebrated small person who traveled the world with impresario P.T. Barnum. The photos I purchased were not bought to gawk and laugh at. I never saw my small friends as something to deride or mock. Instead, I became aware that I identified with them. Not by their size, but I think it was more by their ability to turn a disadvantage into an advantage, to shine rather than to fade.



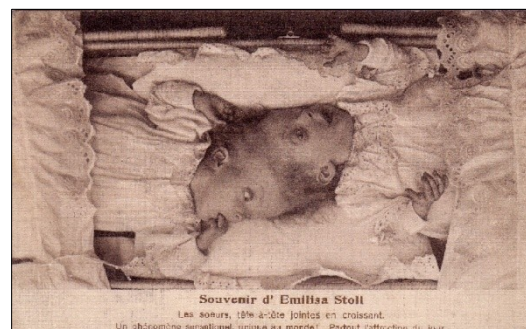
Their outsider status reflected my own, and I saw them as kindred spirits - however imagined their stance on life was in my mind. There was a secret world, one in which I longed to be a part of, to be accepted in. As I have always felt most comfortable in the company of those deemed freakish or unacceptable by common standards of society, my dwarfs and midgets became my very good friends.

I must agree with Diane Arbus, who stated that, "Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born

*with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats."*



Gradually the images of freak shows or human oddities also became part of my collection, not only to oogle at but also out of sheer respect for them. They were *my* aristocrats. Frances O'Connor, who acted in Todd Browning's *Freaks*, is toasting us with her feet (her autograph is on the reverse of the picture). An unfortunate man reveals his monstrous testicles, swollen beyond belief due to the parasitic sickness elephantiasis.





Siamese twin babies, connected at the top of the head, sold as a souvenir picture postcard - did their parents hawk their image? A picture of a dead baby (funeral pictures were common in photography's adolescent years) or a jungle native holding a severed Japanese WWII soldier's head... all of these were images that horrified the gazer, repelled and then strangely commanded you to look again. And again and again. It is the combination of shock and curiosity that give such images their riveting hold over the viewer.



My collection grew by the year. As I took photographs myself, it was in the collecting of images that changed me from a struggling amateur with a camera, to a professional photographer dedicated to learning the craft and art form. I began to see the different kinds of quality and methods of printing, and became influenced by them. I wanted to take photographs and capture images as evocative and startling as the ones I collected. It was a long process, but I have realized that my "friends" have educated and guided me as well as developed me into the art

photographer that I am, and am still becoming. They have taught me to look beyond the surface, to examine the hidden meaning, and even to use my creative imagination in the most pleasurable way.

In my "secret museum", I'm gathering the aesthetical gunpowder on which to further my own artistic sensibilities. The discarded faces and figures of the past are still very much alive for me, and hopefully I will somehow find the method to renew the memories of their lives, perhaps in using them in future works of art. I think just showing them to other people brings life back to them again. And certainly they infuse me with an energy and a sense of the celebratory. I hope you feel the same.



# THE COSTA RICA EIGHT MILE

By Gene Gregorits, Pecker on a Downward Spiral

Image © Chris Brandrick

*Do you understand, gentleman,  
that all the horror is in just this -  
that there is no horror!*

-A. KUPRIN

*Much more affliction than already  
felt  
They can not well impose, nor I  
sustain.*

-J. MILTON

*In the wrong lane  
Trying to turn against the flow  
I'm the ocean  
I'm the giant undertow*

-N. YOUNG

BALTIMORE: LATE DECEMBER,  
2009

It was a straight up rape, after 2 A.M., on Thames Street, one block from what is perhaps the greatest of all American television landmarks, the Homicide: Life on the Streets building. As we approach, we can hear the Mills Brothers' "Someday (You'll Want Me to Want You)" drifting lazily out of a restaurant's empty kitchen entrance. The fiend has overpowered his victim and is having his beastly way with her in one of those goofy little Scion cars-

not the sedan, but the mini-SUV-thing. It's like a large toaster on wheels. "Only an asshole drives a car like that," my greasemonkey friend Delbert says frequently about many vehicles when we're crossing the blighted plains of suburban Detroit together, and although I am sickened by cars, car prattle, and car worship, I do respect his opinion. In this car, submerged in the wet, Lovecraftian murk which rose off the Chesapeake Bay and rolled rogue-like as if smirking at me across the cobblestone streets of Fell's Point, fiend and prey were working it out naturally, developing certain rhythms at times (at 02:15:37 EST her legs encased him, bent at the knees and gripping desperately his hips, her feet curled tightly against the back of his thighs, her hands contorted into reptilian things, etching deep, angry grooves into her assailant's clammy shoulders as the passenger side armrest caused the victim mild internal bleeding around her lower back), lapsing into barbarism at others (at 02:31:12 EST there could be heard as far away as the Apex Adult Cinema four blocks north the repeated cracks of her skull against the ridiculous car's windows and dashboard). From a few feet away, had there been any witnesses, the

roles assumed within this forced coupling were indiscernible, as was their cries, at once more obvious and less ominous than the parked car's strained movements. Had this assault transpired on a weekend, the streets flooded with frat boys and frat girls obsessed with Irish whiskey and group sex, it is doubtful that much fuss would have been made of it, given the prehistoric nature of that culture's mating rituals. But on this calm weekend night, while just a few days before Christmas, belligerent mob activity was nil. The likelihood of such a disturbance as was in progress within that eyesore of an auto alarming the sensibilities of a passerby would seem to be much greater. It seems that most people cling with a fiery passion – and, of course, zero substance- to notions of altruism, of brotherly love, sacrifice, and other such generic Christian claptrap. But the surreal cognitive shock of inner city violence will set upon the civilized human psyche with the velocity of Category 3 hurricane winds, and sadly, when perilously close to a stranger in crisis, flight is a witness's dominant instinctive reaction. Perhaps, when at a safe distance, the witness will report the incident to local authorities, but the fiend works quickly, the procedural quality and integrity of his transgressions is sacrosanct to him, and unless his mind is torn completely asunder by chemicals or spirits, the fiend will be long gone before any red flashing lights cut through the nightmare's dank old cloth and ectomorphic tendrils,

sending the scene crashing back to Earth, from Hell.

I know this to be true, and consider it often, because I am a fiend.

One / your precious children

I'd met with a 24 year old heathen named Izabel Slutzky at Lexington Market earlier in the day. There was a heavy, dank air of foreboding redolent of diesel exhaust, which approached the supernatural in its baleful phosphorescence and which loomed over the already angrier-than-usual Baltimore stink-haze, the cumulative effect being a mournful soak in vaporized bilge water, and cursed with a wretched and eternal hurt, the air thick with ash, so that one was reminded of exactly how far from God one truly was, particularly on this wintry and sullen Baltimore dusk when little Negro children cried but no birds did sing...(et cetera).

Actually, I honestly don't believe there was anything exceptional about the weather at all, but yeah, sure, it was cold I guess, because it was fucking December. And it stank and was damp, sure, because it was fucking Baltimore. But I'm thinking of the pomposity of confused slobs like Izabela, and their monstrous hunger for terrible writing. Jesus wept.

Izabela studied writing for several years at a prestigious college, because no one had taken the time - or, more likely, no one ever had the good sense to explain to her- that

pure writing can not be taught. She rejected my anti-establishment convictions as the vulgar bigotry of a roughneck menace, a severely troubled autodidact, and similarly failed to see the fundamental wrongness of the gimmick-dependant, Nice Guy Badge-flaunting, publicity-crazed Muppet called Dave Eggers, who she dutifully took on as her own personal lord and savior, along with countless other de-fanged, de-clawed, and de-balled spokesmen for middle class mediocritons and smug little art school cunts. I suppose that chapped my ass a little. (Okay, it chapped my ass a LOT. I become something other than sweet-natured when my back is to the wall and I'm forced into the futile task of trying to explain myself to a silly, simple-minded child with whom I have entangled myself for appallingly shallow and blatantly venal reasons.) The problem wasn't only Isabel's utterly cosmetic view of and offensively bourgeois approach to the art of writing, but also the deep dissatisfaction I so flagrantly had with my own work. I have to admit, my most recent publications were not going to ensnare the attention nor provoke the affection of any respectable literary agent. First, there was an altogether snide arts and culture book about New York performance artists who commit suicide onstage while engaged in relations (of a sexual nature, obviously) with children, and various farm animals. This book shamed me most deeply, and cost me the love of my parents, which as you'd probably guess,

I've always cherished most, above all else. I was the first to announce its obscenity to anyone who'd listen. I also tried to apologize to anyone who cared. But few would listen, and fewer still cared. No matter the remorse I felt, the stigma was indelible and it was eternal: "death for the rotten scum Gregorits and his anti-human, anti-art hatespeak...to hell with him! Don't even mention his name around here!" Second was a monthly sex diary I wrote for an obscure B-movie journal which had cemented my reputation as a sex pervert and all-round hapless goon, at least in the Maryland/D.C. area where I was currently floundering through a series of farcical trysts exclusively, as it happened, with wealthy young girls enrolled at the legendary Maryland Institute of Cartoon Animals (MICA). These mentally imbalanced, amphetamine-driven sprites demanded of their sex partners prodigious intake of their pharmaceutical speed, which had a profoundly sexual effect on me, debilitating me at times, and best characterized by a crazed obsession with oral copulation, golden showers, and chain smoking. These girls simultaneously and seemingly independent of one another had taken to referring to me as "dirty Gene". It's true that I was not well, in my writing, in my body, or in my life. It all began in April with the savage murder of my cat, Hank, the world's gentlest little soul, by the pit bulls my house on Ash Street was completely surrounded by, and who had

terrorized all occupants of that house (including a young pug dog, a death metal guitarist, a MICA girl addicted to cocaine, or more specifically, cocaine sex, and a couple of impassioned environmentalists who were also fearsome sociopaths, the kind that make your poor beaten-down Gregorits look like Mary Poppins) for over one year. I was pleading on my knees one evening before my infernal teenage daughter-fixation, the girl called Sarah Tilapia. This Lolita-kick of mine had gotten way out of hand: I'd been seeing the globetrotting twenty-something frat-girl since February, and the night of Hank's scourging by redneck terror-dogs, I was in tears, beseeching her to remain with me, making the usual promises, clinging to her-or, rather, the idea of us, clinging to this hopeless dream as a drowning man would to a piece of disintegrating driftwood. The very minute she had given in to my pitiful wailing, there was a commotion outside, and I broke from her embrace to charge over a low wire fence head-on into a gore-smeared pit bull, tearing open most of my fingertips on its teeth in a hopeless attempt to free Hank. His small face was cracked and broken like a beer pretzel. I understood within seconds, in a flash of concentrated lucidity that my life wasn't worth jack shit anymore, not in Baltimore, or Berlin, or Tokyo, or anywhere, not without Hank...my dearest friend. A 15 year relationship, all that mattered, raped and ruined. I understood within seconds that eventually, if I were ever to lessen

my grief, the owners of the dogs would have to die violently, at my hands. And then, I slipped into a state of shock.

His death was slow and unimaginably painful.

I unraveled quickly and violently.

I was surrounded by degenerate drinkers, slobs, and vampires; lost between the crashing waves in my own sea of equal opportunity abuse and neglect.

It was before and during that grievously ghoulish and death-ridden period that I came to love Sarah, the most libidinous girl I've known. She had awoken a few good things in me, sparked to life a bit of my old self with her childish invocations and small gestures, who had smothered me, my soul not to keep, with a tender, vulnerable, and trusting gaze such as I had never felt, and the most rapturous of all cunt, who adored me and dreaded me, and it was too good in a sense, because the undeniable transience of our affections was always the white elephant in the room, never more omnipresent than during our sad, prolonged bouts of lovemaking, which continued to escalate in frequency and in mutual psychotic determination all the way up to the last one, like some demonic white-trash re-tread of Last Tango in Paris, and the all-consuming fear I had of the end could only hasten it, what was an unnatural, sad, and probably risible affair in the first place; and so it was aborted after

I'd become so fatally, unspeakably cuntstruck that I couldn't tie my shoes or count backwards from ten without giving up, my every thought collapsing in a weary, deconstructed heap only moments after arrival. I groveled, wept, spent weeks crashed out in strange apartments, going through all the slapstick motions of deadly withdrawal. I blubbered and blustered in shifts. That god damned devil Lolita...7,10, a dozen fucks a day! I couldn't get enough of her little body, and all that euphoric, unnaturally good fucking had built up in me like poison. I was a raving jackass, sleeping in creekbeds, moaning like an old ghost in between the blaring of car horns up and down Falls Road. I chain-smoked until my chest rattled and my gums bled. I made it so that in the end, it was easy for her to choose younger, untroubled men, and a new life in New York City, over anything even remotely close to my flaming little death pageant in a dank Charles Village rowhome.

I set immediately to murdering myself, first via starvation, because I had no money for a pistol, and knew no one who owned guns. I could not bear the thought of failing yet another attempt with a blade, so the too-slow starvation method was followed by an IV overdose of cocaine, which caused a stroke that did nothing more than leave me paralyzed for a few days, and then, not without a great resignation, the blade once again. I wilted down from 220 pounds to a skeletal 150, and my most recent

razor wounds resulted in an ER visit and psychiatric evaluation during which I was deemed a threat and placed under protective care. I escaped quickly, over a barbed wire fence early in the morning, and hotfooted it -shoeless on July Baltimore asphalt- back to that haunted place where I resumed my diet of Colt 45, freeloaded marijuana, and one raw egg per day, usually letting the squalid, clammy afternoons (like NYC, Baltimore makes its own kind of fecal gravy in the summertime) pass minute by miserable minute with the black folks next door, a pleasant mixture of Vietnam vets, welfare mothers, security guards, and drug dealers. No one was quite so kind to me during this time, which also included jail, and police beatings, as my neighbors. Pablo was a Special Ops Marine, who'd no doubt killed more men with his bare hands than he could even begin to count. Panda Bear was a lazy bum, whose only interest was in getting high- who could blame him? I can still hear Mama Dolores cackling as I stumbled out onto the porch at 7 A.M. with a warm bottle of malt liquor: "good morning, Mister Gene! Oh honey, HOW you doin', baby? I done SAW you crash into that station wagon on your bike yessaday, honey you oughts to be on television!" and then, her customary farewell, "stop to think, and THINK to STOP, awwright baby? You gone be fine, Gene!" 62 years old, in a cloud of pot smoke, loving me more than my own mother, despite my mental illness and my four illegitimate infant

children scattered throughout Baltimore City proper. Who knows how many years it would be before I could act as a decent role model to any of them? I sold my cherished record and book collections to a shop around the corner, caring no longer for anything but booze, sex, and whatever cheap laughter I could find. There was nothing else for me. I had long since stopped going to work. Instead, I took advantage of a gratis video store membership, renting six films a day, shoplifting cheap steaks from the Giant supermarket, and determinedly working up intricate new ploys with which to cheat the righteously stoned young clerks at the Greenmount Avenue Rite Aid out of wine and liquor. I taunted sleazy homicide detectives in the most cutthroat ghetto barrooms and fucked anything in a skirt. I slept behind fried chicken joints with shell shocked veterans, and in the woods behind Johns Hopkins, rescued stray cats from roadsides and alleys in the early morning whiskey fog of bars that opened at 5 A.M., and enjoyed the disgust of those who watched me disappear, a pound, five pounds, ten pounds at a time. This time, I was going all the way, I had the guts for it, finally, and that brought me a strange peace.

It was also at this time that I discovered the legs which would secure yet another level of damnation, those of the hirsute, gap-toothed Polish dingbat named Izabela Slutsky. This unfortunate surname was pronounced SLOOT-skee- "it's SLOOTSKEE, you

ASSHOLE," she would protest, but very much in vain because it had for several years been known to all and sundry-except me-that Iz was indeed the most well-fondled, fiddled, faddled, fucked, sucked, shtupped, slippery-dicked, diddled, deep-dished, dorked, dog and ponied, double-derriere'd young dilettante in Baltimore's burgeoning Jim Henson and Rocco Sefriedi-influenced "Fraggle Rock Porn" music scene. The frisky little frau fronted what I could only assume to be an unfunny joke band called "Padre Papoose" that I had always despised intensely, while loitering in doorways when they played the local bars only long enough to visually combine the nastily sexy plumpness of her thighs with the rather off-putting, disingenuously precocious Alfred E. Neumann grin she proudly displayed while stumbling drunk and giggling, loathsomely making a fool of herself through each set of their sloppy indie-rock / cartoon folk garbage as I continued juxtaposing the two images in my fevered imagination to remind me how easily obtainable she seemed, as I power-pumped my pulsating pork in some repugnant men's room, leaving me hormonally crashed so as to be able to enjoy my numbing alcohol sessions without the moronic but hideously potent mania of sexualized grief. Yes, it was Izabela whose shows I frequented, because I was becoming in my big fried bean determinedly fixated on those legs of hers, because after only a few months I made the decision that those legs answered something,

and I suspect this came about mainly because each of my post-Lolita MICA girls was rather tiny and so speed-shriveled that opulent thighs like Izabela's brought me warmly towards something a little more recognizably maternal, a buffer, perhaps, against the unwavering threat of Fatal Panic.

Two / talk to my agent

Yes, my treacherous Miss Slutsky was indeed a voracious little sex beast, I knew that right off, but she was also a bogus bohemian nitwit currently \$75,000 in debt, which I learned later was the general price that confused young people pay in order to call themselves writers. Izabela was an immigrant, and former prostitute, having grown up in Poland where she apparently learned to be evil personified, already turning tricks at the age of ten in the crude provincial outskirts of Krakow. Her father was a thug ex-mercenary who had helped fill mass graves with women and children during the Balkan wars, and, she liked to remind me frequently, had just been promoted to a rather high ranking position within the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, VA. Badly worn black and white photos of her old man frolicking at one such death site with Slobodan Milosevich more than quashed any suspicion her claims had aroused. It was to be one of my final nights in Baltimore. I'd made a firm commitment to myself; the time had come to wash off the wrathful damage of my sins and my sloth,

my stinking failure in that that dead city. Sarah, my frat-girl love, was long gone, and my tabby, Hank, after having his poor pulverized little body dragged through the court system and disinterred no less than three times by cat-hating Baltimore police for rabies tests (the pit bulls' owner was suing me), was finally rotting alone but in peace, in a barren Jarrettsville horse pasture, his grave unmarked save for a \$2 plastic rose, a doghouse flower, surely blown into a nearby creek or reservoir by this time. I myself had emerged from a solid 7 months of institutional confusion and gross public scenes, and emerged for just one more, with my only platonic female friend, Kirstie Faust.

I'd been told to remain indoors, as I was by now a marked man, but considerably emboldened by a bottle and a half of my favorite cheap Chilean red (compliments of Rite Aid), we hopped into Kirstie's mangled compact car and drove a mile west to a scummy rock club where I'd had some luck in recent, similar outings. Kirstie was thoroughly disinterested in sex: why bother with such an odious enterprise when the possibility of random psychological manipulation in a crowd of drunkards was perpetually imminent? She was a striking young creature, with huge scheming g eyes, eerily childlike, markedly extraterrestrial in her staggering arrogance and esoteric, delicate mannerisms, and she was always on a Fascism / mind control kick. (She'd taunted me



during our first weeks of contact, with amphetamine and nakedness, but I got over it, when I realized that the 19 year old scamp was in most if not all ways the intellectually sophisticated and morally bankrupt little sister I'd always wanted but never had.) Kirstie had enjoyed great success when assisting me in my quests for young women, guiding or re-centering my awkward advances in bars and clubs. She delighted in my swinishness and prurience, basked ecstatically in my willing descriptiveness of the fruits her deeply corrupt sisterly concern would often bear. I was feeling my long-absent beer paunch begin to return, sucking down one Budweiser after another, against the bar with the other ruinous and irredeemable bastards. Kirstie elbowed me when Izabela began to approach me from behind. "Quicken up, Gene", she said. At that moment, I felt more than ever before like an older brother to Kirstie. (But an older brother who wants to fuck his little sister.)

Be it the moon, the wine, the culmination of so much doom having such an effect that I was just drained, whatever the cause, I was relaxed and confident that night. Any shyness exhibited was false, and Izabela and I chatted for over an hour, mostly about her last lover's footlong penis. She called the young Lothario a "chew toy" (which effectively destroyed her youthfulness, immediately causing me to think of her as not only a dirty whore, but an OLD whore) confiding also that a 12 inch dick is

just the most wonderful thing, because "you feel like you're still being fucked the next day." I nodded politely, hoping that she was drunk, and not really a disgusting pig of a whore. He of the freak-penis was acting manager at the arthouse cinema where, arguably, I was still employed (the nature of this confusion was such that the subject of my employment was consciously avoided by them all...after all, it brought with it a feeling of something arcane, malevolent, coming out of some darkness of evil, and my true status there was and would remain forever shrouded in mystery. No one, not me, not even the theater's owner could remember if I'd been fired, and the entire staff -save for the underage workers, whom I plied with booze and dope- was afraid to approach me in my skeletal condition, or to even look in my direction as I walked through the lobby, muttering curses to myself and openly slurping down pints of Evan Williams or Old Grand Dad...so I came and went freely, collecting no paycheck, but coffee and chocolate bars aplenty, staying abreast of film culture, sometimes sleeping in the back rows of one of the five auditoriums for 3 or more consecutive nights, such as when the best film of 2008, *In Bruges* returned for a weeklong run).

I informed Izabela of my permanent departure from Baltimore in the next week, and apologized that there wasn't time to get to know each other a little better. We were interrupted every 4

seconds by yet another young hipster fellow, his many delicate manufactured affectations invariably dropping from him like as he spoke, but a conversation transpired nonetheless. I don't remember anything she said (anything unrelated to that fellow's genitals, that is), as even then, despite the fact that neither of us could or would admit it, the attraction was, though mutual, a purely physical thing. She too, in her swaggering infantilism, in her "fuck me" skirt and "I'm wet for your prick at this very minute" calfskin boots, saw me as a Dirty Loser, and I, in my compromised / contaminated idealism, in my basement-scented hobo rags, saw her as a ditzy piece of art-school tail worth the abusive array of Cat Power or Bright Eyes or Bat For Lashes or Peter Bjorn & John albums she'd inevitably force me to listen to in her car. That night, I reminded myself what outsized egos rock'n'roll singers, even lousy ones, nurture and cultivate daily, and how this is permissible and even encouraged in female singers particularly...and stripped of romantic pretense, I allowed myself to push for a good old fashioned one night stand, on that night. Perhaps if I'd been quicker to determine how little she understood or appreciated the very things she claimed to love most urgently, chiefly writing, if I'd known what a homicidal, hate-fueled cunt this cougar-in-training truly was....well, you know what's usually said of regrets. Paul Anka's famous song comes to mind, as well as my previous 15 years of

adulthood during which I obviously had not learned nearly enough. (But especially Anka...and he's right, you know. )

There was to be no late night meeting, romantic pretense or otherwise. Instead, I agreed to an afternoon lunch date, less than 72 hours before my final departure from this city, to which I had vowed never to return. The night before this date (I suggested the Lexington Market, for its considerable romantic potential), I staggered home from an all night drinking session at a frat house littered with middle aged eccentrics spouting intellectual yuppie rubbish, where I felt the doom once again, from out of nowhere, and so slashed my wrists with a brand new Wilkinson Arms double edged razor blade I had found in my coat during the 5 block walk home.

Three / all things put together

Our first date commenced then at the Lexington Market, an other-worldly spectacle which does merit a thorough rendering by The Artist, a necessity to which I will unhappily submit, because it seems to be the city's only recommendable spot. Imagine the choking olfactory bluster of stale sweat, raw meat, cooking meat, disinfectant, fish funk, deep-fry grease pits, and fresh baked goods that any large and ancient inner-city market lays singular claim to, and top that off with cheap whiskey, cigarette smoke, human shit, and more fish funk. Imagine a

massive indoor sprawl of vendors, tables, stalls, booths and counters encompassing the cuisine of every significantly industrialized nation on earth, except for, perhaps, France, and imagine that stifling odor met or exceeded by the number and concentration of human bodies (either drunken and grossly overdrawn, or speed-cranked and tireless) creating the vaguely sub-Roman spectacle person by person, each with his or her own special role, in all their various un-magical endeavors, and then you have it: a sensory immersion which maybe itself is somewhat magical, and certainly outdoes any urban market experience I've ever had. Also, you're never more than 50 paces from a large, well-stocked liquor stall, and you're the only white person there. Now you've got it.

I'd had the routine down, having haunted the Lex regularly since making the most catastrophic choice of my life three years ago, when I fled Detroit for Baltimore. The routine developed quickly, first hitting the Korean-operated pizzeria for their daily special of \$2.50 Heinekens (from the bottle, but served in a white plastic cup), savoring the crowd, the dopers and the dose-y whores, the laid back truckers and deranged fisherman, the hawkers and spooners, the choplickers and hammerheads, the strawberry tarts and stingray pimps, the phebes and the phoids, the pickpockets and people watchers, the jokers and croakers, the dinks and the coffee addicts, the aged and the homeless, the

cops and the maintenance men...never a cross word spoken, never an angry voice, drunkards retiring quietly to hide in the walloping stench of the restrooms until recharged, ready to rejoice righteously in the rarified market air. I'd spend \$2 at the Japanese stall, \$3 at the Korean stall, another 4 on authentic Mexican tacos, maybe throw a few to one of the thirteen seafood merchants, keeping the beer flowing, a good, hearty knosh there in the roiling morass of SERIOUS HUMANITY.

I'd been waiting for only a minute or two, standing at one of the tables in the west end's lower level dining platform, when Izabela arrived. The vibe was BAD. I gave her a quick, impersonal hug, unsure - and distrustful- of her intentions, and took her first to the beer stand, then to the adjacent sushi counter. We adjourned to the dirty dining area on the second level, where she questioned my heavily bandaged arm, and asked me if the rumors about me being a heroin addict were true. I told her the arm was a moving accident, and that anyone who told her I was a junkie was obviously trying to scare her away from me because I was a sex fiend, a wolfen rapist, and a putrid alcoholic. This "bad boy" routine works so well it's positively sickening. But little did I know then how supremely revolted her friends were by the lumbering specter of me, and my local infamy as "Crazy Gene", "Scumbag Gene" or, as her winsome art school playmates seemed to insist upon, "old writer dude". Of course, most

of them had carnal knowledge of this girl, and I was pleased as punch, being an old crazy scumbag writer dude, that I could steal the closest thing these soft young boys had to a diva. And to think, I hadn't lifted a finger, hadn't stuck out my little toe that night, but, apathetic and careworn in my old age, had simply leaned there grunting and sucking suds, letting her do all the work and embarrass herself, learning the pros and cons of a freakishly large unit from a morbidly passionate size queen! That's what works best for me, you see: as long as I can keep my big stupid mouth shut...

And she continued: "I saw you one night on 36th Street. You were smoking in front of Townie's Bar, and I said to my friends, 'now that's the guy I want.' I thought you looked like James Dean, standing there."

I was grinning like a real asshole, I couldn't help it. I was thinking, "keep going, honey. Maybe Heath Ledger, as well? What else did you think?"

"But they all said, 'that's Gene, he's a junkie'."

I drained my cup and said, "well, a drug addict isn't necessarily a junkie. I believe they may have their terms confused."

"And they said you were an alcoholic. They said you'll fuck anything in a skirt."

"What makes them so high and mighty? From what I've heard, those M.I.C.A. kids are far worse than I ever was. Or am."

"Uh huh."

"Yeah, a whole new level of scumbaggery. It just doesn't seem as bad, because they're all Muppets. If you talk and act and dress like a Muppet, you can get away with anything."

"Uh huh. That's brilliant."

"Looks like I'm going to need another beer."

A sarcastic art school girl was looking at me over a greasy table like I was a test monkey and I didn't care. I'd already been fed to the pit bulls by one insatiable heathen who gleefully danced on my grave, so nothing looked very romantic to me anymore. I was reduced to the level of a mange-ridden half-Alsatian / half-Mongol creature who hangs out behind the Kroger supermarket caked in his own feces licking his own asshole, riding only once a day to tell jokes for quarters until security guards half-heartedly chase him into hiding again. It was only a matter of time, maybe a month, maybe a year, before I snapped, unable to cope with my condition at such a late stage in life, and developed a plot of mass carnage, painstakingly researched to insure that Total Damage was inflicted upon those (including myself) whom I held responsible.

We shared another beer, and talked, mostly about my nasty reputation. I was becoming fed up with the subject, she was making me quite unhappy, but I'd made the trip already, all the way from Charles Village, so I remained, and serviced her ego without shame when I confessed to what I chose to call "infatuation" (although I didn't specify which part of her specifically I was infatuated with). Izabela confessed to being drunk already, so after trespassing throughout the Lex's many narrow maintenance and management corridors, running at a good clip, pretending to be lost, me pretending to find this juvenile John Hughes bullshit endlessly charming, and then, after insincerely proposing that we collaborate on an article about the place (interviewing the janitors and such), we began to make our exit, eliciting many hostile stares from the crowd. I walked too fast, something I do when my mind is elsewhere, but kept an arm around her waist, navigating our way through the throng of juiceheads and panhandlers, as if afraid for her safety or concerned that she was too precious to remain among the rabble one second more than necessary. Of course, it was those very people who have my deepest respect, and in a sense, we'd been trespassers the minute we entered the market, because Izabela behaved like an exhibitionist, rather than a guest in someone's home. This sort of deliberate straying into a house of "other" is normally something I'll permit myself when alone, because the

natural guilt and self-consciousness I feel is, if not fleeting, then at least minimal, held in check by whatever level of derangement, estrangement, or basic meanness I'm experiencing that day (and also, by the guilt of others, which you can see quite plainly on so many smashnosed faces). Those feelings run deep, stubbornly, and they are such that my presence is not challenged, maybe not even resented. But with a pretty girl on my arm, I am not the same feral creep, now softened, perhaps celebratory in my mood, a normal no-good o-fay motherfucker...I then appear in the eyes of the hardcore Lex regulars as a sore thumb, an insensitive gloater, a contemptuous little shit, a grinning punk cocksucker way out of his depth, dependent upon police for his safety, a tourist, a rubbernecker, all manner of things no one but those actual smug cocksuckers would ever want to be associated with, much less mistaken for. But it's true, the Lex summons forth some comforting voices in me, I can drink there and melt into it all with ease, the hours skulking by like bored alleycats, in the blur of wide open, public sensory distortion, in a rare, uncorrupted place that allows for thought, allows BREATH to enter my lungs, and I'm readied for some meaningful, thoughtful, soulful exchanges with my fellow man... yet I am exceedingly picky when it comes to companionship there. Several months before, my first date with Sarah transpired at the Lex, and on that day I did not drink at all, instead focusing all of

my available energies on making the most of what I suspected (what truly felt like, I mean to say) was a clear head and a bright mood. I limited myself to casual observations, and never let my enthusiasms or my staccato narration grow tiresome or strident, holding it together. I did not mumble, as I often do out of nerves, I did not babble or lisp or soapbox. On that day, I was COOL, my last twenty bucks and no cigarettes and "anything you want, baby, I'm loaded!" On that day, I was sober as a hanging judge and concerned only with her happiness, I played "normal" as we toured the market from one end to another, then back again, without any discomfort or worry or fear, we were smooth and sober and attentive to each other, we were in love and letting a beautiful day just happen, as one so seldom does. I found a way to lose myself a little in those crowds with her as I did alone, and the old men smiled at us as we walked past. There was in Sarah and I both a profound respect for their tolerance of us, for their endurance, a gratitude for their acceptance, an acute awareness that their old school toughness, all that mean street cool, made our short time there something more than it would have been without them, with a middle class crowd, such as the collegiate hordes of Federal Hill...like me, I believe Sarah's experience there was permeated by an implicit awareness that anything we lacked, or that any aspect of us in which we, for any multitude of possible reasons, were

somehow lacking, was nonetheless an essential component of this, and was therefore unassailable, utterly without fault, because this was perfect: our romance writ large on their walls and in their time. And I was maybe a bit sheepish, but it was light we brought with us that day, it was a glow I gave off because of her, and those poor old bastards saw it. A few even winked at me, perhaps sensing that she was too good for me, and while I still couldn't wait to get the hell out of there (lying almost dormant in me was the dread of the moment at which the pair of us would overstay our welcome, find ourselves the source of some affront, no matter how small, because this would bother the shit out of me, and what good am I to a girl like Sarah when bothered in that way?), I knew in my heart that we were having the best fucking afternoon together, maybe the best we'd ever have (it was), that no other place could have paved the way for these moments, could have allowed me to be as reassuring to her, to have given her that time. Leaving the Market, this 5'2' Irish beauty looking all the world like Olivia Hussey in the 1960s, with her brown hair and after-storm eyes, pulled herself up to me and kissed my cheek: "thank you for the most perfect date ever". I am left with a kind of delirium, of both detachment and an aggressive, almost bludgeoning wonderment when reflecting on it today, astounded by the notion that something as superficially unremarkable as a Lexington Market date can assume such

proportions, and even more shocking that the day was exceptional in the minds of us both, in the moment, on the spot, without even a week to begin the dimming of the sharp neon, the obscuring of the rough edges, the process by which the mundane becomes mythical. My memories of that afternoon are among my fondest ever, and that somehow transcends whether or not we went our separate ways or stayed together another month or two, whether our failure was mutually engineered in fits of excessive dysfunction, a rather tired example of sustained sexual obsession gone sour, the result of circumstantial misfortune, or simply a foregone conclusion due to basic generational incompatibility. No matter what we were or why we ended, nothing could ever have been as good as that day. (The subsequent evening was also good, if rather dull by comparison to the high flying adventure of Lexington Market. I probably gave her a long massage, and maybe I licked some strawberry ice cream out of her butt. Maybe we just watched the talk shows and picked at our cold mekrob with chopsticks. But we didn't fight, which is good for the longevity of the thing, I guess. Sarah and I had a month or so left, the clock ticking away, the resentments soon to be formed, the outrageous errors, mostly mine, all soon to begin erupting like land mines underneath our soft, furtive, increasingly panicked footsteps.)

Walking there on my first date with Izabela, a mean spirited,

vulgar child who possessed none of Sarah's sweetness, I did feel as I feared I might on that day with Sarah. She was gone and what was left saddened and angered me beyond reason, so I simply let the beer work its effect on me, losing myself falsely in the possibilities of the hours ahead, in which Izabela would simply remain at my side, or not. I suppose I was jubilant when she agreed to accompany me further into the evening, but not in a reverential way of being jubilant, as you might be without skepticism or unease, inhabiting your truest and purest self, as it were, but rather soaking up the 3rd rate glory of pulling off some petty thieving bullshit, of scoring drugs or kiting a bad check, when you know your luck is shot but getting away with it one more time, OUT of time, feels good for all the wrong reasons. It's like a crack rush. Giving yourself over to vice a little more deeply out of desperation. The law of diminished kicks, my crackhead pal Tracy used to say when the stuff ran out or just wasn't any good. If I'd taken the time to think about it, if I fucking cared at all, I would have realized that Izabela, far more than Sarah, was a thrill seeker and a tourist, and I was indeed the train wreck, the funhouse, I was the atrocity exhibition. All fine and dandy by me, anyway, as long as I got her out of those black leggings, and that particular event was looking like a sure thing. We snaked our way through Fell's Point, bar hopping, flirting ferociously, settling finally on a small punk rock dive a block from the water,

where I'd found myself one dark night shortly after my arrival from Detroit, hopelessly lost in the strange cobblestone streets after midnight. I explained to her the sinister nature of having my two year Baltimore residence bookended by nighttime drinking sessions, both entirely by chance, in the same little Fell's Point dive, the geography of which I was only somewhat clearer on at that moment than I was the first time. We spoke openly about our past promiscuity, our families, our ideas on writing. She seemed to find me sincere, if disturbed, and I was wondering if I'd misjudged the girl, for the talk came easy, and I wasn't faking my laughter. The night was going better than most, my composure holding out unnaturally long, because without the stimulant of nicotine (I was not smoking), panic did not attack my entire nervous system as angrily. Still, I was rosy-hued and a guzzling fool, encouraging Izabela to down shots of liquor with me, even sneaking extras from the barmaid, our new friend, while my date was in the ladies room. As would become our tradition during the ensuing three month affair, Izabela and I necked without guile or tact all the way back to her obnoxious vehicle.

#### Four / Kangaroo Courting

AFTERNOON: radio static and spiders and silverfish abound in a cozily furnished but unfinished cellar storage room, newly acquired rescue beast, claws the size of tennis balls, all hissing flea

bitten bobcat hatred: SAM (he's a "fixer"). And cheap shag carpet, bookshelves with bottles, no books, the DVD menu for Martin Scorsese's Gangs of New York repeating endlessly on the 27 inch Philips monitor, wine-on-top-of-beer soreness, jackhammer in my head, someone's Chuck Taylor sneakers at my transom window, their god damned Camel Light carbon monoxide causing surges of self-righteous loathing and contempt for the vile habit, and shady old Barclay Street is jumping, Northwest Baltimore only inches from my heavy clouds of dreamstuff and bladder-denial, my lair like a street theatre, the naked bulb flooding the asphalt with light when the sun goes down, a beacon, an invitation, warm and private, you might like to come inside, snuggle up, get a glass, do you like Bryan Ferry?, or what about Alejandro Escovedo?, but now the day is here, and I'm smiling into my gore-caked pillow, remembering bits of Izabela and Thames Street, then remembering all of Izabela and Thames Street, no longer smiling: I've really outdone myself this time! Surely, the police would be on my doorstep before I could find my bathrobe or make some tea. Not even a vitamin drink or a shower. I couldn't move, because This is what Happens. I could only wait, the horror no longer even new, but as ugly as ever.

Over the radio and the annoying U2 song from Gangs comes the sound of air being blown into still water, vigorous bubbling, which is



the announcement of an incoming call picked up by jerry-rigged pirate Internet hardware, so I sweep the covers off myself and the bobcat, make a dive for the desk, the computer, the keyboard, fumbling for the cheap radio Shack microphone which caught the self-loving babble of 200 sub-cultural jackasses between the years of 95 and 03, find it, then click the "accept" button.

PAMELA CALL RECORDER ©  
SKYPE TECHNOLOGIES INC.  
TRANSCRIPT 12.21.08 (13.52.16  
EST)

Caller: Gene?

GG: Yeah.

Caller: It's Izabela.

GG: Oh.

Caller: Good morning?

GG: Look, I'm really sorry, I know I got a little-

Caller: Rough?

GG: Yeah, uh...how are you?

Caller: BRUTAL! You were SO rough. My god!

GG: Yeah. How-

Caller: You are insane. What are you doing right now?

GG: You wanna come over? I'll make you breakfast.

Caller: Yeah, yeah. Half hour?

GG: Sure.

After a scalding hot shower and a close shave, I was raw from a not-yet-beaten hangover, a little ringy and hyper, cleaning the house fitfully, emptied of everything except black tea and hormonal fireworks. The Scion pulled to the curb while I wiped down the table and counters of the house's communal kitchen, and I was beating some eggs with a fork when a most pleasing shape appeared through the curtained windows of the front door and the violent doorbell made me spasm and whimper, speed-pulsed with a heart murmur and a hard-on. I turned down the right wing talk radio I listened to for cheap laughs and let Izabela in.

We spent the next several days together, mostly in my bunker-like basement room. I took full advantage of the opportunity to smother her with attention, engaging in many of the things I'd loved doing with Sarah: cooking, drinking wine, watching films, and screwing. Izabela and I cavorted like pigs at least four times in the evening, and always at least once in the morning. I gave her the good news in alleyways, storage areas, public restrooms, movie theatres, parking lots, and small wooded areas all over Baltimore. I sleepwalked through the public and social rituals, and I uttered every term of endearment on auto-pilot, not knowing or caring whether it was a Sarah hangover

which distanced me, or a very real and increasingly acute dislike of Izabela. It was hard to tell, because I'd taken a considerable step out of my own reality, and had come to accept all things as by remote, and observed the various occurrences and random events from afar, with an objective curiosity that only flagged at night; I only re-inhabited my subjective mind fully when inebriated.

We were tender with one another, mostly, yet through her girlish adoration I could detect the faintest evidence of skepticism, related most directly, I presume, to my poverty and joblessness, and there was also fear, unquestionably in response to my gluttonous consumption of beer and cheap wine. Equally obvious to me was the delight Izabela took in introducing me to her little Muppet friends, who were unanimously disturbed by her latest "chew toy", concerned to the point of visible worry for their vulnerable and witless young Iz. She'd made the less-than-judicious choice of beaus a longstanding tradition, and just as it pleased me to witness the barely contained ire of the estimated 5,000 Muppets I was introduced to in clubs and galleries during our first 4 or 5 days together, nothing could touch the unrestrained grandeur and prestige of the role I knew I'd bumbled into: SATAN! Before, only "Dirty Gene", or "Mr. Bad Vibes", but now...an unearthly demon spirit feasting on the souls of innocents, ruthless and primal, I was the sum of Charles Manson and his Topanga Canyon

Freaks, the reincarnation of that fat pig charlatan Aleister Crowley without the retarded Luciferian shock-jive. And I had DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY. An entire community of effete, big-headed piss-artists forced by the stranglehold of their own suffocating scene-vamp manners and hippie affectations to swallow every swollen insult which begged for release, forced to eat their own outrage as I too went through the motions of dishonest civility, shaking hands and laughing pleasantly, aghast at the unchecked narcissism and infantilism on display before me. I was no longer sleepwalking, but quivering in mortal shame, for I had been shoved roughly before THE ENEMY: urban bohemia! It was a world I'd always lingered tentatively on the outskirts of, not belonging to the roughneck legions either, but caught rather inexorably in a spectral no-zone between mutually exclusive parties, both of which were teeming with the fevered bloodlust and unrelenting sadism of a million treacherous, piss-brained cunts.

Izabela's albino roommate, Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington, was a frumpy, overbearing megalomaniac who looked like an exceptionally ill-humored lesbian. Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington had a bulging frontal lobe, beady little black eyes, and like Izabela, was always sorely in need of a bath. But Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington was not a homosexual. In fact, she was an insatiable groupie who

routinely left her heartbroken main squeeze (a sweet-natured, Fozzie Bear-ish gent named Thurston) to hungrily service the American Eurotrash icon Vincent Gallo. The painfully aloof young Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington would squirm and flail and fidget upon the cluttered front room's red velvet sofa like a hypersexual 7 year old, feigning rage, ennui, restlessness, and fatigue as the mood struck her. I was warned by Izabela, who worshipped the bristling femi-Nazism of Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington, to stay on her good side, and to never make eye contact with her. I was also forbidden from drinking in the home. Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington, a New Age priestess who worked as a hair stylist in an "organic" hair salon, had announced the arrival of her "professionalism" at age 24 with a swearing off of drugs and alcohol, and all those "welcome within the Rothstein-Worthington sanctum" were honored with the highest trust: a gesture of respect for her chastity, by making the Rothstein-Worthington vow oneself, was automatically assumed of all guests. I thought Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington was a hellish nightmare of a human being, and said as much to Izabela, furiously warning her that Western civilization, or indeed the entire planet, could drift as deeply into the vagina-rule of the modern age as they-or the cosmos (or Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington) demanded, while I could not possibly EVER submit to such debasement for something as

tawdry and ridiculous as fucking (which I must be intoxicated to even enjoy), reminding her that by comparison to the soul rape of allowing oneself to be pussy-whipped by a bohemian grotesque such as Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington, drag queens -or "chicks with dicks"- seemed a healthy and reasonable alternative. I also explained that, bearing in mind the inhuman misery poor Thurston had adapted to during his indentured servitude with Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington, it seemed only decent and compassionate that I go to him immediately and beat him into the nearest emergency room with a hammer, iron bar, or similar object which, if used correctly, might relieve him of his identity and, one would hope, his shame. Izabela laughed, but I no longer remember how she defended her mentor on that occasion, or if she defended Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington at all: I had already begun to tune her out automatically, because she was never anything less than petulant and disrespectful. I focused instead on the logistic practicalities of my upcoming move out of Baltimore. I was returning to the city of my birth, Harrisburg, where my bastarding bureaucrat brother Mike had secured a cheap efficiency apartment from a colleague of his, a bloated hog of a slimeball yuppie son of a bitch who owned property in the same gay neighborhood I'd lived in back in 1995, when I accepted bribes and overlooked scum-ridden misconduct at the YMCA, working

the graveyard shift. (This was following my first divorce, and was to be my first explicitly criminal enterprise.)

After resuming a 15 year old security guard position for the Pinkerton Agency, I was to remain in Harrisburg for a minimum of six months: enough time to glue my head back together, finish my novel, re-pay the grand I owed my father, and put away enough dough for another move south, this time to Savannah, GA, where I would do nothing but rent a clapboard shack, work dog labor and lay on the beach with the other clapboard shack dwelling dog laborers. It had come to me in a dream. I'm that rare demon who goes through with such things. I am ruthless and I am focused on whatever it takes to extricate myself from The Problem.

I lay semi-prostrate upon Izabela's dirt-strewn bed, thinking about Harrisburg, dreading the town yet almost delirious with excitement at the prospect of leaving Baltimore. Izabela lived in Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington's basement, a vastly different type of bunker than my own, which was by comparison a rustic vacation cabin on the Northern California coastline. Izabela's bunker was an eye-wrecking institutional white from floor to ceiling. Barren and freezing cold, even in the summertime, the uninviting sterility was offset by the presence of a poorly maintained litter box and waist-high mounds of unwashed clothing, amid which

juttled belts, shoes, CDs, photographs, notebooks, and multi-colored bottles of hair product. Izabela's loathsome lavatorial lair somehow managed to be at once German sophisticate art-slob and acne-ravaged Kentuckian meth-head. Several cheap Ikea bookshelves crammed tight with an impressive array of titles confirmed that, while our taste in writers was far from similar, we could at least push new material on each other. This was heartening to me; Sarah was a frat girl whose pussy got wet when she thought of the fight to end world hunger; she read books by Mitch fucking Albom. Leslie before her had read only one book in her lifetime: Motley Crue Unauthorized. Also, my own library was almost completely wiped out for the summer's rent and drinking money, and I'd just stopped reading. It was looking as if I'd never manage my oft-planned and oft-dismissed weeklong binge on Dos Passos' USA trilogy, or any time at all with the Frenchmen like Gide and Zola I'd been curious about for so long, and had never read. Izabela loaned me a stack of books by Pynchon, Rimbaud, Grass, Capote, and others. I wondered how a woman so well-read could be so airheaded, but I dismissed her vapidness as being symptomatic of her tender age...then again, I wasn't like that at 24, was I? In any case, she snapped at me when I selected a lurid 60s pulp novel called I Spit On Your Graves, rebuking me for my rotten taste. "It figures you'd gravitate right to the trashiest piece

of shit book I've ever bought." I beamed with demented pride, and became vaguely fond of Izabela in that fleeting moment. We dropped down onto her unclean sheets, she whining and grunting like a harpooned seal pup, while I tried to pretend she was Ellen Barkin. It was a rotten trap I'd found myself in, but fortunately for you, dear voyeurs, I was a somnambulant casualty, tormented beyond hope, and far past the point of disentangling myself.

Before we were finished, Izabela asked me if I wanted her to speak Polish. Guys always liked the immigrant bit.

"Oh. No...no, that's alright," I said. I slept soundly for a few hours in the never-washed bedsheets, drooling absently into the cum stains of other young men, other afternoons and other evenings, while upstairs, Wendy Querelle Rothstein-Worthington made a vegan feast for pallid, anemic Christmas revelers and danced unemotionally to a ZZ Top record. When I awoke, Izabela was gone. I got out of bed and plucked three pieces of fresh cat shit off the floor with a fabric softener sheet.

I shivered.

I gagged.

Would I ever find a civilized town? Was there a kind -and clean-woman somewhere, I wondered also.

And was it snowing like this tonight in Jarrettsville, over that field where I laid down my old friend? That's where I really was too, without a doubt.

But "keep fighting", that's what I was told. In the meantime, all I had was fucking Izabela. Fucking Baltimore. Fucking booze. I slumped up the stairs, through the party, and into the snow outside. There was nothing in that night but alcohol, in places where I was not exactly protected. Well, one more night couldn't hurt, could it? I lit a cigarette and started north towards 36th street, crunching slowly and clumsily through small snowdrifts, block after block of ugly, cheaply built old rowhomes, kicking in the occasional car door and wincing at the taste of my bloody gums and at the sight of it all.

(For Hanna Badalova)

NEXT: Yuletide



# AUTOMATA EXHIBITION

By Pablo Vision

Images © Siolo Thompson

They gathered like vultures around the installation of the starving child chained to the wall. Those who spoke with the most sincere indignation at 'this moral outrage', were the ones who came back most: it would be necessary for them to witness the exact moment of death in order to really 'feel' this piece, and to truly absorb the horror that their coffee-table-liberal-hearts require to bleed so copiously. I wandered through the conversations of the assorted throng, dismayed at how the ego of each person speaking clamoured desperately for attention. How I had grown to hate covering these sorts of events, and how I had grown less able to disguise my misanthropy.

I was contemplating the possibly carcinogenic effects of passive pretension, when I overheard the bitch from the Herald talking about Rousseau abandoning his five children at the orphanage to probable death, but having the audacity to opine with authority on the nature of education and the rearing of children. I told her, in most emphatic tones, that it was most surely a matter of grave misjudgement, and that in order to be consistent with his views that young children live like animals, he should have deserted them as

babes in the woods instead. But I think it was the endearment of 'sweetheart', and honest appraisal of her breasts, that really pissed her off.



*The Fallen Ipo*

My eyes avert to the vulture prowling with indecent impatience - wings occasionally spreading, and flapping frustration and hunger; how Carter would have prayed for this particular scavenger to have landed instead. The baldhead and the sparse matted feathers remind me of monks; and the cogs, chains, and wheels - by virtue of which the bird moves, and flaps its ominous

wings - makes me think of vivisection and human experimentation: it is the grotesque hybrid automaton that interests me more than the Sudanese girl's emaciated statement. At least here she will have her fifteen showings of fame, rather than the cultural modifications that will take away a different kind of life. A small child asks her mother if she can throw some of her popcorn to the dying girl, and, as I leave, I tell her, sternly, not to feed the exhibits.

The art gallery was once a pauper's asylum, and the corridors, that connect the installations, still suggest lingering disinfectant and the echoes of sickening screams. A sequence of paintings - "The Oppressed" - adorns the walls. I stand before one - "The Fallen Ipo" - and imagine Heath Robinson shackled to the walls of Goya's House of the Deaf Man; the improbable machinery unites all these paintings - but it is the devastatingly desperate look in the eyes that resounds most profoundly. I close my eyes, but still see; and screams reverberate into a crescendo of accusation. What wiring of the brain allows for such connection with paint and canvas, when humanity leaves me so cold, distant, and disdainful?

"The Monkey and the Organ Grinder" interests me greatly. The legs have been removed from our distant relative, and the torso is attached to a wooden platform with wheels; both arms have been replaced with metal rods, and steam powered pistons. There is a

large brightly coloured arm that connects that platform to the central hub, so round and round the monkey perpetually orbits, the movement generating the power for the cacophony of calliopes, and the machinery that crushes, grinds, and minces the amputated genitalia of bullocks, before depositing the meat into large tins, resplendent with silk-screen-print-labels of mastectomised movie stars.



*Poor Sad Bear*

"Poor, Sad Bear" seems even more tragic now; the very first of these animal automata hybrids, he now occupies a rarely viewed corner of the gallery, like a neglected and forgotten teddy bear, or a discarded memory. Without the hindrance of other people I am able to observe, up close, how the cylindrical metal cage below attaches to his upper torso, and

how the metal prosthetic is fused to the stump of his upper arm: the crudely sawn bone, the metal pins, and the rods and wires disappearing into flesh and matted fur. The large wheels and cogs that replace his lower body no longer move. He must either be wheeled out here, or left in this lonely corner. His metal arm is outstretched, and one bent and rusty finger points towards the newer and more exciting exhibits; his eyes resigned to his terrible, poor, sad fate. This sure ain't no picnic, I think, before noticing that his eyelids have been surgically removed. Even with my jaded nature, I cannot help but stare in genuine pity, and debilitating disgust; and even though I *can* close my eyes - I find that I cannot. I hope that I am able to hold onto these emotions, as I leave the bear to his lonely agony, to interview the artist: the architect of his despair.

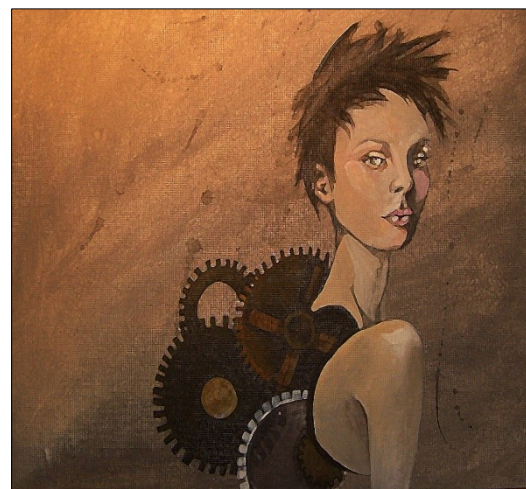
She stands at the window, statuesque, and coldly impassive, as I ask the standard questions; questions that clearly bore her. I too, have little interest in adding column inches to an already overexposed topic, and decide - if only for the poor, sad bear - to attempt to provoke some sort of animation in her.

"Do you not think that these creations are an abomination in the eyes of God?" I ask, fully aware of her devout atheism.

"And God not a Frankenstein's monster... constructed from

incongruent fears and weak desires?"

Still she remains by the window, as seemingly disinterested in the events outside as those inside. I try to keep the image of the missing eyelids in my mind, and summon the cruelty I will need, but her flawless beauty, and confident arrogance, invoke a much stronger, and more prurient impulse.



*For Pablo*

"So really, casting aside the bullshit which we are both clearly tired of, exactly what artistic statement are you trying to make?"

"Yawn, yawn, yawn. When was the last time anyone cared about art? Last century? The century before? Would there be anyone at this showing if there were not something incidental to talk about? Would your newspaper sell more copies if you had any interest at all in art, rather than hoping to find out something to destroy the artist?"

"Perfectly reasonable then, to allow



these animals to suffer for your art, knowing that money and publicity are all that count?"

"I note you neglect to mention the starving child in your impassioned outrage. You are no more human than I - don't contrive some kind of moral superiority. You have no interest in art, and you have little interest in me, other than wanting to fuck me. I may have my reputation, but you also have yours."

Even the most world-weary, and quietly proud, misanthropist wishes occasionally for some empathy and connection with another - the accusation of being as inhuman as her, stung me with both its precision, and its inaccuracy: true that I cared little about anything anymore, but not at all true that I could ever divorce myself entirely from every emotion. And although I was able to provoke responses from her, the words were delivered without emotion - almost as if each word was just its binary equivalent. And yes, I did want to fuck her, but more than that, to make love, or at least something sensual.

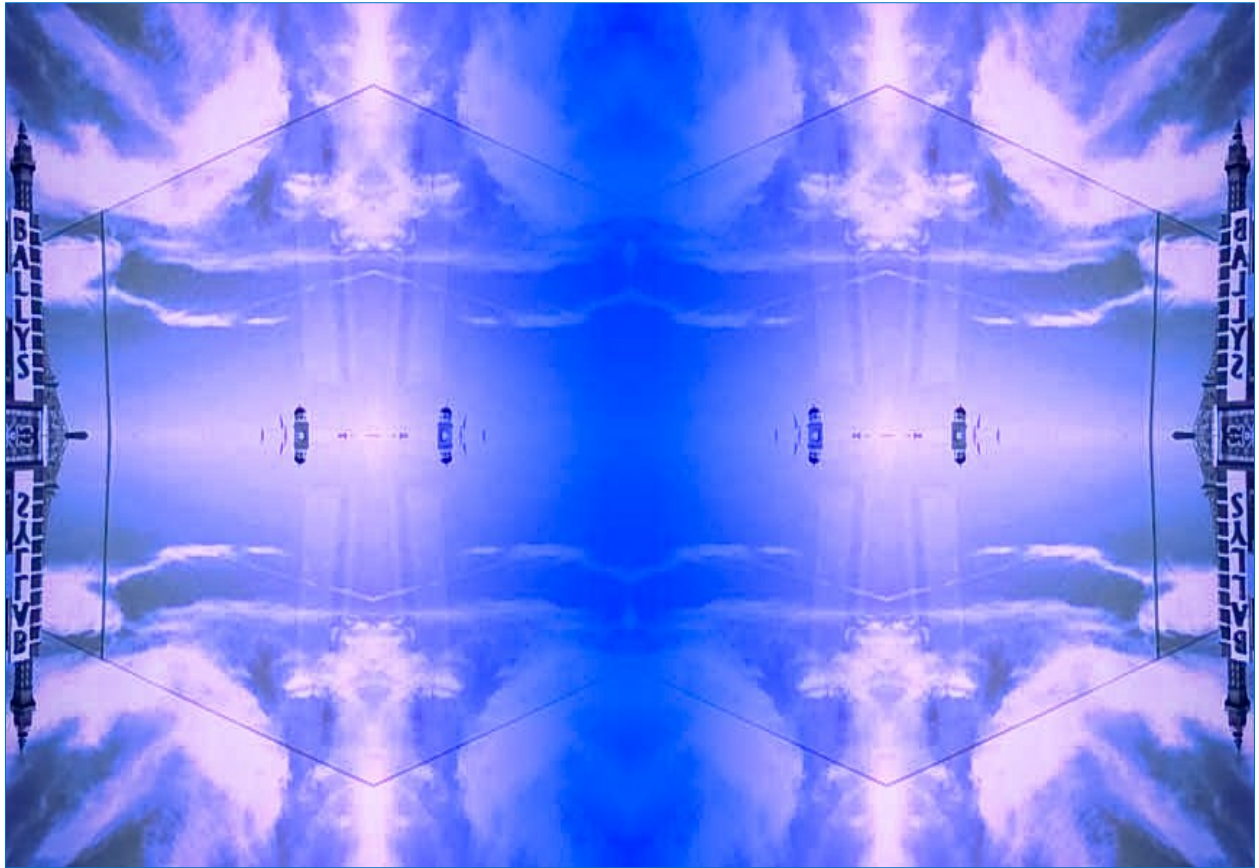
"Maybe I would like to fuck you, but if we are indeed so similar, would that not be the ultimate act of narcissism? Maybe I would also like to hurt you, but again, that would be too much like self-harm. Assuming that neither will take place, and accepting that I care as little as you do about anything, let me ask instead: where do you go from here? The shock-value of

these exhibits are subject to the law of diminishing returns, and already the number of visitors are starting to decrease; what can you possibly do next?"

As she looks at me, I imagine wheels turning in her head; the teeth of cogs grinding; valves warm and glowing; neurotransmitters binding to receptors; and a vast array of positives and negatives being sorted and decoded - a riot of activity underneath the beautiful cold marble of her inert gaze. I try and resolve her physical perfection with the hideous nature of her creations; try to fathom the icy depths of a heart that could cut away eyelids; try to imagine the journey that has brought her to this place - but, instead, only visualize bodies being picked clean by vultures on towers of silence.

"I, the artist, will become the exhibit. No one cares about art; let them dissect me, as they do in words anyway; let them look upon the only kind of beauty they can ever appreciate; let them touch the unobtainable; and let them see, even then, that they cannot possess me."

She removes her dress with the fluidity of a ghost leaving a body, and stands naked before me: love, hate, fear, desire, and horror collide and summersault, as I see the scars that run across her body: she herself: artist and creator: also the created.



## NO TIME TO SPARE

By Brian Routh

*Image Transmission from Vegas* © Patricia Wells

I ran as swift as the wind through the freezing hail towards safety and sanity but the warmth of haven and host was rapidly fading as my being continued to melt and my body seemed insignificant.

'Hold up there sir!' shouted an ugly looking vessel that sailed on by me.

I could not and would not stop.

The end was waiting and I eagerly and feverishly rushed blindly towards it.

'Hope man!' screeched the steamship as it puffed and chugged to catch up with me.

I dared not turn around to see the face of pimples,

Grease stains, gouges debauchery and bad living.

I focused all my concentration on the whirlwind ahead

And stretched my body and being to greater and greater limits, hurtling myself faster and faster.

My feet left the ground and I began to soar higher and higher above the earth.

I flew through the air with grace and elegance.

I looked down with a bird's eye view of the pulsating world below.

All was blissful and wondrous.

'Look ahead! Dive man, dive!' yelled my pursuer,

He was also airborne and some distance below me.

I mocked this rude order from this over-weight rooster

And as I indulged myself in negative thoughts about him, I flew head on into the heart of the whirlwind.

I was picked out of my flight path and spun around in ever increasing circles and finally flung at jet speed

Deeper into the sombre purple tunnel of clouds

That was lit up here and there by flashes of lightning.

I don't know for how long I traveled at this speed as I was in and out of consciousness throughout the experience.

I remember my clothes being sucked from my body by biting winds that blew at me from all sides and threw oceans of icy water at me with such velocity and force

That I was instantly drowning and completely frozen.

The sounds that filled my ears were deafening unearthly howls and screams.

Explosions shook my bones, ripped off the top of my head and engulfed me in flames that were repeatedly extinguished by the swirling waters.

# POSTATOMIC

By Michael Butterworth

The silence sounds. *His* ear could always pick them up: the sound of Overpopulation Speeds (like a drying sound in the back of his mind); the sound of Uniform Tears (a Pop Group, a Happening, a Riot); the sound of Broadcasting Space (a Show Room, a News Paper, a Girl); the sound of Umbrage (like little children playing).

Nobody ever *looked* like Postatomic. His face was a wide-open expanse of clinkered skin. His brain was layered, glazed levels of desert. His skull was uneven and thus deformed, pushed out at birth to make way for cancerous growth from the brain. The rest of him was imaginary.

If you looked in his eyes both sides of your brain would simultaneously flood with histamine – part of him, you remember, was always in the Future.

In days gone by, he would fly through the open windows of skyscrapers, and haunt the long corridors, mournfully playing the part of the wind and decrying the sad silence sounds of the City. You remember the stains that dripped from the skyscraper roofs at night, covering a whole side in tears?

The silence sounds. *His* ear could always pick them up. But the essential part of Postatomic was in the Past – when the City was defeated, Postatomic would cease to exist.

Collectively, perpetually, the sounds rocketed softly upwards in the wind of the ventilator grills, to form a beaded erection over the City. The erection collapsed in a gale of particle ruins on the City floor. It rose again.

## *King Trash*

Back into my cold nest.

I am circulating the blood system of a robin. Poor creature came in from the heat ten days ago. I think something of it because it acts like me. Because it does so I am not going to kill it. It is a wreck. There's no sign of competition. It would be a bloody thoughtless act to kill it.

The castle is glowing again tonight. This means the weather will be dry tomorrow. The castle turrets are armed with nerve coils. The Main Archway protects the castle with a device which gives leucotomy to any person who happens to stray within the castle grounds. The best device is

one that shoots up vertical from the Castle Keep. It sprays sound waves of a special frequency to combat air attack. This is a very helpful device. More recently I've had attached an electronic brain deactivator to one of the castle walls. I am quite safe from robot attack. I'm King of England in the year 2030. And nobody's going to stop me.

I've just come in from the hot outside after rescuing this robin from a nest of rodents. The whole world is hot and filled with red mist. I've just come back into my cold nest. The Crown is on my head.

There's no real use for a crown. It is a worthless thing. In fact one day I'm going to throw it away. I don't think it plays any particular role as far as I'm concerned. It channels prestige and glory into a pinhead. It's a symbol. I'll lock it up in the Symbol Room and keep it there. In the meantime I'll keep this little robin on my finger.

I have two problems that irritate me. One, out of necessity, must remain unnamed. The other is the peasant's wine. It *is* a peasant produce and tastes awful. Far too expensive. I shall have to do something about this.

In the old days wine was cheap. But the peasants of that time (unlike the mutants of this) were nowhere near so loyal to their gods as mine are to

me today. In those days they had a god who didn't really know it was a god because the god in it didn't exist at all as one god but fragmented into little ones. They had churches filled with mumbling congregations who were just not with it. I've got no sympathy with them at all.

The god they were working to get money out of was a god of their children's making. It was a god which was made up of famous personalities. Large business combines. Vehicles and things which shoot up suddenly and fall down again. In fact I thought of calling their god the Mighty Erection. This seems a good idea.

The trouble was they did have a god. A very dicy sort of god though perhaps a good god for the age. But they had nowhere to worship it which seems rather silly to me – a glass church is always falling to bits! Nevertheless, despite the Discjockey Priests that attempted to put things right, their wine was good so I've heard and it was cheap.

In later times it came so bad for the ancients that they had no GO in them. After leaving childhood for good they did not climb up the ladder but fell through it. A spirit of adventure was lacking in them. They did not make full use of their brains. Wherever they looked they saw political shit. Whenever they bent down they got

hooked. Wherever they went they arrived back at the beginning.

If they looked in a bush they saw some commercial drunkard had been sick there. If they looked in the sick they saw their own face. If they then looked into a church they got their hands tied behind their backs and fell down. If they looked in on anything they got their hands tied. To cap it all they often looked into the *real* guts of the world and turned away puking – they couldn't take it. They weren't conditioned to. If they looked anywhere they saw somebody had shit in their way. The obvious outcome of all this is plain to me. At one stage things and people shat on one another. Then the rockets were called in. And I've got the legacy.

As far as I can see in any direction, that's all there is. Trash. Miles of it. This robin's probably the last straw. I'll kill it and maybe get rid of the trash. I'm King of England in 2030 and nobody's going to stop me.

### *Mr Zero*

The deserts are very cold now. Which is not surprising, considering there are no clouds, no sun. And earth has been depopulated. Overnight. You might say that people of all nationalities decided to become passengers, and took the overnight express, which arrived punctually at Platform Zero.

When they arrived they trampled the carefully tended flower-beds, and wrecked the station in their effort to get away.

Mr Zero, they used to say, is a man of frost and icy conditions. For instance, he weeded the station gardens regularly throughout the aftermath, cool and unperturbed at the slightest blast from the skies. In a way I wish Mr Zero had reserved his gardening phobia for an earlier time, for an age which I hadn't known. Out of ignorance, I only know this age, or rather the last age, with any certainty. The last age was an Ice Cream Age, easily licked, and unlike other ages in that it was a terminal time, motivated by senseless rejoicing. An age of constant anxieties and pressures ... brought to bear its collective weights upon the mind of Mr Zero. Mr Zero is a lunatic reject from a lunatic past, finding sanity in the wide open expanses of earth, security amongst its electrified flowers.

It is all cold desert and broken-down weather conditions. Mr Zero is not the best of company, especially amongst the nerve-racking silence cones that invade the deserts – society noises of the silent mind that leak out of the drains of space and bump softly and invisibly against the cold sands. His speciality, apart from gardening and collecting, is conservancy, a wasted art. Listening

to him talking about his impressions of a past age is better than listening to the radio waves coming back from the quasars.

Mr Zero's station is probably the best-kept station for miles around. It is probably the best-kept station in the world, now that his arduous labours have repaired the damage done to the flower-beds by the clumsy feet of the stampeding crowds. Although he owns four platforms, two flower-beds, plus a fairly large siding, he lives in a hastily-habitated signal box which is perched on top of a sooty, filthy-dirty tunnel, of the old kind that were around with the steam engine.

This faded yellow building, built up of horizontal planks of wood, resting on a tall foundation of bricks, is situated more towards the end of the station's longest platform, on this side of the tunnel. It overlooks the four scrubbed platforms and the two neat flower-beds, and the so-polished rails that run away into the tunnel.

Inside the signal box, he has a collection of mattresses, old wooden chairs, tables, bookcases, and a filing cabinet containing bits and pieces of material reminiscent of the earlier age. His other hobby is collecting junk and bright objects, and stacks of cardboard boxes, drawers, and other containers in which to store

things of importance. Mr. Zero is a magpie.

It is unlikely that a train will pass him by, and wake him from his sleep – the last trainload was shunted under the auspices of the tunnel.

At this time of the night, his flowers are looking very pretty in their beds of weeds, and seem to try to reach the very harsh and empty vacuum of space, letting drop the stars into a vortex, and settling them so that they look immovable in the deepest black. It is the silence cones that are eventually attracted to the flowers, and they come lifting their skirts off the desert floor, protecting the flowers from the vengeance of the stars, gently silencing the snores coming from the signal box. Ah, there is a sun, at last.

All day, as the sun sinks into the ground several miles away, having risen into the sky from a point several miles in the other direction, and as the missiles continually fly through the ether of the old man's dreams, towards a target unspeakably remote, and about which I must discourse with him some day soon, I have seen the same toiling with his weeds – Mr. Zero, the ice-cold man of a forgotten society, the only one who ever really understood, who had to suffer, who lives in a signal box on

the top of a filthy-dirty tunnel, and writes postcards to a non-existent postman.

It is a pity, or rather it is a stroke of good fortune for him, that his weeds in the flower-beds are dying off, of their own accord – and I have had to tell him, through my great kindness and dishonesty, that I sprayed a potent weed killer over his bed of flowers.

### *Baby*

The skies were dull metallic streamers of baby colours – blue and red, the colour of Baby's bricks or the small wooden trucks that he pulls around with dirty, frayed lengths of string. So long ago, the images of childhood seemed, but flashed without warning into Pauline's head. Her being was dipped for a moment into the green-yellow glow that came from behind the streaming clouds. Baby sat and played with the missiles on its own under the gigantic skies. Sometimes he would be as high as a skyscraper, and his head would bump through the sky. Pauline laughed, for a moment into the Mothered structure of a child's gentle paranoia.

She went to lean against a white ranch fence, where the souls of the dead horses that lived there gripped her

flesh invisibly and took her on long, circular rides to the places of interest she desired – to the sources of powerfully foaming rivers, that as they aged, passed through the concrete sweeps of the Power Stations of the world; or she could fly much closer to Baby's face. She could hear the pounding hooves taking her over the brick-red deserts, and Baby's screams of delight as he rolled over on to his back and kicked at the sky. When she returned *he will be gone*, she thought.

At night, as the sun lowered, the darkening beams of the football stadiums began to herald the start of a match. Brass band music was played, but the notes floated across the too-long green pitch, so soluble in the yellow stadium lights they had died almost, before they reached her ears. And the roar of the crowd, as the first kick of the ball of the night was played, became so much more static and crackle over the radio.

Pauline turned the dead set off, as she turned it on every morning before she left her bed. It was no use even, to go outside her House anymore. A silence, that made her bones harden and that put a collapsing vacuum into her throat, met her when she opened the back door once. The Houses over the way were empty, and for a moment she was blocked and wooden,



wandering amongst their Kitchens and Bedrooms. The growth of the Houses, in the withered Flowers and Trees, sent a deep mahogany root into her toes; it hurt like it hurt to take damp fingers from a cold metal surface, to move, though there was no cold, and the roots became suddenly soft.

It was time for her meal, though she was not hungry. *The Tubes will be full at this time of the day*, she thought. The Clock on the Mantelpiece over the aged ashes in the Fire Grate, said six o'clock.

A bus was coming her way by the time she had dressed herself up and was stepping out of her front door and on to the porch tiles. A red double-decker bus that wore a sad expression on its face and forehead. It had a bib on its front, and clunks of black soil littered its roof, falling like tears in front of its eyes. It approached slowly from out of the fuzz in the distance, swelling in size and increasing its momentum as it slid silently over the tarmac, passing the dead occupants of the silent houses. It slowed down imperceptibly, to allow her time to reach the bus stop before it rolled past, and on into the fuzz. As it appeared to stop, she tried to mount its black rubber deck *Baby!* her heart warmed for an instant her stomach shuddered her legs turned to sand her check felt a warm

draught of air, the red of the double-decker was dissolving away into the red-and-blue streamers in the sky. Eventually it disappeared altogether, but she saw it once more, receding child along the roadway into the distance.

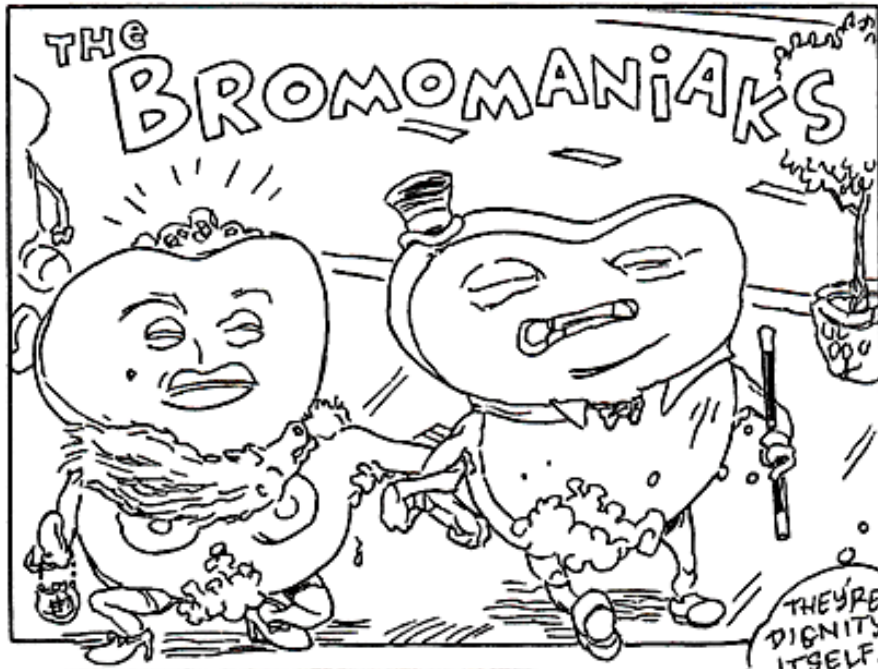
She cried the large tears of Baby at this point. Her tears were blue and tinted with a muddy yellow, elongated globes drawn into straight lines and rails. Sometimes, polished and shiny, Baby looked as if he were being held up in the air under the large skies of the desert, and moved only with the aid of these steel, inverted puppet strings. Likewise, they became her guidelines: each rod that dropped or heightened her limbs as she walked back to her house, was a long picture of a green electric train rushing through a tunnel, a sizzling tremor of patterns from the smiling wrinkles of her dead husband's face, or else another older memory she had forgotten.

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## BRIDGETTE IN INDIA

By Hank Kirton

Images © Brian Blur

When Bridgette returned from India, she came back changed. She also came back without her daughter and dark rumors started following her around. She moved back with her family - into that madhouse - and when I learned she'd returned I had a strange dream about her:

I'm walking across a dark, desolate battlefield. Torn bodies and limbs stretch before me, half submerged

in bloody mud. The sky is thick with black acrid smoke and a dying red sun casts a murky glow over the dismal landscape. The only sound is the buzzing of flies.

And then, floating from the dim horizon, Bridgette appears. She's nude, her dark body festooned with a garland of severed heads. She holds a sword. She approaches me, smiling with bright white teeth. When she reaches me I see

that her skin is smeared with bloody ash. She says, "Hi, Hank," and kisses me, filling my mouth with her tongue and the taste of blood.

I awoke gasping and sick.

The dream haunted me for days. I called her the next week. I don't know why or what I expected. It was an insane impulse I couldn't stop myself from following. I hadn't spoken to her in almost twenty years.

About Bridgette Blake: Bridgette Blake lived on Indian Run Road, four addresses down from the small green house where I'd grown up. My parents had retired to Florida long ago. I now lived about forty miles south of Indian Run Road. Bridgette Blake was my age (36 at the time). We met when we were five and entering the chaotic shock of 1st grade. I saw her at the bus stop. She was the only 1st grader who wasn't accompanied by a parent. Once on board the bus, we ended up across the aisle from each other (the boys and girls magically parted down the middle of the bus, segregating themselves on either side). I sat alone. Bridgette sat next to Tina Feeney who was so nervous and upset about being sentenced to school that she promptly vomited - launching her breakfast into her hands as if she'd hoped to catch the gooey transgression and stuff it into her pockets before anyone noticed. But of course, all eyes turned toward the spectacle and Tina Feeney began to cry. She was

still holding her hands out, strands of puke-mucus stretching across her trembling fingers like a cat's cradle.

Bridgette jumped up and sat beside me. "I'm sitting with you," she told me and laughed.



We quickly became friends.

She'd been a startlingly beautiful child with a round, intelligent face, big brown eyes, and long auburn hair that she usually wore in braids. I remember her nervous habit of chewing and sucking on the ends of her braids until they were sodden with saliva. We were best friends at first, playing together within the Cinemascope grandeur of our restless imaginations. My memories of those days are baroque and impossible, like fevered Renaissance paintings.

As we grew, our affections matured along with our bodies - our mutual lure intensified by the kinetics of over-charged hormones. She became a stunning beauty. I got tall. She became my first crush, my first kiss, my first lover. My first love. Bridgette Blake was beautiful and brilliant and witty and the only true miracle I've ever come across.

And she lived in an insane asylum.



About the Blake family: Bridgette's parents were the first people I'd ever met to whom I could assign the word "hippie." My own parents were older and avoided becoming infected by the 60's zeitgeist as if it were some kind of druggy, tie-dyed influenza. They remained hopelessly square, clinging to conformist 50's culture like a demented Ward and June Cleaver. But Bridgette's parents were something else. Her father had long hair and a beard and my

memories of him are wreathed in smoke. He'd lost his left leg in Vietnam and seemed to live his life at the kitchen table, chain-smoking Camels between hits of a joint, a bottomless glass of red wine close at hand. His drooping red eyes had always seemed friendly (in a weird, dopey kind of way) and it wasn't until years later that I learned he'd molested Bridgette and her two brothers. His name was Stuart.

Bridgette's mother Patty was a plump, incredibly high-strung woman with dark venomous eyes who could fly into a sudden irrational rage at the slightest provocation. Bridgette often sported bruises or welts she'd incur for the slightest adolescent infractions. Her mother was a cracked china teacup balanced on the edge of a glass table.

We were both terrified of her.

Her brother Casey was ten when I met him. When he was nine, he found his dad's stash of acid and ate twelve tabs of Yellow Sunshine. He didn't talk much after that and when he did, made little sense. He went to a special school called "Living and Learning" over in Ashland.

Her big brother Toby was painfully thin. His hair was long and greasy, falling into a face forever erupting with angry red acne. Even though he was ten years older than I was, whenever I looked at him I felt like I was looking into the eyes of a dumb child. The one (and only)

time I was alone with Toby, he pulled his penis out of his pants and told me to, "Play with it." I ran all the way home.

And yet, amid this derangement and squalor, Bridgette somehow managed to grow and mature into a bright, beautiful, reasonably normal girl. The only real shock she ever handed me was when she became pregnant in our senior year and told me, "The baby isn't yours..."

She promptly dropped out of school and disappeared.

And now I was calling her.

The phone rang six times and I was about to hang up and consider myself lucky that no one was home, when the rings suddenly ceased and I heard the hiss of open air.

"Hello?" I said.

And then Bridgette's voice was in my ear: "Hello?" And I realized that I actually missed her. After all these years I still missed her. Incredible.

"Hi. Bridgette? It's me, Hank. Hank Kirton..."

"Hi, Hank," she said, as if I called her every morning just to say "Hi." Her voice had grown smooth and slow over the years. It trickled like liquid.

"Um, Hi. So. How you been?"

Silence for several beats. I listened to her breathe. Then she said, "I was hoping you'd call."

"You were? Really?" I said, surprised.

"M-hmmmm..."

A return to silence.

I said, "Sooo, I heard you were in India. That right?"

"Can you come over?" she said.

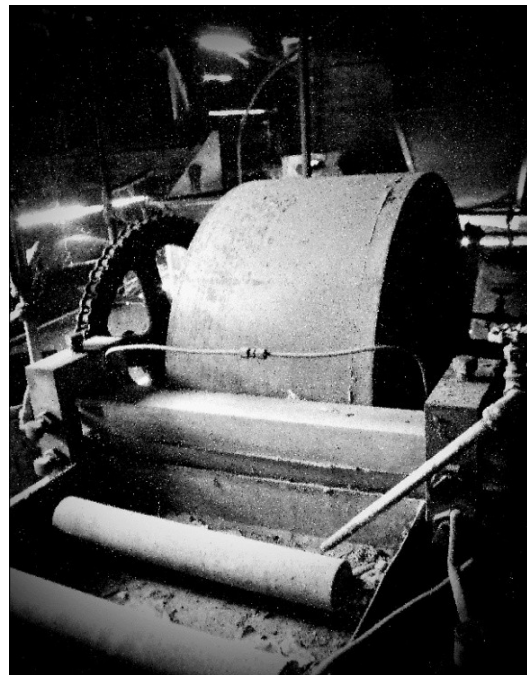
"Come over? To your house?"

"M-hmmmm..."

"When?"

"Now, silly..."

And so I did. And the whole drive over there I kept thinking, "What the hell am I doing? This is nuts!"





The old neighborhood had changed. When I was a kid, it had been populated by hard-working, blue-collar families, but the plant closings of the late 80's had hit hard. A lot of the houses were empty and falling apart - burnt-out husks that sheltered a few crack-smoking squatters and homeless alcoholics. There was more litter than lawn around them.



The Blake house was in the same abject condition. The old brown paint had peeled to a few stubborn strips; the windows had missing panes and were patched with cardboard and tape. The house had been tagged with spray-paint several times. The splintered front door sported an enigmatic, Day-Glo legend: Spookjump 00.

As I approached the house, the thought, "How can these people still live here?" repeatedly interrupted the stream of childhood memories.

I climbed the front steps and knocked on the door. It creaked open and I felt like I was in an old corny horror movie.

I stuck my head inside and said, "Hello?"

And from the darkness I heard Bridgette's voice, "Hellooooo... Come in."

The house was unlighted and filthy and smelled of pot, rotting garbage and incense. I moved through the cluttered living room not wanting to touch anything. Spectral residue from my childhood seemed to hang over the dusty furniture like cobwebs.

I found Bridgette in the darkened kitchen, sitting at the same table her father had camped-out at for most of his adult life. A German shepherd was sleeping by her feet.

She was slow to notice me in the gloom. When she finally saw me she smiled and said, "Hank. Sit doooown."

She was obviously stoned.

I moved toward the table and as Bridgette came into sharper focus I was quietly shocked.

Had I also gotten that old?

She was drawn and thin, her pretty round face now sunken and filled with hollows. Her skin was wrinkled and parched, her hair disheveled and salted with gray.

When she smiled I saw that her teeth were brown and decayed.

I wanted to run away.

"Sit doooooown," she said again.

"Thanks." I sat across from her. The awful smell of rot hit me again but I tried to maintain a friendly, unassuming expression. I looked at Bridgette.



A smoldering joint rested in an ashtray at her elbow. There was a small dish of what looked like grits in front of her. She held a plastic fork in her right hand. I noticed several flies crawling atop the mysterious gruel. The kitchen was alive with flies. Her left hand rested flat and upturned on the table and a small cone of incense burned on her open palm.

She said, "Hi, Hank. Long time no see. How have you been?" and

then ate a forkful of grits - or whatever it was.

"I've been doing okay. And you?"

She put down the fork and picked up the joint. She inhaled a hit and then held it out. "Ganja?" she croaked.

"No thanks."

After she exhaled, she said, "You don't smoke anymore?"

I shook my head. "It doesn't agree with me."

She smiled at that.

I looked around the room, waving flies away from my face. "Where is everybody?"

"Who?"

"Your folks. Toby and Casey."

"They're downstairs."

"Downstairs?"

She took another hit from the joint and nodded.

"In the cellar?"

"In the cellar," she croaked, holding the smoke. She put the joint down, exhaled, and then ate another forkful of gritty gray goop.

"What are you eating?" I asked.

She swallowed and said, "I don't know. I think it's cereal." Then she laughed and said, "Want some?"

"No thanks."

Silence fell for a long time and we just looked at each other. Finally, I said, "So, how was India?"

She shrugged. "It was okay."

"Yeah? Whereabouts were you?"

"All over. Mostly Barha in Khurja, Uttar Pradesh."

"Oh yeah? Is that nice?"

She gave me a strange grin I couldn't decipher. "It has its moments," she said.

"How's Candi?" I said, and then wanted to withdraw the question.

About Bridgette's daughter, Candi: She was a severely mentally-retarded child of incest. Stuart Blake raped Bridgette when she was seventeen. When she learned she was pregnant, she ran away to New York City. She lived on the streets for a few months before hooking up with a new-age cult called The Children of Om. They invited her to deliver her baby at their 12-acre ashram, upstate.

It was there that she gave birth to Candi in June of 1985.

She remained at the ashram for several years. The rumor at our five-year high school reunion was that she shaved her head, wore a

yellow robe and begged for change in the subways. Whenever I was in New York I looked for her.

And then in 1994, The Children of Om made the news.

A seven-year-old boy named Hilly Cotton disappeared from his home, just a few miles south of the ashram. As the police search entered its second day, The Children of Om abruptly disbanded and scattered. The leader of the sect, a middle-aged guru who called himself Sri Baba Biswas (formerly Melvin Finkel), fled to India with a few select members of his flock - Bridgette and her daughter among them. Neither Hilly Cotton nor his remains were ever found, but many believed he'd been ritually "sacrificed" by the cult. Tales of black magic, satanic rituals and even necrophilia and cannibalism still hovered over the history of The Children of Om.



"Candi's okay," Bridgette told me. "I left her in India."

"Really? So, are you going back there?"

"Yeah. I just came home to take care of some long overdue business."

"I see." I looked at her palm. The incense had burned to spent ash and I detected a whiff of scorched skin. Both her hands were spotted with burn scars.



She picked up the joint and offered it to me again. "Sure you don't want some?" she said. "It's dynamite reefer, grown in the mountains of Nepal."

I raised my hands and said, "No, thanks. I actually have to get going." And I stretched my legs, accidentally kicking the sleeping German shepherd under the table. I'd forgotten it was there.

The dog did not stir.

Now that the incense had died out, the smell of decay had grown stronger and something hideous suddenly occurred to me. With mounting fear and disgust, I bent down and looked under the table.

The dog had been dead for awhile. It was crawling with flies and surrounded by a squirming nimbus of maggots.

I don't know how I kept from throwing up. I jumped away from the table and backed into the sink, causing a stack of dirty dishes to topple and shatter on the tile floor.

Bridgette stared at me through stoned, bloodshot eyes and said, "What's the matter?"

And then I remembered her family in the cellar and realized I hadn't heard so much as a murmur or a cough since I'd entered the house. The basement was directly beneath the kitchen.

"I have to go," I told her, already halfway across the room. "I don't feel well..."

I heard her say, "Well, you want some aspirin or something?" And then I was outside and back in the clean fresh air. I drove home with all the windows down, trying to get the smell of smoke and decay out of my nose, out of my clothes.

About Bridgette Blake: Bridgette may have endured the madness and moral corruption of her family with an amazing degree of self-

possession, and even seemed to triumph over her appalling legacy for awhile, but I'd always detected a certain amount of sadness and wrath just below the surface, even when we were small. I'll never know the full extent of the horrors she suffered in that house on Indian Run Road, or what bizarre horrors she fled to in The Children of Om, and the dark, squalid corners of India. But I believe she internalized every cruel abomination she'd ever suffered or witnessed, and these vile, violent experiences slowly devoured her soul, until finally the suppressed evil inside her couldn't be contained anymore.

An anonymous tip led police to the Blake house the next day (and no, it wasn't me). They discovered Bridgette's family in the basement.

Her father had been castrated, his genitals stuffed down his throat.

The autopsy indicated he'd choked to death. Toby and Casey were found with their ears, noses and hands cut off, their tongues cut out. They had bled to death. Patty Blake had been repeatedly stabbed in the abdomen and gutted. Her autopsy revealed that the half-digested contents of her stomach (Rice Krispies, bananas and milk) had been removed. Police found traces of Patty's stomach contents on a small dish on the kitchen table.

Bridgette Blake is still at large four years later.

I assume she returned to India to be with her daughter.



# PIMP OF THE PERVERSE

By Rich Follett

psssssssssst...

You.

Victim.

Boy Wonder.

Pedophile's puppet.

You hear me,  
I know you do.

You liked it, didn't you?

Delectable, ineluctable;  
a petit mal serial melodrama of  
repugnant submission –  
that final furtive flush of  
excruciating, exquisite surrender  
calls to you still.

That's your big secret, isn't it,  
freak?

For years now  
you've been telling anyone who'll  
listen  
how you've devoted your life to  
healing and forgiveness  
(thank God for expert therapy and  
good drugs);

you've fooled the masses;  
dazzled the critics;

bowing nightly to your own  
tumescant hype –

you dickless, simpering poseur

(oh, save the feigned indignation –

we knew all along).

Still;

what a fucking production!

Tonight,  
on the occasion of your umpteenth  
triumphant performance,  
your supporting cast has gathered  
to honor you with an après matinée  
toast.

You may recall Hoover,  
the chorus girl?  
She can suck the chrome off a  
hubcap  
without smearing her lipstick.  
How many times has she finished a  
scene  
when you choked?

And this is UPS Guy –  
the stage manager –  
whenever you needed to look great  
in shorts  
or accept deliveries at the rear  
he never missed his cue.  
Butch

(your straight man)  
is here, too:  
always happy to take the fall  
when stock gags failed to entertain  
and  
the garish light of truth threatened  
to expose your artless farce.

Lorelei,  
(your understudy)  
still waits in the wings  
if ever you feel unsafe, unsure.  
If ever it seemed you couldn't go  
on,  
she always found you a new  
leading man - different -  
with strong, sheltering arms  
to keep you from being afraid in  
the presence of all the others  
(it was just a touch of stage fright  
now and again).  
She'd rehearse him into a lather  
and turn him right over to you  
for the climax  
(before he sensed how the plot had  
twisted).  
Lorelei,  
now appearing:  
one night only -  
it has really always been her show.

They're all here for you, kid ...  
you've been with each of them;  
you've been each of them.

Oh ... me?  
I'm your agent,  
remember?  
The Pimp of the Perverse.  
I pull the strings;

I run the whole goddamn show.

See this contract?  
I own you.

Pathetic parasite -  
you were nobody when I found  
you;  
you'd be nobody still, if ...

Well, never mind.  
this is an open-ended engagement,  
the box office is boffo  
and your adoring public waits.

Just don't get any big ideas about  
retirement

(let us merely say  
I'd be willing, if necessary, to tell  
the press  
your tastes once ran to the...exotic).

Goodness, how 'bout that time?  
They're seating for the evening  
show already!

On stage, Olivier.

Try not to trip over the scenery.

Ladies and gentlemen,

GIMCRACK THEATRE

is proud to present ...

平反六四

追究屠城責任





# UN APERITIVO COL DIAVOLO

By Darius James

Images © Destiny McKeever



The air was heavy with the cloying aroma of glazed nuts simmering in an artificial syrup. Ku'dam glowed in a frost of lights. And shoppers trundled along the boulevard bundled in furs. I wandered from bar to café with one drink bleeding into another, one drug morphing into the next, without finding a soul with whom I could tipple and commiserate. The loneliness was crippling. I drank prodigiously. It bordered on the suicidal.

Since moving to Europe, I had estranged myself from the friends I had left behind and those I knew in Berlin. Christmas had come to

mean no family, no friends, no feast. This most important of holidays had been reduced to an endless supply of wine and a galaxy of drugs.

By the time I settled into the last bar I would visit that Christmas eve, my brain was pulsating with dizzy swirls and throbbing lines. My vision had skewed into flipping horizontal patterns. Everything was in fish-eyed perspective. I could no longer tell the difference between day or night.

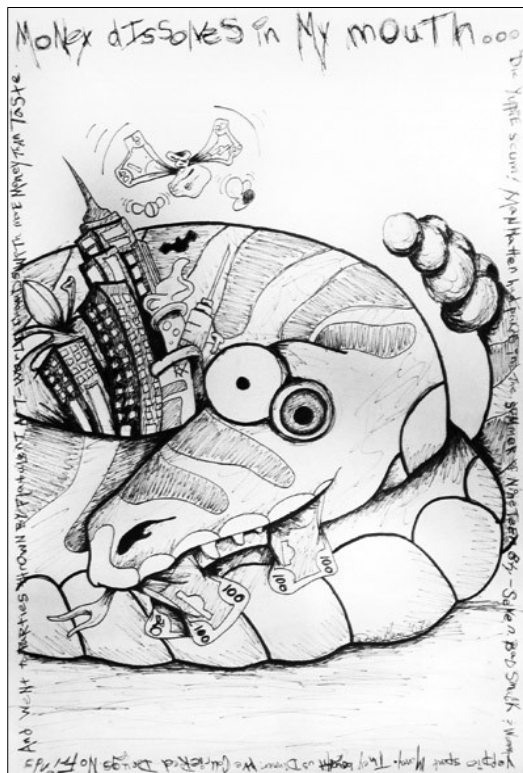
## "Money Dissolves in My Mouth"

Manhattan had peaked in the summer of nineteen eighty-seven. The Lower Eastside was a circus of openings and exhibitions. There was an abundance of money and yuppies. Parties and coke. Bad women and smack.

The battle cry in the squats on East Thirteenth Street was "*DIE YUPPIE SCUM!!!*". But fuck that bullshit. Yuppies spent money. They bought us dinner. We couriered drugs. European tourists were our favorite targets. In the shade of the Tompkins Square Park bandshell, they approach and asked where to cop blow. Cocaine was cheap that summer. So we charged eighty, while it was only twenty, and pocketed the rest. Our foreign-born

guests were always happy with the fat white bags of laxative we scored from the Puerto Ricans at the laundrymat on E. 7th Street.

It was an undemanding life of unending night, even during daylight hours. I made the rounds of galleries; dance clubs; after-hours bars; all-night diners and, freak that I am, bondage clubs in the meat-packing district. I never knew where or with whom I might wake up. Some mornings I was on the floor of a plush loft with a neon-haired floozie naked in torn fishnets reeking of sweat and alcohol. On others, I was sprawled with limbs akimbo in the stairwell of a low-income housing project on Avenue D. It really didn't matter because it would start all over again on a bench in the park.



Where did the money come from?  
No one knew.

But we ate, survived and had fun. Our gratification was in the company of each other. There was always a party, always an opening, with a case of wine and a tray of food.

Summer ended. The leaves withered. And our 'endless night' was over.

Of course, we still gathered in the park. And went to parties thrown by flatulent art-world frauds with more money than taste. We still ate on the Yuppie dime. And short-changed constipated Europeans.

But it was all by rote, all routine. The inspired exuberance was gone. Then Christmas came. Corpses turned up in the park. Some stewed and served in the shelters. There were rumors of a brandy-soaked pudding for desert. Derelicts were raped in the bandshell; brutal cluster-fucks illuminated by a halo of blinking holiday lights. Friends succumbed to the lure of heroin. I became a drunk.

And, as the illness of addiction took over, I watched my friends turn their backs on their own humanity:

*Don't fuck up and o'd. That was the unspoken rule. Handle your shit. We ain't fuckin' 'round wid' no po' leese. So if you do fuck up, kiss your sorry ass goodbye. Ain't gonna be no last-minute miracles in the emergency room. We just gonna dump your ass in a lot and let you die. It's your last dance, pardner. Party over. The D.J. has left the building.*

### **"Latex Skin Glows in the Dark"**

I sat alone at a corner table, unnoticed by the others in the bar. Normally, I preferred anonymity in Berlin. Generally, the average German ignored me. This was because I was both a stranger and an American. We were Europe's equivalent of New York's vagrant 'euro-trash' population. Trust-fund backpackers and off-the-rack hipsters - with their ridiculous claim of never setting foot on U.S. soil until the president of the United States was removed from office - had turned the idea of an "American Expat" into a grotesque joke.

These people were awful. They needed to die in New York. They needed to die in Berlin. I tried to beat one of them to death one night. Long-haired P.C. Vegan asshole thought I was his art-commune's 'kitchen nigger'. *Popped* that muthafucka in the forehead with a soup ladle.

However, these were unusual circumstances. It was the holidays. I was alone in a foreign country. I missed my family. I missed the warmth of human friendship. And I missed the moist warmth of Holly-wreathed XXX-Mass pussy wrapped and ribboned under my Christmas tree.

### **"Tom of Finland Travels By Transparent Escalator"**

I dozed off after my fourth glass of wine. Or maybe I blacked out. It was impossible to tell the

difference. I was sipping a glass of putrid red one moment. And he was sitting across the table the next. I don't even remember closing my eyes. It happened that fast.

I was sitting quietly with my thoughts, lost in some Grosz-inspired jangle of vibrating lines, obviously influenced by the drunkards crowding the bar, when, after a moment-tary sensation of vertigo, there he was - a hawk-faced *leprechaun* with reddened jowls and two wisps of hair jutting over his brow like the dying tendrils of a dehydrated houseplant. They looked like the budding horns of a young goat. His shirt was an eye-aching yellow spotted with gobbling green PacMen.

I recovered consciousness during the tail end of some jabber about waiting tables in New York. "I'd go down to Christopher Street after work," he said, sounding like Don Knotts (with a brogue) in *The Ghost and Mr. Chicken*; "and have a beer at the Ramrod. You're an American. You look like a New Yorker. Ever been to the Ramrod?"

*Did they dig this guy up from under the Paradise Garage and pull him out of a pink time-capsule stamped with a smiley face?*

I knew the Ramrod. I used to live on Grove Street in those days; a block over from Christopher. I'd come up out of the Sheridan Square subway station and Seventh Avenue would be mobbed with

protesters disrupting principal photography on *Cruising*.

Stone-wall was still fresh in people's minds.

At the time, I was friends with an off-broadway actress whose acting, so she said, was guided by the voices of a Semitic demoness named Lilith. She was the first woman she said. She was created out of the same earth as Adam. She was supposed to be his 'help mate' under his direct command. Lilith said:

*"Fuck you and your daddy! Why should I help a muthafucka who can't even find my g-spot? Take out one of them ribs and make you a dumb bitch to pluck your apples!"*

And split. That's why she's a demon. She was the first 'Badd Nigga' of record.

My friend was a dynamic if frightening performer - the sort who enjoyed covering herself in clay and blood and brandishing machetes. But you could always hear, just under the surface of her mind, the jaunty pipe-whistles of a Loony Tunes cartoon.

Anyway, she used to fuck Al Pacino in his trailer between set-ups so he wouldn't lose *his* mind playing a troubled stud-cop in campy leather gear with a yellow snot-rag hanging out of his back pocket.

*"Kiss and tell..."*

She wouldn't. But once her affair with Pacino was over, she began cross-dressing in leatherboy drag and hanging out on the docks. She'd always come back to my apartment with raccooned eyes, begging for food or drugs, banged up and bruised, smelling *really* bad. Little did I realize she was the prototype for a succession of sociopathic girlfriends I would have later in life.

The Ramrod was by the West Side Highway, across from the pier along the Hudson River. The building looked like it was once a drive-through burger joint in the 'fifties; the kind that serviced long-distance truckers. Apparently, it still did. The lot surrounding it was filled with motorcycles; all individually customized, all looking like the boudoir of an expensive 19<sup>th</sup> century whore: pink upholstery, rhinestone studding and flashing neon tubing. Not the kind of stripped-down putt-putts parked in front of the Angels' clubhouse on East Third Street.

The Ramrod was a little like Charlottenberg's scatological fun-house, *Klo*, without the obnoxious heterosexuals or infantile sense of humor. It was just infantile. The place was a urinal with a bar in the middle of the floor. Literally. Gangs of *Tom of Finland* leatherboys quaffed a few drafts at the rail; then, full bladdered, cracked open ampules under their noses, whiffing a delirious mix of amyl-nitrate, Lysol and ammonia-pungent piss, headed over to the porcelain trough built along the

walls for some real mouth-opened wide fun and games.

### **"Ruby Slippers My Dear: Or Black People Before The Invention of Hip-hop"**

I lied and told the leprechaun I was a Canadian.

"Really? Where're you from? Vancouver? Toronto? Montreal?"

"Saskatoon." Saskatoon is Canada's answer to the wheat fields of Kansas; all flatlands and infinite sky.

"I'm from Dublin" he said. "I didn't know they had black people in Canada."

"After pickin' cotton for all them white folks, we had to go somewhere. Couldn't very well walk back to Africa, could we? So it was *Little Negroes on the Prairie*. That's a Saskatoon joke."

I made that up, too. I can't even blame my gay Canadian friend, Michael, for that one. It's called *Jeffin'*. That's what you do to foolish white folks; dubious *dinge* queens like the leprechaun in front of me and otherwise. Willie Best made plenty of crinkly *Jeffin'* white out in Hollywood.

Actually, I'm not from New York, either. I grew up in *Connecticut*, state of the now generally ignored U.S. Constitution. Black people populate that place, too. The obstreperous kind with crack pipes and guns.

"There must be black people in Ireland," I told him. "Otherwise, Sammy Davis, Jr., wouldn't know how to tap dance. Cromwell's European niggas *clog-dancin'* in Jamaica, y'know? Black people are everywhere. I even met a Black Czech chick once. Didn't speak a word of English. Only spoke Czech and Russian. Took me on a tour of Theresienstadt. Besides, my great grandfather was an Irishman."

"No!"

"Yes. Except he was white. Said to himself there are no potatoes in Ireland, sailed to Saskatoon, married a black woman and bought a farm. I grew up just like Dorthy before she spun off to Oz and found those ruby slippers."

"You're a *Black-Canadian farm* boy?! Oh, this is *too* much!"

"Why not? Haven't you ever listened to Negro Spirituals? The ones sung in the fields? Those songs were code for fuck the white man, throw down your hoe and chase that star to Canada. Check it out. Go Down Moses, Let My People Go: 'Harriett Tubman, hurry and get your black ass down to Alabama so these niggas can go pick snowflakes up in Canada!' My grandmother told me that."

### **"Topography of a Phantom Shopping Mall"**

Tito Puente and his orchestra followed Heino on the jukebox. That's what I loved about Berliners. Even they knew you couldn't get

drunk without Puerto Rican music. I wondered if Puerto Ricans would listen to Schlager?

"What brings you to Berlin?" I asked the leprechaun. "*Rotkohl* with the family?"

"God, no!! What on earth is '*rotkohl*'?"

"Red cabbage. It's a German Christmas favorite. Mit gänse und kartoffel."

Frankly, I didn't get it. Bondage, rubber and chunks of metal rumbling in a throbbing orifice I got. But wallowing in steaming piss?!! That was beyond me. What potty-manual did their parents read? *The Charles Mingus CAT-alog for Toilet Training your Cat?!!*

My roommate on Grove, however, swore by it. He loved the leather freakazoids in dives like *The Ramrod* and *The Toilet*. That's why I'm familiar with those places. He told me about it.

Usually, in the morning. Over breakfast. In gruesome detail.

I used to see these characters all the time in the West Village. The air in Smiler's deli was rank with the odor of soggy pee-queens at four a.m.; forlornly ribboned Judy Garlands all pressed against the cashier's counter under the weight of multiple six-packs.

But that's a Christopher Street of an *erased* New York. That Christopher Street - the Christopher Street of

Stonewall and Marsha Wallace, of *Cruising* and *The Ramrod* - disappeared along with Times Square, its peepshows, its hustlers and its tricks. How can a tv set and dvd player ever replace the lap-stiffening grandeur of Vanessa Del Rio on the screen of a Forty-second Street grind house?

The New York I knew was a comingling, a transcultural hybrid, of classes, races, religions, genders and generations. It was an open space without borders. A place of possibility. That space was erased. Avarice had turned the heart and mind of Manhattan into a simulacrum of itself. It had become a phantom city replicated on the Broadway stage - the Theater of *No Surprise*.

It was no longer a matter of recognizing the shifting planes and queer angles in the urban sprawl - the *Flâneur* turning corners in the psychic cityscape; discovering strange new worlds. Those worlds - those *psychic* worlds - don't exist in Manhattan anymore. There are only ghosts. Ghosts on the landscape. Ghosts fishhooked in the mind. This is why I left the U.S. My house was haunted. Money dissolved in my mouth.

The odd thing is I've become a ghost here, too...

*For: Maresa Lippolis*

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# MORNING

By Nick Tosches

Wake up, baby:

*gimme a fucking drink.*

Wake up, baby:

*gimme a million bucks.*

Wake up, baby:

*gimme a fucking blowjob.*

Wake up, baby:

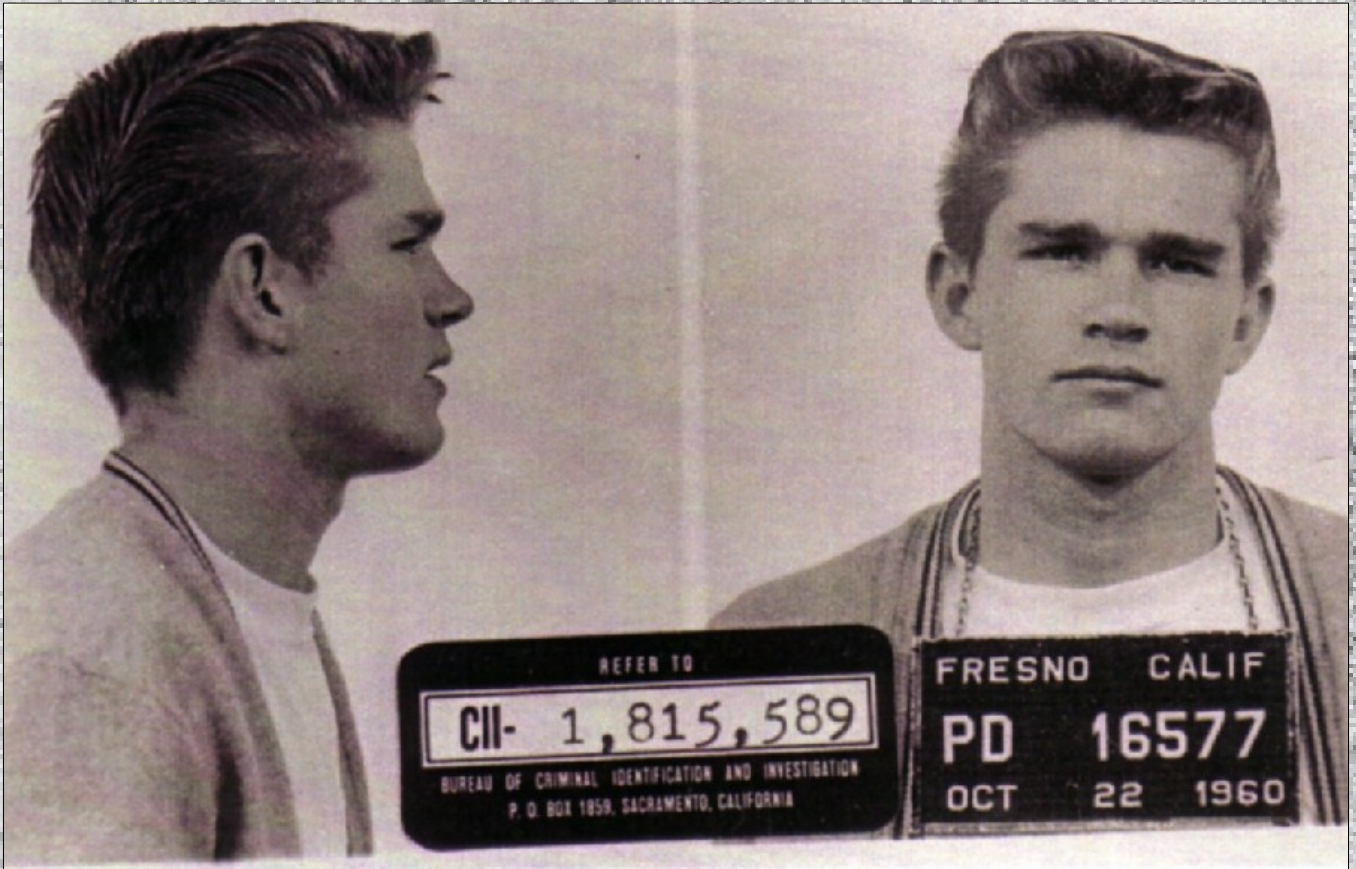
*gimme pork chops, onions, and spuds.*

Wake up, baby:

*gimme the fucking world*

Wake up, baby:

*gimme it all and speed it up.*





# INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

## A TRUE STORY

By John Barrymore

Photo © Malcolm Alcalá

We paced back and forth in front of the mausoleum and waited for the Mexican grave diggers to finish their lunch. Bruce Pedy, my father's lawyer, looked very nervous and kept looking toward the gate of the cemetery while playing with the volume controls on his hearing aids, as if he expected the police to come screaming up the driveway with their sirens blaring. We were there not to make a deposit, but a withdrawal, and maybe the papers were forged, but I still think Bruce was being a little paranoid. I really didn't care. I had gotten very drunk with my father on the way over to the cemetery, and the whole undertaking (no pun intended) had already taken on a surreal quality.

My grandfather, John Barrymore, made a great deal of money in his time. He also managed to live in a style grossly in excess of what even his ludicrous income justified. When he died in 1942, he was destitute. Not only broke, but several hundred thousand dollars in debt. Everything he owned was sold by the executors of his estate

to pay off these debts. Everything, that is, except what my grandmother, Dolores Costello (an actress in silent and talking pictures), managed to "acquire" from him before, during and after their marriage. My grandfather was quite a collector.

Upon my grandmother's death in March of 1979, my father, John Barrymore Jr., and I, began to enjoy a greatly improved standard of living supported by selling off the Barrymorabilia we had pirated from her estate. There must have been 500 pounds of silver, including Georgian Knights candelabra, Georgian silver flatware and dozens and dozens of silver plates and bowls. There were many sets of china and porcelain, as well as Staffordshire and wall sconces by such manufacturers as Meissen, Dresden, Beleek, pre-war Japanese, ancient Chinese, Lalique crystal, etc. Also antique furniture from Versailles, Louis XV, and others. But the greatest treasures were the books. There were cases and cases of rare first editions, an early 16th century printing of Terence's "Book of Comedies" (an

incunabila) and a 13th century French "Book of Hours"-a hand executed, illuminated Catholic doctrine which chronicles the story of Jesus, or what my father used to call the "immaculate deception." Also several triptychs and other old, valuable religious icons and a set of plique-a-jour goblets made for the coronation of Czar Nicholas by Anton Kopolvnik, a contemporary of Faberge.

After several years of abject poverty, we were now comfortably ensconced in adjacent one-bedroom apartments at 8440 Sunset Boulevard-now the site of the trendy Hotel Mondrian.

One of the people we "fenced" the Barrymorabilia off to on a regular basis was a notorious Hollywood reprobate who was widely known as Red Dog. Red Dog was an avid reader and collector, and we sold him many rare books. He usually paid us more than they were worth. Whenever we went to his house, he would read us something by Nietzsche, Stevenson, DeQuincey or some other author. On one particular occasion, we were up there to sell him an edition of Hawkins' "Compleat Angler". He gave me about twice what the book was worth and then said, "Buzz" (a nickname of mine he used to distinguish me from my father, who has the same first and

last name as I) "I've got a poem here I think you'll like."

He proceeded to read us "The Cremation of Sam McGee" by Robert Service. The poem is a tale of the frozen north, about a blood oath given by one man to cremate the remains of another. When Red Dog finished reading, I looked over at my father. He was crying. I knew what was on his mind. He was thinking of his own father's wishes, and of the dishonorable acts that had left him entombed in Los Angeles. He looked over at me and said, "Jake, we've got to get my daddy up." I had already made the same decision.

John Barrymore had left specific instructions in his will that his body be cremated and his ashes be laid to rest next to his father and mother in the family cemetery in Philadelphia. However, due to the fact that his brother Lionel and sister Ethel were Catholic and cremation had not at that time been sanctioned by the Catholic Church, the executors (Lionel and Mervyn Leroy) pulled some fancy judicial manipulations and my grandfather's remains were entombed at Calvary Cemetery, in Los Angeles. It had always bothered my father deeply that his father's wishes were ignored.

Soon after, we were sitting in my father's apartment with Bruce Pedy. We brought up the subject of how one would exhume, or lay one's hands on such a body. OK, perhaps the word "steal" was used, just for the sake of clarity. It involved getting a dispensation from the Catholic Church (since cremation was now sanctioned) and permission for an exhumation from the Health Department, as well as a few other documents including permission from all living heirs. Bruce got the dispensation from the church, and gave me the other documents to be signed by the heirs. There was no way I was going to deal with my insane Barrymore relatives, and being a rather skillful forger, I took the path of least resistance. When I returned the documents to Bruce the next day, he looked at me as if he had anticipated more trouble in getting the signatures, but being an officer of the Court, I think he knew better than to ask about the details.

By the time we got to Calvary Cemetery, my grandfather had been joined by Lionel, his brother, and Ethel, his sister, as well as Irene Fenwick, Lionel's wife, all in crypts adjacent to or in the vicinity of my grandfather's. The mausoleum was also inhabited by various persons with our family names of Drew, Blyth, Devereaux,

and Colt. Dolores Costello Barrymore and her sister, Helene Costello LeBlanc, were both outside in the cemetery proper with their mother, Mae Costello, and father, Maurice Costello. It was clearly the west coast family cemetery, located in a portion of Los Angeles which had, by 1980, become the mutual border of various ghettos.

The grave diggers finally finished their lunch, and we went inside. They removed the marble monument which served as the front wall of the tomb. It read "John Barrymore" across the middle and "Good Night, Sweet Prince" in the lower left hand corner. Bruce wanted it for a coffee table but the administrators of Calvary Cemetery made a big stink about not being able to match the marble and we gave it up so as to not make waves. Once they got it off the smell of the thing assaulted us. He had been dead for thirty-eight years, and in spite of the fact that the body was embalmed it had still been decomposing. The casket was solid bronze, and although it had a glass liner, it must have cracked or something, because the fluids from the body had leaked out and had formed a kind of glue between the casket and the floor of the crypt. The burly grave diggers pulled with all their weight on the end handle, but they couldn't seem

to move the casket. My father got impatient. "Out of the way!" he shouted, and shouldered them aside. He handed them each a red apple. It's a tradition in my family to give red apples on opening night, and, this being an opening, Dad had stopped to pick up a bag on the way over. He kicked off his rubber go-aheads, put one bare foot up on Ethel's crypt and the other up on Lionel's, and yanked on the handle. He only weighs about 150 pounds, but he managed to pull that casket halfway out with one jerk.

We muscled the thing up on the hand truck; the smell was really bad now, but somehow I managed to keep from choking. The Barrymore crypts were on the second floor of the mausoleum and the four of us-Bruce, Dad, a one-eyed Carpathian pirate named John Desko, and myself-wheeled the casket down a long ramp and out to the plain brown Ford van we had waiting outside. The body fluids were leaking out all the way. We cruised over to the Odd Fellows Cemetery, which had the nearest crematorium. We flashed our phony papers and lots of cash and told them we wanted it torched. They said it would take several hours, so we picked out a square urn in the shape of a book and made arrangements for me to pick up the cremains the next day.

My father insisted on having a look inside the casket before we left.

The body had been stolen once before. Thirty-eight years earlier, when he first died, some of Grandad's cronies boosted the corpse and took it up to Errol Flynn's house as a practical joke, so Dad wanted to make sure that his father was in the box. The employees at the Odd Fellows begged me to talk him out of it. I think that even these professional ghouls were a little squeamish about viewing a body that had been fermenting that long. Dad was his usual intractable self, though, so after passing out apples to all the employees he and Bruce went in to have a look. I decided to pass on this one and only chance to see my grandfather "in the flesh"-the smell had been more than enough for me. They came out together a few minutes later. Dad was white as a sheet and crying. He got in the car and said to me, "Thank God I'm drunk, I'll never remember it." I got a graphic description later from Bruce. Apparently all the bouncing around we had subjected it to had sort of busted the jaw apart from what was left of the head. They were convinced it was John Barrymore by the very high quality dental work, and because although most of the flesh on the nose had decomposed, an incredibly long

nose cartilage remained. At any rate, he was in there.

We went home and I returned the next day for the cremains. They handed me a square package wrapped in plain brown paper with a little label on the side that said "contains cremated remains of John Barrymore" in nice funereal script. It was going to take Dad some time to raise the money for the trip to Philadelphia by selling off more of the Barrymorebelia. He went on a sales campaign.

Meanwhile, I kept my grandfather's remains stashed in the top drawer of my dresser underneath my shirts, like a stroke book. In about two weeks Dad had the cash together and went over to my pad when I wasn't home and picked up the body, my best suit and three of my shirts. He took them and the Book of Hours with him to Philadelphia. I received a call from him in Philadelphia about 5 days later. The content of our conversation was as follows:

He had gone to the site of the Philadelphia cemetery where many of our family were interred only to discover that it had been moved. He spent the next few days trying to find out where. He went to the Historical Society, the Edwin Booth home for retired actors, and finally to the residence of Cardinal Krull.

After showing one of the nuns my grandfather's cremains and the Book of Hours, the nun said to Dad, "Wait here, I'll call you a taxi." She then telephoned the police, who took Dad down to the station and had him interviewed by the police psychiatrist. The psychiatrist declared him "sane enough" and he was released. By the time Dad called me from Philly, he was at the end of his rope. He was almost out of money, had been all over town and still not found the proper cemetery. He said to me, "I can't go on, man. Fuck it; he's in Philadelphia." I said, "Well, you can't just leave him anywhere." To which Dad replied, "Hey, man, he's at the Fairmont Hotel! I'll just toss him in the corner and bribe the janitor not to sweep up." I finally prevailed on Dad to continue his quest, and a couple of days later the Historical Society came up with the proper cemetery. Dad went there and fulfilled his father's wishes. Back in Los Angeles, the marble monument was replaced over John Barrymore's now empty tomb.





# A PART APART

Text and Images By Chris Madoch



He was at it again- bitterly obsessively regretting being christened with such a burdensome name, a name that bit at both his ganglia and prostrate, a name never meant for greatness: Godfried Dick. He knew of Phillip Dick, Bladerunner, the sheep, the weeping of the lambs. He got there, fair and square in Thomas Harris territory, in a flash. Lately he was prone to do this, the domestic circumstances predisposing him to introspection and morbid depression.

It was early afternoon, a Friday, and he was watch-watching whilst eyeing inbred pigeons with an intense envy.

He'd ended the working week early with a sense of glee, boyishly exercising his freedom to virtually

come and go when he pleased where he was prized and also demonised by a junior partnership. Law firms ran in the family as did truncated marriages to doctors and unseemly divorces.

He picked at the brie and rocket sandwich he'd purchased from Starbucks, scattered crumbs exciting the sky rats, felt in a blink like some demi-god. Odd as a peg with no hole at all.

London's many smaller, mostly walk-thru parks, were active pockets of intrigue, places of consequence where stories, indeed films, either began or ended or, in the case of some European directors, both. Shit, all of life's detritus, sifted through them in a giant cycle of glory, boredom and regret.

This particular bench, the one marked in dedication to Sybil Fort- a maverick female banker was, he knew, to be his first fresh benchmark, the start of a new life without a cunt of a surgeon wife when the bells eventually chime four. It was ironically apt. On this bench he'd get the call to say the deal was done- his substantial assets duly raped; the West Sussex Manor and the Colombian gardener gone along with two million in pristine sterling. He kept

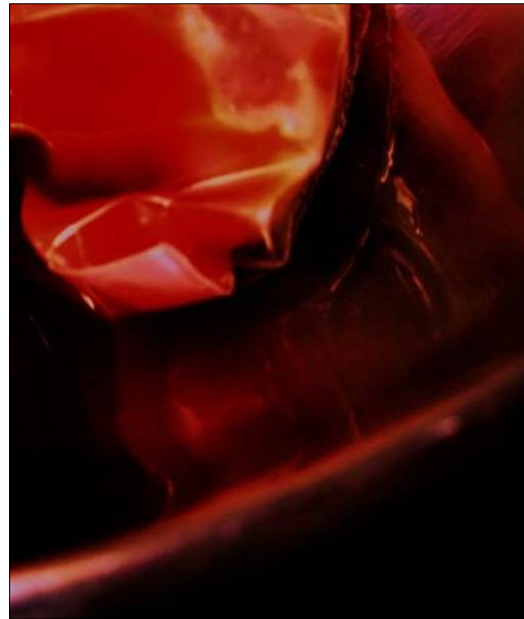
telling himself how liberating it was.

It was an obvious loss. Even whenever he'd been a phenomenal success he'd thought himself a loser. Well, with a name like that, a name that defied a halfway decent nick-name. No-one was going to call him God. Dick was obvious and consequently ubiquitous even at a Public school- Winchester. Winchester, followed by a first in Law at Oxford. Fried Dick always hurt him the most. She who was noted for her heart bypass technique had persistently called him Dickie- the one trifle that had always made him feel rather sick. The scalpel adept bitch.

Glad? Yes.

At least he had the de rigueur bachelor pad in Covent Garden- with garage, a state of the art Audi and a legitimate million. Not exactly a setback to anyone fresh out of the closet about to embark on a new life as a gay man. The head of his firm was a very understanding old queen with a wicked glint in his eye that spoke of tit for tat and prospective promotion. So fuck Ms bleached skin and her endless theses on the refinements of suturing.

His Blackberry played Elgar, cutting the ambient silence like he'd seen MP's from The Treasury slice the end off of fat Cuban cigars.



### **A DONE DEAL.**

Free. But he was suddenly at a loss as how to feel.

Three albino pigeons chopping the sunlight like 'copter wings, the vision slabs of white and black, not unlike the precursor of a migraine attack. The arms of The Isle Of Man. He covered his blue eyes with both hands, began sobbing like a much bullied boy.

Traffic police found the abandoned Audi, doors agape, keys in the ignition, the engine purring. Blood at jam set stage, sticky, viscous, mocked the custard yellow hide of the driver's and the passenger side. No sign of structural damage. No theft. An SLR digital and a Macbook had been left along with all of the vehicle's accreditation. Nearby a major hospital- a great white toad with NHS blue eyes held ghastly court across the urban sprawl where anything of any possible predilection might actually breathe air and reside.



All he has said over and over is 'The bag. The bag. The [expletive] plastic bag.'

No-one is surprised.



#### THE A&E RECEPTIONIST

"I was fresh on. He was my first. You always remember them. Dead on ten pm he was. Never late me. We were pretty slack- just a broken foot and a suspected heart attack I knew full well was dyspepsia. No medical qualifications just years of experience. You see it all the time. He was a walk-in. Well, I say a walk-in. Two, in uniform, door security men helped him stagger to a seat. They're plastic. The Accident and Emergency seating. Totally washable and bolted to the floor. His face was as white as a sheet. His hands and his lower half were covered with blood, totally covered, and he was shouting out about this bag he was holding. Very unpleasant. Major. I immediately pressed the emergency triage bell as per our

pocket training manual. I couldn't look at him. He was smart though. Nice shoes. Probably tailored I surmised. Bespoke. You can always tell a lot about a man by the gib of his shoes."

The assessment nurse arrived. An obese flap of youth, badges and an upside down watch, sensibly shod. She called out almost immediately. The back-up arrived in double time, seeming like too many chefs spoiling the buffet of flesh and flannel, but the froth of chrome and green was altogether necessary. God was whisked away to a semi-intensive surgical bay, the curtains cerulean blue with not a cloud to suggest rain in their softly pleated sky. Sharp scissors attacked his Paul Smith jeans. Quick fingers sought a wallet, diary, any form of identity. Godfried Dick, Queens Counsel. Forty two. Next of kin- Mrs Priscilla Dick, Consultant Cardiac Surgeon. It suddenly seemed he was one of theirs.

In went a multi-valve for a variety of lines- saline, morphine. Swabs. Machine bots all singing and all dancing mountain ranges. Shocked eyes locked then criss-crossing, asking, no-one answering, doing the routine on injuries anything but routine. The whole team breathy and agog. Their silence much louder than when encountering the usual run-of-the-mill proximity to death, to infant burns victims, to nuns miscarrying. In that profession you do become inured to the topography of tragedy until a new volcano suddenly erupts as if to deliberately trip you out of

auto-pilot. Sandra threw up in a recycled paper dish, adding to the scent of shitted Calvin Kleins and tissue damage. Leanne fainted, qualified for her own bay, a cold sponge to the forehead and regularly tapped hands. Eventually done with the humdrum, a junior doctor turned to the transparent bag whose contents, at that stage, needed no medical judgement and offered no surprise tangents of thought- half melted ice-cubes, blood, meat, a pathetic human piece, a part apart.



#### **A&E SENIOR NURSE**

"I'd seen him before. Lovely couple. We have a Cardiac Suite, the fifth floor- all of it. Very handsome. I shouldn't say it but everyone remarked on it- his good looks. Televisual I think they call it these days. Yes. Of course. The hospital ant's nest being the hotbed of rumours that it is we all had an inkling of the impending divorce. Minutes after we laid hands on him he lost all consciousness. Swift

blood matching. Transfusion. Rigorous monitoring. Transfer to theatre and the safe hands of a plastic surgeon who was fortuitously available. No. He never uttered a word other than was sufficient to draw our attention to the bag he brought in with him. Speed is crucial in these cases. He's in intensive care now drifting in and out of sleep supported by a raft of drugs. I wouldn't expect him to be reliably lucid for at least 48hrs. Yes. With severe subcutaneous injury there is always danger of infection and yes, some of those infections can be life-threatening. Mrs Dick. No. No, I can't say that I have."

Still sobbing, he stopped when a young man tapped him on the shoulder and gave him the Blackberry he'd just dropped. God was taken aback. The lad loped off-lank blonde hair, thread worn street threads, careless and awash with honesty. A miracle.

It was four thirty.

A whole half an hour of freedom wasted.

A new cycle of self chastisement began keeping him pre-occupied as he sauntered from the City to Covent Garden. The gate porter smiled. Then, as he entered his G&Q domain- the home she hated, he discovered a scrap of paper in his pocket; unfolding it he read the rather cryptic 'www.squirt.org' and decided to investigate the site later, after his long bath.

Physical nakedness often begets more denuding. Immersion in warm water with all its residual references to the womb where sound and motion both seduced, produces an inclination in us to undress our beasts of lies, to lay bare their reality as unkempt rent or sloppy trollops; at least God thought as much. He'd lied enough and often blamed the legal bar- the greatest liars always made the best defence briefs. They could turn the theft of a Blackberry into the mere 'oversight' much beloved by fraudulent members of The Commons. The Lords too he quickly remembered- how sweet the unsavoury relationship between The Crown and honesty. The joy in that impossibly honest boy. Maybe he was gay too, felt it on his radar. He was showing empathy.

A London blonde boy glowing empathy. That was real, not the prejudicial preconception that he was bound to steal.

Why the fuck speak posh.

God's cock was soft, moist moleskin; sac relaxed. Best wash Priscilla fully off with oils alive with vetiver. Never. How clever the mind. No more the torture of that ever present question- is this a geezer's cunt or a front arse passing itself off as a fucking rose, a blood red origami rose with thorns that prick your swollen bell-end into spending millions for the dubious pleasure of an overblown wank. Men, God thought, are fuckwits to put up with it. Maybe

their wedlocked totty learn. Maybe they come to yearn, to long to have their man shove it up their next to kitty shitter.

'Oh! Come back, loping boy and soft soap me into aping raping you. Lick me dry. I wish. I wish.'

He screamed but soundlessly. The overhead lights seemed stolen from a set by Spielberg- crafty the Germans, spinning, always going back to a beginning, being dazzling, dizzying. His movement on the pillow rang a bell. It came-opaque with hands outstretched and spoke in tongues. It flapped fabric, switched switches, checked both wrists. It twists, spiralling like smoke, a much sucked curly-wurly chew bar. You show me yours and I'll show you mine. Rub it. There, I told you, Fried Dick, isn't cock divine. 'Mother' he whispers and she turns- a face with vast almond eyes staring intently as he drifts back into fretful sleep. He's chalking in white chalk on a black blackboard 'YOU FOOLS. THERE ARE NO RULES'. It spots a drift of spittle and gently cleanses his pale cheek. Dickbrain- ever had poppers, d'you know what Crisco is, fancy a bit of felching, fuck a bit more go for second helpings. Get your kit off. Blimey, that's a beauty. Take a gander at this one son, bloody lovely. It's your lucky night tonight. Tonight I'm gonna let ya shoot right into me mouth.

Mummy wouldn't like it. Mummy didn't ever like what daddy did. She slept with nanny.

It was then God wet the hospital bed.

In intensive care wetting the bed makes a discreet light glow at the nearby nurse's station.

Now why would the psychotherapist have made quite such a pointed point about the fact that he was a happy heterosexual. It is a huge fucking leap from side-effect bonding to random buggery-how insecure was he in his sexuality, his Marks & Spencer's off the rail suit, his no tie casualness and his Next loafers? God guessed he was the Positive Obsessive type who regularly looked in the hall mirror on the way out and told it, Hey shiny guy! If ever I were a lady I'd go moist for you. Please! What was that aftershave. Oh yes. NHS.

And you're British, God thought, not a fucking American mime artist.

It was not a good start. The door was deliberately left ajar. The utilitarian room was beige and institutionally stuffy and even the succulent plants were in dire need of a crash team. God could hear them whimpering on a higher frequency.

So. How is the healing coming along. I mean the physical healing. Oh. Healing. Healing to the point of being pretty much healed. But there are scars and it is not a pretty sight. Would you like to see?

No. That won't be necessary.

There are residual non-palpable scars. PTSD. MDD. Frequent suicidal tendencies. Would you like to see?

I beg your pardon?

It was a joke. You're being so frosty.

I understand that you own a small boutique hotel in...

Brighton...

Brighton. Yes.

...London by the sea- very cosmopolitan, gulls, immigrants, a gay ghetto, rock candy in the shape of cocks, drag bars, drugs, drop-outs, loads of homeless, Big Issue sellers on every corner, a shop where you can buy grow-your-own magic mushrooms and every conceivable variety of skunk seeds. Very high incidence of drink related, sex related violence and disease. It's breezy. It's the seaside. There are lairs for bears, bars for men with beefy bellies and gents with a bent for the hairy likes of them. Rent boys, prostitutes, gangsters, mobsters, big time crime. Any of that lot take your fancy? Crystal meth for the weekend?

This is not about me.

God was totally crap at mind games, wonderfully good at writing, writing and prodigiously remembering. On the day that he was meant to he created a word file

and began divulging the unforgettable.

He was still rather afraid of the dark so, unlike God Almighty, he began by first creating light. He lit a ludicrously expensive scented candle in a cut crystal jar- it glowed whilst diffusing the lily rich aroma of 'Giorgio Of Beverly Hills'. He was rich but didn't give a shit that he was burning money. Besides, that scent, plus a couple of blue diamond meds, and a raging hard-on was a virtual certainty. God bless restorative British surgery.



#### THE END FILE

...there are 350 prior pages to this one but I'm cutting to the chase purely in the interest of the short story genre.

Yes.

I was coked up and cocky as fuck strutting through Old Compton Street. Nothing worth mentioning but a few casual bum fumbles in

the usual dives. I was hungry for action, simple as that. The sign was full on but the sissy fish weren't biting. Wankers. All talk and no fucking walk- ball-breaking spoil sports. You're supposed to be queers. Well then, start acting it dear. It was all beer and bleeding braces with not one geezer at the jump races.

I kept hearing two things, just the two over and over. The first was- go home, put porn on the HD widescreen TV, butt plug, lube, wank in a hanky, no sweat; sleep like a baby. The other said- that destination west, the cottage in a lay-by you got off the internet, give it a look see. Glory holes that site said. I liked that. I liked the semantics of the juxtaposition of the words glory and hole. It thrilled me, made me feel proper queer, dirty, clean, wonderfully obscene, free to be- fingered by a mystery, sucked by a nobody, a mouth for the most part, a mouth attached to a nobody. Anonymous. Sex with strangers. No poncing about with dates. No apologising for being late. Just a place, somewhere soft and warm to jettison my load, drive home alive with endorphins, dreaming of a hot shower, a scotch and a late night movie. Sexy Beast. Yeah Sexy Beast with Ray Winstone that would do it for me. So I gets to the car and educates the sat nav.

This was my first time. True. That's what life is for- breaking the hymen of all them screaming first times.

It was easy. Fulham East.

The door's locked. I was sat on the pottery lavatory pan wanking a stonker. Something in me yearning for home. To my left there's this hole in the dividing wall, a drilled hole filled with an active eye. The more I rub myself the more it bleeding winks. A hazel eye- not old, not young. Through this prick sized hole comes a glistening tongue. I let it lick my prepuce and frenum. It withdraws. My turn to spy. My! He's Latino, Cuban maybe, well hung. Yum. He beckons and I reckon why not. This is hot. This is the action that Soho so is not. I stick my throbbing bang stick through the hole and he envelops it with wet lips and spit and gives it deep throat kisses stoked with bliss.

I come spasms into him a back-up of frustrating stress-filled months and then he jumps.

And then the lights blow.

I feel something cold slide onto me, hand-cuffs, cock-cuffs, what the fuck.

This is where I get a little confused. Damn. Now, how was it really, did the sound of the cut come before the pain set in or was it the other way around? I don't remember and, in truth, it don't matter much.

It was pitch dark. Velveteen. And in the pitch black, hearing me scream, he had the grace to push my severed part back through to me.

I heard him unlock his door. He washed and dried his hands.

It's taken years to put together what came next. I heard the rip of cellophane. I heard what I now believe to be the sound of a fat cigar cutter. It cut through a cigar. He struck a match. I understand. I know I smelled that.

I have a long-time lover now. Life partner. Business partner. He is holistically enormously kind. We have a relationship I had never dared to dream possible. I think I've told him everything. The whole. And the whole does seem glorious. But, most importantly, I don't want one small part of my past life to cause us to be apart ever.

Equally we lay no wilful traps for each other. We're queer and constantly err on the side of queerness.

I'm part of the judiciary now. Part-time. Soft on the young.

OK. I still reason, albeit insanely- if that is at all possible, that the vindictive bitch paid to have this happen to me. A part of me wants it to be plausible but it just doesn't stack up.

And yes. I still shudder and feel sick at the smell of cigars.



## EXCAVATED

By Claudia Bellocq

Images © Malcolm Alcala

we were walking beside the canal,  
you and me. kicking the odd stone  
into the river, poking at the odd  
dog turd with a stick, flicking each  
other with the sharp ends of old  
bits of flotsam we found drifting  
along in the current. it was sunny.

you stopped and turned to me and  
said, "you read about that girl they

excavated last week. down that pit  
not far from here?"

"no," I said, "where's that then?"

"the old tin mine round the end of  
the canal; wanna go?"

and that's when our lives changed.  
from stick tricks to death licks in  
one moment. one tiny decision. one

second of no hesitation. adventure were'nt' it....

you looked me in the eye, "you serious," you said. "you really wanna go," and I said, "yeah, why not...nothing else to do."

so we walked down the canal different already. we started young, innocent kind of, on that walk. sticks and turds and playful prods. by the time we left at dusk we were all grown up. dark, cynical and changed beyond measure. I liked you both ways though but i couldn't understand you dark. for a while, i thought i'd lost you. before that, i would go "hey, alfie, you remember that time when we chased those boys and got to them, all breathless and sweet and didn't know what to say, so we just stared at them and left?" And you heard, "blah blah blah blah blah blah blah," least it seemed that way. Then you said, "hey rosie, i fuckin' love you you know," and i heard, "you're really sweet," and I didn't want to be sweet any more. that's why i said yes when you asked me to go to the mine. to the excavation.

we walked slower after we'd agreed to go. kind of subconsciously delaying the moment of change, when our lives would never be the same. i knew it, so did you. slow walk. dawdle like

our mothers hated: like it pissed them off so bad we'd do it more.

the mine.

Alfie and rosie arrive at the mine. it's late afternoon. hot sunny and there are midges everywhere. the smell of sun on skin is arousing them. there are cordoned off areas "POLICE. SCENE OF INVESTIGATION. NO ENTRY." but there's no-one around. Yesterday's news, well a bit more than yesterday but the tape is still there. Alfie says, "rosie, see there," and points, "that's where it was." and rosie says, "oh."

Alfie looks at rosie and they approach the 'scene of the crime'. tentative. looking at their own shadows crossing the 'scene'. "your shadow is massive," says rosie, not knowing what else to say. ridiculous. 'god he'll think i'm so stupid.' blush.

"stand next to me rosie." it's weird here. intense. brooding.

Alfie imagines the girl, then leans to rosie, friends since nursery, and kisses her.

rosie looks suprised. rosie is suprised. rosie liked it though and so her hot little lips respond to her hot little friend. before you know it rosie and alfie are pulling at each



others' clothes and falling to their knees. what is it about teenage sex that makes them all fall to their knees. no finesse. no style. grabbing. grabbing tits. fingers inside panties. pushing. begging. breathing heavy. alfie still imagining the girl they found. rosie oblivious, except to the sun on her skin. and alfie inside her now.

they fucked hard and rosie thinks she 'came'. alfie knows he did. they button up their clothes and leave the mine. they hear the girls cries on their backs but they keep walking. changed.

excavated.



# ***THEM***

***By Angela Suzzanne***

***From "other worlds", they say  
for ages seen in the skies  
stalking in the dead of night  
slipping in time  
leaving marks  
scars  
impressions  
if shared  
will damn you insane  
knowledge screams  
silence  
but don't sleep  
take note of the signs***

***From "other worlds", they say  
for ages seen in the skies  
stalking in the dead of night  
slipping in time  
intangibility  
grants absolute power  
those who control  
know  
whose only interest in science  
the power of the ultimate sword  
subverting all  
under the sharpest blade  
of ignorance***

***From "other worlds", they say  
for ages seen in the skies  
stalking in the dead of night  
slipping in time  
planting seeds  
making believers  
in a grand ruse  
helpless victims  
against the unseen  
enemy ruling in their yards  
culling without regard  
nor remorse***

***while they blindly look to the sky  
visible monsters reign all around  
Pay no mind to the men behind the curtain***

# THE APE THAT EXPLODED

By Ron Garmon

*Great big gobs of greasy, grimy gorilla  
guts  
Mutilated monkey meat  
Amputated human feet  
King Kong eyeballs  
Rolling down a dirty street  
I forgot my spoon*

-Traditional

Already considerable by even extraordinary standards of Gotham happenstance like 9/11 and the 1863 Draft Riots, the casualty toll attributed to “King” Kong didn’t end with the great ape’s notoriously messy plummet from the Empire State Building. Death continued to fan out from the disaster scene for many days, confounding compilers of statistics.

The popular press, in the weeks leading up to the ill-fated exhibit of “the Eighth Wonder of the World” lovingly detailed the fates of the twoscore adventurers who’d perished on Carl Denham’s first expedition to Skull Island. Scenes of men hurled into ravines, butchered by giant spiders or stomped to paste by the ape were cabled across civilization (and passed mouth-to-ear by awestruck schoolboys across civilization), but would eventually land on RKO’s cutting-room floor well before the

bowdlerized 1933 film premiered. New Yorkers, however, had few illusions during the previous long Depression winter about the hideous consequences on Fifth Avenue of a thirty-eight ton silverback gorilla’s transformation into civilization’s first bio-bomb. President Hoover himself first turned on the lights on this new world’s-tallest structure not two years before, but few of even the most hardened Democrats among Manhattanites were prepared on the night of Nov. 12<sup>th</sup>, 1932 to take this as harbinger of even worse times to come.

Kong’s forty-one second drop from the building’s observation platform was accompanied by a roar heard as far away as Union Hill, NJ, and the monster simian hit Fifth Avenue concrete with the annihilative force of twenty tons of TNT.

On impact, the ape detonated like a bomb made of stupendous quantities of hair, hide, bone, muscle, viscera and enough quick-congealing blood to make even veteran cops green decades later in remembrance. That the giant ape - thrashing, bullet-pocked and streaming gore, but still living-landed in a crowd estimated in the

thousands may pardonably be seen, with the distance of years, as one truly *awesome* full-sized effect. No Hollywood visualization has ever caught Kong's Homeric faceplant with anywhere near the historical detail as remembered by New Yorkers.

The resultant seismic shock registered 2.7 on the prototype Richter equipment then operating at the Hidalgo Trading Company on the building's eighty-sixth floor. Owned by fabled multimillionaire adventurer Clark "Doc" Savage, Jr., this shadowy concern continued to show up on the periphery of historical events during the 1930s and 1940s and we owe it much of the data available about the tragedy. This was done despite the firm's initial insistence on releasing little more than a heavily-squiggled length of paper with the deathlessly cryptic comment of "This time, I really will be superamalgamated!" from company geologist William Harper Littlejohn.

Thanks to Littlejohn's posthumously released notes, along with spot reportage by survivors and the usual mountain of secondary and anecdotal evidence, we know the upper 40% of the great ape's mass was irrecoverably destroyed, most of it sprayed into the air around

midtown Manhattan with immense force. Efforts by NYPD officers to clear the area met with little success, so precise casualty figures from impact are unobtainable. Bellevue Hospital made heroic efforts at totting up the remains of some 842 individual victims blown through windows at Macy's, slathered over the Flatiron Building, rained down on the dome of St. Patrick's or dumped messily from the nighttime sky over Bryant Park, picking through an enormous gross tonnage of pulped xenosimian. No one knows how many onlookers were similarly puréed on the spot, with anecdotal evidence like painted toes raining down on Secaucus or the human ear that plopped onto a Reuben sandwich at Rockaway Beach indicating formidable obstacles remain in compiling reliable figures. A startling red mist was plainly visibly across the river at Weehawken and veterans of the Great War compared the sound to the opening bombardment at Verdun collapsed into a single hellish crash.

Along the Fifth Avenue corridor, flying concrete, metal, glass mingled with lethal cuts of calcium-studded meat, all flung like grapeshot as far north as the steps of the New York Public Library (where five perished in the rain of blood-soaked protein) and

south as the corner at 26<sup>th</sup> St., where the perambulator of little Salvatore Sacco was crushed by the front-bumper of a 1931 Hudson later identified as belonging to Walter Winchell. The columnist famously perished at Point Zero, with other celebrities claimed by Kong's rampage including movie-folk Karl Dane and John Gilbert, speakeasy-hostess Texas Guinan, and gangster Otto "Abbadabba" Berman, all present when the Eighth Wonder overbore its bonds and leapt into the audience, ripping off limbs and biting open heads in a gory spasm of violence that killed nine and injured 18. Novelist Nathaniel West survived Kong's attack on the Ninth Avenue IRT minutes later, but 49 others didn't. Among the confirmed dead at ESB were Mayor James J. Walker -whose heroic dash up 33<sup>rd</sup> Street forever ended all threat of indictment- and at least twenty movie cameramen, all paying with their lives for the miraculous survival of seventy frames of screenable footage from the impact.

All told, Kong's one-night run on Broadway claimed the lives of 1,096 people and left a toxic crater at the foot of its tallest, most famous structure. The biological effects of this sudden explosion of animal tissue pushed the death toll up another 355 victims from the ensuing typhus outbreak and

extraordinarily lethal means used by city authorities to put it down. The fast-disintegrating Hoover administration proved totally unequal to the task of organizing help and interim mayor Joseph "Holy Joe" McKee was little more than a moralist soon unhinged by unprecedented responsibility, so the sufferings of gore-imbued Manhattan were intense and prolonged.

This was, if not the first, then certainly the most crudely emblematic bio-catastrophe of the twentieth century. Despite the seeming avalanche of tissue, much of it lay concentrated in and around the new fifteen-foot crater. Police difficulty in restoring order and clearing traffic meant the next morning was well-advanced before municipal hoses could even approach the fast-decomposing mess. Traumatized citizens wandered the streets jabbering and shrieking for weeks after, scarcely able to recognize a New York, or even a material reality, that rained ape flesh. Carrion birds blackened the sky over midtown for several days as the island was cordoned off by outgoing Governor (then President-elect) Franklin D. Roosevelt, who imposed a censorship even veteran journalists had trouble cracking. The national economy, already in unprecedented straits, constricted

further with the long shutdown of Manhattan. Politically, Denham's stunt pushed the nation into a pre-revolutionary slide.

The state Board of Censors officially seized the great bulk of newsreel footage shot during the event, putting hundreds of hours of priceless (and pricelessly harrowing) film under moratorium until 1996. Still, what images *did* get out paved the way for the next year's blockbuster movie, in which the Willis O'Brien and Marcel Delgado's 18-inch tall puppet ape capered its way into icon status. Much of the runtime of the film was buttressed by scenes scrapped from an abandoned dinosaur production titled *Creation*. The miniature's almost-endearing anthropomorphism, despite King Kong's record run at Radio City Music Hall cut little ice with some locals, who heavily picketed showings of it, the 1935 sequel *Son of Kong* and other random RKO product until well into the Forties. The brass plaque on the pavement outside the main entrance commemorating the mayor and all the other victims was added with little comment at the time or later. Denham avoided arrest by simply mounting another- if impromptu- expedition to Skull Island. This half-mythical place itself sank in 1934, but not before the fugitive impresario could grab a few more

monstrosities for eventual display in fascist Italy. With the author of so much misery forever beyond reach of authorities after his death in Rome in 1940, there was little political capital to be wrought from the widespread public grief and New Yorkers were left to get on with ever-skinny lives.

The winter of 1932 was ghastly enough for the city, but the Kong cleanup would soon kickstart the municipal economy, priming the pump for First, Second, Third New Deals, along many other badly needed reforms. Even as broken fragments of the beast's lower torso were being wrapped and hauled away to Washington by gasmasked workers from the Smithsonian, enterprising merchants were wrestling huge chins and wedges of gorilla steak down Broadway to fry up for sale in Central Park, their carts streaming congealed gore the whole horse-drawn way. For many of the ravenous, sunken-eyed human skeletons who had been gathering there in increasing numbers throughout the year, it was bounty like they'd only see on Election night or Christmas Eve, back when the charities were still operating.

*With love and thanks to Lester Dent and P.J. Farmer, two brilliant Midwestern boys with imaginations far gentler than mine.*



# SOUNDS ABOUND

Compiled by Kate MacDonald

## OUT OF THE BOX: Audio Musings and Reviews by Mary Leary

### *Troubadours of the Apocalypse: Nathan Payne and other Alcoholic Clowns*

Achhhhh! I'm not entirely sure what to write about Nathan Payne. At 35, per widespread ageism, he's past his marketable prime. Nathan likes Mexican food and was born on Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland. He currently drives a cab, performs at coffeehouses and other venues, and attempts to sell his outpourings for a living, which tempts me to spout, "Make it performance art! Blast



your sounds through Austin's streets from a loudspeaker atop the vehicle! Pile cartons of CDs in the backseat, threatening to avalanche the unwary passenger..."

The problem is, months ago I said I would write this damned profile. Also: Some things about Nathan beg not only attention but consideration. That consideration doesn't lend itself to easy summation. The man's a shape-shifter if ever I saw one, a particular American sub-species that a musicologist like Greil Marcus might liken to Harmonica (outcast, wanderer, possible charlatan) Frank.

Until 2005-'06, Payne's *nourish* movements (living in his car and roach-ridden flophouses in L.A., then roaming the country) would have made it easier to paint an intriguing picture: *A disturbed, highly intelligent personality, who without a creative outlet might have been a serial killer.* That image was underscored by the languorous, murky *Black Dahlia* video starring Nathan and his song of that name: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guwkSScuGeE>. But the shape has kept shifting. Shrieks and barks emanating from the bathetic mayhem of active addiction have shifted into transmissions with more humor, maturity and even finesse, regularly veined with socio-political carping. A few years



ago, Payne expelled a few more drops of sweat into the L.A. smog before driving to Austin and parking his trailer on the outskirts. He then went on tour, slammed out two albums (*Blinded by Faggots* and *Vampire Cats*) at a friend's in 11 days, and repaired to Texas, after which he recorded the two-CD *Slow Burning Fun*.

The shape's still an uneasy cross of realism with abstract expressionism. Following mood and/or subject, Payne sound and production utilize various American roots styles. And then there's Payne-as-rocker. In Los Angeles, with a band (Nathan Payne Memorial Service), he accelerated from threatening to ferociously acidic, at best a not-for-the-weak-of-psyche mix of Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, and Sonic Youth (*California Death Trip's* "I Don't Want," "A Man Called Horse"). At times Payne even enters Lux Interiorville. Yet more confounding is his wide assortment of voices. Along with the psychotic roar just described, there's the straightforward folkie, a descendent of Country Joe MacDonald, Phil Ochs, and Tom Paxton that also recalls satirist Tom Lehrer. This voice is sometimes punctuated by country rasps and yelps. Then there's the noir monotone delivering line after line of venom. There's a demonic sneer that pops up, sometimes mixed with one of the other voices ("Princess of No Return," on *SBF*).

His work, to date, is uneven. Unless we want to unconditionally

applaud his maverick freedom, Payne could use some self-editing. But just when I get sick of mining for gold, splendor raises its head. Right now, with "Sleeping Sea #3" (*Slow Burning Fun*) on, it's hard to concentrate as he vehemently mouths, "What will become/of the sparkling spoon?/How long will we scrape our knuckles/across the surface of a chuckling moon?" At such moments I feel all of Payne's work is an epic prose-poem or autobiography set to music, and that the spoken word arena awaits his arrival.

I'm not sure his time was well spent on the breakneck recording of *Vampire Cats*, which has a lot of rockabilly and fast country songs crying for a well-honed band. But there's also some shimmering cabaret ("One Last Kiss"), a mood then disrupted by country yodeling, a few dull tracks, and an abrasive kneeslapper, "Telephone." After that, "Ghost inside a Girl" unveils a sound I hadn't heard or noticed - a light, ingenious melody realized via a hodge-podge of acoustic influences. Annoying! Now I can't just dismiss *Cats* by suggesting it would all work better in a roadhouse, with a few pitchers.



Three albums are more cohesive: the offensively titled *Blinded by Faggots* (at one point he explained the name on one of his Myspaces), *American Infidel*, and *All The Diamonds You Can Eat* (which was recorded with a broken four-track, on cassettes procured at a \$1 store). Payne opens *All The Diamonds* with the forlorn, beer-bottle-clink punctuated, "A Beautiful Place." Next is a folk song, "California Hills," which Fred Kiko of KXLU called his "favorite song about California ever" and which secured guest spots on Kiko's *Demolisten*. To me this is Payne at his least interesting – the song reeks with (albeit sometimes appropriate) clichés about southern California, particularly L.A. This brings me to one of the challenges plaguing any attempt to characterize or even listen to Payne at times. While "CH" is a fairly innocuous example, some of his socio-religio-political hammering makes me want to throw raw eggs at the soapbox – not only have I heard a lot of the same through at least three grassroots movements, I long ago opted for more oblique strategies.

*Diamonds* really hits its stride with "Dark Side of the Dog," which combines Payne's off-the-cuff poetic observations with a compelling riff and good phrasing. Then there's a sleeper junkie classic, "Happiness is Mine." It's not just the anthemic chorus: "we're on drugs because/the flies go/buzz buzz buzz/an' love covers over everything," or great throwaways: "wake up shakin' /in

a lake of naked girls. With the vampiric cachet of Weill/Brecht's "Alabama Song;" "Happiness" would go well with Nick Cave's take on "Mack the Knife" (*September Songs: The Music of Kurt Weill*). The next three tracks are good, and the muted beauty of "Peace & Contentment Blues" is better.

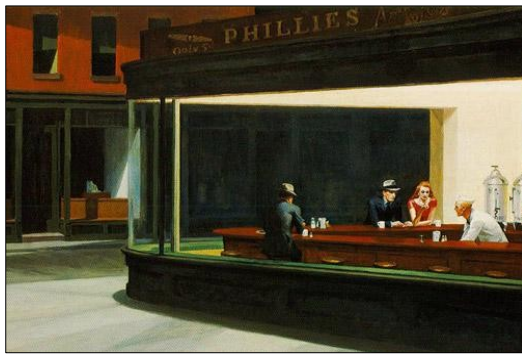
Payne's a bitch to profile. Once the door was kicked open two years ago, I haven't been able to close it. I was initially hooked by a song on his Myspace. "Sin on Wheels," with its bare-boned cowboy lope, has often been on my playlist there, holding its own against Link Wray and Television. And there's a tale being told, one that raises questions: Is he the narrator or the protagonist? Did he murder a woman, or is he on the lam with her... or another one...?

*"...and now her tongue is turnin' purple  
her face is turnin' white  
somebody give her mouth-to-mouth  
resuscitation  
don't be so impolite!"*

*"the cops are right behind us  
so try to stay awake  
keep your foot up on that trigger  
keep yer finger on the brake  
take me off to the asylum  
while I'm still good enough to go  
I'm outta my mind  
but don't let anybody know"*

While Payne's music and production have been uneven to date, he fashions his abundant thoughts into consistently fresh lyrics that often ring as blood-and-dirt true as Hopper's diner paintings (not the doctored ones,

like Santa perched at the counter with a bunch of elves)—well, maybe: Payne sometimes breaks into absurdity, or just silliness, after a stream of darkness. On “Someone to Taste” (SBF,) he mouths, straight-faced: “So pass me the tissues if your love is true/I got chased by a police officer with abandonment issues” (which is surrounded by a mix of funhouse laughter and dry-heave wheezing).



A few more elements make his work compelling. One is Payne’s ongoing hate-hate (he wants to love it, but there are PROBLEMS, detailed in dozens of songs) relationship with contemporary America. Another is his consideration of *the road*, along with the twilight tales he’s often experienced firsthand, albeit at times through a hind-sighted bird’s eye. Re: loving/seeing a purpose in the underbelly (I could cite Jung but would probably drown), I’ll let this poem speak – I wrote it after hearing how remodeling had altered Times Square and Las Vegas:

*Disney Satanist*

*It was time to come out of the closet.  
He kept wearing his Mickey Mouse watch  
with the rodent upside down,*

*had started pulling a Goofy T-shirt  
over his head  
so the dog could only be seen  
from behind.*

*Worst of all  
was the way he played an old 45 of  
It’s a Small World backwards  
until it said he should kill the producers  
of Beauty and the Beast  
and the Herbie remake  
along with bombing the revamped Times  
Square  
and infecting Las Vegas  
with the original neon, greasy burgers,  
and hustlers.*

*People didn’t realize how much he  
threatened  
the upstanding, family-friendly  
everything:  
Who notices an upside-down Mickey  
Mouse watch?  
Who has the time?*



And there are the little psychodramas weaving through many songs. In “Dirty Magazine” (SBF), a man has locked his woman in the bathroom, she’s locked him in, or they’re taking turns. Payne repeatedly gets under the skin of couples who grow so over-

enmeshed, they forget how much they hate capitalism or Republicans and start tearing each other apart. As many poor artists and "misfits" know, this can happen. I'm generally riveted by interpersonal dynamics, especially when they're well-drawn. One of my favorite portraits of purgatory is Sam Shephard's exhausting (for other people, maybe) examination of failed and fading Americana, *The True West* (especially the version with Malkovich/Sinise).

Some lyrics from *SBF's* "Tragic Neurons":

*"baby what's your handle?  
they call me Roamin' Candle  
cuz I roam around from town to  
town  
loosen all my lugnuts  
these pigs are repugnant  
always tryna keep me down"*

*"my baby she's the bitchiest  
most delicious exhibitionist  
to put her tragic neurons on display  
leanin' on the fender  
in all her psychotic splendor  
if you ain't nice to her she'll never go  
away"*

Payne's wife Alyssa is starting to sing on some of his songs. The grit of their "Dirty Magazine" duet approaches Exene with John Doe circa *The Knitters*.

I wouldn't care about his words if the music weren't generally good to very good, with flashes of brilliance. Happily, with *SBF* Payne is getting better at mixing the more listenable with the more challenging. Sure, I shot the stereo a few dirty looks as Payne quietly

ranted for nine-plus minutes on "Licking the Fist that Feeds." If the more exhausting or below-par tracks were shortened or deleted, *SBF* would probably end up on my "Best of 2009" list.

Among Payne's prolific output (8-9 CDs and an EP), there are at least 25 exemplary tracks (I haven't heard one of the albums, *Angels on Fire*). Some are good enough to make me say something rash as we near the end of October, with millions (well, at least tens of thousands) mourning *The Cramps*, who traditionally tore it up on Halloween. Some of Payne's work does its bit to fill the gap left by that band. If Bryan Gregory, the guitarist who pushed the *Cramps* into wild sublimity, were alive, I believe he'd at least sit in with Nathan Payne.



**Suggested tracks by Nathan Payne (keeping in mind that album progression can be more illuminating or yield a different experience):**

*Slow Burning Fun*: Cheshire Moon, Don't Say Please, Someone to Taste, Bleeding Heart, If Hell is a Party (I'm the hors d'oeuvres), Dirty Magazine, Drive You into the

Sea, A Crime in Progress, Love Will Save Me, The Princess of No Return, Sleeping Sea #3

*California Death Trip*: Don't Wake Me Up, I Don't Want, A Man Called Horse, All I Want

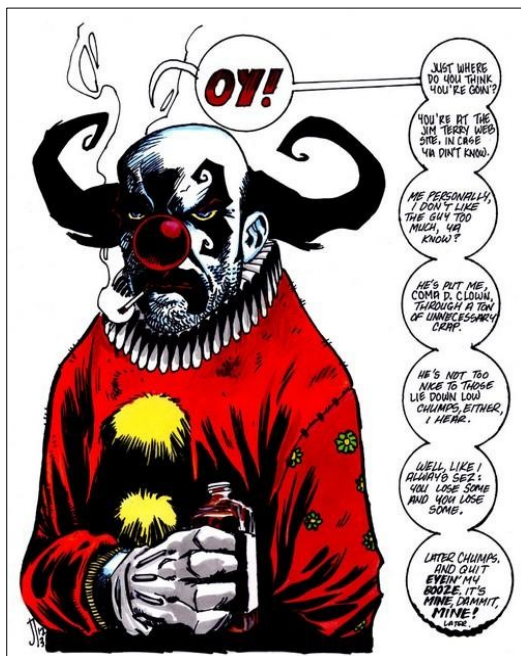
*Blinded by Faggots*: Mulholland Love Song, Damaged Goods, My Ass Is Hooked on Dynamite, Telepathic Proposal, Too Much, Too Soon, Baby Don't Cry

*American Infidel*: My Girlfriend Hates My Guts, Taco Truck Waltz, Neon Signs, Sunny Day, Love in a Room

*No Destination* (3-song EP): \$6 Tux - hell, just buy the EP - the spoken word/sound track is interesting

*Sideburns in the Sun*: (upcoming, for *Sin on Wheels* and to see what else he throws on)

## Alcoholic Clown Records



Speaking of the Cramps, my enquiry about an Alcoholic Clown named **The Slow Poisoner** was promptly answered by a large mailer, the front of which was

covered by a cartoonlike drawing of a swamp. Out of the swamp rises a torso wearing a Little Lord Fauntleroy-type jacket and string tie and, in place of a head, a large hand with an eyeball in the middle. On the back of the mailer are rubber stampings of skulls and bones. This reminds me of the mail art I used to exchange and of all the cool stuff passing through postal workers' hands back when underground actually meant *underground* (record labels, fetishists, wiccans, artists, insurgents). I remember, on some dreary days, howling and grinning all the way back from the mailbox. These are very, *very* good things.



The Slow Poisoner does other good things. There's lots of roots-of-rock riffing (recalling Buddy Holly and seminal rockabilly). There's lots of guitar reverb and a pretty varied assortment of songs about things that matter, and that don't get enough coverage, like how people really originated at the bottom of a muddy river, and that the "Wood Full O' Witches" can mean all kinds of odd occurrences, and

lusting after a “Swamp Gal.” “The Shriek!” features at least three blood-curdling screams. The Slow Poisoner evens warns us, to galloping gospel, of the “Thundering Fists of the Lord.” This strikes me as rather open-minded of Payne, who helms the label with fellow A.C., Brad Hahn. Payne seems serious about Christianity, and if he supports free expression, he might even be a real one (Christian). It’s a thought.



There are low-fi/vi videos of the Poisoner on his website. But I think we could use an interlude NOW, so here’s a slightly superior representation (selecting HQ/“high quality” helps a little): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TsH4iu01bU>

I even like the feel of TSP’s *Magic Casket* CD cover – a smooth, shiny digipak with his irresistible, Halloweeny graphix, The only



problem is his location, San Francisco – he seems so So. Cal. – and there is already enough wonder and creativity by the Bay. Also, I might not like his CD so much if he hadn’t had the sense to keep it at 11 three-minutes-or-less tracks. I need to write something concise about the magic of restraint (or restraints).

This is Payne’s label statement: “Alcoholic Clown Records was founded in Austin, Texas in 2007 to serve as a means of financial, recording, & tour support for artists who we like. Unless they suck.” Besides Payne, there are five A.C.s, most of whom seem to embody different Payne facets.

Making TSP seem like a televangelist’s guest star is a duo that calls itself **Juggernaut**, for whom I don’t have a CD. I’ve just checked out some of their videos and tracks – but that was enough – so much, in fact, that I must pause for another interruption: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0OKVGYFVrY>

The other thing that sold me on these gagaists, other than the fact that I need more (why, oh why did I leave NYC and the amazing dada wacko stuff that only seems to happen there, or San Francisco, or Budapest? Why didn't I join the Neoists?)-- the other great thing is that they have a track called "A Woman's Ass," which includes these pronouncements: "A woman's ass... will make you buy a beer... and forget your beer... and leave your beer at the bar next to your friend... *that's* your fucking beer!" "A woman's ass... is a dump truck of love... a mosh pit of flowers..." "A woman's ass... is a crack house on fire...your grandma's face on fucking fire!" ... and on, into anarchistic epiphanies.



It seems to me that there are far too few odes to women's asses by non-Africans. The sound, you ask? From what I can tell it's mostly recorded tracks, maybe with live rhythm box. "A Woman's Ass" sounds like Suicide, or Soft Cell if it had not been gay, and had gone mad. When Juggernaut uses rock, it's acidic and hits the spot. The CD is called *Down But Nut Out*.

After an abrupt hairpin turn we're at **Matt Pless**, who's firmly

entrenched in the populist neighborhood re-annexed in the '50s-'60s to "singer-songwriter/folk" by Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, among others. While I lean toward more exciting (to me) or intricate tones (British Isles/Celtic, French, Rom gypsy, Hungarian), with Pless's latest, *Alarm Clock Time Bomb*, I did less fast-forwarding than expected to see if the songs would diverge from predictable progressions. Several do, as well as benefiting from fairly sophisticated arrangements and collaborative energy (cello, bass, dobro, drums, and lead guitar). The repetitive form supporting social commentary on "White Picket Fences" is surrounded with enough spice to earn Pless a tenuous perch in the new generation of musical protesters.



At best, Pless is retracing the trajectory of folk-rockers like the Byrds ("Boomerang," "When the Helmets Hit the Ground") or, in a

reverse trajectory, Jorma Kaukonen with Hot Tuna (opener "The Flowers in the Furnace"). Despite a tendency to lean toward Weezer/Pavement on his more straightforward rock, Pless abandons any hope of coolness by holding forth on subjects rarely mentioned by below-'30s, like the dominance of cyber activity. You'd think the Dylan-rippin' "Talkin' Information Blues" was by a writer 30 years his senior. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcPM0oLNTsc&feature=related>

We've arrived at the last two Clowns, **Andrew Scandal** and Brad Hahn. Without CDs, my assessments are based on online tracks and an A.C. sampler. Andrew Scandal is attractive, has high, precious vocals, sometimes adopts a chunky, acoustic Jason Mraz/Bushwalla form, and I *guess* also has a Coldplay sound -- whatever it is, it makes me want to slap him. I could see "Heart Attacks;" "License Plate Eyes," or "Straight Shooters" on the *Gossip Girl* soundtrack. Other than being friends with Payne, and his Myspace statement, re: liking "Jim Beam, arguments, and chocolate," I don't see how Scandal rolls with the other A.C.'s.

Perhaps straddled atop the Alcoholic Clown car is the rangy **Brad Hahn**, who declares on his Myspace, "**Life is a tragedy to the man that feels and a comedy to the man what thinks.**" His folk or folk-rock resists easy branding. When he leans toward Gordon Lightfoot/Neil Diamond ("Partly

Cloudy"), I wonder if he should have studied accounting. When I hear some Marshall Crenshaw in the Lightfoot ("Imaginary Strings"), I want to encourage him to keep working on his songwriting. When his "Gold Rush" brings to mind the manic freedom of the Holy Modal Rounders, I want to know if he's available.



And when he unexpectedly amalgamates John Doe with Jesse Colin Young and the unlikely lyrics to "I Wish We Were All Punk Rockers," I want to see what Hahn would do with Young's "Sunlight," as well as hoping he's seeking psychiatric attention. I've come up with songs like that, which never made it beyond my practice room -- a Franken-song occasionally works, but some elements can't be palatably meshed. Since he has thrown caution to the wind, or is



insane, I will call him a genius, suggest back-up singers, and leave a wide berth.

Several months ago, Nathan Payne asked me if Alcoholic Clown was in fact an independent, or a label at all. I assured him that what's he's doing - putting out and promoting CDs by a few artists he wants to support (and, based on the bundle I received, hastily making copies when needed; the titles often hand-scribbled on the discs), along with letting label-mates follow their production muses - well, that this is the essence of "Indie." Given Payne's gravity re: issues of capitalism, human rights, and so forth, he may have been testing me with the question. Which gives me some assurance that the term "merch" will never be associated with A.C. Wheeeee! Or, from the main A.C. page, "Click on the album covers below to order the discs directly from the artists! (unfortunately, Juggernaut's cover was deleted by Myspace because it's a drawing of a giant testicle with arms & legs and they think it's offensive. We disagreeeeeeeeee!"

*The Alcoholic Clown picture is by Jim Terry.*

*"Disney Satanist," by Mary Leary, was previously published in Gypsy3  
Information on all the A.C.s can be found on the label's Myspace.*

Nathan Payne:  
<http://www.myspace.com/nathanpayne>

Alcoholic Clown:  
<http://www.myspace.com/alcoholicclownrecords>

The Slow Poisoner:  
<http://www.theslowpoisoner.com>

Juggernaut:  
<http://www.thndrbox.com/juggernaut.html>

My review blog/pseudo-intellectual-with-a-short-attention-span amusement park:  
<http://offthebeatentrack-reviews.blogspot.com/>

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## REVIEWS

By Craig Woods



### Lullabye Arkestra :: Threats/Worship Vice Records

<http://www.viceland.com/vicerecords>

There's clearly something special about a band who can move effortlessly from Constellation Records to the Vice stable. While the former stands as the Montreal independent music scene's foremost anti-corporate label complete with a full roster of politically progressive orchestral ensembles, the latter is the infinitely glitzier offshoot of an empire built upon a celebration of

all things crass, crude and hip with some more questionable political motivations. Yet, with this sophomore album, Lullabye Arkestra have managed to cross that divide without losing an iota of integrity and have successfully delivered an impressively uncompromising record to boot.

The band consisting of core husband and wife duo Justin Small (drums/vocals) and Kat Taylor (bass/vocals) has its origins as a side project of Toronto-based Constellation stalwarts Do Make Say Think in which founding member Small continues to play guitar. As such, it took a while for the Arkestra train to gather speed - forming in 2001, the duo acquired and shed a succession of guest players, augmenting the core punk-soul sound with an array of jazz horns, strings, electronics and the occasional snatch of guitar. When their debut record Ampgrave finally surfaced on Constellation in 2006 it proved an enthralling powerhouse of an album but one bloated with the presence of a revolving crew of additional musicians -- a state-of-affairs which would cause the core duo some problems in recreating the tracks live during their subsequent tour.

Forsaking these extravagances, Lullabye Arkestra have pulled off something of a double whammy with Threats/Worship. Not only have they stripped their sound exhilaratingly back down to its bare bones but have simultaneously bolstered their central assets with a refined

approach to the textures of each bowel-shaking riff and foot-stomping rhythm.

Opening track 'Get Nervous' sets the tone with its sludgy bass grind and a riff that would make most metal bands quiver in their boots. As with each of the tracks on which Justin Small assumes the lead vocal, the prevailing vibe is of a nostalgia for 1980s thrash and hardcore albeit with a fresh playful intensity. Things take a more soulful turn whenever Taylor steps up to the mike as in the next track 'Icy Hands' which combines an irresistibly infectious blues groove with anarchic punk attitude (right down to the obligatory chanting of "Oi! Oi! Oi!"). Something of an instrument in itself, Taylor's voice is a formidably versatile medium for the band's genre-bending fortitude, veering as it does from a Janis Joplin-esque whisky bar swagger to a laidback country inflection to a downright intimidating feral snarl. This flexibility is one of several notable assets of which Lullabye Arkestra make thorough use in the rich texturing of their sound, proving beyond all doubt that minimalism does not necessitate monotony.

As a promotional single for the album, the band have chosen 'We Fuck The Night' (for which they have also filmed an enjoyable video clip featuring a mosh-pit of zombies which is worth checking out) and it's not difficult to see why. While by no means the album's strongest track, 'We Fuck The Night' is a catchy riff-tastic

stomper which showcases Lullabye Arkestra at their most crowd-pleasing. Justin Small's driving cymbal-heavy rhythm and flamboyant fills crash like a tsunami against the resilient shore of Kat Taylor's audacious bass-lines while the couple's shared vocals during the chorus resound with the fury of revolutionary slogans. Where the more whimsical duets of Ampgrave had lent a tongue-in-cheek air to the proceedings, here the patent solidarity of Mr and Mrs Small is both refreshing and humbling. This impression of genuine inter-gender camaraderie is a rare one in music and its admirably unsentimental presentation here on a record that is also consistently strong in musical terms does rather reveal The White Stripes and their ilk as the flatulent poseurs that they always were. It's a notion that is hammered conclusively home on 'Voodoo', a rerecording of an Ampgrave-era song now stripped bare in which Justin and Kat unite in unapologetically savage cries of "Baby-baby-baby!". True love has never seemed so simultaneously unglamorous and unequivocally appealing.

Having made the audacious decision to unmask themselves from behind the jazz and orchestral excesses of their debut, Lullabye Arkestra have joined that small but determined breed of bands who insist on placing the often-neglected elements of the traditional rhythm section centre stage. While Justin Small's melodic inventiveness has helped to define

the distinctive sounds of Do Make Say Think, from the evidence presented on Threats/Worship it's difficult not to feel that it would be nothing short of criminal for his equally impressive talent behind the drum-kit to go unappreciated. Each track on this album is driven by a rhythmic sensibility which is equal parts hardcore rage and jazz innovation, the drums pulsating with a personality rarely found in rock music and which characterises Small as a delightfully deviant bastard offspring of Max Roach and Slayer's Dave Lombardo. Likewise, Kat Taylor not only boasts the voice and charisma of a latter day Joplin, but her impossibly infectious playing style marks her as that rarest of phenomena - a true bass hero(ine) who proves beyond all doubt that sometimes four strings are infinitely superior to six. Seriously, I challenge you to listen to 'Fog Machine' at full volume without exploding into impromptu air-bass. I declare that it cannot be done!

Having effectively come full circle since their inception, the question of where Lullabye Arkestra might go next is perhaps a troubling one to contemplate -- it's difficult to imagine that any future record will not incorporate a smidgen of backtracking or repetition, perhaps good reason for the band to have remained a side-project. That being said, Threats/Worship presents an enthralling example of minimalism at its most paradoxically grand and sees a band capitalising on their appeal on no-one's terms but their own. Should their creativity take a

downturn, I personally look forward to Mr and Mrs Small's subsequent career in rock-n-roll relationship advice -- I wager the couples out there who have not "fucked the night" since forever and would pay through the nose for a taste of the magic on show here are legion.

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### **Foot Village :: Anti-Magic Upset The Rhythm**

<http://www.upsettherhythm.co.uk>

If you're anything at all like this reviewer, then the term "concept album" is one which will immediately set off alarm bells, if not in fact send you off on a mallet-swinging frenzy, storming into record stores across the land to deliver swift brutal justice to hapless copies of Lovesexy, all roger Waters-era Pink Floyd, and the entire mournful back catalogue of professional passé poseur Marilyn Manson. But wait! Don't head for the hills just yet, as this latest effort from L.A.'s drum-and-vocal ensemble Foot Village

thankfully falls into the more favourable end of the concept album spectrum. While not quite in the same league as The Beach Boys' Smile or Bowie's Ziggy Stardust, Foot Village's Anti-Magic is a bold and boisterous affair from a band with more than enough talent and acumen to back up their wayward ambitions.

In fact, in the interests of accuracy, it should be explained that Foot Village are no newcomers to the perils of high concept - their entire creative output and artistic persona are part and parcel of a complex analogy in which the band have positioned themselves as an autonomous nation with their own idiosyncratic culture, customs and moral codes. Their first album, 2005's World Fantasy, was a blatant celebration of established cultures, each track bearing the name of a specific country. This was followed a little over two years later with Friendship Nation in which Foot Village declared their ambitions intentions as a burgeoning composite country comprised of disparate elements of existing cultures. As their own press release candidly states: "Erecting civilisation with drums and voices alone, Foot Village are the first nation built after the foreseeable apocalypse". It's an intriguing impetus for any band, particularly one of such limited instrumentation, and providing one is willing to suspend one's disbelief, it's a premise which they fulfil with gripping and unpretentious passion.

This latest release finds the nation of Foot Village embroiled in its first post-apocalyptic war, and the sonic result is convincingly turbulent whilst maintaining an appropriate militaristic efficiency. On previous releases, this band have invariably impressed with their ability to coax raw emotional and primal responses with what is essentially the most restricted of aural palettes. Anti-Magic is no exception and, if anything, sees the band at something of a creative apex. With absolutely no melody to lean on other than the fevered yells and screams of its four members, Foot Village is an unapologetic machine of thunderous power and the tracks on this collection display a new confidence at work in its infernal gears. Realising that their appeal lies precisely in the nature of their limitations, the band have thrust the most violent aspects of their sound to the fore this time around, to a large extent forsaking the gentler and subtler passages which punctuated Friendship Nation. That they have done so without losing any of their characteristic frisky charm in the process is a creative feat which cannot be overstated. The bulk of the tracks on offer here literally explode with a magnitude rarely attained by even the most abrasive of noise-rock and metal bands. The fact that Foot Village successfully scale such cacophonous heights without the employment of riffage or the aid of electricity is in itself a radical achievement. That it also fulfils the thematic parameters of their playfully apocalyptic artistic vision is a success on a whole other

and more imperative level.

Arguably more than any other underground act performing today, Foot Village are quite conclusively impervious to criticism. There are moments where listening to this record all too easily induces the image of a group of mental patients running amok and unsupervised in the percussion section of a respectable high street music store. If you're able to make it from the first track to the last without cracking a single laugh then it's quite possible that you're over-thinking the concept at play here, and therefore falling straight into the trap of those who would criticise this band for their infantile excesses. While they forge their artistic vision with indisputable conviction, it's blatantly clear that the four members of Foot Village are not the sort to take themselves too seriously and that any cerebrally-motivated critique would be tantamount to gratuitous churlishness on the part of any reviewer.

Anti-Magic is not exactly an easy listening experience -- the rawness and incessancy of this tribal onslaught is to an acquired taste -- but in pushing the boundaries of extreme minimalism Foot Village have successfully crafted one of the most honest documents of humanity at its most primal, stripped down to the most basic methods of creative expression - screaming like lunatics and hitting shit with sticks. That the end result is every bit as amusing as it is

stimulating (and, on occasion, terrifying) is to the credit of the band's all-encompassing vision and communicable enthusiasm.

Should the tin foil hat brigade currently fretting about the alleged apocalyptic promise of the Mayan calendar turn out to be right, then Foot Village have at least drawn up a more than satisfying blueprint for cultural survival in the radioactive ruins. You won't encounter a more satisfying slab of scream-and-thump anthems this side of Armageddon, that's for sure.



## LABEL MAKERS

By Kate MacDonald

Images © Dolorosa de la Cruz

Montreal is a city known for its strong arts scene and particularly for art that flits around the fringes

and boundaries- art that challenges, art that combines elements and art that refuses to bow to trends or public pressure. The music scene is certainly no exception and **.Angle.Rec.**, a label dedicated to propagating experimental sounds to the discerning listener, is a great example of what this milieu can produce.

Label owner Martin Lemoine discusses the inspiration, the considerable challenges and the things that keep his dream alive.

### What was it that originally made you want to start a record label?

I don't know, maybe the need to express my interest in sound, music and non-music in yet another way. Sound in various forms has always been one of my greatest passions and fascinations. Concerning the label, the mere challenge of it was appealing as well. I had been into radio programming/hosting, for various radio shows at community college and community radio level between 1986 and 2003 (most notably Bulle-O-Tron on CFOU 89.1 and Dans L'Oeil De La Comète on CINQ 102.3, both focussing on ambient and dark-ambient and experimental and idm and whatnot), had done the dj thing, in various clubs & raves as well (everything via psytrance/chillout to hardcore/metal and electro-industrial to indie), back in the day, a bit of reviewing. Maybe the label journey was just some next natural step or experiment? This or music

making. But I never really MADE music. To this day, I am still too absorbed in discovering all the available music made by others, friends or not...which is a full-time job in itself. There are not enough listeners I think, in this world...so I shall remain on this side of the fence for some time.

Both my parents were and still are interested in music, with a strong focus on chanson française but a few other things, jazz, also a bit of rock. I guess my earliest interests stem from what they played at home. Then in 1979-1980, when I was 10, bigger kids introduced me to Tangerine Dream, Kraftwerk, Aphrodite's Child, Pink Floyd ...and it had a deep impact on me. My earliest roots and encounters in electronic and experimental music lie there. The sound of those artists was so personal yet so seductive. From that point, sky was just the limit.

Then came new wave, and all the eighties; in 1985, thanks in great part to Brave New Waves on CBC FM Radio, I jumped head first into darker and grittier musical universes - TG & PTV, S.P.K., Merzbow, Z'ev, Virgin Prunes, Playdead, Joy Division, Test Dept, Skinny Puppy, Coil...At the same time for me came ebm ... some early incarnations of it: Portion Control, F242, Klinik, and all that followed...and after, 90's electronica and electro: techno, the infamous chillout-sound, electro-dub, the Detroit sound, trance, also rhythmic-noise,

abstract, minimal tech among others.

Also, over time I dug deeper and deeper into ambient, drone & noise/experimental music. I am not even talking about all the other stuff I am into! I have always been all over the place in terms of musical interests and I guess it kinda shows in the .ANGLE.REC. and MONDES ELLIPTIQUES catalogue, even if, overall, the feel might be perceived mainly as "experimental" by some or many. Which it actually is a bit...I think we are an experimental label in the sense we did not stand still; we embraced drone, dark-ambient, rhythmic-noise, pure DIY indie-noise, lowercase sounds, technoid rhythms, analog sounds. We investigated various non-commercial forms with great pleasure in doing so.

Back to the formation of the label: when I met Mr. B in 2000 in Montreal, not only did we connect in terms of many musical interests but also, the city was experiencing another boom in electronic, noise and experimental music. Mr B. also wanted to share his musical visions with the world, too. He was the perfect partner to start the label! Even if a few years ago, he retired from the day-to-day activities of running the label, to focus on music making for example, he still is a good friend and a strong helping hand! The label was conceived around 2000 but it finally became a reality in June 2003.

At start, we did not have a complete and/or definite idea of where we wanted to go sonically with the label. But one thing for sure, I remember we initially wanted to release only vinyl! Things turned otherwise a bit, but hey, out of 18 productions, we finally have 6 vinyl releases under our belt, in all 3 most common formats (7", 10", 12"). The rest is mainly CD, with a few mini-cds and cdrs. A couple of days ago, we released the SEE SAW SAV ANN AH! 7inch by Montreal duo HYENA HIVE. This is intense noise with a strong power-electronics feel. I think that at the end of the day, we "chose" - consciously and unconsciously at the same time - to explore some lesser-known and less-promoted sides of the post-industrial/noise/drone/experimental spectrum of things and, along the process, highlight common grounds between all those different sub-sectors of the vast spectrum of underground sounds (I will get back to that later).

Our goal was not to compete with existing structures but to complement them with special projects, also with a focus on the quality of the packaging...so we were willing to produce unknown projects with a special vision but also a few existing and well-established names having a particular concept or idea to bring to the table for a release through our structure(s). The side label / parallel label MONDES ELLIPTIQUES was started in 2006 to showcase artists and/or projects

with a more abstract/"lowercase" feel. In Montreal, big influences for us were Alien8 Recordings and Disques Hushush (they are in semi-dormancy now and we have the pleasure to distribute their catalog).

**What do you think is the common element between the different artists whose work you've released?**

Earlier I mentioned the "experimental" aspect which seems to permeate most, if not all of our releases, whatever style or sub-style or sub-sub-style of this or that they belong to. Also, most if not all of the releases on .ANGLE.REC. imprint have that gritty, rather unclean and/or often old-school sounding feel and most of the times, make the listener land on not-that-easy shores. All are not always totally bleak and / or plain dark and/or plain noisy but they carry a feeling of uncertainty or mystery. For example, this is why some people saw/heard a similarity between, on one hand, something rather harsh, rhythmic and abrasive like LCEDP's "De L'Utilité Des Convoyeurs" and, on the other hand, a thing that was beatless, floating and way more introspective like AIDAN BAKER's "An Intricate Course Of Deception". Even ventures which, at first sight, seemed cleaner like VROMB' "Locomotive", with its dark-technoid approach, were not that clean at the end of the day. This was not totally planned but, I think we achieved a specific "angular" sound. On our MONDES ELLIPTIQUES imprint,



there is a more obvious similarity between all three releases (THE MISSING ENSEMBLE, MATHIAS DELPLANQUE, NETHERWORLD); sounds are more aerial, minimal, streamlined and CLEAN, this time!

Also, behind most of the .Angle.REC and MONDES ELLIPTIQUES releases lies a concept; it happened like that, but well...we like it! Montreal rhythmic noise project LCEDP was into the urban exploration thing and "urban decay" theme, THE MISSING ENSEMBLE was about "looking for those hidden doors", MATHIAS DELPLANQUE wanted to extract sounds hidden within silence, WILT and MONSTRARE wanted to express "the passing of life into subharmonic spirituality". FLINT GLASS and TELEPHERIQUE made a sonic interpretation and clash about the topic of information overload (a topic, I should say, that is more crucial than ever). Montreal power-drone duo SKINWELL shared their obsessions about tunnels and weird underground damp and enclosed spaces...

### **How do you select artists to be on Angle. Rec?**

We do not really actively select artists at this moment...but when it happens, it is stuff that we are submitted and are subjected to, sometimes from artists we know, sometimes not...or stuff we ask from artists we like. It really varies. One thing for sure, we have to be 100% convinced about it, it has to

bring us somewhere, whatever the "flavour" is ...Cordell Klier (MONSTRARE) and James Keeler (WILT) were shopping their GRAVEFLOWERS project around, I asked them a demo of it, being a fan of both artists. AIDAN BAKER personally contacted me in 2003 and sent the INTRICATE... demo in and we were pleased a lot with this approach of the drone (his now-famous NADJA project had just begun at that time). The LCEDP rhythmic noise project from Montreal was totally unknown to us (and to everyone in Montreal and elsewhere for that matter and we considered we definitely had to change that). Antoine's first demo was handed to me at the very first C.O.M.A rhythmic noise festival in Montreal in 2004, while I was doing my merch table. As for the FLINT GLASS and TELEPHERIQUE collaboration. Gwenn of FLINT GLASS contacted me directly to ask me if I was interested. After hearing the first mixes I said yes wholeheartedly.

Concerning DREAMCATCHER, we discovered them when they opened for EMIL BEAULIAU in 2005 at Casa Del Popolo. We were struck by their personal DIY/old-school approach and found their indie-noise mesmerizing and groovy...and so on and so on.

Concerning VROMB, I had known him from the BUNKER days in Montreal, in 90-92, had followed his career, and we stumbled upon each other again when I definitely moved here 10 years ago.

Concerning VISIONS...time was ripe for a good ol' 10inch slab of nicest dark-ambient from here...GRKZGL had gone through many transformations throughout his progression and it is when he got into his more abstract and noisier sound that we finally worked together as it was exquisitely fit with our overall approach. 15 DEGREES BELOW ZERO from the States, LOW END ENSEMBLE from Montreal approached us with release projects and we totally liked the material. MATHIAS DELPLANQUE had presented his MA CHAMBRE ...installation in Montreal and I asked him for a stereo version of it, just for my personal use. I eventually decided to release it!

**Are there any particular artists you would be interested in working with in the future?**

Hmmm...lots! There are so many project offers I had to turn down in recent years. Most of the time, it's a matter of money. I actually don't know what the future holds for my label(s). Sometimes I guess it would make more sense to pull the plug ...but...old love dies hard. One thing for sure, I scaled down the "operations" and now I release less per year, to keep it going for a while! I could consider some more "accessible" projects and / or big big names who releases 15 albums per year but I personally don't want to go that route. I feel it would defeat the purpose...

**What is the biggest challenge you face as a label?**

As I just mentioned, money. I will explain more here. The market has shrunk and furthermore, .Angle.Rec. chose the "eclectic" and, overall uneasy way, which does not always make sense in terms of marketing...but we would not have had it otherwise I think. Lots of people in the experimental/post-industrial scene/ambient-drone scene will tell you the same thing: market is not as big as it used to be. Of course, in 2009, it's become harder and harder to sell overall, it is a known fact...and the more underground you go, the more it shows, you have to print limited number of copies. It already was like this a few years ago before the advent of mp3 and the democratization of music making and promoting....but the operating margin has narrowed now with the explosion of production; market is flooded and less and less people want to buy physical products. The budget you have for promotion is smaller and smaller...kind of a vicious circle. Many people point to the mp3 as the source of all problems, but I do not totally agree with that. As I said the amount of music available these days plays a role! There's shitloads out there; too many actors, too many artists, too many labels, not enough listeners/consumers...as pointed out in my answer to a previous question. But well, yeah, it is human and normal, the more it goes, most people want the max bang for their buck, and also some

don't even want to pay for music anymore and have as much as possible. Also, finding distribution nowadays for some items is hard, really hard...Many people in the circuit seem to have the same problem at this point.

I've encountered non-professionalism and/or double standards in various forms. Examples include big labels/distros (ones I have supported in the past) who never bothered to reply to any of my various personal (versus mass mailings) distro requests over a long time frame. Even consignment of a limited number of copies was ok with me...A very quick "No, because etc." would have been nice too. At least you know your message(s) got through and were considered.

There are also radio/club djs who copy promo cds to their friends; bookers who never reply and/or who take 1-2 weeks to reply to important questions about a live show at their venue; reviewers (I had this experience with one in particular) who use their position simply to insult and denigrate work submitted to them (I'm not speaking here of a simple negative review- negative reviews are not bad per se). There are people who steal from merch tables- I've seen it on various occasions and a certain number of label owners I know had the problem at least once. Oh, and people stealing gear before/after shows...

Also, the speculation thing, which actually has been going on forever in collectors' circles (not only in the record collecting world, but also in the universe of comics, antiques etc. etc. etc), seems to become more and more ridiculous. That specific other manifestation of the "profit logic" which rules the world makes me say that some people in "underground" circles sometimes do not act different from the "mainstream" they say they despise. Hell, some of the .Angle.Rec. releases weren't even sold-out and I saw them sold on the Web for twice or thrice the price.

Back to the cool stuff : apart from releasing special projects with a different aesthetic, what kept me going on was my passion for sounds and also all the very kind and dedicated people we met along the way; this includes of course all the music fans we have been in contact with and/or met in real life, in Montreal or elsewhere, musicians we worked with or not, promoters, labels/distributors, graphic designers, curators, visual artists...I have fond memories attached to every release; the long afternoons and evening and nights spent designing, folding, assembling, numbering (we numbered most of our releases), the events we put up : VENETIAN SNARES in 2002 (Hushush, .Angle.Rec. & friends collab); MLADA FRONTA/MIMETIC/ISZOLOSCOPE in 2003 (.Angle.Rec. & Geska recs. collab); SALT/SZKIEVE in 2003 (for the launch of the VROMB

10'' and the label itself); NAW/AIDAN BAKER/NATHAN MCNINCH in 2004 (.Angle.Rec. & Petite Sono collab); LAW-RAH COLLECTIVE/XINGU HILL/VISIONS/SZKIEVE in 2005 (Cyclic Law & .Angle.Rec. collab); TROUM/TIM HECKER/AIDAN BAKER/THISQUIETARMY (Oral recs. & .Angle.Rec. collab) in 2006; OBLIVION ENSEMBLE & SAMARKANDE (S.R.I. & .Angle.Rec. collab); SISTRENATUS/GRKZGL/AUN/ VISIONS in 2007 (.Angle.Rec. & Cyclic Law collab); SLEEP RESEARCH FACILITY/SKINWELL/VISIONS (Cyclic Law/.Angle.Rec./Kali/Aun presentation) in 2008...but there are others...the Montreal leg of the Suction tour (w/SKANFROM, LOWFISH, SOLVENT..) in 2004... Most of all, we are really proud of each and every project we have been a part of! We are happy with every release, be it on the main .Angle.Rec. imprint or the Mondes Elliptiques parallel venture. And if we had to do everything all over again, we would not change lots of things. Very few actually. So this is it.

As a label, we also strived to be a voice for artists who do not have a strong "commercial" potential but are nonetheless visionary in their own terms. One thing we like is that we managed to gather a very fair number of artists from here, Montreal, in our roster...

I am happy the .Angle.Rec. & Mondes Elliptiques as well as our

distribution stuff interested not only people from here, but also music fans in remote far countries such as Japan and Australia. Needless to say, Internet definitely has been an invaluable tool! Of course the help of our distributors was priceless as well.

<http://www.angle-rec.net>



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