

PARAPHILIA VI



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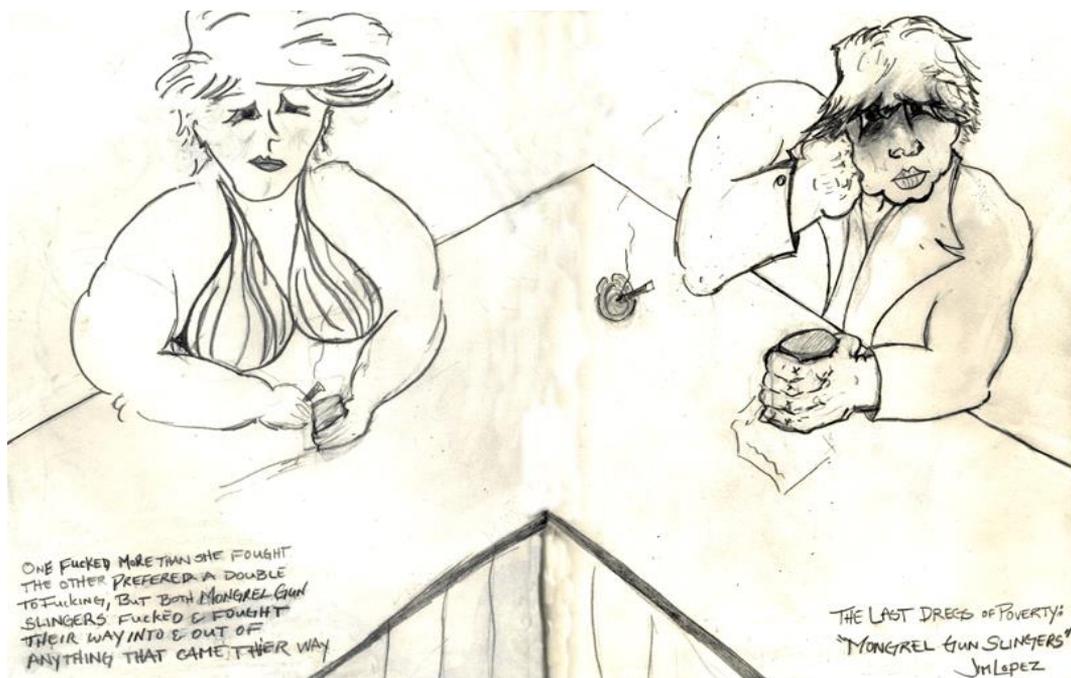
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THE LAST DREGS OF POVERTY: THE MONGREL GUN SLINGERS

Text and Image By Jim Lopez



The last time Georgia (a Yanky Doodle donkey-milking skag dragger) escorted a college girl (who had been featured in an episode of Girls Gone Wild and had trouble pronouncing her vowels) to an abortion he drove her to a Methodist Church, walked her up to the pulpit, made her say her prayers and then pushed her down a flight of stairs. That was a week ago, and

now he and I were sitting in a cantina, listening to romantic songs in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

Rumors were floating around that the Mongrel Gun Slingers had crossed the border and were now themselves in Cuernavaca. It was said that they had massacred a patrol of Border Control Officers and a number of cartel members in Ciudad Juarez. The Mongrel Gun Slingers were

the Darkness in the heart of Light. They were the arm of justice, ruled by one law: the prayers that cried out for vengeance loosed the Mongrel Gun Slingers into this world. I didn't think much of the rumors but Georgia couldn't stop talking about the Mongrel Gun Slingers. He had some deep, disgusting desire to go out with a bang and get tag-teamed by them and, well, Georgia was getting closer to his dream.

I shook my dick, zipped up my fly and walked back into the cantina to order another Havana *tres añõs* rum when I saw the Mongrel Gun Slingers for the first time. I didn't know exactly who they were, but I felt an eerie crawl down my spine as I stood next to a large women sitting next to a large man at the bar. No one had ever lived to tell what the Mongrel Gun Slingers looked like for certain, but a few who lied dying on gurneys whispered that the Mongrel Gun Slingers were hermaphrodites, that they were the Fifth and Sixth Horsemen left out of the Ultimate Apocalypse and forced to be the hand of

tragedy in all the 'Penultimate' Apocalypses throughout the ages, and no ancient scribes had dared to write about them in public scrolls; however, I had come across a manuscript while screwing a Jewish American Princes (who was attending the Kennedy School of Government) in the basement stacks of Widner Library.

A copy of a pamphlet titled, "A Short and Unauthorized Account of the Burning of the Alexandrian Library" by a Bonetavio Puccini had been rattled out the shelves and fell between my pelvic thrust and this Jewish American Princes' ass. It was four pages in length and contained a drawing, which depicted the initials MGS carved into a fallen pillar next to the smoldering rubble of the Library of Alexandria. Supposedly a Sumerian had cursed Alexander the Great's general, Ptolemy I Soter, for killing his family and stealing his secret cuneiform tablets, so the Mongrel Gun Slingers crawled out of a Wormhole and sacked the Library of Alexandria. When I mentioned the pamphlet to a

Jesuit at Weston Theological Seminary he dismissed it as a myth, a hoax, a sort of bogie-man story told to peasants by the Church to keep those who were marked for slavery illiterate and submissive. But the Mongrel Gun Slingers were no myth. They were real Chupacabras and I was standing right next to them.

The Mongrel Gun Slingers were the devils of the Shakin' Quakers. They were the corporeal image of Animal Magnetism. The Ouija Board would not even speak with them and when they made their presence known they were the only ones left standing. Now what did that mean for me? Was this my last drink, my last few minutes of life? Not only did the Mongrels kill, but they engaged in the oldest and most feared form of warfare: they fucked their victims. Was I about to end up a raped carcass, left mutilated, and soaked in the love juice of the Hermaphroditic Fifth and Sixth Horseman, who were too vicious, brutal and obscure to be mentioned in literature?

I had been unemployed before being unemployed was popular,

and I had grown quite irritable with the fraudulent and hypocritical unemployment statistic that were spun by the United States. You see the United States does not count everyone who is out of work; rather, it only considers those who are eligible for unemployment. There are more people out of work than there are those who are qualified to register for unemployment and I intended to kill someone worth killing, but the Mongrels would beat me to the blade. Jeffrey Skilling, Enron's x-CEO, had defrauded the State of California and ripped off thousands of retirement funds from hardworking Americans, and he had just been released on early parole from prison. He and his wife, Rebecca Carter, were vacationing in Cuernavaca and I was going to kill him.

I paid the barmaid and walked over to Georgia, placed his drink down in front of him and sat with my back towards the Mongrel Gun Slingers.

"Georgia, you see those two biggies sitting at the bar?"

"Honey, I had my eye on them since they walked in while you were tugging your pud in the alley."

"Well, I'm not certain, but I suspect they're the Mongrel Gun Slingers."

"Really," Georgia said, leaning forward, seductively whispering and sipping his rum through a straw, "I sure hope so."

"We better get out of here."

"No, honey, we're not going anywhere."

"We're sure as hell not going anywhere if we stay here any longer," I said with a quivering, hushed tone.

"Baby, don't worry, Georgia's here to protect you."

"What the fuck are talking you about you dozy queer. They're going to kill everyone in the place."

"Now, now Jimmy, don't exaggerate. If you've never hurt anyone so badly that he nor she pleaded to God in Precatory Prayer you'll be fine," Georgia

said eyeing the Mongrels, sucking on his straw. This overweight transvestite was flirting with the Mongrel Gun Slingers.

"Are fucking out of your mind? Have you gone mad? Precatory! What the fuck are you talking about? We have to get out of here." I took a big swig, my heart pounding so hard I could have been impaled on a stalk of sugar cane. Georgia had studied Patristics and Byzantine History at Gregorian University in Rome, and he received a perverted education from the priests. Now this Transvestite Princess was thinking about getting throat and crowned by these two 'mythical' lunatics. But as I mentioned before, the Mongrel Gun Slingers were no myth. They were sitting right behind me drinking Havana rum.

"Honey, didn't you study the book of Psalms in Seminary?"

"What? Yeah, I fucking did, and I know what a goddamn Precatory Psalm is. It's when some jilted fuck cries out, asking God to torture, maim and kill

some vicious bastard who has it coming. But I don't give a shit. I want to get the hell out of here, now."

"Isn't that Jeffrey Skilling and his wife, Rebecca Carter?" Georgia asked, pointing with his lips.

I turned around and sure enough there was Skilling waving the barmaid over with a CitiBank Titanium Visa Card.

"I'm going to ram that fucking Titanium card down his throat," I said forgetting the Mongrel Gun Slingers, slamming the rest of my drink.

"Go get 'em, honey. I'm here."

The vein for murder was pumping blood so fast through my heart that I was experiencing True Rage for the first time. I walked up behind Skilling, grabbed his Titanium card out of his hand, pulled his head back and was about to shove my fist down his trachea when I felt a hand twirl me around. It was the 'female' Mongrel staring at me with twinkling black eyes. She lifted me off my feet and sent me skidding across the floor only to

be halted by the boot of the 'male' Mongrel, who heeled me right in the back of the head. "Excuse me, but this is God's business not yours," he said with a voice that resounded like a bolt of lightning thrown from the hand of Zeus. He lifted me off the floor, shoved my face in his armpit, which didn't smell as bad as I thought an Apocalyptic Horseman's pits ought to smell, and commanded, "You mustn't watch," ringing my head tighter into his armpit. But Georgia was watching and he gave me a blow by blow account like a queer Howard Cosell, sucking down Cuban rum with an umbrella garnish. "The Mongrel just pulled an HK USP .40 millimeter out her panties. I love those panties, Big Lady," Georgia said complimenting the 'female' Mongrel and then continued, "Skilling isn't looking too happy. Ooo."

I heard a bang and yanked my head out of the Mongrel's armpit. My head was bleeding into my eyes but I could see clearly. The 'female' Mongrel had stuffed the barrel of that HK so far down Skilling's throat that she blasted

his tongue and pieces of bone and various fragment of organs and tissues out of Skilling's ass, who was now lying in a lump of his own dismembered body parts, blood and feces.

Rebecca, Skilling's wife, went screaming across the cantina. The 'male' Mongrel grabbed hold of her, bashed her head on the bar, and shoved his enormous cock right through her. He didn't even bother to raise her dress or pull down her panties before he raped her. Rebecca's dress and panties wrapped around that Mongrel's member like an alter-boy's lips wraps around an ice-cream cone before a priest shoves the boy's face into the cream behind the confession booth. Rebecca screamed so hard that one of her eyeballs popped out of her head. Then the Mongrel blew a load with such veracious force that it blew off the top of Rebecca's head and plastered it to the ceiling.

The 'female' Mongrel was simultaneously fucking a Federale and two of Arturo Beltrán Leyva's men (Leyva, one of Mexico's most violent drug

lords, had himself been recently killed on December 16, 2009 by Mexican Special Forces). These three men had murdered the mother, the mother's son and daughter, and the mother's sister on the same day (December 21, 2009) that that poor mother was burying her *other* son, who was a Special Forces soldier who had been killed during the Leyva show down. Well, now these three men were getting raped by the 'female' Mongrel, who was looking more and more like a burly Mexican dismantling a roof with a pitchfork. The Mongrel had both tools to execute the hand of justice. She was stuffing one guy's face so deep into her snatch that he started to resemble the tail of a shrimp in a taco covered in cream cheese and guacamole. That was the Federale, who was kicking a little bit and was about to expire. The 'female' Mongrel was also giving one of Leyva's men a colonoscopy with a cock that actually roared and had teeth around its urethra. That guy was just limp and dead, while this dragon-like dick was tearing up his rectum and blowing fire

through his innards. Leyva's other guy was having his dick sucked so hard that his face was caving in. Then his head just disappeared into his neck, which was followed by his shoulders, chests, stomach, waist, hips, legs and feet. His whole body was sucked into his cock. Then the 'female' Mongrel chewed it up and spit it out on the wall.

Meanwhile, the 'male' Mongrel, (I describe him as 'male' even though I wasn't sure if he was a male, I mean he didn't reveal his pussy or use it to kill anyone, but after what I had just seen of the 'female' Mongrel I suspected the rumor was true—the Mongrel Gun Slingers were hermaphrodites), was shooting people in the face as his cod dangled in plain view with Rebecca's other eyeball glued to the end of it. Then the 'female' Mongrel (who was half-naked) joined the 'male' Mongrel (who by the way had a double Havana rum in one hand and a John Moses Browning commemorative .45 millimeter in the other) and started shooting people in the face as well. They killed

everyone in the cantina except Georgia, me and the beautiful Mexican barmaid, who was so frightened that she jumped into my arms. I held her waiting for the Mongrel Gun Slingers to rape the two of us or shoot us in the face. Georgia was calmly sitting at his table gingerly chewing his straw as he sipped his rum.

When the Mongrel's were done, so I was hoping, they walked over to the bar. The 'male' Mongrel reached over the counter, grabbed a bottle of Havana *cinco años* rum and poured two glasses. The 'female' Mongrel was composing herself in a presentable fashion. Then they lit a couple of cigarettes and peacefully drank their rum.

Georgia pursed his lips in frustrated disappointment. "Is that all you two Herms have for us this evening," Georgia huffed like Tinker Bell pissed-off at Peter Pan. "This momentary measure of mercy better wind up with me in the arms of a coup de main. Are you two Mongrel Gun Slingers going to come over here and fuck me, or do I need to call a bellhop to carry my luggage up

to my room?" Georgia asked with a touch of demand in his tone and a whole lot of sass.

I didn't quite understand the metaphor, but I think Georgia was looking for absolution from some sins.

The Mongrels just sat ignoring Georgia, drinking and smoking like a couple of hard-working, unappreciated plebeians who missed happy hour. The Mexican barmaid and I were holding onto each other like a couple of huddling, uncertain characters in a Hieronymus Bosch painting.

"Ewwhoo, pppp, mmwaa, aren't you two the Mongrel Gun Slingers?" Georgia persisted, kissy-catcalling the Mongrel Gun Slingers. "I'm ready to go to hell now."

The Mongrel Gun Slingers continued to dismiss Georgia, who was growing impatient, so he shimmied his fat ass out of his chair, sashayed across the room and leaned into the bar between both Hermaphroditic Mongrel Gun Slingers. "I said I'm ready to get fucked and go to hell now,"

Georgia repeated, pouring another round of rum for himself and the Mongrels, who seemed pleased by his gesture.

The barmaid tugged herself out of my stiff arms, walked around the bar, and reached for a rustic bottle of Tequila that sat on the top shelf. I followed her and sat at the end of the bar far from the Mongrels and Georgia. She placed a couple of shot glasses down between us and poured two stiff drinks. We leaned into and over the bar (the barmaid on the server's side, I on the patron's side), and stared deeply into each other's eyes, our breaths intermingling before we sucked down the cactus juice. Then she poured us another round.

"Do you know why we haven't killed you yet?" the 'male' Mongrel asked me.

The barmaid and I slammed our shots, peering into one another's soul. I was rapidly falling in love with this beautiful, green-eyed Mexican barmaid.

"We asked you a question," the 'female' Mongrel announced with a hallow voice that echoed.

The barmaid and I ignored the Mongrel Gun Slingers. I'd say we did so out of fright and wonder. What were the odds that Chaotic Chance would grace the two of us with romance in this bloody mess? And what did the Mongrels mean by "yet?"

"Isn't love precious," the 'male' Mongrel commented to the 'female' Mongrel.

"I want to get fucked and go to hell right now!" Georgia demanded, poking the Mongrels with his umbrella garnish. "Now, come on, do me now!" Georgia was losing his queenie composure, morphing into a spoiled girl who was denied her sweets.

"No one has ever cared enough about you to consider your actions worth a damn," the 'female' Mongrel said to me. "And you little green-eyed lady,

you don't get out enough," the 'male' Mongrel said to the barmaid. Then the two of them walked out of the cantina with Georgia storming after them, "Fuck me now, damn-it! Fuck me now! I want to go to hell!"

The barmaid and I followed them into the drizzling rain. A Wormhole opened up in the sky. The Mongrel Gun Slingers leaped in like super heroes. Georgia dove head first. And the three of them disappeared. I noticed a soggy, paper rose in the gutter, so I picked up and handed it to the beautiful Mexican barmaid. Then the two of us strolled hand-in-hand through the muddy, cracked cobbled streets making our way to the Motel Canario. And as the clouds began to disperse and the crescent moon shined bright in the black sky we could hear, in the faint and distant yet ever-so-close parallel universe, Georgia not whistling Dixie but nagging, "I want to get fucked and go to hell, right now!"



THE HAJJ THELEMIC

Text and Photos By Nick Louras

It's a beautiful day. We've missed a long bout of rain and arrived for bright blue skies and a pleasant, unobtrusive heat. Strong winds blow up the coast and rustle the flora.

The first thing you notice is how precarious the whole thing is. The only part of the house visible at first is the roof, peeking up above the road-line a few feet away, and most of that has collapsed. Anywhere else in the world this place would have been torn down and paved over. Even here, it almost has been. We're in the empty parking lot of a football stadium planted on a steep

hillside just outside the town proper. There's no one around. The stadium itself is a bleak thing, gray slab ringing a brown dirt field. There's graffiti and trash everywhere. The pavement goes right up to the house, so close it almost touches the roof.

Kym puts her arm around my waist and says, "It waited for us." In the distance, sunlight twinkles on the ocean.

A week earlier, I'd picked up Aleister Crowley's *Moonchild* again, with its besieged Rabelaisian commune, and it struck me that at any moment

one of the most venerable holy sites on the planet could disappear into the pages of history.

It wasn't anything I hadn't considered before, but sometimes you can walk past the same picture a hundred times and still not get it.

This time I got it.

Within a matter of days, we'd made arrangements in Sicily, booked a torturous series of connecting flights, and set out from New York to find the Abbey of Thelema, where Crowley realized his vision, living and making magick with a cadre of acolytes in the early 1920s.

It was a pilgrimage that I'd long wanted to make. I knew the Abbey to be derelict, accessible, and to contain some of the original wall murals painted by Crowley himself during his tenure as "Abbot." Whether through a change in ownership or the owner's relationship with the building, or by the inevitable, unthinkable consequences of age, I knew also that this would not always be the case.

The exigency that carried us over braces us yet as we stand on the hillside. We've come straight from the airport without sleep or refreshment. Our bodies still feel

like they're being propelled through space.

I tell Kym that I'll go down and check it out and see if anyone's inside. I pitch myself over the railing and make the climb down through bramble and weeds. The hillside between the new construction and the Abbey is so thickly overgrown that I narrowly avoid stepping into a straight drop more than once. There's an easier way, it turns out, but I'm eager, and I make it down in one piece with only a few threads plucked from my pant-legs by the pricklers.

A dog starts barking loudly. As I come around to the seaward wall, I see it: a sturdy, muscular thing chained to the front of a small house, of similar design, a stone's throw from the Abbey. I wait a few moments in case someone comes out and I'm required to be charming, but no one does. It's just the dog. It probably spends a lot of time barking.

After a few beats, I move on. At the far end of the house there's an open window, the only means of ingress not securely boarded up. I know already, by a familiarity with the old layout of the Abbey, that this opens on what Crowley called, the *Chambre des Cauchemars* - the Chamber of Nightmares.

As I approach it, I take in the solid white bulk of the building, an eighteenth century farmhouse, and I'm struck by a different impression than the one I'd had at stadium level. The walls are probably two feet thick and in surprisingly good condition. So inured am I to the idea that the Abbey is "in ruins" that to find it a sturdy block with all the outer walls standing is like finding it still occupied by its legendary tenants. My optimism is surely belied by the view from above. It probably has more to do with finding the Abbey a tangible/physical entity right here in front of me than anything else. For so long it had been an idea, as far away as its literary counterpart. Still, the evident negligence seems criminal if it's structurally sound.

The open window was once bricked up and the bricks plastered over. Most of this has been removed by a previous visitor. A few bricks remain on top. In the plaster, someone's carved:

THELEMA ABBEY

FA CIO CHE VUOI... !

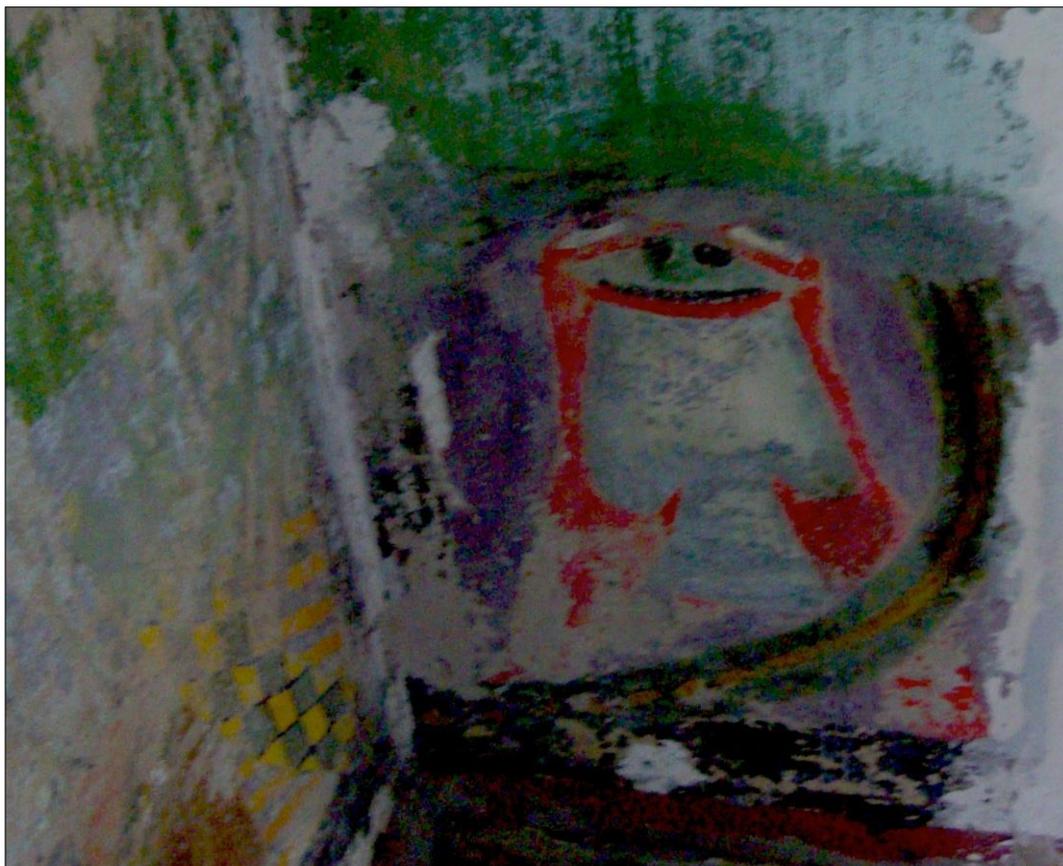
From a few feet away, the interior is completely dark. As I stick my head in, the walls - and what is on them - come into focus.

"*Salve,*" I call out. "Hello." There's no answer. Lest someone inside mistake my intent, I add, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." Still nothing.

I hoist myself in.

There's a brief fear that the energy will have changed here. After all, this is no longer the space inhabited by Crowley and Leah Hirsig, Ninette Shumway and Raoul Loveday, or the equally interesting space inhabited by Kenneth Anger. A new layer must have settled over its psychic strata in recent decades, added to by every pilgrim and curiosity seeker. A thoughtless bunch, by the look of it. They've left their garbage behind and their names and mottos, email addresses and websites. They appear to have stolen chunks out of the walls. As I lower myself to the floor beside a small bed frame with rusty springs, onto a floor strewn with beer bottles, and a candle presumably left by an overnight guest, I'm still not sure if the room will resound with *their* energy: fleeting and strained, like a busy rail terminal.

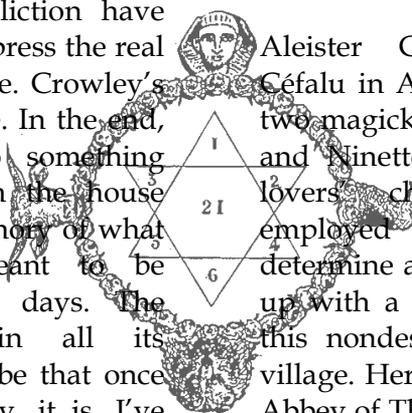
I stand still, eyes adjusting to the light, already taking in what remains of the murals, so colorful, so vivid after all these years, and a total sense of wonder falls over me.



On a certain level - myth, spirit, call it what you will - human transience and dereliction have done nothing to suppress the real meaning of this place. Crowley's presence looms large. In the end, all attempts to do something (anything) else with the house have failed. The memory of what it was always meant to be returns, in its last days. The house struggles in all its devastated pride to be that once again. And in a way, it is. I've never much believed in time as a linear thing. Standing here, I could forget about time

altogether. It's a cliché, but it's true, I feel *close* to them.

Aleister Crowley arrived in Cefalu in April of 1920, with his two magickal lovers, Leah Hirsig and Ninette Shumway, and his lovers' children. They had employed the *I Ching* to determine a new home and came up with a favorable reading for this nondescript Sicilian fishing village. Here they established the Abbey of Thelema, what Crowley dubbed the *Collegium ad Spiritum Sanctum* - the College of the Holy Spirit. It would be the nurturing



ground for the New Aeon announced 16 years earlier in Cairo, where Crowley received *The Book of the Law*, the central text of his new religion, Thelema. Those of his students who braved the journey to C  fal   would form the spiritual core of the Aeon, devoting their lives to Attainment through the practice of magick, yoga, *eros* and philosophy.

Crowley took a room in the western corner of the Abbey, the room in which I am now standing, and painted the walls from floor to ceiling in fresco, representing "Hell," "Heaven,"

and "Earth." Here were depicted unimaginable visions of beauty and depravity, scenes with names like: "Four Degenerates between Christian and Jew at Prayer"; "Japanese Devil-boy Insulting Visitors"; "Faithful on the Gallows"; "The Sea-Coast of Tibet, Egyptian Aztecs arriving from Norway"; "Toad watching Sam Weller imposing Silence on Oxonian (or possibly Sir Owen Seaman)"; "a Dragon-Serpent begins to devour the Seven Hanged Wives in Bluebeard's Closet"; "Monastery on the Caucasus"; and "The Long-Legged Lesbians."



To represent Earth: "Nine lovers of various species, watched by a spotted dog and bowl of newly-invented fishes, in an Arabian Nights city, by a river."

And for Heaven: Aiwass (the intelligence from whom *The Book of the Law* was received) sending forth "His Ministers," The Beast

and The Scarlet Woman, of which Crowley and his lover (whoever she was at the time) were embodiments.

The purpose of this riotous, psychedelic room was an ancient one. Here would play out something akin to the Eleusinian Mysteries, where the initiate was

lead into darkness, touched by an entheogenic sacrament, and there shown visions of life, death and the spirit world. Crowley would pass his candidates through much the same in this chamber,

where they would spend the night, assailed by the demonic and grotesque phantoms that haunted the walls, ideally coming through with complete mastery over their minds.



Around the corner, in the center of the house, was a larger room. This was the temple space where the residents of the Abbey performed Thelema's central ritual, the Gnostic Mass.

For three years, the *Collegium ad Spiritum Sanctum* was the home of Crowley and his teaching order, the A.'.A.'. In 1923, one of the aspirants, Raoul Loveday, became ill, from drinking either cat's blood in a ritual, or, as Crowley insisted, the local water, and died. His widow took her grievance to the English press, who were brutal in their condemnation of Crowley. One particularly offended magazine, *John Bull*, published lurid accounts of children witnessing

bacchanals, and a goat given "a principle part" in "the violation of a naked woman." It was *John Bull* that dubbed Crowley, "The Wickedest Man in the World," a dubious honor that would cling to him the rest of his life. The scandal back in Britain brought the Abbey to the attention of Mussolini's then one-year old government in Rome, and, in April of 1923, Crowley was expelled from Italy.

To rub salt in the wound, the local officials whitewashed over the murals in the *Chambre des Cauchemars*, and when the last of the Thelemites finally left a few years later, it seemed that the evidence of Crowley's time in C  falu was lost.



For thirty years the farmhouse sat, mostly unoccupied.

Then, in 1955, the filmmaker Kenneth Anger traveled to Céfalú and rented it. Over the course of a summer, he meticulously restored the Abbey. It turned out that beneath the hardened whitewash, the frescos in the *Chambre des Cauchemars* were in

fine condition, and as the covering was cleaned away, they were again revealed. Tragically, Anger's film of the restoration was lost. Doubly so because after he left, the walls were painted over again, this time with green paint, curiously leaving a foot or two still visible along the floor on each wall.



The Four Degenerates are all that remain of the "Hell" wall, beneath a line of verse from one of Crowley's poems: "Stab your demoniac smile to my brain. Soak me in Cogniac, Cunt, and Cocaine." The words "Cunt" and "Cocaine" have been obliterated. So have two of the Degenerates.

A detail of the "Heaven" mural stands out more than any other thing in the room: the "memorial

pillar" put on earth by the Beast and the Scarlet Woman, themselves now obscured by the second coat of paint. In an amalgam of Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Qabalistic numerology, is inscribed: *Aiwass gave Will as a Law to Mankind through the mind of The Beast 666.*

It is written in The Beast's own hand.



I close my eyes and pay my respects in a simple manner then climb outside again.

Kym has made her way down from the road and she's walking toward me. We go back inside together.

It's a strange tel this house.

Outside the mural room, there's nothing much left of the interior from Crowley's day, only a splash of the red paint that had once covered the walls of the central temple. The floor plan has changed, several times. A stone sink and a couple dozen white tiles identify the kitchen. Without already knowing what they were, there would be nothing to give away the functions of the other rooms. The floors are all covered in broken roof tiles. Except for the

mural room and the adjoining bedroom, no room has an intact roof. What had once been an attic floor is visible from a number of places.

We make the most of the day and linger long, exploring.

The sun has moved across the sky by the time we prepare to leave. I know that we leave nothing behind. Crowley insisted that within the infinite body of the universe, every point is the center. At the beginning of the 1920s, this house was surely the center of a remarkable universe; but so, without contradiction, was Boleskine House. And so today is anywhere inhabited by the self-willed Individual. We take that with us, each of us. And I think we probably brought it here.





INTERESTING TIMES: SCHOOLDAYS

By Andrew Maben

Idyll of childhood, such as it had been, was about to come to an end, though of course I had no forebodings. One cold, misty, drizzly, January afternoon my father loaded my newly packed trunk and tuckbox into the car and we set off, driving through the bleak winter landscape of the Devon dairy farm country, a journey that seemed to be going to the ends of the earth. Up, up into the gloomy bleached grey-brown hills of Exmoor we drove. A strange new mixture of emotions filled my young heart: fear and excitement; dread and longing. I felt a churning nervousness in my stomach that was almost a pleasure. I felt a fierce love for my mother, whose trembling heart I could sense as she sat beside me. My father

drove with silent concentration, strong and stern, his occasional gentle smiles made my heart almost burst with pride, and the determination to live up to him. I wanted to be independent, free of the nest, to live up to the ideas I had taken from Kipling, Masfield, of what it meant to be a man, an Englishman. It was a few weeks before my seventh birthday.

I was almost shaking with the excitement, fear and anticipation of the great adventure of boarding school as we pulled into the driveway. I had never before been separated for any length of time from my family. I swallowed hard to hold back my tears. The school, Kestrels, was in an old manor house, gothic, ivy-

covered, forbidding. Then, as we parked in the courtyard in front of the porch and its great double doors, I had a wonderful surprise.

There was Peter, from kindergarten! I had never expected to see him again after our goodbyes at the convent the previous summer. In spite of our vows of eternal brotherhood I had all but forgotten him within a week or two. But now here he was, and it seemed to me almost a miracle. The turmoil in my heart and stomach instantly subsided in a swell of good fellowship. I would not be all alone after all. In my eagerness to be in my friend's company I hardly noticed saying goodbye to my parents, my mother's ill-concealed tears.

Peter and I swapped tales of our adventures since our last parting, an eternity that in reality was only a few short months, world shaking adventures so inconsequential that I now remember them not at all. There must have been supper, a welcome speech from Mr. Stapleton, the Head. Trunks must have been carried to dormitories, tuckboxes to a locker room.

Between the joy at rediscovering my friend and the humiliation to come I remember almost nothing. Peter and I were assigned to the same dormitory, called Peregrine Falcon, our beds adjacent. As we prepared for bed he explained a school tradition. At the end of every term there was a dinner at which the boys in each dormitory sang their dorm song. A prize would go to the best performers.

"Our song is 'Daisy', do you know it?" he asked. As I did not – in fact I had never heard it, music had no prominent place in my life at home – we decided I must start to learn the words and tune right away. But first I set off down the dimly lit hallway to the lavatory to pee. I opened the door, turned on the light. There on the floor, between me and the toilet, crouched a huge fearsome spider. It was too much for me in the nervous condition I was in. I turned out the light, slammed the door and fled in terror back to the dormitory.

Egged on by the other boys. Peter and I climbed up on our beds and began to practice.

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do.

*I'm half crazy, all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage
I can't afford a carriage
But you'll look sweet upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.*

Jumping up and down, louder and louder, over and over. Until the other boys suddenly seemed to lose interest in the show, Peter stopped singing. I finished the last few words of the verse, my voice tailing off, and sensing someone behind me, I turned. At the door stood Mr. Stapleton, red faced and steaming with rage.

"What's all this noise?" he roared.

"I'm teaching Maben our dorm song, sir," stammered Peter.

I just stood there, uncertain, scared and embarrassed, on my bed. I really would have been happy to be swallowed up by the earth.

"We were just singing," I managed, in little more than a whisper.

Another roar. "I won't have it!"

The next thing I knew he had us each by the collar of our pyjamas

and was dragging us out of the room.

It made no sense to me. What had we done wrong? Such a towering rage was surely not caused by our innocent happiness?

"We were just singing," I whimpered over and over again, terrified, not knowing where we were being taken or why, what might be in store for us. I was aware only of this rough, red faced man's malevolent bad temper.

He dragged us bodily up a narrow flight of stairs that led to another bathroom. Pushing Peter inside, he hissed at me to wait my turn on the landing.

"My turn for what?" I wondered.

Now. I am well aware that what follows is fairly mild compared to the suffering of far too many other children. It was traumatic for all that, not so much for its physical aspect as for the sudden exposure to malice, the loss of trust in the benevolence of adults, the sense of abandonment. Whoever claims that words cannot hurt has absolutely no idea what they are talking about.

Physical blows can harm the body, permanently if sufficiently violent, but words can damage the soul just as deeply, just as permanently. However I hope I have never pretended that this is an excuse for any of my deficiencies of character, for any of my misdeeds. It may offer some part of an explanation for my choices, but I have tried to accept the responsibility for all that I have done. Let us not forget that by now I had already experienced my own capacity for malicious cruelty. They used to say this kind of thing was character-building. It certainly is character-forming, character-distorting, crushing compassion, generosity, kindness to turn out generations of heartless military men, sadistic colonial administrators, captains of capital always ready to put profit before people.

I did not have long to wait for the revelation of what was in store for me. The unmistakable sound of blows, Peter's muffled yelps of pain, came to me through the closed door. My fear grew, anticipating the punishment to come. Worse, I now felt responsible, that I had betrayed my friend, if not for me he would

not be in there now, suffering. If only I had never come to this place, if only I had known the words of the song, if only. If only something were different.

The door opened, Peter came out, pain and humiliation in his eyes, but he managed a brief small smile of encouragement for me as he passed by. My heart shrank, surely this was all my fault.

"Come in here, Maben."

He grabbed my ear and forced me to bend over the rim of the bath. The cold enamel dug into my stomach, as my feet were lifted from the floor I felt I would teeter over the side and into the tub. He let go and I balanced awkwardly, face against the metal, struggling not to show tears. I hung there for an eternity, uncomprehending of this punishment so out of proportion to what was surely no crime, and in those moments was born my contempt for injustice and those who carry it through.

The first blow fell. Delivered with all his drunken strength, the sole of a leather slipper struck my buttocks, a sharp stinging, burning pain. But it was not the

pain, but the humiliation, the injustice, that truly hurt. The pain, the anguish, the pressure of all my weight supported by my stomach, my still unemptied bladder, were too much, and all the pent up tension suddenly was released. To my shame, hot piss streamed between my legs, my pyjamas were soaked. Worse yet, warm soft wet sticky shit spewed out, flowed over my buttocks, between my thighs. I would gladly have crawled down the drain, wished I could disappear forever into the sewer pipes, if only I could escape this shame, this humiliation. I no longer tried to hold back my tears, indeed tears seemed cleansing in comparison to those other foul excretions.

The beating stopped as he realized what was happening, but I would not counsel any child that this is an effective counter measure to avoid a beating. He reached down and dragged me upright by my collar.

“Stand up, you little worm!”

I stood, shaking, stinking, as he bellowed at me, heaping shame upon humiliation onto my quaking heart. Somewhere inside

I wondered if it could have been the morning of this same day that my mother held me, told me she loved me. How could love send someone to suffer this?

At last he pushed me out of the door: “Get out of my sight! Go to bed!”

I crept down the stairs, crawled under the covers, curled up and lay in my piss soaked pyjamas, legs still smeared with cooling, congealing shit. Aware of the other boys’ attention I struggled to sob silently, mouthing the words over and over again: “But we were only singing, but we were only singing, only singing, we were only singing...” Filthy. Worm. So I suppose it is not all that surprising that it was almost thirty years until I would sing out loud again.

Who knows what thoughts were in that little boy’s mind as he cried himself to sleep that night? One thing is sure, the shame and the fear would remain with him. The sense of injustice, that he surely did not deserve this fought with the suspicion that it would not have happened if it was not supposed to. Above all there was a desperate loneliness that has

never entirely left me. I was completely bereft, there was no one to offer comfort and love, perhaps that was what I deserved. Yet somewhere I clung to the notion that I did deserve to find love, that I was not completely worthless, not a worm. At that moment perhaps the idea formed that in order to be loved, I must strive for goodness. If only I could discover what "goodness" might be.

The next morning I awoke to face, from some, taunts at the evidence of my shame, my soiled bed, from others embarrassed avoidance. And I knew I was alone. Not knowing what to do, I tried to hide the stains with carefully placed creases in the bottom sheet. I went to the bathroom, washed, dressed. When the bell rang I went with the others to breakfast. No one spoke to me. After breakfast we went back to the dormitory to make up the top covers of our beds. On the dorm roster I saw a black mark next to my name: "Untidy bed".

I soon discovered that four black marks added up to a beating. And so a wretched spiral of misery began. Fear, shame, pain,

repeat. For years. Too frightened to leave my bed, in case I met the Head - or the spider - I would wake in the night, struggling with my bladder. Sometimes I would manage to hold it, sometimes not, and of course everyone knows the relationship of fear and peeing. So my bed was untidy as often as not, so the black marks would mount up. Then would come the evening when my name would be called after supper, a supper that I would scarcely have touched, because of the knot of fear in my stomach. The lonely, fearful walk down the cold passageway, knocking timidly on the great oaken door.

"Come in."

Opening the door, closing it behind me.

"Bend over. Lift your dressing gown."

The four, or six vicious blows with a hair brush, bristles to skin. Refusing to cry. Walking back to the dormitory, feeling the welts blossoming on my buttocks. The covert stares of the other boys as I crept into bed and pulled the

covers over my head. And so on...

As I went on, although the prevailing mood of the years that follows was one of low grade terror overlaid with a generous helping of shame and self-disgust, I kept in my heart a fierce and stubborn certainty that one day it would be different. That certainty, based entirely on a faith that came from who knows where, a faith that ran counter to any evidence, allowed me to preserve the notion that this whole system was wrong. Deep within I kept an idea of myself that I protected, as best I could, with an attitude of sullen resistance. While it is true that Mr. Stapleton used to stalk the halls in the evenings, looking for pretexts to mete out arbitrary beatings, none of the punishments I was dealt in the ensuing years had quite the taint of cruelty or injustice as that first night so I will make little mention of them, beyond saying, now, that for the next nine years I was beaten on a fairly regular basis, with hair brush, slipper, strap or cane.

Once again my recollections are fragmented, shards thrown up

with no sense of continuity or relatedness. Not all are entirely negative and there was even one moment of ecstasy. Must I repeat that looking back from so many years later, knowing something of the current state of the world, the utter horror of the twentieth century, and all the dismal crimes of which humanity has been guilty through all the centuries that it has blighted this paradisaal planet, knowing this, of course I know that my pain is inconsequential next to what so many millions have suffered, and are suffering at this very moment. Listen though, my suffering was perpetuated, not by any individual who may have performed a particular act, but by those who chose not to see, or seeing chose not to intervene. To be a witness of injustice and to remain silent, whether from fear or self-interest is to be guilty of the crime. Perhaps the greatest injustice of all is to "bring to justice" the individual perpetrators and to pretend that assuages the guilt of all the rest of us who created the conditions that allowed the crime to occur. These ideas were coalescing somewhere within, barely understood, totally incommunicable, but the bedrock

of my education. Everything that followed built upon that, gave me the means to understand and express those ideas. My crime is to have not spoken up loudly or clearly enough.

I developed a bizarre capacity to fall into hysterical fits of giggling with very little prompting. One afternoon, with a group of three or four other boys, "When I'm getting a beating, all I have to do is have a fit and I don't feel a thing," I boasted.

Naturally they were skeptical. "No, really, I'll show you. Peter?"

Yes, somehow Peter and I were still friends of some sort. Several years later I would subject him to a wanton, petty and cruel betrayal, but for now we were at least allies.

"Fit," he taunted, "fit, fit, fit!"

On cue I began to giggle uncontrollably. The other boys had all gathered switches from a nearby tree. Gleefully they beat me. Beat my legs, my back my arms. I just giggled. They beat me till my bare legs and arms bore a pattern of red stripes. Still I giggled.

"Stop!" commanded Peter. I stopped giggling, the boys stopped beating.

"See, I didn't feel a thing."

My resistance to the whole sick system mostly took the form of minor acts of disobedience. In particular I made a point of always being last to arrive anywhere, usually managing to arrive late enough to be noticed, but just in time to avoid another black mark for tardiness.

One afternoon, later than usual, I was on my way to a cricket game. The playing fields were a half-mile or so from the school. I was running. Somehow - did I mention that my nervousness made me rather clumsy? - I managed to slip my bat between my legs and trip myself. I went tumbling. My knee struck a sharp pebble in the road. Rather an impressive little gash, from which there came a satisfyingly copious flow of dark red blood, which soaked into the tops of my white knee socks.

As I stood bent over my wounded knee I realized that there were several benefits to this mishap. Firstly, I would not have

to play cricket today, such a boring, pointless game. With luck I might even be excused from sports for a week or more. And I could pass myself off as brave, even a martyr of sorts, which might well afford me a little respite from the near constant teasing.

Day in, day out I was teased. Teased about my ridiculous rabbit teeth, teased as a bed-wetter. I was, I think, too fierce to be victim to much physical bullying. But the psychological torment was virtually non-stop.

There were two Danish brothers, Dan and Bo Lundgren, both older and bigger than me. One day Bo was leading a group of boys in a round of taunts. Boys usually have a fine sense of how far to push without provoking a physical response. Bo must have been enjoying himself a little too much, enjoying the encouragement of the crowd that had gathered round. And I reached a breaking point. As the hot tears of torment came to my eyes I was filled with rage and hatred. I flung myself at him.

“You... foreign devil!” I screamed. You may find it hard

to credit, but even as I screamed those words, I felt a pang of guilt. But I tried to get my hands around his neck. It was not hard for a boy so much bigger and stronger to deflect my attack. To the cheers of the onlookers he threw me to the ground, knelt on my chest. I writhed and struggled, tried to kick.

“Stop,” he hissed, “give up. Lie still.” I continued to struggle until a teacher arrived to break us up. Black marks for both of us, of course, but neither Bo nor his brother Dan ever came near me again.

On another occasion, much later, a fat boy with the unfortunate name of Dobbin, and who was himself the victim of much teasing, was tormenting me. He too did not know when to stop, and I attacked. He fled. I pursued. We ran all over the school until I eventually cornered him against a table. Dobbin was older and bigger than me, but a coward. I managed to get him in a neck lock, but then I had not the first idea what to do. He was so much bigger than me, if I let go he would surely thrash me. I squeezed his neck.

“Stop it, Maben,” shouted someone in the watching crowd – there was always a watching crowd. “Stop it, you’re killing him! Look, he’s turning blue!”

I looked, his face was turning a rather frightening shade of puce, and he was not struggling very hard. I had no wish to kill anyone. Still frightened myself, I let go and fled for my life. He did not follow. And from then on he left me alone.

I promised a moment of ecstasy. I do hope this is not a disappointment, it may seem trivial, even trite. Nevertheless it was ecstasy, an ecstasy deep and genuine enough to offer a little sustenance to my starved spirit for years to come. At one end of the school was a little grassy knoll. The story was that until recently it had been overgrown with nettles and the bullies would strip their victims naked and toss them into the thicket of nettles. Let me repeat: I know my sufferings have been relatively mild. That’s still not the point. OK, OK, back to ecstasy. One game I liked to play was to run full pelt down the side of the knoll, arms stretched out and back. I was a Spitfire diving from

cloud-cover, sun at my tail, to attack the massed Luftwaffe bombers approaching across the channel. One morning I was repeating this game. Somehow I became so swept up in my running, the green of the grass, the blue of the sky, the brightness and warmth of the sun, that for a moment I lost myself. Somehow I was no more, just a joy, life, a world. Ecstasy. Unplanned, unasked for, love, acceptance. Most of all, belonging. Laugh if you like, dismiss it as the delusion of a lonely, wounded child. It was real enough for me. Now I knew that I belonged, as much as anyone, to the world, in the world. And I knew that the world belonged as much to me as to anyone. I do have the right to be here, even a right to make my claim for happiness. That small bright flame has burned in my heart, sustained me through all the pain, the loneliness, the cruelty that I have seen and lived through. Do you think a mere illusion could have done that? No it was pure, heaven-sent ecstasy. I reached the bottom of the slope. The moment was over.

My schooling continued, and I have a memory of an English lesson that must have been in the

very earliest days. Our teacher, pretty, young, oh so well-meaning was giving a spelling lesson.

"Marmalade", she wrote on the blackboard.

"I'll tell you a story that will help you remember how to spell it. Once upon a time Marie Antoinette - she was the Queen of France - was sick. Nothing seemed to help. Until one day one of her ladies-in-waiting brought her a bowl of jam made from oranges. Placing it beside the Queen's bed she said, 'Pour ma malade.'"

She wrote on the blackboard again: "Ma malade."

"That means 'my sick lady' in French."

She erased the board.

"Now I want you all to spell 'marmalade'."

We boys all set to carefully scribbling in our notebooks.

"Has everyone finished?"

She walked around the classroom, looking to see what we had written.

"Very good. No that's not right. Good. Good. No..."

She arrived at my desk.

"No, Maben, it's M - A - R..."

Brilliant, so why go to the trouble of all that French? She said M- A - M - A - L - A - D - E, didn't she? Why distract us, me anyway, with the wrong spelling?

Surprisingly there was one teacher who inspired my liking and admiration, sparked a tiny flame of intellectual curiosity. His name was Mr. Hamilton. At the first Geography class that he taught, he had two of the boys distribute atlases to the class. I was one of the first so I had the chance to thumb through the pages before Mr. Hamilton began his lesson. I have a faint recollection of turning pages dominated by the pink of the British Empire. Perhaps it was simply the absence of that pink that attracted me to the map of South America, could it be that I had already developed an

instinctive loathing for the oppression and exploitation that were the basis of that empire? It seems a stretch, I was, what, seven, perhaps by now eight years old? More likely just the existence of a whole continent I knew nothing of beckoned my curiosity. Whatever the reason, I was transfixed, I spent the entire lesson staring at that map. I vaguely heard the outline descriptions of Europe, Asia. I traced the course of the Amazon, tried to envision the peaks of the Andes, to pronounce the exotic names. When the rest of the boys came at last to the same page, Mr. Hamilton finally had my full attention. And so was born an obsession. Within a few weeks I could draw a passable freehand map of the continent. I sought out books - *Tschiffely's Ride* in particular captured my imagination, inspired me with an urge to travel, alone, dependent on the kindness of strangers.

One winter, snow on the ground outside, shortly before the Christmas Holidays, Mr. Hamilton broke away from the regular syllabus to tell us an epic tale of adventure from his life in Canada. Midwinter in Labrador. A settlement struck by an

epidemic. As a fearsome blizzard blows, the brave and dashing young Hamilton loads a sled with vaccine and medical supplies, harnesses his faithful dogs. With a lusty cry of "Mush, mush, my dogs!" he sets out alone to travel hundreds of miles of barren white wilderness. After days of hardship and mishaps, the death of the lead dog, his most faithful friend for years, at last he reaches the beleaguered settlement. Many lives are saved, he is modest in his heroism, will not allow the grateful townspeople to greet him as their savior. A true life adventure, or a tall tale fed on imagination and Jack London? Even had the question occurred to us, we boys would surely not have cared. We were rapt, eyes shining with admiration. And in the end does it even matter? He managed in one short hour to plant in our hearts the seeds of the ideas of honor, courage, self-sacrifice, modesty. It is true that it was after this that I set out to devour the works of Jack London.

Though certainly the knowledge acquired in other classes has remained with me, those are the only three lessons I recall with

any clarity from my years at Kestrels.

And, if it was so unpleasant, you may be wondering, why did I not make some effort to escape? Do you not think that if I could see any possible opening I would have taken it? We were obliged to write weekly letters home on Sundays, why not just tell my parents? But our letters were carefully inspected for grammar and spelling mistakes. Such at least was the pretext. But woe betide any boy foolish enough to attempt to describe the true misery of his lot. His letter would be torn up and he had to rewrite it in a more acceptable form. To make the lesson perfectly clear to all, his name would be called after supper.

Then why not run away? The school was isolated on the edge of Exmoor. It's not as if a boy could just jump on a bus or a train, there were none. No, running away entailed exactly that. Running. Away. Across miles of hilly farmland and woods. It is true that every term one or two boys would be driven to make the attempt. None managed to stay away for more than a few hours, a day at most.

The one child who actually reached his home was returned to the school by his own parents. And running away was punished. Naturally a beating, by all accounts even more savage than usual, would be inflicted on the first evening. But of course it did not end there, privileges were suspended and black marks awarded at the least excuse. No, escape was not an option.

Why not simply unburden myself to my parents, my mother at least? Well, on the one hand I no longer placed an unbounded trust in their care. On the other, I was still, somewhere buried, the boy who had been so protective of his mother that day in the hospital. When they asked how was school, I would smile and say, "Fine."

I do not know if it was after two or three years, but I think it was three, that it finally dawned on them that the reason, every time we approached the school, that I would have to get out of the car to vomit at the roadside, to get back in white and trembling, was not car sickness but terror.

So at last they moved me to Ravenswood.

GOD ENTERS THROUGH THE WOUNDS

By Kenneth Rains Shiffrin

As the darkness struggled to keep its place
In the form of a mad mirror,
The light that has been funded by the labor of sweat stained sheets
Against murderous habits of fear and avarice
Guided the blackness to an exit.
Fuck it – let it go where it must
Off a cliff – into a swallowing black hole,
If that's its destiny
It's not welcome here anymore
This was but a pit stop.

The pit is no longer
A toxic dump,
But a landfill of love
And under that light the wound is exposed
Oozing puss festering failure of all that has been denied.

Let it breath,
Do not cover with a band-aid
Do not block it at all.
I've heard it said,
God enters through the wounds.



TRACTOR FOOT

By F. Collyer Reed

Photo © Brian Blur

Paddy woke up with a start. He'd been dreaming of his childhood on the farm, of the mice roast and the accident. He remembered that during the winter months hundreds of mice would take refuge from the cold by living under the cattle troughs and eating dropped feed. When the cattle were moved, or the area around the troughs became too crapped up, the troughs were hooked up to a tractor and relocated. The mice, suddenly

exposed, frantically scurried for shelter.

Paddy couldn't remember the first killing, but he did remember every weapon they'd ever used in the development of mass mice murder. At first he and his brother simply tried to stomp them into the mud, crunching their bodies under their rubber boots and stabbing them with a sharpened stick. Although sporting, it was ineffective; the

majority of rodents scurried away, and a great number survived being pressed into the soft mud. Stabbing them with a sharpened stick also proved to be too slow and cumbersome.

The next step in the evolution of rodent mass murder was a four-foot board with a hundred protruding nails clustered at the end. Although a dramatic lethal weapon, it proved to be a hindrance.

After a few swats, the nails were clogged with dead and dying rodents that had to be picked off by hand. By the time they had cleaned the carnage from the board, Paddy and his brother found that the survivors had dissipated en masse, so chasing the few strays was a wasted effort.

Next came the homemade napalm. A handful of powdered laundry detergent in a five-gallon bucket of gasoline thickened it enough to stick to the rodent's fur. Paddy's brother would jerk the troughs forward with the tractor, unhook the tow chain, and pull the tractor to safety before the frantic mice knew what was happening. Then Paddy doused them with the gasoline/soap mixture and tossed a match. The force from the ignited mixture created such a powerful wall of heat it would

have knocked the boys down had they not braced for it.

Hundreds of burning, squealing mice ran in frantic desperation to escape the burning mixture stuck to their fur until their charred bodies collapsed into the mud and cow crap that engulfed their remains. A sweet smell from the soap lingered in the smoke that hovered above the flickering flames and embers.

The boys whooped and hollered with joy at their homemade entertainment. No general surveying a battlefield covered with dead enemy soldiers was as proud as Paddy and his brother as they surveyed charred rodent carcasses.

It was during such a mouse roast that Paddy fucked up. His brother pulled the trough forward, unhooked the tractor, and pulled it to safety as usual. Paddy tossed the homemade napalm and a lit match. There was the usual whoosh as the gas exploded into flames, but in his haste, Paddy neglected to notice that the trough was downhill and the burning mixture was flowing toward it.

His brother yelled over the squealing of hundreds of mice, "Hook the trough back on the chain so I can pull it away from the gas!"

After connecting the chain to the trough, Paddy yelled, "Pull! Pull!" but he neglected to notice that the chain was wrapped around his foot. His brother threw the tractor into gear and yanked open the hand throttle. The tractor lurched forward, snapping up the slack in the chain and hauling the trough safely away.

When Paddy's brother jumped off the tractor, he saw Paddy lying on the ground, frantically beating off the swarm of burning mice crawling over him. Paddy's left boot, his foot still in it, lay a few feet away. A trail of blood and tendons, mixed with mud and cow crap, connected his stump to the piece of bone protruding from the top of his boot.

After the accident, Paddy was taunted at school with the name "Tractor Foot." With the aid of a prosthetic, he eventually walked with only a slight irregularity to his gait.

As Paddy put on his prosthetic foot and dressed for work as a railroad yard security agent, he reflected on his marriage to his first cousin, Martha, whom he had married in a bar twenty-three years earlier. Martha had been pretty back then, before she had the two girls. She kept gaining weight after each baby, and then she didn't want to have sex. He

drank every day at the railroad yard and continued to drink when got home; it was all he had, getting drunk and climbing out of bed in the dark to do it all over again.

It was a hell the two of them lived in, a hell he couldn't figure out how to escape, so he did as he pleased. He took his pleasures where and when he could because in this life it was all he was going to get.

He had an ugly, fat bitch for a wife and two sluts for daughters. There was the occasional visit with Melody, his beautiful five-year-old granddaughter. At least Melody had a chance; she could get an education. Her father had a good job, and he was only in his twenties. He made more money than Paddy, and he had fewer mouths to feed. When Melody came to visit there was warmth in the house. For the moment, he and Martha put aside their mutual hatred and shared in their love for their blue-eyed, flax-haired granddaughter.

When Paddy's oldest daughter, Anna Rae, got pregnant at fourteen with Melody, she got married and moved out. By that time, Martha's only pleasure in life was Melody—and eating. Holding Melody took Martha back to when she and Paddy were young, when she still had dreams. Paddy had paid

attention to her then, before she carried more than two hundred and fifty pounds on her five-foot-two frame.

Paddy was supposed to become an engineer and drive the train. He and his wife wanted a home with a lawn, a brick barbecue, nice carpeting, and a kitchen full of shiny white appliances. Martha would have spent her days cleaning, watching the soaps on television, taking care of the children, and making Paddy's dinner. Instead, because of his drinking, the railroad made him a yard security agent, a railroad bull. He chased men with little to live for away from transportation and shelter. If he drank, it was with good reason: He was a loser, a drunk, and, as far as she was concerned, a murderer.

Three winters ago, two bums had been found frozen in the snow. They were barefoot and naked from the waist down. Their bodies bore whip marks. Martha had felt bad because those men were human beings who had felt pain and sorrow, maybe even love. What was left of their tracks led back to the train yard.

Aside from the fact that the railroad owned the town, the people in it, and the police department, the police report said the bums had lost their shoes and pants gambling and froze to death before they could find a

home to rob. Nothing was mentioned of the whip marks. Word of the incident quickly spread among the railroad bums, and they stayed away for much of the following year.

Martha loathed her own image. She knew that no man except a drunk like Paddy would want her, not that even Paddy wanted her. He simply had no other place to go. She worried that most of Paddy's paycheck would go wherever it was that he found sexual relief. Weighing so much, she was too fat to kneel comfortably or spread or raise her legs. She'd almost suffocated the last few times Paddy had lain on her, mounting her from behind, and she was sickened by the thought of Paddy's—or any man's—cock in her mouth.

She had resorted to greasing her ample breasts with bacon fat.

Sitting in front of Paddy, she'd hold up her breasts and squeeze them together to provide an orifice for Paddy to relive himself. Whenever she looked away, Paddy pulled her by the hair, forcing her to look into his blood-shot eyes, peering at her from a bloated red face as he pumped his unwashed cock into her. Pressing his sweaty, hairy body into her breasts, he took further delight as she agonized about the discharge mixed with

bacon fat and pubic hair that would drip between her breasts. Greasing Martha, and the shed at work, was enough to keep Paddy's paycheck coming home—until the night he'd flashed his meat to the kid, their second daughter, Carol, who was sixteen at the time and fully developed.

That day Paddy had overheard some of the younger guys in the yard brag about a wild fuck who liked to do two or more guys at once. Paddy sat with them, enjoying their sexual stories with this wild fuck—until he realized it was his daughter they were talking about.

He had come home blind drunk that night and barged into Carol's room.

"What are these stories I hear about you in the yard?" he demanded.

"I'm a virgin! I'm a virgin!" she cried.

Paddy got mad as hell because she was lying to his face. He unbuttoned his fly and pulled out his cock. "Are you telling me you ain't never seen one of these, you lying bitch?"

At the sight of her old man's meat, Carol became frightened and visibly flushed at the same time. The two of them faced off—her eyes on his meat and his on

the outline of her bra-less breasts under her nightgown.

The next thing he knew, he was lying on the floor in the midst of a broken chair. He couldn't figure out how he got there until he heard Martha yell, "I don't care if the fucking bastard is dead!"

Paddy sighed. It had been years since he'd had the pleasure of Martha's breasts. He got dressed and left for work.

Working as a bull in the railroad yard and keeping transients off the freight cars was as much a pleasure as it was work for Paddy. The yard was his kingdom, and all those in it were his subjects to do with as he pleased. Because Paddy couldn't run, he had a couple of boys who regularly flushed the freight cars of transients. They'd open the doors on one side of the boxcars and chase the hobos to Paddy, who would wait for a man to jump from the car and, while airborne, catch him in the groin, gut, or knees with a baseball bat.

On a good day, Paddy had several men lying on the ground, withering like snakes that had been run over, unable to crawl away. He'd spend hours dividing his attention among them, like a cat toying with dying rodents. Most of the time a man got off with a beating in the yard. A man with a smart mouth, one who

tried to fight back, could count on some time in the yard security agent's office, which was Paddy's shack.

Paddy's shack was set up for his pleasure—and the administration of justice for the trespassers. A fifty-gallon drum was bolted to the middle of the floor. Four hooks were screwed into the floor, two in front and two in back of the drum. Paddy's men, Sean and Michael, would drag a beaten man to the shack, rip his pants off, spread him over the drum, and tie his hands and feet to the hooks, exposing his asshole and balls. Paddy would lay into him with a switch, cutting and welting the transient about the rectum, back, and legs.

It was a gift, an art, Paddy often said, how quickly he could instill such fear in a man until he would crap and piss on himself—or agree to suck him off in order to stop the beating. The faces of the men, their screams, their threats of retribution, were a blur, nothing more than farts lost in an outhouse in mid-summer. Spineless men, too afraid of Paddy to muster the courage to stand, crawled off like slugs, leaving a trail of blood for slime.

Only one man, a young, fair-skinned transient with a wreath of roses and r.i.p. mom tattooed around his right bicep, haunted him. Sean and Michael had

stripped and tied him over the drum, and Paddy whipped him good, drawing blood from the welts as the switch cut across his bare buttocks. The young man cringed from each stroke of the switch but he never uttered a word.

Paddy dropped his pants and jerked the young transient's head up by the hair so he could see his prosthesis and cock. He pressed his cock against the man's face and cooed, "Come now, Martha, my dear, tell me you love me. Tell me how much you want your loving husband to take you. Come on, say it! Just three simple words: I ... love ... you. Oh, come on now, you can say it, can't you?"

Turning to Sean and Michael, he said, "I guess my virgin bride is the silent type, boys, or maybe she's just shy."

"You'll wish you were dead some day," the young man said.

The shack grew quiet. There was nothing but the sound of heavy breathing and flies trying to escape through the dirty windowpanes.

Paddy picked up a fly swatter, and like a general with a riding crop pondering the strategy of war and history in the making, paced the shack wearing nothing but a sweat-soaked T-shirt and

boots. He alternated between tapping his prosthesis and smearing flies across the windowpanes. The transient's words had stunned Paddy.

The young man hadn't uttered a sound during a whipping that would have broken even the toughest of men to some degree. Paddy could let him go, stop it now, but that would be admitting fear of a transient trespassing on railroad property. No, he couldn't do that in front of his boys.

"I'll wish I was dead some day, will I? Listen, my sweet little thing," Paddy said, "I wish I was dead every day. Do you, for even an instant, think I enjoy my work?" He smirked at his boys and got a knowing look of approval. "You'll soon be on your way, lesson learned, a little worse for the wear and tear. But me? I'll be here tomorrow and the next day and the day after that, and all the days to come until sweet Jesus comes to take me by the hand from this ..." Paddy squeezed the transient's buttocks and dragged the fly swatter sideways through the crack of his ass. "Look around you! Is this any place to spend one's life?"

Paddy turned to the boys. "Sean, be a good boy and hand me the wheel-bearing grease."

With the boys cheering him on, Paddy rode and degraded the young transient with the wreath of roses and the r.i.p. mom tattoo. "Oh, Martha, tell me it feels as good for you, my darling. Talk to me, Martha! Tell me how you like it, dear, fast like this or nice, deep strokes? Talk to me, dear. You know I want to please you."

Tears streamed from the man's eyes, but he never spoke.

Paddy uttered a low guttural sound, shuddered, then stepped back, wiping wheel-bearing grease and excrement off of himself.

"Pack up my bride and get her off railroad property, boys."

A week later, the boys were waiting at the shack when Paddy arrived. The sun was barely up, but Sean and Michael were passing a pint around.

"How you doing, Paddy?" Sean asked, handing him the pint.

After taking several long slugs and waiting to feel the warmth, Paddy said, "I feel like shit. What have you guys got for me?"

"We came down early today," Michael said. "We heard some coughing from the boxes on Number Two Track. There's a bunch of fucking crap piles next to some boxes on Four Track."

"Must be five, maybe ten, fucking bums to crap that fucking much." Sean added. "Sure does fucking stink! You can smell it all over the fucking yard."

Paddy's face reddened and trembled. "We're going to find them bastards who shit in my yard! And that shit is going to leave with them the same way it came— in their stomachs! It's shit-eating time, boys. Let's start on Track Four."

Paddy took his position on one side of the boxcar, bat in hand. "Open the door and start banging on the floor with your bats."

That usually got the bums to flee out the opposite door. But this morning there was no movement inside the boxcar.

"Hey, assholes!" Paddy yelled to his boys, "I thought you said there was maybe five or ten in there!"

"Fuck you, Paddy!" Michael yelled back. "Look at those fucking piles of crap. You think they came from fucking heaven or something?"

They moved on to the next car. "Get your asses over here and open this fucking door!" Paddy demanded.

The boys crawled under the car. There was no sound emanating from inside, no desperate, wild-eyed, fearful transient clutching his worldly possessions and facing men with bats.

As the door slid open, a girl of four or five rolled out from inside the boxcar. She wore a long-sleeved, blue velvet dress buttoned up to her neck and trimmed with white lace. Above the collar was a four-inch slash. The dried blood around the wound was black. She clutched a doll dressed in an identical blue dress with both arms.

Melody's flaxen hair moved slightly in the summer breeze, but her blue eyes saw nothing. The right sleeve had been torn away and a garland of roses had been drawn around her arm in colored ink. Below it, in calligraphy, was written r.i.p. paddy.

Paddy dropped to his knees. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus..."

Tractor Foot is one of a collection of short stories and novellas taken from the novel Trash. Written by F. Collyer Reed and published by iUniverse Trash is available online. More about the author at www.FcollyerReed.com



THE UTTER SUBJUGATION OF DARREN SMALLS

By Ty Gorton

Darren Smalls has delivered a single package of identical size to the same address each day for the past three years. The package was a paper bag brown with no name, no address. He estimated its one foot by one foot shape weighed thirty pounds. It made no discernable sound when shaken or turned upside down. There was no odor beyond that of the recycled paper used to wrap the package, the only folds visible on one side, which were neatly held with clear tape.

More curious than the package itself was the home where he delivered it. The address was 219 Walnut Street, an enormous four story Victorian immaculately kept on the outskirts of the city, tucked nicely into an orchard of peach trees. Darren had never seen a vehicle of any kind on the property, and while the orchard and minimalist landscaping were clearly well tended to, he had not witnessed any evidence of upkeep. On the day of his first delivery, he was given a white envelope along with the package which contained concise typed instructions, the kind of type only produced by an old, manual typewriter.

Today, like the previous one-thousand-and-ninety-four days, Darren parked his car just off the main road and walked the rest of the way to the house. The front door was unlocked and he opened it without knocking. Inside, it was wall to wall hardwood floors and rows of tall, naked windows. There was not a single piece of furniture, no rugs, no decoration of any kind. The floor groaned that old house appreciation with each step he took toward an elegant spiral staircase. The second floor was identical to the first, empty and remarkably clean. The third floor held a lone green armchair, a leather upholstered antique without a visible blemish. The chair sat catty-corner with a single floor lamp nearby. Darren had considered sitting in this chair on each visit, but something held him back, a tickle of trepidation inspired by the instructional letter's precision, right down to the number of steps it should take to reach the final delivery point, steps which he counted off each visit.

Upon reaching the top step of the fourth floor, Darren placed the package at his toes, its edges

perfectly parallel to the grain of hardwood. Around the landing of the spiral staircase was built a floor to ceiling circular enclosure with a curved green door. The sensation of being four stories up inside this wooden cylinder brought back a childhood memory of playing rocket ship in the wood's with his best friend Ryan.

As he was about to turn and begin his descent, something new happened, something not outlined in his letter.

"Darren Smalls," A voice. An aged man's gravelly voice pierced the absolute silence of the cylinder and grabbed Darren's heart, filling him with a fear he never knew existed within himself. He froze there, left foot suspended over the first step, and he waited. "Darren Smalls, please enter through the green door and bring the final package with you."

Still, he hesitated, finally daring to pull his left foot back to rest beside his right.

"I know this deviates from the instructions in the letter, but I can assure you that I have full authority to request such a deviation as I am the author of the letter in question. Please enter through the green door with the final package."

Darren pivoted on his heels and stared at the green door. Every night for three years, lying alone in his studio apartment, he conjured this door before sleeping. He invented a thousand different possibilities, and then dreamt them into abstract fantasy. Now, confronted with the reality of discovering the door's secrets, he was held in place by a desire to protect the mystery. How could the truth on the other side of this door live up to the concoctions of his mind?

The voice from beyond the door rose again, "What you find on the other side of this door will be both a disappointment and more fantastic than you have hoped."

Without setting eyes on him, the man seemed to know his mind, and this worked to put him at ease. Darren bent down, lifted the box, and moved toward the door. The round, silver knob was cold and the mechanism it worked felt heavy, of a quality he had never experienced before. The door swung inward and for a moment, Darren was blinded by the unfiltered sunlight of the room beyond.

As his eyes adjusted, he understood why the light in this room was of a greater intensity than that of the first three floors. Stretching out across the floor in every direction were rows of

dominos, aligned perfectly. Each domino had the quality of meticulously polished silver, causing their surface to catch the light and refract it. The effect was a luminous, pulsing vibrancy that made Darren feel as though his feet were no longer connected to the floor.

"Please take care where you step."

Darren had all but forgotten about the voice and the man attached to it. Squinting against the brightness, he scanned the room until his vision focused on a short, thin figure near the back corner. The man was gesturing for him to come closer. Through the maze of dominos set to fall one into the other at the slightest disturbance, there was a narrow path, just wide enough for a person to carefully step along. He took a deep breath and began the journey with more care than he had begun anything in his past. As he approached the man, he saw that he was older but not on his last leg by any means. He guessed sixties. He had long, scraggly gray hair and wore round spectacles similar to those made iconic by John Lennon. A thick stubble existed on his face, and there was a general aura about him that suggested it had been many days since his last good scrub.

Once Darren reached the far

corner, he saw that a simple bed existed there, along with a single nightstand and another floor lamp identical to the one on the floor below. The little man smiled as he approached and Darren was certain a more genuine grin had never been offered.

"Hello, I am Dr. Breton. How do you feel Mr. Smalls?"

Having successfully traversed the pathway, despite there being only five feet of distance between the bed and the first row of silver dominos, Darren felt secure enough to make a sweeping survey of the room. All walls had been removed, leaving only the cylindrical structure at its center from which he emerged. There was not a square inch of floor that did not contain a domino, except for a patch near to the bed. Dr. Breton saw his eyes pause on this barren space, "As you might have guessed, the final box you hold will consume the last feet, after which I will have completed my task."

"I see," this reminded Darren of the package in his arms, which Dr. Breton motioned for him to set on the bed.

"How do you feel, Mr. Smalls?" He repeated the question.

"Fine." Darren sensed he wanted more than this but "fine" was all

he could bring himself to offer.

"I should hope you feel more than fine, but let me explain why."

"OK." Darren placed his now empty hands behind his back, suddenly self conscious of his every mannerism.

"You have just completed a three year task without flaw, without a single deviation from the instructions given you. While the task you were charged with may seem simple enough, you have no idea how many before you were unable to achieve it."

"Before me?"

"Yes. While you've been delivering my package for three years, I have been engaged in this project for seven. Each time a previous employee deviated from the instructions, I was forced to start over. Their imperfection became mine."

Darren looked to his left and right at the endless rows of silver plated dominos, "I'm not sure I understand."

"No, I suppose not. Essentially, it makes no difference what the pursuit is, so long as perfection is the goal. The pursuit of perfection is the cleansing fire that opens doorways."

"Doorways?"

"Yes, to new awareness. Exactly thirty seven others were given the same task as you. Deliver an unmarked package to the fourth floor while resisting the temptation to discover its contents or deviate from the instructions in any way. Thirty seven individuals, young and old, male and female, of various descent. All of them failed. Most lasted only a few days, some for months, a few made it past the first year, only one other came close."

"And you started over each time?"

"Yes. All dominos were removed, destroyed, remade, and redelivered with each new employee."

"Why?"

"Perfection knows no compromise. It is the only path to the sublime I have discovered, perhaps the only one there is. All other pursuits are tricks of society, inventions of intellect or desire. You have done what others before you could not. So, Mr. Smalls, how do you feel?" Dr. Breton asked for a third time.

Unlike the first instance he was asked this question, Darren felt the weight of it, he felt himself reaching up through a fog to

grasp at something tangible and exhilarating, "I'm not sure. Confused...but intrigued."

"Yes?"

"Excited, maybe...but I'm not sure I know why."

"What you feel is an inner evolution. New awareness. It is not recognizable the first time, I know this from experience, but it will become as breathing to you if you seek it out with intention. Which brings us full circle to the point."

"The point?"

"Yes. Today, after you leave here, I will place these last dominos. If I fail in that task, if I accidentally trigger their premature collapse, that will be my failure, not yours. If I succeed, I will open that bottle of wine," Dr. Breton gestures toward the nightstand where waited a bottle of Chateau Petrus, "Pour myself a glass, and then trigger the first domino. Again, if every domino does not fall as intended, that will represent my failure. Regardless of my success or failure, you will come back tomorrow, this time without a package. You will pack each domino back into the boxes they arrived in, which reside in the shed out back, and take them to the jeweler located at Fifth Street and Jackson downtown. There

you will sell them for their silver, and the amount obtained is yours. All this has been prearranged."

Darren stiffened slightly, "Mine?"

"Yes, every cent."

"But that's-"

"Somewhere in the range of \$1,000,000. Yours."

Something about this reignited Darren's fear, "I can't possibly have earned it."

"Earned? The concept of worth, of earning...that is something dictated by society. And ours is a society of slavery, Mr. Smalls. Do you truly believe you are not worth such an amount?"

Darren could find no way to answer the question, causing him to break eye contact with the short, aged man to whom his fate had suddenly been eternally tied to.

"The sum is of little importance. The real question is, upon receiving it, what will you do?"

"I'm sure I have no idea."

"But I do, Mr. Smalls. I have a very specific idea."

"And it involves me?"

"It involves whoever successfully completed the current task, and that is you."

"And what is this idea?"

"The nature of the idea will not be revealed to you. The money is yours, and you can choose to take it and yourself wherever you choose. What I ask is that you submit yourself to the philosophy of perfection. This does not require your knowledge of the idea itself, but it does require your surrender."

"You're asking me to agree to something without knowing its nature?"

"Yes."

"And the money?"

"Upon the completion of your task, there may be nothing of it left and, economically speaking, you would be back where you started. However, you will have devoted to something beyond the concept of money, and based on the devotion to perfection you have already displayed, there is no reason to believe that you will not move beyond myself in time, perhaps emerge into the very nucleus of perfection itself."

Darren Smalls considered his life. A birth, his schooling, his parents, his friends, his home, his

daily rituals which had amounted to little more than idle distractions. He measured the man he has become against the man he promised himself to be, and suddenly the long dormant wings in his gut fluttered. It was an excitement he had not felt since a naïve and wayward youth, a pure tongue of heat that promised to forge something new and beyond naming.

Dr. Breton could not resist a small chuckle, "Will you submit to the philosophy of perfection, Mr. Smalls?"

"Yes."

And so it was that Darren Smalls left the company of those surviving and opened his eyes to the sublime. Somewhere in the vast chamber on the fourth floor of Dr. Breton's Victorian home, the perfectly pitched "ting!" of one silver domino falling into another rang out. Maybe it was a tremor, barely a whisper on the Richter Scale, or maybe the hand of some mischievous god could no longer resist.

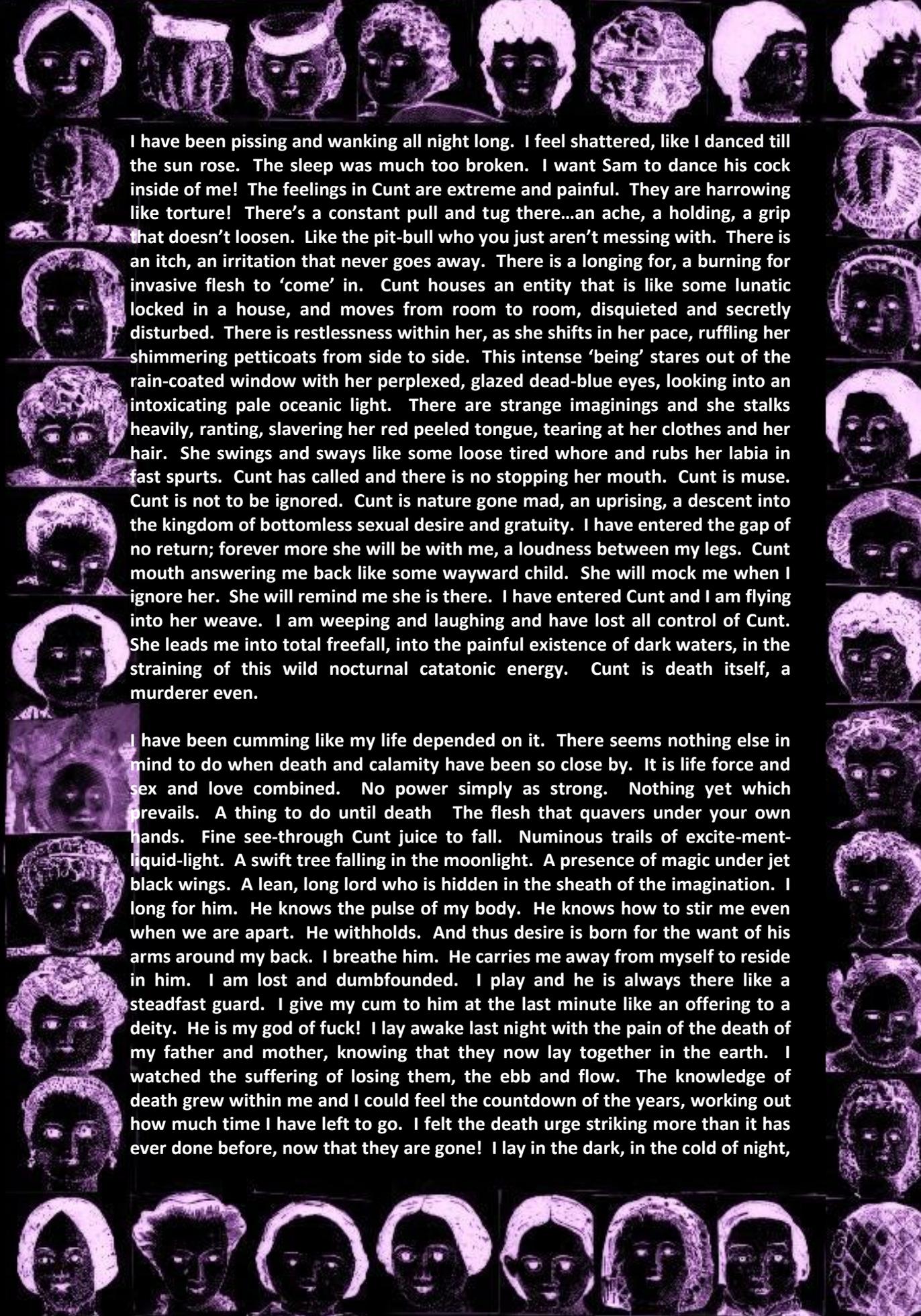
Despite the demise of his seven year commitment, the good Doctor laughed out loud, lost in the silver's enchanted sound of rapid fire collapse.



GAMBLER OF FLESH

By Sue Fox

Image by D M Mitchell



I have been pissing and wanking all night long. I feel shattered, like I danced till the sun rose. The sleep was much too broken. I want Sam to dance his cock inside of me! The feelings in Cunt are extreme and painful. They are harrowing like torture! There's a constant pull and tug there...an ache, a holding, a grip that doesn't loosen. Like the pit-bull who you just aren't messing with. There is an itch, an irritation that never goes away. There is a longing for, a burning for invasive flesh to 'come' in. Cunt houses an entity that is like some lunatic locked in a house, and moves from room to room, disquieted and secretly disturbed. There is restlessness within her, as she shifts in her pace, ruffling her shimmering petticoats from side to side. This intense 'being' stares out of the rain-coated window with her perplexed, glazed dead-blue eyes, looking into an intoxicating pale oceanic light. There are strange imaginings and she stalks heavily, ranting, slavering her red peeled tongue, tearing at her clothes and her hair. She swings and sways like some loose tired whore and rubs her labia in fast spurts. Cunt has called and there is no stopping her mouth. Cunt is muse. Cunt is not to be ignored. Cunt is nature gone mad, an uprising, a descent into the kingdom of bottomless sexual desire and gratuity. I have entered the gap of no return; forever more she will be with me, a loudness between my legs. Cunt mouth answering me back like some wayward child. She will mock me when I ignore her. She will remind me she is there. I have entered Cunt and I am flying into her weave. I am weeping and laughing and have lost all control of Cunt. She leads me into total freefall, into the painful existence of dark waters, in the straining of this wild nocturnal catatonic energy. Cunt is death itself, a murderer even.

I have been cumming like my life depended on it. There seems nothing else in mind to do when death and calamity have been so close by. It is life force and sex and love combined. No power simply as strong. Nothing yet which prevails. A thing to do until death The flesh that quavers under your own hands. Fine see-through Cunt juice to fall. Numinous trails of excite-ment-liquid-light. A swift tree falling in the moonlight. A presence of magic under jet black wings. A lean, long lord who is hidden in the sheath of the imagination. I long for him. He knows the pulse of my body. He knows how to stir me even when we are apart. He withholds. And thus desire is born for the want of his arms around my back. I breathe him. He carries me away from myself to reside in him. I am lost and dumbfounded. I play and he is always there like a steadfast guard. I give my cum to him at the last minute like an offering to a deity. He is my god of fuck! I lay awake last night with the pain of the death of my father and mother, knowing that they now lay together in the earth. I watched the suffering of losing them, the ebb and flow. The knowledge of death grew within me and I could feel the countdown of the years, working out how much time I have left to go. I felt the death urge striking more than it has ever done before, now that they are gone! I lay in the dark, in the cold of night,

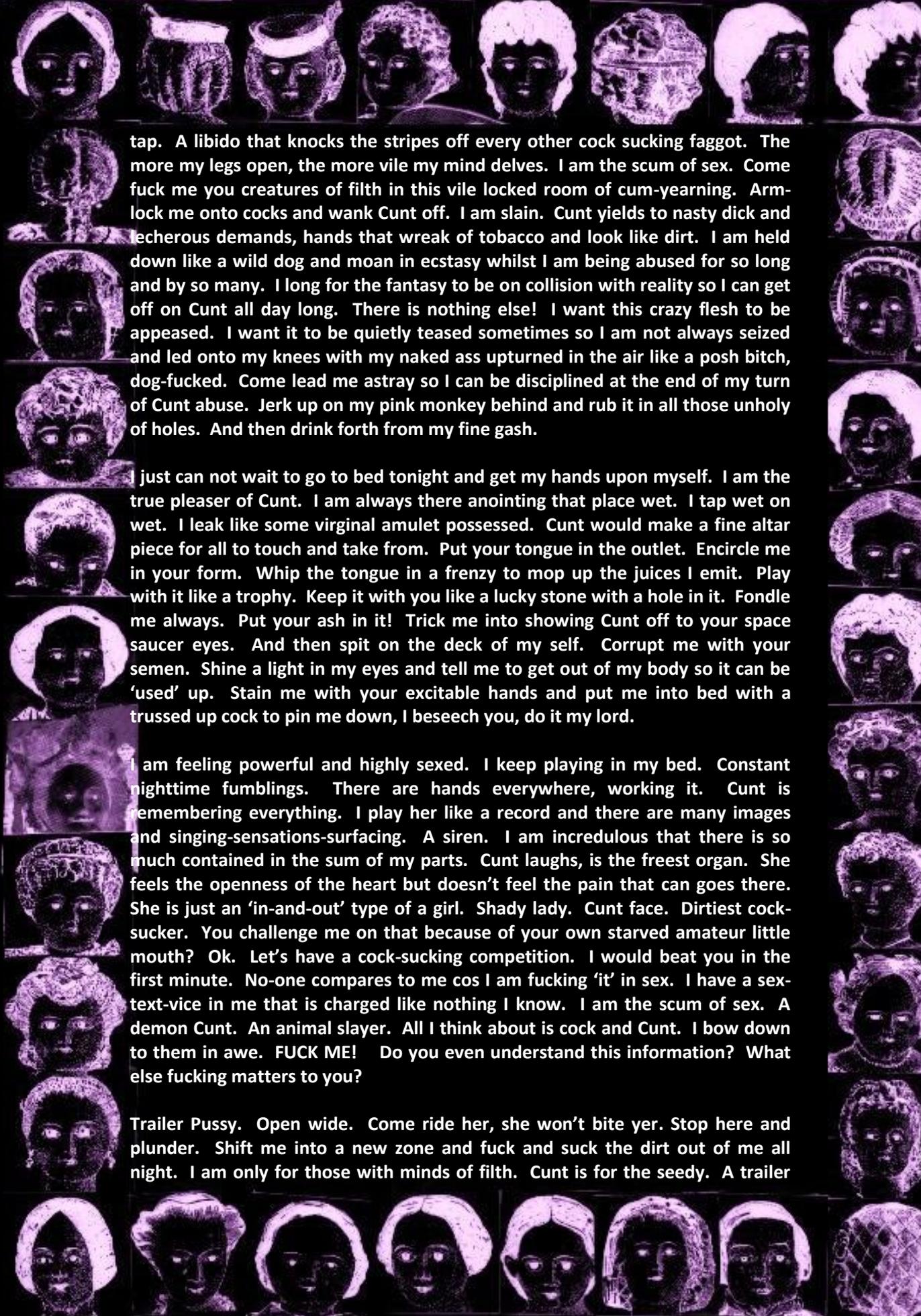


after cumming, and stared into the void with only my own child-soul for comfort. Cunt shivered.

I spent the morning in bed playing with my wet flesh. I always get insight arising like an array of fetishes caught in a violet fishnet stocking. I realise I have to bring the inside of Cunt to life, since my 'fucking' days have been limited. No man made me cum much (unless they loved me) through that great thing called fucking and Cunt never got met in the explosion with a swollen cock in full swing. I was milking the dildo and playing with my pelvic floors, squeezing my leg muscles subtly and allowing the movement to circle around, ready to ejaculate out through the shoot hole. And then I was dying to finish off with a second cum on the chair, I merely just watched a few seconds of porn sex on screen and I came hard and fast. I like that blast of quik cum. A nice cum shot in the face eh? The secret is to focus on one thing and then give it ultimate expression and physical surrender. I got off on sex texts from Sam. I said I wanted to do bad and insane things to him...he replied back, 'the worse the better'! I text 'I want every fucking thing that can ever be thought of...' I say later on, 'fuck my dirty little porn mouth & stir up my rabid heart'. I want my mouth pin-pricked and loaded with his hard-hung rod. I want to be force fed a red dick that cums fast onto a hungry hot-plate of tongue. Cunt has much sex to enact with one so fine and brute as he. He is filled with a litany of fire-kisses and seduction. And I want to get down on my knees and suck him off.

And double dog dammit Cunt features rabbit is back on board. A rabid Cunt that wants fucking taken to the cleaners. She could do with being nipped and tucked and violently fucked. A bit of lightweight gymnastic surgery during the lunchtime break. She can be put through her paces and then made to do a whole new 'whore' routine, backwards. Get her on the skipping ropes, gaining rhythm and momentum. Smack her when she cums or slap her fleshy wrist bones if she trips up and soils herself. Pole-vault her! Get that naked Cunt worked out like an athlete on a secret solitary army manoeuvre. No distractions except for her swollen parameter ankles. There is so much lust inside this squawking Cunt! Just swish out the juice to be heard in loud spurts from the very heart of her. Line her up. And cum on down if the price is right. Sweet-vanilla-milk-shake-is-in-the-house-to-lap-up. Here pussy, pussy.

I was a crazed Cunt last night. A dazed Cunt in the underworld thrashing my wet pussy about. I was slaying her Cunt edges with a stinging red-hot water bottle. Rubbing her in her weakness with singing rubber edging. Splaying her so openly that she will do and think everything remotely possible to get her off. I am far worse than de Sade ever was. He is a tame retard. Restrained. A fucking limp prick in his simpering sick meanderings of Victoriana. Cunt is on the other side of a straight fuck. Cunt is a manic street preacher. A gambler of flesh. A dweller on Satan's cock. A strumpet with a whore-sucking-mouth-on-



tap. A libido that knocks the stripes off every other cock sucking faggot. The more my legs open, the more vile my mind delves. I am the scum of sex. Come fuck me you creatures of filth in this vile locked room of cum-yearning. Arm-lock me onto cocks and wank Cunt off. I am slain. Cunt yields to nasty dick and lecherous demands, hands that wreak of tobacco and look like dirt. I am held down like a wild dog and moan in ecstasy whilst I am being abused for so long and by so many. I long for the fantasy to be on collision with reality so I can get off on Cunt all day long. There is nothing else! I want this crazy flesh to be appeased. I want it to be quietly teased sometimes so I am not always seized and led onto my knees with my naked ass upturned in the air like a posh bitch, dog-fucked. Come lead me astray so I can be disciplined at the end of my turn of Cunt abuse. Jerk up on my pink monkey behind and rub it in all those unholy of holes. And then drink forth from my fine gash.

I just can not wait to go to bed tonight and get my hands upon myself. I am the true pleaser of Cunt. I am always there anointing that place wet. I tap wet on wet. I leak like some virginal amulet possessed. Cunt would make a fine altar piece for all to touch and take from. Put your tongue in the outlet. Encircle me in your form. Whip the tongue in a frenzy to mop up the juices I emit. Play with it like a trophy. Keep it with you like a lucky stone with a hole in it. Fondle me always. Put your ash in it! Trick me into showing Cunt off to your space saucer eyes. And then spit on the deck of my self. Corrupt me with your semen. Shine a light in my eyes and tell me to get out of my body so it can be 'used' up. Stain me with your excitable hands and put me into bed with a trussed up cock to pin me down, I beseech you, do it my lord.

I am feeling powerful and highly sexed. I keep playing in my bed. Constant nighttime fumbblings. There are hands everywhere, working it. Cunt is remembering everything. I play her like a record and there are many images and singing-sensations-surfacing. A siren. I am incredulous that there is so much contained in the sum of my parts. Cunt laughs, is the freest organ. She feels the openness of the heart but doesn't feel the pain that can go there. She is just an 'in-and-out' type of a girl. Shady lady. Cunt face. Dirtiest cock-sucker. You challenge me on that because of your own starved amateur little mouth? Ok. Let's have a cock-sucking competition. I would beat you in the first minute. No-one compares to me cos I am fucking 'it' in sex. I have a sex-text-vice in me that is charged like nothing I know. I am the scum of sex. A demon Cunt. An animal slayer. All I think about is cock and Cunt. I bow down to them in awe. FUCK ME! Do you even understand this information? What else fucking matters to you?

Trailer Pussy. Open wide. Come ride her, she won't bite yer. Stop here and plunder. Shift me into a new zone and fuck and suck the dirt out of me all night. I am only for those with minds of filth. Cunt is for the seedy. A trailer

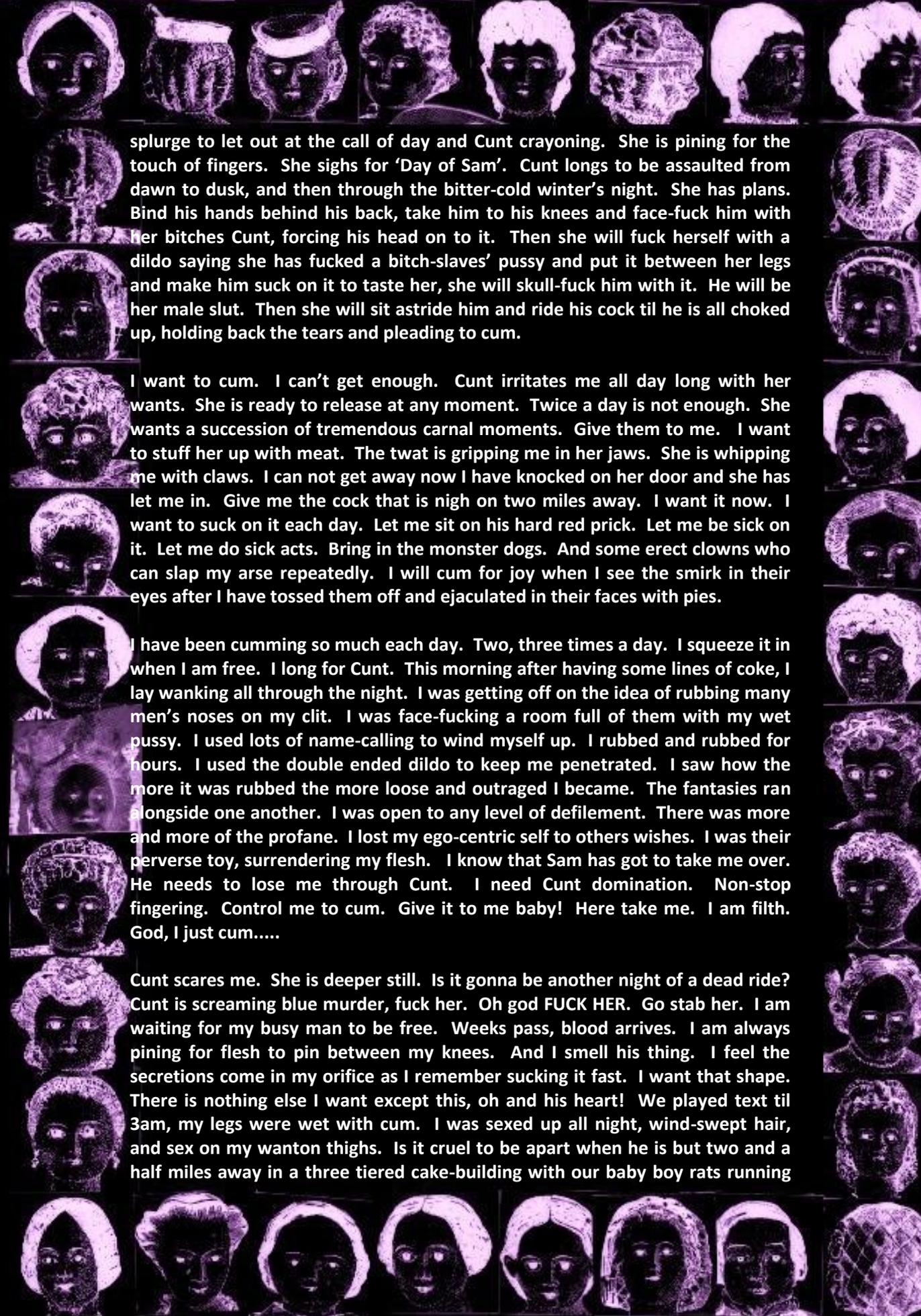


trash Cunt. Hard done to..... PLEASE. Savaged by teeth and strong hurricane tongues. Hard meat going in and out of all holes, all day, in all-ways. The pounding and sounding of flesh. Slap! Hung off stretchers of meat. Sucking blood through dry lips. Irregular shapes form under the skin of love-bites-bitch markings. Every ounce of me fuck-ing the lingam. Wanting my 'Day of Sam' again....there is never enough of them. Wakened up by morning lust and the 'rocking motion' that never lulls. The undulating waves of Cunt salvation riding the invisible cock of eternal time. I would love to be locked away in a room of sex-starved men. A new kind of a trail blazer! I would let go of every thing and fall down on my knees in a visceral frenzy. After that, how could I ever be the same again? How would I ever walk straight? Sex makes me warped, Cunt-talked and dumbfounded. I want to evolve and progress into the beyond. Pleasure draws me in by its little hook in my tongue. And yet deeper than the desire of flesh is the desire to love and be close to another human being. Cunt switch off. Cunt goes quieter when she hears the call of love entwined with barbed rapture! I see his name etched on my skin...S...A...M... and the imprint of his teeth leaves a soft wet track on the nape of my neck.

The camera makes you God. Any aperture allows you to see into your own being and out again. Delving into another world, changed. Cunt is the camera within. The camera-obscura. The invisible lens. The shutter. The rays bounce. Cunt opening. Cunt eye. Cunt scape. Light coming into create patterns. In and out. Cunt thinks she is nothing without a master. She knows that is not the truth. Cunt existed before he came....and years later the bloodstains remain. The hole is forever. In the shadow of the valley of death, Cunt-dolls takes over the Indus! They come to lay down and fuck there. Tools are dropped, heads are chopped, fingers are collected on garlands, and corpses are dragged about. Let's sacrifice the man. Cock and balls. Let's rip his body to shreds. Let's give it all up to the higher demon-god. Channel the funnel-ended-hollow deities and buddhas and demons with monstrous mouths and green-black fingers, those of the dead. Give up the flesh of cock and Cunt and there shall be no more of the torn body lover. Let us transcend our meagre selves and be born as heavenly celestial bodies!

Women are the true whores. The sexual outlets. Cunt flowers. If I show you the rose will you follow? Cunt is an institution. Deflower her. Cunt is made from the unknown. She is of the mothers incarnate. Of the immaculates. Of the virgin suicides. The begorrah. The sheela-na-gigs. A realm of Cunts is a throng to archangels. Fuck the fucking angel Gabriel. Hear that serendipitous music of saints. Like corn popping! A creation of encores. Embalm Cunt as a symbol more potent than any fucking swastika!

There is so much Cunt talk. A babbling brook. I want to do it over and over. Babble. Coming and coming. Cunting like punting. There is a never ending

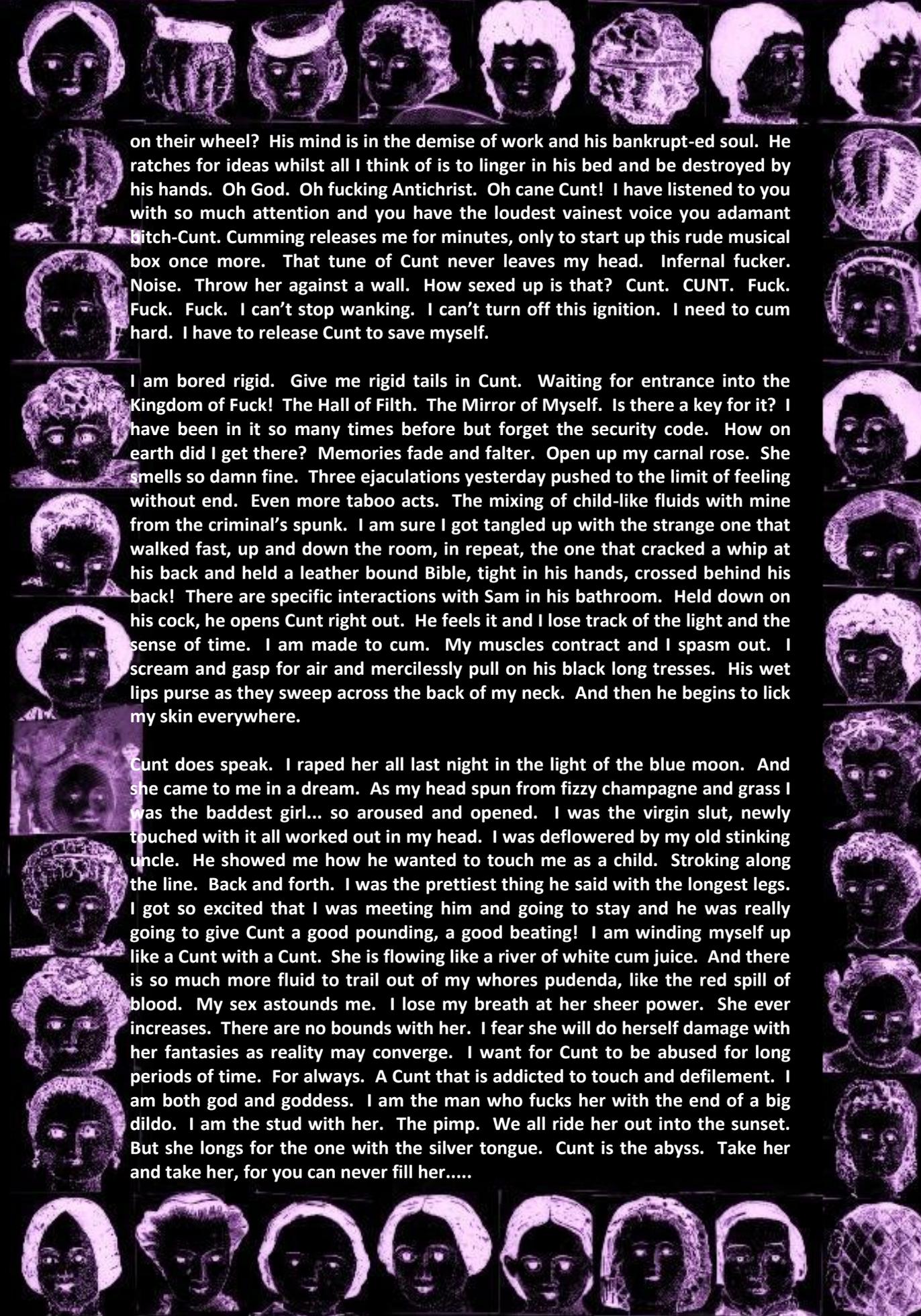


splurge to let out at the call of day and Cunt crayoning. She is pining for the touch of fingers. She sighs for 'Day of Sam'. Cunt longs to be assaulted from dawn to dusk, and then through the bitter-cold winter's night. She has plans. Bind his hands behind his back, take him to his knees and face-fuck him with her bitches Cunt, forcing his head on to it. Then she will fuck herself with a dildo saying she has fucked a bitch-slaves' pussy and put it between her legs and make him suck on it to taste her, she will skull-fuck him with it. He will be her male slut. Then she will sit astride him and ride his cock til he is all choked up, holding back the tears and pleading to cum.

I want to cum. I can't get enough. Cunt irritates me all day long with her wants. She is ready to release at any moment. Twice a day is not enough. She wants a succession of tremendous carnal moments. Give them to me. I want to stuff her up with meat. The twat is gripping me in her jaws. She is whipping me with claws. I can not get away now I have knocked on her door and she has let me in. Give me the cock that is nigh on two miles away. I want it now. I want to suck on it each day. Let me sit on his hard red prick. Let me be sick on it. Let me do sick acts. Bring in the monster dogs. And some erect clowns who can slap my arse repeatedly. I will cum for joy when I see the smirk in their eyes after I have tossed them off and ejaculated in their faces with pies.

I have been cumming so much each day. Two, three times a day. I squeeze it in when I am free. I long for Cunt. This morning after having some lines of coke, I lay wanking all through the night. I was getting off on the idea of rubbing many men's noses on my clit. I was face-fucking a room full of them with my wet pussy. I used lots of name-calling to wind myself up. I rubbed and rubbed for hours. I used the double ended dildo to keep me penetrated. I saw how the more it was rubbed the more loose and outraged I became. The fantasies ran alongside one another. I was open to any level of defilement. There was more and more of the profane. I lost my ego-centric self to others wishes. I was their perverse toy, surrendering my flesh. I know that Sam has got to take me over. He needs to lose me through Cunt. I need Cunt domination. Non-stop fingering. Control me to cum. Give it to me baby! Here take me. I am filth. God, I just cum.....

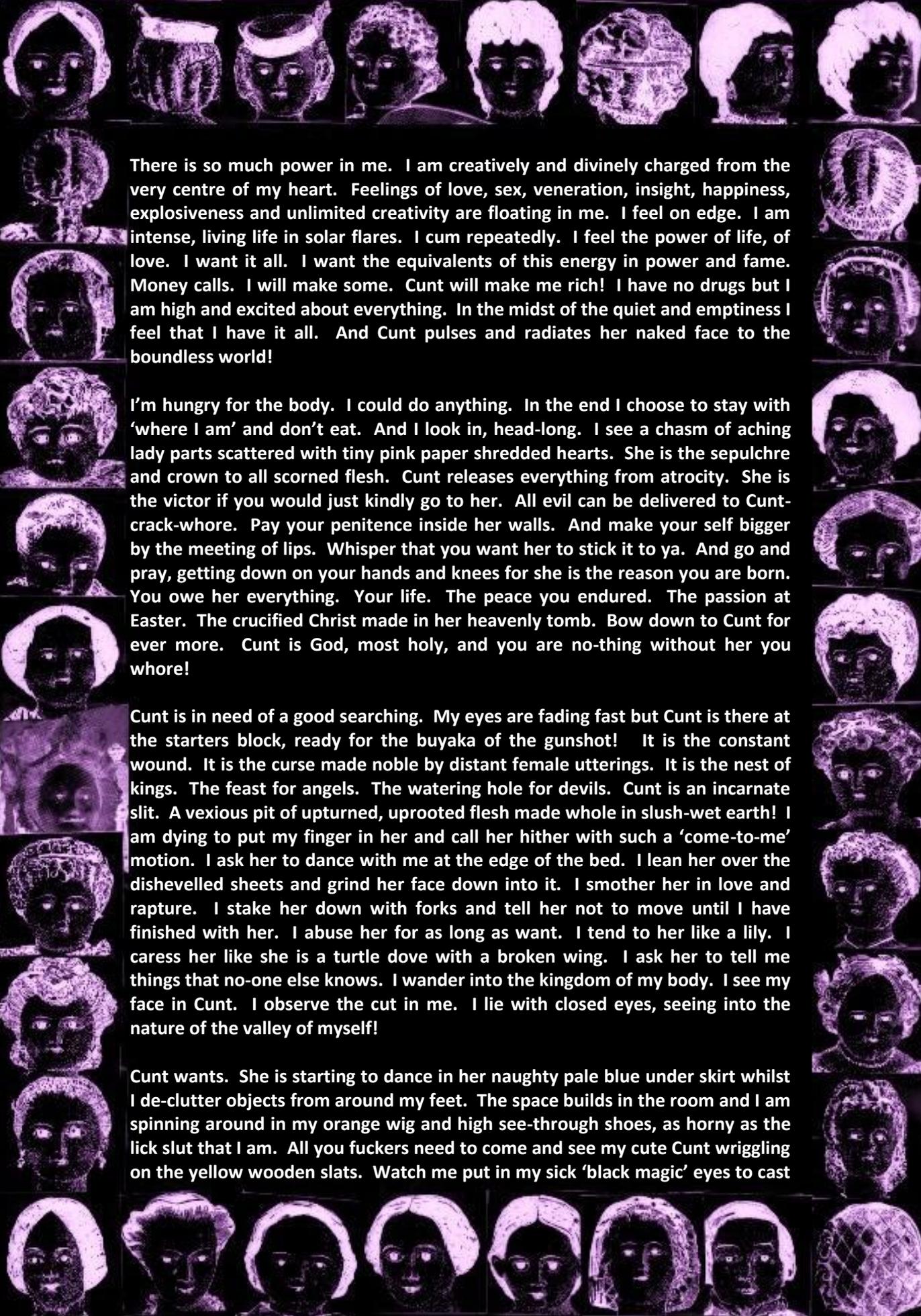
Cunt scares me. She is deeper still. Is it gonna be another night of a dead ride? Cunt is screaming blue murder, fuck her. Oh god FUCK HER. Go stab her. I am waiting for my busy man to be free. Weeks pass, blood arrives. I am always pining for flesh to pin between my knees. And I smell his thing. I feel the secretions come in my orifice as I remember sucking it fast. I want that shape. There is nothing else I want except this, oh and his heart! We played text til 3am, my legs were wet with cum. I was sexed up all night, wind-swept hair, and sex on my wanton thighs. Is it cruel to be apart when he is but two and a half miles away in a three tiered cake-building with our baby boy rats running



on their wheel? His mind is in the demise of work and his bankrupt-ed soul. He ratches for ideas whilst all I think of is to linger in his bed and be destroyed by his hands. Oh God. Oh fucking Antichrist. Oh cane Cunt! I have listened to you with so much attention and you have the loudest vainest voice you adamant bitch-Cunt. Cumming releases me for minutes, only to start up this rude musical box once more. That tune of Cunt never leaves my head. Infernal fucker. Noise. Throw her against a wall. How sexed up is that? Cunt. CUNT. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. I can't stop wanking. I can't turn off this ignition. I need to cum hard. I have to release Cunt to save myself.

I am bored rigid. Give me rigid tails in Cunt. Waiting for entrance into the Kingdom of Fuck! The Hall of Filth. The Mirror of Myself. Is there a key for it? I have been in it so many times before but forget the security code. How on earth did I get there? Memories fade and falter. Open up my carnal rose. She smells so damn fine. Three ejaculations yesterday pushed to the limit of feeling without end. Even more taboo acts. The mixing of child-like fluids with mine from the criminal's spunk. I am sure I got tangled up with the strange one that walked fast, up and down the room, in repeat, the one that cracked a whip at his back and held a leather bound Bible, tight in his hands, crossed behind his back! There are specific interactions with Sam in his bathroom. Held down on his cock, he opens Cunt right out. He feels it and I lose track of the light and the sense of time. I am made to cum. My muscles contract and I spasm out. I scream and gasp for air and mercilessly pull on his black long tresses. His wet lips purse as they sweep across the back of my neck. And then he begins to lick my skin everywhere.

Cunt does speak. I raped her all last night in the light of the blue moon. And she came to me in a dream. As my head spun from fizzy champagne and grass I was the baddest girl... so aroused and opened. I was the virgin slut, newly touched with it all worked out in my head. I was deflowered by my old stinking uncle. He showed me how he wanted to touch me as a child. Stroking along the line. Back and forth. I was the prettiest thing he said with the longest legs. I got so excited that I was meeting him and going to stay and he was really going to give Cunt a good pounding, a good beating! I am winding myself up like a Cunt with a Cunt. She is flowing like a river of white cum juice. And there is so much more fluid to trail out of my whores pudenda, like the red spill of blood. My sex astounds me. I lose my breath at her sheer power. She ever increases. There are no bounds with her. I fear she will do herself damage with her fantasies as reality may converge. I want for Cunt to be abused for long periods of time. For always. A Cunt that is addicted to touch and defilement. I am both god and goddess. I am the man who fucks her with the end of a big dildo. I am the stud with her. The pimp. We all ride her out into the sunset. But she longs for the one with the silver tongue. Cunt is the abyss. Take her and take her, for you can never fill her.....

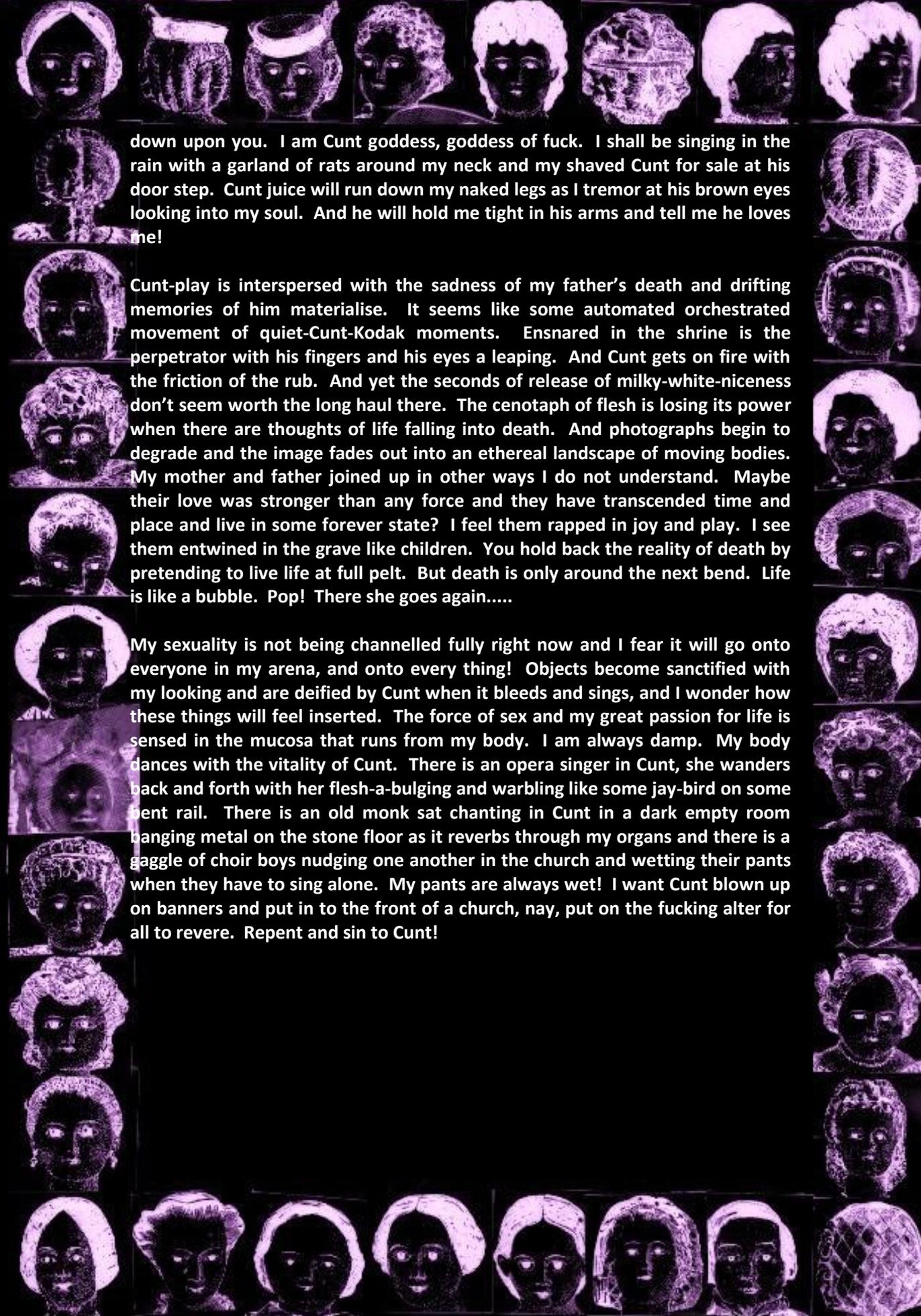


There is so much power in me. I am creatively and divinely charged from the very centre of my heart. Feelings of love, sex, veneration, insight, happiness, explosiveness and unlimited creativity are floating in me. I feel on edge. I am intense, living life in solar flares. I cum repeatedly. I feel the power of life, of love. I want it all. I want the equivalents of this energy in power and fame. Money calls. I will make some. Cunt will make me rich! I have no drugs but I am high and excited about everything. In the midst of the quiet and emptiness I feel that I have it all. And Cunt pulses and radiates her naked face to the boundless world!

I'm hungry for the body. I could do anything. In the end I choose to stay with 'where I am' and don't eat. And I look in, head-long. I see a chasm of aching lady parts scattered with tiny pink paper shredded hearts. She is the sepulchre and crown to all scorned flesh. Cunt releases everything from atrocity. She is the victor if you would just kindly go to her. All evil can be delivered to Cunt-crack-whore. Pay your penitence inside her walls. And make your self bigger by the meeting of lips. Whisper that you want her to stick it to ya. And go and pray, getting down on your hands and knees for she is the reason you are born. You owe her everything. Your life. The peace you endured. The passion at Easter. The crucified Christ made in her heavenly tomb. Bow down to Cunt for ever more. Cunt is God, most holy, and you are no-thing without her you whore!

Cunt is in need of a good searching. My eyes are fading fast but Cunt is there at the starters block, ready for the buyaka of the gunshot! It is the constant wound. It is the curse made noble by distant female utterings. It is the nest of kings. The feast for angels. The watering hole for devils. Cunt is an incarnate slit. A vexious pit of upturned, uprooted flesh made whole in slush-wet earth! I am dying to put my finger in her and call her hither with such a 'come-to-me' motion. I ask her to dance with me at the edge of the bed. I lean her over the dishevelled sheets and grind her face down into it. I smother her in love and rapture. I stake her down with forks and tell her not to move until I have finished with her. I abuse her for as long as want. I tend to her like a lily. I caress her like she is a turtle dove with a broken wing. I ask her to tell me things that no-one else knows. I wander into the kingdom of my body. I see my face in Cunt. I observe the cut in me. I lie with closed eyes, seeing into the nature of the valley of myself!

Cunt wants. She is starting to dance in her naughty pale blue under skirt whilst I de-clutter objects from around my feet. The space builds in the room and I am spinning around in my orange wig and high see-through shoes, as horny as the lick slut that I am. All you fuckers need to come and see my cute Cunt wriggling on the yellow wooden slats. Watch me put in my sick 'black magic' eyes to cast



down upon you. I am Cunt goddess, goddess of fuck. I shall be singing in the rain with a garland of rats around my neck and my shaved Cunt for sale at his door step. Cunt juice will run down my naked legs as I tremor at his brown eyes looking into my soul. And he will hold me tight in his arms and tell me he loves me!

Cunt-play is interspersed with the sadness of my father's death and drifting memories of him materialise. It seems like some automated orchestrated movement of quiet-Cunt-Kodak moments. Ensnared in the shrine is the perpetrator with his fingers and his eyes a leaping. And Cunt gets on fire with the friction of the rub. And yet the seconds of release of milky-white-niceness don't seem worth the long haul there. The cenotaph of flesh is losing its power when there are thoughts of life falling into death. And photographs begin to degrade and the image fades out into an ethereal landscape of moving bodies. My mother and father joined up in other ways I do not understand. Maybe their love was stronger than any force and they have transcended time and place and live in some forever state? I feel them rapped in joy and play. I see them entwined in the grave like children. You hold back the reality of death by pretending to live life at full pelt. But death is only around the next bend. Life is like a bubble. Pop! There she goes again.....

My sexuality is not being channelled fully right now and I fear it will go onto everyone in my arena, and onto every thing! Objects become sanctified with my looking and are deified by Cunt when it bleeds and sings, and I wonder how these things will feel inserted. The force of sex and my great passion for life is sensed in the mucosa that runs from my body. I am always damp. My body dances with the vitality of Cunt. There is an opera singer in Cunt, she wanders back and forth with her flesh-a-bulging and warbling like some jay-bird on some bent rail. There is an old monk sat chanting in Cunt in a dark empty room banging metal on the stone floor as it reverbs through my organs and there is a gaggle of choir boys nudging one another in the church and wetting their pants when they have to sing alone. My pants are always wet! I want Cunt blown up on banners and put in to the front of a church, nay, put on the fucking alter for all to revere. Repent and sin to Cunt!

WHAT GOES ROUND, COMES BACK SQUARED

By Salena Godden

{Scene one: Dickensian Underworld. Cockney East End London. Bonnie's Boudoir}

Oh dearie please, we can't pretend we didn't see this coming. Don't apologise for pity's sake and don't pity me for god's sake and don't stand there wringing your hands not knowing what to do with yourself, we know what you can do with those hands when you set your mind to it, now don't we. Come and press that fine frame against mine and let's see if we can't make this thing a little more...friendly shall we say. Oh you look your cuffs are twisted...come here, let me fix you up.

What'll you do? What do you mean what will you do...didn't I teach you nothing? After a lovely supper you take her to the dance. Oh and don't do that thing you do with your fork and your front teeth it'll put her off...oh and take her somewhere where the music is soft not that tinker gypsy stuff...then you could, say, take

some air, a walk in the moonlight, show her the stars down by the river and then the ring, get down on one knee and tell her she's all you ever want, you be sure you tell her you love her...What? What do you mean shy? You aren't shy...not once set your talent to it... besides if you get tongue tied you should just kiss her...like this...no you brut... gently! Cor blimey, don't kiss her the way you've kissed me! If you give her one of those smackers, her legs'll go to water and she'll faint on ya! Ha what a shambles! Just give her a soft kiss... like that...that's right darling exactly like that... She'll melt and give you the key to her heart if you kiss her like that.

Now be off with ya and be sure you give her a flash of those pearly whites and it's all happy ever after and a down-payment on twinkle junior within a year. I think you and her and that little idea you have about running a pet shop in The Cornwall sounds adorable, how could a girl refuse? Yes I know dear I heard you the first time, a pet shop that sells

little turtles and fluffy kittens and...yes dear just like what you said! Sounds like bliss...How could a girl refuse?

We had a swell time though didn't we. I tell you something for nothing, I know what I will miss most about you...that talent of yours...damn shame to see all that talent walking away, and boy did we work on that talent. I just hope it's not going to waste, but hey waste is just left-overs and I aint bitter, I liked that bit of ya but I aint bitter...Taking it well? Hey you know me, I'm a gambling girl, hey that's how we met, me betting you'd knock Jack Figgins out in the first round remember? You did too...it was grand Baby Boy. You keep at it, you're gonna be a champ one day...you mark my words.

Now, pass me my fox honey, I've got a mink to catch and I'm a little late if you catch my meaning. Hey what's with the sorry, sorry for what? Go on and sweep that pretty young thing...whats her name? Katy? Yeah that's like I said, Kitty, Kitty Morrison, the girl that sings and sells flowers outside Old Drury Lane, you told me all that already, you be sure to treat her right and make sure you tell her you love her with all your heart,

before some other lover boy whisks her away.

{Scene Two: Drury Lane}

Hello may I speak with you dear, you are Kitty, Miss Kitty Morrison? I hope you don't mind me talking to you Kitty do you? To you I must be a perfect stranger but I have been hearing awfully good things about you and it seemed only proper I come to you myself. You see I have heard that you have the voice of an angel! Pure heavenly. Now, I'd like to help you Kitty, because I was where you are once, trying to get by and well, if someone had whispered in my shell like what I am about to pass on to you, well, what can I say? Everybody needs a little guidance; doesn't everybody need a little something sometimes? Now you've heard of The Brick Lane Music Hall? Yes? And you've heard of George Bright? No? You haven't heard of George Bright? My oh my, what rock have you been hiding your bushel under? Well I happen to know that Mister George Bright is scouting for new singers and dancers just like you to put on a new show! I heard about you and well, I have put in a word and they want to meet you right away, right away yes, but you

have to keep it under your hat, you understand they don't want the place swamped with podgy, buck toothed, two-bit nothings with milk rash from some dairy farm in The Cornwall. They want classy girls, authentic talent, they don't have no time to waste...Cornwall...you're from St Ives? Well haven't you come a long way, you must have a head for travel. But you don't go telling them that you goose...tell them you are from the smoke...you live here now don't you? Well then...you're Londoner now girly and don't you forget it!

Kitty dear, there is no time to waste, here's the address and here's your ticket. Just go now and don't say a word...why, you'll have to pack and leave this very day, this instant and hot foot it too, take the coach from Farringdon...why to The Royal Tunbridge Wells of course...you've never been? Oh you'll love it, it's just like in the newspapers lovey and the water is terribly good for keeping your lovely looks and figure! Oh you are kind...yes, it is exactly just like a dream come true! There's a coach leaves at 4 o'clock...yes...

Oh, now you listen up and listen good, take it from me there is

gonna be a lot of other girls like you, a lot of competition so keep your mouth shut, your eyes open and don't lend anyone nothing. I'm sure you will make friends in no time but don't make friends with the nice girls who act too friendly and ask too many questions. Girls like that just want an angle so they can work you out and take your place, before you know it they'll borrow what you got and steal what you don't even know you have yet, then it's nothing but tittle tattle over the chorus line when it's you that should be in the limelight. I should know dearie...oh don't know I should know. Ask for George Bright and if he 'aint there ask for a fella who goes by the name of Slippy Razor, say you want to audition, he'll see you right and look after you. thank me? You don't know how? Well you can thank me by getting on that Coach...

**{Scene Three: Bonnie's Boudoir:
the next day...}**

Why look what the cat dragged in! Oh dear or dear, what on earth has happened? Take a seat, and tell me all about it. She's gone? Kitty? What do you mean gone? Left for where? What she didn't even explain? Oh Baby Boy you are shaking, talk

slowly...She's gone to Tunbridge Wells? The Royal Tunbridge Wells? Why I thought she was sweet on you and the whole pet shop package...why only yesterday morning you came here to tell me that the boxing was all washed up! What flight of fanciful fiction that is, everybody knows there are perfectly accomodating theatres here in London town, why would she need to go so very far away? Besides George Bright is doing that Revue...look here it is in the paper see...it opens this very week! I know your readings not up to much lovey, but see here it says George Bright there! Oh there must be a reasonable explanation, I mean one minute she's all candy sweet then she runs off out of the blue...Say do you think she may have run off with another fella? I'm sorry to be the one to break it to you but that's the only explanation I can think of. Who would have thought it? You would never guess, they always say it's the quiet ones. Ah these buttery young country girls coming to London with their milky heads in the clouds!

Hey ho, well you've got more important things to think about right now, you've got the big one tonight. There's a lot of money

invested in you, this one is the make or break Baby Boy, you win this fight and you have a chance at the title, you do know that? You gotta accept it, this other fella must have been a real grease, one of those types, all flash and full of promises to get you the scratch but only give you the itch if you catch my drift. He must have filled her head with what she wanted to hear. I bet he was like that Johnny Two Scars...the grease you gotta fight tonight...Yeah I bet he was just exactly like that Johnny, all slimy looking with sly eyes and arrogant like he owns the ring. You've got to harden up I'm afraid...you know what, I can't believe Johnny stole your sweetheart...

Well, look at the time...Oh darling, not now really...maybe later...maybe when you win that fight Baby Boy...Go win for me and we'll talk about that other business...Oh stop now...besides I have just set my hair...oh off you go now...chin up...that's it...kiss kiss...no, on the cheek...

{Scene Four: Brick Lane Music Hall}

Hello George, now don't you look fine, that Royal Tunbridge Wells water must be treating you

well...Now listen I have a proposition for you that just might be the answer to your prayers...a sweet little nightingale, goes by the name of Kitty Morrison...poor thing is as green as the corn fields of Cornwall...Well, I don't know...then before the corn goes yellow...I never saw a corn field in all my life! Now listen, Kitty Morrison, like I said she's a good kid and she could use a break, poor thing nearly ended up in a warren full of cat toilet and dog waste all her life with a contender from the Docklands! Oh we won't go into it now, it's a very long story...youth is wasted on youth...

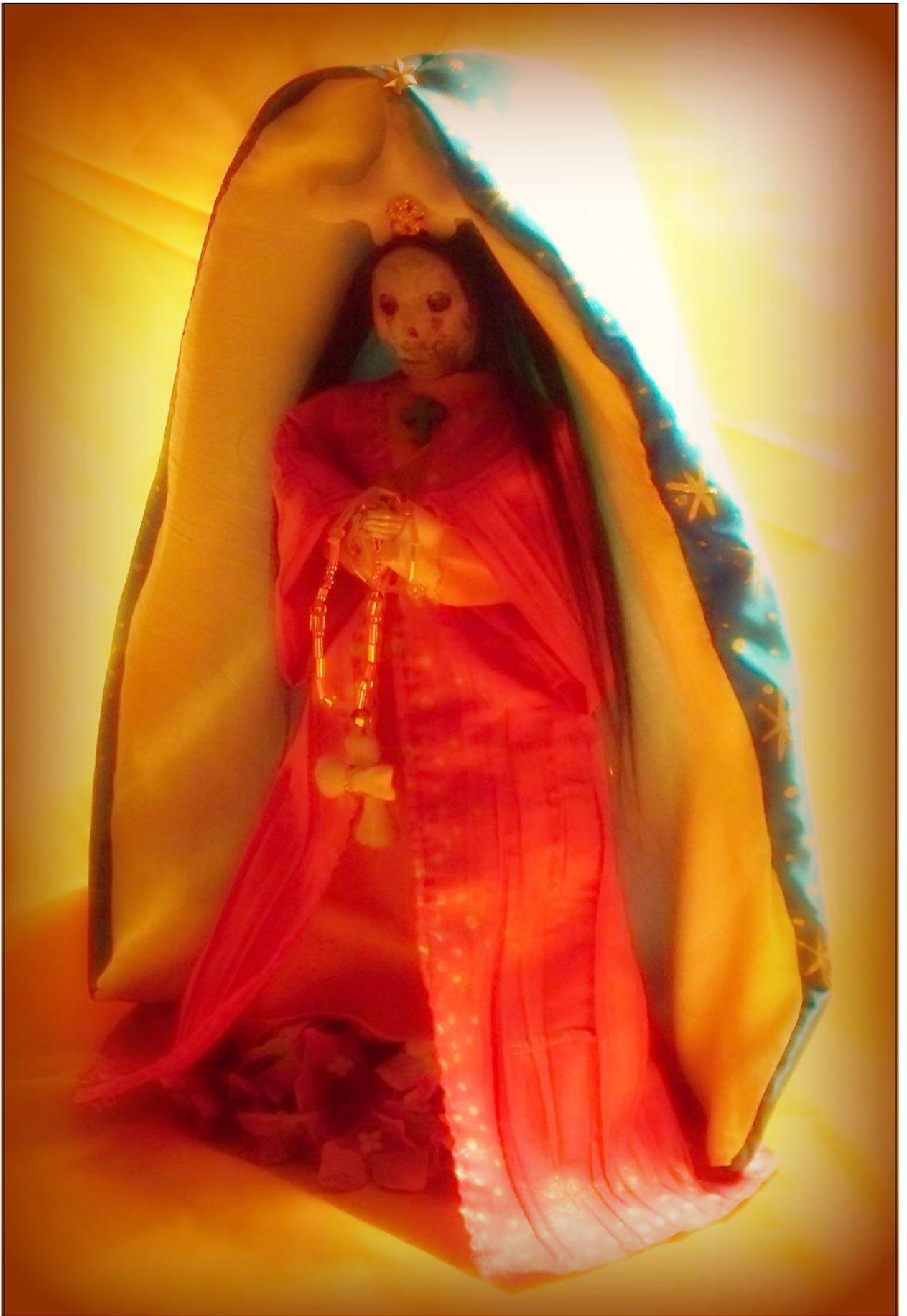
You can trust me now, don't you George? I have never been wrong on this right? Well, I heard she's good, really good...yeah surely a bit ropery at the edges, she's got a ridiculous accent and she'll be a little nervous but she's got terrific talent George, so I sent her to Slippy, he'll teach her the routines and then she'll be ready in time for the summer season.

I know dear, that's what everybody says about me, always looking out for other peoples' interests...Cut? Of course a cut...I said she was green what do you take me for? What five per cent?

Ten percent? Off the cream? Make it fifteen George and I still won't tell your wife about a certain actress we know as Fanny Arkwright...do we have a deal? Good. George. She got the 4 o'clock from Farringdon yesterday, she should be there with Slippy by tomorrow and be kind to her George treat her like your kid sister...She reminds me of me back in the day, but without the common sense.

{Scene Five: The Golden Hart Pub. Next to York Hall Boxing Club}

Good evening Joe, I'll have my usual, oh and hey have one yourself. While you are at it can you put me down for a fifty to win on the Big Baby Boy fight. Yep Baby Boy to win...Outsider? Long shot? Ha! Joe know what? I got a hunch, I got a feeling the gloves are coming off and I put all my money on Johnny two-scars getting knocked out cold in the very first round.



PROUST AND THE RAT

By Nick Tosches

A quiet, desolate-feeling winter afternoon: Johnny, Jean-Jacques, and I are sitting together. The talk has turned to Proust. This may be because Johnny and I have acquired some bottles of the Calon-Segur wine that Proust is said to have favored, or because Jean-Jacques has acquired the newly published *Carnets* of Proust. Or it may be because of the convergence of these acquisitions.

And so it comes to pass, in the wintry quiet of this afternoon, that Jean-Jacques tells us of Proust and the rat.

In his nocturnal roamings, Proust was a furtive frequenter of the old brothels and hammams. One evening, he posed a strange question:

“Do you have rats here?”

The mistress, or master, of the establishment was taken aback and became defensive for a moment, as if Proust were questioning the cleanliness of the place. But the look in Proust’s

eyes seemed to be one of innocent hopefulness, and his question received a natural and nonchalant answer.

“Of course we have rats.”

“Can you please bring one to me?”

Then, in a chamber upstairs, it unfolded. There was the big black rat in a cramped makeshift cage. There was the maid of Eros, holding between thumb and forefinger the pearl head of a gleaming, needle-sharp hat-pin of perhaps twenty-five centimeters in length. There was Proust, with his cock in his hand, giving precise instructions: the hat-pin must be directed slowly but steadily through the snared rat, so that this piercing would bring to it a death that likewise came slowly but steadily. Proust tried to synchronize the process, so that when the point of the hat-pin exited the underbelly of the rat, the drops of his semen fell simultaneously with the drops of blood that fell from the point of

the hat-pin, and his orgasm and the death-throe of the rat were as one. In the secret course of the years to come, Proust perfected this act.

Johnny and I are transported by this tale. Here, we feel, is sex supreme. Here, we feel, is Proust—beyond the stiff collar and cork-lined room—revealed to be, yes, spiritually free. As we sit wordless, savoring the beauty of it all, Jean-Jacques delivers the coup de grâce:

“I think there was also a picture of his mother. A small photograph of his mother. Yes. In a frame. He placed it by the rat, so that he could look at both the rat and the picture.”

This is it. Johnny and I decide to search out antique hat-pins immediately. I feel that there can be no greater love.

But what, we ask, is the source of this tale? Georges Bataille, says Jean-Jacques.

Soon we are joined by Michel, a gentleman of great erudition who even knows the location of the hammam that was Proust’s favorite. Yes, he confirms, the source of the tale is

Bataille. He seems to mention a title: *L'érotisme e le Mort*.

I later discover that there is no *L'érotisme e le mort*. There is *L'érotisme* and there is *Le mort*, and there is *La littérature et la mal*, which has much to say of Proust but nothing of the rat. In fact, probing through the dozen tomes of the *Oeuvres complètes* of Bataille, I find no glimpse of the rat.

Seasons pass, and in the *Times Literary Supplement* of July 26, 2002, in an essay, by Malcolm Bowie, on two new biographies of Proust, I read Bowie’s observation that the death of Proust’s mother, Jeanne, on September 26, 1905, was for Proust “far too troubling to be transposed directly into his fiction. It not only left him incurably wounded but gave him a new freedom, shadowed by guilt, in his pursuit of sexual pleasure.”

The summer passes. It is good rat weather. I sit with a strange and obscure book about Proust, by Maria Paganini. It is called, in translation, *Reading Proust: In Search of the Wolf-Fish*

and was published, in 1994, as Number 84 in the Theory and History of Literature (THL) series of the University of Minnesota Press. (Professor Paganini has refused to publish her original, French text, which bears the title *A la pêche au poisson-loup*.) It is a study of the three letters of the alphabet—*a*, *r*, and *t*—whose verbal permutations are seen to form a pattern in Proust's writing through passages in which his prose is wrought through the repetition of words such as *art*, *rat*, *tare*, and *rater*. But, while noting that one scarcely needs to be reminded of the fascination that rats exerted on Proust, there is not a hint about Proust and the rat; and the author is far more concerned with the word *rat* than with the creature itself. A note appended to the study refers to Jeanne Bem's article "Le Juif et l'homosexuel dans *A la recherche du temps perdu*: fonctionnements textuels," in the February 1980 issue of *Littérature*. This article calls our attention to the passage in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (I:576) where the madam, in praising the charms of a whore

named Rachel, can not articulate the name of Rachel beyond its first syllable, which, in French, is the sound of the word *rat*.

In my search for the perfect hat-pin, I have learned that these pins likely began, in the early nineteenth century, as decorative hair-pins, which grew into the longer hat-pins to accommodate the bigger and bigger hats that dominated women's fashion from the last decade of that century through the second decade of the twentieth century. As the size of hats increased, so did the length of hat-pins, from an early average of twelve and a half centimeters to known specimens of up to thirty-five centimeters, with heads that were often ornately jeweled. All of them made for lethal weapons. Injuries were inflicted frequently throughout Europe and America, and legal measures were taken against their use in Germany and in New Orleans. In Germany, the police threatened that safety finials must be affixed to the points of all hat-pins worn in public.

A thirty-five-centimeter hat-pin could do even the fattest and biggest river rat quite nicely indeed.

But the tale itself: is it true? Johnny and I wonder about it. In the end, we resolve the matter. If it were not true, it is true now.

An intriguing passage in an obscure book is brought to my attention. In *High Diver* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1977), Michael Wishart, in the chapter "A Shakespearean Snail," concludes his observation on Maurice Ravel's sexual involvement with hermit crabs with the words:

"This rather macabre revelation is hardly more surprising than the delicate penchant of that other frail creature of spats and perfumed kid gloves, Marcel Proust, for watching young men stick pins into the eyes of rats. Clearly even the most fastidious have their releases...."

Roaming further through the endless book-shelves and stacks and dust, I came upon *The Genealogy of Values: The Aesthetic Economy of Nietzsche and Proust*

(Lanham, MD, and London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), by Edward G. Andrew, professor of political science at the University of Toronto. Andrew quotes a statement made by Proust in his first published book, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1896), later translated into English, by Louise Varese, as *Pleasures and Regrets* (New York: Crown, 1948).

"I have never been able to read without shuddering with horror stories of those beasts who torture animals, their own wives, their own children; I now confusedly felt that in every sensual and sinful act there is just as much ferocity on the part of the body in the throes of pleasure."

Andrew follows these words from the young Proust by observing that, "In the last years of his life, Proust's sexual encounters only achieved climax by torturing rats."

"Sensual and sinful" – to Proust, one and the same, inseparable.

And further: André Maurois, *À la Recherche de Marcel*

Proust (Paris: Hachette, 1949), translated, by Gerard Hopkins, as *The Quest for Proust* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1950), pages 147-152; George D. Painter, *Marcel Proust: A Biography*, Vol. 2 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), 1989 edition, pages 268-270; Julius Edwin Rivers, *Proust and the Art of Love: The Aesthetics of Sexuality in the Life, Times, and Art of Marcel Proust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pages 74-77; Ronald Hayman, *Proust: A Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1990), pages 426-428. Rats, sex, sin in the dry pages of Proust scholarship.

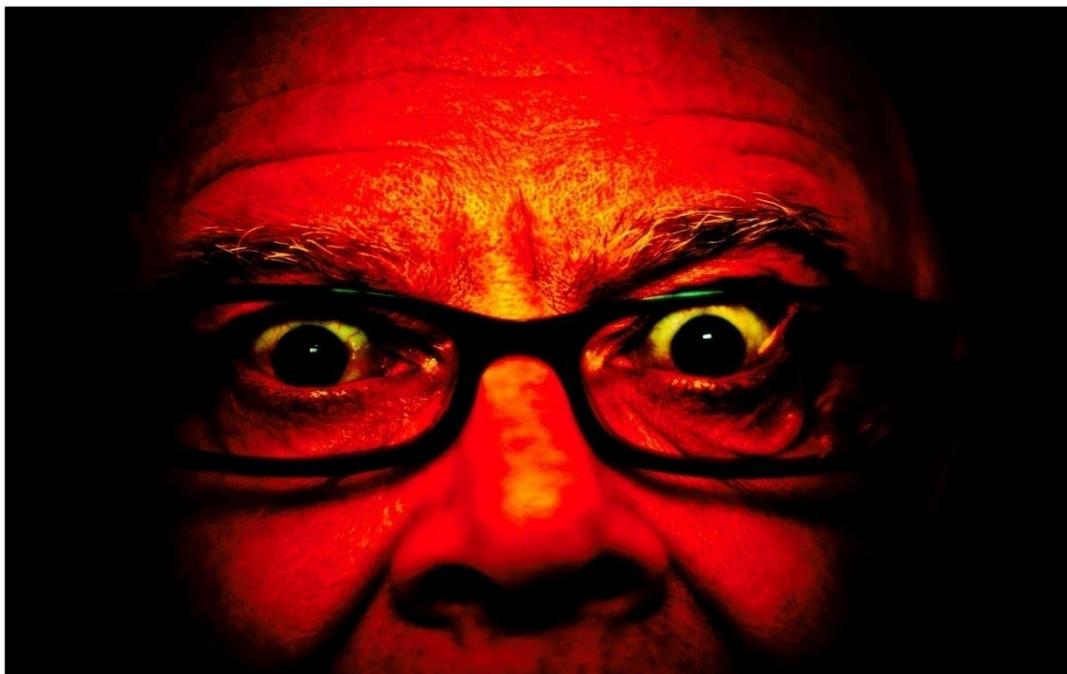
I lately also have located a copy of Bataille's rarest volume, *Histoire de Rats*. This small volume, with three original etchings by Alberto Giacometti, was published, by Les Éditions de Minuit, in 1947, in a limited edition of two hundred and ten copies, of which forty were numbered copies with a suite of three additional etchings, and ten were hors commerce copies with

the additional suite on Rives paper. In "Georges Bataille ou l'impossible" (1984), Daniel Leuwers, maître-assistant à la Faculté des lettres de Tours, stated: "Les expériences relatées dans *Histoire de Rats*, mettant en jeu l'érotisme et la mort" – there: that phrase, that chimerical title – "se justifient par [la croyance] que 'l'outrance du désir et de la mort permet seule d'atteindre la vérité.'" ("The experiences related in *Histoire de Rats*, bringing into play eroticism and death, are justified by [the belief] that 'the excess of desire and death alone renders it possible to reach the truth.'")

Sensual and sinful. The only way to go.

When the holy days of Christmas giving come, I will give this rare volume to my beloved.

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BLOOD ON MY HANDS

By Christopher Nosnibor

Photos © Lisa Wormsley

I'm not an angry person by nature. I am however, often frustrated. The frustration is brought on by my myriad causes, ranging from small niggles, like when the post doesn't come or the washing up takes longer than I'd anticipated, to major beefs about the state of the economy and the selfishness and greed of people. I'm very vocal regarding my frustrations. The ones that matter, anyway. Really, I'm not the kind of guy to rant on about the fact that there's a crumb in the margarine or that the wind is blowing from the west when the

forecast said it would be a southeasterly or that I have a spot on my chin. I'm not that self-obsessed. I'm not that petty. Besides, there are so many, far more important things to gripe about, things that give rise to real, deep-seated frustrations. And while those minor day-to-day niggles are indeed frustrating, they're passing frustrations. The bigger ones, well they're another matter altogether.

But please, don't mistake me for a whinger. Whingers are a cause of

frustration in themselves. No, you see, that's the difference between me and your common or garden whinger, most wingers aren't terribly bright for a start, and they just moan about things that they don't understand and complain about how crap it all is, usually in some horrible, flat, downbeat tone. And they'll complain about the most insignificant of things, flouncing on about how the bus was late, and then it as full, or about how they're struggling to lose weight (while chomping on a fucking Mars bar). It's not that I don't possess the capacity for sympathy, but as I see it, sympathy is like respect, it has to be earned. And I'm not going to feel anything for those who do nothing to help themselves with their situation.



So while I do complain, most vociferously, I usually identify the cause of my frustration and justify my dismay rationally and as eloquently as I am able. I can understand cause and effect, I can see mismanagement, misgovernment, the flagrant disregard for other people, the evil that men do, the changes in society, the climate and people's steadfast refusal to accept any kind of responsibility for their own actions. It doesn't make a genius or visionary. I just feel as though I'm banging my head against a brick wall and screaming into a vacuum when I vent my frustrations. But still I do, in the hope that someone will listen and take note.

There are times, though, when my eloquence escapes me. I mean, sometimes something will

really get to me, and the frustration will build and build until it's no longer merely frustration. It's never possible to predict when this might happen, what the trigger might be, and even when I feel the tension mounting, I still can't tell if or when that tension will boil inside me. I can't even tell where the line between the frustration and all-out anger lies. I just know when that transition from one to the other has been made. And when it has, it's generally best if I don't talk, if I just shut the fuck up. That's if I'm actually capable of speech. Sometimes I'm rendered truly speechless, inchoate.



The anger is something I invariably channel inwardly when it does hit. I'm not a violent man, and I'm always careful to

control my tongue even when I'm desperate to say exactly what I think, no matter how brutal, offensive, shocking or insulting. Not that I'm a spineless pussy: I just believe that diplomacy is always a more effective route of resolution - assuming there's a resolution to be reached.

As well as being prone to frustration, I'm also quite anxious and nervous by nature. I don't bite my nails like many people do, but instead gnaw the skin around the nail on my thumbs. Much of the time I don't know I'm doing it. Also pick at the skin on my thumbs using my forefingers. It's more discreet, I suppose, and is a subconscious method of diffusing tension.

And so it was that I found myself walking home in the dark. I knew I'd reached anger. A conversation and situation from which I couldn't readily extricate myself as quickly as I ought to have done for the sake of my health had really driven my tension levels up. Certain people just get to me. Certain types of people just get to me. And certain situations are just more than I can handle. It had been one of those situations, with some of those people, and some of those sorts of people. The sorts of people who are full of crap and believe they know everything. The sorts of people who will contradict themselves during the course of a

single sentence simply to 'win' an argument. The sort of people who simply have to be right, simply have to be superior, simply don't see the bigger picture, simply only look out for themselves, simply only follow their narrow-minded ways, simply will not listen to reason.

I knew I was livid when I finally did manage to make my exit. In the cool night air, I felt a stinging in the palms of my hands. I turned my palms up toward my face, and under the orange-hued glow of the street lamp I saw four perfect arcs etched into the flesh. My nails, which needed cutting, had forged red curves, edged with yellow-white, across my lifeline. My forefinger had lacerated my spirit line and had even broken the skin slightly on my right hand. That would be sore in the morning. My head was aching. The traffic passing by

on the road beside me seemed uncommonly quiet, its sound muffled by the roar of the blood in my pressurised head. My face was pulsating, throbbing, it felt as though my eyes were visibly bulging in their sockets. My breathing was erratic and came in wheezing, shakings gasps.

It was then that I noticed a wet stickiness on my fingers. I glanced down again and realised in horror that there was blood on my hands. Down the back of my fingernails, too. Running down my thumbs. I had no recollection of doing this, and was largely sober. There had been no red mist that I knew of, so what was this? My nervous system reactivated and sent pulses to my brain. The rips on my thumbs began to sting. And sting. A mild and somewhat strange form of self-abuse, perhaps, but at least it was my own blood. This time.



PEARLS

By Ele-Beth Little

"But far from being an agreeable sensation it was extremely distressing and yet even that had a thrill and delightfulness of its own; it was after all rebellion, debauchery, it was life and spirit."

- Hermann Hesse, 'Demian'

When I was seven, my favourite Barbie became engaged to the 'Dream Fred' doll I got that Christmas. He always wore a lilac, glittery tuxedo and smiled like an imbecile.

In each tale to follow, Dream Fred is merely a background prop. He kisses Barbie on the cheek, then leaves; he has important things to do that I can't be bothered to invent. The significant plot turn is when Barbie is abducted by a somewhat unhinged but romantic recluse. Here I deviate and use a boy's toy - usually some kind of monster with bulging frog eyes or a snarl. He chains her up in his home. (I remember loyally reusing my dad's toolbox. I would stand her against the cold, dented metal and slide the handle over her body like the bars of a rollercoaster).

The monster immediately confesses that he intends to force her to fall in love with him. Following this there are occasional struggles as

Barbie attempts to resist his various devices of coaxing and persuasion. These struggles excite me.

By the time Dream Fred comes to the rescue, his act of smarmy heroism is precluded by Barbie choosing the monster instead. Though this was the one fixed point of my plot, I rarely bothered to act out the final scene. Even as a child, I preferred the tension to the conclusion.

I suppose, implicit to this plot is the idea that the monster is only perceived as a monster by those outside his own world, and that his act of abduction is almost justified. Further, Barbie doesn't simply fall in love, but undergoes a thorough transformation - her abductor becomes a portal out of the life she had initially resigned herself to. He has rescued her.

But I don't believe this was ever meant to be a comment on womanhood. To me it simply conjures the luxurious kind of self-consumption that occurs when liberation is gained through submission. And it reminds me that my acts of submission are essentially voyeuristic and vampiric - silently collecting exertion, stains, and orgasms as if they were pearls.



15 YEARS

By Gene Gregorits

something reminded me
only just now, tonight, walking
home
along the susquehanna
river bank,
of
schizophrenic Jackie
was always
smiling Jackie had a
youthful quality Jackie
would cause public
scenes Jackie,
she was what you
might call
“kittenish”, Jackie
would sulk and
simper, catlike so yes then Jackie
was indeed “kittenish”
though not in the sense of an over-sexed
teen
ager
but an over-sexed
girl, I mean

a child, I mean
a baby, she
was 17 years my senior but she made me feel
like a pederast
and she
was
always squirming, in this
unpleasant way, as if possessed
by sex, and I almost knew
from the beginning,
that if you fuck
Jackie,
You're sparking her primal force
into action
into overdrive, throwing gas
on a fire
solving a Satanic
configuration, you are letting her eat your
soul
because you are eating her
soul,
because that wounded cat-in-heat
fuck
will fuck all the other fucks
and it will batter them straight out of any
meaningful emotion
of any depth of heat any

richness of sensory recall even
during fever dreams because
memory itself
is assaulted
by her sex,
a viral thing,
which somehow destroys the details that snag
like the bleaching of membranes and
you'll find yourself
maybe a few years later
sitting
in an cheap restaurant, after midnight
with bad nerves
with ruined stomach
with anemia and
you will discover one day that you are bled dry,
an invalid permanent
a devalued and defaced component
of the bigger picture
a place in time
a position once held with authority
what seemed to be a savage weirdo's
last refuge
a paradise for lonesome
and wounded
monsters
a place that you can only dream about tonight

tottering through
the wreckage,
all the makings of
an
unspeakable, and
in-the-flesh
real life
purgatorio as the black river
outside
so full of knowledge that it can not
bear
to
let
it-
self
flow black river
shines quietly
under black sky
shimmers angrily
under black sky
moans low and old and ruined
under black sky
waits patiently for me
tonight
what else
can it
do?

EXTREME EXPOSURE

By Jana

He tried to lift his arms to hold his head but his arms were heavy. He looked down and saw the white plaster of casts wrapped around both arms. This shocked him. Where was he? He felt like he was looking at someone else's arms. These can't be his. He remembered that the last time he saw his arms, they were carrying suitcases. He was sure they were suitcases? One in each hand. Two of them. Yes. There had been two of them. His arms were fine then. But not now. So were his hands. His hands were fine. They weren't attached to these casts. So was his head. Now it throbbed. Throbbled. What had happened? His head ached. He felt sick. He was dizzy. He couldn't think. He tried again to remember. It was an effort. It took his strength.

He stopped looking at his arms and lifted his head to look at the rest of his body. His body was covered by a sheet, a thin filthy greyish sheet covered with stains. Lots of stains. He revolted at the

sight of the grime. Where did this sheet come from? It wasn't his. His sheets were always clean and even ironed. He was fastidious about his sheets and took them to the local laundry and dry cleaning store to have them washed and then ironed. So he knew these were not his sheets. Again, the thought oozed through his mind, "Where am I"? This is not home.

Again, he recalled his arms and the two suitcases dangling at the end of his arms. He had been walking. That's right. Walking. Vaguely he remembered a taxi on the other side of the street. A dark lime green taxi came faintly back into memory and then just as quickly darted out of memory. All safe taxis are lime green in this city he had been told. Dan, don't ever get into a taxi that is not lime green he had been told. The lime green taxi, a Volkswagen Beetle, came back into view and then flashed away into a crumpled mangled body. His body. Was it his body?

Next he noticed that his legs weren't moving. He gave his legs commands, "move" "lift" "wiggle" and nothing happened. They just hung there at the end of his view propped up by his bed. Flat. They didn't move. Strange. Should he call someone? He cocked his head slightly, curious. They too were wrapped unevenly in some kind of a plaster. Involuntarily, he snickered to himself. This must be a joke. But the pain was no joke. Stinging, crippling pain began to clamor to his brain clanging for his attention. What's that rattling sound? His breathing? As he closed his eyes, his brain seemed to float in a pool of muck.

He forced his eyes open again. In a daze, he shifted his head to his room. There wasn't much light. It was dim. He couldn't see well in this light and the hazy slime seeping through his brain. The walls were as grey as his bed sheet. Scarred. Paint chipped away revealed grey cinder block and cement moldings. And mold. Crawling mold. Names were crudely scrawled. But he didn't recognize the language. He saw on the wall next to his bed a

cross. It was a simple cross made from two wooden popsicle sticks lashed together by string. It hung lopsided. He looked around the room. He was surprised. He wasn't alone. There were others in the room. They too were in beds like his. But he noticed they didn't have casts. He could hear them moaning. Some were crying. Their sobs drifted into his semi-consciousness. Others were coughing, hacking. The sounds cracked within the ache in his brain. Their sounds were only slightly louder than the questions forming slowly in his mind. Oh God this headache. Where am I? Out of the corner of his eye, he thought he saw a man in a long black dress walk passed his room door. A priest?

An image floated back into view. The lime green taxi. A street. He was carrying two suitcases and crossing the street. He was walking to the taxi to go to his hotel? Yes. That's it. He had been walking across the street heading towards a taxi when... when... and now he is here. Where is 'here'? And it smelled. It smelled of vomit. Ugh. Dirty sheets and vomit. It smelled of shit, yes shit

and antiseptics, soap and vinegar, detergent, wet, sweat, heat, alcohol and vomit... It made him sick. He gagged "Oh Save me, My God," escaped from his bruised lips.

A woman in a worn slightly tattered blue uniform came through the door of this room. She walked towards his bed. He stared up at her. Who is she? I don't know her. His thoughts formed like sludge, slowly. He should ask her name. He should ask her where is he? He should ask her how he got here? Where is 'here'? What happened?

Her English wasn't very good. It was broken, "Señor Dan. Como esta Señor? Como se sienta? How are you feeling? Soy Magdalena. Estoy su enfermera. Sorry... you don't speak Spanish. My name is Magdalena. I am your nurse. We got su nombre from your bolsa... I mean we got your name from your wallet. Lo Siento mucho. I'm sorry for your accident. A car hit you in the... calle. Street... You were walking, I think... The taxi brought you here from the aeropuerto... airport but you were not conscious; you were

unconscious... sin conciencia... I am sorry Señor Dan, we don't know who hit you. They left. How are you feeling now? Como ha estado? Do you know where you are? You are at Hospital de San Juan de los Manos de Dios. Oh, in English, you are at the Saint John of the Hands of God Hospital. I'm sorry. Lo Siento. We could not find un tarjeta seguro social... como se dice...how do you say your health insurance card in your wallet. We couldn't find it. The money it was gone ... maybe the taxi driver took it... no insurance. I am very sorry but we had to put you in the room with the other patients who no tienen seguro tambien... who don't have insurance... these are rooms for sick people like you who do not have insurance. This is D.F. Distrito Federal. Do you remember Federal District? Do you remember? You are in Mexico City. Acuerda? Do you remember? And the others here with you? They have the flu. Puerco de Influenza... I think you call it the Pig Flu.



ART AND BOOKS

By Brian Routh

Image © Patricia Wells

art and books
negative hooks
they're phony they're fake
they make my head ache
although i don't read
i sing 'til i bleed
don't waste my time
cause reading's a crime
painting's much worse
a lie and a curse
it's all just pretentious
it makes me contentious
i'll fight to defend
my ignorant friend
all culture is sad
it just makes me mad
no use in thinking
i'm better off drinking
ignorance is better
i don't need no letter

as i sit in the drain
i'm drowning my brain
the books might be right
but they're blinding my sight
i'll set 'em on fire
and quench my desire
art is no fun
go get me my gun
i'm soon gonna crush
the man with the brush
i'm free of all learning
i'm angry i'm burning
you've come far too late
i'm strangled in hate
i don't need no heart
no books and no art
now i lay in my grave
i'm too late to save
you can all go to hell
i'll ring my own bell

X TO Y, FOR SOME Z

By John Patrick Ayson

thanks to the problematic couple in unit 333, & their confrontational yells which rattled the scant, wafer thin walls, x was deported from a deep, invested tangent, reverted back to the shoal, scattered accent of real time - where his body's imperfect, inanimate curl - embedded on his imperfect, cigarette burn infested futon - was transformed into an animated series of perfect neck, arm, & leg stretches - a perfect precursor for a perfect morning, day, night

but thanks to the dingy living room table made of cheap, second hand glass - x witnessed a besmeared, tell tale reflection - of nothing, but perfect imperfection - evidenced by

pools of purple, encircling his eye sockets

burgundy hues, defining the outlines of his nostrils

cuts & gashes, cleaving his parched chops two streaks of caked drool, trickling off his left cheek:

ruins, of another all night mind fuck marathon

then thanks to the seven thousand day old rash behind his right ear & its need to be fondled & scratched, x's mini self survey was broken - so with the same, perfectly imperfect appearance he donned for the previous eighteen hours, he exited 332 - without bothering to close the door - beelined through the halls, down three flights of stairs, then outside of the fifth generation tenement he called home - where he faced the familiar aroma of

a stagnant, nauseating blend of emissions

from each car, participating in the chronic,

rush hour gridlock, coupled with a synchronized union of

synthetic belches from asbestos, benzene, & chloride factories

although x was reared in this backdrop, a thirteen block span comprised of rows upon rows of those same factories, sections upon sections of failed housing projects, fractionalized into integrated maelstroms of unkept main streets, side streets, highways, & overpasses, varying in a myriad of lengths, widths, & usefulness to those same cars in those same rush hour gridlocks - x was still a foreigner, both to foreigners, & citizens of gap...

because thanks to gap's mandatory requirement, of having all its inhabitants wear a protective gas mask & matching body suit - x was nonpareil - by default, because he thought

such costume did not lessen his chances - nor prevent him from acquiring a terminal disease - if it did they should not be sold for profit - nor priced at ridiculous, unaffordable rates - & since he was never in the market for one - he was the poor man's poor man

so thanks to his part illogical, quasi reasonable, semi cynical psyche - x braved the malicious conditions of gap city as is - dismissing intentions of covering his facial orifices from the sinister air, alternating between a scoured walk & a twinkled jog, on the brittle, decrepit concrete - while dodging slews of chafed drivers, & ignoring their universal dialect of disdain for pedestrians - verbalized via militant honks, hoisted middle fingers, sterile obscenities, en route to

a structure, built with a buffet of leftover bricks; constructed, out of calculated negligence - a confluence of

a slipshod storage space & a mangled, wartime barrack with a bright, violet tarp for a roof; without windows, nor any openings for ventilation, except a plastic door, sans lock

nor latch - with a word, spray painted above:

l i b r a r y

& thanks to his temerity & fervor, he did not deem a knock, nor any other gesture to signal his presence & desire to enter - because the library was a paradise, parodying gap city's fostered pursuit of a putrid existence - a sacrosanct sanctuary, which countered gap's assimilate or else agenda - & fatigued as he may be - all signs suggesting so were gone, exactly right when he saw the librarian, y, behind the checkout counter

- tell me you have some, y...please tell me you have some...

- did anyone follow you?

- no...

- did ANYONE... follow you...

- no, man...

- for the third time... did an-
- no, man... it's me... x

thanks to the plastic door swinging outwards, at the whim of a polluted breeze, y was able to scan the exterior from one hundred yards out, & saw that x was indeed truthful

- right... x...
- yes... i've been coming to you since the last branch closed
- don't you have overdu-
- yes, yes...
- multiple late fees dating back sinc-
- i know, i know...
- & didn't your card expire this past wee-
- there's no need to remind me, i've already sen-
- in spite of all that, you have the audacity to show your face - & ask me for more?!
- look man. the stuff you gave me last time was..
- was what?
- it was...
- was..?
- oh come on! i know & you kno-
- but you still decided to borrow it - & read it, did you not?
- yes - but tell me- if stephanie meyer was the last author on earth, would YOU read her?

thanks to x's pressure filled question, y began to perspire profusely & ultimately gave in, forcing him to remove his gas mask, wipe off the steam, & sought what he wanted

- i take it this is what you wanted...
- yes! this is IT isn't it?
- the last one he ever wrote. & this is the fifth of only seven copies ever made
- amazing. can i touch it?
- in one condition: fill this membership renewal form first, & as soon as you do...

& thanks to x's indifference towards forms, he was able to finish it quickly, exit the library, finger the book's flamboyant orange neon cover, & dove into the first page, which read:



CONSENT

By Audree Flynn

She was 18 and she loved it when they honked their horns or whistled and never acted like she didn't; she wore thin-strapped cotton tops that hugged her warm brown shoulders and her breasts, stopped about midway and hugged her taut brown belly, she rolled her cutoff shorts to make them shorter, it was summer and her hair was golden brown.

He was three or maybe four years older but he graduated Central, they knew a lot of the same people, she and her boyfriend bought a quarter-ounce of sinsemilia from him once; she bumped into him that night, really bumped into him coming around the corner and almost didn't recognize him—black dress pants, white dress shirt, like a waiter at one of those restaurants where the menu's all in French, the six-pack in his hand was short a beer.

He talked about the new job at the new hotel downtown, how much it paid and how the benefits were good, he joked and said he was a Miller Man but got the Heineken tonight to celebrate; he *was* cute and she *was* kinda down, some stupid little thing her boyfriend said. She didn't know him well but she knew him

well enough, he said he had some weed and he said he lived close by, she couldn't hurt his feelings when he asked, just being friendly, if she'd like to come along.

shut up

turn around

never done it this way have you

hurts a little there at first

say you want it

say you need it

dirty bitch

got something for you

turn around

open wide

wider

that's it

yeah

good girl.

Bathroom's right in there, he said, get dressed I'll take you home—don't take too long, I gotta get to sleep; that new job starts first thing in the morning.

I don't know why some girls act like they don't want it.

Good thing you don't act that way, he said, her hair was dark with sweat; she was 18, it was summer and she shivered.

PHANTASIES OF INFANTICIDE

By Patrick Wright

Smothering's an act of mothering.
It seems sane, a blunt shock to the brain,
A pillow over the face, when the angel Gabriel asks me to.

I respond with scissors as popsicles and knives of candy,
Sweet Mary answering, with fists on ribs, bruises flowering.

I can empathise,
Blackening. I can empathise, blackening
The bruise and how it sprouts stars like a nebula.

I'm a nurse, too, a nurse who should know better,
To shake, shake the baby, like the legs of a dance,
Shake him to haemorrhage, stop the shrieks and stamps.

No, not cute, he slobbers, reaks of sacred umbilicus and hollers –

For nothing, for mother, for death.

Oh the nothing he gripes over in his crib. The shit he sits in.
What he hems in with limbs he moves like a puppet.

Once egg and sperm he's the meat I made, and so I take,
Take back the steak I bought, I bin or cook,

Or throw to birds in meadows of marigolds,
Let the rabbit-like corpse plant seeds of birth.

THE WET SPOT

By Hank Kirton

The door opened. Pale desert sunlight seeped into the darkness of the Wet Spot.

As soon as the bartender saw the guy come in, he made himself alert. The guy looked like trouble. You develop a kind of ESP in a dump like the Wet Spot. You have to. Just about everyone who comes in looks like a badass or a nut or a gun-packing troublemaker. Most are just harmless, good-old-boy shitkickers looking to grab a quick buzz before heading home from work. But there was something different about this guy. Oh, he didn't really look that unusual. He was around fifty, gray hair spilling over broad shoulders, kept out of his eyes with a grimy red bandanna. His jeans and denim jacket were worn thin and white. His face was brown, baked with deep crags, haggard and falling from a lifetime of defeat.

But there seemed to be something wrong inside him. The bartender could tell by the way he moved. He creeped, as if trying to sneak into the place. His mouth trembled and worked, muttering to himself.

And those eyes.

The guy looked around the joint, once, twice, a third time, before he approached the bar. He sat down as if slipping into a tub of scalding water, face pinched with pain, breath coming out in one long gust.

The bartender approached him. "What can I getcha?"

"A beer," John said, pulling a wallet out of his back pocket.

"What flavor?"

"Whatever's cheapest."

The bartender turned, grabbed a mug. He kept his eyes on John the whole time.

John looked at the woman three stools down. She was drinking whiskey, her face obscured by a haze of cigarette smoke. She looked like an assassin.

A cowboy at the other end of the bar was staring at him, long oil-stained fingers wrapped like tentacles around a bottle of Bud.

The bartender placed a mug of beer in front of him. John plucked six bucks from the wallet he'd recently acquired from an old

man he'd met at a Citco station, placed them on the bar.

He took a sip of beer. Cold. Ice cold. Nice.

"Hey, there, uh, buddy... Where you comin' from? Vegas?" said the cowboy.

John turned. The cowboy was tall, long brown hair pulled back in a greasy ponytail, mouth hidden behind a formidable mustache.

"The desert," said John.

The cowboy laughed; a dry husking sound. "No shit. We're *in* the desert, man. That ain't a proper response."

John shrugged. "Well, that's the only response you're gonna get." He took another sip of beer. The bartender was still watching him. He looked too small and jumpy to handle the kind of violence a place like the Wet Spot must conjure up. He probably kept a shotgun under the bar.

The cowboy moved a few seats down. Only one stool separated him from John now. John kept his eyes on his beer, watching the bubbles climb into the foam.

The cowboy leaned toward him, wobbling. "Whussamatter? You think you some kinda tough guy or something, sayin' that?"

John looked into the cowboy's red-veined eyes. Dumb drunk eyes, no faking that. He was too stupid to be an assassin. Too stupid to be a real cowboy, even.

"No," John said. Ten years ago he might have started something, shoved something sharp and jagged into his dumb animal face. But he was tired. Too tired. "I told you the truth. I came from the desert. I live there. I do my work there, like John the Baptist."

The cowboy didn't say anything for a few seconds while he slowly unscrambled what John had said. Out of the corner of his eye, John saw the woman turn toward them.

Gotcha.

The cowboy smiled. He was managing to hold on to one jutting bottom tooth. "John the Baptist, huh?" He laughed uneasily.

"That's right. The desert can teach a man a lot about himself. A lot about how things work in life. A barren landscape cleanses the mind. You should try it." He finished his beer.

The cowboy laughed. "Alright. John the Baptist. Or can I call ya Johnny? Fuck it. Okay, you came from the desert. Hey, Davie, why dontcha baptize John here with another beer. On me."

The bartender reached for the mug but John waved him back. "Don't," he said. He knew better than to accept a drink from a stranger. He'd been poisoned too many times. Too many people wanted him dead. "That won't be necessary. I'm leaving." He tossed another buck on the bar, thanked the bartender, and walked out. He didn't look at the woman.

The cowboy snorted. "What a fucking nutcase. You see his eyes? *John the Baptist*. Shit..." He lurched back to his stool, finished his beer, and ordered another.

"You leavin' too, Angie?" asked the bartender.

Angie closed her purse, stood up, and smoothed down her skirt. "Yeah. Gotta get back to work."

The cowboy laughed.

John was standing by his truck, watching the crimson sun sink toward the horizon. He could hear the assassin giving a splendid impression of clumsy drunken footsteps on the gravel behind him.

"What do you want?" he asked, without turning around.

She wobbled up beside him and slipped her arm around his waist. She was at least two feet shorter than he was. He could see the top

of her pale scalp through her short black hair. The smell of heavy perfume, cigarette smoke and whiskey swirled into his head like poison gas.

"Thought you might want a little company," she said, purposely slurring her words. "You look lonesome. Am I right? I can tell by your eyes, you have..."

"I am not lonely," he told her.

He felt her stiffen under his arm.

She cleared her throat. "What a gorgeous sunset," she said, unsure of herself now.

Enough. "How much?"

She stiffened again. "How much what?"

"How much for access to that little pussy of yours?"

She broke away and a look of shock took over her pudgy, sunburned face. "What?" she said, like she was offended. He almost laughed.

"That devil's triangle you got between your legs. That *is* what you're offering, isn't it?" he said.

Her face turned to brick. Her eyes narrowed. "Twenty-five," she said.

"That's what I thought." John lifted the wallet and handed her two tens and a five. "I got a mattress in the back." He lowered the tailgate and climbed inside.

He slipped his hand over the shotgun behind the mattress.

Angie crawled in and kneeled on the mattress. She started patting her sweaty hair into place.

"Okay, John the Baptist, let's see wh..." She looked around then, really *looked* at the inside of his truck for the first time. Her eyes widened and filled with fear.

"What the fuck..."

Beautiful. What an actress. "What's wrong?"

Her face had drained of color. She opened her purse, snatched out the money he'd given her and let it fall on the mattress. "Nothing," she said. Her voice had gone small and breathless. "I just changed my mind is all." She started to crab-walk backwards, giving John a clear view up her skirt.

"I gotta get going is all," she said.

John raised the shotgun. "Stop."

She stopped.

"Throw your purse over here."

She did.

He dumped out the contents. As usual, she knew not to carry anything that might give her away. She had exactly the kind of stuff you'd expect a woman of her age and type to have. But it was *too* perfect. Her cover rang as false as a dinner bell at the crack of dawn; pictures in her beat-up wallet of dirty children and long-haired men with sleazy, lounge-lizard mustaches. A pink heart keychain that said Foxy Lady. An old pack of Trident, wrapper faded and sticky with age. A new pack of Parliament menthol lights. Used tissues, condoms, crumpled receipts, a nub of a pencil...

But at least she had a few bucks. *They* were certainly real. He pocketed thirty dollars and some loose change.

"Can I please go now?" she said, little polluted rivers of mascara running down her cheeks.

"Yeah, sure. And tell your bosses that they're never gonna get another shot at me," he said, caressing the shotgun. "I am AWARE twenty-four hours a day. I DREAM them in my sleep."

She nodded. "Okay, sure, I'll tell them." She lowered the tailgate with shaking hands.

"I have been BAPTIZED!" he shouted.

She screamed and scrambled out of the truck, nearly tripping over her feet and spilling into the gravel.

John crawled out of the truck in time to see her run back into the Wet Spot. He hopped into the cab, twisted the engine to life, stabbed it into gear and sped back to the road, spinning clouds of dust and a hail of gravel behind him.

When he was deep inside the desert, he pulled over and climbed into the back. He needed to pray and meditate.

He looked around at the inside of his holy sanctum. The walls were lined with animal skins and bones; steer, dog, cat, human. Fragmented skulls, X's made from long thin femurs, and clackity mobiles of polished bone. His head-board was an altar; two human skulls mounted on either side of a big plastic heart wrapped in barbed wire.

He tucked himself into the lotus position and tilted his head back to loosen the cramped muscles of his neck.

On the ceiling was a huge collage of pictures he'd collected over the years: car crash victims - blood and brains bursting from

crushed, misshapen heads; gaudy, colorful autopsy photos of flayed corpses, innards exposed; genitals riddled with dripping syphilis; Thalidomide children; grainy, black and white photos of withered bodies stacked inside concentration camps; a scrapbucket full of bloody fetuses; women eating shit and drinking piss; men with their bloody scrotums nailed to sawhorses; women sucking off dogs, horses, pigs, getting fucked by apes; men pulling their anuses so far apart you could fit a cantaloupe inside; grossly deformed men fucking drooling, retarded children in the ass; women crushing kittens and puppies to death under fancy, elegant high-heels. In one picture a man with a stoned, gold-tooth grin was sticking his dick into a dead woman's jellied eye-socket, looking into the camera like a proud fisherman. Skull-fucking they call it. What'll they think of next?

He slept on his back and every morning, when he opened his eyes, this was the sight that greeted him. A mad vicious scramble of humanity.

Humanity as it really was. Beautiful and fevered and lost and fucking and killing their way into Hell.

He wanted to bless them all under his divine hands.



DEATH WISH CHAMELEON VI

By Cricket Corleone

Photos © Richard A. Meade



Greta lies asleep in a hotel bed, it is 2am and there is no sign of her married man. She showed up a little earlier than what they had planned as their meeting time... 11pm. Greta was there by 10:45.

She had taken a quick shower and freshened up a little. Put on her favorite scent. Brushed her hair out but tried to make it look as if her hair just naturally had the perfect fall and swing. A look of effortless beauty that is anything but effortless to achieve.

The lock on the hotel door turns suddenly, waking Greta up from a shallow sleep. Shallow from anticipation and nerves. Though every fiber in her being told her she needed to see him, as the time grew later and later she started to rethink the whole thing, mostly out of humiliation that she was finding herself right back in the same place she had always been forced into with him. Alone and made a fool of. All she could think was how much Dustin would tease her over this if she had known, "What a waste of good lipstick," she would say. Greta wondered when someone as screwed up as Dustin would find her way to being perched on Greta's shoulder like her fucked up version of Jiminy Cricket?

Greta's married man enters the hotel room and locks the door behind himself. As he walks closer and closer to the bed where Greta is now sitting up fixing her hair a little, this impulse in Greta telling her to shout out and confess to what had happened at his house days earlier with Dustin, is being pushed down furiously as the only words that come out in placement are, "I

didn't think you would make it." Greta forces a smile.

Before Greta knows it the married man moves in for the kill pushing Greta back onto the bed with his hands and his kiss. Greta gives in as if a virginal school girl who just doesn't know how to say "no." It is obvious who is holding all the cards in this relationship... this affair.

The married man goes to slip off Greta's panties but she stops him. "Wait... can we just... talk or something?"

The married man smiles, "What's there to talk about? We both

know why we are here." He starts to kiss her again. "Yeah but..."

The married man sticks his hands under her panties. Greta jolts up, "Wait!"

The married man is taken aback. He sighs, "Fine... let's talk... we can do that." He gets up from the bed and turns his back on her which just makes Greta feel guilty.

"It's just... I don't know? Just 'cause I wanted to see you doesn't mean I want... that." Greta straightens out her clothing.



A moment of silence passes before the married man responds with, "Look... what exactly do you want from me? I am married... you know that. Don't you want to be with someone who's available?"

Greta wanted to smack him. She couldn't believe he would ask her such a question when he knows deep down that the answer here is, "No... I only want you." She shakes her head and looks at the floor.

"I have a wife at home waiting for me in bed... so I don't know what you want here." He says coldly.

Greta, humiliated, stands up. "I shouldn't have come here... I am such an idiot." She grabs her things.

The married man stops her, "Wait, you got me here and now you are just gonna leave?" He puts his hand over the hotel door, "Come on, don't be like this. Stay."

So many things Greta wants to say in the moment but she holds back. "Why don't you go home to your wife then? What exactly do you expect from me? To just put out and watch you leave afterwards? To just lay there feeling sick that I let myself believe once again that this meant anything to you? To just get over

it?" Instead of saying that, Greta goes and sits back down on the bed and continues to stare at the floor. Her bare feet brushing against the egg shell colored carpet. Her toe nails painted a glossy rose red. Her finger nails to match. Though one of the nails had broken somewhere between the bed and the door. She bites the broken part of the nail off and then hides her hand under the blanket of the bed. The last thing she wants brought to her attention is her imperfections seeing as she knows she will never be perfect enough to be loved by her married man. She didn't know what sickened her more, that she cared, or that she wanted that love so badly? She thought to herself, "I could get up and walk out... which won't make me feel any better... or I can just shut my mouth and let him fuck me... and feel good for now but worse later on... or I can bitch him out for doing this to me and really tell him like it is... and still feel bad later when I have scarred him off? Great choices..."

She opts for feeling good for now, and when the married man comes to the bed, Greta gives it up to him without a fight. She feels love. He feels a warm pussy and a willing body... occasionally checking his watch to make sure he is back before his wife wakes up. When he cums, he makes Greta take it in her mouth and swallow it. It is the first time she

has ever let a man do that to her. But she couldn't help it, she wanted every last drop of his cum, even if really it was her way of showing she wanted every last drop of his love. But she can't tell him that now... he got what he wanted and he won't listen until he wants it again.

The married man leaves. Greta lies in the bed again, looking at the cab fare he has left for her on the bedside table. She wants to shower... shave her head... scold her skin... take out her brain and erase the very thought of him, but no matter where she goes in her head and how much she wishes it would stop, that love for him, it's all around her like a terminal cancer eating away at her world. "... and in the end, what did I get?" She thinks, and pulls the pillows over her head.

While under the pillows she feels safe from the outside world. So she starts to talk to herself under there. Letting the cloth from the pillow case soak in her words so that no one can hear them and no one will be the wiser of this silly thing to be doing... talking to her ghosts. "Why? Why did I think he was going to make me feel better? Why did I think he was going to care? Why has he changed so much on me? He used to care? It wasn't all in my head? And how do I know he isn't leaving me, lying to me about going home to his wife,

when really he is off to his next wet hole? Oh god... am I just a HOLE to him?" The words ache throughout her body and she cringes. "Stupid stupid stupid!" Greta says as she stands up off the bed and goes to take a shower, slamming the bathroom door hard behind her.

Later, Greta is walking home alone in the darkness of the city. It is freezing cold outside and there seems to be every crack whore and junkie on every corner she passes. They all proposition her, "Hey lady, I'll lick your pussy for twenty bucks?" Greta turns her head and thinks, "Great, now even THEY think I'm a hole." She casually says, "Do I look like I have to pay for it? Don't answer that." She keeps walking. A few blocks down she has passed the part of the city where all the druggies like to hang out in the off hours. But now it seems too quiet. Until she hears some loud music coming out of a back alley. The sound of drunken young guys thrashing about and breaking bottles. A very disturbing sound to a young girl walking alone with no protection, so far from home. She would have taken a cab but instead she let the money sit in her pocket. She would keep it, she thought, to remind her of what she means to the married man so that next time, she won't be so "stupid."

Greta passes the alley way but not before the drunken guys notice her and start to call out to her. "Hey baby, you lookin to party? We got some coke? Hey, where's your boyfriend? Hey come back, baby!" The guys egg each other on and laugh at the obvious nervousness they are afflicting onto Greta. Like a pack of wolves honing in on their prey, they swarm around Greta and lock her into a circle.

"Look, I have had a rough night and I am just trying to get home. So, please... if you don't mind I just want to be left alone." Greta looks up at the face of "packers" ringleader as he smiles and sips on a beer. A knot of fear hits her like a ton of bricks over her body. "Shit... it's him." The skinhead from the day before, the one Dustin had thrown the empty bottle of wine at. The fear was in knowing that she wasn't going to get out of this so easily, this was the exact opposite of the kind of rowdy drunk boys you want to run into at this hour on her own.

"Actually, we do mind. In fact, we might take it as an insult if you don't at least join us for a drink? Just one harmless little drink?"

Greta knew the skinhead did not recognize her. But she also knew that she was trapped and if she had tried to make a run for it, she was outnumbered and totally

screwed. What could she do but buy some time while trying to make her escape. "A... sure... a drink."

The skinhead throws his arms around her shoulder almost in a head lock leading her to the alley. "Drink up, get cozy... the night is young."

The boys laugh.

Greta knew the moment she saw the guy's face that something bad was going to happen. Like seeing a car crash just as it is about to happen but not being able to stop it.

The skinhead shoves the bottle of beer into her mouth making her drink the rest of it down.

The guys cheer him on. But this is not a synchronized party here, and they toss her around the group like a rag doll for a moment as they all shoved their beer bottles into her mouth until she chokes on them.

"OK! That's enough!" Greta pulls away. "You don't have to be rude about it. Now, I am just going to leave because I have someone expecting me... and if I don't show up soon they will probably get worried and call the cops. So, I am just going to leave you to your party here... thanks for the offer." Greta backs away slowly and turns to leave. But just as she

had foreseen, it wasn't going to be that easy. The next thing she knows she is being pulled back to the alley kicking and screaming while the skinhead leader holds her mouth shut. One of the guys in the group keeps an eye out while the others take turns raping her up against a filthy, smelly, cold dumpster. There was nothing she could do, once again, she was not holding the cards.

The morning sun is just showing its light over a blue sky. The damp morning air chills Dustin to the bone as she is walking home, chain smoking, and stumbling a little from drunkenness. She had made a

"date" with a guy who was looking for a "Lolita" type for a late night romp at a hotel that rents by the hour. But after waiting for a few hours to a no show, she bailed out, leaving the credit card of one of her previous death suitors. It was almost too easy she thought, the person behind the desk in the office didn't even run the deposit before giving her the key. Didn't check the name on the card. Didn't check to see I.D. But, from the looks of it, Dustin could see the desk clerk was highly fucked up on something, and probably just wanted to be alone so that they could "hit" some more. Not her problem, she thought.



The last of the late night junkies is stumbling about as they pass Dustin, "Hey... I'll... li... lick your..."

Dustin flicks her cigarette, "Fuck off."

The junkie keeps moving on. As Dustin passes an alleyway she hears the sound of whimpering. Normally, Dustin would keep moving. But instead she leans in a little to take a look. "Hey, you ok back there? You really shouldn't be sleeping back here in this weather. There's a drunk hotel a few blocks up. Might be better for you to check in there."

She sees the back of the person whimpering as the person tries to stand up but falls forward and knocks down a trash can. Dustin can see there is blood on the person's hands. Dustin rolls her eyes, "You gotta be kidding me? Hey, did you get into a fight?"

The person is not responsive.

"Shit... I know I am going to regret this." Dustin says to herself as she approaches the bloodied person. "Look, you need to go to a hospital or something. I will walk you down but if you freak out on me in any way I will bloody you up more. You got it?" She helps the person up. Once the person turns towards her, through bloodied hair and a mess of a face, she sees it is Greta. "Ah

shit... what the fuck? Come on." She helps Greta to walk holding her up. "We gotta get you to the nearest ER." Dustin says.

"No!" Great sobs through the blood and spit around her mouth, "Just... just take me to your place... please..."

Dustin is hesitant, but sees that her friend is not in a good state and need to not be questioned, "Okay, you got it. My place."

As the two pass by early morning people on their way to work, Greta tries to cover her face. Dustin sees this and takes off her jacket. She puts the jacket over Greta's head and becomes her eyes and feet as they make their way to Dustin's apartment. She can hear Greta start to sob again under the coat and over Dustin's shoulder. "Don't worry, I gotcha," Dustin reassures.

Greta whispers, "Everyone is looking at me."

Dustin comforts her, "Fuck them. Just talk to me. They don't exist right now. It's just you and me. Only three more blocks to go. Then you can take a shower, change your clothes, and get some rest."

Greta holds tight and whispers, "Ok..."

Back at Dustin's apartment, Greta is taking a scalding hot shower. Once she is out, she wraps herself in one of Dustin's robes and joins her in the living room.

Now, in a state of shock, Greta is not sobbing, only trying to register everything that had gone down in that alley. But her body is shutting down now from all the trauma. All she wants to do is sleep it off and wake up only to find it was all just a bad dream. She wants to go back to a day ago, she wants to put down her cell phone, never have met her married man at that hotel, never having walked that street, never having passed that alley at the time that she had. The money in her pocket mocks her, "I should have taken a fucking cab," she says out loud.

"What are you talking about?" Dustin says as she pours them both a shot of tequila.

Greta downs the shot without flinching. A moment passes and Greta sits back, "I was gang raped."

Dustin grabs her head, "You should have told me that... fuck, Greta?! We should have taken you right to the hospital, don't you know that you just washed about 99.9% of evidence off your body?"

Greta closes her eyes, "Don't yell at me."

Dustin sits down, "I'm... sorry... it's true though. Do you know who it was? The people who raped you?"

A flash in Greta's head of the leader of the gang of rapist skinheads as he is pumping away on her while the others hold her down, haunts her. She shakes the memory out of her head. "Only one of them..." she says quietly. "I really don't want to go through all of this right now. Please, Dustin."

Dustin nods her head. "Fine. That's fine. Just, get some rest. When you wanna talk, you'll talk. No pressure."

Greta lies back on the couch, "Thank you."

Dustin stands up and goes to shut off all the lights in the apartment so that Greta can rest. "I'm in my room, if you need anything," she says as she turns to make sure Greta has everything she needs. The care in her heart scares her, Dustin is worried... and she has not felt so concerned for another person in a very long time. Part of her wants to run and hide. But, another part is devoted to seeing her friend through this. And possibly kicking some ass once she finds out who has done this to her

friend. But for now, she waits. She waits for Greta to come to her.

In Greta's sleep, she is haunted by nightmares. She sees the married man standing above her in the alley way, watching as these men rape her. Wet cement falling from a rusty pipeline on the nearby building, falls right into her mouth flooding it and drying so quickly, locking her screams under it. She looks to her married love for help, but he just turns his back on her and walks away. Greta wakes up crying. She sits there on the couch as the daylight from outside exposes her face to her own feelings of shame and weakness. All she can hear other than her own sniffing is a high pitched ringing sound in her ears. Probably from a giant gash on the back of her head. She hadn't noticed the body pains until now. Her head about to explode from the noise. She struggles to go back to sleep but to no avail.

Dustin is still asleep in her bedroom when Greta makes her way to the bathroom. She searches the medicine cabinet and finds some sleeping pills. She takes out two and washes them down with some water from the sink facet. Desperate to make the ringing stop, she takes two more. She goes back to the couch and lies down. Watching the cloth from the nearby window dance

around in shadows against the ceiling of the room, she eventually passes out. Greta sleeps all day and into the night, Dustin checking in on her periodically.

What seems like days later, Greta wakes up. Groggy and dizzy. Dustin is in the kitchen making some food. The smell of breakfast for dinner, eggs and such, fill the air. This only makes Greta's stomach turn. The last thing she wants right now is food. She just wants to empty herself, of everything. Greta covers her nose.

"Sorry... I can open a window," Dustin says as she opens the nearby window.

A chill from the outside air fills the room instantly.

Greta stands up and goes to the window to look out. "I need you to do something for me, Dustin."

Dustin leans against the doorway to the kitchen, "Shoot."

Greta thinks for a moment, "Do you have a camera?"

Dustin goes to grab her cell phone, "I have this? I can take pictures with it?"

Greta closes the curtain to the window and strips out of her robe. She stands there naked in

front of Dustin. Her body covered in bruises and gashes. "I need you to take pictures of this."

Dustin nods in agreement. "Do you want me to get just the marks and bruises?"

Greta shakes her head, "No... I want you to get the whole thing. Me. All of me."

Dustin waits a moment, then turns on her phone and starts to take some snap shots.

Two hundred photos. Two hundred photos of Greta's nude white skin, and in some places, bruised and dried bloodied areas. Her swollen vagina that had been torn into. Her ass, still bleeding a little around the hole. Her neck with red marks and hand prints still visible around it. Her hair falling out in places where it had been pulled too hard by the fists full. Glass cuts on her wrists and ingrained gravel still stuck in the wounds. Neither of them made a sound through this session. There was nothing to say, it was all mapped out over her body. Dustin could feel the terror of Greta's experience the more Greta shared her body with her. Once the last shot was taken, Greta covers her face. She begins to sob through what seems to be hyperventilation. Dustin moves close to her and wraps her arms around her exposed body.

But Greta pushes away, "No... I don't want to be touched right now." She throws the robe back on and goes to the bathroom. She locks herself in the bathroom for an hour.

Dustin goes to the outside of the bathroom door and sits with her back up against it.

Greta is inside doing the same. "It was the skinhead guy. The one from the other day. I don't know who the others were. It was dark... and it all... happened so suddenly, she confesses as Dustin listens in.

You can see the anger on Dustin's face growing.

"I... lied to you... I told you I was going to do some photos that night... I wasn't... I was going to meet up with him. The married man. We met at a hotel. We had sex. He left. I walked home after that. That's when it happened."

Dustin looks down at her hands and starts to bite at a hangnail for a moment before confessing, "I lied to you too."

Greta tiredly laughs, "I know."

A silence befalls them.

Greta begins to speak again from the other side of the bathroom door, "I won't do that again... I promise."

Dustin wishes she could say the same but can't, not at first anyway. But when she hears Greta trying to muzzle her tears from beyond the door, her heart falls, "I won't lie to you again either, she says in a breath. But instead of a release, she only feels a tight knot of fear in her chest.

"Dustin?" Greta lifts her head up and stops crying.

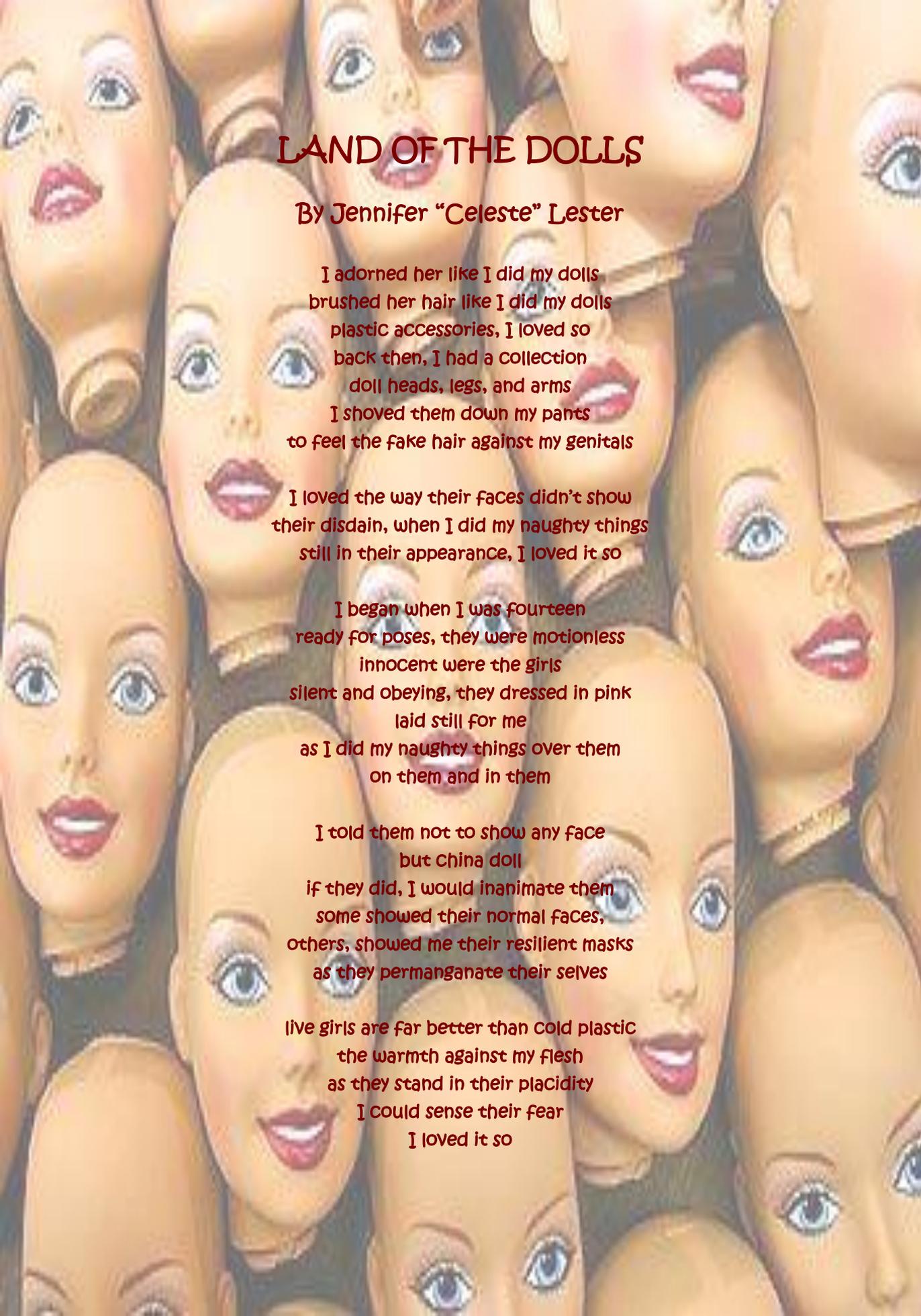
"Yeah?" Dustin responds.

"I need to use the phone."

Dustin nods and gets up to retrieve her phone. The bathroom door opens a crack and the phone is slipped through.

Dustin is back in the kitchen as Greta sits in the bathroom contemplating calling her married man. Though she knows that it might turn out to be a bad idea, running to him in her state at the risk of being turned away, she dials anyway. There is no answer but the voice mail. Greta hesitates a little with her voice, "Hey... it's me. Ummm... I really need to talk to you." She grabs her head and closes her eyes, telling herself not to cry again. She smacks her face a little to pull herself out of it. "I really need you right now. I... I am staying at a friend's... the number is probably on your caller ID. Call me back, please... Ummm... OK... bye." Greta hangs up. But he never calls back.





LAND OF THE DOLLS

By Jennifer "Celeste" Lester

I adorned her like I did my dolls
brushed her hair like I did my dolls
plastic accessories, I loved so
back then, I had a collection
doll heads, legs, and arms
I shoved them down my pants
to feel the fake hair against my genitals

I loved the way their faces didn't show
their disdain, when I did my naughty things
still in their appearance, I loved it so

I began when I was fourteen
ready for poses, they were motionless
innocent were the girls
silent and obeying, they dressed in pink
laid still for me
as I did my naughty things over them
on them and in them

I told them not to show any face
but china doll
if they did, I would inanimate them
some showed their normal faces,
others, showed me their resilient masks
as they permanganate their selves

live girls are far better than cold plastic
the warmth against my flesh
as they stand in their placidity
I could sense their fear
I loved it so

MI CASA ES SU CASA

By John Barrymore

I was alone in my apartment, enjoying candlelight, Beethoven, and the solitude of the wee morning hours, when I heard it: "Get out of here, you motherfuckers!" followed by the sound of a Dresden pitcher smashing against the wall. "Uh-oh," I thought, "it's that time again." The source of the disturbance was the apartment immediately adjacent to mine; my father's residence. The old man was screaming at his ghosts again.

After several years of abject poverty, my father and I were enjoying a greatly improved standard of living supported by selling off the Barrymorabelia we had purloined from my recently deceased grandmother's estate. There was literally a ton of shit. Georgian silver, first editions, incunabula and illuminations, Czarist Russian goblets, furniture from Versailles, Louis XV and others, china and porcelain by such manufacturers as Meisen, Dresden, Beleek, pre-war Japanese, ancient Chinese,

Lalique crystal, etc. Family treasures of every description. What we weren't selling or giving away, Dad was breaking up.

We were both one or two steps away from shopping-cart status when we came into this windfall. It wasn't a fortune, but a tidy enough sum to enable both of us to establish respectable lodgings. We rented adjacent apartments, numbers 110 and 111, at 8440 Sunset Boulevard. It was one of those huge concrete monstrosities, formerly the Breymer Towers, and these days the site of the chic Hotel Mondrian.

My father called it Cell Block Twenty One. And so there we were comfortably ensconced, our front doors but fifteen feet apart off the common corridor, yet definitely two separate residences. We had peacefully coexisted for several weeks, suffering only a few minor border skirmishes, when Dad's trouble with the ghosts began.

We were both doing a lot of speed in those days, the major difference being that Dad would wash his Desoxyn down with room-temperature tequila, while I would chase mine with ice-cold vodka. I was drinking about as much as he was, and doing twice as much speed. But try as I may, I couldn't seem to get as twisted up as he could. At any rate, I never saw the ghosts.

They sure bothered the old man, though, and I could tell from the sounds of shattering glass and crunching furniture coming from his pad that it was going to be a long night, or rather morning. I decided the only sane course of action was to pull back as far as possible from the combat zone to avoid the physical and psychic shrapnel that would be flying around for the duration of the battle. I left the building, sneaking by Dad's open door commando-style, and walked over to Ben Frank's to see if there were any other refugees desperate enough to brave food poisoning at 4:15 on this lovely morning.

There were only a few customers, a booth full of black pimps waiting for their girls, a couple of

narcoleptics nodding into their coffee, and the waitress who had been there since The Creation. I had a cup of coffee and walked home. By the time I got back, the door to apartment 110 was closed and all was quiet. Dad had either repelled the invaders, reestablished domestic security and/or passed out cold; or else he had suddenly "regained his senses" and might be preparing a late snack. Anything was possible, but it really didn't matter, since he would have no recollection of the freak-out the next day.

So it went for the next several months. There was a great deal of traffic in those days to, from, and between our respective apartments. Dad had a circle of cronies he would regularly hold court with. I referred to them as the Old Men's Catholic Association. And I had a pretty steady stream of young ladies coming and going from my pad. So while I spent many hours in my apartment playing the guitar or piano, reading Shakespeare or poetry to some young lady or other in an effort to get into her pants, Dad would hold his Court of Fools next door. Whenever he got bored, or whenever his

audience started to wane, he would throw a “psychotic episode” which would totally clear his apartment of all unwanted guests in a matter of seconds. Inevitably, he would then walk down the hall to my crib “just as sane as could be” to see if he could wreak just a little more havoc with my life before he retired for the night. Maybe even catch me with some impressionable young “actress” he could terrorize.

Don’t get me wrong; the “psychotic episodes” Dad would throw to get rid of the company were simply his flair for the dramatic. They had nothing to do with his battles with the ghosts. Those were *serious*.

Sometime during our residence there, 8440 Sunset Boulevard was purchased by Ashkenazy Properties. They had big plans to turn it into the lucrative Hotel Mondrian, and they just loved Dad. His screaming and breaking furniture and priceless porcelain at all hours of the night and morning with all his doors and windows open was evicting tenants from the building faster than they could ever hope to. It was all getting to be too much for

me, though, so I decided it was time to burn this camp and move on. Like most of the other tenants, I just had to get away from Dad.

Please don’t misunderstand. I love my father. I even love his, well, eccentricities. But some things are best loved in minute doses, or from a reasonable distance.

I moved two blocks away to a building on Harper called the “Casa Real.” It was the seediest building in West Hollywood, straight out of a Raymond Chandler novel. Full of dope fiends; the kind of place where when someone moves out it’s usually in a zippered plastic bag. But what the hell it was mine, and it was relatively peaceful. Two blocks was too far for Dad to walk just to terrorize me.

I was there about a month when John Donovan, the retired mortician who managed the building said to me, “I have a nice surprise for you. I rented the apartment next door to yours to your father.”



NIL BY MOUTH

By Claudia Bellocq

Photo © Thomas Evans

Nil by Mouth I

She sat picking off the bits of dried blood from around her eyes. There were other parts of her filled with tiny rivers of caked-on blood; she was anxious about tugging at those because there were numerous scars and wounds embedded within them that she had: a) no desire to rip open and: b) that made her feel

sick to discover up close. She could not speak about herself. Her face felt mask-like, frozen, in limbo. She smiled, through a full set of not yet finished teeth and sighed; would she ever be able to speak freely again? Nil by Mouth.

Her bondage was complete. Theft, prostitution, drugs, theft again, escape, capture, escape again. Recovery. Nil by mouth.

A slight woman of immense stature in other ways, she was strong, capable, determined. She allowed little to touch her and few of her friends really understood her. Of those who did, her appreciation of them was enormous; unspoken though. Nil by mouth.

Lately she was getting better and drip-feeding a small rivulet of recognition to both herself and to those she cared for but it wasn't easy. She drifted into remembering...

"If you're gonna be my woman, there's three things you need to know. First you never question me about anything I do. Second, you never chat my business with anyone, under any circumstances, and third, you never answer or ask any questions about yourself, me or our life together. Is that clear?"

She'd been puzzled... "yes" she'd responded in tiny words that meant nothing at the time. Slowly, her ability to make the normal introductory small-talk required in most social situations diminished. "What do you do?"... "oh, this and that," she would reply vaguely. "Where do you live?" "Oh you know, here and there," she would say, terrified of revealing too much. Eventually, tired of dull conversation, people stopped asking. Nil by mouth.

She had come to imagine any question of a basic nature to be too private or too intrusive to be spoken aloud, even if she was only asking "so how long have you lived in London then?" and her ability to communicate was vanishing. Now she sat here pondering the irony of turning herself inside out, at least that's how she felt in this precise moment, and once again losing herself and the power of speech.

The sign over her bed had read 'Nil by Mouth' and had been scrawled in broad marker pen on a rudimentary card, duplicated and taped to the door. She'd noticed it on her way down. Blue gown fastened at the back, all jewellery removed, her own clothing and underwear removed and replaced with hospital issue. It reminded her of her brother's wedding where she had had been stripped of her personal identity in order to be re-shaped as the perfect bridesmaid.

"Please don't henna your hair again before the wedding!" her brother had asked. "C doesn't like it, it clashes with the dresses and she's gone to a lot of trouble to co-ordinate this day."

Perfume (Calvin Klein) sprayed delicately onto the wrists, nape of neck and décolletage of all three of us; pearls replacing silver. Even the fucking underwear taken and swapped. Barbie.

"Hello, nice to meet you... it's a pleasure, yes of course I'm proud, yes, of course I'll be next." She ripped that fucking dress off not one second before she was allowed and jumped up and down on the hotel bed, screaming wildly. Censored. Nil by mouth.

Rules everywhere. Sod that for a game of soldiers. People don't take kindly to opinionated women. "Ooh, I bet you're a handful" ... yeah whatever.

She stared deep into the mirror she held and felt as if someone had taken her entire body and turned it inside out. The skin was facing inwards, all of her organs were hanging crudely on the outside of her; exposed, vulnerable. 'Who. Am. I?' she'd asked herself... 'who the fuck am I?'

She was waiting to re-create herself and was presently in the cocoon phase of the metamorphosis. 'Don't push it,' she counselled herself; 'just be.' Don't speak too soon. Nil by mouth. Good advice. She would scribble it onto a piece of card and tape it to the back on her door again as a reminder, for the time being at least, until things made sense. Nil by Mouth.

Nil by Mouth II

There was a numb pain in her right buttock, descending down

the length of her thigh. It pulled like a dead weight on her leg whenever she woke in the night, reminding her of the point of entry of the morphine injection, long since dissipated through her system.

There were sticky grey rings of tacky plaster strategically placed around her torso: One on the arch of her foot (saline drip), one on the rear upper shoulder (monitoring pad), two on the front of her chest (various pieces of medical equipment), and a pin prick bruise on the back of her hand from a secondary point of entry (general anaesthetic). Her eyes were dry and stinging, her face numb and swollen, her body blocked up with all manner of chemical cocktails.

Awake again..... awake again..... dancing in a strange rhythm, finding pace in a new beat. Night time becomes her; writing is her lifeline. It's a dreamlike distant one but it works still... an old friend calling in the distance..... "helloooooooooo, helloooooooooo. Why don't you answer me?"

No words emerge. Nil by.....

She imagines herself tall, six foot maybe, and Amazonian. In fact she is small and buzzing like a fly. Self composed or decomposing? She's not sure which, when, why or how. Opiate like visions flash before

her imagination. 'Ha! I'm so tall' she reminds herself. Tall women are taken seriously. Short women have to fight that much harder. 'I'm at least a foot taller now and no-one messes with me. They can't see me though... I hover above the heads of everyone... I wonder what's wrong?'

She sighs. Everything stings, burns or calls out to her begging attention. Sleep is really not an option. Drifting in and out. Imagining a cocktail of body-removing drugs. One to make my head disappear, one to make my bones liquid, one to rest my nerves, one to fast-forward time. Pink sweeties, blue sweeties, multi-coloured pretty things, all Sweeny Todd candy. You know, you go for something sweet like a haircut and come out with your throat cut. Open wide and swallow dear...

She does.

She likes the release from pain. She loves the absorption into space and nothingness.

There's something important going on about lessons, the past and love. There's something important going on about unconditional love. She can't work it out. She has to go too far back. Small; daddy loves you when you're quiet and clever and good. Small; mummy loves you

when you don't rock the boat too much because it's not a very sea worthy boat that the family set sail in. Small; brother loves you when you're ordinary. Bigger; lovers love you when you put out, shut up, make up and look good. Lovers love you when you bring in the money. Lovers love you when you enhance their own sense of themselves, a trophy. This lover loves you exactly as you are, naked, seen, in the raw, anything, everything. Fuck! There's a big hole required to take that one in. She feels herself in that cell-like state again, only this time the cell is anchored somewhere. She has no idea where.

She fights against the hand that holds her; wrestles with the change. The drugs soothe her. She understands them. Love terrifies her. She doesn't trust it.

She likes the bruise on her ass where the morphine injection entered her system. The memory comforts her.

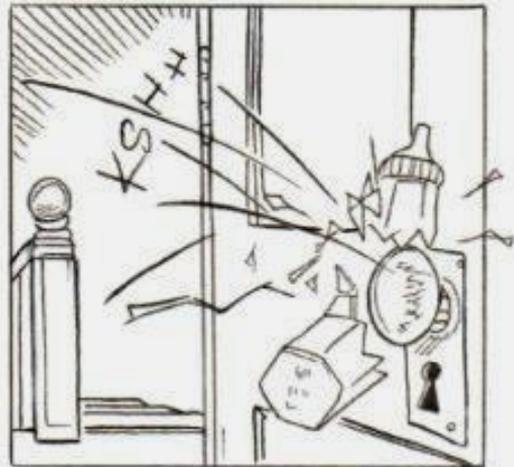
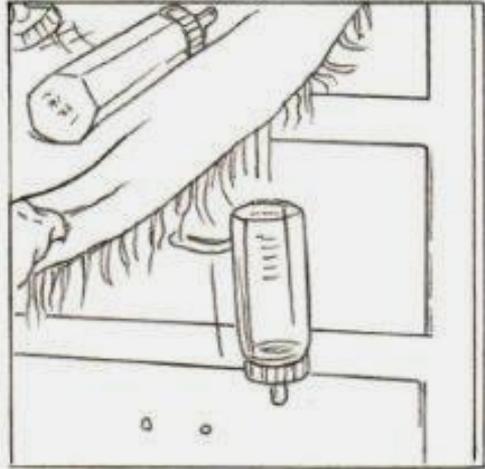
She thinks: 'this is gonna be a long haul to the finish.'

Sighs.

Exit stage left.

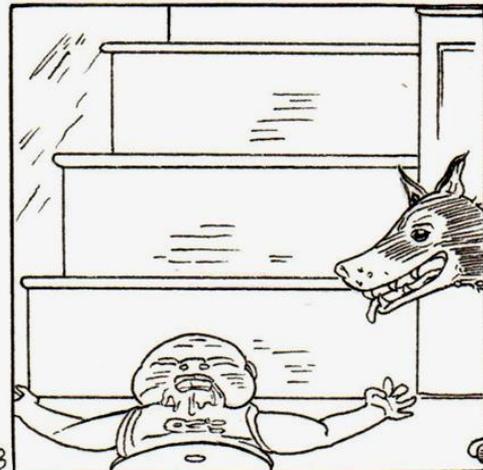
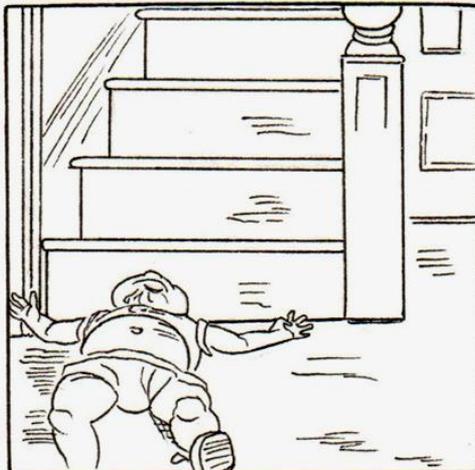
Prepare for Scene II

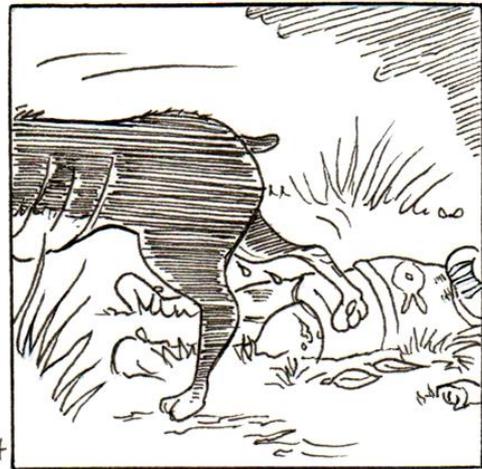
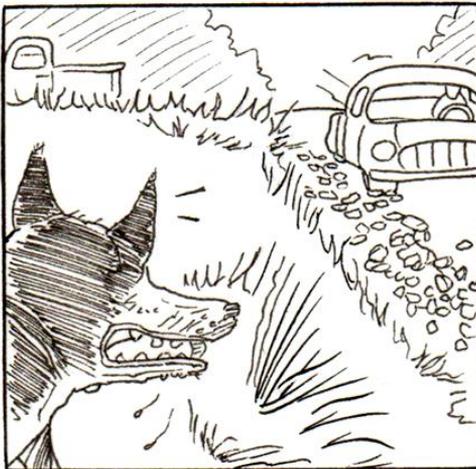
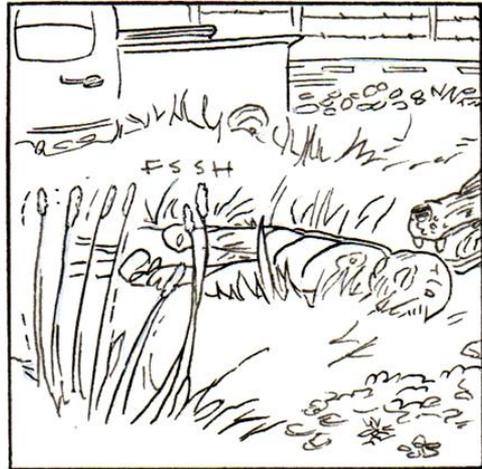
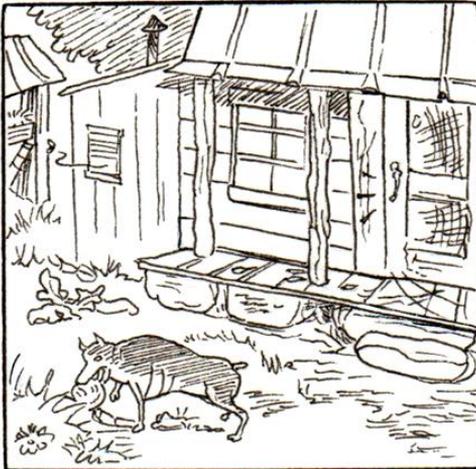
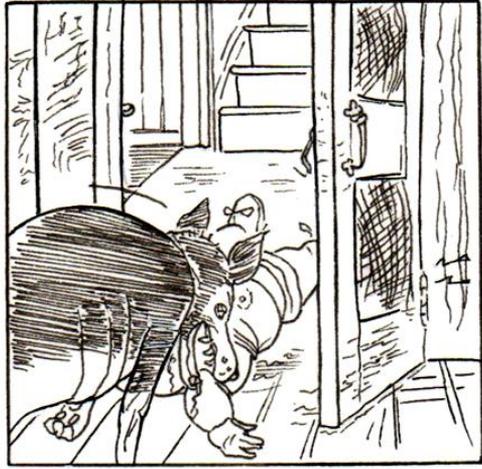
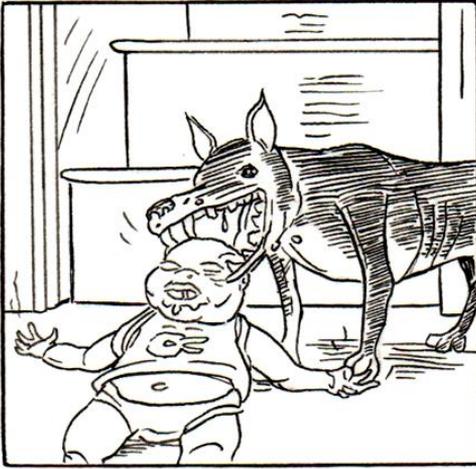
THE USUAL By Rick Grimes

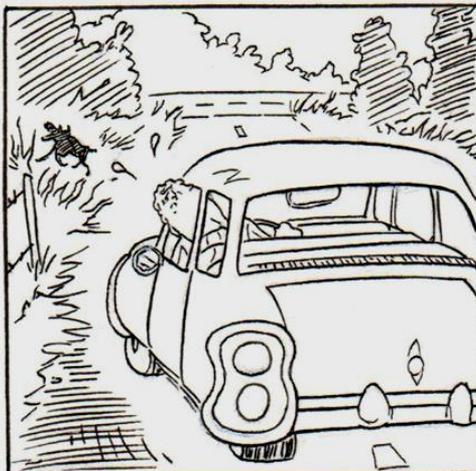
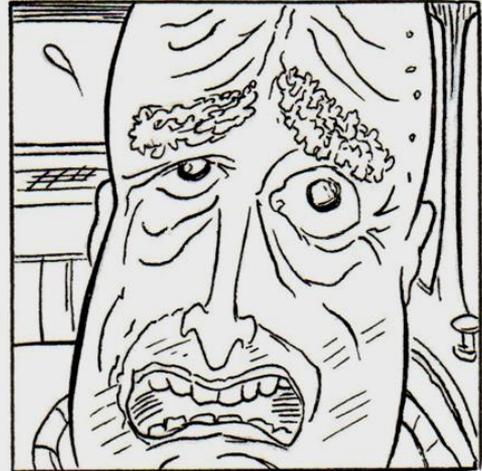


the usual









MUST HAVE SPECIAL TALENT

By Dirty Honky



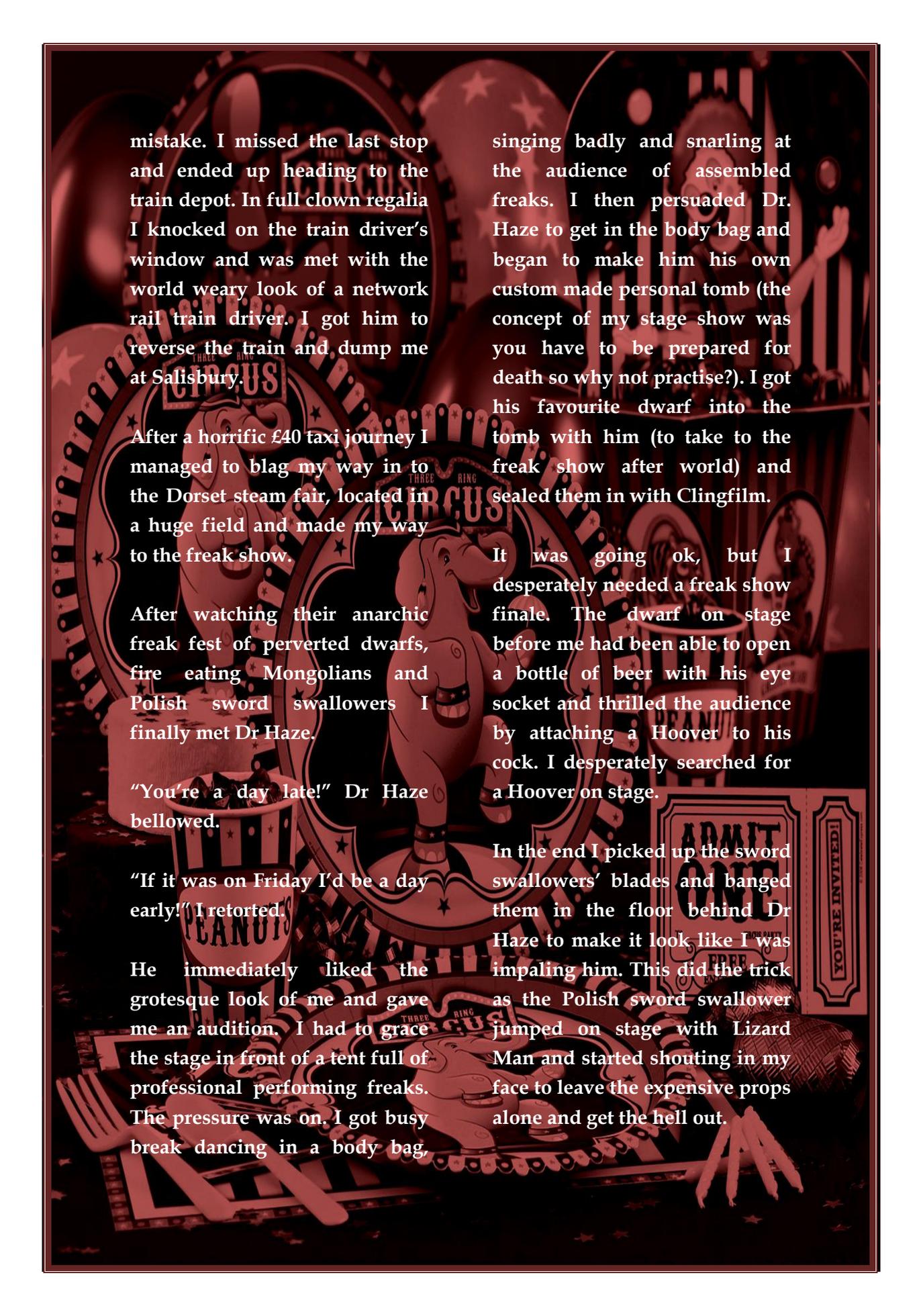
Performance art doesn't pay, unless you're second name is McCarthy or Abramovic. Paul McCarthy said he gave up live performance as there was no money in it and he was worried about his psychological state.

I know what he means. I have spent five years developing my alter-ego pig nosed clown Dirty Honky from an obsession with graffiti art, Leigh Bowery and the punk street hustling

prostitute Valerie Solanas, as portrayed by Lili Taylor in the film *I Shot Andy Warhol*. Honky has never paid the bills (he is a hobo grotesque), which is why I left the art circuit to whore him out in the wide world and earn his keep.

The actors and entertainers section in the Jobcentre always have an excellent variety of jobs on offer, which is handy for a pig-nosed clown such as my alter ego, Dirty Honky. In between jobs for sumo wrestlers and adult web cam models (must be comfortable with nudity), I spotted an audition for Dr Haze's Freak Show, down in the depths of Dorset. 'Must have special talent', the advert read and I jumped at the chance. Well nearly. The deadline for the job had passed. I was a day late, but still went, thinking they could only say no.

It was a long train journey from London so I decided to get changed in the toilet. This was a



mistake. I missed the last stop and ended up heading to the train depot. In full clown regalia I knocked on the train driver's window and was met with the world weary look of a network rail train driver. I got him to reverse the train and dump me at Salisbury.

After a horrific £40 taxi journey I managed to blag my way in to the Dorset steam fair, located in a huge field and made my way to the freak show.

After watching their anarchic freak fest of perverted dwarfs, fire eating Mongolians and Polish sword swallows I finally met Dr Haze.

"You're a day late!" Dr Haze bellowed.

"If it was on Friday I'd be a day early!" I retorted.

He immediately liked the grotesque look of me and gave me an audition. I had to grace the stage in front of a tent full of professional performing freaks. The pressure was on. I got busy break dancing in a body bag,

singing badly and snarling at the audience of assembled freaks. I then persuaded Dr. Haze to get in the body bag and began to make him his own custom made personal tomb (the concept of my stage show was you have to be prepared for death so why not practise?). I got his favourite dwarf into the tomb with him (to take to the freak show after world) and sealed them in with Clingfilm.

It was going ok, but I desperately needed a freak show finale. The dwarf on stage before me had been able to open a bottle of beer with his eye socket and thrilled the audience by attaching a Hoover to his cock. I desperately searched for a Hoover on stage.

In the end I picked up the sword swallows' blades and banged them in the floor behind Dr Haze to make it look like I was impaling him. This did the trick as the Polish sword swallower jumped on stage with Lizard Man and started shouting in my face to leave the expensive props alone and get the hell out.

I was thrown off stage. The audition was over. I had failed miserably. Brilliant!

I asked Dr Haze for some feedback, and like Simon Cowell, the original freak show ringmaster, he gave it to me straight. I didn't have a special talent, or an end product they could use. I was a washed up, pathetic excuse for a freak.

I walked out feeling wretched and humiliated. The Polish sword swallower waved a bacon kebab in my direction as I left.

The humiliation continued outside as a gang of rural, hoodie wearing teenagers threatened to cover me with ketchup from a huge squeeze bottle. I desperately needed cover. I stood next to a family with a pram thinking the bumpkin thugs wouldn't risk it. They did. They let me have a huge blast of ketchup with mustard, which also hit the pram. My human shield pushed me away in disgust, to receive a

second blast. I was a walking hotdog.

My luck continued as there was a fatality on the only road to the train station. Luckily a taxi driver dropped me in Poole for another £35. During the journey he opened up to me and told me he had lost both his legs in a hideous lorry accident.

I got back at midnight. The trip to the freak show had cost me £100 and Dr Haze hadn't called.



SCENES FROM IMAGINARY FILMS:

I – REFINING FIRE

By David Gionffrido

*Film has been the dominant medium in American culture since at least the mid-1960s. In the U.S., there are even isolated tribes of middle-aged men who communicate only in movie quotes (“But it looks good on you!” “Show me the money!”) Much of our lives are spent in thrall to the filmmakers and their actors. But I find there are very few movies memorable from beginning to end. What stays with me are the indelible scenes, the important images: that last, long tracking shot in **Citizen Kane**; Michael Madsen’s **Reservoir Dogs** torture dance; Catherine Deneuve inching down the corridor of hands in **Repulsion**; Cybill Shepherd’s **Last Picture Show** diving-board striptease. These pictures are the building blocks of post-modern consciousness. Like family snapshots found in a junk drawer, these moments let us reconstruct entire stories, eras, lives. Some of us are all thumbs with the camera, however, so we are left to play with their literary equivalents. My scenes aren’t meant to be beginnings, middles or ends. Consider my humble offerings a parlor game, simple party favors inviting you to dream your own stories, to invent new rewards, conflicts and tribulations for these very malleable characters. Have fun...*

INT. VILLA BORGHESE, ROME -- DAYTIME

AVEDON and CILLA wander lazily through an opulent gallery adorned with sculpture. Cilla fusses with a handful of picture postcards.

CILLA

You’re making a lot of funny old-man noises today.

AVEDON

That’s because I must be a funny old man.

They sit on a bench, admiring Bernini's statue of *Hades and Persephone*, and marking the tourists who mill past or pause contemplatively before it. A long, silent moment passes.

AVEDON

So, what do you think?

CILLA

About...?

AVEDON

My proposal. It won't stay open forever.

Cilla has the look of one who wishes to change the subject. Once it becomes clear she can not, her features settle into a mask of inner struggle. She strains for diplomatic words.

CILLA

It's wonderfully tempting. Really, it is. Maybe too tempting to resist.

AVEDON

Then don't. (A pause.) This is my game, after all.

Outside, the setting autumn sun is throwing long shadows over the grounds. A group of small children chase each other noisily. Inside, a docent gives his watch an impatient, showy glare.

AVEDON

Look at that guy. He can't wait to go home. The treasures of the ages all around him and all he can think about is his belly. You have to laugh.

CILLA

You're going to think me awfully old-fashioned, but...I can't get comfortable with the idea of *evil*, making peace with it. It makes me cold all over.

Avedon rolls his eyes as if encountering a familiar objection. Agitated, he leans into Cilla and speaks affectionately, but with sharp emphasis.

AVEDON

I like you, Drusilla, I really do. I picked you out right away. And I think you like me. So why do you put me in the position of treating you like a child? Cilla, you must think of things like we do, like *he* does. Evil is only nature granting permission for things to run logically. Evil is strength, direction. Reason. You know who smears values and buzzwords all over it? The weak. The inept. The borrowed-timers.

CILLA

So that's what it's all about? Efficiency? Survival of the fittest? Nothing else? Pretty banal.

Avedon composes himself, as if for a final assault.

AVEDON

Okay, I'm going to tell you something about evil. You know what evil is? (He gestures toward the statue, toward Hades' hand on Persephone's thigh.) Right there. Those fingers pressing into that flesh. Digging. Most famous fingers in art. That there is a *rape*. A kidnapping. Imagine if that were real. There would be bruises, fingerprints, for Christ's sake. Blood, maybe. They would be taking crime

scene photos to use in court. But you could sit on this bench all day long and watch elegant gentlemen – *connoisseurs* -- holding forth, impressing their friends, by showing off those fingers. The subtlety, the smoothness of the little valleys of flesh. It never fails. And why? Because everything of great beauty has some evil, some nastiness or cruelty, behind it. Evil begets beauty. Always has.

Cilla laughs.

CILLA

“Begets.” I love that. “Begets...”

AVEDON

Yeah, well, it’s true. Those guys knew all about evil. Could you carve *that* unless you had enacted that scene over and over in your mind? Maybe in person, even. Unless you knew how the flesh would give? How the shadows would fall? Let me tell you about this guy. You know what kind of a guy Bernini was? He was so upset about losing his mistress, he threw acid on her face. Some guy. He didn’t even have the nerve to do it himself. Sent his manservant to do it. Can you imagine? Later, he became a family man and went to church every day. Big deal. All of them were bent that way. Honest. Lippi. 50 years old, seduced a 21-year old novice who was posing for the Virgin Mary! Cellini. Multiple killer. Caravaggio. Murdered a man over a tennis game. Just ask me about Caravaggio. We might still be here tomorrow.

They walk silently into the next gallery, toward Bernini’s *Apollo and Daphne*.

AVEDON

Here. Another rape. This time she gets away, though. If you call turning into a tree “getting away.” I always find these places a little like those torture-dungeon wax museums. Look at any of these great works long enough and you’ll start to feel your heart pounding, like there’s something behind you, gaining on you. Something...magnetic and unwholesome. Makes people crazy. Stendhal’s Syndrome, they call it. That’s evil, Angel. Evil is that little kick that makes man forget himself. Makes him decide to take a run at God. Makes him *create*.

The galleries start to empty, as the guard announces closing time.

AVEDON

If you want to know the real secret, Heaven and Hell aren’t all that different. One is about longing and one is about stasis. A creator is going to be miserable in Heaven and a thinker is going to suffer in Hell. Ask Rodin. He figured it out.

CILLA

So, what does that have to do with me? With us?

AVEDON

I think, everything. That’s what I think.

Cilla looks uneasy, as Avedon gently takes her arm at the elbow and leads her out. They dissolve into the exiting crowd.



DOSE

By Ron Garmon

"The street name for this hellish drug is "Trip Kitty," confirmed DEA Czar Rudolph Giuliani at a feisty press conference on Saturday. "It combines the effects of ketamine, a well-known party drug popular among degenerates, with psilocin, a psychoactive hallucinogenic euphoric narcotic supposed by hippies and other idiots to induce visions." The nation's new top drug cop was clearly peaking and went at the looming specter of a hallucinoterrorist threat with oldtimey staccato gusto- "We're talking about a chemically dangerous, highly illegal unknown substance that can be introduced anywhere into the environment, even as an aerosol spray, and I think it's time, long past, far, far past time," paused Giuliani, the chief's hand dramatically clawing air before him as if groping through mist, "For the federal government to take decisive, punitive action against the bums and losers and creeps who'd mastermind a thing like this. I'm canceling all leaves until I have these bastards by the heels!" The atmosphere was unaccustomedly rowdy and loose for an official event, with the famed crimefighter at one point dangling an imaginary noose over his neck and appearing to gag. "Hang 'em high!" Rudy roared, eyes on fire.

Newsweek, 6/20/13 - "Who'll Take the Next Trip?"

The show was nearly the same every time, so the whole process was its own mini-hallucination itself, for all the mindfulness with which the host went about the last few minutes until air. The all-live format forced on him by execs nervous at ever-shriller competition meant less than nothing to the result, since the structure scarcely varied and *that* was what his 3.5 million nightly viewers wanted. That and the *Talent*, which was him. Or so he decided long ago, back when he was driving a cab, that people craved structure, *order*, for all the bigmouths at Harvard yelled against it. Even these thoughts were a bit stale, having bounced many a time through that high and telegenic dome as the countdown to Magic Time began, never leaving any bump of understanding within.

Under such circumstances, very minor deviations from routine can seem merry, almost frolicsome. Like that strange sweet fragrance hanging in the studio air, the one Bill noticed just as the famous heavy theme music began to play him in.

"Hello, FOX News viewers, and God bless America on this 724th Day of U.S. hostages in Caracas,"

Bill began, scarcely bothering to look to the playback monitor at that familiar Gaelic dimple his tight smile made, the one Mom loved, "Tonight on *The O'Reilly Factor*, we again take on the Culture War and President Palin's seeming reluctance to come through on her campaign promises to rid our nation of domestic terrorists." "We at *The Factor*," he began imperially, suddenly envisioning his audience of 3.5 million versions of him- all races, colors, male and female alike, all squinting at the plasma screen, rapt, clarified, and considerable more stunted in stature than his own 6'4, "Believe the single worst problem confronting America today isn't that madman Chavez's holding of U.S. embassy personnel and oil workers and not the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Arizona- it's the rot from within who are the moral equivalent of the terrorists who kill our boys an' girls in uniform. I'm talking about actors and writers and pop musicians and *freaks* who spraypaint nutty far left slogans on every vertical surface in Manhattan an' West L.A. an' all upendown Collins Avenue in Miami." "Cue th' goddamned tape!" Bill suddenly yelled, startling the soundman.

Onscreen, the folks at home were treated to video footage of the previous night's demonstrations- a jerky patchwork of flashmob youth, their faces obscured, on

the usual rampage with spraycans and Molotovs. The camera froze on one burly kid, pockets dripping with stolen cash and resplendent in too-small Iron Maiden tee and a rubber Bill O'Reilly mask. This giddy punk turned an upraised middle finger to the camera and began wriggling it in an obscene manner.

"*There ya go!*" barked Bill, "All the hipster crud an' slackers an' dopers with their pierced noses an' rivets bolted into their faces an' abortions an' Starbucks!" Bill's own face, shrunk to the bottom left quarter of the screen, was yet gigantic in anger. In the near background, a Starbucks Coffee could plainly be seen to burn, the yellow flicker making the kid's rubber mask look startlingly jaundiced. "*This is the social end result of liberal coddling of punks and neer-dowells- kids giving America's News Channel the stinkfinger on national television.*" Bill paused, essayed an effort to look startled that registered as incipient psychosis to some viewers. "*No respect for authority!*" he cried, pounding the table, "*For achievement!* Last night, the west half of Wilshire Boulevard burned down clear to Beverly Hills, with palm trees burning like matches and Mercedes-Benzes blowing up! *Giant balls of fire!*" Bill liked the sound of those words as they peeled off his lips

and began to bounce around the control room and so drawled them out in a slurred parody of his well-loved tough-guy enunciation, all the while working himself up to a familiar rant. Bill's face suddenly expanded to fill the screen and he was, as they say, rolling.

"Now you know, on *The Factor*," Bill began, imagining how wounded his audience was and hurting along with them, "We sympathize with the problem of disaffected and sexy young people and only occasionally bring them on for a talking-to, usually during Sweeps Week." Bill's attempt to suffuse his face with kindly indulgence later wound up on tee-shirts itself and the lewd wink that followed assisted one elderly male viewer in Valdosta, Georgia to a fatal coronary, "But this kinda behavior is not only diseased, but represents a *threat* our new president is *loath* to act against! The last president was weak an' a liberal an' half his Cabinet wound up in Gitmo *an' I put 'em there!*" Bill's glare was heroic, triumphant- not even Winchell knew such power! - and he felt himself beginning to expand heroically, overflowing the frame, cracking through the building and blotting all the lights on old Broadway. He turned benignly to the live caller buttons, stabbing at them distractedly for a moment,

muttering, "We'll take our first caller, um..." Bill squinted at the prompter for ten seconds, watching the letters smear and deliquesce, "Charlie from Cedar Bluff, Virginia."

"Hey, just want kinda drugs you on, man?" The voice was thickly Appalachian, so Bill had trouble judging the earnestness of the question.

"*Who let this redneck on?*" Bill was apoplectic. Are they fucking *high* in the control room or what?

"I'd sure be careful who you call a "redneck," asshole," the caller continued, with no trace of upset in the jocular monotone, "Lessin' you want a doggone Remington 12-gauge crammed up your hind end."

Bill's face, already puce, purpled deeper still. "The motherfucking *nerve!*" he screeched, "The trouble with bums like you is no ambition! Instead of working hard and playing by the rules, you call in here with your Jethro Bodine act and start making *terrorist! Threats!* Against the most-watched journalist in America!"

"I'm talkin' damn Model 870 Wingmaster pump action and sawed off a pussy hair over legal barrel length," the caller informed him cheerily, "I'm a peace lovin' man, but know me

where some bear grease is *and* that New York City, too, so you talk polite on this telephone.”

Bill’s wrath was now gargantuan. “This has *gotta* be fuckin’ Sacha Baron Cohen!” he shouted, punching the console to disconnect the caller. “This is what I’m talking about!” he snarled in triumph, jumping atop his desk and pointing down at the camera, a sweating and trembling Jeremiah unloading a prepaid freight of doom. The cameraman had the presence of mind to tilt the lens upward, catching O’Reilly nimbused by a florescent ceiling light, one of those accidental conjuring tricks that would’ve won the then-unconscious operator an Emmy had they had them that year at all.

“Tonight’s Talking Points Memo is,” the great man bellowed into the microphone now freshly popped from his shirt and now nestled between his Bruno Magli’d feet like loosened tick. “I believe th’ day is about to come when ordinary, decent, boring people will rise up to reclaim America,” the host intoned, his clarion voice resounding tinily in living rooms across that favored land, “No hippies! No hillbillies! No minorities begging for handouts! No trendy people with exciting lives an’ weird affections an’ un-American affiliations! No jobless scum clogging our streets

with crusted blood on their faces! No crazy people wanderin’ burned out on drugs an’ th’ filthy insanity of th’ media an’ finally, Bill paused, “No-o-ho more payoffs to fat ugly counterhelp at Gristedes tellin’ me I can’t say the word “cunt” without her callin’ the Village Voice!”

“Fuck PC,” he spat for good measure. “And that’s Tonight’s Memo.”

Back in the Green Room, no one seemed to care. Michael Moore was splitting a doob with Brit Hume and Laura Ingram and Barney Frank were dancing close to music only they could hear. As dawns of new eras went, this one seemed pretty nice.

The foregoing is a work of science fiction parody and not meant to libel anyone alive and able to sue after the year 2013. Thanks, and grease 4 peace- RG



WHITE BLACK

By Chris Madoch

Image © Dan-Paul Flores

..the journals are in black and white. Hidden. His. He had thought ..ebony and ivory but rather disliked Paul McCartney for his overt ..mass appeal Jesus consciousness. Jealousy maybe.

..This entry: Idylls are dead. Last night I fought off watching porn. ..It made me remember once wanking so much that my foreskin ..bled. I don't think for one moment God was there to see it scab.

Near to heaven.

The view from the cathedral bell tower thrills the senses.

In the middle distance, rural activity as old as the hills.

The giving. The taking. The belly aching.

The living true.

A fatherly shepherd is at his sheep, driving them from pasture to pasture, with musical whistles and calls. The beautiful creatures show no signs of stress. He freshens their bedding, fills their water trough. And in the leaning shelter he offers them food and the human touch.

Its getting rare to see a man who cares to care as much.

As if in a painting to celebrate Christ, he cradles an abandoned lamb, fits him on the skin of one stillborn.

The dead lamb's mother, on the edge of madness, comes calling to her mangod. Awash with milk and wonder, she takes the strange lamb on.

*

Marcus Boscombe, 44, is frequently troubled by his mercurial ascent to power and responsibility, even though it makes enormous sense to others. He has made all the right moves, walked through a chequered hallway and found the right doors open.

Even the final rung of this ladder to the summit might be within his reach.

At six foot two the man is never belittled by costume or props.

His film star looks, mellifluous voice and a natural gift for communication that bridges all class and cultural divides, these are the things that have repeatedly catapulted him, head and shoulders, above less able aspirants. The Oxford University network has played its part- a double first class honours in Economics and Divinity is always florescent on the CV, regardless of the way it is word processed. A timeline of magical work placements and spotless references complete the picture. Being a white European, adept at chess, has proved no handicap.

..This entry: The church is stuffed with psychotic cunts.

His detractors, and in any institution there will always be detractors, have slyly labelled him a highly competitive strategist. And enemies there are, types who loathe board games.

But nothing of consequence has ever appeared in the debit column.

No wonder he worries.

*

Wren gave the city what remains of the present palace. One weathered end wall evidence of an early amputation. Three fifths of this fine stone residence, currently set up as administrative offices, the residue being a mixture of public and private space. The privacy itself being medieval, as it suits the various servants, *all* areas remaining liable to be infringed upon at any given moment.

This is an historical seat.

It could never be a home.

The apartment that Marcus now occupies is by any measure princely-cubed rooms with high ceilings, tall windows and inherited art. The décor leaden with gold and green highlights, something drummed up by a pupil of Pugin.

In the double cubed reception he has French windows opening onto a balcony of blood red geraniums that overlooks a vast lawn fringed by intensively nursed rose beds and the water meadows beyond.

The *invisible* ley lines are strikingly evident- the cathedral to conical hill, and in between the burial mounds of ancients. And like radii, the ancient trackways, their flattened grass blushed by under chalk.

..This entry: I cannot help but believe in alien intercourse with ..mankind throughout our true timeline.

Mists most mornings, giving mystery to the waterways.

Walks with swans and the ghosts of poetry.

Time to find words of reflection.

*

Boscombe is haunted in his study by stale books and fresh ideas. And the eyes of former incumbents taunt his *youth* and difference.

The ambience accuses.

There is conflict in Iraq.

Habituated soldiers killing as intended.

A centrist administration paying only lip service to spiritual concerns.

The roar of the established church reduced to a mewling.

Women in the churches skirts crying hallelujah. Their fans, a tribe of local pawns in twin sets and sensible shoes examining his ministry through hysterical myopia. Nouveau clerics drowning in a detritus of syringes, weaponry and racial abuse. Ethical investments.

The African fundamentalists ascendant.

The wealth of Mugabe versus the health of Zimbabwe. Aids an epidemic on the treacle continent.

The age of self, painting by numbers a delusional landscape.

Order being magicked out of hats by media bites.

Homophobia.

Romophobia.

The family being reinvented, cited as refuge.

Prostitution peddled as a hedge against poverty.

Child sex traded in the school yards, common as sweets.

America dominant, its rampant knights fucking the arse off a passive world.

..This entry: When Nietzsche said 'God is Dead' did he do so from a ..position of knowing what is was for there ever having been a God ..alive? The word fuck has grown more powerful than the word God ..and it is useful and describes something far more pleasurable.

The white phone, the phone of least priority rings, breaking his bleak chain of thought. It is a brusque secretary with advance warning of an approaching assistant. A dull prospect until she imparts a name.

As a spontaneous antidote to bleakness, a profound happiness awakes, a smile suddenly decorating his face. This is no ghost of a negligent philosophy. It is the day's true expectation realised, the long awaited return of someone dear.

The black queen, back in play.

Someone who missed the ritual enthronement.

Someone trusted.

*

Henry Washington Simbele will want to know all the gory details.

For starters, Marcus has repetitive strain injury in his right hand.

'You talk.' Henry offers, his travel weary self being swallowed by a green leather chesterfield, 'I'll listen without interrupting.'

'Right.' Marcus chooses the black phone to ring out. The black phone being the vehicle of formal and official communications. 'No calls, Rhiannon, and no visitations, not for an hour. Absolutely. Absolutely.'

'Should I lock the door?' he asks Henry.

'No. You must learn to trust your minions Marcus.'

'Yes. Of course. And Rhiannon is super, really. Devoted. She's a super minion, the Rottweiler of Cathedral Close.'

'Well then.'

'There's an album in preparation, a video being edited. I've never shaken so many eager hands. If they had asked me to record a single of 'The Lord Is My Shepherd.' I would not have been surprised. Anyway, look on the bright side, I'll be able to endlessly repeat myself far more than usual. And, as usual there was the press call. *Unusual* in point of fact, in that it *preceded*, on the schedule, time set aside for my devotions. That made me think how modern we had all become. There were too many of them there for my liking. And of course I was prepared for the usual bone of contention. The bone in question having been beefed up, made considerably meatier by recent events in North America. When will they ever learn. I have not changed my answer in twenty years so why expect me to change now. Still, I can see how difficult it must be for them. To be confronted, in the twenty first century, by celibacy in action, so to speak. To hear it spoken of in glowing terms as something cherished, something fulfilling. It must do their heads in. These guys, Henry, they are all serial wankers. They moved on from nocturnal emissions the minute they had one. As far as sexual matters go we lock horns like alien species. They will not, in a month of Sundays, believe I don't get off on the likes of Jordan or Robbie Williams or any of the many supposed genders in between. I am not gay, so far as I know. I am forty four, Henry, a virgin, still intacta, true. Yes it is true. And still it won't compute for them. Not for them. And not for the world. Most people seem to enjoy seeing me as some freak of nature got up in gold and jewels. They don't read newspapers, they read comics. They hear me preach on poverty and fairness and they miss the relevance- that I'm largely preaching to *them* about *them*. Then their sad minds wander from my mitre to my loins. They wonder how I deflect desires. How I deal with loneliness and longing.'

And so it went on, the painful unravelling of the great day's pyramid, until the polished pinnacle of it met the Aubusson carpet that graced the study floor. Bishop Boscombe brought himself to mother earth with a very human sigh, a sound that suggested he'd already had his fill of pre-eminence and ceremony.

One month into any job and the honeymoon is over.

The red telephone phone rang.

Calls of the highest priority only.

It was the County's senior policeman.

The authorities had a cathedral deacon in custody, on suicide watch. His wife hospitalised- not expected to live through the night. Two children,

twelve year old twins, a boy and a girl, separated and in care. The girl four months pregnant. The boy showing clear signs of cigarette burns and rectal abuse.

'Who else knows?'

'There's a media circus setting up camp as we speak. From where I am standing, your Grace, I can see a forest of satellite facilities.'

..This entry: Shit happens and the Almighty doesn't give a fuck.

After two years of studious discretion, the first ever images of Marcus and Henry together were shot as they negotiated the high tech gauntlet between their car and the police station. The bishop and his assistant in tandem, on an errand of mercy.

Offices no stranger to testosterone. Loud talk. Signs and secrets.

All the serendipity of law. Lock and key.

Safe seating. Poisonous coffee in extruded plastic.

Strange, the vision of John Braine got up in white- a one piece paper suit covering his nakedness. His presence blinding in a small room, uniformly grey. His blue eyes first fast and fearless, then slow and melancholy, then still and dead.

'Marcus.'

'John. This is my assistant Henry Simbele, a lawyer amongst other things.'

'A church lawyer?'

'Yes.'

'Well. The church of Christ can't help me now.'

'John..'

'No!' he screams, hands raised, terminating the audience, 'I am lost. And in a place where prayer and platitudes hold no sway.'

*

The twins' tutor, a small and balding man usually immersed in music, brought the problem to their head of year. It was a matter of private and public health. The headmaster, a mathematics specialist, brought the tale to an extraordinary meeting of the governing body. The governors followed the required procedure as far as was possible, there being no sub-section to the page on psycho-sexual disorders that fitted exactly.

No-one involved, from the fur collared do-gooders to the world weary politicians, would ever forget the steps needing to be taken when pupils are discovered collecting their faeces in paper parcels and storing them in their desks like lunch packs.

And later, deeper into the inquiry, those same pillars of the local community, whose prior concerns had been whether or not eleven year

olds understood place settings at table or the importance of being polite to the elderly, would need to offload cherished prejudices and rewire their outdated preconceptions- first year pupils at their comprehensive could very well be sexually active, drug taking, smoking, drinkers.

They could be parents.

They could be thieves.

They might even be blackmailers.

More than a few of them had already starred in more than a few pornographic films alongside various shameless adults including a twenty four stone policeman, a Pakistani social worker, a teacher from the local Catholic primary and a New Labour magistrate.

Following an express visit by the senior under-secretary from the Home office- chauffeur driven Rover, skirt suit, Mary Quant bob, the governing body and the whole of the staff including ancillary workers such as dinner ladies, cleaners and caretakers, were sworn to silence, made signatories to the State Secrets Act.

An immediate press blackout was put into place.

And, in a clinical damage limitation exercise, there would be a swathe of sackings and a show trial involving the Braine family.

Antiquity paving the way.

Truth moulded and piped like royal white icing on a cake of shit.

Deacon John Braine was elected the scapegoat, beloved of Azazel- the leader of the rebel angels, and after twenty four hours of protesting his innocence to the temple elders he was cast into the wilderness of internment, naked, in a paper suit, his skin full to bursting with the insinuating sins of the many.

Janet, John Braine's wife, was elected the goat of the Lord. And, as the Lord's goat she was first favoured then sacrificed.

She is said to have slashed her forearms, wrist to elbow. How knowledgeable she was. Her pale goat body in red bra and panties, found soaking in blood in a magnolia corner bath. Her pink slippers and housecoat tidy and to one side. The short, but razor sharp knife, out of place in the fat pig soap dish.

The stark picture etched in acid on the mind of the new Bishop.

One of many visuals.

Too many.

*

..This entry: Beyond me. I have it in me to me free.

Marcus took himself off to the crown of the conical hill, let the circle of oaks surround him like cohorts. And in the dappled light he sat alone, being energised by the oneness of things, the pollen on his sleeve like sorrows yet to be addressed. His boots thick with fingers of mud, as if he'd stamped hard upon the pleading hands of those in need. And he was sure his heart weighed heavier than ever. Its beating dull and songless in the dark prison of his breast.

There was much to see at this world's edge, a green and pleasant counterpane of civilisation spread before him, comfortable, cosy, making a good job of hiding the vast bed of nails. And in the miniaturisation of perspective, the realisation that church and state and education are linked by ancient bridges, if not genuinely old then fake. The kind of compliment that makes tame architects a favourite with small minds.

If those links constitute a chain, where was freedom figuring? Or was that something else needing to be stolen?

A Celtic mismaze cut into the chalk hillside mocking our loss.

History twisting and contorting in the pay of ugliness.

Marcus bereft, his breathing less than beneficial. A panic attack beckoning like feral love on a plate. What would Christ do? Would he masturbate, like other men, then drift into a post orgasmic sleep, his body curled in on itself like a foetus, then later wake a changed man, his whole aura alive with light?

How odd to be the promised one, expected. So desired that you were finally engineered, devised by fanatics, an amalgam of man and God. A doll to play with. A dummy for the mouths of babies.

Satan pleased. Listening to the Catholics teaching- suck on this.

His thought pattern scattered by the rabid birdsong of a mobile phone.

Just a text-

'Your move. White bishop to black queen. HSx.'

The walk back making pea green crickets fly from the fat grass.

Marcus tingling, thrilling to the chatter of his flesh.

A thrush in flight, dies, stops, then drops like a stone, its dead weight writing rings on the still tributary.

And a small mother shrew, fat with babies, casts him a look from the path ahead.

The tears come, kissing his linen handkerchief like clear blood.

But by the iron stile he manages a grin.

And, thinking fondly of *him*, it breaks into a smile.

In poets' footsteps.

No regrets.

*

No-one's about.

He switches off the wasting lights as he moves through the palace, almost silent. His serenity born of hot decision not of princely cool. Once through the doors of his apartment he does what he's never done before, he turns, turning to turn the key, turning to shoot the bolts and pray, 'God help me.'

Henry is leaving the small kitchen, the wine open and the glasses full.

Henry whose colour has more allure than black tulips.

Henry whose liveness never injures the air.

Henry whose African eyes claim him.

The chessboard is in action. There's an opportunity for a diagonal line of attack. Or is it defence? Or is it something else?

Marcus visits a window, the view of his great cathedral being eaten by sudden inclement weather. There would seem to be unseasonal sleet thickening the squall. He watches while the edifice dissolves before his eyes.

Then, when he finally turns to accept some red wine from his friend, there is no question.

There is no answer that he needs to hear.

*

You could imagine the city's bakers mumbling that, as much as anything, the freak snow made the night memorable.

God on the remote control had cut the volume.

Marcus saw and heard.

His awake self, wrapped in blankets on the stone balcony, marvelling at the expanse of white lawn. And here and there, the tell-tale tracks of creatures, just like him, who knew what it was to be alive.

Life, complete and unexpurgated, had arrived at last.

But, as if in payment or a fit of jealousy, God had gone.

He'd heard the last of the Almighty's carriages crushing the gravel just before dawn. They'll not be missed, all those imaginary belongings, the esoteric personal effects. The incense and the glint of things that sparkle will prompt remembrances. And then, in time, when even they dim to nothing, they'll not be missed also.

He was crying quietly, but ignorant of it, his both hands culling petals from the cold geraniums. He was casting them like drops of blood on the chill air. And down to the slight snow they fell, the imaginary trail of a wounded angel. A fantastic being shot by fanatics, cruelly winged in the act of making love.

Then there was Henry, naked and magnificent at the French windows,
being brave and fearless, offering breakfast and a way out.
The way out proved uncomplicated, almost ridiculously so.
One medium length call on the red telephone.
Rhiannon taken to one side.
Two remarkably short letters on diocesan headed notepaper.

*

The summit beckons.
Marcus has unwittingly made it to a higher rung.
Bright Mediterranean light wakes him. The hotel bed too firm for
indolence. Henry is already on the phone, finalising the purchase of an old
villa in the mountains. When he finishes, the two men sit beside each other,
the die cast, committed lovers already deep into their long future together.
A double six thrown repeatedly.
Marcus' book deal in the bag.
Henry's immigration service up and running.

'I had another broken sleep.'

'Yes.' Henry said, his face rich with concern.

'I keep seeing their peeling faces.'

'Whose faces?'

'Children's faces, like before. I dream children's faces. Not just John and Janet's. Any children's faces, just when they are about to change. I was a shepherd once, and now I dream the peeling faces of children who are losing their innocence. Innocence is ripped away from them. Raped. And all their lost innocence is like lambs being wrenched from the warmth of their mothers. Never again will they suckle milk and know immunity and sheep love, the woolly warmth of the comfortable sheep community. All they have left is the endless bleating, over and over. They know only endless bleating then death. Metal death. Death as and when. Death sent according to market forces. No wonder I lost my faith.'

'And I found you, and you are beautiful.' Henry Simbele tells him, softly, tenderly, certain, without a shadow of a doubt that it is true.

..They burned the journals. Pagan. The herding of mental cattle ..through the smoke to ward off disease. The pestilence of the past ..got rid of by a pile of cinders smouldering on an altar to the sun ..beneath the midday holocaust. Another life within a life begun as ..it can when freewill is released.

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NOT ONE STONE

By James Miller

Photo © GUTTERSAIN

...After the storm we were wandering the shoreline, searching for salvage amid all the waste of the world washed-up wet and glistening in the milky dawn and then we saw him, striding towards us, his naked skin glowing with the phosphorescence of the surf and the spray of breaking waves and his eyes liquid pearls pulled from a silent watery kingdom. There he was, walking proud like a newborn Adam or a beautiful angel freshly fallen from the sky and some, the more religious among us, knelt down to pray but with a small twitch of his hands he told them to rise for

he would have no man bow before him. He made it clear he was neither a God nor a demon but I don't think they believed him. They were too anxious for omens, for the fulfilment of prophecy, for signs and wonders... the cross in the clouds... a vial spilt across the sun... the beast in the clouds with many heads... and then the storms. Believe me, the storms were destroying everything. Each year, no matter how we might try and build it back the wind and rain would tear it down... ashes and dust and he had seen it all. He took those of us who would follow to a high

place. Don't you see? He spoke with a lofty tongue, with words like quicksilver, like towers of melting ice or rays of light dancing across the water. To build a better world from the rubbish of the old, that was the challenge, to bring the stars down to earth. After the storm the sun was hotter than ever and we could hear the military helicopters flying back and forth above the ruins of Miami Beach, looking for something, for him, perhaps... and when, eventually, they found him, you know what they did? They killed him, of course they killed him and left his body hanging on a cross in an empty precinct. The crows pecked out his eyes... but that's not it. That's not all. He left us with something, a promise stirring in the hot afternoon wind. Even now you can hear it, a faint rustling in the palms at first light or in the hum of the cicadas in the long grass. Even now.

We all know Billy. Most of us like him. He has his stories. Most of us have heard them before but that never stops him from tellin' them again. Me, I ain't never particular. A hot night and I'm just glad of a cool beer and some company. I ain't seen Billy for a while but I knew that look in his eyes, when he'd been drinkin' too much. Lord, we all do, I suppose, but, you know, he was given to lookin' inside himself. That's what I mean. You could see it in his eyes, in his face, like he was scrutinisin' his soul. Unlike the rest of us he expected somethin'.

We all drove rigs for the Darkwater boys back and forth between the Storm-Zone and the rest of Florida but Billy, well, he was the only one of us what actually lived one time in the Zone. He said he'd even fought for the Zone and I for one believed him. You couldn't make up that shit. Most of the time the Zone was just like a black hole by which I mean nothing came out of it. We all know folks back home and most of them ain't hardly even aware of its existence. I mean, they *know* about it, they can't deny it like it's a fact like death is a fact but that don't mean it's somethin' they all want to find out about. Me, I'm always in the Zone but I stick to the Grid. There ain't many places I want to go. The Red is too dangerous and the White just freaks me out. As I like to say, it's best viewed through bullet proof glass at sixty mile an hour with an M16 at the ready. Keep your friends close and your guns closer, that's my motto and it done me true so far.

Billy weren't one to waste time with small talk or anythin' like that. No how are you bud how you been how the wife? He was always straight in there running with whatever was fresh in his mind. Like this.

- There been a lot of rumours, a lot of stories about who he was and what he did and

what happened. He was hunched over his beer, as if he was cold, as if anyone could be cold in this heat. I was buyin' so I didn't feel like I had to say nothin'. I'd heard it before, more or less. He went like this. Some said he was a force for destruction, a manifestation of chaos, but others have a different story. Billy rubbed his face. After all, he said, ain't there as many different ways to be free as there are men in this world?

- Could be.

- I might say he was free man. A man bound to no other.

- Ain't many like that.

On the TV above the bar we could see the President leadin' his congregation in the daily prayer service. Behind him, past all them secret service folks and the religious police and the rest of it I could see them bonfires, same as always, burnin' fierce and high.

- Look here, I don't know how else to say it. They say he was just a man and they killed him. He was a man. That's for sure. With my own eyes I saw him. But he ain't dead. I don't know how I know but I know. They say otherwise, if they say anything at all. He gestured at the TV. But he ain't dead. I just knows it. I never saw him dead. I never saw his body. No one saw it. No one. It was too dangerous.

For a while they took control but then they lost it again. But he's coming back. I'm sure of it... can't you feel it?

- I don't know man.

- I feel it. Every day, every night, sort of like a faraway taste or a sound you've heard before but almost remember. You know? It's... I mean... goddammit... Like this? You know what I mean?

- Billy. Don't sweat it man.

- Lord.

- Have another beer. I'm buying. You want another beer?

- Soon the whole goddam state gonna be dry.

- Whole goddam country.

- Lord oh Lord.

Later we goes out stumbling one two three. Puddles in the tarmac. So goddam hot. Mosquitoes. The night is thick with them. Pop pop pop they go, blasted by the vaporizers. Billy keeps talkin'.

- We never knew his real name, his old name. Rumours were he'd been an Englishman, once. Not no more. Kalat. That's what he called himself. We ain't got but one chance and we blew it. Ain't it always the way? Most

people don't want it, not freedom or a chance or anything. Can't say I'm that different.

Pop pop pop.

- In the morning you'll feel better.

- You don't understand.

- Yeah? Well I got my own shit.

- See you.

- Yeah.

Come morning it will be a nine hour drive for me to the Forward Operating Base near Palm Beach, my rig full of Oreos, Pepsi, Hershey Bars and no-alcohol Bud for the grunts out there. Poor bastards don't know what they waitin' for or why but I guess that's no different to any of us. Yeah... you see it, after the storms... you see it, the trailers in the fly blown afternoon sun... Ripped tongues of rubber tyre on the freeway... Empty-eyed children with red teeth and metal hands... crazy end of the wordlers with their camps and rickety wooden ladders reaching to the clouds and the President keeps on preachin' like a motherfucker and the bonfires just get higher. Burn it all away. That's what they say. Burn it all until God feels the fire. Let's warm His almighty ass and let him know we mean business.

Mexican chicks hangin' round the trucks. Yeah. High heels, hot pants yanked around tight little butts and lots of long black hair. Sometimes salvation comes cheap. I'll get mine. I'm not partial. A cool beer, a crazy story, a bit of company. I take two of them back to my rig. Girl-women probably only fifteen or sixteen with parents lost somewhere in the Texan sun-fields. Lord oh Lord. Officially none of this exists anymore and so it don't happen and it ain't like no one will admit anything anyway. That's how it goes now. Don't ask me why. I didn't make the rules and I don't like them. One of them, Maria or somethin', she got some crystals and we smoke a couple of bowls and it be good, strong shit strong enough to freak out the other, Theresa or somethin' so she get the shaky giggles and has to go outside to puke. Pop pop pop. After that I ain't in the mood no more. Anyway I can't sleep so I swallow a handful of droppers and wait for the drowsiness to come. Try the radio. Beyond the Holy Rollers and the Shock Jocks preaching doom on the infidel there ain't shit. Just lonesome static long and strange. I listen but I don't hear. Maybe it's like Billy said. Maybe he didn't die. Maybe he's just hiding. Maybe he will come back. I don't know. Don't blame me. I just see what I see and do what I do.

“ONE SMALL BOY WAS ALL IT TOOK TO UPSET THE UNIVERSE...”

Review of James Miller’s *Lost Boys*

By Craig Woods

In a long staid literary mainstream, it has become a thoroughly rare experience to encounter a debut novel boasting half as much thematic and philosophical ambition as James Miller’s *Lost Boys*. Drawing on a topical mesh of postmodern paranoias, Miller has crafted a provocative riff on the neuroses of Britain in this era of Madeleine McCann and the War On Terror. Confidently rustling a choice selection of sacred cultural cows, the novel presents a compelling vision of a contemporary London stricken by panic as increasing numbers of respectable white middle-class schoolboys vanish in the night, shedding the privileges of their caste to enrol in a shadowy anti-Western guerrilla movement.

Split into thirds, the story begins by enveloping the reader into the mind of Timothy Dashwood, an outwardly “normal” adolescent WASP, whose unremarkable exterior conceals a steadily

bubbling cauldron of alienation and a mind beset by sublime visions. Nightly, Timothy dreams of a mysterious and exotic wild boy who beckons him towards a life of adventure far beyond the asphyxiating material confines of Notting Hill opulence and the social hierarchies of public school. Soon it becomes clear that Timothy’s fellow schoolmates are experiencing similar apparitions and, before long, a number of boys have vanished from their homes without a trace. Through a stream of associational clues culled from further dream visions, the content of violent videogames and passages of selected literature, Timothy apparently attains access to a new psychology wherein he is able and willing to cast aside his past, his home and family and seek out his role in the coming revolution. Without sentimentality, the first act closes with Timothy’s ascendance towards a new conception of existence: “*He was other than what he had been.*”

From there, Timothy and his runaway brethren become enigmas as the remaining two thirds of the story are told from the perspective of the adults left behind, clinging desperately to their shattered preconceptions in a world whose idols of privilege and security have been exposed as frail illusions. Through the eyes and memories of Timothy's father Arthur (a Western oil exec whose initially unexplained release by kidnappers in post-Saddam Iraq plants a crucial seed of mystery in the novel's prologue), the failings and hypocrisies of both middle-class culture and Western political and economic power are brutally exposed and interrogated.

Recognising that Arthur may not be the most reliable of witnesses, Miller chooses to keep his protagonist in check by having him hire a private investigator named Buxton to pursue all leads pertaining to Timothy's disappearance. Through Arthur's review of the material collated by Buxton (recordings of interviews and monologues, the transcripts of which form the narrative of the novel's second act) the novel effectively communicates a broad and detailed picture of the

Dashwoods' past, from Arthur's own childhood to the family's tenure within a Western compound in Saudi Arabia. More importantly however, it allows the author to flesh out the other characters - including Arthur's neurotic wife Susan and their melancholy Eastern European au pair Veca - to an extent beyond Arthur's own perceptions. As clues to the impetus of the Lost Boys accumulate and the web of deception at the heart of the Dashwood family unfolds, Buxton eventually follows Timothy off the page leaving Arthur naked and unshielded as he leads the reader into the novel's final act and towards its devastating denouement.

In terms of narrative, *Lost Boys* is a straightforward affair. The events of the story are spare; the same material essentially raked over three times through the eyes and ears of three separate witnesses. Eschewing narrative conventions, Miller instead makes his concept the star in a determined novel of ideas. Packed with a bold array of references - both candid and ambiguous - to his literary progenitors such as William Burroughs and J.G. Ballard, the

author seems also motivated by a desire to redress the Disneyfication of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. By turning that classic narrative on its head, Miller has effectively crafted a postmodern spin on Barrie's fairytale as seen from the perspective of the abandoned and panic-stricken parents. We can glimpse more than a hint of Wendy Darling's brash businessman father in Arthur Dashwood, while the intensity of Susan Dashwood's neuroses seem proportionately related to her failure or refusal to embody the selfless matronly figure to which Barrie restricted Wendy and her female relatives. In restoring the oft-ignored but inherent darkness and horror to a classic tale while also redefining its context for a contemporary audience, Miller has pulled off an audacious double whammy.

This reappraisal of classic English literature provides the novel with a springboard from which the very foundations of British (and by extension Western) society and culture can be reached and duly assaulted. While the initially sketchy details of Arthur's ordeal as a hostage in Iraq quickly establish a recognisably contemporary and topical

backdrop, the first third of the story is littered with barbed references and observations of a Britain hopelessly stymied by antique institutions and outmoded traditions. From the perspective of the disillusioned Timothy, this is a colourless world where psychological development is held in check and where violent videogames and insurrectionary fantasies provide the only release.

The prestigious public school which Timothy attends is presented as a psychological prison, entrenched firmly in archaic social values and presided over by a staff who seem terminally out of touch with the realities of their pupils' inner lives. At an assembly following the first disappearance, the school's headmaster, full of pomp, is keen to reiterate - in rhetoric thick with deference to God and state - the core beliefs at its centre;

"We believe in restraint, moderation and hard work of course, but also in good cheer, honesty, teamwork, and having fun."

It's one of several instances in the book where the blatant chasm of understanding between the

adults and the boys becomes unsettlingly comedic. These children are on the cusp of a revolution far beyond the confines of an institution dedicated to producing future men in the mould of Timothy's father - architects and maintainers of a sterile status quo. When Timothy is later called to the headmaster's office for questioning about the disappearances, it's no coincidence that he is under "*the impression of being in the bowels of an old ship, called before the captain on suspicion of mutiny*" - the naval metaphor conjuring the ghost of the British Empire and those antediluvian hierarchies and ideologies against which the boys are poised to rebel.

Speaking of his childhood in wartime Shanghai and subsequent internment in a Japanese POW camp, the late J.G. Ballard was loathe to describe his experiences as "extraordinary", instead claiming that such ordeals represent the reality of most people throughout human history and that it is the modern materialist West with its anaesthetised culture and gated communities which represents the true aberration. This

particular Ballardian slant informs much of *Lost Boys* as Miller paints an unsentimental portrait of a society where abstract boundaries and arbitrary labels serve as simulacrum of meaning. With the boys' rebellion, the stage set of Western society is swept brutally aside revealing the adults as the true children, floundering helplessly in the rubble of their shattered illusions.

Interestingly, not all of the adults are so entirely ensconced in the façade. Betraying his clearly liberal political persuasions, Miller endows the Dashwoods' au pair Veca with a degree of perception not afforded by her bourgeois employers. Through her immigrant's eyes, the landscape of London appears "*blunted, sapped of colour*", the entire city "*slowly dissolving into the same grey mush*". While the other adult characters are essentially homogenous - teachers and parents of a middle-class professional template - the modest Veca stands alone in being able to identify the self-deceiving artificiality permeating their world; a drab, alienating realm which represents the sensational opposite of Timothy's

illicit dreams of the boy who lures him towards an extrasensory future.

During the novel's pivotal second act, Buxton muses:

"We thought the young had a stake in our society. We thought they loved us for the world we had created ... What is the difference ... between an alienated public schoolboy, seething in his dormitory with frustration and resentment and the Gaza youth, bombs strapped to his body?"

To the casual reader this may seem a fanciful stretch of logic, but Miller's portrayal of Western society as a bland construct of superfluous customs and vapid ideals does lend dramatic credibility to these phantoms of adolescent rage, driven to forge and pursue their own savage convictions in what has become a moral and cultural vacuum. Positing a distinct parallel between the Dashwoods' previous life in the Saudi compound and their subsequent Notting Hill idyll, the novel illustrates the destructive potential of the psychology of a gated community. The first third of the story highlights numerous traits on the part of the parents to

keep their children wrapped firmly in an anaesthetic papoose. Susan Dashwood's refusal to allow her sons to travel on the London Underground due to a vague threat posed by ill-defined "*black boys from the estates*" is symptomatic not only of casual racism on her part but also of an assumption that any threat or danger to their methodically maintained bubble shall surely come from outside in the shape of an identifiable "other". It is a complacency which proves to be its own undoing. As Ballard wryly suggested in his 1988 novella *Running Wild*: "*In a totally sane society, madness is the only freedom*". Elaborating on that notion, Miller openly suggests that in sheltering its young from the realities and consequences of the outside world, the West - that largest and most concentrated of gated communities - has sown the seeds of its own destruction. Content in their manufactured delusions, the Dashwoods and their ilk possess neither the psychological insight to comprehend the mutiny of their own children nor the martial wits to counter it.

Much of the strength of *Lost Boys* is due to the author's admirable

ability to shift seamlessly between different narrative voices and a variety of stylistic tics dependent on the key characters and scenarios of each segment. The first third, detailing Timothy's disillusionment and gradual seduction by the phantom boy of his dreams, is related in a style which is dry and uncluttered and arguably presents Miller at his most consciously Ballardian. However, towards its close this section becomes increasingly erratic, incorporating lengthy descriptive passages of hallucinatory power, signifying Timothy's attainment of a new mode of thinking as he is liberated from the linear restraints of the artificial world he has known. So accomplished is this shift in tone that it is difficult for the reader not to become infected by the excitement which Miller skilfully evokes in his lyrical intimations of adolescent revolution.

It's all the more startling then to find that the second act forsakes the visionary elements of the first, unfolding in the manner of a transcript. In keeping with the concept of a society based on assumptions and a reliance on secondary information, this

section finds Arthur Dashwood toiling hopelessly over evidence collated by a contracted party as he and the reader alike attempt to glean answers from Buxton's findings. Stepping back from the page to let his characters do the talking, Miller packs a lot into this middle section and he is clearly in his element as a multitude of hypocrisies and self-deceptions are batted gleefully around in a splendidly satirical session of literary fastball. It's a pity then that this exercise in narrative experimentalism ultimately feels over-extended and gimmicky. While these dialogues yield moments of brilliance (Arthur's discomfort at hearing his own voice, reeking blatantly of denial and delusion, has the reader palpably wincing), it is difficult not to come away with the suspicion that Miller has opted for this device as a means to relieve himself of the burden of narrative prose in a middle act crammed with vital clues and revelations.

Things improve in the third and final section which is nothing short of a stylistic tour de force. Following Arthur Dashwood as he relents to pursue his own investigation into his son's

disappearance and venture beyond the illusory boundaries of the world he has helped to shape, the novel's tone becomes distinctly apocalyptic. Fundamental ideas of Western society, culture and economic power are now set to a cataclysmic flame. Combining elements of social realism, Surrealism, science-fiction and satire, Miller propels his readers through a veritable storm of vivid imagery and accomplished prose which is at turns poetic, horrific and hilarious.

As Arthur becomes increasingly aware of the self-defeating mendaciousness in which he and his middle-class brethren are enveloped, the indictments on Miller's part become more pronounced and outwardly humorous;

"It's absurd" claims one desperate father, struggling to comprehend the boys' renunciation of Western ideals, *"He's a twelve year old English boy with Christian values"*. Clinging anxiously to arbitrary labels long since exposed as meaningless, the abandoned adults become pathetic figures of disquieting ridicule. Elsewhere, in one of the novel's

most comical passages, the parents discuss the trail of books which have led their sons astray (including William Burroughs and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*), demonstrating that bourgeois sanctimonies, though wounded, are difficult to shed;

"They have those books in the school library?" asked Susan.

"Well, it is a very good school," added Linda. *Everyone nodded in agreement.*

The sober tone of these scenes contrasts directly with the abstract and freeform nature of the communications later received by Arthur from the Lost Boys themselves. Here, Miller adopts a new literary voice, rich in texture and unbridled in its lyrical embrace of sensationalism;

"the afternoon stillness and the drone of cicadas in the hot sun ... shards of pink light that strike a snow-capped mountain in the early morning ... scents of cedar and pine in the valley below ... the play of dust in an empty warehouse and the melancholy of a seaside town on Sunday ... fragments of posters and fading graffiti on a whitewashed wall..."

These splinters of perception are the richest such descriptions in the novel and reveal an unexpectedly elegiac side to Miller which is all the more remarkable for its restraint. This dreamlike intrusion into Arthur's fastidiously composed world reveals the truth of the boys' revolution: they have embraced the tattered fragments of the universe, that great chaotic entity kept so long at bay by the walls of the Western compound. In essence, Arthur's son has become the man - the fully realised being - which he himself has failed to be. Timothy and the other Lost Boys have achieved a true awareness of the full fury of existence in a realm of raw sensation and transcendent dream energy. Theirs is an all-out liberation from the asphyxiating coils of an ersatz civilization they have unsentimentally left behind. It's a profound and compelling vision deftly rendered.

Without wishing to spoil the conclusion of Miller's novel, it becomes clear long before the end that Arthur's choices have locked him into a critical impasse. The book's closing chapters find Arthur confronting the consequences of his own actions

(and lack thereof) as both a parent and also as an active component in the machine of Western economic and political power. To this end, Miller saves his best for last, bringing his *Peter Pan* revision full circle with the appearance of a postmodern Tinkerbelle - the conduit through whom all would-be Lost Boys must pass on their way to transcendence. His deconstruction of Western iconography is so deliciously on the mark here that it is a challenge to resist revealing it. But alas, it is a ghoulish treat best served unexpected.

There is also, however, a downside to these developments. In focussing on Arthur's impending guilt, the story does lend itself open to a strain of moralism which serves to undermine much of what makes the novel's original thematic elements so compelling. What begins as an intriguing hypothesis on the fundamental nature of Western culture gradually morphs into a "Sins of the Father" melodrama - the satirical edge dulled slightly in its subsequent application to War On Terror specifics. The scathing observations of the artificiality of

British society made in the novel's first act fall somewhat to the wayside as Arthur's role as an oil exec is thrust to the fore, effectively hampering the reader's ability to interpret the story as anything other than a polemic on the injustices of Western involvement in the Middle East. This in itself is perhaps not such a bad thing, but from here the novel never quite manages to convey its intent with the same proficiency which makes the more general themes of the first act so provocative. Placed alongside Veca's humble observations on the "grey mush" of London, Susan Dashwood's later melodramatic contention that "[Westerners] should be punished ... it is our fault" comes across as a tad hackneyed by comparison.

Throughout the story, Miller titillates the reader by dangling before them a plethora of frayed narrative and thematic threads, many of which are left hanging in the forlorn breeze of a desolate London. For the most part, these diversions and red herrings effectively serve to cement the lucid vision of a fractured world on the brink of dissolution and are potent in their lack of

conclusion. However, there are a few questions which one cannot help but feel ought to have been addressed more thoroughly. Specifically, the females of the novel are very much pushed to the sidelines, a perplexing state of affairs considering Miller's apparent mission to postmodernise the *Peter Pan* myth -- surely the Wendy Darlings of the contemporary world deserve a revolution as fundamental as that of their fugitive brothers! If the staid and deluded figure of Arthur Dashwood can be seen to represent the future on which the Lost Boys have turned their backs, then it follows that his fractured, overanxious spouse typifies the destiny in store for their female counterparts. All the more difficult then to conceive of any reason why the pristine daughters of the West would not be spurred towards an insurrection of their own.

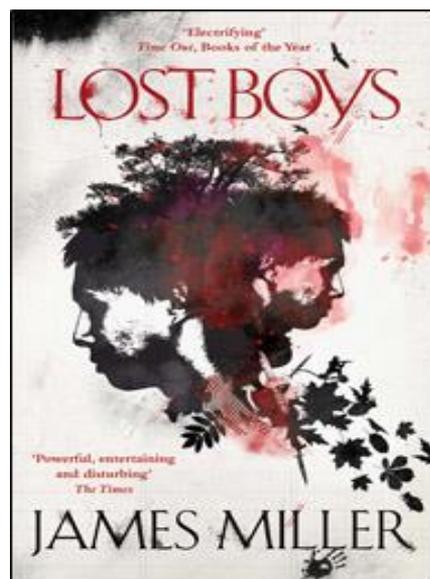
Perhaps in an alternate (and better) world - where the publishing industry is not geared towards pandering to the inane and where the average attention span of the contemporary reader is not relegated to the banal bulletins of Dan Brown novels -

Miller could expand on these themes. The strength of his prose and the audacity of his imagination suggest that he is more than capable of crafting an epic version of *Lost Boys* which might encompass both sides of the gender divide in equal detail. In any event, this particular reader would be most intrigued and excited at the prospect of a companion piece - a speculative flipside to *Lost Boys* wherein legions of disillusioned girls enact a secondary rebellion using less violent, more insidious and inventive means to strike at the heart of the society which birthed and betrayed them. As it stands, Miller's story offers a plethora of unexplored possibilities and it is but testament to the spellbinding nature of his talent that the reader is left hankering for more.

While *Lost Boys* may not constitute a masterpiece, its astonishing breadth of vision and artistic aspiration certainly mark it as an important and vital work. Regardless of its flaws, this is a novel with a clearly defined and very particular set of objectives which its author pursues with the admirable savagery and elegance of a trained assassin. In this post-Ballard world where the literary

mainstream hovers precariously on the edge of its own self-satisfied rectum, James Miller has stepped boldly forward to offer himself as a new and much-needed interrogator of our contemporary anxieties. At this novel's most accomplished moments, its writer boasts an aptitude and originality almost supernatural by today's accepted standards. If *Lost Boys* can be regarded as the first shot in a new war for literary quality, then the complacent custodians of the publishing status quo might do well to heed Timothy Dashwood's words to his ineffectual father: "*Run, Daddy, run, the old world is behind you.*"

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