

Farley>>>> <<<<<Farley

By Steven >>> <<<<Schutzman

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...* "Farley," by Steven Schutzman, reminds me of a Burroughs fever dream, and not one that you're just walking away from reading with a better understanding of the world but more like did I just read a heroin orgy with a Moroccan boy.

At least, in this case, there isn't any questionable legality. The story, still, isn't exactly for the faint of heart. Lots of cunnilingus, lots of willing submission, lots of girl-on-girl-on-girl-on guy-who-wants-to-be-a-girl action.

In all fairness, Schutzman has his own style and flavor to add to the dirty surrealism (literary eroticism? I don't know...) game. The structural connections between the cinema and the screenplay mixed with the short story is an nice technique to enhance the voyeurism that takes place as a deconstructive look reader, author, and text. The plot of the story folds in on itself as the characters become a part of the creation,

The story is about a film maker turning into a woman after forty years of being a man and not just any man, a Don Juan who had slept with hundreds of women, a technician of the female. In the script, the character says he went to bed with so many women because he wanted to observe them up close to prepare him for his transformation. Obviously this is Farley's story, his first directly autobiographical film, starring us.

There is a nice sense of the postmodern meta-awareness that shines through here from the depths of this story – a sort of Coen brothers-esque knowledge that writing about writer's block can churn out Barton Fink.

Whether you like this story or not, it's power lies in the grotesque surrealism of its composition. Having read this story your mind doesn't float back down to reality for a while but rather makes you question the inherent categorization of meaning – you do come back down after a bit though.

Enjoy.

QUALITY QUOTABLES (for the love of language...)

I imagined the other actresses and me bumping into each other in the dark, giggling like eleven year old girls at a sleepover, supercharged with naïve

sexual intuitions and haywire desires, as we watched Farley sleep like a caterpillar in the cocoon of his male body waiting to turn into a butterfly, dreaming of gowns and boas, coy looks and wild transgressions, breasts and a vagina. He is a man. He is a woman. He is a man and a woman at the same time.

Scene 1. Naked on a king sized bed, we talk about our childhoods, nothing else. None of us is sure where the cameras are though we are sure they are there somewhere, getting it all down.

I never caught Farley at anything. He was always sleeping, or so it seemed. He slept randomly like a cat, or a borderguard at an obscure frontier, no set bedtime.

Farley
a story by Steven Schutzman

Farley, the underground filmmaker, had one overwhelming wish: To become a woman, metaphorically in his work, and literally in his life. Forty years old, he had lived his life so far as a spy, an infiltrator into his actors and a master of disguise, who craved being stripped and unmasked but only by a spy of equal prowess and no one was equal to him. On the other hand, he was working the slow, cumbersome, and intensely scrutinizing bureaucracy in order to have the state of California pay for his transgender operation.

In this unreal life of his, Farley positioned himself behind himself like he positioned himself behind the movie camera. If you were one his actresses like me, Farley was a mirror, the expression on your face became the expression on his face. He studied you, creating his films and his future life as a woman at one and the same time.

Farley gave me the key to his house, big and echoing, empty and dusty, like an abandoned movie set mansion, that Uber drivers could get close to but never actually find.

“You can come over here any time you want,” he instructed me. “But always sneak in, never tell me you're here. So whether you're here or not, there's always the wonderful possibility that you're here.”

I knew what he meant. My childhood was like that, a struggle to bring my presence to where I actually was.

Farley only works with women and has given his house key to all his actresses. There are four of us: Veronica, Fleur De Lys, Aura and me. All of us would sneak into Farley's house but never on the same night, as if there was a schedule I didn't know about or some higher magic at work. I never caught Farley at anything. He was always sleeping, or so it seemed. He slept randomly like a cat, or a borderguard at an obscure frontier, no set bedtime. While I was there, it felt like he was dreaming me and hidden cameras were getting it all down, as I tried to act naturally which is hard to do when you are alone and feel you are secretly being watched.

Though it never happened, I imagined the other actresses and me bumping into each other in the dark, giggling like eleven year old girls at a sleepover, supercharged with naïve sexual intuitions and haywire desires, as we watched Farley sleep like a caterpillar in the cocoon of his male body waiting to turn into a butterfly, dreaming of gowns and boas, coy looks and wild transgressions, breasts and a vagina. He is a man. He is a woman. He is a man and a woman at the same time.

Farley slept with all his actresses and made us all want to sleep each other. We really loved each other, and were never jealous artistically or sexually. Farley and his films have earned our profound respect, admiration and affection. None of us uses our real names in the credits. And we all let him have his way with us sexually, as a male. Sex wasn't the point, for him. The point was to observe us as closely as possible. The other girls and I were both the witnesses and the raw material of his transformation.

When Farley slept with you, he wasn't really in bed with you, he was behind the camera, taking notes in the mirror. Though he had a bunched, pocked, ugly yet sensual face, his penis was truly beautiful, and he used it very deftly and objectively. When he entered me, he took my temperature with the blinks of his eyelids and measured my orgasms in the meters of his fingernails. He observed me. I acted me. The camera got it all down for future reference. It was like being had by a ghost, between life and death. You weren't penetrated, you were dispersed into eternity, carbonated into the void, emptied of yourself. You came in icy shivers, in billowing exhalations empty of sound, a little bit of your femaleness stolen from you each time.

Farley's beautiful penis was a shaft of cold, white sunlight as he lay back on the bed. It glowed. It laughed. It throbbed Farley's genius into the air. Impossible. Impossible. When I lowered myself down on it from above and it filled me, it felt like the top of my head might unscrew and go spinning off like a frisbee into the wide open universe. I came without moving, just sitting there, the electric current causing me to shiver like you do when you have the flu, a cold fever, when all you want to do is dream. You weaken, it gets stronger, and then it cures you. A story has been planted inside you, Farley's next film. You start to feel that you won't exist if Farley stops thinking about you. Maybe that's what genius is.

Once every film, Farley would lose his temper and have a full-out, screaming fit of anger on the set, as if he was acting out a cliched Hollywood tantrum. When he exploded he was like a blind-folded person trying to bash a piñata on a wildly rocking boat. He reeled and stumbled and ricocheted against nothing, against everything, knocked around by his own screaming voice. Eventually he would fall to the ground in convulsions before entering a deep, solemn sleep. He had screamed himself hoarse and would talk in whispers for many days afterwards, sweet, child-like, quivering, and that was when I desired him most; all of us did, our darling child, but he didn't have the time. He wouldn't even

accept a blow job while he continued to scribble note after note on yellow pages torn wildly from his pads filled with his child-like scrawl, seven or eight words per page. He could never write fast enough to catch up to his visions.

This year Farley has turned forty and embarked on a mysterious film project. The filming is always at his house. Separately, we all let ourselves in with our keys, strip naked and immediately start talking about our childhoods, as we have been instructed beforehand to do.

Veronica: Veronica was a bookish child and when she turned beautiful it surprised her and everyone around her and so she is a rare person, a very beautiful woman who doesn't believe that so many men and women desire her. Most beautiful people know exactly how beautiful they are and play it for all it's worth. Not Veronica. She is very mindful and exact in everything she does, as if she is secretly and precisely following written inner instructions. Such is her focus and attention to detail that you can make out with her for hours and never want anything more, just the intricacy of her complex kisses and how she feels your breasts like they are combination locks to open the safe of your heart. Afterwards, you are peaceful and complete, as if Veronica has reset the codes in your troubled soul.

Fleur De Lys: When she was a girl, Fleur De Lys, a shy beauty and only child, would wander off on her own for hours, climb trees, wedge herself into tree trunks and between large rocks; that was how she taught herself to be an actress she said, hiding and making herself small, learning to be perfectly alone first in nature and later, after much practice, among other human beings. When you know how to be perfectly alone, the camera cannot intrude and you are completely natural in front of it. In bed, Fleur De Lys' skin is always smooth and cool with wind, as if she'd just come in from a blustery, fall day outside.

Aura: Aura has black hair and yellow eyes, a beautiful, fiery Latina. Farley found her when she was as a teenager working as a maid in

a motel and saw her erotic and artistic possibilities. She tells us she was smuggled over the border in the stifling heat in the back of a truck, just a girl of six at the time. After an endless ride, the back of the truck was opened and she found that the person holding her, who she had thought was her father, wasn't her father but her uncle. Her father wasn't there and she never saw him again. How could that happen? Aura didn't know but from then on, she said, she felt like she was living the childhood of someone else and that her own childhood had died like an infant sister she had barely gotten to know. She scares me like a captive tiger, supposedly tamed. Much as she rubs her head seductively against the bars, I am reluctant to put my hand in her cage.

I have always considered myself the most normal of us four girls.

We haven't seen Farley awake for months but he sent his new script for us to read. The story is about a film maker turning into a woman after forty years of being a man and not just any man, a Don Juan who had slept with hundreds of women, a technician of the female. In the script, the character says he went to bed with so many women because he wanted to observe them up close to prepare him for his transformation. Obviously this is Farley's story, his first directly autobiographical film, starring us.

Scene 1. Naked on a king sized bed, we talk about our childhoods, nothing else. None of us is sure where the cameras are though we are sure they are there somewhere, getting it all down.

Then everything changes.

All of a sudden, the other girls lower me onto my back and spread me out on the bed, working together in such an organized way it seems these stage directions must have been in their scripts but left out of mine. It is slow, gentle, dreamy, yet ominous. Veronica's head is against my head as if we are dancing cheek to cheek. She breathes in my ear, regular breathing, the sound of everyday life, warm, homey, without sexual intention and that makes it sexier, as if we were living together in a house

where sex is the very air you breathe, where you are bound to be had when you merely cross paths with somebody, atmospherically, and everyone walks around in a continual state of domestic sexual excitation.

Usually, of course, a big part of being turned on is in response to your lover's intention, his or her needs, will and desire. Not this time with Veronica. Farley's house and his camera and his story are providing the intention for what's happening. They are what drive us. Act yourselves and you will become yourselves and the world will know you for the first time. We are vessels, instruments for his creative ideas. It is complete surrender, our own sexual wills non-existent, gone. Veronica is just breathing in my ear and I am just listening to her breathe. No big deal but my vagina is gushing and swollen and my clitoris pulsing with red heat.

Fleur De Lys is kissing my breasts as if eating a meal, regularly bringing her lips down to my flesh like a predator at leisure over a kill. My breasts aren't big. They spread to a flatness as I lay on my back, my nipples like eyelids softly closed, not hardening, not turned on in the usual way, though Fleur De Lys' kissing or the idea of Fleur De Lys' kissing is very exciting. I see it in my mind. I am not only me and my character. I am also someone else watching the movie of me and I see it like that from above, a floating voyeur. Fleur De Lys moves her head to the side of my ribcage where the flesh of my breasts spills over, rests her face on my upper arm and gently licks the spilled flesh for a long time, cleaning and preparing me. Then she simply rests her head on my chest. Her sleeping head is very heavy and very exciting. Her sleep hums and warms my heart. Her breathing electrifies my skin. Perhaps we have been drugged, or I have.

Aura, who scares me, has her head down between my legs, with her teeth clamped softly on my vagina. In keeping with the rhythm of the others she moves her head minimally from side to side, with my flesh bunched and held between her teeth. She is not even touching my clitoris directly but this indirection is more exciting than a direct touch. This is

not teasing but something else entirely, the power to do harm, fear, and the choice not to do harm, love. Like Fleur De Lys' mouth at my breasts, it is very animal-like, dreamy, savage without being brutal. I'm not going to come in the normal way, no explosion, no release, no fire. I'm a glowing ember and these women are soft zephyrs making me burn hotter and brighter, a glowing planet in the cosmic winds. I am going back in time.

Then suddenly, in unison, as if on cue, it all changes. This wasn't in my script either and now I know why; my relative normality compared to the other women. This, I know, is what Farley has always wanted of me, my innocence.

Scene 2. Veronica sticks her tongue way down into my mouth, an invasion, a blind hot worm flopping and wriggling inside my gaping mouth with all the force of primeval life; Fleur De Lys savagely sucks my breasts and bites my hardening nipples, devouring me. Are my breasts still there? Scary Aura straps on an implement and enters me. Someone above me is holding my hands down on the bed while others raise and spread my knees. I am splayed, legs wide open with Aura pumping me full of her dead childhood. I've never been that fond of implements but this one has the size and the smoothness, the laugh and the cool white light of Farley's penis and it's then that I know, that I have my first inarticulate inkling, a hint of what's really going on: It is Farley's penis, or former penis. Impossible but leave it to Farley to turn the story in on itself, to come up with the idea of fucking himself as part of the plot.

The supernatural strength of Aura pounding me with her dead childhood, the exact and fervent tongue-kissing of Veronica and the sudden boldness of shy Fleur De Lys, all part of the script, inspire my acting and bring my character and myself to the most powerful orgasm I have ever had in my life, a series of shocks that shudder through my body with seizure-like tremors and magnetic heat. Genius. Farley set it all up with his script, his intricate and systematic preparations and direction. When I come, I am not myself. I am just my scream and only recognize

myself as I was minutely in its echoes. To have an orgasm as someone else is to live forever in the mind of God and I know that whenever I watch this on film I will have to have the person or people watching it with me or touch myself if no one else is there. This is my memory of the future, and Farley's. Now Aura takes the implement off and rubs it across my mouth so I can taste my own sweet-salty juices and feel with my lips the wonderfully authentic job that was done preserving the lifelike feel of Farley's penis. Aura, no longer scary, softly kisses my lips. Mi amor, she says into my ear, anointing me with her blessing.

Scene 3. Farley, her blonde wig in a fifties flip, walks into the room naked, no longer hairy, less muscular, her belly soft and distended, small breasts that look unreal and bewildered, and her facial skin still pitted with the ravages of teenage acne, like his was. Farley's walk is somewhere between a childlike prance and a runway model's dramatic, self-possessed, dramatic stride, thrusting her new vagina forward, her head thrown back proudly, her eyes shining. Toying with stereotypes and cliché, hands on her hips, she sashays toward me, shimmying her shoulders slightly from side to side. She is very happy with her new vagina which looks like any other woman's vagina, a triangle of hair covering the soft, dark cave.

"Darling," she says to me.

We kiss.

Farley is grotesque and angelic. She is ugly and beautiful. She is caught between who he was and who she will be, only half out of the cocoon but no matter. What else is beauty but the struggle of the soul to reach the light of actualization? I feel this tremendous affection for him, for her, feel a deep wish to please and immense gratitude that they have chosen me for their maiden voyage. I strap on the beautiful implement and enter Farley while the others look on and the cameras roll.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: *“Right now I can't think of anything.”*

AUTHOR BIO: Steven Schutzman is a fiction writer, poet and playwright whose stories have appeared in such journals as The Pushcart Prize, Alaska Quarterly Review, Fleas on the Dog, Painted Bride Quarterly, TriQuarterly, Third Coast, Post Road, Sand and Gargoyle among many others. He is also a seven-time recipient of a Maryland State Arts Council Individual Artist Grant, awarded for creative writing excellence.