

Eights Coast

by [Paul Illidge](#) (January 2025)



Seascape (Joaquin Sorolla, 1904)

Liztaylor came up with a plan, knowing if not then Dede would die doing something so stupid, her mind when she's livid goes like that, goes *virginia*, she calls it, when pure poison rage just takes over. Liztaylor says:

"Don't do it, my darling. Ask me beforehand, ask Lizzie, cause that's what a good friend is for."

She's Dede's now and always, and Liztaylor knows even if, and

no matter, there's no stopping Dede Durand when her mind is made up. She's going and that's all there is to it, getting out, for her own good since they never lay off her now. Anyone. Ever.

First it was A'S. Someone started blacking out A's in the reading room lounge full of books. Someone went virginia with A's, and most of them said it would only be Dede Durand to do something like that. Who else read so much? Who else loved A's so much? How could it not be she who got the blame—which had Dede fuming mad.

“—And why not?!” she screamed as the guard nurses gave her the fine-out, the needle that settles sybs down. Sybs? Patients. Which it did then. Fine-out subdued, but still with her lingering anger, Dede spoke up softly in her defence.

“For your information, I read only *National Geographics* here. Books are lies. It's magazines only I read. Never books. Words eat your mind. I hate words.”

They knew that. They knew Dede adored merely pictures, the maps of all places around the world especially, though yes it was true, she loved A's. It's a letter she would of course love, want to, always. Why cross out all the A's? Her mother was the well known poet Juna Mecarsay: three A's.

But the guard nurses found the black ballpoint pen Liztaylor had loaned Dede to write to her sister. It matched the scribbles that had blacked out the library book A's.

“So what?” Liztaylor told them in Dede's defense. “I loaned her the pen to write a letter to her sister.”

Whenever after that Dede went to the reading room lounge to look at her magazine pictures, the guard nurse supervisor made certain nurse Dench went along too. She sat by the open window indifferently smoking her menthol cigarettes while Dede browsed her beloved magazines.

No words were ever exchanged, except once when Dede asked guard nurse Dench for fun if she wanted to look at pictures of a thousand-foot Antarctic ice cliff in her *National Geographic* magazine, guard nurse Dench just said "No," drawing on her cigarette, exhaling out the window.

Then out of the blue, it wasn't blacked out A's anymore. Pages began vanishing from books. One or two here, one or two there at first, then parts of chapters, then whole chapters.

Sybs were searched. Extra guard nurses were brought to the library whenever Dede was there. But pages kept disappearing. None were to be found. They appeared to have been cleanly cut out using a sharp blade. But how could a syb get her hands on something like that? The mystery drew the fascination of sybs who seldom went to the library. It became a daily drama. The guard nurses prowling the suddenly crowded library, everyone listening for the sounds of tearing, never hearing any, yet pages continued their invisible exodus right under the noses of the guard nurses.

Guard nurse Dench couldn't smoke any longer, so she was livid. Her supervisor or the assistant would always be patrolling the library so serious was the problem becoming. Dench hated Dede even more. She had started the whole business. Now Dench's fellow guard nurses were blaming it on her. And to top it off, pages continued to disappear.

Dr. Esquith, the facility director, had the library closed until further notice, and hired a new guard nurse supervisor, a woman from Britain who demonstrated her first day on the job how sybs would be treated if they *ran afoul* of her more disciplined approach to treatment. A tall, big-boned woman with a short, military style haircut, a gruff, aggressive manner, plus a mostly impenetrable Scottish accent whose name when she introduced herself for the first time sounded like "New Meat," so that is what the sybs called her.

New Meat wasted no time asserting her *more disciplined approach* to psychiatric treatment. Her first order of business was to punish Dede Durand for removing pages from the library books. At morning chapel one day soon after her appointment, New Meat came down with her punishment.

She had Dede brought to the chapel stage by three nurse guards. New Meat took Dede by the ear, twisted so hard Dede stooped over with the pain.

"There's been some changes since I'm in charge now," New Meat announced so all the assembled sybs could hear. "Sybs can't have hair as long as yours is, Durand!"

While two nurse guards held her, the other produced a large pair of shears and began lopping off Dede's shoulder-length raven black hair—

"—You running the dyke army now New Meat?" Dede shouted, "I never took pages!"

"Even your sick little pores are mine now, Durand."

Liztaylor jumped up on her chair shouting: "*DYKE, DYKE, DYKE, DYKE!!*" the ninety other sybs joining in at the top of their voices, for everyone loved Dede Durand, the bravest of all the sybs, who always stood up against wrongdoing in all forms.

Righteous cheers went up for her three days later when one of the nurse guards on library patrol discovered who but holier-than-thou Curwell Logan—always letting everyone know how utmost and sacred and devout she was—sitting cross-legged by the window in the back corner of the reading room lounge tearing pages from her monogrammed, leather-bound Bible then stuffing them into her mouth fistfuls at a time like she was hungrily eating them.

The nurse guards unable to subdue her and remove the pages she kept tearing out and stuffing so fast into her mouth, Curwell

choking, thrashing, kicking and swinging at the guards working to get near her with the fine-out needle, nurse Dench was called. Without a word, she dropped to her knees in front of Curwell and in one rapid movement wrapped her hands around Curwell's neck and began strangling her until Curwell started choking, her face reddening, Dench tightening her hands around Curwell's throat like she would never let up—but suddenly pulled one hand away, jammed a finger into Curwell's mouth and extracted half-chewed pages as Curwell in a flood of tears gagged, gasped and collapsed in Dench's arms, nurse Dench lifting her up, carrying her quickly out of the library, never to be seen again.

New Meat ordered the reading room lounge to be closed until some new rules were made.

Dede went to New Meat demanding an apology for the way she had been treated.

New Meat chuckled with her by now well-known sarcasm: "That'll be the day... "

Dede's mind was made up. She lived to read her *National Geographics*, worshipped them, dreamed of them, imagined the maps with their names of strange destinations, places and locations she could picture herself one day visiting. She liked the thought of one day going to Asia and Africa, Australia too, but most above all it was the continent of Antarctica, three A's, where Dede knew deep down one day she would flee to. She would escape and be there. Find her way south to the Pole and explore all the places whose names she knew by heart from the *National Geographics* map on page 556, Volume 171, number 6—more than nine hundred places to hide where no one could ever find her, names she knew off by heart like Cape Lloyd, Moody, Latady, Joinville. Larsen, Aagaard, Ellsworth, Cape Lookout, Aspland and, her favourite above all, Eights Coast, the domain of thousand-foot ice cliffs she loved over everything else from the glossy *Geographic* colour

photographs.

Antarctica. Where Dede one day would—tears welled up just thinking about it during showers that Sunday morning having finally decided she could wait no longer and told Liztaylor she would die trying to escape while she still had her wits.

Standing together under the showers, naked, steaming, taking longer than usual since the guard nurses were yakking away longer than usual that morning on purpose, all with their lusty eyes as usual glued on Dede and stupid Liztaylor (they called her *Cleofatra* from hating her blue eyes and chubby beauty), Dench in particular looking on the hardest, ready at any time with the fine-out, hoping Liztaylor wanted to go for some trouble, commit some infraction the fine-out needle would have to quell—which suddenly it happened. Liztaylor did go violent, breaking away from Dede shaking with insulted wrath, her body stooped in livid anger as she charged at Dench intent on strangling her to death—yet Dede ran up behind, wrapped her arms around Liz, hugged and held her and drew her back under the steaming showers telling Liz to remember the names with her, the names Dede had taught her to block out bother, stave off anger, quell down fear, the two of them shouting together at the top of their voices in the echoing shower room *Dott Rise! Newcomer! Amundsen! Newness! Brownson! Thwaites! Enderby! Valkyrie! Lauritzen Bay—*

“Hey, pussy slut!” Dench called to Dede over the sound of the showers, eyeing poor Liztaylor’s overweight body. “Your sweet little sybfriend there just got a lot sweeter.” She closed her eyes, smiled to herself running a teasing tongue over her lips.

The other guards chuckling, Dench tossed towels at Dede and Liz, neither of which fell anywhere near them but into the water pooling around the drain instead.

“Oops!” Dench joked, turning to go.

"Oops!" the other guards laughed, following her out.

It wasn't just that, but the sight of her friend's hairless head and body—"I'm so afraid," cried Liztaylor, "but you look like cancer." And she wrapped Dede in a long embrace, the two holding onto each other together under the hot shower so they would never forget this friendship, ever.

"What a pair we are," Dede joked, and they laughed.

"Never mind that," said Liztaylor, peering about to make certain they were alone. "You need to plan your escape. Do something so wrong that it gets New Meat sending you over to work for Hades Brulai on his pharo (construction) gang next door at HABITAT PROVIS with the psycho sybs. You stand zero chance of getting away from here at not even medium security HABITAT SOLACE. Word is Brulai is building a new steel fence running down to the bay and into the water so no sybs can swim away. But you could. You're a good swimmer, the best. Lake Huron's open water is waiting for you to swim to freedom, my girl. But only if, like I say, you do something so wrong that New Meat has no choice but to send you to PROVIS for punishment. You'll be working on the point. You drop your shovel, run for the water, strip off your coveralls and dive in. Brulai's boys aren't going to stop you. They'll be whistling and cheering the nude show you're giving them, louder than ever when Brulai and his guards can do nothing to stop you since none of them know how to swim.

They laughed at the thought. "I can't take any more, Liz, that's all."

"I know, dear. But don't worry. Opportunity is here, I know it is . . ."

Dede stayed on full alert night and day, behaved herself so as not to attract unwanted suspicion, cat-napping here and there, no sleep at night, since that's when mischief could best be made. There would be plenty of time for sleep once she was

free. She watched, she waited, stayed always on guard for the *right moment to pounce*.

Five days later it happened. Just after seven a.m. on her way to the dining hall for early breakfast under the supervision of Karla the Monster (at six-foot one, nearly two-hundred pounds, Karla the meanest of all the nurse guards) who had been ordered by New Meat to keep her eyes fastened on Dede twenty-four-seven since she just knew something bad was due to unfold, as Liztaylor overheard New Meat warn the guard nurses one day. Dede had just been too quiet and compliant, even greeting New Meat with daily smiling *Good Mornings* in the dining hall where New Meat could always be found sitting just inside the doors when they opened for breakfast at 7:00 a.m.

On her way with Karla to the dining hall for breakfast, the chapel doors open as usual, an electrical drill stopped whirring inside, a new tool boy from the pharo crew stepping out as they passed. He flagged them down, caught up with Karla and asked if there was somewhere he could have a smoke.

"Only outside, out back, you need clearance." Karla looked him over, Dede knowing Karla wanted to be there, to smoke a jolly with a nice boy like him.

"Hang on," said Karla. Walking Dede over and inside the chapel, she marched her seven pews down the aisle, pointing for her to take a seat.

"Don't budge for an inch till I'm back," she warned.

She took out a ring crowded with keys, walked back to the doors, stepped out to the hall, closed the doors behind her and locked them, leaving Dede alone in the chapel sitting in her pew gazing toward the front, the gold cross, the altar, the tall candles, the stained glass windows above and silence complete, Dede listening, her glance shifting then to an unmarked door built into the wood-paneled wall on the other side of the chapel near the front that was kept permanently

locked. And only Dede knew why.

Karla would be gone long enough for her to slip over and try the door. You just never knew. Off she ran down the aisle to the front, went left and along past the stage, turning up the side aisle quickly where she tried the door, hardly believing it when the door wasn't closed all the way. And there was an extension cord from a wall socket running under the nearly closed door. In she went.

This was where she came Sundays for church, the chapel, this pew across from the door where she always sat. She could see from the pieces of lumber and equipment that the tool boy must be working inside.

This small room was never used anymore since the time long ago when Dede and her twin-sister Dreese were eight—her heart shook, her throat swallowed suddenly dry remembering—for in here it was true, in this place where the door she pulled open, under the light bulb hanging down that flickered off and on like the bulb would soon burn out, boxes stacked up filled with ancient dusty books, the tool boy's large drill lying on the floor beneath a hole half way up the bare yellow-painted wall, all silent, all still. Dede couldn't tell whether she felt frightened or joyful to be here at last. She closed the door behind her so it was as she found it, and closed her eyes.

"I can feel her alive," Dede said to herself. "Feel as she must have felt that day when she came here with her mind made up at last to be free from her pain."

Aunt Ruthie had said on burial day afterwards: "Your mother could not stop her pain, Dede dear, and she didn't know why, she didn't know how except this way to stop all such hurt. It is best. For once your mommy finally found that peace the world cannot offer. Don't be sad now. For once she has probably finally found it, some glorious peace."

And Dede sat in her own glorious peace by herself, humming softly in the place where her mother Juna Mecarsay, the Ojibwe poet, brought two-thousand pages of poems she had written in her life since she was a girl and, locking the door, lay herself down on the papers piled up on the floor like a mattress made of poetry before striking the match that lit the freeing fire—

The door banged open. Karla the Monster reaching down, enraged, yanking bald Dede by her ear, bumping the tool boy back out of her way while screaming hysterical at Dede: *“ARE YOU DEAF, DEDE DURAND? WHAT DID I SAY? YOU’LL DO PEACE ACTS FOR THIS TILL YOU’LL WISH YOU’D NEVER BEEN BORN!”*

And just like Liztaylor had said that was all it took for New Meat to throw her next door in HABITAT PROVIS where Hades Brulai ran the show: the pharoman’s pharo, the boss who could treat sybs like Dede most needed to be treated, doing peace acts till they cried out for mercy. But it was all hands on deck so she’d start out first with the build gang working on the new fence out at the point.

So they put her in prison-orange coveralls choring with three other sybs who New Meat had shit-listed too, along with seven men who had their own pharo boss, not Brulai, who was nicknamed the Zit on account of his acne mean face.

Word had come by from Liztaylor the night before, a note saying farewell cause she knew this was it, as it should be. “Good luck, girl,” she wrote down. “When you run, just don’t stop till you get where you know you are free, my darling. Remember I am with you always until we meet again—and we will I know in my heart, I just do. P.S. Jane Jesperis says just in case to know that old Brulai likes nipples.

Next day when working away setting fence posts in holes that Zit and his crew had made ready, old Brulai came by and got talking to Dede, a girl named Selda and one named Vi, about

sex, about what got them excited, what turned them on.

"You feel it inside, in your twisted syb minds, you get turned on?"

No one answered Brulai right away. Word was that he did this, always played innocence like this, nothing a good boy would not want to ask until he found out whether what he could do, would you even know if he was fuzzing your wares and report him, not that it mattered, his reputation was such. What was wrong with some step-over-here-for-a-second and open your buttons so Boss Brulai can poke for some extra, some on-duty slipdick? Though he kidded his boys that he had to be careful with neuro cases like Dede. Three months ago a pharo got into it such that the neuro he was inside squeezed herself so tight around his penis that she wouldn't let go of him, never.

Vi frowned, so dumb poor girl. "Turned on. You mean like a light gets turned on?" she asked Brulai.

"No bitch," Brulai snarled, "like hornball, hot, excited. You stick a stiffy in your hole it might make you feel good—"

Selda joined in. "Before that, tell us what jingles your coins, Brulai?"

He shifted his stool that he was sitting on and put down his shotgun to light up a smoke, chuckling. "I don't mind a good set of hooters, like none of you puny girls got. Here he snorted and coughed up a juicy gob that he turned and spat on the ground. "But a deuce of some bing cherry nubbers on top of a nice pair of smokies will do it for me every time."

Dede spoke up. "Don't be too sure until you can see for yourself, sir, but maybe they're right in front of you under these coveralls, sir, the best pair of secrets your eyes would ever have feasted on. *Sir.*"

Selda then laughed, said to Dede just like they planned during

the night: "Don't waste your time, doll. He told us he knows he's not missing anything. Forget it. His loss. *Sir.*"

And that, as they hoped it would, got him all pondering. *Sir* was what he deserved, some respect for his power, and so he sat watching them work for ten minutes until he said,

"Fine. But if this is some of your tease-ball shit, you'll pay you dumb sybs till you're begging for mercy where none can be found."

"It's not tease-ball," Dede protested, "if we want to mingle that way in HABITAT PROVIS like others, what would he want them to do, *sir*—"

"I give the orders!" he erupted, his temper virginia, bad violence raging that they were laughing at him. He stood up, his face red as beef as he glared at them. "You think I'm that easy to screw with you syb bitches, using *sir* like I never knew why?"

Shotgun in hand he approached Vi, who was closest, raised the gun and sighted like he was going to blow her head off. "Get down on your knees!" Which right away she fell to.

"Open your mouth. You play games you get hurt, you bitch." He lowered the shotgun, put the tip of the barrel in front of Vi's mouth. "With your teeth broken off you can suck on my *sir* all you want to you syb slut."

When Vi said so sweetly, the plan to perfection:

"Not bad if you've got something worth sucking on, Brulai."

He stepped forward, shotgun raised to smash down and shut Vi's mouth but she rolled backwards and lay on her back crying, "Worm dick! I bet you're a worm dick, Brulai!"

"*Hooters*, Brulai!" Selda shouted. "Dede's showing you just what tits can be like in your dreams."

So he sideways glanced fast, not seeing at first, but then:

"Fuck what!" he stammered, confused. The instant he turned just away from poor Vi, his eyes in amazement locked on Dede as she ripped open her coveralls, lowering them waistward so Brulai could get a good look at her beautiful bare smokies with nipples erect so the sybs could well see the coins in Brulai's pockets were jingling—but only for a second before Selda whacked him in the head with one of the steel fence posts as hard as she could. The shotgun dropping from his hands, he fell to his knees and toppled forward, motionless, dead by the looks of it.

Vi picked up his shotgun while Dede peeled off her coveralls.

"Get going, girl!" Selda yelled.

The nearby pharo crews stared over stunned and astonished at the sight of Hades Brulai lying what looked like dead, but even more at Dede Durand streaking naked toward the point, sybs all around hooting and cheering her on.

She stopped at the rock shore, turned and looked back for a hurting quick second at the Blue Oak psychiatric buildings, the Egypt of all she had lived through, yet her long dreamed-of exodus had come true.

Liztaylor she thought of, her deepest friend ever—till a frantic wave from Vi screaming desperate:

"Hurry, Dede!!"

The Zit running over having seen what had happened, raised his shotgun on Selda and was sighting her just when Vi ran up from behind him raising Brulai's gun, blasting the Zit away before he knew what had ever hit him.

Swimming hard, the water more frigid, more cold than she'd thought, Dede kept her strokes hard and even and splashing in rhythm with the various names in her head that she knew of the

places one day she would reach, legs kicking, arms churning, running the names through her mind in time with each wind-blown splashing stroke to ward off the biting cold:

“Ryrie, Point Williams. Philbin then Ranvik. Ragnild and Goodenough. Chesney, Strathcona, Cape Jules, Banzare, and finally, not least, the Eights Coast cliffs in the Antarctic Sea!

“I’M FREE, I’M FREE! I’M DEDE DURAND AND AT LAST I AM FREE!! ”

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Paul Illidge’s most recent book is the true crime financial thriller *RSKY BZNS* (New English Review Press, 2022), a “fascinating story” (Frank Abagnale, Jr., author of *Catch Me if You Can*), a “gripping and intricate read” (Conrad Black). His book *THE BLEAKS* (ECW Press), was a *Globe & Mail* Best Book of 2014. Books in his *Shakespeare Novels* series *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, are all available internationally at www.kobobooks.com

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