

The Diner continued

John made an effort to look out the window, but his eyes wandered time and again to the waitresses nipples popping through the stretched thin white cloth of her blouse. As she made her way up and down the aisle serving other tables, he gawked awkwardly at the calculatingly inviting lace edging of her panties visible beneath her skirt, hugging those big buttocks. It occurred to him that perhaps George was right and the time had indeed arrived. After his hamburger he would pay a social visit to the sisters of mercy, those necessary young harlots at that little hotel around the corner, to find release.

The waitress stopped by his table. "How's everything John, can I get you something else?"

"Another beer."

"Is that all you need?"

"Yeah, thanks." He lied.

Argie ambled casually down the aisle, reaching John's table.

"Everything Okay here, John?"

"Yeah, great Argie, thanks."

"Slow night."

"Maybe it'll pick up."

"Fine by me this way. Been a busy day."

"Well, you'll be closing up soon, I guess."

Argie stood awkwardly by the table, waiting for more, but John didn't oblige.

"Want some company?"

"Sure. Sit down."

"So, what have you been doing, John?"

"Writing."

"That's right. You promised to let me read something of yours, remember?"

"Well, I haven't finished it yet."

"It's been a long time. Do you write slow, or is it a long story?"

"Geez, Argie! A little of both...I guess."

"What's it about?"

The waitress brought John's beer, interrupting them. "Couple of customers at the door, Argie," she announced bluntly.

Argie didn't look up. Irritated by the intrusion, she responded crisply. "Well, go ahead and seat them, Okay?"

Annoyed, the waitress brusquely walked off in silent resentment.

"Don't think she's too happy about that, Argie."

"This isn't a union shop. Everyone does a little of everything."

John took a mouthful of his cold hamburger.

"Tell me what it's about."

"The book?"

"Yes! Whatever it is you're writing."

With his mouth full, mumbling, "life."

"Women?"

Another large bite, "yeah."

"Sex?"

Abruptly, John choked on an errant piece of hamburger. He coughed, spewing masticated food uncontrollably from his mouth, spraying the table.

"Geez! I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Argie."

"No. It's my fault."

They reached to the napkin dispenser simultaneously, their fingers inadvertently touching. Her hand trembled. He held it lightly, indecisively.

"I think you took me by surprise," he explained lamely.

"Obviously." She attempted to sound assertive, but her voice cracked and she was alarmed it would betray her, just like her respiration and heartbeat that had suddenly become erratic.

The waitress arrived. Their hands separated reluctantly, permitting her to clean the table with a damp cloth.

"Are you finished here?" the waitress demanded in a bold, insinuating voice, annoyed by their intimacy.

"Yeah. Take the plate," John responded anxiously. "But bring another beer," he called after her and immediately averted his eyes to stare fixedly out the window.

"You like cars, John?"

"I don't know. I guess so. Why?"

"Well I'm sitting here in front of you, and we're talking, but you seem to prefer looking at the traffic."

"Oh, hey, it's not ...It's that ...Ah...I apologize..."

"No. I think I'm the one who should apologize, I guess. I interrupted you to talk and all I'm doing is making bitchy remarks. I've just been very tense lately. I'm perspiring, it's so hot and stuffy in here!"

There was a long pause as John attempted to interpret her confession, since the diner was climate controlled, and to him seemed rather chilly.

"I really am sorry, John."

"Well, I guess you were a little aggressive, but hey, forget it. Do you want to go outside? Take some fresh air?"

"Outside?"

"Yeah. Can you take the time?"

"Sure. It's my father's place, what's he gonna do, fire me?"

They laughed, got up and walked out, George looking after them from inside the kitchen. On the street, they walked with their shoulders touching. Not speaking. Taking large gulps of the sultry night air.

"Gonna rain," he finally said.

"You think so?"

"Yeah. Smell the moisture in the air."

"It's nice. Thank you for inviting me to walk with you."

Hot fingers of perspiration coursed indecisively down his back as John hooked his arm hesitantly around her moist waist and she molded herself comfortably to his body.

"I feel better," she murmured.

They walked by the small hotel where several prostitutes lounged outside, their conversation halting abruptly as they watched the couple walk by. John made an effort to ignore them. They were discreet, and avoided greeting him.

"Must be a terrible job those girls have. " She said.

"Guess so."

"They probably thought we're lovers."

"Probably."

"Do you think they work all night, and sleep all day?"

"I don't know that much about it."

"Aren't you curious? I mean being a writer and all. To use one as a character in a novel?"

"You think I should go back and spend some time with them? Just for research, of course."

She laughed. A sweet, melodious laugh. "No. You're with me now. I don't want you to leave."

Silence. A long silence. A deafening scream suppressed, yearning to issue from her mute lips. Finally: "Do you think those girls invest in a room for the night, or does the hotel charge by the hour...or by the customer?"

"Shouldn't I be taking you back? Your dad will think I kidnapped you."

"If you want. I guess we should go back, I feel better."

As they walked, a smothering heat surrounded them, making breathing difficult. They laboriously gulped at the stagnant air, anxiously searching for relief. The veneer of thick perspiration that sheathed them saturated their clinging garments with a febrile heat. Argie shivered. Approaching the diner, John stumbled abruptly into the opaque narrow canyon of the contiguous alley. She followed, walking by his side without objection. After several steps, enclosed in a tenebrous darkness, he pulled her around to face him and searched her face intimately with his. Argie responded with unexpected passion, suffocating him with a hungry mouth.

He lifted her from the pavement in his arms, moving both of them further into the shadows, as thick drops of intermittent rain plunged unexpectedly from above, bursting with a vaporous hiss on striking the parched pavement. Groping into her blouse, he ascertained that indeed her breasts were as he had imagined, in no need of the harness that she used strictly for the sake of modesty and convention. Geez! He thought, Old

George was probably telling the truth when he said his daughter never had a boyfriend. Tits this firm had never been fondled.

Emboldened, the light drizzle transformed itself into an impetuous rain falling from an enigmatic and capricious sky as he pressed her body against the wall of the diner. Reaching beneath her skirt, he fumbled in a timid caress, surprised Argie didn't utter the obligatory, clichéd "don't." Attempting to penetrate her, he suddenly realized she was still a virgin. John wanted to stop, but Argie was moaning and panting rapidly, desperately trying to catch her breath as her arms crushed him in an anxious embrace. Geez! How do I stop this now, he thought anxiously, simultaneously pushing hard, piercing deep, then losing himself, surrendering to her ravenous probing as she devoured his body.

"Did you bust it?" she asked. Breathless, he was unable to answer.

The fevered perspiration coursing down their faces mixed with the wet from an intensifying, stinging rain that violently soaked their bodies. From somewhere far away John could hear Argie wailing hoarsely in his ear. He placed his hand

across her open mouth to muffle the piercing cacophony. Thunder roared angrily above them.

A sudden, howling gust of wind blew through the alleyway, whirling in a reproving, moaning vortex about them, spinning the garbage into noisy, furious whirlpools. The crashing sound of falling, splintering empty produce crates distracted his violent thrusting, stirring him to a vague consciousness. A black alley cat leaped into the air, caterwauling, evaporating through the debris. John became aware of the lighted window that was the diner's men's room opening to the alleyway. A shadow was observing them. Deep thunder rolled across the diner. Lightning flashed. In its brilliant incandescence he recognized George, tears streaming from his eyes, a spectator to the debauchery; witnessing the abrogation of his cosmos. John suddenly spilled in spontaneous, instinctively urgent bursts back to his forgotten liquid beginning in the soft, moist hollow of Argie's body. His mouth opened in an involuntary wail as he replicated that unremembered primordial ejaculation out of Africa that created the Assyrian, the Chinese, the Egyptian, the Hebrew, the Indian, the Greek.

The heavens suddenly parted sensually, without embarrassment, in an inundating downpour. Heavy water cascaded as a roaring waterfall, baptizing their inert, spent and coupled bodies.

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John never returned to the diner again after that night. And he moved to another part of the city. Many years later, in midtown, he ran into an acquaintance from the old neighborhood, a Greek boy whose parents, like his own, had immigrated to this country. His friend was dressed in a finely tailored dark suit with a crisp white shirt, conservative tie, and shiny black lace shoes. Redolent with the fragrance of expensive cologne.

Holding a thin leather briefcase. Integrated thoroughly into American society, John assumed. A well remunerated executive working for some transnational corporation; bartering his life for the possibility of a corner office, and a company expense account.

The executive talked about his house in the suburbs, and showed a picture of a blue eyed, blonde American wife, two children, and the golden retriever around a

swimming pool sparkling in brilliant sunlight. A large house under shady trees in the background. The American Dream. He probably has a similar photograph on his desk at the office, John thought maliciously, just to remind him, during those moments of inevitable existential anguish, why he's decaying there.

Nonetheless, John felt a tinge of jealousy and more than a hint of resentment at this manifest affluence. He still lived in a six floor walk up on the Lower East Side. It all depended on how the cards were dealt, he brooded. Or more likely how the deck was shuffled! No, he rapidly corrected his flawed thinking, it was neither. It was how you played the hand you were dealt.

"So how's by you?" the executive asked, slipping into what he considered the obligatory neighborhood vernacular for this encounter.

"Still writing. Almost finished my novel."

"Same novel?"

"Yeah. It's complicated."

"What's it about that makes it so complicated?"

"It's a historical novel. About us. People. Government. Religion. The big lies. Our small victories."

"Wow! Think you're ever gonna finish?"

"Hope so. This book is about the way we were. I want to write a sequel. About what we will become, but I don't think I'll live long enough to complete it."

"Does this one have a title?"

"The Rape."

"The Rape?"

"Yeah. We've all been violated at one time or another."

"Gonna be tough finding a publisher, people don't read anymore."

"I know. They watch TV."

"Write for TV. Or Hollywood. They pay millions."

"They're just a palliative for the masses. It's not literature."

They chatted briefly about the old neighborhood, and as they were parting the executive asked:

"You married?"

"No. I prefer to rent, not buy."

"I know what you mean. Works out cheaper in the long run."

Then he mentioned Argie. "She always had a thing for you, you know. Everyone thought you'd end up together."

"Argie. Yeah, I remember Argie. Whatever happened to her?"

"Word had it somebody knocked her up."

"Geez! She got pregnant?"

"Remember George? The diner? He sent her back to the Old Country for an arranged marriage."

"Geez!"

"She was lucky, if her father had been Muslim, he would have slit her throat."

"Geez!"

"She married a surgeon."

“A surgeon!”

“Yeah. Must have cost George a bundle, the dowry to snag a surgeon. What with her pregnant and all!” the executive chortled mockingly.

“Did she keep the baby?” John asked. And immediately regretted voicing a concern that betrayed that reluctant vestige of prosaic conformity that still lingered in the persona he had created, and had erupted involuntarily from his lips.

“Don’t know. Doubt it, what with a doctor husband. Not his baby, probably aborted. Last I heard she has a couple of kids and lives in Athens.”

“And George?”

“George is dead. He’s buried here, in the Municipal Cemetery. Of course you know there’s a skyscraper where the diner used to be.”

END

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