

## Read These Stories at Your Peril, They Will Show You a Brilliant (addictive) Hidden World

By Pierrino Mascarino

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### Love Will Burst Your Heart

By Pierrino Mascarino

"Go-or-or do," sung cinnamon skinned, pretty little Graciela up to Gordo through the sputtering smoke of his sizzling sausage cart.

"Por favor," said Gordo, squeezing onto his grill yet another floppy bacon wrapped sausage; "don' go calling me Gordo no more, I been rebajaing my weights."

"But I bring you flores," Graciella whispered in a tender, husky voice, through Gordo's popping sputters, holding her vase bouquet of yellow ranunculus, purple anemones, crimson poppies, blinking her jet black eyes.

"Para mi," he said, "you bring? for why?"

"Saying I love you, you silly Gordo," stamping her foot and moving her flowers out of the grease sputters.

"Love? Now? gotta sell salchiche this morning, if I don't sell. Are dey any no good manana?"

"What you are den yourself?" Graciella demanded, "(cough cough) una bestia, who don't got no eyes for seeing de mujer here que te quere?"

"Who dis womans who loves me?"

"¿Quien? Maldito, you know whom is whom love you," Graciella had been going to night school.

"Take a salchiche gratis," Gordo said scooping up one of his sputtering, bacon-wrapped specials covered with onions, dripping grease, up in a professional motion and sprinkling on little green capers and fresh cilantro.

"Sweet Gordo," she said, "don't pretend no ignorances to me, you know I don't come for no salchiche gratis."

A large flower van skareeched up, creak, out its door came the driver, announcing, "I got no quarters, parking costes too much," pulling out a large long flower box, "I wonder do Gordo quarters have?"

"I got quarters, Jorge, cambio for sausage, everybody want de quarters, I am salchiche not bank."

"Muy bien, da me dos sausage--5 centavos, the parking, each minute eet cost now," then to Graciella, "and

look quien esta, the most beautiful embra of the whole market, more beautiful dan de flower demselfs," he smiled and winked at her, resting his large extracted gladiolus box on the edge of Gordo's smoky sausage cart during jamming a large hand in his pocket excavating sausage dollars.

"Ten cuidado ispartoso," Graciela laughed, "please, Jorge, quickly tell to dis pinche Gordo some poem so he don't be so escare of de love."

Jorge's early morning spontaneous limericks were famous up and down the Wall Street flower district, but here was coming a flashing orange Parking Enforcement light just down the street. The city of Los Angeles was bankrupt and bleeding its citizens dry.

"Eet weel find you Gordo," said Jorge, picking up one of Gordo sausages already slidden to him across the counter with his change; "ees esneaking up on you," first setting down his flower box on the sidewalk, grabbing the greasy parking meter quarters, rushing over while reciting,

"You have shut you heart,

Like shut a door,"

and then turning half back and chewing while still feeding in parking quarters,

"To starve de loves inside, not trouble you no more.

"But down Wall estreet here come de wet new wind of May,"

then walking back and picking up the Graciella's bouquet vase,

"Blow you flower smell from de Graciela's bouquet.

"Now you love yell out in thee,

"I strong, I break you hearts,

If you don't set me efree."

Graciella clapped her hands, "Muy maravilloso, gracias," little tears in her eyes, "your poecia would make the estones fall in love."

"Take a salchiche gratis," said Gordo.

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## Corby's

By Pierrino Mascarino

Peter Sebastian and Zeek stood in a Los Angeles' Highland Park alley, "Gaadzooks," whispered Zeek, "whole spankin new half pinta Corby's. I'm a pure devil for breakin them blue whiskey tax stamps there onna neck--show ya trick I learnt down the road," reaching.

"Naw," said Peter Sebastian, turning out of reach, "that's all right, busted a few seals myself in my day," with a quick twist of his wrist.

"Yeh, see yer more then a fair hand at it. But now," as Peter Sebastian raised the bottle went up, "you're drinkin wrong, leave a space further forwards with your lips and let a bottle breathe, nature aborts a vacuum; show ye--gi'me a swig that," Zeek said reaching.

"Naw, wisht I could," Peter Sebastian said turning further away

"Wisht ye could? I'm talkin' about a small demonstration swig, won't even drain the neck," coming around to his bottle side.

"Naw bad for yih."

"Ain't that stingy?"

"Naw, jest follyin' epidemic health rules."

"Health?"

"Gainst unsanitary sharin: y'never brush yer scummy green teeth. Heaven only knows what kinda TB, polio and diphtheria dental plaque y'got lurking in yer maw," the bottle went up again for another a long pull.

"Brush my teeth?"

"You got periodontal tooth and pulmonary throat germs inculcatin all over the place."

Zeek rolled his eyes upwards in heavenly apostrophy, "Lord, what's he talkin' about? caint drink his lacquer thinner, that'd take the paint off a Rolls-Royce convertible, cause of brushin' my teeth for God's sake?"

"Don't swear. Taken Lord's name don't become ye--sides you got the gallopin TB buddirow—ye was coughin up pieces a spongy lung last night."

"But that Corby's whiskey'll kill any puny germ I got--no bacterias can't stand up to that batry acid."

"That a scientific fac'?"

Zeek grabbed up an alley tincan, "Now jes wait, back off, chuggin a whole damn bottle down. Just liddle bit in this old Franco-American spaghetti can here and no germs?"

"It'd ruinate a flavor mixin' it. Sides no damn good fer yer health, yer a peripathetic invalid, may Jesus save

us all from sin."

"Invalid? so I cain't have Corby's in a Franco-American spaghetti can?"

"Be cruelty contributin' to yer early death buddy-row."

"Gadzooks, never knew ye ta be so kind. What about your own early death? Me, I'm kind too--just savin ye drinkin yerself inta gallopin alkyholism jes ta stinge it from me--y'know solitary drinkin's a sure sign of a alkyholic."

"That right?"

"Argument's gonna be over right quick here 'cause yer drainin that bottle empty about 10 seconds, way you slammin it down; I swan, never did see nobody didn't have more a sense a' bad manners that needed to be pig drinkin all by hisself in front a' somebody that himself needs a drink."

"Here y'are, Captain Marbles, yer turn."

"Gadzooks, if you didn't leave jis half'a swallow in here ye stingy son of a bitch."

"Yer welcome, you'll thank me some sweet day."

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## Flowers of Remembrance

By Pierrino Mascarino

"Clarisse," he murmured, walking slowly along Hyde Park Ave. in Tampa, arthritically bent, a lost, tottering old man in distracted remembrance, his arms swinging loosely in the fashion of the elderly, wearing his faded frayed sweater she'd knitted him long ago, and smelling again this same musty aging tree smell.

Wished he could whistle, loved the sound of his own whistling in the twilight, as they used to do, he and Clarisse, walking along this same evening street.

A rattling old jalopy was passing, with headlights still unlit, feeling its stumbling way along this familiar sunset street over loose sticking up bricks, clicking them together, treading gingerly on its Goodyear white corded slick tire-slippers, its wobbling fenders and bumper banging, springs groaning as it crept slowly by him.

Hyde Park bricks needed sanding—useless as they were now, as he had become; a dump truck with piles of gray Florida sand and brooming men to work it down between those empty rattling spaces time had created between these loose clicking bricks and souls. And souls.

He ducked down under a huge, dark, low Live Oak trunk lowering over the sidewalk, these gray massive trunks untended were collapsing, an old tree's uncut toenails, barely sustaining themselves, sagging lower over the waiting sidewalk, their million convex shinny little leaves now catching, holding the whispering darkness amongst them as this evening's gloaming progressed.

Even these evenings, gloamings, tree's leaves were growing fewer for the old man, and soon God would take the few were left.

Suddenly a passionate mocking bird shrieked out a chickadee's stolen song to split the settling silence and protest the setting of the world's sun, "Stop going down," demanded the arrogant bird of the sun, up on a still lit Live Oak branch, bobbing, and arrogantly demanding, praying his strident objection to this final dimming of a last sunbeam, screaming back the inevitable darkness. The inevitable darkness.

And another familiar sound, on that corner was the same flower vendor as before murmuring, "Flores, Flores," on the late afternoon air, actually flowermen's faces had changed over the last 40 years, but not for him.

Today remained one last bunch of bright red blooms left in the pail and the flower seller was already emptying his flower water into the bricky gutter, clanging the handle on his rusty galvanized bucket.

This was part of the walking old man's dim ritual, enjoying a first sight of Clarisse's favorite blood red carnations, next crossing this same street, as he was now, at this same place, pausing a moment, and working

one faded pension dollar out of a cracked wallet for the smiling vendor; then, always remembering inflation, and taking out another dollar.

The price doubled over the decades but he liked to pretend it still the same single dollar as on that last day of her life.

Carrying the bright red flowers next to his green sweater he continued up the street toward the green house with this last bunch of carnations. For a long time now he could not smell them anymore and even their bright red was dim in his fading sight.

Suddenly a pair of flashing green eyes under bright orangish brown lashes shaded by the straw brim of a red hat she wore were hurrying round a corner—a young woman, she quickly passed him down Hyde Park Ave.

Momentarily he was shocked by the sudden intrusion of the persistent bright image of those passing eyes—so like Clarisse—red hair.

He did not hear her returning footsteps.

"Sir?"

He turned.

The hurrying eyes—this time he noted her enormous velvet irises, almost too big for the freckled young face beneath. She asked in a soft urgent voice, "Where did you get your beautiful flowers please?"

"Flowers?" Forgetting he even had them, he looked down. The flowers suddenly much redder, perhaps after the green of her eyes? "oh, from the flower seller just..." here he stopped himself, whispered, "but I'm afraid I bought his last bunch."

She said, "Ah, too late and I really must have flowers," and she frowned a gorgeous freckled frown that made a little ache in his throat.

"Never too late," he whispered, jarring himself out of his encapsulated self-pity. He presented the last bunch of carnations to her.

Her long pink dress had delicate white stripes and rippled a whispering wind rustle in the sunset breeze in the moment of following silence.

"No-o-o," she protested very softly, looking up at him, "flowers are important, you must have bought them for a reason? For someone?"

Her roseate eyes, now reflecting back the glints of the red flowers he had placed in her arms and revealing a voluptuously gentle heart, waking him from his sad, self-pitying senescent sleep, reminding him again of that delicious first moment with Clarisse, a tremor ran through his body. "Til human voices wake us and we drown": and the smell, it was back! He hadn't been able to smell the spicy smell of these flowers in years, and see those

eyes so clearly, Clarisse's green eyes.

"Yes," he said slowly, "but only for an old man's remembrance."

She looked at him a moment with tender comprehension, "I'll pay you for them," she finally said.

"Please, no. It means much to me that my flower giving in this world is not completely over with. I know how important flowers are: I came running to that old house across the street where my greeneyed Clarisse lay dying, she wanting only one last bunch of my flowers: but, like you, I was late. It's made an eternal space in my life. I still bring carnations now in remembrance of those times—but there's no one to receive them. You've done me a favor."

He smiled a wrinkled smile and walked away, but much straighter and even one hand in a pants' pocket, a little jaunty, and—he tried pursing his lips—whistling, oh my whistling! walking instead now into the future.

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## Sardines

By Pierrino Mascarino

Tall Zeek, in his ragged overcoat, was trying not to just grab the sardine can away from seated Peter Sebastian, who had frayed pant knee holes, his dirty knees peeking out, "Thank God I'm here to save ye, don't panic, just, steady, first put that can a sardines down."

"What?" said Peter Sebastian not even looking up.

Zeek bended over, whispering patiently, "You gotta know those sardines is dangerous high-protein?"

"They is?" said Peter Sebastian prying loose one of the compressed little fishes beyond curled open lid of the can with a rusty tined pocket fork he always carried for emergencies.

"I mean high protein."

"High?" Echoed Peter Sebastian, fishing a part-crumbled cracker out of his lower coat pocket, then forking out one of the oiled, bilious-yellow, canned fish.

"That's it," continued Zeke, "very augmentations, eating that many. An that mustard inna can?" Pointing down emphatically.

"It is?" Peter Sebastian.

"Got consumptive mutated mustardic acid," Zeek said holding one hand underneath the precipitously tipping, spilling oil sardine can, it, "bind ye up preposterously without papaya powder," he said, then licking the spilled fish oil off his fingers, pooling spit thickening his diction.

"Does?" Said Peter Sebastian tenderly placing another oily, largeeyed sardine on a piece of crumbled cracker.

"Keep ye from spontaneously defecating regular."

"Will?" Sticking this next cracker and sardine up past his anticipating lips.

"For double dog sure," said Zeke, "paralyzes lower regions a the bivalveic pyloric colon. Kicks hell out of peristalsis."

"Helluvathing," said Peter Sebastian slowly ruminating the sardine laden cracker now inside his mouth, extracting maximum taste.

"You can take that fact to the bank," Zeek said, shaking his head, minutely following, Peter Sebastian's cheek's moving food bulge, smelling the delicious fishy odor.

"What ga I do plor it?" said Peter Sebastian, closing his eyes, simultaneously exposing all interior tongue surfaces to the sardine's flavor, only swallowing little bits at a time to keep the flavor going in his mouth.

"Papaya powder—lucky I got some."

"Pappy had that," finally swallowing.

"I say Papaya powder."

"No shit?" repeatedly licking his lips.

"That's it. Sardines without papaya' ll just rot ponderously precarious in your stomach," higher alarm creeping into Zeek's tone.

"Damn," said Peter Sebastian, sardineing another cracker, almost dropping part of his fork load in eagerness, causing Zeek to momentarily jerk a catching hand downwards, saying, "careful there! and then you got... ." Zeek's fingers twitching.

"Goo do?" The eater's tongue cargoed by another inserted food load.

"Lowers--Lord Almighty," Zeek was choking on saliva, raising himself on his toes, "lowers yer pneubralic resistance ta zero. Run you slap into disease. Like a fungus rotting off yer toenails."

Peter Sebastian looked up, "I've had that!"

"There you go buddy row!" Said Zeek, rubbing his hands together in confirmation, "a ounce of prevention, you've had first sign of over eaten perambulation," standing a tiptoe looking over the beautiful rim of the golden sardine can lid, "national health contortion of diatomaceous proportions. Not gettin no good digestion and they..."he trailed off, his rapt gaze lost in the sardinic vision before him, the sweet scales, "see," he gargled, in ecstatic longing, "food botulism histomine toxins'es creeping in your body."

"My body?" The fork's tine tonked again against the can, as Peter Sebastian was sardineing again.

"Merciful Jehovah," Zeke said weeping, "talking about yer insides fer Lord's sake!"

"Of sardines?" Picking up two more obese... .

"Naw, damn it, talking about botulism buddy."

"Damn right," said Peter Sebastian loading dripping fish onto his near-to-last cracker.

"Hell yes. So for the love of mercy are ye figurin' on eating all them Sardines?"

"Believe I will," Closing his eyes in masticatorial ecstasy again.

"God Almighty dog, pay attention now, I got papaya powder. Trade it to ya fer some sardines."

"Naw."

"Well iffen you choose to plunge yourself into imminent disease. Losing yer toenails."

"Nobody cares a bum's got toenails--ain't goin' to the beach none," reluctantly swallowing, only small parts down his throat.

"You never know."

"Ain't in no beauty contests that's for dern sure," said Peter Sebastian.

"Man never knows," suppressing a rising sob.

"Well, if they ast me, I'll go slow onna sardines, save my toenails."

"Be too late."

"Too late?"

"Terrible botulisms be pouncing on you that you just cain't just turn'em around onna dime ye know. Now there, that there's the worst, y'gittin' down now ta the most dangerous part of the can--bottom part's the most toxicificated."

"It is?" Peter Sebastian looking down and seeing that the sad bare bottom was being uncovered, the golden empty patches glaring up at him.

"Damn sure is, that's where all the sardinopoisons settle out."

"Do?"

"That dangerous big feller right there for a instance: he's botulizing dark, bad sign, transmogrificationed horrible."

"Is?" Peter Sebastian forking up the last large toothsome fish onto the last cracker surface. The savory oil from the can spreading, darkening the cracker surface.

"Damn sure is."

"Guess, I's t'offer you this here biggest sardine you'd turn it down cause it's so derved poison right?"

"Well..." here Zeek paused, "not necessarily, see difference is—alright this here's the real medical scientific, I took European medical treatments, so that it don't botulize me no more. I've been immuned with this papaya powder, hell of a thing and takes forever to get to but once yer there yer ready to face whatever damn thing luck throws yer way, far as eatin' goes."

"That right?" Slowly inserting into his mouth, onto his scummy white tongue the last fish and cracker, relishing the cracker's piquant saltiness, letting the sapid oil run off, deep into his mouth.

"Sure...oh, now you done it—swallerin that whole sardine down—I feel sorry for ye, doubt you'll git through the night."

"Well, I always was a reckless fool, guess I gotta take my chances. Wisht I had some more crackers though to sop up this delicious oil in here."

## Lucretia Borgia, Garibaldi, and the Fila Brasileros

By Pierrino Mascarino

Lucretia was a short girl with a little plump face. One of those sweet kittenish faces.

"Look," her father said to her tearful requests for his permission, holding up in front of her a streaked and peeling mirror, "Lucretia, you are fat-legged, short, little girl with plump face, no man going to go crazy about you; you are not no Gina Lolabrigida, and you are not even Sophia Loren."

Lucretia's Italian father remembered movie names from 30 years ago, when he'd been looking at women in that way, now he only imported Italian olive oil and didn't look at women so much.

"Me ha proprio stufato con queste lamentele," he said, tired of his daughter's "stupidagginae."

Deliberto didn't need a man around and therefore Lucretia didn't--or shouldn't.

"What he's doing this, what's his name Garibaldi? why coming here? why he's bothering me only unless to steal Borgia money? non capische? You gotta look at de reality of realism. How he even dare himself to transgress to my doorsteps without no asking no permission first? he knows? He knows I say no, him a bloody butcher. Who he thinks he is I don't know for nothing."

"Please, Papa, no harm can there be, Papa, just going to drink Coca-Cola, taking a walk? I never get married if I don't know nobody; if I don't have any... ."

"Oh, I know how dees things go," yelled her father, "you think I don't know? I know dees things: first a Coca-Cola walk and subito I gotta butcher bambino. And no son-in-law, or if I'm lucky I got a son-in-law who is only a schifoso butcher and I gotta daughter doing de pocceria---I know! No! not in my house I don't allow, I not allow! de peoples to transgress transgressions here, I'm talking to you about transgressions dat's what eet is."

Deliberto was using his new English word, "Its respect they don't have no—I know how deese things transgress nowadays with spacebook, you think? Don't think I too stupid to know nothing!"

His swelling red-and-blue-nose, veins throbbing; dark blue nose and bright red face.

Besides Deliberto had been much indulgent of his own product, gallons of Borgia olive oil, on his bruschetta and now, walking, he was kicking his pendulous hairy bare belly in front of him, back and forth, waving his arms for emphasis, the belly behaving according to the laws of physics, stopped not when he stopped, but continued its twisting movement, the belly button winking, til Deliberto found himself off-balance, out of breath and sat down hard--falooooop in a dust-stuffed chair raising a cloud.

"But Papa," whispered his meek maidenly daughter, approaching him with prayerfully folded hands--she knew how Deliberto got, Gibraltarishly impossible to move once he'd made up his mind and only because He'd

made up his mind and no other reason.

"But Papa, what I to say to poor Garibaldi coming to the door in a few minutes, he begged to meet you, to visit. He's our guest, Papa, he's our guest."

"Not my guest of mine! We don't answer no door, let heem knock he's knuckles bleeding, let Fleek talk to him."

Fleek was the massive family dog prowling homicidally about the courtyard of the oily Borgia mansion with its yardground greased by spilled olive oil, now turned redolently rancid in the compacted dust. With a large self-demolishing garage across from the house for the two oily 2 1/2 ton vehicles, and a storage area for "Borgia Olive Oil", which Deliberto Borgia canned himself and sold under the name Borgia.

The name Borgia was crookedly lettered on the greasy peeling sign over the driveway that descended steeply down to stacks of falling down greasy oil cans, populated by a clattering crowd of oil-licking rats, clanking the white and gold gallon size slippery olive oil cans.

And Deliberto named his daughter Lucretia so she'd keep keeping his account books and never get married.

At this moment Fleek, a Fila Brasileros mastiff, enormous dogs bred during slave retrieval times in old Brazil, was setting up a deep throated, bone chilling, slobbering roar: someone was violating their little courtyard.

"Papa, that's him, that's Garibaldi Lipschutz ... ."

"Lipschutz? You invite a dirty Jewish to my house?"

He launched his quiverquaking belly upwards and lurching to the window, "You know what de jewish are—you want hold you hands with a dirty Jew? Make Jewish babies? born with horns that'll rip your fica when they come out!"

"Papa," shrieked Lucretia, "his mother's Italian, Fleek will scare him. I'll go tell him Fleek's chained... ."

"You put my beautiful dog in jail for a dirty Jewish?"

The arriving Garibaldi, wearing a too small feathered hat, had a long gift salami wrapped in green paper from his mother's Deli; and, hearing Fleek, was only edging down the courtyard path, baseballbatting the salami like a club.

"You don't go out," Deliberto said, "you my fat ingratta figlia eating too muchly my spensive foods, fatly living under the roof of me—you do what I say, not for a Jewish will you to go to outside, you will not!" looking through a dirty window crack.

"But Papa... ."

"Ah, Bravo Fleek, he broke loose. We let Fleek teach him a lesson, the dirty Jew."

Fleek was definitely teaching.

Bong, bong, the terrified Garibaldi was scrambling up on a pile of gallon Borgia oil cans, holding onto his momma's long, bound-with-white-strings salami, a gift for Lucretia, yelling, "Lucretia, Lucretia," floundering hip-deep in the falling cascade of oil cans, the terrified rats clattering out from the collapsing pyramid and Garibaldi's fallen hat seized by Fleek.

"Please, Papa, let me go out!"

Outside Garibaldi took out a pocket knife.

Deliberto screamed, "He transgressing my cans to stab my dog!" "I will keel heem," grabbing an ancient, rickety revolver from a drawer.

Garibaldi had gotten up on top of a pile teetering cans; but while balancing was pulling off his salami-club's green paper and slicing off salami pieces, throwing them out to Fleek below, who was nosing then gobbling them up.

Diliberto now cracked open the window and raised the rickety revolver.

"No, papa, no!" screamed Lucretia grabbing his arm.

"He stealing my dog weet foods."

The revolver went off, a bullet actually came mostly out the barrel but the old cylinder was so approximately aligned it shaved off bits of lead in many directions, spattering against the window.

Whang-g-g the missent bullet holed the bottom of an olive oil can, gluging out olive oil onto Fleek, who licked it up, his maw now full of chewed salami and olive oil.

"My life is ruined," shrieked Lucretia.

Garibaldi flung the yard long salami to Fleek. Fleek first scented this prize then picked it up in his enormous jaws and trotted off.

Garibaldi clattered down out of the collapsed cans and fled back up the coutyard path.

"Never ever invite nobody, never again, to dees house," said Deliberto.

"I'm going to kill myself, Papa."

"You do what I tell you."

Garibaldi's dog spat hat and the green salami paper remained in the dust.

## Reginald, His Boots, and Leticia

By Pierrino Mascarino

For Leticia's tall blond young man, Timothy, a farm implement salesman, it had become a brightly glowing world today, even in the middle of what might have seemed a cold dreary Illinois winter to others. He'd come here to ask his Leticia, come to her school, to pick up his most-beautiful-of-all-world sweetheart, his almost fiancé, a truly pretty, young, first-grade teacher. She taught farm children in a brick building in the middle of a small northern Illinois town.

Leticia had very orange hair, and a delicate skin color that so enchanted Timothy, speckled gold freckles all over her--when they went swimming this past summer. He had been speechless at the beauty of her body, the water on her skin. It all matched her soft interior loveliness.

Timothy came here at three, to help her end her school day this snowy afternoon.

But something had changed for him, for them. The way they felt around each other. It was such a bubbling up of exuberant hope—scared him, but he loved it. This growing awareness between them, almost as though a third reassuring presence was drawing them together.

The deep snow was hiding sidewalks and streets, falling since morning. Leticia's first-graders, had worn loose, scuffling, all-the-same black rubber farm feedstore galoshes individualized with decals : FLEET FEET with a lightning bolt, or POWER to PUSHERS, to establish ownership, all from Joliet Feed Store to crunch three blocks, or two blocks, or one block home through deepening snow.

Even little kids wouldn't be picked up, they'd go with older brothers or sisters, even through this kneedeep snow.

Chebanse, Illinois was a farm town, its children farm children.

But teacher Leticia, after every school day's end, had lots of jobs: kids had to carry them back, their black, also Joliet Feed Store, lunchpails, for refilling, overfilling with tomorrow's fried pork chops, local orchard apples, cold hamburger and fried egg sandwiches—yucko-ducko, cheese sandwiches, which the children hated, better were peanut butter sandwiches, Twinkies, potato chips, Doritos, Fritos, corn puffs which the children loved—and were also negotiable trade food: "Who wants a salami sandwich? trade ya + a bag a Doritos for a peanut butter and jelly?"

Besides being in charge of the children taking back home their huge empty, POWIE-ZOWIE, decaled lunchpails, principal Mrs. Higgins told Leticia, " Gotta put on coats, scarves around their necks and tuck'em in their coats, put on hats and pull on those gloves."

Gloves and mittens had been sewed first to heavy farm boot shoelaces, then the shoelaces to coatsleeves and were loose-proof even if left off and just dragged home through the snow. Kids were always in a hurry to play.

But most important, were galoshes to protect new costly shoes—if a kid's galoshes came off, weren't on right, Leticia would get a note next day: "please," it would come, a jagged piece of bank mortgage envelope, safety-pinned to the child's coat, "be shure Joey (or Frank or Susan or Donna) has the bootes on going home from school, kan't afford no new shoeses."

And Letecia did, standing out in the hallway at the cloakroom door after school, "No, Murgatroyd, you've got to put them on." And, "Nathaniel, fasten all the snaps on those galoshes."

And here Timothy was helping in the midst of today's little kid stampede. Slipping on coats, winding scarves—he needed alone time with his teacher sweetheart before evening paper grading, so he was speeding everything up in her cloakroom—a separate room at the back of the school room.

Timmy, she called him Timmy, was worried that Chebanse's only little restaurant, the only place he and Letecia could go, closed early if there were no customers. All his plans were possible, but only if they skedaddled out of here very quickly.

Now, the cloakroom jammed full of noisy, pushing little bodies and shouts: "Frankie, gimme my hat," or, "I'm tellin," and, "Stop it! Stop it!" And, "Hi Mr. Timothy, and "I'll race you! Hey those are my boots, Reginald, put on your own boots. Nyaaaah Nyaaaah, I'll be already gone outside and you not even getting yer coat on, slowpoke," and, "Miss tecia, Terry's got my lunchpail."

Kids grabbing down heavy coats, dragging them out into the hall, not stopping to put them on to quicker escape school, but there she was, coat-galoshes-hat-scarf checking Letecia standing right at the door—her beautiful face shinning over the heads of the pushing kids—oh he loved her so much, she was glowing, her orange hair, her beautiful skin and eyes, while putting her papers in her brown leather briefcase he had bought her for Christmas and checking coats.

"Oh Miss Letecia," the frustrated kids protested at the delay while their obedient fingers were then impatiently buckling, zipping, and then were shouting, plopping and jingling in galoshes down the hall.

Suddenly it was quiet, all gone.

Except for one very small leaky boy, still in the dark cloakroom, with a red, dripping nose, sitting on a red little-kid chair and still trying to get it on, pulling it, his first galosh. It's metal latches tinkled as he gasped and grunted, lost his grip, shinny snots on his front lip.

Poor little Reginald had suddenly risen up as an impediment, a ruining delay with his boot struggles.

"Oh," Reginald was saying, his little hands, red fingertips aching from pulling on the rubber, getting teary from frustration from trying to pull on tight boots.

"It's all right," Timothy said, in spite of his own urgency, "we'll get'em on." Leticia loved that in him, that generosity, a grandness of spirit.

Timothy first spread one of his broad blue handkerchiefs down to save his blue surge pants from the dusty floor, he must look right for Leticia tonight, even at the town's only small farm restaurant, and knelt his one knee on the handkerchief.

He said gently to the struggling little boy, "What's your name?"

"Reginald."

"I'll help you Reginald," gently taking one of the little square Buster Brown shod feet and fitting its toe into the galosh, "nice new shoes, huh?" he said while pushing the toe further in; the shoe was even progressing a little way into the galosh but then stopped.

Brown eyed Timothy said, "Let's push a little harder, Reginald?" smiling his gentle smile. Leticia loved his sexy smile, there was something so full of strength, pleasant masculine firmness about it. His face had become so much more dear to her recently, the intensity of her own feeling frightened her. Some wonderful thing was changing between them.

"Hurts," Reginald said, and shook his head. Little Reginald was snufflesucking nose snot down over his lip into his mouth.

"Don't do that Reginald," said laughing Timothy, smiling up at Leticia, "applying a clean handkerchief to Reginald's nose, "blow," said Timothy.

"No," said Reginald, "dirty," shaking his head at Timothy's mothbally handkerchief.

Leticia was smiling her tender amused smile, "Can I help?"

Timothy laughed, "Try to keep your ankle stiffer Reginald then it won't hurt."

Holding Reginald's ankle with one hand since and pushing the boot up and on at the same time.

"Well," he finally said, "Leticia, this here's a wonderful adventure. Reginald, let's you and me and Miss Leticia all try it together."

This made Leticia laugh. Timothy loved the sound of her laugh. He could listen to her laugh into eternity. He imagined how it would be to hear her laugh in the darkness.

So now they both got, he and his lovely Leticia, one in front and one behind Reginald, "Don't worry Reginald," said Timothy, but seeing his wooing time with Leticia slipping away.

He was going to ask a certain question tonight over supper, so Timothy reached his arms very tenderly

around Reginald seated in the chair, his own chest butting against the little chair's back, wrinkling his red and blue tie and jamming the ring box he had in his inside pocket into his sternum.

Laughing as both he and Letecia tried, both their hands pulling and pushing on Reginald's boot.

Leticia kept catching glimpses of Timothy's cheerful eyes over the top of Reginald's head--couldn't let herself look long or she'd get into that dreamy, huggy, kissy... .

But the boy's leg still only buckled, even with Timothy holding it straighter at the knee, under their mutual pushing and pulling pressure--Leticia putting the heel of her hand on the heel of Reginald's boot and gently shoving it--Timothy pulling on boot with one hand while holding slowly it began to move.

Leticia kept laughing, shaking her head at the shiny, new smelling rubber galosh's fierce resistance, and finally said, "Sometimes they buy the boots a little small so the next child can..." while looking again--couldn't help doing it--deeply into Timothy's eyes, what a good way to see if a man were the kind you would want to raise a family with.

The dimming gray winter light coming through the tall cloak room windows that caught her green eyes, just at their orb's tips, made little brilliant sparkles that dashed around inside.

Timothy wanted to kiss her but couldn't.

"Maybe if you sit down on the floor Reginald," said Timothy, "definitely a three-person job."

Now all three of them were working in a three-way boot-compressing hug, little Reginald being tickled by it all, because he was getting raised almost off the ground.

Finally the first boot slipped over his heel and rushed on pushing out a little draft of rubber booty air; and then, with even more red-faced effort, the other one.

"We did it. Good boy Reginald," Timothy said, out of breath, quickly snapping up the metal latches, checking his watch--supper was still possible--everybody was laughing, the first time Letecia and Timothy had really laughed so hard together made them feel closer.

They both looked at each other for a quiet moment, she could smell his sweet breath that she loved when he kissed her; and him, oh those so very soft womanly lips, he'd been thinking about it all day.

But here was little Reginald, still not doing nothing, not jumping up and grabbing his coat, but just staying still in the chair cause he really liked very much being between two people holding him, his parents didn't do that much at home. First he held one leg up then another looking at his newly installed, very tight boots.

"What's the matter Reginald?" asked Letecia.

Reginald shook his head, "Not my boots."

Timothy's heart sank.

"They're not?" said Letecia, "Are you sure? Why didn't you tell us before? Why did you let us put them on?"

Reginald did not answer just kept shaking his head.

"No wonder they don't fit him," said Letecia, taking her head in her hand in mock despair and shaking it.

But Timothy didn't show any sign of impatience, even though supper had got suddenly far away, "I'll take them back off, sweetheart," he said to Letecia, "if you'll look around for his boots; maybe raise that shade, in here it's so dark you can't see much. Reginald just made a mistake. All the boots look the same"

Leticia looked up and down the dark cloak room in the shadowy late afternoon winter grayday light. She heard the Timothy unsnapping the recently snapped boot snaps, and saying, "Hold on Reginald, brace yourself, that's good, real good. We'll get them off. Where're your boots Reginald?"

He now had one of the boots already off and was unsnapping the latches on the other, "Now hold still, that's it, we're getting it off."

"Reginald," said the patient as well as beautiful Letecia, "I don't see any other boots in here."

Reginald, shaking his head, was now sadly contemplating the now newly removed footwear, "they're my brother's boots but I gotta wear'em."

## Courtship

By Pierrino Mascarino

The young woman raised her head and looked at him, "Why are you standing so close?"

"You know I love you?"

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't."

"Why not?"

"It's; it's inconvenient."

"Inconvenient?"

"Yes."

"Love inconvenient?"

"Well, it is."

"I see."

"I'd rather you didn't."

"That I didn't?"

"That you didn't."

"What would you rather I do instead?"

"Something else."

"Other than love?"

"Exactly."

"But what exactly?"

"Well, you could try liking me."

"Liking?"

"Exactly."

"So, I should go from loving to liking; how are they different?"

"Less messy."

"Liking is less messy then loving?"

"Exactly."

"Why?"

"Well...it is."

"But liking could be just as messy as loving."

"Why?"

"If I wanted you to like me back."

"Why would that be messy?"

"Well, what makes love messy to begin with?"

"It's full of, full of things nobody can be in charge of. It hurts people. Yes that's it, it hurts their feelings. People get mad if you don't love them back or if you love them for less time than they want you to."

"So, better to live without love? Better to live with only friendship which is less messy?"

"Exactly. And please don't do that."

"Don't touch your wrist?"

"Well, you can touch if you must, but not like that."

"Because it's not just friendly?"

"Exactly."

"It's more toward the messy thing?"

"Yes, it's more toward... ."

"It's more toward the unmentionable?"

"Yes, more toward that; exactly."

"It's messier."

"Messier yes."

"I'd like to make a suggestion."

"What suggestion?"

"I think you invite that which you say is "messy."

"I invite it?"

"Exactly."

"How do I do that?"

"Even though its messy you invite it. By wearing your hair so long."

"By wearing my hair long I'm inviting messiness?"

"Exactly."

"You say... ."

"And orange, did you know your hair sparkles orange in the sun."

"Orange?"

"Exactly."

"What do you mean orange?"

"Well, some people would call it red, but I don't think red really exists as a color in human hair. It's really orange."

"What's the difference?"

"Well, look at that--no no, just let me hold up a little wisp so that we can see the sun shining through it. There. Look at that, it has way too much yellow in it to be called red."

"You're right...yellow."

"Which makes it orange. Which of course you know because you're wearing that deep ultramarine blue sweater."

"I know it...?"

"Yes, you know that blue is the complement of your hair's orange and makes the orange more orange. And besides you have freckles. Orange hair and freckles are very beautiful."

"They are?"

"Exactly. And you're tall."

"So my freckles and being tall are inviting... ."

"Messiness. Not friendship but messiness. And your body, you're not hiding it."

"And that... ."

"Is another invitation."

"See, what you're doing now... ."

"You mean holding you?"

"Exactly. That's... ."

"Messy?"

"Exactly."

"What about that?"

"That's very messy. Would you like me to do it again? and again? Messy can be very nice."

## Mommy, I Don't Believe in God No More

By Pierrino Mascarino

"...for a reason, known only to the Lepidopterans themselves, certain species of butterfly will congregate in the forest at the end of the summer and seemingly expire in unison, mounding into a conglomerate pile of butterfly wings."

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"Mommy," the panting little girl rushed up, gulping breaths, swallowing, "I don't Mommy," she spoke with certainty but not enough breath, whispering urgently into Mommy's ear, standing on a step below where Mommy was reading.

"Don't what, sweetheart?" Her redhaired mother looked into the tearfilled green eyes.

"Mommy--don't believe in God no more--not gonna pray no more, ever, ever again, cause I got gypped outta all my prayers; and anyways, now I found it, out in our woods, by St. Peter and Paul, found it, Mommy."

Little Judith, was getting her breath back now, slowing her voice down, swallowing extra spit and talking so Mommy'd understand her.

"Found what, Judith?"

"Mommy, it's them, with all their orange butterfly's wings, silver on the bottom, grey sky streaks underneath--Mommy, you know, the Gulf Fritaries, like we liked so much; and they still got my prayers dimmy writed on their wings, whom they were supposed to take up to Jesus? For Him to read off their wings? Like Daddy said, during us following them? wherever they flied onto our orange Mexican flowers, drinking flower's juice, getting energies, but the butterflies got robbed; it's a scam. I don't believe nothing no more, in God, or even Jesus and Mary."

Judith went on, "Come and see, Mommy; member you and me and daddy--watching their long little windowshade curly proboscus tongues stick down inside, getting their flower energies remember? Come on, please let me show you, and then Daddy said they was carrying up to Jesus the secret little butterfly prayers we said?"

Martha said, "I certainly do remember, and Daddy told you that each time you prayed and saw a butterfly and then you should ask the butterfly to carry your prayer. I remember that."

"And then," said Judith, "every Fritary butterfly I ever saw, Mommy, after daddy got sick and I never let no butterfly xaped, and followed every butterfly—please come see--prayed like crazy, lots of Hail Mary's, Glory Be to the Fathers, and Our Fathers and everything, whenever the butterflies stopped to drink, " here Judith folded

her hands palm-to-palm, showing her mother proper praying as she'd been taught, "and I could even see them, my prayers, sticking right onto the butterflies in little black writings. So I just prayed lightlessly to carry just unheavy Hail Mary's to not squash them, poor butterflies flying zigzaggy, trying to carry my prayers up to God. And they did but God's totally a scammer, he's just--I want my prayers back for a recall."

Judith was tugging at her mother's hand, "Please come and see mommy—not even no heavy Our Father's onto the poor butterflies." Then, like she was whispering a scandal, "God just took my prayers, even just light Hail Mary's," Judith was walking backwards pulling her mother's arm a little, "my prayers for daddy got robbed away for somebody else and the heavynesses just killed the butterflies anyways. Whom is not fair."

Her tall, red-haired mother, Martha followed, loving Judith's passionate earnestness and urgency; it reminded her of her little girl self at six years old--now they'd reached the end of the back yard.

"Excuse me Mary Flowers," said Judith walking backwards, but being careful not to step on any of him these bright yellow asters: Mary flowers she called them, carefully walking around the great flower bed, "Mommy, it's just all a lie."

Little Judith stopped for an extra breath and swallowing, making little hand moves in the air, "I got robbed by God stealing my prayers," Judith was crying.

The whispering, brilliant yellow poplar trees next to the dark woods, were letting loose their dying leaves, softly gliding them down, turning cartwheels and sailing them in the autumn wind.

Judith advised the trees, "Don't you believe in God no more either, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, He's just a gyp."

Judith's daddy named these four trees after the four evangelists--she now reached up to them her little arms in her yellow flowered dress, same bright color as the yellow falling leaves, with the white lace frilly sleeves, that Daddy liked so much--she wanted to wear his "Daddy" dress every day, even dirty.

She rushed into the dark woods, saying him, "You and me're friends. God's a gyp, so don't never trust Him no more."

"Judith," her mother called after her, but the sweating little girl again was hurrying, scolding herself, "Me," she was shouting at herself, "I was just a dopey kid thinking God'd be honest and not a stealer."

She turned back, "Listen to these woods' trees Mommy, wind talking; trees're honester than peoples, they aren't no crooks like God."

The still moist leaves were brushing Judith cheek, they still had patches of disappearing green chlorophyll around their stems separating into it's parts: bright scarlet-vermilion-crimson and violets, yellow carotene and the anthocyaninic colors of death, setting their branches against the autumnal winds, quieting themselves in for

the long snowy winter.

Her mother finally caught up with her, took little Judith by her arm gently; and, kneeling next to her in the soft red, yellow and scarlet leaf carpet under her blue gene knees, slowly smiling, and softly brushing Judith's cheek with the back of her fingers, then holding her hot little head, Judith's red feverish face, kissing her and looking in her red eyes, "Why do you think God stole your prayers Judith?"

"Didn't save Daddy," her little girl turned stubbornly away and pointing an accusing little finger upward, "just took them and spend them for something else."

Martha said, "God did answer your beautiful prayers; we don't really know, but I think Jesus especially hears the prayers of good, loving and angry girls, and that's the most we can ever know, sweetheart. Daddy always felt your love. He felt comforted and even at the very end sweetheart, he said your name over and over and asked me to love you extra hard, you were precious to him with your prayers. But prayers don't always work just the way we want."

Judith stamped her foot stubbornly, shouted, "But, mommy, no, no, it's a scam; he just didn't even save Daddy!"

"Yours prayers did save him, Judith, they did."

"Where's my Daddy then? Where's my Daddy? I don't ever feel--you told me that after people go to heaven we never lose them. Daddy for sure's a saint; you told me, that it's a rope between our hearts—us holding on to them with our rope to feel Daddy in heaven; but God didn't do it! He just wasn't even paying no attention and lost my Daddy. He's lost! I want him! I want my Daddy back!"

She wrenched her little shoulders away from her mother, "Daddy," she screamed, throwing her arms around, smashing her little brown leather shoes in the soft leaves, making them fly up escaping her crushing little feet, "gimme back my prayers! I'm mad at you for not saving my Daddy," here she ran across the clearing, "look over here! by St. Peter and Paul."

St. Peter and Paul were a large oak and maple, tall, gravely looking down on the raging child at their roots.

"Look," shouted Judith, "here they are!"

Martha, was weeping herself now, got up and went to the raging Judith standing by the trees named St. Peter and Paul, "look, mommy, look, here they all are, He just robbed of my prayers, right off of their wings."

There was a windfall of multicolored butterfly wings all laying in a heap by the tree roots. A butterfly graveyard. Their wings had elongated silvery lozenges on the bottoms, with dark cloisonné divisions in the orange scales on top; one was still alive its antennae tiredly waving in the autumn wind.

Judith said in soft tones to the dying animal, "You don't have to do no more, I'm sorry, I gave you too

much prayers to carry and God's just a crook anyways. Just rest and live. Don't die," sobbing quietly, "please don't die."

Martha put one arm over the shaking shoulders, holding her little daughter, smelling the baby shampoo in Judith's red long hair, holding her tightly and feeling the little girl's hot wet tears flowing down her own cheeks, their tears mixing .

Finally, Martha said, "Let's give God another chance and say a prayer together for Daddy. We won't even ask this poor butterfly to take it to heaven for us. God will hear us anyway."

They finished praying and got up, but little Judith turned back, addressing the fallen drifts of butterfly wings, "It's not your fault, you did your best to carry my prayers. You'll go to butterfly heaven. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost."

She blessed the butterfly bodies as father did at Daddy's funeral.

"Judith," said Martha firmly, "Daddy's spirit's still with us, don't worry, we didn't lose him forever."

"Well," said Judith up to the two, side by side ancient trees, "good bye Saint Peter and Paul" -- at that moment a beam of late afternoon sun shone through the forest canopy and illumined a young white birch tree separated from the other trees. Its white bark in powerful contrast to the rest of the dark forest, blazing in the sun with fluttering yellow leaves, it seemed stepping forward, presenting itself.

"Look," said Martha, seizing the moment, "that can be your Daddy tree."

Judith didn't say anything for a moment, her eyes were wide, then whispered, "Is it from Daddy, Mommy? Is it...the heart rope?"

She said it very quietly, cautiously in her mother's ear, astonished; barely breathing.

Martha whispered back, "It is if you want to make it be. The Holy Ghost speaks to us in strange ways if we'll just open our ears. There are always answers everywhere around us."

Just then the remaining tired butterfly roused itself, fluttered into the same brilliant beam that lit the tree and settled to bask in the last warming rays.

"Oh, mommy—look at that! it is then, it is, I do want it to be. I'll pretend it that."

She ran to the tree throwing her arms around the birch's soft smooth white trunk, "Oh God, I'm sorry I called you a crook. Daddy, Daddy!" she cried out, "I feel the rope again."

The two solemn oak and maple trees sailed down a benediction of three or four leaves, flashing yellows and reds, through this day's last sunbeam into the darker forest.

## The Course of True Love 2

By Pierrino Mascarino

Red haired young Willie's lefthand's freckled fingers were stretching his blue, white, yellow and green tie, while his right thumb nail was scratching at a frilly tie flower figure on it—he hated wearing ties—specially girly ones—but they wore them at work, and this particular one was a gift for his 21st birthday, two weeks ago, given him by this sweet, precious Irma, who loved him once but was now just sitting down the coach from him in icy silence, down the faded green sofa here--lovely, desirable, sexy and sexier Irma, so far down--the distance was growing further between them like reverse binoculars.

He'd been tenderly caressing her soft birthday present tie all day, even kissed it once, when no one was looking—its sweet soft silkiness reminded him of Irma's softness when she wasn't testing him again, as she was now, and he didn't care nothing about everybody kidding him, even about it looking faggy at lunch because he was so worried.

So worried he'd hardly been able to swallow his ketchupy hot dog from anxiety about Irma being mad at him—then the undigesting hotdog had bounced around inside him and now was making a rumbling fartknot in his agitated stomach of flatulent gas.

But he'd worn Irma's tie in memory of their love all day, and wore it tonight too—specially since Irma herself wouldn't talk to him, maybe the tie would speak for him.

But he'd got hotdog ketchup on it, his thumbnail was now scratching at it, the tiny shinny ketchup stain on one of the tie's frilly yellow flowers.

He had a hangnail on his thumb.

And there, down the dusty sofa was golden-haired, dimpled Irma: oh her very kissable but very distant dimples. He could even feel her delicious cheek dimples under his lips in memory. His authoritarian mother had dimples.

He and Irma should be kissing right now.

Would they ever kiss again? The doubt scared him and made him worse flatulent, swelling his stomachgut, just like when Ma was mad at him, the knot was getting painful; making him sweat.

Irma'd hear him if he let it go in her toilet, "I can't believe you came over to my apartment to stink it up, Dude, that is so uncool" the noise and smell—he have to leave her toilet door closed, light a match in there, except he didn't have one, have to ask for one, Maybe go outside or make some excuse... .

Irma's distant cold emerald eyes were still turned icily away, certainly they'd never look at Willie again

this milenium. She hated his smells anyway, saying things like, "When did you shower last, Dude? That testosterone smell is really awful."

He liked the way her body smelled.

Her confederate, the also cold-faced grandpa clock in the corner, swung its mocking arm, thock, thock, making the cold silence silenter, Eddie's hangnail more annoying and Eddie's heavy heart 10 lbs. heavier and that growing gaseous interior stomach-knot was growing. Just like when Ma was disgusted by him. His father had disgusted her too before leaving.

Irma looked down now, became a bug scientist examining—what was she examing? Her handkerchief? Tripping on her handkerchief? Spreading it like a science specimen of a extinct spotted owl species on her knee? Those large deep greeneyes, that could become so soft when she forgot to be disgusted at him, were now examining every thread microscopic close.

Willie cleared his throat--no good, she didn't look up, "Wanta beer?" remembering not to be too controlling, not to let himself sound too...too something.

"Nope," she said, "none in the fridge anyways." Still examining her handcherchief.

He even remembered to metrosexualize his voice up higher to a less threatening, more girlish key, not be what Irma called, "So testosteroney and objectifying" to not remind her, she said, of her macho father that she passionately hated. All the dudes that had not given up, if they wanted to "hook up" even in one night stands, which is what they did with chicks these days, had to be softy girlish, even duck their heads, be ashamed of being aroused. Be like a gal pal.

"I better go down to the store... ." he then would be able to relive himself outside, beyond earshot when she couldn't hear him fart.

"Too much hassle," said Irma, "nooooo, don't wanna hassle you, but really, thanks egregious—so very cool of you, supercool--I extremulate you being so very extra cool. Thanks."

Ohhh, thanking him, always a terrible sign getting him into some position to do some penance for???

She now switched from handkerchief to hand.

"Chill out," Willie said, with a very pronounced effeminate non-threatening lisp that all the girls liked so well, "you're just thanking the thiit out of me." He instantly regretted the "thiit," bad habit. There were so many hoops... .

At least the ketchup spot was getting scratched away.

"Oh," Irma, a college dropout, said, "obtund me with a fornicating spoon," she loved using college words that made her feel superior when she was working on him, "egregious sorry if I, in any jejune way, bummed you

Dude—I know what it feels like getting bummed, in private or public, specially public—but I can't process somebody 'shitting' me just for saying, 'thank you'."

Her blonde bangs hung down in front. There had beentoo many controlling men in college.

Willie said, "I didn't... ."

"Ooops, didn't?" She said, "my bad, guess I'm having auditory hallucinations," comforting seeing Willie confused, completely abject--revenge for daddy ignoring her, "I thought you did, I thought you just... ." she was now languidly smoothing her long blonde hair, he loved her hair, it turned him on. She would first put him firmly in his place just to be sure he was not controlling her and she was boss.

"Look, sweetie poo," said Willie, now probing for just the right, non-threatening childish endearment, "I just was wanting to beer you, nothing to get your shorts in a knot about," shouldn't have said that last. He bit his thumb hangnail. His inner urgency was growing, he couldn't stink up her bathroom.

"My shorts?" she said, "Ooooooh, that's the uncoolest, sexist expression, objectifying women, I ever heard onna adult dude; sides, sides, who's getting my...whatever? I'm positive I wasn't hip I was getting...saying I wouldn't dream of hassling you. You're biting your nails regressively again."

She now had tightly wound a strand of her lovely golden hair around one finger and was tugging on it, with one elbow back over her head to turn him on, pulling her shirt tight over her chest.

"Okay," Willie said, "so then do me the big favor of letting me beer you."

"Gadzooks, comrade you gotta go, dude? Somebody waiting, don't let me harsh your high. Pa-lease, you got your action legs going you better move, you're free Dude," here she smacked the sofa arm hard for emphasis, raising a considerable dust cloud, "you're..." coughing on the dust.

"Ah, give it a rest Irma," he was so angry heforgot to lisp, knew he was lapsing into testosteronyness and throwing caution to the winds, just recklessly, in misery, biting hard on his hangnail, peeling it way back so it bled.

Irma said, "Don't you dare tell me..." cough cough "what," cough "to do," cough cough, you sexist control freak. The days of tyrant men controlling women are over I can tell you that right now, we have women boxers now, dude, that are just as strong as men. We have a woman Supreme Court Justice that knows how to deal with white men in a wise Latina way. We have women action heroes. We'll never allow ourselves—men are now gonna be controlled... ."

"Irma, what's going down here?"

The piece of cuticle skin had peeled off in his teeth bringing blood.

"Zero nada nothing's going... ." she said. "And what you're doing's really disgusting."

Willie said, "You're just saying this stuff, all this...this," looking for a place to hide the little piece of bloody cuticle, at the little bubble of bright blood on his thumb and feeling the air burning on its wounded raw place. These sessions when she went through all her feminist, new age, pc crap were right at the edge of not being worth it.

Irma said, "I really won't stand for that testosteroney controlling language. Too bad you're bummed, sexist! the whole world's been suffering from you controlling men forever."

Her eyes still watering from coughing on the couch dust, "so do it, go get unbummed. Gotta be lots cooler spots than this living room, but you shoulda told me, lotta dudes, maybe even women wanted to see me tonight. But no big egrediod to me--much rather you bail...whereever and party. Doesn't feel good you trying to control me," cough cough, "me sitting here feeling you're bumming some dude and him trying to control you. God, when will she let women be free?"

"I'm not bummed! don't wanna go noplacel! Come on sweetie poo won't you tell me what's freaking you? Please?"

"I haven't the micro infinitesimal idea what you're talking about," but now Irma was making Willy one of their mutually agreed on signals, signals she always made and he always recognized when she felt she had gotten him properly in his place, during their fights—she now let her eyes tear up--displayed her tears, even turned her head slightly so the lamp light would catch those pearly tears she had squeezed--it made a nice effect, "I'm cool," She said, a self-pitying tearful little kid—it always worked with when she wanted something from her home-only-on-weekends daddy, "Don't know what you mean," she went on in a very small wounded, poor me, child's voice.

Willie saw the opening, "Yes, you do," he said crooning a little, the croon was a recognition of her submissive signal.

He very carefully slid down off the couch without compressing his stomach and inadvertently expeling his gaseous lump—thought longingly of going outside for a quick one, but this was the crucial moment of humiliation that he'd—she'd been working toward, if he didn't respond to her signal all the rest of the torture game might have to be repeated. This was it if he wanted any kissing this evening, so he kept his part going, "Something's gotta be the trouble. What'd old mean me do?" taking full responsibility for who knew what because Irma herself couldn't never admit being wrong--just wiped her out, just like with Willie's Ma, she had already trained him to admit to whatever silliness. He had to do so now if he wanted to kiss those unbearably kissable lips, not argue. Ma had conditioned him to always be wrong. His father too, before leaving, had always been eternally wrong: insufficiently attentive, smelled bad.

"Goodness," she said, "there's none of it's no big thing to me, anything you do anyways irregardless of nothing."

"Please don't, Irma," he said, "Will you, please?" She wasn't going back to it now? Not fair, reinstating the war after her white flag declaring a truce?

"Don't what?" She said, to affirm who was IN CONTROL here even though she knew already she had him where she wanted.

"You know what I mean," he said, "same stuff like on the phone today too--really well you know."

"Excuse the living feces out of me," she said, banging the couch hard again, raising the dust of war again, "I don't know? You opinionated woman objectifyer? Who's trying to get control of... ."

"Hold on, hold on, sorry, sorry, sorry, didn't mean it. You got me so I can't track nothing no more." His gaseous lump, he was down here on his knees and couldn't get up now from his knees without the compressive effort doing something very indelicate that she would never forgive him for. He must get to the door.

"Well, you sure got me egregious wrong dude," she said, "I'm a pretty equal lady. Trying to objectify and control me like that. Besides you're using double negatives and your finger's bloody. Eooh," now back in full cry again. Although she herself, really just wanted kissing and holding, but at a price.

"Told you I was sorry, didn't I?" He remained on one knee now, estimating the knee crawling distance to the door, "Honest, sweetie poo, didn't mean it. Please forgive me? Please?"

"I'll take it under advisement," she said, "cripes, don't feel you gotta apologize to me so disgusting simpy, like you're a bad little boy and I'm your mommy."

Should he just make a break for it? Hope he got the door open and outside before... .

"It's just totally obtund," she went on, as he began edging doorward on his knees, "me having some cat come over and rank on me, that's all."

"Ok you win," he said, running out of sphincter resistance, " better let this sit tonight you're just gonna stay pissed at me."

"Me pissed? Get up off your knees," she said, "what in the universe stuck that jejune notion in your brain. Me pissed at you?"

He was nearing the door, still on his knees not daring to get up. Would just turning the knob... .

He said, "I was freaking all day.. ."

"Oh no, wait a minute," she said, "don't you dare lay that on me, that's not me I know lots of evochicks do that, in revenge for centuries of masculine oppression and tyranny, but that's not me.

"I better bail," he said, "this is just freaking you more?"

"Do whatever moves you, dude, don't stay here wanting to be with somebody else. Go right over to Betty Johnson's, right?" So that was it? The epiphany even penetrated his abdominal pain, "that's where you're wanting to go, right?"

"Betty Johnson's! That dog?" Forgetting his effeminate affectational lisp again, "Betty Johnson eats Alpo."

"What a typically sexist and very objectifying a thing to say, Betty Johnson was totally cool to you at the party last night: I was embarrassed for you, Dude," he now put one hand on the doorknob, "climbing into her lap that's how uncool she was to you last night."

"Climbing? I didn't want to talk to her at all."

"But you think she's beautiful, liar." she said, "some tasteless people say she's cool. I hear she's very popular among the blind. Or did you just think it was a good chance to humiliate me and control me in public."

"Cool? like my fat Aunt Ida with a moustache, I tried talking to you, you just walked away."

"Me?" She said. "Oh, that's a hemorrhage dude. That's the best. Can I laugh now?"

"Laugh yourself silly, but you walked," he tightened his grip on the doorknob.

"You sprained your ankle getting to her like she owed you money. I thought you two'd be happily ever after with grandchildren by now, you were so obnoxiously aggressive and testosteroney, like death till you part, slobbering all over her."

"Irma! That loony swooped down on me with a deathgrip before I could even get a breath."

"You weren't trying."

"Me there, with my bare face hanging out? chewing my tie trying to talk to you?"

Here he pulled it for emphasis, "And you walking away. And then Bessy, Betst, Betty—bow wow--the Queen of the Dogpound. Dracula's aunt with that black goth lipstick and breath that'd make a cockroach puke." Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, his buttocks tightly compressed.

"For sure," she said, "anybody can see that, but I don't know, some dweebs say she's egregious cool."

"Not alongside you," he strained to be romantic, lyrical.

"She has got that gigandahuge shnaze," Irma said, "I totally feel sorry for a girl with a egregious proboscis like that."

"I seen smaller at the zoo," he said, "course you got the most lovliest little nose in the whole world. Least I've ever seen."

"Me? No way," she said, "me? You're just... ." ah, she was giving in... .

Now seeing his advantage, "Gosh and beautiful hair and a sexy mouth, And beautiful hands. Let me have

one of the little hands, look atta little hand! Who's got the prettiest lips and dimples in the world? Who was the sweetest girl in the world?"

"I don't know," she said, now pouting one lip out, "whom?"

"You don't know!" He said. "Oh yes you do."

"I do not, who? Betsy Johnston?"

"Oh, Betsy Johnston, you freaked about Betsy Johnston! A girl like you getting freaked about a dog," another slip, "like Betsy Johnston!"

"I think you're just perfectly hydraulic," she said. "I was not freaked! You're tripping dude."

Here hydraulic Willie pulled the doorknob, still kneeling hoping to whip open the door and thrust himself outside but suddenly there it was, a terrible noise and odor. A great flatulous expulsion.

"I guess you think that's very masculine," Irma said flatly, "coming into my house and farting!"

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