

Ernst Graf by Jan Matejko, 1862

THE MEAT MACHINE

By David Playfair

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Chapter Two—Who was Ivan?

What kind of a man was the Ivan Kublev who reported to NKVD headquarters in 1939?

To understand the man you must know about the boy.

I was born in Russia, the year 1903, to a landless family of poor peasants. My mother died when my sister and I were little children. I never went to school.

We could not afford books, and besides, I was too busy helping my father at his work. He had a horse and cart, both old and worn, and hired out to richer peasants for very low wages. Boris, our horse, was my closest playmate. I used to ride him round the yard and reward him with dandelions.

Sometimes he got sick or lame, and then we had to pull the cart ourselves. Came the day when Boris just didn't recover. One shoe-boil too many on his right rear leg had capped his elbow beyond recovery. His working days were over.

'Can we just put him out to graze?' I'd asked my father.

'No, son, we can't afford his winter oats. We're hard put to feed ourselves, let alone an animal who can't work for his living. Poor old Boris is sausage meat. But we'll make it quick. Go round to the Rabbi's place and ask for the loan of his slaughter knife. The Jews keep the sharpest blades.'

We were church-going Krestyani, but father respected the Rabbi more than the priest. The Rabbi worked his own land while the priest lived idle on his tithes.

When I got back with the big knife my father had fetched out a bucket. He'd hobbled Boris's ankles and tethered him to the yard fence. He held a bunch of dandelions in his left hand for Boris to nibble, and gentled the horse's head with his right hand. I passed the knife toward him but he didn't take it.

'This is a task for Boris's best friend, and that's you, Ivan.'

I heard laughter and turned round. A handful of neighborhood kids were watching.

'Little Ivan's a cissy,' said Semyon from next door.

I swung round to face him, knife in hand. At that moment I'd have sooner stuck it in him.

'Beat it, kids,' said my father. 'Leave Ivan alone to do what he's got to do.'

He turned back to Boris, and laid a finger on the horse's neck.

'That's the spot, son. The great vein's just beneath. Plunge in that knife while you still can.'

That was the day when I hardened my heart. And, yes, we made a lot of sausages, starting with the blood that my father caught in his bucket. And we ate them throughout the winter, else we'd have starved.

In 1917 the Emperor was overthrown. Soon afterwards Communist workers, the "Reds", seized power in Petersburg. My father and I were too busy laboring for paltry wages on other men's land to care about such distant city events. It was 1918 which made the big difference to my life. That was the year when the Emperor's men, the "Whites", planned to return him to the throne.

The Reds dealt with this threat by shooting the Emperor and all his family. After that it was all-out civil war. To the knife as they say. There was no place in Russia where fighting did not break out. Both armies came through our little village. Both helped themselves to supplies.

The Reds ate most of our potatoes, which we didn't grudge too much because they seemed our sort of people and paid us with paper money. The Whites took our cart to carry ammunition, with no apology and no compensation, and murdered the Rabbi, for which they earned my father's undying hate. When I told him I was going to enlist in the Red Army — though short in stature, I was a strong lad — he wished me luck. I was fifteen.

That civil war lasted three years, and took me all over Russia and the Ukraine. In 1919 my unit was in the north of Russia near the shores of the White Sea.

We were fighting to recapture the port of Archangelsk from the British Marines and the Canadian Mounted Police. (Yes, it seemed that everybody wanted to mix into our war! Killing the Emperor had offended other royalty.)

My right leg stopped a Canadian bullet. I was lame, just like poor Boris. I was glad they didn't turn lame people into sausages, not then anyway. They transferred me to the police.

I've been a policeman ever since, even after my leg got better. We won the civil war but I didn't go back to the country. I'd shovelled horse-shit since I was six years old. Now I wanted to ride on the horse, in a nice clean uniform. The atmosphere of a police station — boot leather, healthy sweat, cologne and tobacco — was the smell of home to me. I wore my badge, sword and shield, with pride.

Force, I decided, was good when it furthered the working classes. Jesus had tried the gentle way and been murdered for his pains. So I quit going to church and spent every Sunday morning

at target practice with my Colt revolver. My arrest record was exemplary — criminals could read on my face that I was a dead shot.

Some people — too many in fact — join the police because they like to push other people around. Such fellows make rotten officers, because they're also lazy. They'd sooner beat on a suspect then do the legwork of background enquiries. What attracted me to police work was the freedom from routine drudgery. I didn't mind the long hours because they were filled with unpredictable variety. Ironically, it is that same hatred of routine which attracts others to a life of crime. Criminals are the evil twins of policemen.

What happened to my father after I became a soldier? He had a very rough time of it for years, laboring in all weathers for whichever rich man needed ditches dug or fields hoed. It was too hard for a middle-aged man, and it gave him bad rheumatism. There was no security. He was hired by the day. I sent him as much of my pay as I could spare, but his revolution didn't come 'til ten years after mine.

1928 was the year of collectivization. The rich peasants were forced to share their land and livestock with the poor, and were imprisoned or shot if they objected. Any modern history book is full of the groans and laments of the dispossessed wealthy. The quiet happiness of the liberated and empowered is not recorded. Good news does not make the headlines. At the risk of boring my audience, then, I will mention that the collectivization turned my old man from anybody's drudge into a prominent citizen. He was put in charge of the village stables, and of organising the grain harvest. The collective allowed him a vegetable garden of his own, which was larger than the tiny patch he'd owned before.

Maybe I should also introduce my country, the Soviet Union. At this point I've got to warn you. You won't — can't — understand this story if you suppose that Russia then was just an old-fashioned version of Russia now. To use the language of the philosophers, there was a difference in the quality of things as well as their quantity. Between 1917 and 1989 Russia was a socialist republic, one of a great Union of other socialist republics. In fact Russians like me were outnumbered by Union citizens of other nationalities — Ukrainians, Kazakhs, Jews, Mongols, even

Germans. (Indeed this story centres around some Germans who lived in Russia and were citizens of the Soviet Union.)

Our leader, Stalin, was a Georgian. We all got on pretty well with each other. Why shouldn't we have? Every one of us had a guaranteed job and apartment. This was a time when women were tractor-drivers and fighter-pilots, and when foundry workers and coal miners earned three times more than clerks and physicians. A poor peasant's son like me could become a captain of police.

Who ruled over my country? Soviet politics was a rough business. Other countries may pension off failed politicians as Senators or Lords. Defeated Russian statesmen and emperors get killed. If you think this tradition started with Communist rule, read a history book. If you think it stopped with Communist rule, read a newspaper. The Soviet period did at least provide equal opportunity for the ambitious — when else could a Georgian cobbler's son have risen to the top? As for me, I believe that politics is necessary but am very glad to leave it to others. Though I joined the Communist party, I never sought any office.

Our leader then was Vladimir Lenin, a man with unerring sense of when to wage war abroad (for which he'd employ General Trotsky) and when to consolidate power at home (the job of Party Secretary Stalin). When Lenin died in 1924 — you can still see his embalmed body in Red Square — these two lieutenants fought it out. After four years of political infighting — I won't bore you with details — Stalin came out on top. What was he like? You'll find out as this story unfolds.

Back to me. What did I look like? Permanently short. It was impossible to grow tall on what we peasants had to eat in the bad old days. Most men can look over the top of my head. But I had a broad chest and good muscles. The body of a cheerful defensive soccer player.

My shortness made me shy with the girls, until I realized that the best of them were more interested in other qualities. When this story begins I was thirty-six years old. I looked young for my age — or at least I did when these adventures began.

What about the mind inside that body? Like a lot of short fellows I had a hot temper, but the army taught me to keep a lid on that. As for schooling, I was practically illiterate when I first joined the police. Back then they weren't looking for scholars. What counted was class-consciousness — hostility toward the rich and comradeship toward other working poor — and I had plenty of both.

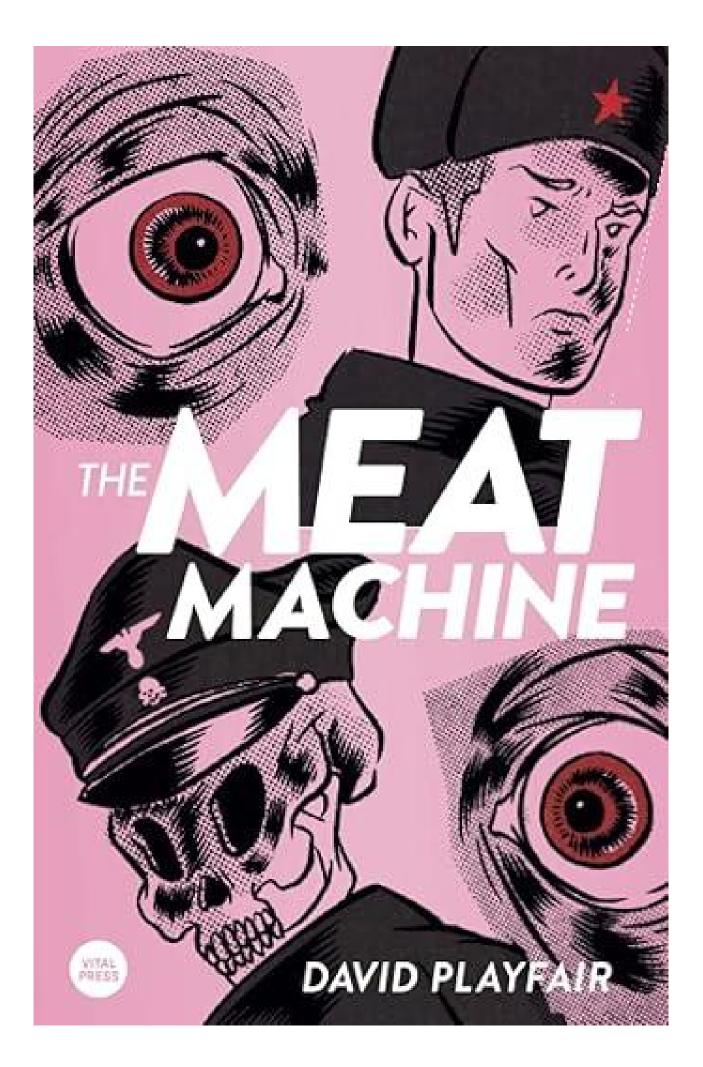
But you don't become an officer without some book-learning. I owe my education to our old police chief, Felix Dzierzynski. He pushed me to read, everything from science texts to *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*. If I began to tell about Dzierzynski we'd never get on with the main story. I've taped a memoir about the man. You can hear it later if you wish. I'm still a peasant, for all my later education. I notice, in recent American books, the unpleasant literary convention for their heroes to vomit after any violent event in order to demonstrate sensitivity of soul. You won't find me vomiting now. I did throw up once — in private — after slaughtering poor Boris. But then I gritted my teeth and buckled down to sausage-making. Peasants learn to harden their hearts and souls. Our minds are as calloused as our hands.

I joined the Communist party when I was a young soldier. The party has fallen on hard times now, but I still pay my dues. Even if the ship is sinking, I choose not to be one of the rats who swim away from it. Staunch member though I am, as I mentioned, I avoided party office. Political ambition is fraught with risk.

Such was the Workers' Paradise where I grew up. We had gone to war in 1917 against the capitalists of the entire world, with the slogan *Bread*, *Land*, *Peace*. And now, after twenty years of famines, invasions and wars, we had won through to those goals. If not world-wide, in our patch at least. Too good to be true? Well, let's not forget that every paradise has its snakes. And we police had to think snake-like thoughts to outwit them.

Remember the bible quote "Be gentle as a dove but wise as a serpent"? A difficult piece of advice to follow, and the man who spoke it came to a sticky end. Yet I thought then, and still do, that it's possible to do patriotic duty as a police officer and remain decent. Possible but not easy. How successfully I fulfilled this ideal you will have to judge from my story.

NEXT WEEK—Chapter Three—Beria's Plan



JOSEPH W. SARNO RETROSPECT SERIES



SWEDISH WILDCATS

(1972) Reviewed by D4Doom

The fact that writer-director Joe Sarno's 1972 film *Swedish Wildcats* (also known as *Every Afternoon*) is released on DVD by Seduction Cinema could lead you to expect that you're about to see a moderately sleazy sexploitation opus. If so, you'd be quite wrong. What you actually get is an outrageously romantic and rather poignant love story, and an interesting and sensitive look at illusions and why we need them.

Susanna (Cia Löwgren) and Karin (Solveig Andersson) are sisters. They work in a Copenhagen brothel run by their slightly dotty and extremely colourful Aunt Margaretha (Diana Dors). Susanna spends her afternoons wandering about the city daydreaming about being a ballerina. In fact she's just about convinced herself she really is a ballerina. One day in the park she meets a nice young man named Peter, and they fall in love. He's a test pilot involved in an ultra-secret government project, but of course he's really no more a test pilot than she is a ballerina.

They both cling desperately to their fantasy lives, but in both cases they're about to have an unexpected and not entirely pleasant confrontation with reality. Peter's nemesis is his boss, Gerhard, an obnoxious thug mixed up in drug smuggling who also

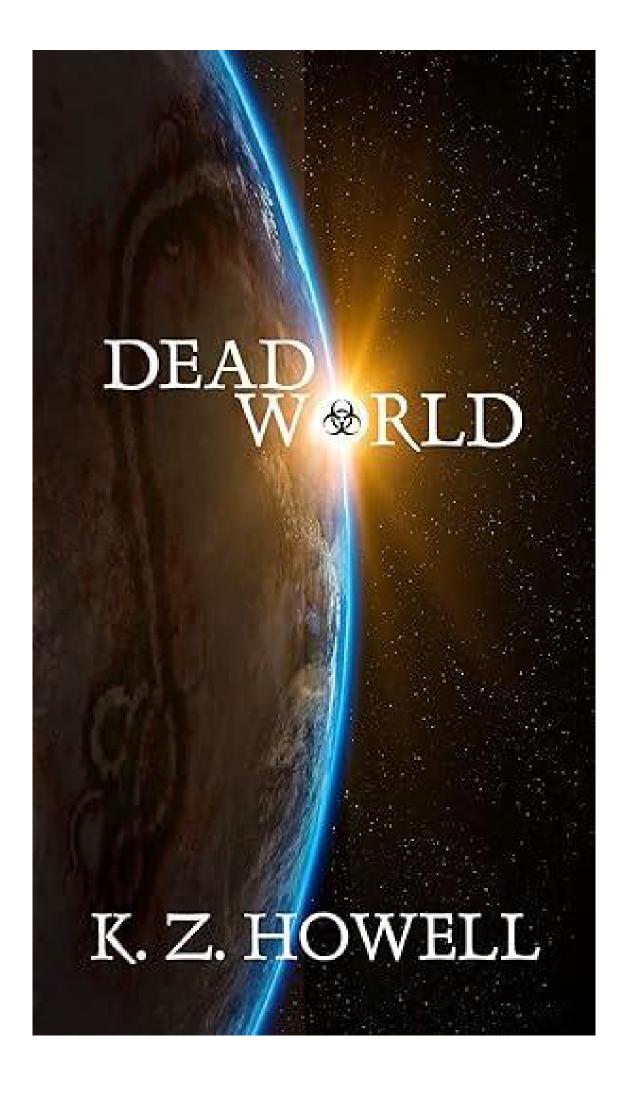
happens to be a client of Aunt Margaretha's brothel. And Aunt Margaretha's attempts to make her establishment the most celebrated in Denmark lead her to involve the two sisters in ever more dangerous sexual game-playing.

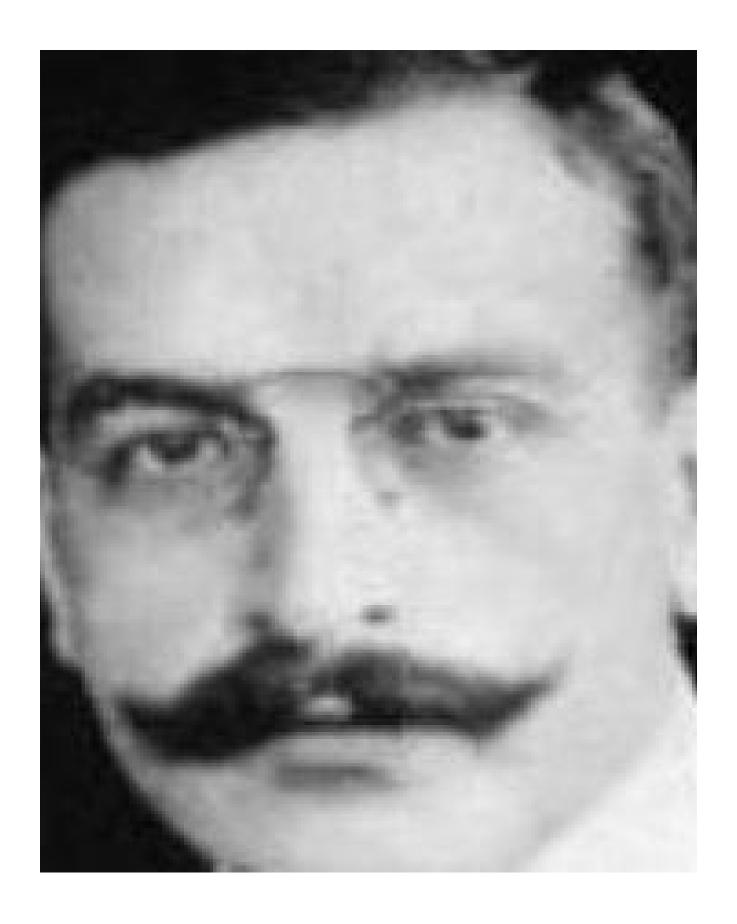
In the interview included on the DVD Sarno claims that his Scandinavian crew on this film were among the best in the business. Looking at the results they achieved on a very low budget, he may well be right. It certainly doesn't look like a typical low-budget movie. The one technical weakness is the soundtrack, but even that is so delightfully 1970s that you end up growing quite fond of it. Well, you do if you're a connoisseur of 1970s cinema!

Two things make this film stand out from the crowd. The first is the surreal quality to the brothel scenes. Aunt Margaretha believes in giving her customers a real show. Dressed up to resemble a circus ringmaster she introduces live performances by her girls before the clients get down to the serious business of choosing a partner for the evening. The scene with the girls in wild animal make-up and costumes is wonderfully bizarre, ending with the customers pursuing them with gigantic butterfly nets. Several of Aunt Margaretha's other shows involve sado-masochistic elements, something that was forced on the very reluctant Sarno by his producer. If anything they probably strengthen the movie, making the attempts at escape (both literal and in the world of the imagination) by Karin and Susanna more understandable.

The movie's second great strength is Diana Dors. This very underrated actress gives an extraordinary performance. She's very funny, at times menacing, more often manipulative, but she's always delightful. The acting overall is quite decent.

This is the sort of movie that could only have been made in the 70s, which is why I love the movies of that period so much. Sarno obviously cares about his characters, and we end up caring as well. Even Aunt Margaretha is strangely likable. An odd little film, but worth a rental.

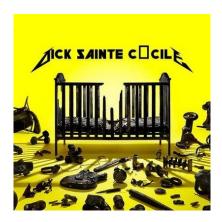




What doesn't destroy me had better prepare itself for my revenge.

The Marquis de Shard, 1727

THE SURPRISE



By Dick Saint Cécile

Today is a holiday and the weather is nice. So it's the perfect opportunity to get outside in the middle of autumn and I don't intend to miss out. Head to the riverside park not far from my house, whose benches will probably welcome my laziness with just a book that I'll open or not, we'll see.

It only takes me about half an hour to get there, and strangely enough, I'm almost the only one who had this idea. Unless the Halloween feasts have kept people up late and they're sleeping off their orgy of candy. That's just as well, though, because I won't be bothered to laze around.

The sun caresses my face as well as a light breeze. I feel good and I close my eyes to better enjoy it when I feel a presence. I decide to ignore it at first but, since the intruder comes to sit next to me, I can no longer do anything but deal with it and, a little exasperated that someone comes to disturb my peace in this way, I turn in his direction to tell him my home truths. Surprise, the annoying person is a lady and I swallow all the bile that I was going to spill as her smile is so disarming.

"Yes, I know, I'm intruding, but it was the only bench on which there was a bit of space left and I had to take a break or I'd spoil the surprise that awaited me at the guinguette."

There is indeed a small establishment a little further on, but her words perplex me. She realises this and continues.

"It's the same every year, I have a mystery date somewhere and, in the end, my husband is waiting for me there. It's cute you might say and I agree. It's just a bit repetitive and I would like to be truly surprised one day."

This is getting devilishly interesting and I seize the opportunity.

"Well, since you dared to disturb me in my bliss, I find myself compelled to give you a token."

She is surprised at first, then completely thrilled.

"A stranger who forces me? And why not? Tell me..."

Her gaze turns cloudy. I am caught in my own game and I have to react quickly.

"You interrupted my reverie, so you must restore it. Give me some pretty things to contemplate."

"Such as?"

She pulls her shoulders back and puffs out her chest, revealing her round chest under a rather tight blouse.

"Like you do now but with a few buttons undone."

She doesn't answer but opens wide her bodice under which she wears nothing. She has heavy breasts with dark areolas and aggressive nipples that are quite appetizing.

[&]quot;And now?"

There is still no one in the park and the opportunity is good but we have to act quickly.

"You're going to please me with your tits, I guess you know how to do that."

"With the risk that we will be caught? Are you crazy?"

She nonetheless takes my cock out of my pants and begins to jerk me off until I get a satisfactory erection.

"This is crazy, but come on."

Here I am facing her and my sex warm in her furrow.

"What a shame if someone were to surprise us. You will enjoy yourself soon I hope, I am a respectable woman you know?"

Maybe she is. She also knows how to play with her chest wonderfully to quickly increase my pleasure, which I do not fail to announce to her in case she wants to finish me off by hand on the lawn, thus avoiding unfortunate stains

"Defiled by a guy I don't know in a public place, but how horrible."

It is on these words that I ejaculate in the hollow of her breasts before she spreads my sperm using my glans like a paintbrush. She then looks at me, falsely angry, while adjusting herself.

"Are you proud of yourself? What if my husband finds out?"

There are indeed wet spots on her blouse but she doesn't panic. She even seems delighted about it in the end.

"That said, for the impromptu it was successful and I thank you for it. Wouldn't you be his surprise?"

It is unfortunately not, but I prefer to keep the mystery and the situation suits us both. She closes her jacket, bids me farewell and leaves. It is almost time for an aperitif and I wonder if I should go to the guinguette. To see.



THE GODDESS A DEMON

RICHARD

The Goddess A Demon

1900

By Richard Marsh

CHAPTER XXII. A MIRACLE

The hustling throng came quickly forward. In its midst some one was being propelled towards the entrance. Although he was shouting at the top of his voice, he appeared to be offering no actual resistance, but seemed rather to be regarding the proceedings as a joke. In spite of the hubbub Mr. Bernstein's accents reached my ear.

"Did you ever hear anything like him? Isn't he a beauty? And that's the man who's had I don't know how much cash out of me—a hatful! And that's how he goes on!"

I was indifferent to Mr. Bernstein's lamentations. As the crowd came nearer I was beginning to ask myself if I was dreaming; if, again, I was about to become the victim of a nightmare imagining. I turned to Miss Moore.

"Hadn't you—better go? Hadn't I better—get you out of this?"

I was conscious that my voice was a little hoarse. Hers was clear and resonant. Although she did not speak loudly, it seemed to ring above the din.

"Go? Now? When it's coming face to face, the light is breaking, I'm beginning to see clear, and it's my call? No; now I'll stay and play the scene right through until the curtain drops. It was God who made us miss that train."

The crowd was drawing very close. Was I asleep or waking? Were my eyes playing tricks, my senses leaving me? What suddenly made the world seem to spin round and round? Who was it in the midst of the people—the man they were hustling—who raved and screamed? Was he a creature born of delirium, or a thing of flesh and blood?

It was from the girl at my side that recognition first came.

"It's he!" she cried. "It's he!"

It was he—the wretch who had set us all by the ears; who had fooled and duped us; who had played upon us, as a last stroke, a trick whose nature, even yet, I did not understand. I strode into the crowd.

"Let me pass! Make way for me!"

They made way. It was well for them they did; the strength of a dozen Samsons was that moment in my arms. I planted myself in front of him.

"How is it that you've come back—from the gates of hell?"

"Ferguson! It's you!" He broke into a peal of laughter, which spoke of pain, not pleasure. "But I've not come back! They're still stoking the fires!" He threw out his arms as if referring to the jeering mob, which pressed upon us. "Here are the attendant demons—can't you see them?"

I continued standing still, regarding him.

"It is Edwin Lawrence, as I live. Edwin—not Philip."

"Yes; not Philip—Edwin!" He laughed again. "Would you like to see the strawberry mark? It's there."

"What is this game in which you have been taking a hand?"

"It's a game of my own invention—and hers!" He made an upward movement with his hand. "It was from her the inspiration came. She named the stakes, framed the rules, started the game, watched the play—and with both eyes she's watched it ever since. Those eyes of hers! They never sleep, and never blink or wink, but watch, watch, watch all the time. They've watched me ever since the game began. They're watching now! She haunts and hounds me—into the train and out of it. She's here now—enjoying the joke. Hark! Can't you hear her?" He stopped to listen. I heard nothing out of the common, though it seemed he did. "That's her laughter!" He broke into discordant merriment. "I play the part of Echo. She has me, body, soul, and spirit; and she thinks it such a jest!"

He spoke as men do in fevers. I could see that there were some about us who set him down as mad. There were those who jeered, as fools will at the sight of a man's anguish, when, in the abandonment of his shame, he trails his soul in the dust. I had seen persons in his case before. He was not mad, as yet, but on the border line, where men fight with demons. He had been drinking, to drive them back; but they had come the more, threatening, on every hand, to shut him in for ever. He knew what it was they threatened. It was the anguish of the knowledge which caused the sweat to stand in beads upon his brow.

The railway officials, I fancy, took it to be a case of incipient delirium tremens. A person in authority addressed himself to me.

"Are you a friend of this gentleman's, sir?"

"I know him well."

"Are you willing to undertake the charge of him? You see he's not in a fit state to go about alone."

"I'll take charge of him."

"Then you'll be so good as to remove him from the station at once. He's already given us more than sufficient trouble."

Lawrence interposed with what he intended to be an assumption of the grand manner.

"My good Mr. Railway-porter, or whatever you may be, I will remove myself from your objectionable station without any hint from you. My destination was Ostend, and is now Pimlico. This is an acquaintance of mine who owes me £1880; but I don't require him to take charge of me. There already is somebody who does that. Can't you hear her? That's her laughing."

"Come," I said. "Let's get into a cab."

"Thank you, I prefer walking. Nothing like exercise when you are liverish. Are you alone?"

Miss Moore came through the crowd.

"No; I am with him."

He stared at her as if in doubt; then with sudden recognition—

"Ah! It is the sister of the brother—the affectionate relative of our dear Tom—the beautiful Miss Moore! It is like a scene out of one of the plays in which you are the bright, particular star. The ghosts are gathering round. You were there; you saw her?"

"Who?"

"The Goddess!"

"Was it—a Goddess?"

"That's a demon!"

"What do you mean?" She took me by the arm. "Ask him what he means."

Lawrence answered.

"It's not a thing the meaning of which can be clarified by words. Come, and you shall see; come together—Mr. Ferguson and you."

She looked at me, inquiry in her eyes. I questioned him.

"Where do you propose to take us?"

"To a little place of mine, where the Goddess is."

"What is this stuff about the Goddess?"

"Come, and you shall see."

I glanced at her.

"Let's go," she said.

He caught her words.

"There speaks the lady who would learn; the woman possessed of the spirit of inquiry."

I repeated my former suggestion.

"Let's get into a cab."

But he declined.

"No; I'll have none of your cabs, I'll walk. I'm cribb'd, cabined, and confined out in the open; in a cab I'd stifle. There's a hand upon my heart, a grip upon my throat, a weight upon my head; they make it hard to breathe. I'll be in close quarters soon enough; I'll keep out of them as long as I can."

I turned to the officials. "Can't you keep these people back? I don't want to have them following us through the streets. The man's not drunk, he's ill."

"I should get him into a cab."

Lawrence, hearing what the fellow said, rushed at him in a fit of maniacal fury, repeating, in a crescendo scale—

"You'd get me into a cab! You'd get me into a cab! You'd get me into a cab! I'd kill you first." The man shrank back as if fearful that his last hour had come.

We went out of the station, a motley crowd—Lawrence with Miss Moore, and me close at his heels; behind, before, on either side, a miscellaneous assemblage of fools. I would have prevented her from coming had I had my way. I told her so at starting; but she whispered in my ear—

"I'm not afraid. Are you?"

"I am afraid for you—of these blackguards; of the mood he's in; of where he's taking us; of what may happen. I don't know what devil's trick it is he has been playing, but I'm sure it is a devil's trick, and there may be worse to come."

"I'm safe with you."

"I doubt it."

"But I am sure. The light is coming; I'd like to see the brightness of the day, for mine honour's sake, which I thought might be a consideration, perhaps, with you. Still, I'm under orders. If you bid me I will go. But—mayn't I come?"

I could deny her nothing which she asked in such a tone, though it were an apple out of Eden. But I was gruff.

"Then take my arm."

"I'd like to."

I know I was a fool, and should have forbidden her to go with us, nor have allowed her, wheedle as she might, to have run the risk of what might be to come; but when I felt her little hand upon my arm, I would not have had her take it off again, not—not for a great deal.

When we had gone a little way from the station, Mr. Bernstein, corkscrewing his way through the crowd, reached Lawrence's side. Apparently, although he had made an effort to screw his courage to the sticking point, he was still not quite satisfied as to the sort of reception which he might receive; he spoke with such an air of deprecation.

"Now, Ted, dear boy, don't be shirty, it's only me. Do take my advice—be careful! Don't go too far! Be reasonable, and I'll be the best friend you ever had, as I always have been; only—do pull up before it's too late!"

Lawrence, standing still, addressed himself to the crowd.

"Gentlemen—and ladies!—because I believe there are some ladies among you—real ladies!—allow me to introduce to you Mr. Isaac Bernstein, usurer, Jew, who makes a speciality of dealing in forged bills. He keeps a school for forgers, where young penmen are trained in the delicate arts of imitating other people's signatures. He's been

the cause of many a good man's being sent to gaol; where, one day, as sure as he's alive, he'll go to join them."

Mr. Bernstein stammered and stuttered.

"Don't—don't talk to me like that! The—the man's stark mad!"

"Not yet. Still sane enough to make the world acquainted with Isaac Bernstein, trafficker in forgeries."

With his open palm he struck the Jew a resounding blow on either cheek. The people roared with laughter. I turned to the lady.

"You see? I must go to him. I shall have to leave you."

"We will go together."

She kept close to my side as I went forward. I expected to see Lawrence repeat his assault. Bernstein stood looking at him, motionless, gasping for breath, as if he were on the verge of an apoplectic fit. Taking him by the shoulder I sent him spinning off the pavement.

"Leave him alone. The fellow will get his deserts elsewhere."

Lawrence clapped his hands like a child.

"Bravo! Twirl him round—roll him in the mud! She enjoys it; can't you hear how she's laughing?"

He raised his hand in an attitude of attention.

"I can hear nothing."

"But I can." Miss Moore spoke from behind my shoulder. "I can hear It."

"What do you mean?"

"It which was present in the room; It which did it all; the sound which we heard in the Fulham Road just now. Listen! Can't you hear it, too?"

It might have been my imagination—probably was—but, as she spoke, I certainly did think that I recognised, as if it issued from the lips of some one who was within reach of where we stood, the woman's laughter which had in it so singular and disagreeable a quality. It had on me a most uncomfortable effect. I returned to Lawrence, fearful lest, if I was not careful, the proceedings might take a shape in which I might relish them less even than I did at present.

"Come. Let's be moving."

"With pleasure. Life is movement, and exercise is the thing for the liver."

"What is the address of the place to which you are taking us?"

He laid his finger against his nose.

"That's a secret which I wouldn't divulge for worlds. There's a lady there—a goddess! And a demon! Would you have me tell all the world where she's to be found, as if she were a person of no reputation. She's with me all the time; she never leaves me for a moment alone; and yet, all the while, she waits for me at home. That's to have a familiar in attendance, if you please."

I made no reply. That his words had meaning, and were not the mere ravings which they seemed, I did not doubt. I was asking myself what was the solution of the problem to which they pointed, and was still obliged to own that I had no notion. I had, also, my attention partly occupied by my efforts to keep the rabble from a too close attendance on the lady, whose little hand again caressed my arm.

Lawrence was swinging along at a good round pace, his hat a little at the back of his head; his eyes, lips, every muscle of his face were in constant motion. His arms were as if they had been hung on wires, which continually thrust them this way and that. He was not for a moment still. If not speaking aloud, he muttered to himself. Presently he began upon a theme which I would have thanked him to have avoided.

"So, Ferguson, you're a humorist—practical and actual. I've been reading the news—still sane enough to read the papers—how you locked the coroner in his court. I'd have given one of Bernstein's forged bills to have been there to see, though it was on me that they were sitting. I thought I never should have done laughing. And she—the Goddess—she's laughing still."

The lady put a question.

"What's that he's saying?"

"He's telling about some nonsense which he saw in the papers."

Lawrence interposed.

"Nonsense, he calls it! And excellent nonsense, too! Haven't you heard? Has no one told you? Don't you know? Charming sister of my dear friend Tom, to-day the coroner's been sitting on my corpse—as I live, upon my corpse! Ferguson's been there as witness. They wanted him to say, it seems, that you had killed me—yes, you, with your own two small hands; but he wouldn't. He said he'd see them—warmer first; as warm as I am now. I can't think where, at this time of the year, the heat can come from. I'm on fire inside and out. So they talked of sending him to gaol.

"But, bless their simple souls, they didn't know their man; how that he was a fellow of infinite jest. For when they talked of locking him up, he locked them up instead; marched straight out, turned the key in the lock, with them on the other side of the door—coroner and jury, counsel and witnesses, audience and policeman—the whole noble, gallant company. And so he left them, sitting on my corpse."

As might have been expected, the rabble, which still hung round us like a fringe, hearing what he said, caught something of his meaning. They bandied it from mouth to mouth.

"That's Ferguson, that there tall bloke. He's the cove as locked the coroner up this afternoon, Imperial Mansions murder case. Didn't you hear the other bloke a-saying so? No lies! I tell you it is!"

While the gutter-snipes wrangled, playing fast and loose with my name—with my reputation, too—the lady whispered in my ear. Despite the noise they made I heard her plain.

"So that's why you came to fetch me? Now I understand; the secret's out. It's another service you have done me! Aren't you afraid that the weight of obligation will be more than I can carry? Yet you needn't fear! They're the kind of debts I don't at all mind owing—you, since one day I hope to pay them every one."

"You exaggerate. And Lawrence is a fool."

"Yes. So are we all fools; perhaps that's why some of us are wise."

I liked to hear her voice; to feel her hand upon my arm. Yet, every moment, my concern was getting greater. The crowd was growing, both in numbers and in impudence. Any second they might make an ugly rush, then there would be trouble; and that was not a scene in which I should wish the lady to play a part. Lawrence was marching on as if he meant to march for ever. I began seriously to ask myself if he was not playing us still another of his tricks; if he was not leading us he himself did not know where. On a sudden, he determined the question by stopping before a building which, outwardly, was more like a warehouse than a private residence.

"At last," he cried, "we are arrived. The Goddess waits for us within." "Is this your place?"

"It is—and hers. Enter omnes!"

He threw open the door as if he were offering the whole crowd the freedom of the premises. I placed myself in front of it.

"I'm hanged if it shall be *enter omnes!* In you go." I thrust him in. "Now you and I together!"

The lady and I were across the threshold. I was about to slam the door in the face of the rabble, when some one came hurrying through the crowd. A voice exclaimed—

"Stop that! Don't shut that door! Let me in!"

It was Inspector Symonds; with, as it seemed, a friend or two.

NEXT WEEK—IN THE PASSAGE

LOOK AT THE TIME I WASTED TRYING TO FIT IN

By Byronium

On a quiet Friday evening my mentor looked at me and said, 'You are trying to add beauty to your daily life'. I don't know why that caught me off guard, what was initially a meeting for her to give me feedback on the projects I am working on turned into an intimately profound conversation on my fractured identity and how she relates to what I am going through. When I mentioned I have a strong proclivity to hide myself, she said that people will eventually see me anyway.

Our conversation lasted for a few hours and left me with an immense sense of gratitude. She said life gets better after 30, I just have to hang on till the new dawn appears. It's amazing how deeply I can look within myself when I simply close my eyes. I can see a tether holding an old habit together; but naming the demon exposes it to the light of sincerity. Over the past few years I have unraveled myself, put the fingers in my own wounds to find the untainted and pure instinct that animates me. Stripping away the layers and collecting the

scattered pieces to remake my broken image. Reminds me of what Socrates said to Alcibiades: beyond saying 'Know yourself', he said that the 'eye of the soul' searches our depths to find the core of our being, and I have undone everything I used to be. Questioning beliefs I never thought of casting aside, my quest to grow displaced my desire for familiarity. The latter has become like death to me. To search for belonging has been one of my destructive flaws. Every time I leave the shadows, God kills the lambs I sought to care for, and solitude humming in the darkness becomes my mistress again.

My focus has narrowed like a piece of chalk becoming a sword that cuts just by looking at it. I fear I have become a lot colder, ruthless, and selfish. But I am tired of seeing all the faces of my passion as an embarrassment, a good conscience is a restraint, not a virtue. I chased that warm feeling because the number of ways I don't care outnumber the ways I care. When I care, it's an obsession. In fact, I don't like talking about myself. There is a project I am working on with a founder of a company and he said people are hungry for writing that allows readers to connect with the heart of the writer. Tough ask, because I don't like being seen, and being seen is to give a part of myself to someone that I can't control.

Learning to let go has been enormously difficult, now I barely care about how I am perceived - I let my personality land, run, caress, kill, whatever it pleases. If I don't find rest in being myself in the world, I will always find that mediocre joy in the plasticity of human affairs. But I will always feel like a caged animal. There was a time when I could have settled down and been okay with having my pride and joy be a green front lawn ten years from now, but instead I have taken a massive risk and am slightly terrified of the direction it's taking me in. Yet at the same time I feel as though I am being called to face my deepest fears and trust that everything will be more than okay, it will be wonderful. I need to remember, that I can never rush a beautiful thing.



LOVE ME SOME OTHER WAY

Berlin 2008-10

By Ernst Graf

VIII

Then a voluptuous busty peroxide blonde Swedish girl started dancing at the Black Pig on the night of the Bonfire Night Ball, November 5th (as Adelaide always said, "the Black Pig always has the best Balls"). Rosa. She was a little bit crazy, but she turned me on, as voluptuous busty peroxide blonde Swedish girls generally do. She appeared to like drinking very much. I went to the bar to order my next drink and made sure I found a gap at the bar next to where she was sitting, said "hello" and asked her if she wanted a drink, then stood next to her chatting to her all the time letting the massive bulge in my trousers rub, press, rest against her arm or leg to gauge her reaction. She didn't bat an eyelid & appeared to like it very much.

After buying her two or three drinks, on the next one I plucked up the courage to ask if I might buy her a drink somewhere else, outside of the Black Pig, when she finished her shift. She said she was meeting her cousin and his friend for a drink that night after work and I could come too if I wanted.

I sensed I was finally going to get some leg over for the first time since my on-off affair with Adelaide began nearly three years earlier.

My heart was pounding as we left the Black Pig together and after meeting her cousin and his friend, we ended up back at Rosa's house where she lived with her mother high up in a massive Stalinist block of flats in east Berlin, in her bedroom with the cousin lying on her bed, the friend on a chair, and Rosa and me on the sofa. Rosa gave me a photo album to keep me occupied while the other three spoke in Swedish, a language I have not yet completely mastered.

I saw a photo of Rosa I was very familiar with but had not seen for years and my heart leaped out of my chest.

Let me quote a paragraph from my first book about the beginning of my affair with Adelaide—

"Can I wait for you to finish?"

[&]quot;No." But after a few weeks of asking, watching her, drinking champagne with her, I went to see her at the Wild Horses, some rough tiny edge of Berlin strip pub, and finally it became:

That day there had just been two girls dancing, Adelaide and some girl called Rose (myself and Adelaide were whispering that she appeared to be an alcoholic), who I paid little attention to as I was hopeful that this would be the day I could finally start fucking Adelaide, and so it proved—Adelaide and I left the pub together and came all the way back to my house where we finally joyously began our tortuous affair. But the point being, on the website for the strippers' agency there was a photo of this Rose girl and I now recognised it was this self-same photo in Rosa's personal photo album.

Finally about to have sex with a girl other than Adelaide for the first time since that night at the Wild Horses, it turns out to be the other girl who was working that night at the Wild Horses!!!

You could not make it up.

All the breath was sucked out of my body. I sat in a state of shock. The world started spinning around me. I thought I was going to pass out. This was beyond belief. How the gods play tricks with us. I had not made the connection before. When Rosa started dancing at the Black Pig not for one second did I think I had ever seen her before. Her appearance had changed quite a lot since that picture was taken. How funny is Fate.

The night progressed with much drinking of vodka and beer and Rosa's cousin became increasingly truculent and rude and looking at me with increasing malevolence as if to say "what is this guy still doing here?" and I fancied he was asking the same question of Rosa in Swedish with increasing anger. I saw from the way he touched her his love for her was more sexual than is common for cousins.

Eventually she led me outside to the stairs where we talked for a while and she apologised that I would have to leave now, as her cousin was becoming too jealous. At 4am in the morning, on a freezing cold November Berlin night, I had to find my way over streets of treacherous black ice to wait for a night bus home, with barely time to reach home before I had to get up for work in the morning. "Fuck this for a game of soldiers," I thought. My hopes of finally getting some jiggy jiggy with a girl other than Adelaide seemed to have been dashed.

I have no luck.

Rosa was at the Black Pig the next night, shy, soft, grinning, again enjoying feeling my bulge rubbing against her, and I again asked if we could leave together. She said yes, and that she wished she could leave now, 8pm, rather than having to wait all the way until 11pm end of shift. Being friends with the bar staff (to the extent I went out socialising with them sometimes and one night slept on the manager's sofa at his house around the corner when I was too drunk to go home) I asked the manager if she could leave right now, and knowing my desperate blue ball need for rumpy pumpy and how long it had been for me, and what hell I had been through with Adelaide, he grinningly said "yes".

"Ernst you're such a slut!" Flora called out from behind him, and while Rosa was getting changed, came up to where I was sitting, again crushing me in a great bear bug while letting my free hand stroke her huge big soft knockers. I loved Flora very much.

We got a taxi to Rosa's, stopping off to buy vodka for her and beer for myself, and proceeded to get very drunk in her bedroom. She let me stay the night but only on the sofa beside her bed. In the morning waking up in time to get to work, I quietly asked if I might get into the bed with her just for the last hour before I had to go, and she said yes, and we then finally made love. Over the next few nights we fucked like wild animals. In the early hours one morning she whispered with a grin "Making love with you is like being in a movie and I never want the movie to end! I want the movie to last 24 hours a day!"

She told me before she had thought herself frigid, unable to achieve sexual pleasure, and now that had been proved wrong. If I had a pound for every time a girl has said this to me.

We now were very obviously a couple at the Black Pig, to Adelaide's obvious dismay and grief. One night Rosa came to me in my corner where I was watching Adelaide dance and all but made love to me, kissing me and letting me fondle her breasts, just so Adelaide could see. One of the other girls who was collecting for her next dance told us both "You are both disgusting". We went to Tenerife together for a week at the start of December. Lying together on our sunbeds around the hotel's rooftop swimming pool, and finding ourselves alone, I climbed on

top of her on her sunbed and we fucked there, quickly, I finishing and rolling off of her about one second before a German family of mother, father and two small children strolled out behind us.

She swam topless in the swimming pool oblivious of who saw her and her magnificent huge Swedish tits.

Rosa was a free spirit. A 'Swedish wildcat' indeed.

Back home in Berlin, I was now at her house every evening but now she gave me a serious talk. She was not ready to waste her time anymore, she wanted a serious man to settle down with and have children with and if I was not that man then there was no future for us and I should leave right now. I now began to feel very uncomfortable. I began to feel uncomfortable but I loved the fucking and her magnificent huge Swedish tits, but clearly the good times were already over. Many times we would be talking in her bedroom and my phone would be ringing off the hook with missed calls from Adelaide, made worse by the fact that I had Adelaide's photo attached to her number so her face kept popping up on the coffee table in front of us.

After many rows with Rosa I left her house many times, but then she would always call me quietly, apologetic, and I would go back, sometimes the same night.

By now, I had spoken to Adelaide on the phone, and she, crying, had apologised to me for everything, and said she wanted me to come back to her, and this time we would live together. I had been in love with her since I had first met her when she was a 16-year-old schoolgirl in Soho, and she with me, she only dyed her hair blonde to try to attract me, but nothing had happened then as I was scared of her young age, but I had never loved anyone other than her since then.

I told myself I could not leave Rosa just before Christmas, it would not be nice, and let us get Christmas out of the way and I will make the break in the New Year, my deep deep yearning desire to return to Adelaide, and really only a sense of decency making me delay the end of the affair with Rosa.

Rosa had a music channel on the TV in her room and at this time the two biggest hits on constant repeat were Lady Gaga's Bad Romance and Rihanna's Russian Roulette, and every night at the Black Pig these were the two songs Adelaide would constantly dance to, while having to see me drinking with Rosa all night and

leaving with Rosa, but all the time really yearning to be back with Adelaide.

On Christmas Eve I was sitting with Rosa on the sofa in her bedroom, when there was a commotion at the front door. She jumped up and locked the door to her bedroom, and returned to the sofa. Within seconds the door had been smashed open and the lock sent splintering across the carpet, and there stood Rosa's Albanian ex-boyfriend, who she had left, but who had never accepted the affair was over.

"Get out," he said to me.

"No," I said.

He left the room and went to the kitchen, where we heard him opening the cutlery drawer, and he returned with a very sharp knife and leaning over me, held it to my throat.

"Get out," he repeated, with the knife pressing into my neck.

I thought I cannot leave now, as Rosa will think me a pussy, and never respect me again, and will tell everyone at the Black Pig how I had run away, so scared was I, and left her to fend off the knifeman alone, so I had to be a man and refuse to go, but really deep down I did not want to be there anyway and yearned to be with Adelaide. Now as it seemed my life was about to end, all I could think about was that I would die and Adelaide would never know that it was her I loved and I was just waiting for Christmas to be over before going back to her, and that thought made me more sad than dying. I loved Adelaide so much in that moment.

Rosa eventually chased her ex out of the house, they furiously shouting and swearing at each other in some language known only to them, she spitting in his face, he spitting in her face, and I thinking an English office boy does not belong in an environment like this. The thug left vowing to go away and get his friends and come back shortly with them to finish the job.

Rosa's mother said we should swap bedrooms, as her bedroom door did not open inwards, but outwards, so would be harder to break open. We swapped beds and laid down to try to sleep, me reporting the incident to the police as I lay there in case I would not have time to give our address details later if the thug did indeed return with his friends.

The Christmas Eve night passed without further incident.

Christmas Day and the party in Rosa's bedroom with some of her friends and some of her mother's friends, and some of the men they both had met at the nude sauna they used to frequent (don't ask) also passed without further incident, though Rosa's friend Suma jumped out of her skin every time she heard a noise from outside, and our affair limped on, with increasing rows and irritation on both sides, though still making love and drinking together prodigiously.

On the morning of January 5th, 2010, the morning of Twelfth Night, I woke up in bed beside her and tried to cuddle and fondle her and rub myself against her but she rebuffed every one of my attentions. I told her quietly I think it is over between us, and it is better if I do not come back anymore. She was quiet for a moment, then said "I am pregnant."

I did not believe her. It was just her last ditch attempt to make me not leave her and return to Adelaide. The old "I'm pregnant" card!

She now spoke to me viciously. "I will have your baby and take it to another country and you will NEVER see it!"

I said coldly, "Good! I do not WANT to ever see it!" I dressed and went to work. It was over.

That night after work I went to the Black Pig for the Twelfth Night Ball and Rosa was there, dancing, as well. To be polite I bought her a drink and stood next to her to drink with her, but she straight away turned her back on me and began to talk intensely to one of her young Indian man friends she knew from her nude sauna (don't ask). It appeared he was a lawyer and she was asking him how to get child support money from an absent father. I reached past her shoulder, took the drink I had just bought for her, and slowly upturned it and tipped it all over the floor, before politely reaching past her and putting the empty glass back in front of her, and leaving the pub.

That night I was dead tired and desperate to sleep, but it was after all Twelfth Night, and the next day January 6th was Adelaide's birthday, and I just wanted to wait till the clock ticked past midnight so I could go online and send her a happy birthday. At 0001 I logged online and saw that she was already online also.

She was waiting for it. I sent her the message "Happy birthday" and she replied in a single second. "Thank you. How are you?"

"I'm fine," I said. "I broke up with Rosa today."

"Oh my God. Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"I'm shaking now."

"I'd like to see you again."

"I would come right now if you let me."

"Yes. Come."

"Are you serious? I will call a taxi and can be there in half an hour?"

"Yes."

Within half an hour to 45 minutes my front door buzzer rang and I pressed the button on my entryphone and heard her running up the stairs. I opened the door and we began kissing and making love, and she stayed with me, she crying herself to sleep.

The next night after work I went to the Black Pig to see Adelaide, and there happened to be a massive fight this night. A group of Albanians got into a fight with a bunch of young local Berlin lads, the Berlin lads were lifting the bar stools and smashing them over the Albanians' heads, and the Albanians were smashing beer glasses and slashing the Berlin boys in the face with the broken glasses. While this extreme violence was going on, the dancing room was empty and Adelaide and I were quietly kissing all alone in the dark corner against the bar. She put one leg up on the bar, & I lifted the dress under which she wore no knickers, & entered her, & we fucked, in the exact same spot where Rosa had all but made love to me. Girls are like that. This was Adelaide's revenge. Just as I was buttoning myself up again, Flora came into the room and said "Oh look at you two kissing each other when the whole place is being smashed up on the other side!"

Within a month I had given notice on the place where I was living, and moved in with Adelaide.

ENDNOTES

Your Editor Ernst Graf—A cultured man with a passion for opera & European pornography Marquis de Yellow Pill / X and My Books

DforDoom—Cult movies, classic movies, horror, cult tv of the 60s & 70s, vintage genre fiction <u>Classic Movie Ramblings</u> & <u>Cult Movie Reviews</u> & <u>Vintage Pop Fictions</u> & <u>D4doome</u> / X

Froutib— Man, 50, erotic art lover. Art is sublimation of life. Life is Art. I \heartsuit the beauty of curves & sensuality of forms, without perversity Froutib / X

Dick Saint Cécile—Author of stories about smartmachin, most often erotic. A novel in AE on Amazon: *The Flesh Remembers*. Ongoing projects in search of beta lect. <u>Dick Sainte Cecile (@DickCecile) / X A deux doigts du clavier</u>

David Playfair—Two broken mirrors were connected by a tunnel through space and time, and a different part of me was at each end. Meat Machine / X

The Meat Machine: Amazon.co.uk: Playfair, David: 9781739667696: Books

Byronium—'The spirit is dreaming inside the body.' Trying to understand why beauty matters to me. Substack: <u>Black Etna</u>

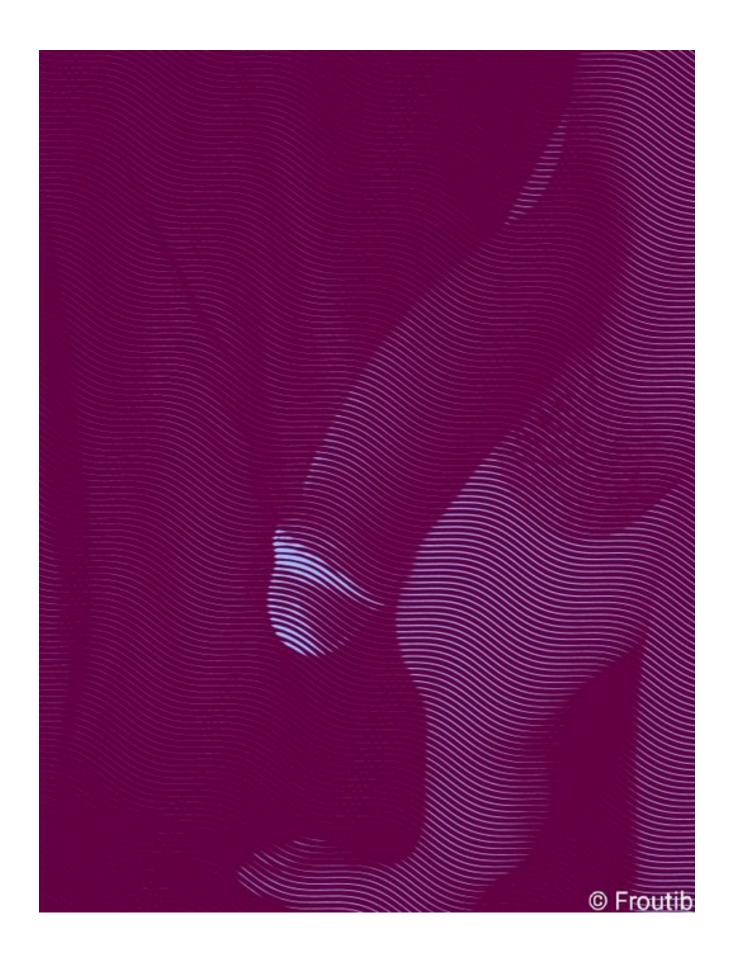
K.Z.Howell—Father, Soldier, Author & Redneck Philosopher (SW Tennessee). I write Science Fiction, History & Thrillers. A relentless supporter of Penicillin magazine on X <u>K. Z. Howell (@KZ Howell) / X</u> for a long time now. We shall be advertising Mr Howell's books in the coming weeks as a small thank you <u>Dead World eBook: Howell, K. Z.</u>

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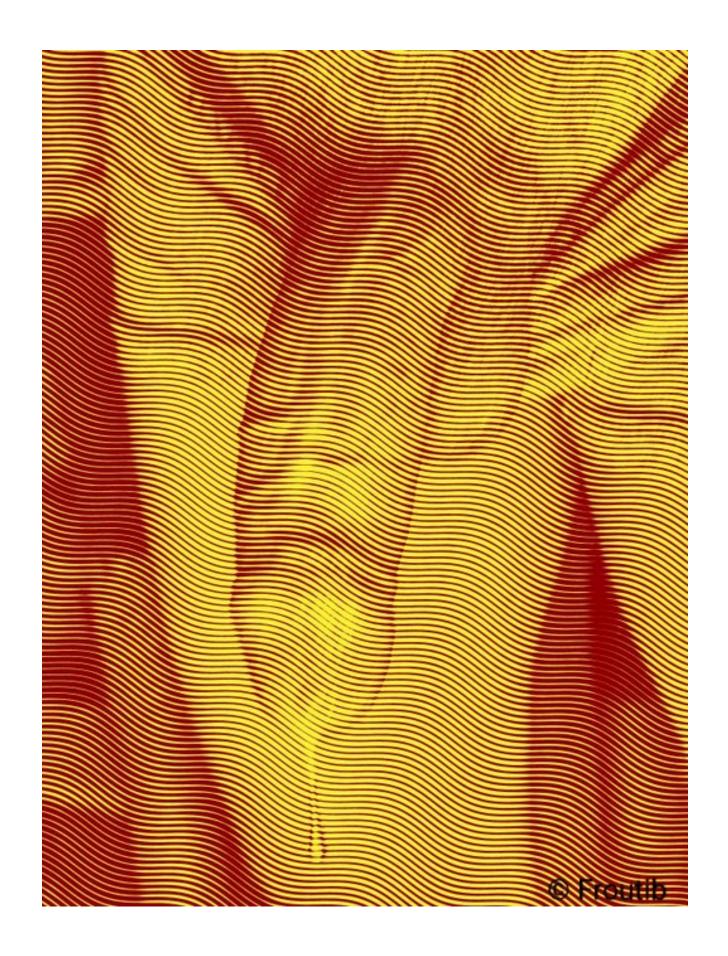
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Ernst Graf's First Trip to Europe (1811) by Caspar David Friedrich



In der Nacht by Froutib



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