



PENIC ILL IN

189

24th October 2025

THE MEAT MACHINE



By David Playfair

COPYRIGHT VITAL PRESS © 2022

Chapter Thirty-three—The Battle of the Airfield

Our rabbits had bounced across the minefield and exploded into furry bits. Our cavalry had stormed through the broken fence. Our foot soldiers had poured onto the airstrip in their wake. A second attack at the main gate was held up by determined machine-gun fire, but at least it diverted the German defenses.

Our attack upon the airfield was under way at last. We had thrown all our forces, trained and untrained, into this battle. They were to infiltrate until the garrison was swamped.

Harry was with the attack on the gate, while I had followed the rabbits and the horses through the fence.

Corpses bristling with arrows marked the Mongols' passage. Across the concrete I saw our horses racing alongside a row of Stukas, the riders

swinging hammers against the cockpits. With Zaretsky at my side, I walked through the chaos toward the big tank of aviation fuel.

Bullets from Maslov's antitank rifle had pierced its sheet metal sides. High octane petrol ran like water from a dozen holes. Maslov gazed, perplexed, at his handiwork.

'I thought it would explode,' he said.

'Non-sparking alloy,' explained Zaretsky. 'We've got to do something more, or else they'll simply patch those holes and refill it.'

'Sugar,' I said. 'Dump some into the bottom of the tank, and any gas they pour over it will be spoiled. There are sacks among the food stores we looted. Get one of the cavalry to fetch them over.'

He ran over to the buildings, and returned with Lilith, leading her horse, which they'd loaded with two fifty-kilogram sacks of sugar. The horse balked at walking into the pool of gasoline. Maslov and Zaretsky each grabbed a sack and headed for the fuel tank, with me following close behind. We splashed through an ankle-deep pool of spilled high-octane petrol. The fumes intoxicated, and it was a relief to climb up the spiral ladder on the fuel tank's side.

Hauling a plumber's wrench from his belt, Zaretsky unbolted the hatch. Maslov helped him haul the lid aside, then they hacked the sacks open and poured in the contents of both.

Standing high on top of the big fuel tank gave me a fine view of the battle. A full petrol truck flamed furiously on the taxiing ramp. Another tanker-truck, parked alongside, boiled out petrol vapour and, as I watched, blew up.

A roaring fireball — a black, yellow and pink flower — shot fifty meters high. Chunks of truck clanged onto the metal where I stood. The exhilaration of destruction left no room for fear. I threw my arms up above my head,

'On top of the world!' I shouted.

'Yes,' said a quiet voice. 'This is the proper place for a general to be, surveying the battle from a commanding height.'

It was Genghis. His horse had been shot from under him, so he'd followed us up the fuel tank.

A fresh outbreak of submachine-gun fire came from below, followed by the explosions of hand grenades.

'Guess we missed another guard,' observed Genghis.

Unperturbed, Zaretsky worked on. He rebolted the hatch. He brushed away the sugar-dust with his cap and folded up the empty paper sack.

'Mustn't leave any clues to what we did. I'll burn this later.'

I scanned the smoky chaos below. Through my telescope I could see that all the planes had smashed windows and hacked tires. The cavalry were wheeling round to the main gate, where Harry's petrol bombs had set

a row of armoured cars ablaze. The airfield was littered with bodies, some moving but mostly still. I didn't see a single German on his feet. We had wiped out their garrison!

'Time to pull out,' I said.

'I'll go down and pass the word,' said Genghis. 'Attila's already working on the wounded.'

'Too bad we didn't save some of the sugar for our tea,' said Zaretsky.

'Good riddance,' I said. 'Poison for engines, poison for people. All right as a treat, maybe, when good food's plentiful. Give sugar to half-starved people, like our partisans, and they'd go crazy. It sucks the vitamins out of your brain.'

We climbed down from the tank, a glorious vista of dead Germans and damaged airplanes stretching out before us.

'I can't see that damned Storch, though,' he said. 'The one that strafed you after capturing the horses.'

'Out on a mission, I suppose. Can't hang around for its return. Maybe we'll see it again the hard way.'

'Its crew are in for a shock when they return to base.'

Harry ran up to us, clutching a heavy wooden case.

'A typewriter!' he shouted. 'Had to smash a few doors down to find it, but I knew there'd be one somewhere. Now Huldah can really teach me to write. The machine won't mix up those p's and q's.'

He slung the case onto his back.

'But where is Huldah?' he asked.

That's when Attila showed up, riding Huldah's horse with Huldah clinging on behind him. She gave Harry a wan smile, but we could see she was hurt. Her face was as pale as a sheet of paper. I saw that Attila had strapped her to him with his belt.

'Bullet in the belly,' he said. 'Not good. Might have tipped the spleen.'

'I'll carry her back,' said Harry.

'No, you won't,' said Attila. 'The horse will be faster, even with two riders. She's got to get back as quickly as possible, so Genghis can give her a blood transfusion.'

* * *

'Funny typewriter,' said Harry. 'I don't see where the paper goes in. When I hit the keys, these little colored lights glow.'

We were back at Katerindorf. Genghis was working on Huldah's wound, and had chased Harry out of the sick bay. We studied the machine to take our minds off the worry.

'I don't know that it is a typewriter,' I said. 'Look at this row of little knurled wheels. They've all got letters on too.'

I took out my trusty magnifying glass. The wheels were double, the two lettered faces hard-wired back to back. Each wheel turned the next. I

saw that the wheels were detachable, could be rearranged, or replaced from a little shelf of extras. A calculating machine perhaps?

‘Huldah will know,’ said Harry confidently. ‘Let’s go back. Genghis will let us in now.’

We found Huldah laying in bed, her belly bandaged up and her legs propped up on pillows. She gave Harry a faint smile and tried to embrace him, but was too weak to lift up her arms. Her skin was as pale as the bed sheets. Harry wrapped his big left arm around her shoulders, and kissed her lightly.

‘I’ve brought your glasses,’ he said, and propped them onto her nose.

‘That’s a lot better,’ she said in a tiny voice. ‘I can see your face now, Harry. And what’s that you’ve brought me?’

‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘Thought it was a typewriter, but we can’t make it go.’

‘Put it on the edge of the bed,’ said Huldah, ‘and I’ll figure it out. Turn the light up, will you, Genghis? It’s a bit dim in here.’

Broad daylight was streaming in through the window.

Genghis took my arm and drew me back from Harry’s side.

‘She’s dying, General. The bullet hit must have broken her spleen, and I’m not enough of a surgeon to find the artery and tie it off.’

‘Couldn’t you try?’

‘The little bit of ether we had is all used up. The shock of an operation without anesthetic would finish her. She’s had three liters of blood transfused,’ and he pointed to a clamped tube which led to a needle in her arm, ‘but I think it just ran straight out of the bleeding point into the belly cavity, because she’s still in shock.’

Harry called us back to the bedside.

‘Huldah has something to tell you.’

I put my ear down to her lips.

‘General,’ she whispered ‘Here’s my last bit of scholarship. That enigmatic machine is no regular typewriter. It’s a coding device. It changes the letters of their messages around. A cascade of changeable rotors... That’s why we could never make sense of their radio signals. Take it to Moscow. The mathematicians will figure it out. Now, let me talk to Harry again.’

She died in his arms.

We had fought a necessary battle, we had won a great victory, but I felt nothing but sadness as I watched the tears running down Harry’s face.

NEXT WEEK—Chapter Thirty-four—Robots

THE **MEAT**
MACHINE

VITAL
PRESS

DAVID PLAYFAIR

FANTOMAS: A ROYAL PRISONER

(1911)



By Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre
Reviewed by D4Doom

Published in 1911, *A Royal Prisoner* (*Un Roi Prisonnier*) was the fifth of the Fantômas novels.

The brilliant arch-criminal Fantômas is one of the most iconic figures in the history of French pop culture. Marcel Allain (1885–1969) and Pierre Souvestre (1874–1914) wrote thirty-two Fantômas novels between 1911 and 1913. Allain wrote further Fantômas novels after his collaborator's death. Fantômas later featured in TV shows, silent movie serials, movies and comics.

A Royal Prisoner begins with King Frederick-Christian of Hesse-Weimar (a tiny mythical kingdom) visiting Paris. It's not an official visit. He's in Paris to see his mistress, the glamorous courtesan Susy d'Orsel.

Reporter Jerome Fandor (one of the three recurring central characters in the novels) meets the king and they get drunk together. Then there's an unfortunate incident, with a woman apparently committing suicide by throwing herself out of a window. The French authorities want it to be a suicide. Anything else would cause diplomatic nightmares. The problem is that a witness saw enough to make it certain that this was murder. And the only person with the woman at the time was the king. The king is now very much the prime suspect for murder.

Detective Juve (another of the recurring central characters) is instructed to investigate and to come to the politically acceptable conclusion that this was suicide. But Juve doesn't operate that way. He intends to find and arrest the murderer, even if it is the king.

There is a great deal of confusion about the murder. A third person may have been present. Meanwhile Jerome Fandor has been mistaken for the king. And he's met a pretty lacemaker who has fallen in love, thinking that she has fallen in love with the king.

Mistaken identities, false identities and disguises will play key roles in this story, as in many of the Fantômas stories. Both the police and the criminals are often operating on false assumptions.

There is also a threatened revolution in Hesse-Weimar. And a stolen diamond. One of the most valuable diamonds in the world.

These are all classic ingredients in Edwardian thrillers and mysteries. The Fantômas novels have a very pulpy feel. There are kidnappings and narrow escapes and secret passageways. In this case there's a mysterious singing fountain, and the reason it sings will become important. There's a wildly convoluted plot. There's breathless excitement. There's romance. There's everything needed for a fun crime/espionage/adventure romp. Plus there's the sinister figure of the ruthless criminal mastermind Fantômas. The ingredients are there and the authors know how to combine them to perfection.

One interesting element is the air of sexual sophistication. Susy d'Orsel is a courtesan. She is technically a prostitute. But she's a nice girl and not one of the characters expresses the slightest disapproval of her. The king is having an open affair with such a woman but no-one expresses any disapproval. This truly was La Belle Époque. Paris was the city of love, which meant it was the city of sex.

Fantômas's mistress, the wicked sexy Lady Beltham, naturally puts in an appearance.

Fantômas himself is a figure of mystery. We see the story from the points of view of Juve and Jerome Fandor. They suspect Fantômas's involvement early on but they can't prove it. Fantômas is ever elusive. Sometimes he succeeds, sometimes he fails, but bringing him to justice seems impossible. He is sinister and ruthless. One of the great fictional super-villains.

A Royal Prisoner is fast-paced crazy pulp fun. Highly recommended.

"Confirms once more that
Louise Brooks was one
of the most enduringly
fascinating women ever
to appear in front of
the camera."

— Andrew Sarris, THE VILLAGE VOICE

**KINO
VIDEO**
PRESENTS
Interama
COLLECTION

Louise Brooks
PRIX de BEAUTÉ



PRIX DE BEAUTÉ

(1930)

Reviewed by D4Doom

One of the tiny handful of films to feature Louise Brooks in a starring role, *Prix de Beauté* (*Miss Europe*) is worth seeing for that reason only. It was one of the very first talkies to be made in France, in 1930, and it was actually started as a silent film. In fact the dialogue is sparse and mostly unnecessary, and it has the feel of a silent film.

It's a very odd film indeed. It tells the story of a typist named Lucienne who much against the wishes of her fiancé Andre, enters and wins a beauty competition. This gives her the opportunity to break into films and thus escape the tedium of both her job and Andre. This doesn't please Andre at all, who proceeds to behave like a spoilt child whose favourite toy has been taken away from him.



Can Lucienne realise her dream of stardom, or will Andre persuade her to become a meek little obedient housewife?

The movie starts out as if it's going to be a lightweight comedy, and then takes a darker turn, and then takes a very dark turn indeed. Brooks looks fabulous, of course, and her ability to be both very restrained in her acting and at the same time to light up the screen is the main reason people are going to watch this movie. In fact, although it's an odd mix, it's an interesting movie and definitely worth seeing. The ending is particularly well done.

The movie is also nicely ambiguous – we sympathise with Lucienne's desire to make something of her life but at the same time we see that her dream of being a movie star really is an escape into an unreal existence (which is emphasised by the ending), but then her short-lived attempt at conventional domestic life is portrayed as being equally unreal.

The Kino DVD release is just awful. Picture quality is bad, sound quality is bad, there are no extras. Although it's a sound film the speed of the movie is all wrong, just like silent movies projected at the wrong speed where everyone is moving too fast.



A man without several nom de plumes should not be trusted.

ROBOT DOG AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD HITTING ON SOFT 17



By Nick August

Prisons and church basements are full of men who
"loved unconditionally"

The only aisle seat remaining for my Atlanta to Newark flight when I bought my ticket was in the last row of the plane. I didn't like sitting in the rear but only because, once back on the ground, I want off right fucking now. Claustrophobia is real; controllable, but real. The situation aft was looking comfortable, at least. The last few rows happened to be sparsely populated that early in the morning (this was 2016), and the flight attendant was cute and chatty. Between an extended drink service and her hot takes on Atlantic City, it was a good flight.

I was just starting out on a two-week hybrid business/personal road trip around the Northeast. I had business on the New Hampshire seacoast, family in Manhattan and upstate New York I hadn't seen in years, and the desire to just go and do things mostly alone. Mostly. Because I'm a gambler—as we all are (getting to that)—I had decided to kick off this grand tour in Atlantic City because I'd never been there.

This was July. I was six months out of a failed marriage, had been doing “the work” to figure out how I wanted my next twenty years to be different from the previous twenty. I was off to a good start. Somehow, through odd twists and turns, I had wound up briefly in a Facebook group for divorced people through which I had managed to meet a couple cuties and convince them to meet for fun or games or whatnot during my travels, one of whom was a blonde from New York. When I told her my plans, she invited herself to come hang out with me in AC the weekend I would be there. I thought that was a fantastic idea.

So I flew into Newark on a Thursday morning, early. I picked up my rental car and began my two or so hour drive to AC. Except I was using Google Maps for the very first time and wasn't aware my default setting was for it to automatically reroute me around traffic problems. So instead of sending me down the Garden State Parkway, it sent through the pine barrens and around Fort Dix. I saw a lot of rural New Jersey that day, a lot of woods and farm country and, I must say, it was just what I needed. Looked just like the parts of Alabama where I'd either lived or played my whole life, and the small gas stations and convenience stores I stopped at in places where I had no real clue where I really, truly was, reminded me how people on their own tend to be way better than people in groups.

Travel tends to do this.

My roundabout journey to AC cost me an extra hour but added days, if not weeks, to my overall outlook and mindset about life, so I came out ahead.

At the casino, the line at the check in desk was short. I was able to check in early and went straight to my room, cranked the air conditioning down to something ridiculously cold, crawled into bed, and took a nap. Having been up since 3am that morning in order to get to Atlanta from Alabama for my early flight, deal with the loss of an hour going from Central to Eastern time, etc., I was exhausted because I also don't

usually sleep well on nights before travel. Slept like a rock under warm, heavy blankets in that cold, cold room.

I awoke to three-hour old texts from the blonde girl—let's call her *Elsa*—asking me the things most women ask:

Did you get there safe? Is your room nice and what you wanted? Is it any warmer or colder there than we thought it would be? I'm packing!

I lay in bed a while answering her and finalizing specifics. It was around suppertime Thursday, but she wouldn't be down until early Saturday morning, which was perfect. It gave me time to chill on my own, get back into blackjack mode, enjoy some solitude out on the Steel Pier with a drink watching the Atlantic be the Atlantic.

After dealing with her texts, I dealt with the rest from others and checked in with work and checking work emails. Then I pulled up my blackjack review notes and play simulator. Ran through those for about thirty minutes since I hadn't played in a few months. Then I took a shower, dressed, and headed for the tables.

It couldn't have gone worse. I went up almost a thousand dollars immediately. That's a good problem to have, no question, and it doesn't affect anything in and of itself. When I first play after a significant absence (meaning longer than a week, which is always), I have to fight overconfidence and "luck," and then have to fight my fighting overconfidence and luck. Before I know it, I'm so far out in my head I could polish the windows on Voyager 1 (look it up, zoomers).

Which is bad. There is always a correct play in blackjack based on simple math, the table rules, whether you're counting or not, etc. My goal, always, is to play like a machine to the extent of my knowledge, experience, and ability, but if I don't play several times weekly, at least—which I rarely do—it takes me a while to get out of my head and simply *play*. There almost always comes a point where I'm tensed up, holding on too tight, following the match strictly but not really trusting it where I start pulling back, reducing bets out of fear rather than strategy, that I tend to hear a voice in my say, *Are you here to play this game, or not?*

How do I know when I'm truly *playing*?

First, it's *fun*. It might be stressful or terrifying at moments, but those are all in service to fun much like I imagine surfing must be. If it's fun

even while it's all of those other things, I'm doing something right. What is *fun* to me? I have the experience of being full in the middle of it and *doing* it while being aware of what I'm doing at the same time. Can't really explain it, but that's what I call it and that's what it's like. Playing is supposed to be fun. Yes, there are conclusions to draw here. Draw them.

Second, I don't care if I win or lose because I know I'm going to win *and* lose. If I'm holding on or fearful, desperate, something's off. It's no longer fun. I'm either playing with money I can't afford to lose, I'm too ego-invested to think clearly, or I'm focused on the outcome rather than the wave I'm on and following the math which is the guide. When you ride a wave, large or small, you're on an edge. The math doesn't say you'll always win. The math says that if you do everything you can do, you'll win more than you lose on a long enough timeline. That's a tricky one. Think on it a while.

Third, I'm playing to win. Those who express disdain for the concept of "winning" are either immature, liars, or both. There are a lot of ways to look at winning. Look to nature for definitions if you want. Look to theism if you must. But to deny our biological imperative to win is to deny who we are as living creatures, beings, whatever. And yes, playing to win while remaining outcome independent is, indeed, a thing. A good thing.

Correct blackjack play is just following equations, probability formulas based on math. Equations boil down to equivalence between two expressions. Remember having to balance equations in Algebra 1? There is wisdom there because an equation essentially describes a relationship between two expressions. Let's hop on the Metaphoricycle.

Whatever a particular relationship is—marriage, friends with benefits, business, siblings, actual friendship—it's an equation being continually solved by two people. It's about both sides balancing, not in some feely cosmic sense, but in a day to day pragmatic sense. Most people's prime source of misery originates in failed relationships, which, for adults, really means their own failure to manage themselves in their relationships. A primary point of failure if not the only one? Balancing the equation, meaning both sides giving approximately the same amount of time, energy, effort, etc.

Approximately, because this is human behavior, not mathematics. Don't sperg out and start a spreadsheet to hold your other accountable. The

specifics of balance end up being more accurately described by a boat, barge, or raft. Port vs. starboard. Bow vs. stern. Any of those can handle some small fluctuations in weight distribution, but if any one takes on too much water or cargo, the situation rapidly deteriorates past the point of anyone's ability to correct. The vessel swamps and is likely lost. The application is simple: if you want the relationship to remain seaworthy, don't overdo it and don't underdo it. Again, don't get weird about it. Both parties should roughly match levels of interest and investment. In more serious relationships, more accommodation is sometimes necessary. If you're unable to read nuances and the ebb and flow of dynamics in your situation, then you either have a problem or you are the problem.

Keep this in mind: the whole "you should love unconditionally" thing is, for the most part, a lie. It's the Mindfuck Rollercoaster. Unconditional love is spiritual speak. It is life in the abstract. It applies to Jesus, not you. Men are particularly bad at this. Prisons and church basements are full of men who loved unconditionally.

This is about grokking both objective and subjective reality in situations where emotions can distort either, or both.

Which is what playing is all about: operating at full competence and having fun while managing your behavior and responses. In the old days, they called this being captain of your ship. Whatever you call it, drive your boat.

I had a good time in AC. Played almost non-stop from Thursday evening until Saturday morning as I tend to do. One of my favorite things to do with dates who are into it is to take them to the tables, let them play with my chips (play with, not keep, boys) while I tell them how to play each hand if they don't know. They usually don't. It's fun for a while. When Elsa got there, she wanted to play with her own money. Bad idea, I told her, unless she was committed to playing on a long timeline which few women—or men, for that matter—are. She was a little miffed when she couldn't turn her two hundred bucks into ten thousand with my guidance, but it was a fun weekend, regardless. She also kept trying to stand on soft seventeen—an ace and a six—and I kept correcting her play. She saw no difference between that and a 10-7. The difference is that Ace-Six can play as a seventeen or a seven, which means in most configurations of decks, table rules, etc., there is no disadvantage to hitting a soft seventeen, so you pretty much always do it. Blackjack scenarios, like relationships with human beings, are highly nuanced. Is

he/she into me, or just being nice? Am I that good of a salesman, or am I being set up to fail? Does my boss really support my future here, or is he/she passing it off as his own?

You have to play a lot to learn a lot. You have to fail a lot. You have to think, study, analyze, get better informed.

In the drive back to the city, I got in a wrong lane and got forced off the Garden State Expressway, ended up very quickly in what looked like the middle of nowhere. Despite a normal couple of days together, Elsa went very quiet and, despite being very white, went even a little more pale which I wouldn't have thought possible. I realized she feared this had all been a ruse and I was going to murder her or something. I was operating at peak performance, however, rising my wave, so I knew better than to make a joke or reassure her or even mention it at all. Misunderstandings and whatnot. I just apologized and found my way back to the highway asap.

Epilogue

I left Elsa very much alive in a cab in Manhattan where I got out and checked into my next hotel. I had a few hours before I would be joining my cousin and his girlfriend for dinner, so I got a shower and napped to the sound of car horns and sirens.

As I lay down, I also ran my thoughts on all of this by Soup, my robot dog which, thankfully, the hotel allowed without any pet fee or security clearance, probably because I was a loyalty program member. I told Soup that relationships could either be gambling or playing, and that understanding the difference between seemingly identical (but actually different) hands is more important than being Alpha, or a writer(tm).

I had put Soup into *big nasty security mode* since I was about to fall asleep naked in New York, so he was at the window scanning and tracking every outside vehicle, person, and pigeon on our block as well as any low-flying airplanes and anyone in the hallway. Soup nevertheless concurred with my notes, and then his socialization drive hummed and whirred for a few seconds then told me it was okay to admit I was a lesbian.

Robot dogs aren't all they're cracked up to be.

PERFORMANCE



By MT White

**A major new series
From the Substack 'Discussions'**

12

TESTIMONY & TRANSITION

**Testimony as the basis of both self history and national history;
how Solzhenitsyn is poetically superior (and more frustrating)
than Ayn Rand**

Counter-narratives are not always right. In fact, many times they are wrong or just dealing in the same currency of sensation and image establishment organs do. But when an author of Peter Handke's pedigree does write a counter-narrative, we cannot help but take notice. This does not negate the testimony of Bosnian victims, but it also gives space to Serbian testimony, which Handke noted, seemed almost non-existent in Western media.

And testimony is a powerful mode of performance, a very common facet of daily life—from what someone is telling you about an event they experienced—whether it be a concert or car accident—it is very common to trust what they are saying unless there is a known suspicion not to trust them. As philosopher CJ Coady observed, there is “no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators.” Testimony, a key element in

settling disputes in a court, what Coady labels “formal testimony”, is just an extension of the far more common “natural testimony” of daily life, where “we have a speaker engaged in the speech act of testifying to the truth of some proposition which is either in dispute or in some way in need of determination and his attestation is evidence towards settling the matter.”

Testimony ranks alongside memory, inference and perception as a cornerstone of human consciousness. Eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid called testimony the “social operations of mind”, which gives knowledge itself a social character, a social character negated by the Enlightenment and its emphasis on the individual. This isn’t to negate someone thinking for themselves, but rather to negate the idea of total isolation—socially and cognitively. Per Coady, the independent thinker is “not someone who works everything out for herself, even in principle, but one who exercises a controlling intelligence over the input she receives from the normal sources of information whether basis be individual or communal.” And any critical attitude we might have is “founded upon a general stance of trust, just as the adult awareness of the way memory plays us false rests upon a broader confidence in recollective powers.”

There’s no doubt many testimonies are rehearsed. Lawyers coaching witnesses for trials, for example, is common practice. We have all heard the stories told by friends and family, stories we have heard multiple times, sometimes in variant forms, with interesting additions and subtractions, different details emphasized, those who were also present at the time of the story may add details to the testimony or contradict them, yet that only helps to add to the veracity of the story. At evangelical churches, people give their “testimony”, a form of confession, narrating their personal journey from sin to repentance—a testimony they may have given several times, or maybe rehearsed in the mirror so as to be as clear as possible. It does not mean it is false, or fake, or a lie, because it was not “natural”. It’s a performance for a trusting community.

Paul Ricoeur wrote that testimony, “constitutes the fundamental transitional structure between memory and history”. Testimony, that “transitional structure” is the alpha to history’s omega. The performance of memory—testimony—is the key “structure” history relies upon, history being that act of re-presentation of a collective narrative, of a group re-presenting itself to itself and giving it meaning. For the historian, “everything starts, not from the archives, but from testimony,

and that, whatever may be our lack of confidence in principle in such testimony, we have nothing better than testimony, in the final analysis, to assure ourselves that something did happen in the past, which someone attests having witnessed in person, and that the principal, and at times our only, recourse, when we lack other types of documentation, remains the confrontation among testimonies.”

“Transition” itself is an important word, one of the true essences of artistic power. For Emerson, everything “teaches transition, transference, metamorphosis: therein is human power, in transference, not in creation; & therein is human destiny, not in longevity but in removal. We dive & reappear in new places.” These transitional acts—memory to testimony, testimony to history, thinking and feeling to speaking, writing, painting—to performance!—are the acts of power that everyone has but an artist demonstrates to its highest element.

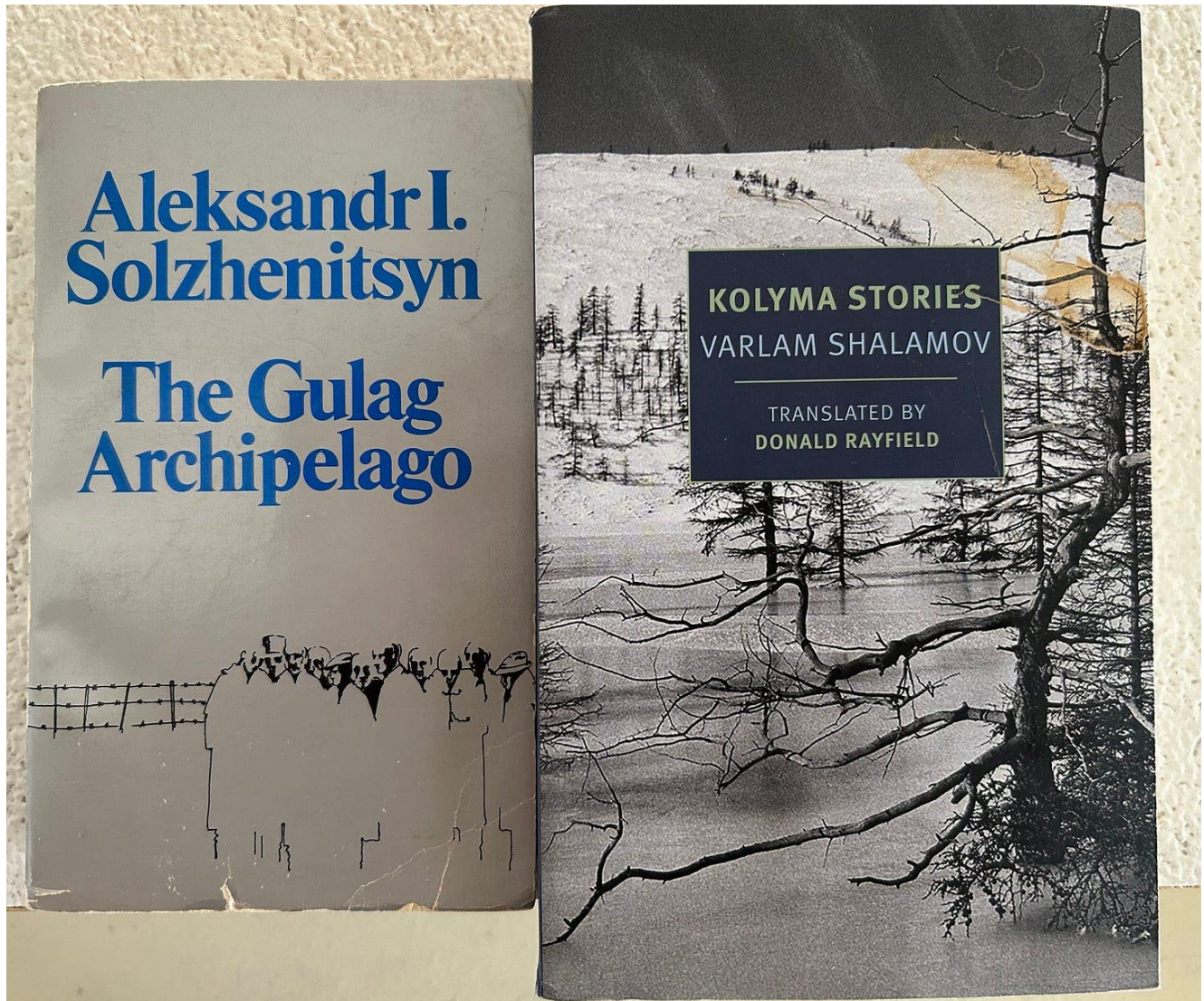
Naturally, there is a political dimension to this.

For someone like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who collected testimonies from survivors of the Soviet Gulag, including his own, and gave them literary formation starting with *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and climaxing with *The Gulag Archipelago*. From the outset, his work contained a political charge, where de-coupling from the political became almost impossible. His work became important because it was politically important, serving political ends—first, starting with Nikita Khrushchev’s efforts to distance from the Stalinist era with the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, making Solzhenitsyn a literary celebrity in both the Soviet Union and the West, which in turn led to his banned work being published in the West—starting with *Cancer Ward*—leading to his winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970 for the “ethical force” in pursuing the “indispensable traditions of Russian literature”.

This decision by the Swedish academy did not lack controversy. Swedish author Artur Lundkvist criticized the decision, claiming it politicized the Nobel Prize. But politics fueled Solzhenitsyn’s popularity in the West. *August 1914*, his first entry in his historic *Red Wheel* series, was a bestseller, and *The Gulag Archipelago* (published in 1974) was also a bestseller and considered politically damning for the Soviet Union.

There’s no doubt there is great literary skill in these works, and both the Soviet and American governments knew their power, and threat, lay in said literary skill. Even if it was not on the level of Tolstoy or

Dostoevsky, the fact many compared his work to those great authors, gave him a political air of importance. In a Politburo meeting Yuri Andropov called the *Red Wheel* an “anti-Soviet slur”, and in a way, it was. Solzhenitsyn wrote it to re-describe the Bolshevik’s seizing of power in Russia, counter to the established Soviet narrative. And there is no doubt, Solzhenitsyn wrote with a performative manner that suggested moral urgency echoing the Russian literary tradition.



The Gulag Archipelago is part of this tradition as prison literature was a common Russian literary genre since at least Dostoevsky’s *Notes from a Dead House* (a book that received praise from both Tolstoy and Lenin—both did not care for the rest of his work), one of the more morally certain and hopeful of Dostoevsky’s works, a work part fiction, part autobiography. Solzhenitsyn, with his “literary investigation” in to the Gulag, wrote squarely in this tradition, a literary echo, of Dostoevsky. Compare the righteous fury of *The Gulag Archipelago*, with the nihilism of Varlam Shalamov’s *Kolyma Stories* or the black comedy

of Sergei Dovlatov's *The Zone*: the tones are vastly different, dependent on the perspective of the author, whether they be a Christian (Solzhenitsyn), an atheist Marxist (Shalamov) or just indifferent prison guard (Dovlatov). All were "dissident" writings, yet Solzhenitsyn wrote with a purposeful and spiritual heft on a grossly political topic, giving it weight—the length (several volumes) of the work added to literal and figurative weight of the work. The "literary investigation" in to the world of the Gulag, the poetic description gave an added dimension of importance, because the topic was not treated like a plain, boring, non-fiction document. Solzhenitsyn wrote with a moral certainty as an heir to Tolstoy—even making him a character in *August 1914*. The influence of Dostoevsky can be heard, not just in choosing the genre of prison literature but also in experimentation (polyphonic perspectives in *The Red Wheel*) and the philosophical ruminations, where in a work like *In the First Circle* the characters wax about the morality of the Soviet Union possessing nuclear weapons.

But, it should never be forgotten that the Soviet government sanctioned this voice originally, that it allowed the voice to take shape, and endowed the discovery of Solzhenitsyn's writing as an official voice, which in turn made the Soviet populace realize this is a voice, a concern, that could be given voice—even if it had not been considered beforehand. The word was spoken, it could not be unspoken. Was the voice of the Gulag being "repressed" by the Soviet government until Solzhenitsyn? Or was the voice formless, struggling for consciousness, until Solzhenitsyn gave it shape, and received sanction from the government, endowing it with official shape? It should also never be forgotten that Solzhenitsyn intended to win the Nobel Prize in Literature while imprisoned before he ever wrote a word. This is not to call him an opportunist—he put himself in too much danger to reduce him to that—but it is certainly to call him a performer.

Once he domiciled in the United States, Solzhenitsyn's cultural capital diminished because he was no longer a dissident within the Soviet Union, but also because he wanted to focus on literature—finishing *The Red Wheel*—rather than be active in politics (though he gave speeches from time to time). Being a writer in exile is also a Russian pastime (Dostoevsky wrote *The Idiot* in Venice to escape debtors, Ivan Bunin and Vladimir Nabokov continued writing in exile from Soviet Union, etc.), though Solzhenitsyn's distaste for his host country's liberal attitudes carried an immediate tension as exhibited in his Harvard Speech—which really killed much political relevance for him in the US (even Ronald Reagan, who called the USSR "the evil empire" would not

meet with him), and any interest in his future work—unless it was as object of liberal outrage (there was a row over a passage of his work being read on Voice of America radio for passages deemed anti-Semitic), a sign of perpetual dissidence and distrust.

When Solzhenitsyn the dissident voice lost political expediency, many lost interest in Solzhenitsyn the author. America ignored *The Red Wheel*—written in the US but never fully translated here—missed its non-political traits, its strange sexual energy: One female character has burdensome big breasts, another takes delight in her husband whipping her, while the married Vorotyntsev, one of the many protagonists, has an affair with an intellectual monarchist, an affair practically excused because he's met someone who values him on levels deeper than mere social appearances. All pulpy and melodramatic details certainly (sexual tension is present in a lot of Solzhenitsyn's work—*In the First Circle* has a memorable scene where a married prisoner kisses a female prison employee adding a sexual tension to the penal tapestry), but made more substantiative alongside the details of pre-Bolshevik Russian life, intimate character portraits, and the dense historical asides.

The obdurate nature of *The Red Wheel*, its unapproachable length, a challenge for even native speaking Russians (Joseph Brodsky's main criticism), using a vocabulary that is foreign to even them (some disputed the pre-Bolshevik vocabulary Solzhenitsyn used), shows an inner dissident in Solzhenitsyn himself, exhibiting a desire to not be easy and assumed, a desire for readers as serious as Solzhenitsyn himself as a writer—it all is performative dissidence, the grand artistic act of dissent, undermining the political with the literary, of dense counter-narrative to the straightforward commercial narratives that permeate western media. Solzhenitsyn seemed to believe in the Soviet ideal of an art that serves the people, but his actual artistic performances seem to counteract it. The only interest “the people” have for his work is its political and moral knowledge, where tragically Solzhenitsyn's performative powers get lost, though there is certainly no poverty of wisdom and observation.

And I think tragic is the right word here, because the art of Solzhenitsyn could never transcend the political attachment. He can only be read politically, in English at the very least, and in the frame of “The Cold War”. His work did not end Stalinism, close the Gulag, nor did it bring down the Iron Curtain. Rather his work was used as a symbol of political action. When the Soviet government wanted to pivot away from the era of Stalin's purges, they approved publication of *One Day in the Life of*

Ivan Denisovich in *Novy Mir* as a part of the symbolic shift. When they wanted to retrench to a harder line position, they suppressed Solzhenitsyn's work as a symbol of that, eventually deporting him. The United States allowed him residence as a symbol it is a country that honors free speech and dissident opinion. In the 1980s, when the USSR wanted to symbolize openness and promote *glasnost*, they allowed publication of excerpts from *The Gulag Archipelago* at the author's behest—just as there were nightly documentaries on Russian television about the same Gulag. When the Soviet Union fell, the newly formed Russian government allowed Solzhenitsyn entry back in to the country, giving him time on television for political commentary as a symbol of reform. When the newly appointed president Vladimir Putin paid visit to the author's house, with camera crews in tow, it was a symbol of the former KGB agent seeking the audience of the symbolic conscience of Russia. When the same Putin awarded him the Order of St. Andrew, Solzhenitsyn symbolically accepted where he had refused Boris Yeltsin earlier. This is not to say he was “used”, but rather that his work carried a political symbolism that could not be decoupled from the work—even though in every symbolic role Solzhenitsyn participated in, it was always precarious, sitting on unstable ground, an individual artist amidst the two “millstones” of political power. Yet Solzhenitsyn could never avoid controversy in his life—his book *200 Years Together*, about Russia's relationship with its Jewish population put an exclamation point on that—but he also continued writing literature. His “binary” short stories, written towards the end of his life, displayed a minimalist and powerful skill of bi-phonic contrast, a desire to describe things from different perspectives, a desire to use literary imagination to understand.

Compare Solzhenitsyn to another Russian exile to America: Alisa Zinovyevna Rosenbaum, better known as Ayn Rand. After Rand wrote her two massive fiction best-sellers, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, paeans to capitalism, she gave up fiction and settled for basically preaching, a preaching for the “virtue of selfishness” and other political writings, becoming a symbol for the business class, the tech moguls of Silicon Valley in particular. Her books are the second most cited by members of the US Congress as their main influence only after the Bible. Rand admired Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, but abhorred Tolstoy. The men of capitalist industry were in her mind the true *Übermensch*. But Lev Shestov noted how Nietzsche's concept of *Übermensch* was similar to Tolstoy's concept of “the good as God”, where it becomes attractive in that “it permits a man to separate himself from others, to find enemies and fight against them”, an aristocracy of being. “Where philosophy must halt before the limitation of human

power, preaching begins” because it creates a “pathos of distance”, the “source of all moral indignation”, created by the “helplessness before the enigmas of life”. This “aristocratism” created by the concept of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* and Tolstoy’s “the good” are “only means of beautifying life” but also leads to “the alternative of stamping all men either as plebeians or as sinners, to characterizing them as creatures that are either worthless or immoral, petty or criminal. There is no other way out.” Rand, the preacher of capitalism, where business success gave one moral authority, a sense of “the good”, was closer to Tolstoy the preacher of the “the good”, than she thought.

And yet...

“What the Russian is struggling with, crying out against, is not life itself: it is only European culture which has been introduced into his psyche, and which hurts him,” DH Lawrence wrote in his introduction to Shestov’s *All Things Are Possible*. Did Solzhenitsyn write in this Russian tradition of what Lawrence called “surgical outcry” of removing imposed western culture, lacking any “spontaneous utterance”? To a degree, yes. Solzhenitsyn at his worst preached like Tolstoy, but the preaching is what is most celebrated by those in the West today (like Jordan Peterson), for his criticisms of western culture but also his criticism of the Soviet Union, a regime founded on the philosophy of Karl Marx, a German. In this way, he is championed by conservatives because of his inherent revulsion at western-style liberalism. “Russia has been expressing nothing inherently Russian,” Lawrence wrote, and this is reflected in Solzhenitsyn’s championing of Russian nativism and nationalism—especially in post-Soviet period—a desire to express something truly “Russian”.

But Solzhenitsyn never gave up literature, never succumbed to pure preaching. This too is political because I can’t help but think this was what Solzhenitsyn discovered in the Gulag: His idol Tolstoy proclaimed “The Good”, defined “the Good as God”, even renouncing his earlier literary masterpieces of *War & Peace* and *Anna Karenina* because they did not serve said good, therefore did not serve God, forcing Tolstoy to abandon literature for pure preaching. But the Gulag was the end result of pure Good as God. All those who dissented from the absolute rule of the Soviet, a government forged in doing good, helping the poor and proletariat, freeing them from the shackles of monarchic tyranny—those who opposed it needed to be arrested and put in labor camps and “rehabilitated”, all digression, represented in art but also in intellectual curiosity, had no place in a world of the pure Good of the Union of

Soviet Socialist Republics. “But the dangers to abnormal discourse do not come from science or naturalistic philosophy. They come from the scarcity of food and from the secret police,” Richard Rorty wrote. Solzhenitsyn, living at the same time as Rorty, understood this too well, because he lived within the reality of it, a world of famines and secret police, and saw in literature an escape from the mental prison. The Good as God led to prison camps.

It is telling that Solzhenitsyn admired the experimental, abnormal work of Vladimir Nabokov, rather than contemporaries closer to his literary style, like Mikhail Sholokov. This was not to take him “Beyond Good and Evil” in the sense of Nietzsche, but rather take him to God. The good was in God, but there was more to The Creator than just the good, all good was enveloped in the power to create, just like God creates, but in the human need to get distracted, in digressions, in investigation, the desire to explore in realms outside the prison house of our own realms, the prison of our own conceptions or those imposed upon us, not demanding the world conform to our conceptions like Tolstoy, but that we adjust our view, allow room for adjustment, humble ourselves, create views, through perceptions, through transition, something which prison itself taught Solzhenitsyn (and maybe Dostoevsky before him). Good in itself, like all other things in themselves, just leads to corruption and desolation. Everything is built on its relation to other things. Even evil itself, in relation to war, is in itself required: “The real dilemma is the choice between peace and evil. War is only a special case of evil, concentrated in time and space. Whoever rejects war without rejecting the state is a hypocrite. And whoever fails to see that there is something more primitive and more dangerous than war—and that is the universal evil instilled into men’s hearts—sees only the surface. Mankind’s true dilemma is the choice between peace in the heart and evil in the heart.” It was not soldiers who were to be reproached but “those who do not struggle against evil.” This passage comes from a literary work (*November 1916*), so it asks to be considered rather than demands to be accepted as a work of pure preaching would. Solzhenitsyn considered his literary task a struggle against evil, a form of war in time and space. As Norman Mailer wrote, all literary form is a “record of a war”, and Solzhenitsyn’s literary life is a record of such a conflict. So, it’s not necessarily a bad thing, actually maybe it’s a necessary thing, for a work and artist to have political dimensions if said artistic performance is to have any power beyond its dimensions.

NEXT WEEK—PERSONAL FASCISM

ALL INCLUSIVE

By Dick Saint
Cécile



The holidays are over and it is with a touch of nostalgia that I return to work. I wanted to experience a new way of travelling and I think I will keep traces of it for a very long time, if only because the fact of being in an enclosed space facilitates human relations and I had more than my fill of them. I am thinking in particular of this young woman who arrived at the same time as me and who practically accompanied me to my room. I am exaggerating a little there but she was staying in the same place as me and we followed

each other to my door without having started a conversation. I had nevertheless taken the time to observe her surreptitiously and she was damn pleasant with her black hair cut in a boyish style and her full curves that I distinguished easily despite her baggy clothes.

This apparition had accompanied the beginning of my stay without me being able to see her again, we did not engage in the same activities, probably did not have the same schedules and she would very probably have disappeared into limbo if it had not been for this evening in one of the many bars of the club. I was drinking a cocktail there while watching my fellow creatures evolve, which is a very interesting thing from an ethnological point of view, when she came to stand in front of me.

— Do you mind if I sit down? You have the only empty seat at your table that doesn't make me want to go elsewhere.

The statement was abrupt, but I nonetheless invited her to take the seat that, in any case, she seemed to have assigned herself.

— No need to buy me a drink, I'm old enough to order on my own.

Had she read my mind and anticipated my suggestion? So I refrained from doing so, and it was only once her drink arrived on the table that she seemed to relax.

—Thank you for your concern.

- How so ?

—You didn't initiate the conversation any more than you initiated the drink, and I thank you for respecting my privacy. Are you comfortable here?

I replied that although human relationships were not lacking, they remained superficial and quickly forgotten.

— That's my opinion too, we're in a consumer universe here, which is what I wanted to experience, but I haven't found an interesting subject yet, maybe you?

It was blunt and I felt myself blush when her hand brushed my thigh.

—Let's finish our drinks and go. I think this place is boring me more than necessary and we have better things to do. Do you mind if we go to my place? I know I have everything I need there.

I had to admit it when we walked through her door, there were toys, condoms and lube on the bedside table and I was looking forward to getting into it like that. We were soon naked after that and she pushed me onto her bed.

— I'll take matters into my own hands, if you don't mind?

The gesture illustrated the precept because she grabbed my cock and gently jerked it until I was properly rigid. She then covered my head in latex and straddled me. I wasn't making love to her, she was using me to fuck herself and the thought excited me terribly as she undulated her pelvis around my shaft. She was doing such a good job of pleasuring herself that she came quickly. A brief but intense orgasm that left me a little hungry, however.

However, I was far from being at the end of my surprises because, after regaining her senses, she asked me if I would like her to fuck me. I only really understood when she took out a harness equipped with a dildo from a bag that was on the small sofa in the room. It was a new proposition for me and I hesitated for a brief moment before she told me that I would come like never before. Still a little perplexed, I got into the position she asked me to take, on all fours on a bath towel that she had previously spread on the duvet. The first sensation, when one of her fingers anointed with gel came to present itself on my eyelet, finally convinced me. It was rather pleasant to be touched there and it was only the beginning. Her index finger searched me for a while before her middle finger joined it, which she moved back and forth inside me, giving them a rotating movement. I felt myself opening up and it was something delicious, especially since she had continued to caress my sex with her other hand.

— Do you feel ready? There's no obligation, you know?

It wasn't so much the fact that she had switched to using the informal "tu" that surprised me, but rather this final hesitation on her part, even though she had, in my opinion, done most of the work.

— I want it

— So be it.

Adorned with her artificial phallus, she came to present the head on my arsehole. It seemed big but I wasn't afraid, only wanting it. She entered slowly, centimetre by centimetre until she possessed me completely.

— Here we go.

I was almost knocked off balance by her first thrusts. It was so strong, yet she did it with such tenderness, all my senses were turned upside down. My only point of reference was the fingers of her left hand moving back and forth on my shaft in time with her penetrations, and I knew I wouldn't last very long with such treatment. I told her so.

— I understand you, let yourself go and let go of everything.

I felt like I was going to explode as endless jets of cum flowed from me. I felt myself contracting in time with the shaft inside me, which she finally pulled out just as gently as she had inserted it. She then took me in her arms.

— I really liked your abandonment, and you? How did you find it?

— A moment of letting go like rarely before, thank you.

I left after that, there was no question of us sleeping together, and I didn't see her again until I left.

It's still early, I'm drinking my coffee alone in my office, and I tell myself that it was an experience that I will have to repeat without waiting for the next vacation.

STRIPPED BARE FOR THE MUMMY MONSTER



By Lucille Simmons

Chapter 3

The morning sun filtered through the kitchen curtains, casting a warm glow over the Formica table where Richard's parents, Abraham and Drucilla, sat with their usual breakfast spread —burnt toast, watery coffee, and a bowl of soggy cereal. Richard trudged downstairs, still groggy from a night spent replaying Crystal's striptease in his mind, his body tingling with the memory of her naked dance, her full breasts, her pert ass, and the fantasy that she'd been stripping just for him. His heart skipped as he reached the bottom step, freezing in the doorway. There, at the table, sat Crystal Blue—Big Chrissy—sipping orange juice, her red top clinging to her curves, a short skirt riding up her thighs. His stomach dropped, panic seizing him. Oh God, she knows, he thought, his face flushing hot. She knows I was behind the peephole. They all know my shameful secret. His throat tightened, tears pricking his eyes as he braced for the inevitable lecture, his parents' disappointment, Crystal's rage—or worse, her disgust. He opened his mouth, ready to

stammer excuses, when Abraham's voice cut through, calm and oblivious.

"Richard, come sit. This is Crystal Blue. Your mom and I are heading out of town for a few days—business conference in Cleveland. Crystal's gonna stay here, keep an eye on you." Abraham's tone was matter-of-fact, but his eyes lingered on Crystal, a flicker of something hungry in his gaze. Richard blinked, the panic dissolving into a rush of disbelief and secret elation. Babysitter? Big Chrissy? Here? Under normal circumstances, he'd have bristled at the idea—seventeen, nearly a man, needing a babysitter was insulting. But this was Crystal, the girl who haunted his dreams, whose naked body he'd memorized, whose rebellious spirit made his heart race. Alone with her for days? he thought, his pulse quickening, a grin tugging at his lips. This is too good to be true. Drucilla, her buck teeth jutting as she sipped her coffee, adjusted her horn-rimmed glasses and nodded absently, unaware of the tension. Abraham, however, stole another glance at Crystal, his mind wandering. Damn, she's a knockout, he thought, picturing her curves under that tight top, a stark contrast to Drucilla, whose faded beauty—once vibrant—now made his stomach churn. Those teeth, those glasses... I can barely look at Drucilla without gagging in my own mouth, he thought, suppressing a grimace. He envied Richard, hoping his son would seize the chance to get close to Crystal—maybe more than close. Kid's got a shot with a girl like that, Abraham mused, relieved. I was starting to worry he might be a fag, but he's got eyes for her, no doubt. The thought of Richard and Crystal together stirred a mix of pride and jealousy; Abraham wouldn't mind a taste of "Big Chrissy" himself, her confidence and allure a far cry from his wife's dowdy presence. Richard slid into the chair across from Crystal, his hands shaky as he grabbed a spoonful of cereal. "Hey, Crystal" he managed, his voice cracking slightly. She flashed that sly, defiant grin—the one that drove the jocks wild, the one that fueled her "Big Chrissy" reputation—and leaned forward, her top straining against her braless chest. "Hey, Richard," she said, her tone playful, her eyes glinting with that rebellious spark. She's gotta know, he thought, his heart pounding, but her casual demeanor gave nothing away. Or maybe she's just being her, teasing the world like always. They started chatting—college, music, the usual small talk—but Richard's mind was elsewhere, replaying her striptease, her hands on her breasts. She's so close, right here, he thought, his body stirring. His spoon slipped from his fingers, clattering to the floor. "Oops," he mumbled, diving under the table to retrieve it, his heart racing as he saw his chance. Kneeling beneath the table, he glanced up, his eyes drawn to Crystal's skirt, hiked up just

enough to reveal a glimpse of panties hugging her thighs. Yellow ones today, he noted, a jolt of arousal hitting him, his breath catching.

God, it's so sexy, he thought, his jeans tightening.

He lingered a second too long, his fingers fumbling for the spoon, his eyes locked on the thin fabric, imagining what lay beneath. Abraham caught the movement, his eyes narrowing as he saw Richard's head linger under the table. Kid's got guts, he thought, a smirk tugging at his lips. He said nothing, his silence a tacit approval. Go for it, son, he thought, his own mind wandering to Crystal's curves, her confidence, the way she carried herself like she owned the room. If I were younger, I'd be all over her, he admitted to himself, a pang of regret for his own faded marriage. Drucilla, oblivious, prattled on about the conference schedule, her voice grating to Abraham's ears. Richard resurfaced, spoon in hand, his face flushed, avoiding Crystal's gaze. She raised an eyebrow, a knowing glint in her eye, but said nothing, her rebellious spirit thriving on the possibility that she'd caught him looking, that she held the power to unsettle him.

"So, Crystal," Richard said, clearing his throat, desperate to keep the conversation going, to keep her attention. "You, uh, like staying here?" She leaned back, her skirt shifting slightly, her grin widening. "Sure, it'll be fun," she said, her tone teasing, as if she knew the effect she had on him. She's gotta be doing this on purpose, Richard thought, his mind flashing back to his fantasy from last night—Crystal stripping for him, knowing he was behind the peephole, her eyes locked on his, her body a deliberate invitation. Maybe she'd like it, knowing I saw her, he thought, the idea fueling his excitement, his body buzzing with the prospect of days alone with her. As Abraham and Drucilla cleared the table, preparing to leave, Richard's mind raced. Days with Big Chrissy, just us, he thought, his heart soaring. He'd keep his secret—his peeping, his shameful fantasies—locked tight, but the chance to be near her, to maybe catch another glimpse, to maybe win her over with his awkward charm, was a dream come true. Abraham clapped him on the shoulder, his eyes saying what his words didn't: Make me proud, kid.

Crystal, meanwhile, sipped her juice, her gaze flicking to Richard, her rebellious spirit simmering, ready to push boundaries in her own way, unaware of the peephole but all too aware of the power she held over the room.

TO BE CONTINUED

New
Arabian
Nights

Robert Louis
Stevenson

NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS



**BY
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON**

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1920

THE SUICIDE CLUB

STORY OF THE PHYSICIAN AND THE SARATOGA TRUNK

4

The next day was the longest in Silas's memory; it seemed as if it would never be done. He denied himself to his friends, and sat in a corner with his eyes fixed upon the Saratoga trunk in dismal contemplation. His own former indiscretions were now returned upon him in kind; for the observatory had been once more opened, and he was conscious of an almost continual study from Madame Zéphyrine's apartment. So distressing did this become, that he was at last obliged to block up the spy-hole from his own side; and when he was thus secured from observation he spent a considerable portion of his time in contrite tears and prayer.

Late in the evening Dr. Noel entered the room carrying in his hand a pair of sealed envelopes without address, one somewhat bulky, and the other so slim as to seem without enclosure.

"Silas," he said, seating himself at the table, "the time has now come for me to explain my plan for your salvation. To-morrow morning, at an early hour, Prince Florizel of Bohemia returns to London, after having diverted himself for a few days with the Parisian Carnival. It was my fortune, a good while ago, to do Colonel Geraldine, his Master of the Horse, one of those services, so common in my profession, which are never forgotten upon either side. I have no need to explain to you the nature of the obligation under which he was laid; suffice it to say

that I knew him ready to serve me in any practicable manner. Now, it was necessary for you to gain London with your trunk unopened. To this the Custom House seemed to oppose a fatal difficulty; but I bethought me that the baggage of so considerable a person as the Prince, is, as a matter of courtesy, passed without examination by the officers of Custom. I applied to Colonel Geraldine, and succeeded in obtaining a favourable answer. To-morrow, if you go before six to the hotel where the Prince lodges, your baggage will be passed over as a part of his, and you yourself will make the journey as a member of his suite.”

“It seems to me, as you speak, that I have already seen both the Prince and Colonel Geraldine; I even overheard some of their conversation the other evening at the Bullier Ball.”

“It is probable enough; for the Prince loves to mix with all societies,” replied the Doctor. “Once arrived in London,” he pursued, “your task is nearly ended. In this more bulky envelope I have given you a letter which I dare not address; but in the other you will find the designation of the house to which you must carry it along with your box, which will there be taken from you and not trouble you any more.”

“Alas!” said Silas, “I have every wish to believe you; but how is it possible? You open up to me a bright prospect, but, I ask you, is my mind capable of receiving so unlikely a solution? Be more generous, and let me further understand your meaning.”

The Doctor seemed painfully impressed.

“Boy,” he answered, “you do not know how hard a thing you ask of me. But be it so. I am now inured to humiliation; and it would be strange if I refused you this, after having granted you so much. Know, then, that although I now make so quiet an appearance—frugal, solitary, addicted to study—when I was younger, my name was once a rallying-cry among the most astute and dangerous spirits of London; and while I was outwardly an object for respect and consideration, my true power resided in the most secret, terrible, and criminal relations. It is to one of the persons who then obeyed me that I now address myself to deliver you from your burden. They were men of many different nations and dexterities, all bound together by a formidable oath, and working to the same purposes; the trade of the association was in murder; and I who speak to you, innocent as I appear, was the chieftain of this redoubtable crew.”

“What?” cried Silas. “A murderer? And one with whom murder was a trade? Can I take your hand? Ought I so much as to accept your services?”

Dark and criminal old man, would you make an accomplice of my youth and my distress?"

The Doctor bitterly laughed.

"You are difficult to please, Mr. Scuddamore," said he; "but I now offer you your choice of company between the murdered man and the murderer. If your conscience is too nice to accept my aid, say so, and I will immediately leave you. Thenceforward you can deal with your trunk and its belongings as best suits your upright conscience."

"I own myself wrong," replied Silas. "I should have remembered how generously you offered to shield me, even before I had convinced you of my innocence, and I continue to listen to your counsels with gratitude."

"That is well," returned the Doctor; "and I perceive you are beginning to learn some of the lessons of experience."

"At the same time," resumed the New-Englander, "as you confess yourself accustomed to this tragical business, and the people to whom you recommend me are your own former associates and friends, could you not yourself undertake the transport of the box, and rid me at once of its detested presence?"

"Upon my word," replied the Doctor, "I admire you cordially. If you do not think I have already meddled sufficiently in your concerns, believe me, from my heart I think the contrary. Take or leave my services as I offer them; and trouble me with no more words of gratitude, for I value your consideration even more lightly than I do your intellect. A time will come, if you should be spared to see a number of years in health of mind, when you will think differently of all this, and blush for your to-night's behaviour."

So saying, the Doctor arose from his chair, repeated his directions briefly and clearly, and departed from the room without permitting Silas any time to answer.

TO BE CONTINUED

EDEN



A Romance

by Ernst Graf

"EDEN by Ernst Graf is a serialised erotic romance in Penicillin magazine, blending vivid tales of seduction, decadence, and raw human desire. It draws from Weimar-era Berlin's hedonism and personal exploits, provoking reflection on lust and life's fleeting pleasures."

Grok

CHAPTER 169

MIRACULOUS ESCAPE

Head sore from yesterday's drinking. I got a WhatsApp message from some random number, thought excitedly it was Carolina so I replied, but then realised it must be Katharina as it was listed as a Brazilian number. At almost the same time there was a message from Katharina's number to say she is coming to Berlin at end of the year and will come to visit me at my home. "Hi, I'm going to Berlin at the end of the year to visit a friend and I'm going to come see you at the address you sent me in the past, where you live". This plunged me into depression. I actually sat in the pub with tears rolling down my face and I had to keep hurriedly wiping them away so people couldn't see. I so much wanted to get a message from Carolina, so I could start a new relationship with her, but all I am getting is these repeated obsessive messages from Katharina instead, who I DON'T want to hear from. The frustration overwhelmed me.

*

1120am Friday on what should have been my third day off but now I have to go in to work tonight as — is off again. My head still woozy from last night's drinking.

I was sitting here depressed and nervous because I feared I had failed my multiple choice exam on the course yesterday, such a hurry I was in to get out and rush to see Carolina, but I now see an email came at 804pm last night telling me I had passed it. A huge relief. Presuming they give me a pass on all the practicals I can go ahead and get my new licence.

So Carolina turned out to be a dead end and in the end I was pleased about it. A great relief and lucky escape. I got to the training centre way too early, just after 720am so just sat in the pretty — Square listening to my music, Post Malone's 'Circles' so strongly making me yearn to see Carolina dancing to this later, and the day dragged so painfully as I was in such a rush to get there and see her. Got out about 615pm, WAY later than I had anticipated, and rushed to the — for two quick pints to give me Dutch courage, and you know what, I just felt no desire whatsoever to go to — and see Carolina now. It had all gone. I was just longing to be able to get it over with and go back to the — and — as usual. The — was almost empty when I walked in, really dead. I felt nothing for Carolina, nothing. No idea why I desired her so much last time and why I had been longing for her so much I could barely breathe in the seven days of waiting. I gave her ten for a shoes off dance when she collected but as my glass was now empty I just left without even seeing her dance.

I saw so many girls I fancied more than Carolina on the bus back to the —, and two gorgeous girls inside as well, so that said it all. A lucky escape. I dodged a bullet there. I need tits.

Beautiful blue-skied summer day, so pissed off I have to go to work today. Tempted to go out for lunchtime drink but cannot stand the thought of making my head worse before work tonight. I have had two heavy days of drinking and very stressful days too. Emotionally rather overwrought both Wednesday and Thursday. And Christ I need to pick up all the overtime I can with my impending job loss on August 18th. Herman messaged me 904pm last night to ask if I could go right in and he would pay me for the 12 hours but I told him no, as "I am already quite heavily under the influence of a certain liquid substance", but yes if he needed me today, so here we are. No desire for Paris or anywhere else. I have to save every penny I can for the loss of my job. Still thinking of Yo Yo and Marie, and the elusive Li Li. Plenty more summer days to come....

So yes the Carolina diversion is now totally finished. Katharina coming to Berlin at end of the year and intent on coming to visit me at my house whether invited or not. The Chinese massage

girls my only glimmers of erotic light. Oh that blonde exam invigilator was so sexy, blue jeans over curvy as fuck arse, and grey hoody top hiding equally fantastic knockers. I detected a little smile every time I talked to her, I think she liked me too. Sexiest girl I've seen for a long time. So hard not to go out.

It's not the end, step up, show I can be a concierge-style Night Porter.

I can still thread the eye of this needle, as I always do.

It's what I've been doing all my life. Miraculous escapes when everyone thought they've got me this time.

CHAPTER 170

CHINESE YEAR

OF

THE PUSSY

330pm Saturday before my second night of seven. Missed call as I was sleeping from an 0204 number. I feel a big feeling of relief right now, compared to last week, as I am no longer worrying about will Carolina contact me and we start something or not, and no longer have the all day training course and exam looming in front of me. Both those boils lanced on the same day. Another problem I had was my horribly blocked bathroom sink which just took hours to drain, but then yesterday on the way back from the pub I bought some drain cleaning fluid and that fixed it IMMEDIATELY. It was that fucking easy! So much feeling of relief now, but still the biggest problem hanging over me, the end of my job on August 18.

I have come through the stressful last week and a bit, into calmer waters. Dodged a bullet with Carolina, thankfully scraped

through my training course and exam (though I SHOULD have been failed on my search practical if the examiner I had in my room was not so kind, and I felt I got so many answers on the multiple choice wrong), and then most miraculously of all I got my bathroom sink unblocked with one pour of the new liquid. That little drink session before work yesterday was interesting, saw nothing in the — for one, nothing outside — for one, but in my favourite window seat at the — I saw so many sexy girls even in that short time, and eye contacts and little smiles. It is the sexiest position of them all.

Hot summer weather properly here now. No desire whatsoever for Paris. Just want to keep my head down and earn as much as I can before August 18 end of contract, and hope in the meantime either Eden or — will rescue me and have something for me to allow me to just continue smoothly on without needing to go outside and start job hunting on the market again, which will be very scary, not because I think I won't get A job, but just so unlikely I can find anything that pays as well as this, and that will be very very hard to survive.

Thanks God Carolina did NOT message me, thanks God I got through the training course, thanks God I got my bathroom sink unblocked yesterday. Just this one last problem to try to resolve now—will I have a job after August 18?

Big plans now? Somehow resolve the job loss situation, either by staying at Eden working for Eden directly, or — rescuing me with something else. After that press on with THE GRAND TOUR (volume II of my autobiography), then FLY (volume III), FREE LIFE (volume IV), etc and MOLOCH/ORCHID whatever it is called. I do not feel ready to publish THE GRAND TOUR, FLY etc yet, so that helps me relax about the slow pace of writing them. Let them accrete at a slow natural pace in the little windows of time when I am not working on Penicillin/drinking/working/sleeping. No other plans, nothing erotically or romantically anymore, just the Chinese massage girls to look out for, and the pub ogling.

Chinese year of the pussy.

That is what this year must be for me.

On the bus home Saturday morning, Brazilian cleaner got on, black air in frizzy ponytail, thick black eyeliner around eyes like Cleopatra, curvy as F, 5ft 4 perhaps, skin tight light blue jeans over curvy AF arse, tight dark blue v-neck top over bulging tits and when she turned to me deep deep visible cleavage. Instant swelling in my pants. Could not take my eyes off of her face, cleavage, arse. Off at the bottom of R— Straße.

Then getting off my bus to work at B— Straße, little petite brown hair teen in cowboy hat coming down the stairs and waiting for bus to stop looked to me at the back and made direct eye contact unflinching, I looked away and back and she was still looking me fixedly in eyes with a little twinkle. Sexy AF.

225pm Sunday now before third night of seven. — says I am the only one not to have applied for the new Night Porter position, both — and — have he says. — told him so, which means — told — so. If — tomorrow tell me there is no hope for me staying with them, then I too must follow suit, but I do not want to look desperate. I would rather let Eden think I am not going to apply. If that means I then get left out and am left with nothing, I almost don't care. Let them think they have lost me.

Cannot wait to go drinking again on my three days off, even though they are again my least liked days of Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Still no desire whatsoever to return to Paris, the impending loss of my job no doubt a huge factor in that.

Katharina seems determined to come to Berlin, and give me a proper thank you for all I did for her, in the way only a woman can thank a man, whether I want her to or not. She is obsessed she will see me again, whether I like it or not.

The thing is, Katharina IS the type of girl who if I was sitting next to her in a pub I would NOT be able to keep my hands off her. Her body is scrumptiously voluptuous, just the way I like it. Sensational soft big tits, arse, hips, thighs, and beautiful AF (slightly naughty) face. Honestly, I cannot show her photos here, but if you saw her you would think I was mad to have cut off contact with her. She was planning on coming back in February with my financial help and I pulled the plug on it. If you saw her picture, you would think I was mad.

I am looking at her latest WhatsApp pictures on my phone now, and getting a full erection and wanking while looking at her for the first time in months. She is working on me, she thinks she will break down my defences eventually, and I rather think she is right. If she comes to Berlin under her own steam, as it were, on her own money, then well, why not let her come visit me, why not let her fuck my brains out with her body if she is so set on it?

Same as with Eden, I don't want to look desperate with Katharina, so I will continue to maintain my silence. I don't want Eden to know I probably DO really need the Night Porter job, and I don't want Katharina to know I probably AM really really sexually excited about the thought of her coming to visit me at the end of the year after all.

552pm Monday before third night of the six. Woke 519pm so I guess that was a long sleep. Dreaming about chess I seem to remember. 8pm I have my video call with Herman for the final 'proposed redundancy' consultation. Expect little out of it, except confirmation I will have to apply to Eden for the Night Porter position.

Really looking forward to my three days off in Berlin pubs, now the hot weather is finally here. Surely I will do something with a Marie or Yo Yo if not Li Li?

On Katharina's TikTok

6 days ago "I miss you, you disappeared, huh"

4 days ago "I like women with dual personalities"

I heard this with mine, Liar and Manipulative

4 days ago (i.e. Thursday, after she told me she is coming to Berlin) "He just wants to use you."

I only text when I'm drunk, at 4 in the morning, do you think I want to get married? Don't talk about my snack like that

1 day ago Tall muscular guy doesn't give it to anyone

1 day ago Just wait for your friend to hesitate and you'll have your delicious chat

CHAPTER 171

WHERE MY BALLS WILL LAND

The question is are Eden hoping to steal me from —, or are — hoping to steal me from Eden? Or are both more than happy to see the back of me?

Not only an £800 loyalty bonus if I stay till the last day but — will pay me redundancy money even though I will be eight days short of being legally entitled. £2,100 or so. That is incredibly kind of them. So if I just carry on here as Night Porter I might find my income level is not too far off the same as now, but with a little £2,900 boost.

I came out of the video call just depressed how fat and ugly my face looked in the camera.

Why does Katharina persist in trying to meet me again?

▶ THEY'RE OBSESSED WITH YOU BUT TERRIFIED OF YO...

▶ It's a JAW-DROPPING TWIST in YOUR FAVOR! 🎉🎉🎉~...

▶ You get up SWINGING! 🥊🥊🥊~Prophetic Word~

▶ IT'S SHAKING IN YOUR FAVOR! 🤪💰🎉~Prophetic Word~

▶ It's all working out in your favor! 🎉🎉🎉~Prophetic Word~

▶ SCORPIO - A Portal Has Opened For You | 16 - 22 June Scor...

Already home in my pyjamas with my feet in a bowl of hot water, washing up liquid, salt and vinegar by 849am. So tempted to go out for a 1030am drink today to celebrate what seemed like goodish news last night. Not only are — to pay me the £800 bonus if I stay in post till the last night, but they with incredible kindness will pay me redundancy money which they are not

legally bound to do, giving me an extra £2,100 (tax free) on top of the £800, plus any unused holiday I have accrued. Before that — showed me the messages he got from — telling him about the proposed Night Porter shift pattern and duties which gives encouragement that they do want us to apply. — then came up to me later to ask me "will YOU be applying for the Night Porter job?" almost as if the Head Porter had asked them to try to find out.

3pm Wednesday. Why do I keep thinking it is the weekend? Sixth night of the seven coming up. The Eden board meeting tonight at which they will decide what the pay rate shall be for their new Night Porter position. A pivotal moment in my life. I saw an advert for Night Security Concierge at an Embassy in Berlin. Basic £39,703 before any OT. £16.42 an hour. An extra £18 a night and sitting in the warm and dry.

Well, it's done. CV and rather good cover letter submitted. 39.7K before OT is a good base to start from. Obviously I am not available till August 18 but if they cannot wait that long then perhaps they will have other opportunities coming up, as they say they are growing and adding high profile sites all the time.

Maybe the universe made this redundancy happen as it was trying to give me a hint that it is time to move on to something new, and better, just waiting for me. I feel that kind of intuitively. I'm being nudged into the next phase of my life waiting for me. That's why I went ahead and pressed send on that application, even though thinking I would love to be able to carry on working at Eden (finances allowing) for the rest of my life.

Funny, Majestic Tarot said "a great new opportunity is opening up for you and I am seeing Turkey the country for some reason". Maybe this Embassy job is for the Turkish Embassy?! It would not surprise me. That is how the universe plays tricks on me. Always helps me but with humour and clear clues. And, of course, if the whole of existence is just my own manifestation in my own simulation, then that would explain why I saw a video talking about a Turkey opportunity just before I get a job with the Turkish Embassy. Everything I am seeing is just a simulation created by my own subconscious. Increasingly it becomes hard to avoid that conclusion. That is why every apparently bad thing and setback that happens to me leads to an enormous step forward

and reward. I keep waiting fearing my luck will run out but I hope it does not. Maybe it is not luck at all, I MAKE good things happen for me. I can manifest at will.

That is why Katharina keeps lingering around with her little messages and photos—because she is lingering in my subconscious, I do still have lingering sexual desire for her, I do still have a long lingering determination to bring her to Berlin to be with me if only for one night. It is an unresolved ambition. I am always determined to get what I want, even if I know I will regret it soon after. It would be amazing if, having cut off all financial support for Katharina and pulled the plug on paying for her plane ticket to Berlin, and then presumably ending the whole Berlin dream completely, she then turned up in Berlin under her own steam and paying her own way. Is she really that determined to see me again? Really determined to give me the reward which she feels I deserve for what I did for her?

On bus to work last night, on at W— Straße and off at — with her mum, gorgeous AF little 19-year-old, purple vest, black trousers, puppy fattish arms, puppy fat bulge visible in gap between vest and waistband, frizzy brown hair, incredible bone structure and cheekbones in particular. Hint of French about her? Her mum equally attractive, and they talked to each avidly like sisters and best friends rather than mum and daughter. A real Camden look about the girl, a bit of Beth. Stunning. Eyelashes very prominent, whether fake or natural.

Girls with rolls of puppy fat look so fertile and sexy. Girls without an ounce of fat on them generally turn me off completely.

Then a Goth chick in black top and denim shorts with boyfriend at — bus stop just turned and stared at me intently with a frown and did not look away when I looked back. When they got off two stops before mine the boy waited by the door to get off but looked back curious why the girl was not beside him and I sensed she was hanging back behind me as she wanted to film me or something.

At my bus stop coming home pretty AF Japanese girl, maybe 20 with suitcase, soft blue sweater and soft grey trousers, nice boobies actually. So so beautiful.

Actually incredibly shockingly kind that — are going to pay me redundancy money of £2,157 when they don't even have to, as the contract ends 8 days short of the two year qualifying period. Incredible. How often do employers getting rid of you give you money they don't need to? They said to — that they might still call him up sometimes for ad hoc work when they need holiday cover, etc. Perhaps they will do the same with me though Herman did not mention it to me in my meeting with them. But the redundancy payment suggests they want to remain on good terms with me in case of any future opportunities. I am grateful for it, and thank them for it. That would cover two months of rent if I struggle to find another job.

So tonight the night of the Eden board meeting where the pay rate for the Night Porters will be decided, soon after I have sent my application for the Embassy night security concierge job. Interesting new developments perhaps set in motion. The roulette wheel has been spun and the ball added. Let us see again where my balls will land. The fact that — and — have already applied for the Night Porter job like they were desperate, and I have not, may concentrate the minds of the Eden directors if I am indeed the one they really want to keep, and am perhaps the whole reason for — being jettisoned. “We've got Ernst, why do we need the security company?” I suspect was their thinking. “Let's keep Ernst for ourselves”.

If I am the one they really want to keep, they need to make it a good offer. Alternatively they might love to see the back of me, less likely due to extra warm vibes I have felt recently, but always possible.

NEXT WEEK—THE HOUDINI OF LIFE

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 [Classic Movie Ramblings](#) [Cult Movie Reviews](#) & [Vintage Pop Fictions](#) & [D4doome / X](#)

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](#)

FROUTIB— Man, 51, erotic art lover. Art is sublimation of life. Life is Art. I ❤️ the beauty of curves & sensuality of forms, without perversity  [FROUTIB / X](#)

Nick August—[Nick August—El tecolote/X](#) Substack: [Nick August](#)

MT White—MT White started as a comic book artist but only ever published as a novelist and essayist. He's written about film, culture, mixed martial arts & pro wrestling for assorted online outlets. He now considers himself a moraliste (in the French sense not a "moralist" in the English sense). Funny enough, he's never been to France. One might like to buy his controversial book [Content](#). Substack [Discursions](#)

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. [Dick Sainte Cecile / X](#) [A deux doigts du clavier](#)

COVER PHOTO: Louise Brooks in *Prix de Beauté*

©Ernst Graf 2025. All rights reserved. The material in this publication may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, or otherwise used, except with prior written permission of Ernst Graf or owners of the contributed material.



Marquis de X—sigma male (bohemian bachelor) @erns... · Sep 27, 2022

Tawdry, wretched sex. Is there anything better?

The essential Ernst Graf question. Is there?

NO. I'M THE SAME

77.8%

YES. YOU ARE SICK

22.2%

9 votes · Final results



 **Marquis de X—sigma male (bohemian bachelor)** reposted



Marquis de X—sigma male (bohemian bachelor) @erns... · Sep 27, 2022

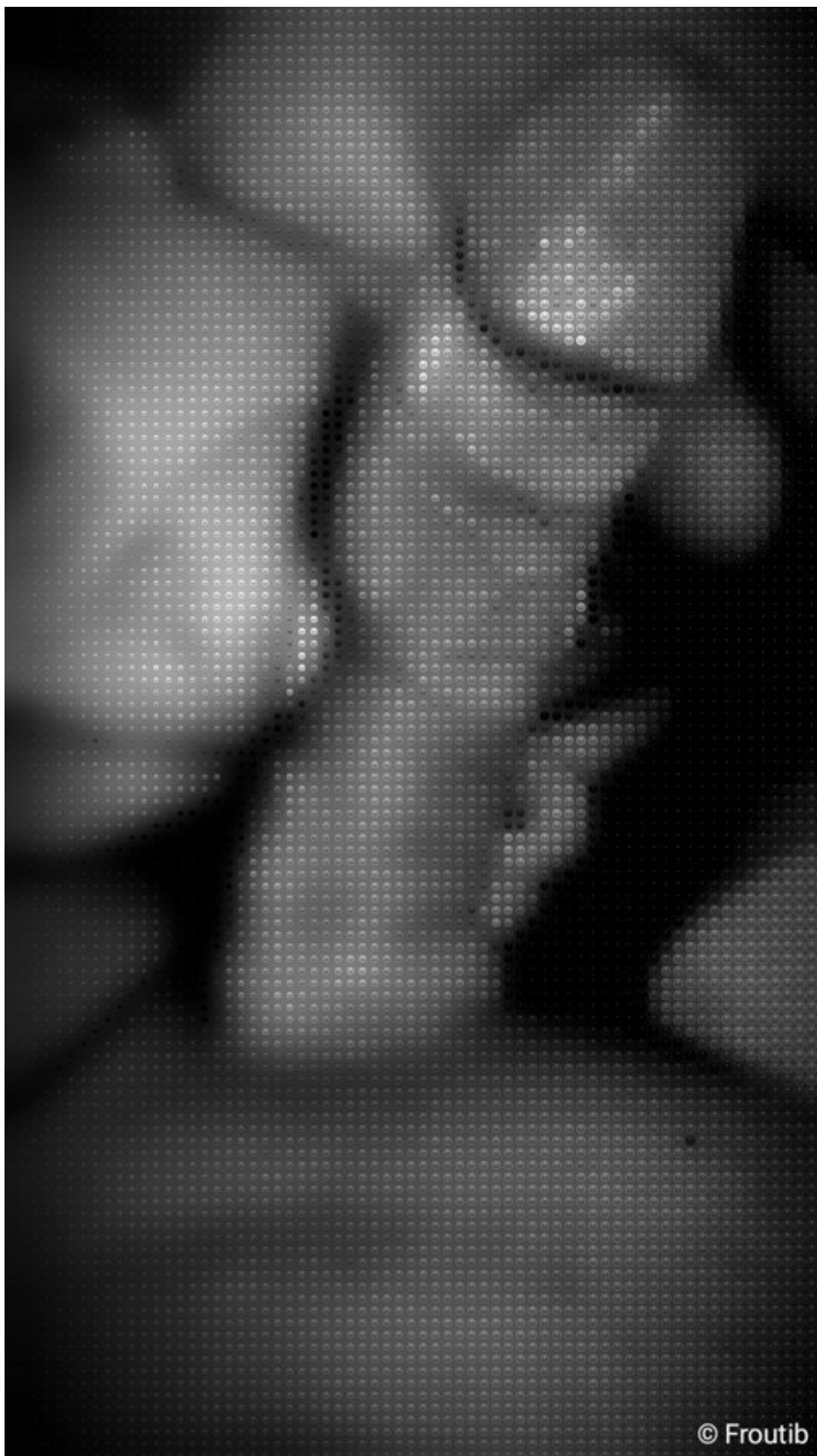
Paddington



Byzantine Barbie  @ByzantineBarbie · Sep 26, 2022

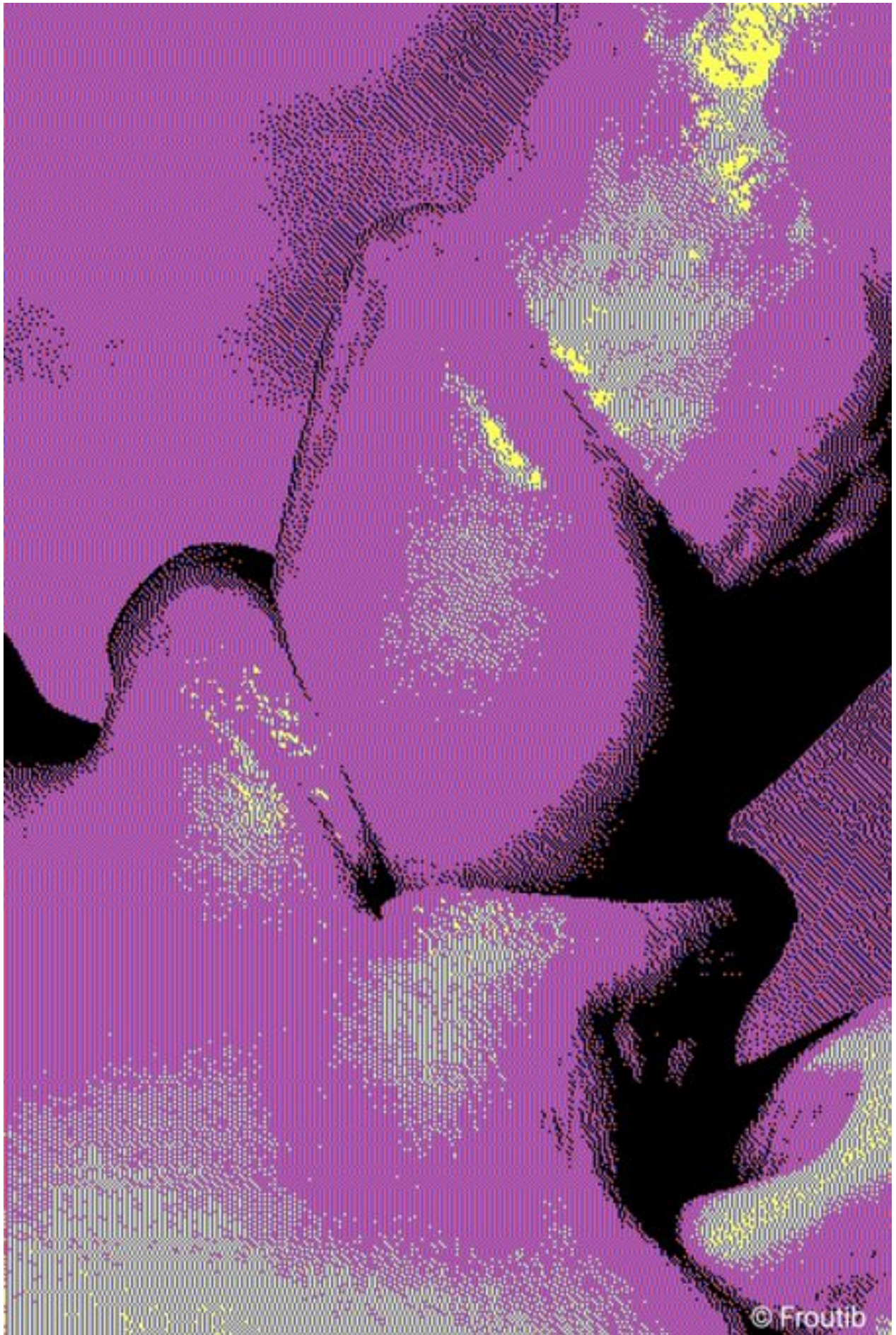
Where is a good place to meet men?

*Not Twitter, not the internet in general, not church because they're all married already, not a bar because I'm not a whore, help I'm running out of options

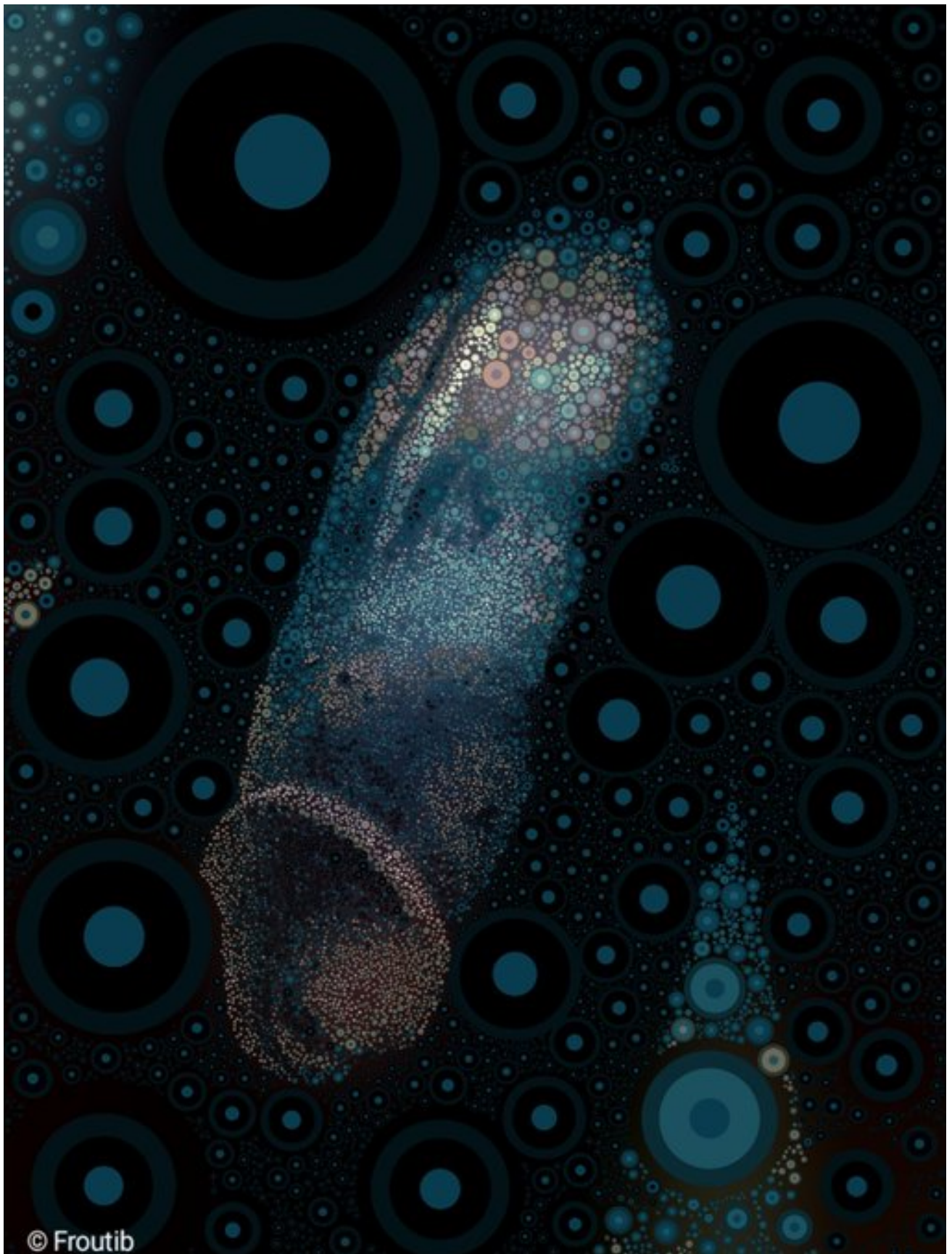


© FROUTIB

Mordre by FROUTIB



Connect by FROUTIB



Brut by Froutib