

Songs of Sodom

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“A belief in clairvoyance, telepathy, or a ‘sixth sense’ is a symptom of schizotypal personality disorder.” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

We were lost. Daddy sucked on a fat cigar, leaned across the steering wheel, stared at the dark road up ahead and let out a stream of four letter words, which my mother told me never to repeat. She snapped off the radio, got real quiet. The car filled with smoke, my eyeballs burned. I rolled down the window, gulped the night wind, and squinted at the crescent moon, which to my blurred vision looked like a clove of garlic. I imagined the vast black ocean and wanted to be swallowed by it, drown it in its deep dark belly. I often had dreams about being swallowed by something big and black. Holding back the pressure to go to the bathroom, I squirmed in the back seat, my stomach ached, hands clenched, ready for a fight.

“This is not the way to go,” Mama said, getting the map out of the glove compartment. “You should have turned right back there. Now we are going to be late. Shoot. Now we are going to miss the beginning of the movie. I like to see the credits.”

“That’s the Gulf of Mexico,” I said to distract them, and I know that the Coronkowa Indians lived near here. They were cannibals and used to eat people—”

“You learn that in geography class, Kensey?”

“Yes, mam. I made an A on the test.”

“You did? Well I’m real proud of you, honey. Too bad your daddy didn’t study his geography.”

“It wasn’t geography, Mama, it was Texas history.”

Daddy yelled, “Would you two shut the fuck up!”

We got real quiet again. She didn’t want me to lose respect for that man. That man that was my father. That man that was her husband. That mad man that was driving the car in circles on a back road that seemed to be going nowhere.

“Are we there yet?” I fidgeted, trying to stop what I knew was going to happen. “My stomach hurts.”

“If you don’t shut up,” Daddy glared at me in the rear-view mirror, “I’ll give you something to cry about, you little sissy.”

“Now Big Kensey,” Mama said to Daddy, “you shouldn’t talk to little Kensey that way. Turn right at the next intersection.”

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Daddy said, between clenched teeth. “I know what I’m doing.”

“Can’t you go a little faster?”

“I’m doing the speed limit, God damn it! I’m not going to get a ticket because of you. Woman, you think you’re so smart, you drive the fucking car!” Daddy slammed on the brakes, the tires screeched, the car came to a dead halt. Surrounding the little car was a big black silence, the big black thing that was going to swallow us, and just the sound of the surf and some crickets singing in unison along the side of the road.

“What’s wrong, sugar?” Mama asked. “I just said to turn right.”

“Woman, you make my ass crave stove wood! Fucking bitch!” Daddy threw the lit cigar in her face but luckily the cigar stuck to the lens of her eyeglasses. Both of my parents, in the front seat of the car, facing each other. She with her mouth wide open unable to scream, a lit cigar stuck to her eyeglasses. He with a red face shouting four letter words. From a distance, faintly, then getting louder, I heard the rumble of a diesel truck, the blast of the horn.

This madman was my father, who taught me how to tie a tie and shine my shoes, and who always said the blessing each evening over our supper. This man opened the car door and got out and disappeared into the dark, just as the diesel truck zoomed past. Kicking up a big gust of wind that lifted my mother's loose cotton dress, it blew debris from the road into the car through the door he left wide open—a smashed Styrofoam cup, a torn brown paper bag, a knotted up plastic straw, white paper napkins. The cigar was blown off her glasses and into her lap where it made a crimson glow. I guess she didn't notice it.

She sat there, unresponsive to the faint glow from that cigar on her lap, still wet with my daddy's saliva. She looked as if she was frozen, numb; a slight small smile on her face as if she was relieved, as if she were warming herself before a friendly camp fire.

Then a spark from that still hot cigar leaped into life, a real live fire that had no respect for anyone's property, a wild fire she had to pay attention to. Her body became a fluid rapid movement, a trapped bird, flapping its wings. I helped her put out the fire, swatting my hands at it, afraid of touching what was the most vulnerable part of her body. When we were sure the fire was out we sat there motionless. Her white dress had a hole in the middle of it, her pale pink flesh, exposed. I knew something evil was happening.

"I can't go anywhere like this." She said quietly, trembling. "We won't be seeing the movie tonight. It's too late. It has already started. I guess your Daddy has left us."

"He'll come back." I said, "He always does." I paused for a moment. "I wish he would stay away. We could do okay without him."

"Don't you love your father?"

"I love him but he don't love me. He caught your dress on fire. Can't we just leave him?"

"He's got the money."

"We don't need his money. Just get behind the wheel and drive the car."

“He took the keys. Where can we go? He’ll find us. We’re stuck Kensey Jr., right in the middle of nowhere.”

“Please, Mama, let’s get out of here. He’s delusional.”

“Delusional? Where did you learn that word from?”

“I looked it up in the dictionary. That’s what he is. Delusional.”

“That’s no way to talk about your father.” Mama got out of the car, and chased after Daddy as he stumbled down the dark road.

She screamed. “You walk away? Just like that? When I’m on fire? Look at my dress! It’s ruined. You do this in front of your son? He thinks you’re delusional.”

“Mama, would you be quiet and get in the car?” I begged.

“Is this the way you teach your son? What kind of man are you? What kind of man would abandon his wife and child in the middle of the night on a back road in the middle of nowhere?” They were swinging at each other, shouts, screams, slaps. I still smelled the fire, the stench of mama’s scorched hair.

“I demand respect,” he shouted. “Why can’t you be on my side just once?”

Then I heard the sound of another diesel truck coming from the distance. I saw the glare of the headlights in the rear view mirror. I saw the shadow of their bodies in the fierce white glare, locked together, on all fours, then rolling around on top of each other, then crying, pleading, and cursing. They didn’t see it coming. I watched it all in the rear view mirror. The white hot glare, the loud blast of the big truck’s horn.

I don’t remember much about what happened next.

I began to hurt all over. Everything turned into the color of blood.

I began to feel like I was floating through the roof of the car and then above the ocean, up into the night sky, up beyond the moon and the stars. Flying with my mother beside me holding my hand, she was laughing as we changed direction and headed back toward the earth with tremendous speed. Turning into falling stars we hit the ocean and went deep into the crust of the earth and into the real dark.

I was warm at first, but then I couldn't find my mama. I felt frozen and couldn't move and there was nothing there or anywhere except the sound of my father's growling voice in a language I couldn't understand. This language was pure evil; the language of the devil. I started screaming but no one could hear me scream. I was all alone in the dark forever, in a great big coffin with no TV, no food to eat, no body to feel. And then I started to forget. I forgot about everything except that feeling of evil and it was the worst evil I ever felt. I was floating and heard some voices talking about me somewhere over my head. As I became aware of the voices they started to whisper and trying to hear them became a strain. I gave up.

I came out of a long dream, a long dream with lots of blood in it. When I woke up I discovered it wasn't a dream. It had really happened. My father was there beside my bed with a worried expression on his dirty face. There were policemen there, too, and a nurse, with a long needle gleaming in the harsh overhead light. They stood in a silent circle around the bed.

"Where's Mama?"

Daddy whispered to me, "Son, listen to your father. They want to take me away from you. Tell them not to take me away. Tell them you want to stay with me. Whatever I've done, I'm your father and I love you." He put his trembling hands on my shoulders and looked at me with bloodshot eyes. "At first you only remember the bad things, then you only remember the good things and then one day you won't remember anything at all." He gripped me tight and cried. His hot tears fell on my neck. He smelled like an old cigar. "If they take me away, you'll never see me again."

I asked for Mama again. No one answered me so I knew what had happened. My father was crying and I reached out towards him but the cops held him down while the nurse injected him with a needle. They dragged him toward the door and I pleaded to go with him. "I'll go with you," I cried out after him, as they led him in handcuffs down the corridor. "Take me with you."

The nurse told me they were going to take him to a place where he would be safe. Then she gave me a pill to swallow, looked at her watch, and jotted something down on a clipboard. Closing my eyes, feeling numb all over, I wanted to feel numb like that as long as I could. The pain went somewhere else. Dark, down into the dark.

There was a warm washcloth on my forehead. Then a cool hand on my cheek. Suddenly there was sunshine again. I squinted into a bright room, feeling a stiff thermometer stuck under my tongue, which was withdrawn quickly. I was told my fever was broken, that I was back to normal. The kind nurse left and I opened my eyes. Studying the bright room I noticed in the next bed a scrungy looking teenage boy with matted hair sticking up on his head, unshaven face, a few years older than me. There was a bag of golden liquid tied to a pole next to his bed that leaked through a tube and into the needle taped to his arm. He smiled sweetly at me, got out of his bed, and wrapping his hospital gown around him he limped over to my bed. He placed his lips near my ear and told me I had been screaming for days. He said he had been afraid I was a real goner. He said that he had prayed for my recovery. I felt my tear roll down my cheek and I closed my eyes again and fell asleep.

I made a swift recovery. I was surprised how much I loved the hospital. They were so nice to me. Because I was an orphan, they were extra nice. Gave me a menu each morning, told me I could pick out whatever I wanted, three square meals on time every day, extra desserts. All the TV I wanted. This was the kind of attention I never got at home. And home. Where was my home going to be?

Sharing the room with that teenage boy for a couple of weeks was a lot like having a brother, and for the first time I felt at home with another human being. He had been in a motorcycle accident and ruptured his spleen, was often in pain, sometimes had to vomit, especially at night. When he was feeling good he was talkative, spoke freely about his motorcycle accident. About the girls he had fucked. He knew I had never balled a chick before, that I was too young for that. But he enjoyed telling me the details of his love life. I listened, enjoying his pleasure in the telling of it. I wondered why that special girl he liked never paid him a visit. But most of all I wondered about the feelings. The strange desire I had to share his excitement, to be with him when he was with his girl, to enter his body and become him. That's when I suspected there was something wrong with me because I had fallen in love, but not with the girl. I had read enough definitions in the dictionary to suspect that I was a bisexual or a pervert or a deviant or maybe even something worse.

My roommate was very good looking.

When I left the hospital, and said goodbye to my roommate, I was depressed because I liked the hospital. I liked the three meals a day. I liked him. Liked him more than I should. When I said goodbye, and shook his hand, I knew I was in love with a lonesome teenage boy with a ruptured spleen, who received no visitors and would be in the hospital for a very long time. I knew I would never see him again. I knew I would miss him, miss his kindness. Miss his talk about girls and sex. I was in big trouble, because I was in love with a boy rather than a girl.

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I'm a Caucasian man, well built, wearing tight jeans with a bulge in my crotch. Moving lightly, a trace of paranoia in each step, I'm walking on a tree lined street in Harlem searching for a Love Supreme. I feel as if I have lived here in this Caucasian body, on this street for a short time. I'm a stranger here. Enjoying the brisk weather and the falling leaves, I observe from a distance the kids playing basketball behind a fence. I sit on the bench and daydream and the backstory of this new incarnation returns to me in waves. The mood is tragically romantic. And gay.

My lover, Bismarck, who happens to be black, wants to adopt children. I love kids, too. But I'm not ready for that. We are an interracial gay couple, just starting out, and it's hard to imagine that happening. Becoming a parent is not something I aspire to, but Bismarck does. He's the kind of man who likes to hold babies, to rock babies to sleep. I'm Bismarck's first gay relationship and he's having a hard time making the adjustment to gay culture. He doesn't like it.

I hear Motown playing loudly on a boombox. Rick James sings, "*Give it to me, that funky stuff, give it to me.*" As I sit watching the boys play basketball, suddenly, the ball bounces towards me, and rolls to my feet. A youth that reminds me of a younger teenaged version of Bismarck, shouts, "Pass me the ball."

I'm too shy, too afraid they will think I'm a sissy as well as a honky. Frozen in a cramped posture, unable to respond, negative thoughts darken the mood. The bright colors start to fade into gray and dull tones. There is a shadow that passes next to me. My attention is distracted by the shadow and I forget my purpose. Forget that I was once a High Priest. Forget the old Negro woman, the Harlem hooker, as I start to get pulled slowly into the lower astral by some demonic force. I start to shiver.

I notice a junkyard car parked across the street. For some reason it looks familiar. As I focus, the blurred outlines of the car sharpen in detail. I notice it carries a Texas license plate, making my heart race wildly. Daddy. It's my father's car. He has found me, destroying all my good luck. I'm trapped in my demonic father's fury. His sins have fallen upon me. I feel swept up into a cosmic struggle, a titanic battle coming towards me. A howling tornado is rushing towards our little village and will turn it into shards of glass and twisted car parts and uprooted trees.

I unlock the door of the brownstone and throw it open, shouting, "Bismarck? Are you home?" It's a dark, silent house. I turn on the light. My voice rises in a panic, "Baby, are you home?" I walk through the living room, the downstairs, and the upstairs. I return to the kitchen.

My demonic father is standing at the back door. "Who's there? Son, is that you?" he asks in a gentle southern drawl.

I stare at him speechless as he steps into the light. He's not what I remember. He's a small, frail man, silver haired, wearing a faded denim jacket, holding a baseball cap nervously in his hands. "Son, it's your Daddy. May I come in?"

I can't speak. I just watch him, tongue tied, wide-eyed with terror. Feeling as if I'm in the presence of my own self when I get old. He walks carefully into the house, and this is the moment I've dreaded.

"I told Aunt Peggy I don't want to see you."

He smiles. "Well, son, you know Peggy never was a good messenger. That woman doesn't know her ass from a hole in the ground. Besides, you and I have a lot of catching up to do." His voice sounds kind of tender, like when he read to me when I was little. "I'm an old man, Kensey, and I ain't well. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Get out!" I scream, "You don't belong here! I don't want you here, God damn you!"

"What are you afraid of? I don't bite," he chuckles as he strikes a match and lights up his cigar. "I can't believe you're my son. You're so handsome. You used to be such a scrawny kid. Come give your Daddy a hug."

I feel the current flow, a surge from his pelvis towards mine, and I block his move. He's become a vampire, and he knows he's met his match. I'm no longer the boy he could torture, intimidate, turn into mush. He exhales a cloud of acrid cigar smoke.

"No matter what you think of me, I'm still your father; you're my son. Nothing can ever change that."

"What kind of son would I be if I let the man who killed my mother into my house?" Holding steady, connected to my center, I notice a long forgotten southern accent has crept back into my speech.

"You got a good point." He looks off into space for a moment, a vacant stare in a fog of cigar smoke. He mumbles, "I see what you mean. This ain't the way I hoped it would be. Hoped you would find it in your heart to forget and forgive." He looks at the objects on the table. "Do you have an ash tray?"

He notices a picture of me and Bismarck taken on the rooftop of my apartment in the East Village. He asks, "Who the hell is that?" I grab the picture away from him.

"That's none of your business."

"You haven't turned into a nigger lover, have you? That would break your mother's heart." The surge comes from the solar plexus and I feel the psychic heat. Once again I resist the temptation to play his way. He says, "I gave you life and I can take it away." Before I respond to his blasphemy, I hear footsteps at the front door. Bismarck stands in the doorway, dressed in a police uniform. "Who called the cops? I ain't done nothing wrong. I just traveled a thousand miles to see my son. Is that a crime?"

I kiss Bismarck proudly on the lips and then sneer at my father who turns pale. Daddy has a look of fear on his face. "I hate cigars!" I grab the cigar out of his mouth, and stomp it on the floor. I grab the handcuffs on Bismarck's police uniform, grab the stick, and strike the Demon Daddy on his shin. A crack of bone. He falls to his knees with a cry and I cuff Daddy's wrist, just like a pro. I handcuff him to the grate around the fireplace, so that he's trapped, like a lamb being led to the slaughter.

"You like rough sex, don't you Daddy? I remember how you used to slap mama's face and spit on her. Call her a bitch and make her cry for mercy. Fuck you, old man! Now it's your turn to suffer." He starts to shake like a dog that's wet the floor.

"Daddy, there's something you need to know about me. I want you to know who I am, Daddy. And then I want you to have a heart attack and die. Malcolm X said that the white man must learn to love the black man. Well that's what I've learned to do. That's right, Daddy, I'm your worst nightmare."

Bismarck is mesmerized. Before my eyes he becomes like an angelic being, a halo around his head. I get down on my knees, look up into his eyes and say tenderly to him, "Bismarck I love you more than anyone else in the world. You saved my life, baby. I was miserable until I met you. I want you to marry me. Baby, will you marry me?"

"Yes, Kensey, I'll marry you."

"Trust me, baby. There's something that I need you to do, so that Daddy can get to know me better and then he will go away and never bother us again. Will you do this for me?" Bismarck rests his hands on my shoulders and nods his head in agreement. "I want Daddy to know I'm your dick slave. I want Daddy to see my Master's big cock. I want to service you now." I unzip him. "Daddy, sorry, you can't have any. I'm sure you've had plenty of cock where you come from." I deep throat Bismarck with a supernatural fury. We go into ecstasy while Daddy goes into convulsions.

"Goddamn you!" Daddy roars. "I wish you had never been born than to be a nigger lover faggot!"

Before Bismarck shoots his load, I pull off him and cry out to Daddy's demon. "Daddy, I love it when Bismarck corn holes me. You want to watch him corn hole me, the way you used to corn hole Mama?"

Daddy's face has turned red, slobbering at the mouth, eyes bulging, gasping for air. He tries desperately to get out of the handcuffs, furious that he can't hurt me anymore. Bismarck shoots his load on my bare chest.

Daddy stops struggling, his eyes are staring into infinity.

I recite the monk's prayer.

"NOW BY THE POWER OF THE CHRIST OF GOD WITHIN ME WHOM I WORSHIP WITH ALL MY HEART AND ALL MY SOUL AND ALL MY STRENGTH I ENCOMPASS BISMARCK AND MYSELF WITHIN THE DIVINE CIRCLE OF HIS PROTECTION. GET THEE GONE!"

The Daddy Demon returns to the body, opens his red eyes and screams, "That prayer doesn't work unless you believe in it!" His long tongue slithers out at me but I take a drop of Bismarck's holy semen, pooled in the hollow space between my nipples and smear it upon the demon's rough leathery tongue. The Demon cries, "I AM YOU!!!"

"GET THEE GONE!"

And the Demon removes his presence. Daddy's corpse shrivels up into a fetal position, turns into a big hair ball, and then blows away, without a trace.

I open a bottle of champagne. We raise our glasses and I propose a toast. "Here's to our future, Bismarck. Here's to our vast future." We put down our glasses and embrace. I feel the stiffness of his police uniform, his virile smell, the roughness of his unshaven face. We begin to slow dance, dreaming of things to come. But I stop. I hear a rumbling. We disentangle and I feel that we are being blown apart by a whirlwind. I cling to him until the force pulls us asunder and I'm falling into another world. A hard world with sharp angles, kicks, screams and groans. It is still Harlem, a strict Timespace with dense connections. I am crossing over the threshold, bringing with me the memories of the High Priest, the Harlem hooker, the boy from Texas, and the Demon Daddy, arriving again into impossible living arrangements. I had a mission but I am forgetting my purpose.

"Kensey! Wake up!" I open my eyes to see Bismarck, now, in the physical, waking, world, standing over the bed, calling my name. He brings me back into the sharp angles and the hard surfaces of Timespace, with a past, present, future and many rational perspectives. He shakes me awake, with fear in his face and asks, "Hey, baby, you okay?"

I look around the room seeing phantoms from other Timespaces disappear, going through the walls and out the windows into a black sky. I bring with me my knowledge of the yet to be liberated astral

worlds back into the rational world of lawyers and doctors and bills to pay. Someone else was there in the room, behind Bismarck's tall, muscular, nude body. A thin, light skinned woman wearing an ill-fitting wig and a cotton, pink nightgown stood by his side with a grim look on her face. I was ashamed for I was buck naked, too, and this was Bismarck's mother.

"What's the matter with this white boy?" she asked Bismarck.

"Nightmare." Bismarck said to her, "He'll be okay. Go back to bed, Mama."

"He's sure high strung." She seemed to float out of the room, back to her room downstairs, the old floors creaking beneath her bare feet. I sensed that she was in the wrong Timespace. She had died of cancer a decade ago, but still hung around haunting Bismarck who was unaware of her influence.

Bismarck returned to our bed. Agitated, I got up and paced the room, with the bed sheet wrapped around me like a toga, and peered out the window into the warm, black night. I stood half naked before him, feeling his erotic, hungry gaze upon my body. I thumped on my chest, trying to return to a heart center, for I felt my energies were scattered across several dimensions. But I knew Bismarck and I shared the same heart, shared a familiar quality of safety. I always seemed to find him, in whatever world we met, like a homing pigeon returning to the right place after flights across great distance.

"Don't you ever have bad dreams?" I asked.

"Never," he replied. "Sleep like a rock. I never dream."

"But everyone dreams."

"Not me. Now, come back to bed, knucklehead." He pulled back the covers.

Bismarck had become an intellectual. He has covered up and shut down on his psychic abilities, I thought. It was then I noticed on the table beside the bed, a fat book. The book was *Being and Time*.

"Do you read that stuff?" I opened the title page and got a feeling of nausea. Puzzled by the sudden exaggerated, intellectual side of his nature, I returned to the bed feeling slightly dizzy. It was as if I

was floating again, weightless, transparent, between two worlds, neither here nor there. I rested my head on his shoulder and immediately felt the protection of his big warmth, coming back to planet Earth.

"You know what really impresses a white guy?" Bismarck asked.

"A big black dick," I reached down and held his sex. He smiled at my provocation but didn't respond.

"Heidegger," he answered. "If you quote Heidegger they're really impressed. They're impressed to find out a black guy knows who Heidegger was. They also are shocked if you have been to Paris. I've been to Paris and I can talk about existentialist shit, and being thrown into the world. If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life. And only then will I be free to become myself. I am more than just a big dick."

"Sorry that I objectify you. I'll stop doing that." I smiled at his audacity, his making fun of white people. "James Baldwin said black people are inside white people and white people are inside black people." His sex organ came to life, throbbed in my hand, pulsed with pleasure.

I also felt something vague, like a snake slithering in the grass. I meandered through the maze of my troubled memories, searching for the tail of that snake. I figured I would have to wrestle with it. I saw, against my will, an image of a black man hanging in a tree. I felt a wave of terror.

Forcing the image from my mind, not knowing for sure what was real, what was imagined, I pushed back the image of the hanged man into the far away recesses of the mind. Bismarck kissed my lips, as if he could taste the fear.

"I remember something that happened long ago." I spoke slowly, in a trance state, from the middle of nowhere, "It was a string of pearls. Mama was putting on a string of pearls and I am brushing her thick dark hair. She was getting ready for work. She was a bookkeeper at a store downtown. She was telling me to be a good boy and do what Mary says."

"Who was Mary?" he asked, sleepily.

“Mary was a Creole, our black maid. I heard Daddy say that we gave her a dollar a day and all she could steal. I was maybe four years old. I remember one morning, Mary watched Mama get into that green Chevrolet and drive off to work. She told me we were going to her house and that we were going to have fun. We waited for the bus. It was a hot day, and her house was by the river. I remember chickens running around in the yard. Daddy had said to my mother, that Mary lived in Nigger Town.

“She had two grandchildren, a girl who was taller than me and a boy who was my size. I can’t remember his name, but I remember he took me by the hand and we walked down to a stream to catch crawdads. We had poles with string on them and we would catch them and put them in a bucket, wiggling and squirming in the noonday sun. We saw a woodpecker hammer its head into the bark of a tree. Swarms of dragonflies were all around us. We watched some big boys shoot a big snake with a BB gun. They picked it up and carried it over their heads with its mouth wide open. Then Mama drove up in the green Chevrolet and she was cursing out Mary, yelling at her, ‘What have you done with my baby? Kensey, where are you?’ She carried me back to the car, hysterical.

“‘What have these people done to you? You’re filthy.’ I started crying. I said I didn’t want to go home. I wanted to stay with Mary. I wanted to stay in Nigger Town. She said, ‘You hush up. You keep crying like that and I’ll give you something to cry about.’”

“What happened to Mary?” Bismarck asked.

“I don’t remember. I guess that was when I first became aware that I was a white person and that I wanted to live in Nigger Town.”

We were quiet, now. Bismarck was drifting off to sleep, and I was too fragile to initiate love making. He mumbled, “Don’t like being a symbol of three hundred years of oppression.” He rolled over on his side and pulled my arm around his torso. The cat had jumped onto the bed and made himself comfortable.

Out of the window, over the sleepy houses, I could see the moon. ‘Oh mama! What would you have me do? Oh, mama.’ Bismarck’s snore faded away as I followed that snake in the grass, and the snake turned into a cat, and at the end of the meadow the cat turned into a woman, a woman who was running in fear from me. She stumbled and fell in the mud. Mama?

We are both adults, wrestling in a muddy ditch. She tries to run away from me. I shout at her, “I am not your husband! I am not your father! I am not your lover! I am your son!”

She is trembling in the rain and tells me, “I’m afraid of you. I was afraid of you before you were born.” Then she runs into a field of gray and the field bursts into bright sparks and like a celluloid film that gets overheated, the image burns, melts and turns into blinding white light.

The light was so bright that even with my eyes closed it filled the inside of my skull. I opened my eyes. Wide eyed, filled with a nameless fear, I remained motionless for hours, staring at the ceiling, aware of the sound of the traffic. I sensed there was another room, in another village, where my mother slept. I was aware of my body humming, of my irregular heartbeat, of death, of her death and mine. My human body, I knew, had been enslaved, sold and resold, raped and killed, burnt alive. I have been beggar, priest and whore, man, woman, child, Angel and Demon. Each lifetime we think we will make it turn out right but it always turns into just another ugly, unforgiving dream.

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As I opened my eyes I smelled bacon frying. The room was still dark, the cat curled at my feet. Bismarck was downstairs cooking breakfast. The cat leaped to the floor as I wrapped a terry cloth robe around me. Then I noticed, sitting in the corner of the bedroom, dressed in a police uniform, was Bismarck’s mother. I picked up her story telepathically.

She had been raised in foster care. Then as a teenager she married Bismarck’s father, who abandoned them. She became a police officer. She was a single mom who raised two sons. One of them was Bismarck, her eldest son. The other son had died of an overdose. She wondered what Bismarck was doing with a loser like me. I wanted her to love me, but I knew that was an irrational want. She asked, bluntly, “What do you want with my son?”

“Love him, I guess.”

“Love?” She looked like she wanted to spit “You doin’ drugs?”

"No, mam, I don't do drugs."

"You from the South?"

"Yes, mam, raised in Texas, born in Alabama, Tuscaloosa."

"Tuscaloosa?" She looked horrified. "The killing fields. More black folks lynched in that hell hole than the rest of the South put together. What are you doing here in New York?"

"An actor. I want to be an actor, but I'm tending bar downtown in a place called the Monster."

"The Monster? I know that place. An evil place, where all the faggots go."

I noticed on her lap was sheet music. It was Mahler's second symphony. "*Resurrection Symphony?*" I asked, surprised, "Are you working on this music? Are you in the chorus?"

"I'm a soloist." she laughed, sardonically, "Ich bin von Gott und will wieder zu Gott!" She stood and faced me, and a chill came from her. "Use an alternate route." And then she faded into the yellow roses of the old wall paper.

I went downstairs, feeling troubled, trying to figure out what she meant by an alternate route? Where were these ancestors, my father and Bismarck's mother, located? And why were they appearing in my energy field in such a haphazard way? I let go of my memories of those other realms and pretended that I was a denizen of this slice of reality that some believed was all there is. I realized it was best to surrender my memories of that other world, just to see if I could. Then I heard some delightful music.

The radio played a Schubert quartet as Bismarck cooked. Nothing sexier than my man in the kitchen, dressed in heavy denim and a white T-shirt, moving lightly, gracefully to the music. He was so sure of himself, so completely inside his body. Tall, broad shouldered, with a thin waist, shaved head. I had a desire for him. As I watched him make breakfast, swaying to the music, unaware of my presence, I thought how different we were.

I was not on equal terms with my body. Something was wrong with it. No matter how much I meditated, no matter how much yoga I did, I could never completely relax into it. Bismarck was just himself. I felt his expectation as I put my hands around his waist while he stirred the frying pan. I rubbed my crotch against his butt. “You want a little sugar in your bowl?” I whispered in his ear.

“You sure are horny, all of a sudden.” He turned off the stove. He sat down at the dining room table and ate quickly. He looked like a fine thoroughbred, getting into the starting gate, full of energy.

“Do you always get up so fucking early?” I yawned. “The sun isn’t even up yet.” I sat down and started to eat, too.

“Early rehearsal at Lincoln Center. I like to walk through the park before work.” His viola was in the case on the table. He finished his last mouthful, gulped down his coffee, laced up his sneakers. I felt uneasy. “Are you rehearsing Mahler?”

“How did you know?”

“I’m psychic,” I replied. “Seriously, I am.” Bismarck looked nervous. “What’s wrong, baby? Is it about last night?”

“You should talk to your father,” he said, firmly. “How long has he been out of jail?”

“Not a jail, an insane asylum. And you want me to talk to that pig?” I poured a cup of coffee, my hands shaking. I turned off the radio. My voice rose, loudly “After all the shit he’s done you think I should talk to him? What part of it do you not understand? My father thinks Martin Luther King was an uppity nigger! He thought Hitler was a good man! My father was too fucking weird even for the Ku Klux Klan!”

“That’s not the point!” Bismarck shouted back at me. “He’s still your father. You’ve made up half of this shit. You haven’t seen him since you were ten years old. You don’t know who he is. You always daydreaming. Going off into some fantasy. It’s reality time, baby, it’s time to face reality.”

“I don’t want reality, baby, I want magic!”

“You rely too much on the kindness of strangers.” Bismarck shot back at me.

“I support myself,” I said, feeling defensive, “I have my own place. I can become an investment banker if I want to.”

“Well, good luck, baby, don’t let me stand in your way.” He sat in the chair across from me, with a creased forehead, wiping his mouth with a paper napkin. I stared down at his big Nikes. I put my bare foot on his sneaker, feeling my desire for him. Bismarck spoke quietly, in his deep baritone, in a reasonable tone. “Look at it this way. Your father is an old man. He’s sick. He has no power over you. You and me...we’re trying to make a go of it. We need to start with a clean slate. I’m not telling you what to do, but if you got a problem with him that affects me too.” He put his hand on his heart.

“He does have power.” I corrected him. “He’s got the evil eye. He wants to destroy me.”

“Never, never land,” Bismarck said. “You be Peter Pan, living in Neverland with your lost boys down in the Village, almost forty years old, still waiting tables.”

“Okay, girl,” I turned sarcastic, “and if I be Peter Pan that makes you my Tinkerbell!”

“Shut the fuck up! Don’t ever call me girl! Not in my house.” He stopped himself as he saw my testosterone rising to match his, like two alley cats hissing at each other. “Get dressed and walk with me to work. Let’s go through the park.”

I washed my face, dressed fast, and met Bismarck outside on the stoop. He locked the front door. I saw the sun rising over the park at the end of the block and started to feel a sense of vertigo, that weird feeling again, as if I was dropped in the middle of a Hollywood set and that this was just make believe. The quality of the light bathed the park in a celestial glow.

As we walked across the street towards the park, I noticed a big tattooed guy with his shirt off. He was being pulled by two ferocious pit bulls which were snarling at each other. They were coming towards us and I could tell the guy with the tattoos thought we were faggots. I got ready for a fight and sent him a wave of energy. I watched him and the dogs pass us by and suddenly felt a rush of relief that we escaped from being attacked.

Within minutes we were sitting by the edge of the lake in Central Park, listening to the gentle lapping of the waves. Far away in the distance we heard mute sounds of traffic. Above us a jet passed over, like a silver bullet in slow motion. Bismarck closed his eyes while I stayed alert, watchful, determined to protect him. I dared not touch him for he was shy about touch in public and it might trigger a bad reaction.

"By the way," I said, gently, "did your mother wear a wig?"

His eyes widened. "How the fuck did you know that?"

"Saw her last night. She was talking to you about me. Told you that I was high strung."

"Oh shit," he said sounding amazed. "She's right about that."

"She died of cancer, didn't she? She stayed in the maid's room downstairs, to save you the trouble of carrying her up and down the stairs."

"Kensey, I don't want to hear this." He said, reluctantly. "Deep down inside of you, there is a black woman. You just got a vivid imagination."

"That's true," I agreed. "I've listened to enough Billie Holiday, but it's not my imagination. It's real. Your mother is still hanging around your house. I know nothing about Heidegger but feel it's just a lot of pretentious crap. You are afraid of knowing your past too."

The ducks floated on the shimmering surface of the lake. A rank smell of rotting weeds wafted along the bank. Voluptuous clouds rose up majestically, reflected in the water. All of it arising and passing away. Rough magic. Breathing quietly, I no longer wanted to be a bodhisattva nor did I want to share the merit of my meditation with all sentient beings. I just wanted Bismarck and me to be okay.

Then it happened. A great rush of wings, bird shrieks, twigs from above fell onto our heads. Crows making harsh cries circled all around us and their shadowy shapes flapped ominously. All of this reflected in the broken up water of the lake.

What I saw next astonished me. It was something I had never seen before. There on the ground, a dozen yards away from us, landed a great hawk. It sat upon the struggling body of a smaller bird that flopped helplessly in the bigger bird's talons. The hawk was probably young and still a clumsy hunter for it looked confused by the condemning crows who took turns swooping down to peck his noble head. The crows seemed to hate this cannibal hawk that was going to feed on the defenseless bird.

Feathers were flying. The hawk could not fly off with its struggling prey while the crows were attacking him. Determined to take off, the hawk gathered strength for its big flight. I watched his innocent victim struggle. I was tempted to throw something at the hawk but a deeper wisdom held me back. The hawk may appear evil but he was beautiful and I knew I had no right to interfere with his natural desire to hunt and prey on the weaker creatures. He had his chicks to feed.

Finally, awfully, the hawk lifted its wings, which were dappled with delicate creamy feathers, and lifted into the air. He struggled to hold onto his exhausted bloodied prey. He began a crooked flight above the shrubs along the shore, and then flew straight across the lake. He was soon above the trees, finding open space and an escape towards the horizon, as angry crows followed the hawk in hot pursuit.

"Oh shit!" I gasped, in awe. "Did you see that?" I felt chills go through my body. My mind was suddenly empty, without a plan, without a hope. Cuddling up against Bismarck, my body softened into his, overwhelmed by gratitude. "You are right, baby. I do need to see my father. Thank you." He nodded his head in agreement, kissed me tenderly on the lips, in public. This was a sign that he was letting go of his being stuck in the closet. I released his hand and told him I was going to book a flight to Houston, to go back home, back to Texas. To the scene of the crime. To see my father.

We took a brisk walk through the park as the lazy summer morning started gathering momentum. More pedestrians and bikers appeared, moving all around us. The great Manhattan madness was starting up again.

"Will I see you before you go?" he asked.

"Better get this over with my father before I see you again. I have bad boundaries with you. I can't help it. When I get back we'll start with a clean slate. You are inside of me." We embraced, a long

embrace, as pedestrians rushed off to work around us, totally ignoring us, giving us our privacy. I waved farewell to Bismarck as I heard the A train arriving at the station, preparing to go back downtown to the Village.

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After Happy Hour at the Monster, I got off work and hooked up with Barry, my best friend. Barry had blue eyes, blonde hair, and was a real hunk. We started out at the Barracuda, on the West side. It was a stuffy professional scene, mostly actors and models. The same old boring, cookie cutter, crowd. After the Chelsea circuit, feeling discouraged by the slim pickings, we decided to go to a salt and pepper bar down in the Village.

On the back of Barry's bike, I balanced on the narrow seat while he pumped up and down with his strong legs. Holding on tightly to his broad shoulders, I marveled that we kept our balance after all the booze we've been drinking. "I love you Barry!" I shouted over his shoulder.

He shouted back, "Love you too, darling!"

Familiar stores and restaurants looked strange, whizzing past us in a neon blur. We stopped to pee on the street. I told him I was going to catch a flight to Houston, to see my lunatic father.

"Are you sure you want to do that?" he asked.

"Bismarck thinks it's good therapy."

"Good luck." he said, keeping it superficial. He locked up his bike on the street and we strolled arm in arm into the club. It was a late night vampire crowd. Old trolls and an assortment of pretty boys up way past their bedtime, high on coke. The diva sang, "*Sweet dreams are made of this, who am I to disagree, some of them want to use you, some of them want to be used by you.*"

Barry looked startled as he glanced at someone in the dark corner on the other side of the pool table. Barry looked away. As we ordered drinks and sat at the bar, in the mirror above the bottles, I could see the tall black guy with Dreadlocks, a jewel sparkling in his ear, gazing fixedly at Barry. The black

guy's body was gracefully poised, like a cheetah that's been running across the savannas, hiding in trees from the lions, ready to leap out of the trees when he feels safe.

"Who's that guy staring at you?" I asked. "He's cute."

"That's Dr. Feel Good." Barry said, as he lit a cigarette. "I've stopped seeing him. He's the kinky doctor I told you about."

"Why did you stop seeing him?"

"He's a needy top," Barry replied in a flip tone. "Always checking up on me. Too hot and heavy. He gets on my nerves. Would you stop staring at him? I don't want to get involved with him."

"Well, it's too late now. Here he comes."

The big cat moved from his perch, floated across the room, as if he was suspended by wires from the ceiling. "If you don't want him, give him to me."

"Don't start with me, bitch." Barry snapped at me.

The big cat stood next to Barry, waiting for his acknowledgement. "Why haven't you returned my calls?" he asked Barry.

"I've been busy." Barry replied, blowing smoke in his face.

"Hi, I'm Richard." He turned to me and introduced himself in a dignified manner. We shook hands, then he gracefully put his arm around Barry, as I excused myself and went to the toilet. They needed to be alone.

As I emptied my bladder, I noticed the latrine next to me was occupied by the bouncer, a big black dude, three hundred pounds of steroid muscles. He had a nose ring, tattoos, and a heavy chain around his neck. Out of the corner of my eye I quickly glanced down at him. Huge. Uncut. I glanced away quickly. He zipped up, ignoring me completely. He didn't wash his hands.

I had a sobering moment, gazing at my reflection in the mirror. If I pick up someone, then I won't have to go home alone tonight. Missing Bismark already, I also want to be a no-good slut. I'm torn down the middle! I want that Sunday kind of love, but I love Bar Culture too.

I was startled by a look-alike Diana Ross drag queen who strutted into the bathroom and locked the door. I watched as she opened her purse, as if she was alone in the room, and casually spread out a line of coke on a cocktail napkin. She snorted it through a rolled up dollar bill. She turned, with her bleary eyes heavy with mascara, and offered the white powder to me. I took a hit, flattered by her attention. She smiled. "You're cute." She reached down for my dick. I stopped her. She shrugged her shoulders. "Did I get it wrong? Sorry, baby."

"I'm a married man," I opened the door, turned to her and said, "You look gorgeous."

"I am an image," she smiled at herself in the mirror. "A shadow of a dream, with a beautiful mind."

At the bar, Dr. Feel Good was wrapped around Barry like a boa constrictor. I felt like I was in a bad porno movie. The bouncer, perched on a stool, near the entrance, was reading a paperback version of *Pride and Prejudice*. I gathered my courage and walked over, tried to start a conversation.

"So, you're the literary type?" He ignored my comment but I foolishly pursued it. "Do you like Jane Austen?"

"You have a problem with Jane Austen?" He looked down at me as if I were a nerd. I walked away embarrassed. I had no rhythm tonight. And besides, I was just sabotaging myself. I needed to catch a flight the next morning. I should make my exit. I said goodnight to Barry and the good doctor.

"Take a cab," Barry said. "Get home safe."

I wished I had taken a cab. Maybe it wouldn't have happened. I decided to walk home. I was bombed. Easy prey.

A few blocks away from my apartment I saw him emerge from the steamy heat, a gorgeous kid with a hipster's walk. Rough trade. The color of French roast. The kind of kid that makes old ladies hold onto their purses. The kind of kid that I'd jump through hoops for. As he walked past me with a

high indifference, I averted my gaze, not wanting to appear too obvious, getting a whiff of his strong patchouli oil. As few steps later I was surprised to find him walking behind me. Slowing down my pace, I turned and faced him.

I immediately felt the tornado coming right at me. He kept his eyes steady upon me. I felt like I was, once again, looking into the eyes of the King Cobra who was getting ready to spit. Alert to the danger, I was attracted to it nonetheless. He offered me a stick of gum. The sweet chew made me feel young, blasé, kind of naïve.

"I live with my girlfriend over on Avenue D," he said. "Had a fight with her."

"You got a girl? What do you want with me?"

"Pussy is easy to get." He acted hyper. "A good piece of ass is hard to find."

There was a construction site nearby. He took me into a dark area behind the dumpster. "You want to look at it?" He whipped it out. He's huge. Fully erect. "Fifty bucks," he said. "I'll fuck you to death."

"No thanks." I turned away from him.

"Fuck you, faggot." He hit me in the jaw.

I stumbled back onto the street, looking for a well-lit area. I felt grit in my mouth. Loose enamel. I was a block from my house. The street was empty. Stumbling towards my building, the street refused to stay still. I put my key in the door, opened it. I was pushed through the door, slammed to the floor with a blow to the back of the head. I kissed the concrete. Managing to rise, I stumbled towards the stairs, felt another blow. The gorgeous kid had a box cutter at my throat. Oh shit. The Angel of Death. Might as well relax. Get ready to meet my Maker. I swallowed the chewing gum.

"Why," he asked, "did you make me show it to you if you didn't want it?"

Pace, pace, mio Dio.'I heard Maria Callas singing from the crazy Italian lady's apartment.

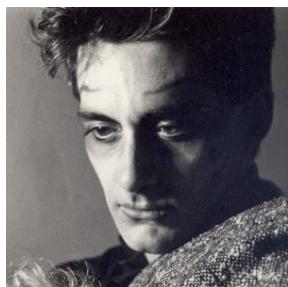
The kid reached down into my pocket, pulled out all I had, a ten-dollar bill, then walked out the building, slamming the front door shut. During the scuffle, I had pulled off his wristwatch. I stared at it in my hand. I just got mugged and I ended up with a nice watch, more valuable than the ten bucks he got from me.

The old Italian lady peeked through her door. Maria Callas flooded the hallway with her golden voice. Mrs. Pedone suffered from insomnia ever since her husband passed away. She didn't even like opera, but her husband had been a big fan.

"It's okay, Mrs. Pedone." I tried to calm her. She was almost blind, but she knew my voice "Sorry to disturb you."

"Oh, Mr. Jones. It's you." After she sniffed the air for danger, she closed the door.

I stared at the watch. Was this a message? A cosmic joke? I recalled the words to the song... *'Does anybody really know what time it is?'* I hummed the melody as I climbed the steep stairs, hearing the echo of my lonesome voice. Tumbling into my apartment, grateful to be alone in my bed, alone in the dark, alone and alive.



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