

The Dancing Guppy ©

JK Savoy

Derived from my dystopian mystery, And Then There's Lily

For as long as I can remember, without fail, every Friday evening at five PM, my personal pilot, Guy and I would join Doctor Tom for drinks and basic bullshit. Happy or not, it would be an hour or so for old friends to catch up. It was also the start point for my nightly pickup prowls of West Broadway's chic saloons. The Dancing Guppy was a recently opened Genesis Bar on the Soho tavern strip. Guy said it was the latest thing and we should bear witness to the phenomena that our country's faith-based Regime hath brought unto us. Imagine, a bartender pours you a drink then drops a guppy into it, the fish's fluttering fins thus serving as mixers. A timer is set and the crowd bets on how many seconds will go by before the tiny fish croaks from the alcohol. Hey, this is New America and as God loving Americans, we must never question the many mysteries of Revelation! Grudgingly our skeptical, nonbeliever friend Doctor Tom agreed to join us.

Manly men that we are, we sat one stool apart from one another. The crowd at 'The Guppy' cheered when Melissa Ferret, in a news special taped earlier that day, said, "*A blessed day unto all. At a Sunday staff prayer breakfast, Arch-Bishop Harland Gates, secretary of the newly created cabinet post, The Department for Faith Based Initiatives, assured President Greene: 'Madam President, since Intelligent Design states that all creatures great and small are the dominion of Humankind while on Our Lord's Earth, and were created for its needs and pleasure, there is no sin in sacrificing them in pursuit of the*

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happiness of Our Lord's true children.''' To which the bar's gathering cheered spontaneously, "Then let's get it on!"

As if challenging the crowd's sanction, Doctor Tom said, "Now I've heard it all! This intelligent design crap is going to set civilization back a thousand years!" With piercing looks of disapproval hitting him from all directions, in a voice barely above a whisper, Tom added, "The day those clerical fascists got voted in, I couldn't believe how the electorate actually bought into their bullshit. What's next: this party hack, Gates, or worse yet our hallelujah Congress, declares Earth to be the center of the universe? At the rate they're going, I'll be treating patients by singing hymns and applying leaches!"

"Actually, there is merit to the leach thing," answered Guy as he signaled for another Appletini, "Even Park Avenue doctors have gone back to using them."

"Not this doctor!" said Tom, "That Creationist Amendment will be the basis for this New America of theirs to become no different than Islamist states with their laws of Shariah. The only difference will be: Since our feudalism is wrapped in a different alphabet, we'd be cutting off a thief's trust fund rather than a hand!"

"Don't sweat it, Tom. Regimes come and go, but we peons party on no matter who's tapping the keg." said Guy as Tony, the bartender, handed him an Appletini.

Not wanting to fall behind in the inebriation race, Tom told Tony, "Give me another Grey Goose." Turning to Guy, he quipped, "Goddamn liquor cartel! The goddamn establishment numbs the public's ass with booze so they won't feel it while they're being screwed. Been like that since we were swinging

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from the trees all messed up on rotted fruit we bartered from the alpha chimp. All we had to pay him was first dibs on our ladies, or first swing on the next vine.”

“So you’re saying that swinging’s a natural thing?”

“Speaking of swinging, Appletini’s a gay drink, ya know,” shouted a mock Scottish brogue coming from a man dressed in full highlander attire. After slapping me across the shoulder, the faux-Scotsman placed himself on a stool between Guy and Tom.

“Bullshit!” countered Guy, “Who the hell are you to say anything? You’re a friggin’ dude wearing a silly-ass skirt!”

“Have a blessed day, Laddie. And, for your edification, it’s a kilt! We’ve worn them to war long before battling the Romans. We beat them, ya know!”

Ever the combatant, Guy stood and yelled, “Hey, if it’s a fight you want?”

As Tom ranted on and on about the holy zealots’ corporate death knell ringing across New America, I pressed Guy down to his stool by the head saying to him, “Cool it. This character is a partner at my company’s new law firm. Let him live Guy, at least until he squares away my will and shit like that.”

I asked, “What brings you here, Stewart?” Leaning toward his ear, I asked, “And what’s with the piper’s outfit and the brogue?”

Grasping my shoulder, he winked saying, “Sometimes we’ve got to give the inner persona inside some time on the outside. Live your bloody dream!” Slapping me across the back, he laughed and said, “All that aside, can’t a hard working word-pimp have a night out?”

“Sorry about that crack, Stewart. No offense meant, but it is what you do.”

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“None taken, Laddie. Ours is a noble task: Hooking up folks like you with a harem of the right words so you fuck everyone over and get away with it!” he pointed to the TV and whispered, “I gotta tell ya, that Melissa Ferret lassie you had fired for selling your network’s news scoops to the highest bidder is smokin’ up the airwaves. The political pendulum crashes through the right side of the clock and suddenly the conniving bitch is the church lady?” Leaning closer to the screen, he confided, “Aye, Laddie, all else aside, ya gotta picture that greedy backstabber as a parochial school lassie in a plaid skirt,” whispering, he asked, “Regardless of how she fucked you over, is she or isn’t she wearing panties?”

“What does any of that that have to do with anything, Stewart?”

“Everything, Laddie! It all goes to a whiff of the prey, the thrill of the hunt, the stalking and best of all, the anticipation of the kill!”

“You want me to kill Melissa Ferret?”

“No Laddie! But after the game of it all, she’d make a fine and worthy lay.” Huddling nearer to me, he said, “Okay Laddie let’s say, a stark raving naked chick comes out of nowhere, rips off your boxers and jumps your bones.”

“Though I do wear briefs, I’d have to say, we’re off to a great start!”

“But where’s the challenge, Laddie?”

“Goes to state of mind. I have enough challenge on ten boards of directors.”

“State of mind? Explain, Laddie.”

“Okay, why’s a smart guy like you going horn-dog over scattered electrons in a video? What we see here doesn’t even

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qualify as a ghost. I'd go with the stark raving naked chick coming out of nowhere and jumping me. It beats a phantom breaking for commercial while you're left with your under-kilt situation in hand."

Referring to Ferret's prim and proper TV persona, Stewart said, "Like the serpent's temptation of Adam: Live, recorded or sitting right here, forbidden fruit like her is always the juiciest. Well worth eternal damnation, no?" shaking me at the shoulder he added, "In sexual targetting, a uniform conceals the bullseye. The more the getup says no, the more the beast thumping beneath the codpiece says, aye!" Salivating at the sight of Ferret's button down facade, he said, "Believe me when I say it, tight-ass thieving, corporate broads clad in Lady Armani suits and ties are the wildest lays a Laddie could dream of."

Watching Ferret's image push three wayward strands of her neatly pressed scarlet mane from her face, I asked the kilted one, "Are you that drunk already?"

After scanning the bar, he looked at me wobble-eyed saying, "Aye, I'm that drunk. I shouldn't mix law stuff with booze, should I? So, do ya come here often?"

His eyes drooped and began looking downward. Nervously I answered, "First time for me," When I asked, "What about you?" his attention grew scattered.

After texting someone, he tried to get the bartender's attention while saying to me, "Aye, Simon, it's a good place to go to get time away from the old ball an' chain," grinning, he added, "Old married men like me gotta keep up with ya single swingers somehow, aye?"

Leaving Stewart to his fantasy world, I returned to my drink while observing the bartender carefully measure Guy's

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next Appletini, as a plastered Doctor Tom aimed his finger at the TV. Then he said to all who might listen, “Doesn’t anyone see it? This Creationist Amendment is nothing but a throwback to an ancient pope’s Doctrine of Discovery which brought the Inquisition to Medieval Europe! That done, all creatures great, small or heathen became the dominion of Papal sanctioned royalty for its barbeque or chopping block indulgences.”

Guy said, “His name was Pope Alexander the Sixth. According to his 1493 decree, non-believers who refused conversion became available as blood sport.”

After he looked around the bar, Tom went on to slur in a loud whisper, “We’d better be careful about who’s listening. There was a time we could bullshit out loud about this stuff, but since blind belief has come to be Regime policy we’d better ...” after slugging the rest of his Grey Goose down, Tom said, “Tony, gimme another one.”

Stewart waved off the doctor’s remarks, and gibed, “Cut the bullshit my good man. This is New America, land of the free: In The Lord and good stock tips we trust.”

Grabbing his refill, Tom managed to maintain his focus and say to Stewart, “So, I overheard Simon telling Guy that you’re his latest lawyer. Is this true?”

Tony slid his drink to Stewart and told him, “This is your sixth, counselor. After this one, I’m cutting you off. Now, have yerself a blessed night.”

Scotch in hand, Stewart high-fived the bartender. Responding to Tom’s question, he said, “Aye! Guilty as charged. I’m Simon’s lawyer and word-pimp.”

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While we raced to the bottoms-up finish line, Tony reached into a fish tank, pinched a guppy by the tail and held it over Guy's Appletini. As soon as the fish landed in the drink, a large clock above the bar began its countdown.

As if oblivious to the upcoming fulfillment of the Genesis Bar experience, Tom asked Stewart, "Then how can you, an officer of the court, not see it? True, we should trust in God, but never in those who claim to speak for God. Therein lies the danger. These ecclesiastical gangsters did a midnight end run around all that Americans held sacred, especially their faith."

In response, Stewart downed his drink, scrunched his lips and stared at me while saying to Tom, "Like I always say, this is still free market America. But please, go on Doctor."

Needing no encouragement, through the power vested in him by his inner Grey Goose, Tom declared, "And quickly becoming flea market *New America*! Somehow, those so-called tax cuts drained the middle class dry. Religious choice is getting fleeced by those who claim tolerance until they choose not to tolerate any religion that opposes state dictated beliefs. Our founding fathers must have seen the bullshit that went on with the Salem witch hunt judges when they made it a point to separate church from state. Think about it, Stewart: What would Thomas Jefferson have to say about this Creationist Amendment that's been shoved up our New American butts?" After slugging down more Grey Goose, Tom added, "And laws by Scripture? That bullshit's ten times worse than the Patriot Act. Where has our system of checks and balances gone? All of this is nothing but state mandated religion decreed by The President, rubber stamped by Congress and sanctioned by a handpicked Judicial. Now, Scripture-based legislation is the law of the land of the

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once free? What's next, sex police under our sheets watching who we screw?"

Like Goliath risen, Stewart's inner-monster soared. Grinning, he glared at me saying, "What's wrong with someone watching, Laddie? Hey, does that mean the Sex Pistols might be making their comeback? I can totally dig that!"

Oblivious to conversations around him, a smashed Guy, the pilot, held his churning Appletini on high declaring, "Cool! If I were James Bond, I'd say, 'Fuck shaken, make mine flippered and not stirred!' Gazing into his glass, he added, "Wow! The drink got totally mixed before my eyes. In its death dance, that tiny guppy's hummingbird fins mixed Absolut with Apple Pucker. Gotta love this bar!"

Tom looked Stewart dead in the eye and said, "It's denial at the highest and most learned levels. Even a so-called lawyer like you can't or won't see it." After the splashing in Guy's perfectly mixed Appletini ceased, Tom looked at the drink to see the tiny, silvery fish slowly float to the surface. Amidst the howling of the joyful winners around him, as if eulogizing the finned critter, he went on to ask all who might hear him out, "What has civilization come to? First they come for the guppies, then who knows who's next? It's just a matter of time before every human or house pet in this New America who won't lay prostrate before illusory gods and demons, will be relegated to floating to the surface and then be disposed of!" After a faux toast to the departed fish, Tom said, "Will the next group to be sacrificed at the pleasure of Creationists be those who disagree with them, or merely question them?" Dismissing Guy's attempts to stifle his rant, Tom went on to say, "People will be disappeared, tortured or killed by the will or whim of those who

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lay claim to the words of supposition or false rumor at best.”

After downing his bourbon, Tom shouted to the ceiling, “Where the hell is the virtue of dissent in this brave new fucking world? Where are the heroes?” Glancing around, Tom went on to say, “Shit! I’d better watch my mouth!”

“Cut it out, Laddie. You’re drunk. And don’t ye worry, no one’s listening.”

“Ouch!” I shouted as drops from another guppy slaying splashed to my eyes.

“If you can’t handle the fallout, don’t lay with the bomb,” said an all too familiar voice as she landed on the empty barstool next to mine, while the defiant fluttering of the guppy’s fins in a nearby Black Russian began to subside. The instant the fins became still, a giant sweep hand on a timer next to the bartender stopped at five seconds. No sooner than a buzzer noise faded away, the little fish floated to the top of the drink.

Suddenly, the TV blasted, “*Breaking news!*” As Melissa Ferret went on to say, “*Moments ago, President Greene was arrested for seeking an abortion from her personal physician. More on that as the story develops...*” At that very instant, she sat beside me. Before I could ask myself, ‘How can Ferret be making that announcement and be here at the same time,’ I heard, “A blessed evening to you. So it really is the infamous Simon Blake right here, right now. Fancy that!” stated Melissa Ferret, the merciless journalist I had fired from my cable station, CN-Plus, while giving me the once over. Considering the chance of her being my catch of the night; I envisioned a lover of hers fluttering and about to be dropped and then consumed in a vat of one of Ferret’s well-choreographed deceptions. I was so glad I had her producer fire her vindictive ass rather than me.

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Pointing to her image on the screen, I shrugged my shoulders and asked, “Ferret, how can you be in two places at one time?”

“Oh that? We recorded the bulletin much earlier.”

“But I thought it was a hot bulletin. You even said, *‘Breaking News!’*”

“True, I did say that just as soon as it came in. But the story hit my desk at three PM. So my news-team and I agreed to hold it for the six o’clock report.”

“What? A bulletin is supposed to be a bulletin. You say it when it happens!”

“Like, who’s watching at four in the afternoon? Why waste hot news like a pro-life President seeking an abortion on Klenker’s Auto Body’s chump-change time at four, when we can reward Crayton Labs for shelling out top dollar at six? Since those suckers pay us dearly for product placement, the least we should do is reciprocate with proper story positioning.”

“So, what’s gonna happen to *‘every sperm is sacred’* President Greene?”

“Hah! The bitch will at the very least spend about seven months in lock up, followed by a few long hours of hard labor. What goes around, comes around.”

While I watched the dead guppy floating in his final reward, her sweet smelling hand turned me to her by the chin as she said, “So! A blessed evening to you, Simon.” Joining me in mourning the little critter, she said, “You know, sooner or later, everything gets its four or so seconds of fame.” Melissa had to be a regular. I knew this because, while keeping hold of my chin, she yelled toward the winner, “Dammit! A friggin’ guppy can last up to eight seconds. Some are known to go the full ten if

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there is more Kahlua than vodka.” As if the winner might care, she went on to shout, “They say it’s because of the higher water content in the liqueur,” she glanced past me and said to the drink’s holder, “Next time, don’t order it extra dry. Just put your chips on the six-second square and let it ride. You’ll see. Then you’ll have yourself a truly blessed night.”

Slowly, my head moved closer to her as my mouth quivered, approaching a grin. Distracted by something, her attention shifted. After seeing her and Stewart exchange fleeting glances, I downed half of my Appletini and bet two chips on the six second square next to her. ‘Thank God,’ I thought, since doing this allowed my hand to be next to hers. Just as I was about to express my gratitude for her advice, Stewart’s hairy paw came between us and lay three chips on the seven square.

Having done that he said, “If it’s the water that keeps ‘em going Tony, a fish should last a week in one of your drinks.”

“Don’t use me as your excuse for a foolishly placed bet,” answered Tony, “You’ve come here enough to know how long it takes for a fish to go topside. And don’t believe that water myth.” As if realizing who and what he was talking to, Tony backtracked and said, “Listen here Counselor: The Dancing Guppy’s an ethical Genesis Bar. No bullshit, and everything’s done by the Good Book.”

“And by even better bookies?” Like a schoolboy having spoken out of line to the teacher, Stewart turned to me, winked and shrugged his shoulders.

With all eyes on the mix-maestro, Tony placed a tall, tapered glass in front of Melissa, selected the ingredients for her drink and said to Stewart, “She’s having her usual

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Cosmopolitan. You sure you want to keep your bet where it's at?"

Knowing how there's a high water content in lime juice, one of the components of a Cosmo, I was about to reset my chips to the seven or the eight square when Melissa's warm, moist fingers melded with mine. Her soft lips brushed my earlobe as she whispered, "Trust me, Simon. Leave it where it's at."

The pouring segment of the ceremony was complete. Tony set the clock to zero. The instant he did, the sports video monitors muted. After grabbing the handle of a tiny net, Tony swirled it about in a large aquarium in front of the mirror. As if the same drum roll was playing in the minds of the bar's flock, we watched Tony ceremoniously grab a tiny fish from the net by its tail. Everyone's attention jumped from the surface of the Cosmo to the fish, then back to the clock. Filled with a sense of empowerment from holding the fate of a lone guppy and an excited crowd between his fingers, Tony fist-pumped his other hand and grinned.

The fish couldn't have been more than six inches over the glass. After it was released from Tony's grip, it seemed to flutter for an eternity before splashing down. The instant it hit the drink's surface; the clock started. The tiny critter must have gulped passionately at what it thought was life sustaining H₂O, only find that it was a self-embalming Cosmo: Because all of its little fins did the hummingbird- flutter more excitedly than the victim of Guy's Appletini did. A bloodthirsty Madam LaFarge chorus of a mob began to chant, "One-Two-Three-Four-Five..." The moment it roared, "Six," the guppy went topside.

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Goose bumps spread across my loins as Melissa's lips planted a wet one on my cheek. The instant they departed she shouted, "Yes! And six is the winner!"

An angry Stewart let out a loud, "Ah, shit!"

I asked Melisa, "How did you know to keep it on six? I thought the high water content in the lime juice would stretch it out to nine."

"I see that we have something in common, sweetie. I like my drinks kind of dry, just like you do." Optimism that my nightly hop along the hip bar archipelago might begin and end at the Dancing Guppy approached reality as Melissa asked,

"So, the big man at the top of CN-Plus is into fish sacrifice, ay?" Amazing how after five or so Appletinis the strongest, most lofty mountain of masculine mass becomes mush from a single stroke of a silk stocking encased foot. Not that that I'm that lofty or very strong, I guess it's just that when all juiced up, I'm typical and all too predictable. Speaking of typical, as the energy from Melissa's foot shot upward to my groin; my uncontrollable, inappropriate mouth uttered, "So, do you come here often?"

"Sometimes. But I can think of a far better place for doing that, Simon."

In the midst of my thoughts of things to come, Tom whispered into my ear, "My friend; try to think ahead to when you sober up, and think back to right now when you're stone drunk. You know damn well she'll pump a dude however she has to for whatever dirt she can get, then expose the shit out of him on that yellow-journalism megaphone that just hired her! And remember why you had her fired!"

Leaning away from Melissa, I said, "Bro, I can't hear you!"

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Before heading for the door with Guy, Tom uttered, “She looks great now, but come morning she’s not just another disposable, because this one’s vagina is weapons grade!” Resisting Guy’s tugging at his shirt, he slapped at my burgeoning boner while saying, “Be thankful for miracles and massive doses of penicillin.”

Though alcohol vapor is invisible, it’s amazing how quickly it establishes itself as a partition between what we in the sober state consider to be discretion, good taste or giving in to really stupid shit. Not that I was about to give in to anything really stupid, it’s just that I was too damn drunk to know the difference between that and what normally powered the Simon Blake engine. With my eyes anxious to get back to Project Melissa, I reset my stare upon the target of my libido driven cannon and asked, “So, how did life take you from writing character assassinations to observing guppy executions?”

Curling my leg closer to her with her ankle, she replied, “I’m here to check out the latest way to sink Humankind to another low in the race to the bottom of all living things, and expose it for what it is or isn’t.” Fanning her face with both hands, she declared, “My Lord, it’s so hot in here!” Glancing at me before seeking a mirror, she wiped at her forehead and asked, “Getting pumped for your infamous Friday night constitutional along West Broadway with a little fish-fry, Simon?”

Feeling a twinge of guilt for having the ruthless, slanderous bitch cut from my news station, I slugged down the rest of my Appletini, signaled for another and said, “Yeah, another night, another bimbo.” Pointing to the TV, as one more US senator is arrested for heresy, I asked, “How fucked up is it that TV

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stations can serve as career executioners without consequences?” Realizing through my stupor how Ferret had been my handpicked news director at CN-Plus, I added, “Can’t people like you keep that garbage off the air?”

Pursing her lips, she said through the mirror behind the bar’s liquor array, “Life is so unpredictable. On any given day, a girl can wake up and find that she’s been discarded and realize all she has left in life is the slippery slope of her career. So, it’s better to stay ahead of the game: Grease up, and pick a soft landing spot.”

“What do you mean?”

“A girl has to look out for herself. People may come and go; but rumor, innuendo and the gift of a creatively artistic imagination are eternal.”

‘She always had such a way with words,’ I thought as I watched the cable-news ruthless superstar’s reflection loosen her necktie. As she undid the knot, my mind floated back to the board meeting when I chose the former in depth journalist as news director of CN-Plus. If there was ever a contest held for de-fanging other vampires and then bleeding them to death with a single question, Ferret would stand atop the Transylvanian bat heap.

From cub reporter one year to co-anchor and then sole anchor during the next, she rocketed through ranks of commentators following her interview with the then Senator, Bob Truman. Who could ever forget how she and Sally Mander, a chameleon of an intern, used their incredible charm and cunning to lay the groundwork for Truman to be given no choice but to admit to his career and marriage ending affair with presidential advisor, Bud Wilson? For her efforts in nailing the

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kill of the century, as chairman, I awarded her content control of CN-Plus News and a champion red Persian cat.

With her tie and tongue loosening, Ferret answered, “Simon, as you must know, basically, there are two kinds of people in the news business: People who make the news, or the people who make the news the news. Sadly, for Simon Blake, his silly little butt is always making the news. Good news for the news, but it could be bad news for the newsmaker.”

“Let me tell you this: what can be made can be broken,” staring at her, I added, “People come and go, but clout is eternal. Know what I mean, Ferret?”

Undoing her top two buttons, then fanning at her bosom, she said, “I hope not, and I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that. Good Lord, but it’s so damn hot in here!” Okay, it’s true, I make the news the news and sometimes, I can break the news but only by breaking an even bigger story. The good news is, the American viewing public has the attention span of a corn-pecking chicken. The bad news is, front-page manipulation can get complicated.”

“Can you break a story into pieces and throw it all away?”

“Trying to kill a good story is like putting a Hefty Bag over the Hiroshima blast.” Pointing to my drink, she exclaimed, “So, it is true, the infamous Simon Blake is into Apple Martinis!”

Was it at that moment when I realized something I had never noticed before? Ferret was a knockout of a woman! Was my alcohol-in functionality the first thing to become enthralled by the way the ruthless, cutthroat, win at all cost cannibal flipped her flowing hair away from her face? Whatever it was; when Ferret pushed away her scarlet mane, it was as though a warm, gentle woman, who lurked behind the claws, had somehow replaced the cold blooded tigress. Stunned, enamored

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and visualizing myself as a selfless gentle man, who would gallantly contain his weight on his knees and elbows for his lady, I said, “I’d never put that kind of pressure on you, Melissa.”

With a twinkle in her eye, she ran the tip of her tongue along the apple slice from her drink, stopping just in time to allow the juice from the wedge to drip into her cleavage while saying, “Oooh... that feels *s-o-o-o* cool and refreshing!” Her finger ever so gently wiped sweat beads from my brow as she went on to say, “Business dealings aside, a little pressure in the right places never hurt anyone ...” after taking a nibble from the apple peel, she said, “... and that’s often a welcome thing to a girl, Simon.” Placing her foot on the rung of my stool and her knee next to mine, she added, “Really, I’m built to handle pressure.”

Leaning slightly forward, her cavernous cleavage presenting itself to me. Without delay, nocturnal Simon began to take charge over Simon the finicky daytime fool, who wouldn’t know a French kiss from a French fry. My mind yeah-yeahed her answer while I fixated on her nipple bulging at her bra as she said, “Simon, even if my editors backed away from a great story like yours did to mine, every other news whore in the country would stay on top of it until it dies.”

“News whore? Why would press people call themselves news whores?”

As if checking to see if any thought monitors were reading us, she looked around and then said, “Regardless of where this whole faith-based police state is going, let me be candid and say; whore isn’t such a bad word, Simon. In fact, it’s rather noble.”

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“Melissa, I’m no altar boy, but I don’t get it. How can a whore be noble?”

“Whoring goes to promiscuity, which is like the news business itself.”

“How’s that?”

“First of all, promiscuity means, *‘to indiscriminately mix and mingle the actions of many with no other plan or purpose but to survive and profit from the moment.’*

“That’s a very interesting admission. Go on.”

“So how isn’t whoring the essence of the news world? All of us in the biz do what it takes to get what we need to sell the world what it wants to hear. So, I’m a news whore, so big deal! We all do what we have to. Are you any different? Hey, my boy, get real: Everyone’s fucking everyone else, everywhere you look.”

Imagining a bobbing head under a heaving habit, I said, “Then don’t look!”

Simon, I am where I am because I’m not afraid to look wherever I have to in order to get the story. One gets jaded when you spend twenty years looking the biggest government, business and religious whores in the world in the face and dig from the eyes down ‘til you hit the shit that moves them. After sitting face to face with the most powerful names in the headlines, like I do, I asked myself, *‘Who in this world isn’t whoring at what they’re doing in order to get over and move on?’* and felt damn good about being a news whore; ergo, the nobility of it all.”

With the news of the world eclipsed by images of self-righteous whores bouncing upon me, my eyes drifted from her breasts to her tongue working the tip of the apple slice as I

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thought, ‘Great! She lives one flight above the lobby in the same building I do! If we don’t connect here, and she’s still showing interest, we can share a cab. Truth seekers aside, if I don’t get to first base by the time our doorman ushers us in, I still have the elevator ride to step up to the plate.’

Contingency plans faded into my dust covering the first base bag when I gazed away from the lucky Granny Smith between her fingers and saw her eyelids lower like closing bedroom doors. The two of us drew closer. As if sliding into second, I placed my hand on her thigh while asking, “Do you really like to stay on top of a thing until it dies?”

Laying her hand over mine, she signaled me toward third saying, “I’ve been known to, but I don’t want anything to die without putting up a fight to the end.”

“Why?”

“Either it goes to the nobility in the news whore, or the cat with the mouse by the tail in me. Like any good story, or anything else, I like to keep whatever it is alive for as long as I can...” then while stroking her thigh with my hand, she said, “Even forever ...”

“Here’s to eternal life!” I shouted to her thrashing breasts while the news director’s palms dug into this joy filled chairman’s shoulders. While Melissa ground away at my pelvic bone as if she were riding a barroom bronco, I held my runner at third. The catcher leaped for a wild pitch. Waiting for the nod to steal home, I grabbed her bedposts and thought, ‘I had to be blind. She’s incredible!’

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Melissa screamed, “I won the bet!” Suddenly, an immense undulation followed by a massive quake sent my runner across home plate.

“What bet?”

“You’re not gay! Give thanks unto Our Lord.”

While she rolled away from me clear of the sweat soaked side of the dugout, I asked, “What the hell ever made anyone think I was gay?”

Gasping and giggling, she said, “Well, maybe not entirely gay...” then, she asked bluntly, “Okay, what totally straight guy drinks Appletinis?”

“This one does and so does my pilot-friend, Guy!”

“Should I dismiss tales of your walks on the wild side of West Broadway?”

Through post coital ecstasy, and the mesmerizing power of ten plus ounces of Absolut & Pucker coursing through me, I chomped at the shiny thing, planted the hook squarely into my fat lip and yelled, “Bullshit!” and then asked, “Exactly what did you hear? ... And who did you bet with?”

She clicked her stereo remote. Billie Holiday sang while Melissa said, “There’s talk at The Dancing Guppy that...” then she to adjusted the sound.

“What kind of talk?”

Setting the volume just below her whisper, she said, “Well, the word around town is that you swing both ways. Bear in mind, I did bet that you weren’t gay.”

“Who said I was gay?”

“Talk is talk, Simon. Action speaks louder than words and you’re surely a man of action.” As if to summon another batter to the plate, she nibbled at my ear. Showing there was plenty of

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action left in this manly man of a hitter, I pointed my wood to the upper deck, awaited her next pitch thinking, ‘Lovers come and go, but home runs are cherished forever!’

Ready for a curve, fastball or whatever; my bat went powerless as she whizzed a slider past me by saying, “Simon, as a man of action, you know in our little circle of lone wolves and stray dogs, it’s all a game of musical mattresses followed by pillow talkathons. Sour grapes make for a bitter wine, and scorned bedmates whine about the strangest things to whomever comes next. All too often, the least of our worries is catching the clap. Simon, no matter how much we cover up before the deed or scrub down afterward, the real killers lurk hidden in the words that follow the act.”

Sensing signals dangling from a squatting crotch behind this batter, I tightened up on my Louisville Slugger and asked, “What am I missing?”

“Sweetie, when we’re all hot and bothered and the lights go out, we don’t see the bullseye on the mattress below for the soothing feel of the silk sheets above it. Bottom line, whether you realize it or not, every new lay is an opportunity to settle up for the one before that left your self-esteem bleeding. It’s like, people appease their wounded pride with spiteful tales as an antidote for past rejection until all scores are settled.”

Indifferent to the booing bleacher creatures, I asked, “What do you mean?”

As if having whiffed two more past me and heading for the dugout, she said, “Simon, let me cut to the chase: All too often what we choose to believe as being privileged doesn’t always stay that way.”

“A person’s word should mean something.”

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“Sadly, the bedroom becomes integrity’s pawn shop.”

“Oh really? Priests, therapists and especially lawyers, they’re bound by rules of privilege. What the hell are you saying?”

“You didn’t mention pawnbrokers, Simon. I’ll say only this, and you can figure out the rest. It’s like when kids swear to keep a secret, then they can’t control themselves and they pass it on as it becomes devalued to neighborhood gossip. It’s just human nature, that’s what we news whores live off. Regardless of what it is, it’s just a matter of time before the most profound privileged confidence is relegated to plain old, you know. That’s the world we live in, I’m just saying ...”

Pelted by crumpled beer cups, a half-eaten ballpark frank and hearing the ref yell, *‘Yer outta here!’* I declared, “No one would dare betray Simon Blake!”

“Sure! And all fish-bar guppies die of old age or overfeeding. Simon, get real. As sure as orgasm’s fading glow precedes the humdrum, the narcissism in all of us eclipses ethics. It’s like Freud might have said, if he lived long enough to think it: Ego will always trump fidelity. So, don’t let anything surprise you.”

Was it the instant that I let out my reckless babble that the game was called? Was it because I pounded on her silk sheets while yelling, “*Shit!*” that lowered my side of the blanket like a post-game flag? Should I have stuck with fishing metaphors, much like the guppy going down for the count that I’ve become? Hearing the purring from her red Persian cat that leaped upon the bed and lay across her tummy, I wondered, ‘Who names a cat, Delilah?’

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Whatever it was, though her lip had long left my ear, my battered self-esteem was patched with Ferret's message to sop up the blood, "Don't worry, Simon. I'll never doubt your manhood. I might even say that you're as incredible in your eight seconds of ... whatever, as I am in keeping secrets!"

As if floating face up while staring at a motionless clock, blood began to return to the outer reaches of my body. Microbes bursting from Ferret's subatomic vagina detonated and began their crawl toward my urethra and the eventual erosion of my wellbeing. Caught somewhere between a pecker's need for isopropyl and my spirit's demand to know if I live and breathe, out came, "Do any of us ever learn it all in one lifetime?"

"Makes you wonder if that very thought ran through the guppy's mind as the waiting Appletini grew closer. Wow! Will you look at the time? Simon, I hope you don't think I'm the type of girl who gets a little wasted, has her way with a fella then asks him to leave. But seriously, this girl does need her beauty sleep." Clapping the overhead light off, she said, "If there isn't anything else ..."



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