

[real piece of work]

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1.

Some called me cheap, but I was free. It was a discipline. I opposed distinctions. I fucked all my neighbors, as a discipline. The discipline lay in mine own pleasure, otherwise it was charity merely, and charity implied distinction. Nevertheless, I soon found myself at the limits of mine own logic, for instance, Mr. Simson's friend did rape me, yet, as we had been formally introduced, the terms were unclear, nor was it evident that this was a matter for discipline at all, even the last-ditch disgust = fascination, which had yielded such acceptable consequences with Mr. Simson himself, yet with his friend, at best mixed results; moreover that friend did leave fifteen dollars on the coffee table. I spent it on fare to a monastery outside the city where I asked this question: if I did fuck by discipline, and I did, would the discipline be affected by considerations of force or payment? They threw me out. Well! I cannot say my respect for these monks was increased by their position. Sex was in any event out of the question. Monks, you see.

I did visit a commune near the Delaware Water Gap. They threw me out. I did sleep on my friend Bonnie D's brother Paul D's floor in Washington Heights. His friend Ruth was vacating three rooms in a quarter of the city to which I had never traveled, where life was cheap, and the rents, forget about it. \$77! I had some clothes, cloths, pots, gomasio, rice, a Royal typewriter and an RCA changer, both suitcase-style. I moved all in two trips, through heavy snow.

My home. Little room after little room. The airshaft. The bars. The view of windows. The little yard. The silence. Squirrels did disport, and cats did defecate. Pigeons mourned. And there were water tanks too against the winter sky, with snow on top, the icing on the cake. And by the river, utility towers loomed. \$77! And I tell you, others paid less.

What a time that was! Tuna in tins, 37 cents. Kidneys, 39 cents. Here were three minuscule rooms under the roof. Here an airshaft. Here were built-in drafting tables which

faced the airshaft. Guests could sleep on these. A previous tenant had glued cloth on the wall and painted the ceiling orange, also the fridge. The stove had three burners. Here were straw mats. I could lay them on the floor of the room that did face north. I could sleep here, for I had no mattress. Also, I had no fear.

. . . Footsteps on the stairs . . . Boom! Boom! Boom!

There were two parts to my address, the front and the back, with a courtyard between. I lived in the back.

"Hello?"

It is my friend Bonnie D's brother Paul D's friend Ruth's boyfriend Paul R. A zippered jacket and a hat with earflaps. A red nose. Polyester flares. Stupid shoes.

"Did they leave somethin' fer me? They're s'posed to leave 'em with Mrs. Kvestian."

Two cardboard boxes. Paul R lived in the front.

Two families filled the floor below me, the Santiagos and the Ribaudos. The Woiczdass, the Kvestians. The Chinese man with the eyepatch. In front, white mothers with dark babies. The super's wife. Her nephew, Walter. Only after Walter's death would we learn: he was not her nephew.

. . . Footsteps on the stairs . . . Boom! Boom! Boom!

It is my neighbor Paul R, back: he did forget the packages.

Years later I would realize it was my nudity that had made such a strong first impression. It was a discipline.

The war was over. Many said, since its moral invalidity had long gone, it mattered not when it truly ended. 1973. Welcome aboard. We were seeing old things in a new light. Many said it was drugs. It was quite honestly politics

Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Hello?"

It is mine old comrades. Trix, Luka, Bonnie D. New Year's Eve. We had plans.

Here was a plan. Restructure the system from the inside out.

Men threw women off roofs in those years, don't ask me why. Youths set fire to buildings, then sold the copper piping while the fire engines were on the way. Youths set fire to European organizers; just the women, you see. Don't ask me why. So many did seem to be missing something in those days, and as for myself, I had no mattress. And fear, forget about it. Did I think for a minute that I would be alone under the roof in a building without a lock? I had no fear. Gomasio, yes, pots, yes, cups, mats, a Royal, an RCA, yes, yes. Fear, no.

And thieves did come by night and steal the Royal, the RCA. They left the pots, mats, cloths, clothes, gomasio behind. Fear, too.

A mattress, no.

Fear kept me in those rooms. I sat at the window and peered out through the bars. Fear stood at the door, ear cupped, against intruders.

The rice was gone. The onions. I did walk to Key Food through the snow. I did there purchase sundries. Out through the snow I did return. Fear followed me home.

Fear followed me back through the front hall. Shiny green tile, very Dutch. Tile floors in the front hall, which was so unplumb the tenants did lurch like sailors. The brief trip across the courtyard, with the sound of family. Indians would come later. These sounds were Ukrainian. The old soggy formerly white towel lying in dirty snow. The drain. And back up all those landings to those tiny rooms. Fear raced ahead, checking out the landing. Knocked the keys from mine hand, pushed ahead, and hid under the drafting table. What a jerk.

. . . Footsteps on the stairs . . . Boom! Boom! Boom!

Trix, Bonnie, Luka D. Here was a plan: one or two or three of mine friends could share mine rooms. Say Luka D moved in: \$38.50 per. Or I would pay the change: \$39/\$38. Or, say I paid the main: \$52. For Luka D, \$25, an excellent prospect. \$25! She opposed the vibrations. Thus, I was alone, and paid more at \$77 than I had for \$116.38, which I had shared, for no one would share these, for fear of being mugged. Well, there were other problems. My disciplines got on people's nerves, for I was such a slob. So fear was mine only roommate. Well, vermin, certainly. I opposed violence and could not step on them, you see. Yet accidents did happen, certainly.

Now it did come to pass that Mrs. Woiczda was raped in the courtyard, by a stranger. And Paul R's girlfriend did bring a petition for a front door lock. And we did smoke a joint. She resembled her boyfriend. They were both of rodent-like demeanor. I did ask the signs of her birth. And this did give me pause. For she was triple Leo, but looked so rodent-like. And we did talk about the war, which I did privately feel had outlived its moral invalidity. She said, "Yes, I did feel the same." And I did see great grief in Paul R's girlfriend, sort of. "I thought you were a hippie," she said. We did laugh at that. "I am a hippie!" I said. "Rudy said there are no hippies." "Who is Rudy?" "Paul R." "Oh, Rudy would know!" "He wants to sleep with you." "I already did! I believe!" We did fall over. "No! That was some other neighbor!" For, as I believe I mentioned, I had made it my discipline to fuck all my neighbors, as a discipline.

Ruth: "Did he have a tail?"

Me: "I don't recall!"

"If he had no tail, he must have been some other neighbor!"

Yet it became clear to me as we spoke that I had allowed mine discipline to lapse, though it was possible I had merely been unobservant, as, first things first, yet as I reflected, I had evidently not even fucked Paul R called Rudy, which would have been the simplest thing in the world, whereas in mine old rooms I did fuck the old postman, Mr. Simson, Mr. Simson's friend, not to mention Thurmond, Trix, and Luka D, though I had refused the janitor, I can't think why. And as a bartender, forget about it, I did unto my customers what I did unto mine neighbors. I opposed distinction. Wasn't I lucky to be a slut so long ago? Of course there were always practical considerations, but not to the same degree as recently. Well, ethical too, of course. Once I did sleep with a Samoan guy just because I never had, and that did seem unethical. For race was on every mind at that time. But I didn't mind being a slut. Others seemed to mind it. Once I slept with three brothers, separately, and afterwards the till was robbed and the brothers disappeared. I guess they were outraged. And I learned from that, because it wasn't even my own money, it belonged to Corky.

Ruth did conclude: "You *are* a hippie."

And I concurred, yet I did keep mine counsel, for were locks not enforcers of distinction, and was I not glad to see the lock go on, if truth be told, but what is truth?

"Hello?"

Trix and Luka. Bonnie had been mugged in the subway station and moved to Pennsylvania.

The snow did fall. The wind did blow. I did stuff some clothes in the window leaks. I did make herb tea.

Here was a plan: we could work. We had tried everything else.

We had tried organizing, but this implied distinction. Teaching, too. Who were *we*, to teach *you*? Who were *we*, to organize *you*? Art was naturally out of the question. Art was worst of all. We had considered cartoons, but there were other problems, not even counting money, for, while we wished naturally to be free, readers preferred sales to handouts, which they naturally threw away. Yet that was one of many problems. Hands, you see--that was a problem right there. We were amateurs, naturally. Hands were beyond us. I was the best, yet even in those hands I drew, the fingers reminded certain women of penises. Well! This oppressed those women. I drew mittens on them. This oppressed Doris's girlfriend. Before the year was over I rebelled, took off the mittens, and drew nailpolish. Doris and her girlfriend hit the ceiling. They opposed gloss. I threw in nailpolish remover. The collective threw me out. They disbanded within the month. Trix left on a grant. I went into a depression, which naturally I could not share, and soon after, I had moved to these three rooms, which I also could not share, which was the real problem, for no one wished to be mugged, and these were perilous times, thus, with fear and mugging making mincemeat of so many plans, distinction was everywhere. Chiefly, racism, which dragged so many off without a murmur in those days.

For, much as I found conflict between my opposition to distinctions and my tendency toward charity, which enforced distinctions, just so, many found their need to be free meant the need to express racism freely; otherwise they were hypocrites surely. It was not to avoid expressing racism that they had fought for their own freedom.

And many in those days were allergic to freedom much as, it is said, were the Greeks and early colonists, slavery being the allergic symptom, the idea being, if freedom was not a privilege, it had no worth. So not everyone could be free.

In mine own dreams, race was a frequent subject. In dreams persons changed race. Race would simply move up and down a person's face as a blush is said to. Yet who has seen it?

And much as race passed up and down the faces in my dreams, so fear and racism were in confusion. Where one did end. Where one did start.

Here, Nick the newsman, from whom I did buy lightbulbs, and who had been mugged. He sold papers and sundries from behind an interesting cage. His dog, who had also been mugged, wore a cast. Racism had both by the throat.

Nick: "These colored fellows, watch out."

Me: "Well, certainly, it would vary with the individual."

Nick: "Watch out!"

The dog, too, growled at persons of color.

I dreamed a neighbor did leap through mine wall, the wall being a sort of burlap, chiefly, the neighbor wearing full African traditional costume, chieftain. The symbolism being so

obvious I could recognize its meaning in mine sleep, I jumped in, too, and collared myself: "I will not tolerate this insupportable racism!" That was a good trick.

Yet even threatened by fear, even fear of mine own racism, I could not bring myself to vacate mine home, for the rent was so cheap, even after the loss from mugging, I was perhaps \$100/mo ahead. Yet as I could not find a roommate, I was pretty much in hot water.

I borrowed \$100 from Luther, who owed me \$250. Corky gave me some subbing off the books. \$4/hr was not yet enough, at 4 hrs total weekly work. \$16/wk was not enough. I would need a roommate, certainly. Raoul would pay \$20 to store things. Naturally we did not fuck. I was trying to cut down on discipline. \$64 plus \$20.

Fear waited outside the door as I sat by my bars and worked by hand. The Royal had been stolen, as I believe I mentioned.

Mine uptown friends did hire me to tend bar at private functions. One thing led to another, you see. I did participate in a performance. \$15! I did wonder now if I was cheap or what?

Fear walked me home, past abandoned sofas. And many in this quarter did practice disciplines, as, junkies practiced junkie Tai Chi certainly, for they bent their knees and swayed. A bum did call out after me, "Hey! My friend would like you to sit in his face!"

"Oh! He would be right at home then, for he is a real asshole!"

Fear had forced me to say that. I did tell fear, "Never do that again!" Yet fear had the giggles. "Cut it out! I'm not kidding!" Fear sometimes was good company, on the street.

The hallway was another matter.

Boom! The narrow hall, dark, smelly. Past the Chinese smell. Toward the little courtyard to the back building, with those landings to mine room. Past the dog diarrhea. Footsteps coming up, my terror. Something was in my mouth, something red and slimy. I leaned against the wall. It was just my heart, in mine mouth. Thus my mouth did beat, you see. My mouth went boom when I did leave my room.

"Yer speaking a little louder, I notice." It was my neighbor Rudy, in his hands forty or so records.

Boom!

Behind him in the hall, a dozen records had slid to the floor. Another dozen slid even as we stood.

In my relief that Ruth's boyfriend had not mugged me, I carried two dozen records to his door.

"You kin put 'em on the floor."

He did lock the door. Boom!

The color scheme in his rooms: mustard, black. Corduroy, vinyl. Rubber bands were plentiful, also, industrial shelves at angles of roughly eighty degrees to the floor. There was a stained Danish modern coffee table upon which sat a sardine can, and there were toothpicks here, too. There was mayhem here, also squalor. Furred grease, etc.

Would I like to stay to lunch?

"Where's Ruth?"

"Fucking hippies."

I hesitated, for if we did not exist, then what was Ruth engaged in, some sort of masturbation fantasy? Yet I held my counsel. For I was glad to have some free lunch, nor did I realize that with Rudy, rarely was anything completely free.

Lunch was broiled chicken necks, very interesting. The mustard sofa was covered with a strange sort of balls, which I did ponder, for they were socks.

There was a large cat named Effect. Its brother, Cause, had evidently moved to Grigorius. Effect's belly did sweep the floor of Rudy and Ruth's four rooms, and evidently not much else had swept this floor for, arguably, 4 years. Cause. And effect. Cause. And Effect.

He did have strange manual machines, which served no function. He did keep detailed lists, which he did lose. And I did wonder at these things. For I was very vague. And these things were not vague. They served no purpose. But they were not vague.

Boom! Ruth came home.

Rudy: "I know what you are thinkin' and I didn't."

Me: "How do you know what she is thinking?"

Ruth: "Rudy I don't care if you *did* fuck her."

This was over mine head.

Rudy: "Hers, too. I read her thought balloon."

Ruth: "As far as I'm concerned, you could fuck her and I wouldn't mind. Nor would she, because she is a hippie."

"She's not a hippie!"

"She is a hippie!"

"(I am a hippie.)"

"See, Rudy. She is a hippie."

"There is no hippies."

As it occurred to me that I had overstayed mine welcome I did seize mine opening, the door, and I did exit here, which they did not seem to notice, for they were at it.

"Rudy! What does it matter if she is a hippie!"

"[unintelligible]"

"Rudy! Stop it! I hate it when you do that!"

I lingered outside the door briefly, in hopes of hearing what had so enraged her, but I could not. So back I did go. Over the courtyard. Up mine stairs. To mine home. Boom!

The winds did blow. The snow did fly. I did walk to Unemployment.

Bachelors moved in, Forhan and Sirgash. Mrs. Rodriguez's old uncle was mugged.

Rudy, too, was mugged, his glasses being broken in the process. I did run into Ruth and Rudy in the hall, arguing.

"She wants t' go West. \$250/mo! We c'd be mugged every month fer \$150 (total) and still come out ahead, utilities included."

Ruth: "Yet they did break your glasses."

He planned to mend them with tape.

Ruth: "But there is a commune."

Me: "What is the rent here?"

"\$64."

I began to feel a little faint.

Ruth: "But many share the commune rent. They share all."

Rudy: "!"

"He is afraid I will fuck others."

"She just talks like this to impress ya! She thinks yer high class!"

"I think she's a hippie!"

"She's not a hippie!"

"(I am a hippie.)"

As this began to seem familiar, I made mine exit once more, which as usual they did not notice, for the usual reasons.

"Rudy! Stop it! I told you not to do that! Rudy!!!!!!"

I heard these ejaculations all the way down to the landing below. Yet it did strike me that, as this conversation was occurring in a public space, I could more easily eavesdrop. So I did creep up half a landing. And here it did seem to me I heard a sound that was technically impossible. I hesitated where I stood, hoping to hear it again, for it pleased me strangely. Yet here the door did slam and silence remained. So I did walk, across the courtyard, up the back stairs, pondering the sound, which it would have been technically impossible for me to hear. For the sound was: "!@#%^^&*()_+!"

I did dream I was seeking my way in Paris. The language was no problem, but the currency baffled me. I could talk the talk, you see. I could not make the change. Happily, through discipline, a leap could turn into a kind of levitation, which upon waking I understood to be art, which was, as I believe I said, out of the question, for art underlined distinctions. It served no purpose. No one wanted it.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Would I like to earn some money?"

It is my neighbor Rudy.

Boom!

Carrying things.

"Er."

"Ruth said you could fuck me. She will not care if you do heavy work fer pay."

Well, he certainly had come to the right place. So I did follow him down the stairs, down the hall, and to a Chevelle parked outside. A string was affixed to the trunk, and that around to the backseat. By pushing the seat, a square of metal could be seen, which in turn could be pulled by a string. In this way, access to the trunk was possible, for the lock was jammed. Rudy did remove various bags, boxes, and records, which I did carry back down the hall and up the stairs to 2C.

"Would I like to settle?"

Boom!

I had worked 40 minutes. At \$3/hr, this came to \$2. Lunch was free.

"Er, we c'd barter!"

We did approach the couch. Then my heart began to beat, boom, boom, boom! For I wondered if he planned to exchange sex for mine labor. Yet when he did move the sofa, baring a poster of Poland, it boomed louder. Nor was it necessarily mine heart where all the action was.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! He did remove the poster, revealing, behind the poster, a door. To be honest, it was mine vulva. *BOOM!* He opened the door, and behind the door was a closet. He had a closet behind the sofa. I did feel faint. "For I did spend mine childhood in closets."

"That 'd explain it!"

He did unhook the closet door. There was a smell of lint and metal within.

"Have a look."

I did approach. There was a disassembled meat slicer, apparently, also a Buttoneer. An unrolled sleeping bag with broken rubber, and there was more rubber.

"Keep lookin'!"

And out fell cheeseboards, backgammon, barbecue tongs, a cheese slicer, a Kitchen Magician, raincoats, a really stupid parka, stupid boots, various nylon shirts, a bedboard, a camera, glue, shoe polish, etc.

"Looky here!"

A large, ochre tablecloth, gritty with filth.

"Jackpot!"

Then mine vulva did swell so big I thought it would fair burst.

"How much did this cost?"

"I traded fer it."

"What did you trade?"

He did reflect. "A car."

"Rudy!"

He was giggling like a schoolgirl. "You should have seen the car!"

For at bottom, weighing thirty-two pounds, too big, too heavy, too old to steal--under the lintbrushes and an embroidered ochre tablecloth--an antique Royal upright. It had a Magic Margin.

"Give a thief a hernia," said Rudy, admiringly. "An' fer what?"

Now we all know the story where the one she truly loves is the one who waits to fuck her. This is not that story. I fucked Rudy on the spot. Ruth said we could.

Unfortunately, I could not get the typewriter, as it was worth more than mine labor. So. "You c'd come down and use it in th' closet. Bring y'r own paper," he added, for, as Ruth, who arrived soon, pointed out, he was so cheap.

"We did fuck, too," I explained.

"What did he charge you for that?"

Rudy said, "It was fairly cheap."

"See, that is all he understands. How did you like the tail, by the way?"

I had forgotten all about it. First things first.

"See, Rudy, I don't mind. I said you could! If it's okay with me it should be okay with you."

"Did I say *you* could?"

"But you *did*."

"You said I could."

I suggested: "Should I fuck Ruth?" I was getting a little tired of this by now. "Rudy, could Ruth fuck me?"

But Ruth didn't fuck women. I said I would show her how. We did. It wasn't all that

much fun. Except for Rudy. I got Julius to stay in mine home and went to the monastery again, for I had the feeling a tragedy was unfolding in which I rilly had a walk-on role. Kneeling, as it happened.

I could see that Ruth wished to be free. Rudy's chiseling got on her nerves. Rudy did know the cost of everything, and it is said this is the mark of a cynic, yet Rudy was not a cynic, not exclusively. He was mainly cheap. And it was this, truly, and not the sex nor even the paid work that caught my attention. Well, the closet.

For to me, sex was not such a big deal, as sex I had aplenty. Nor was freedom, for I had been free for some time. I was not quite as free as I had been before, for I was a coward. So I was nearly free. Still, I was free enough to know freedom was just another word for nothing left to lose--briefer, catchier, you see why it entered the lingo. When the monks threw me out this time--for uncleanliness, I believe--I came home to find that mine rooms had been mugged again. Yet everything remained. For I had nothing left of any resale value.

So I did think me, if free was nothing left to lose, I had about had it with being free. I did go knocking on Rudy's door for heavy work, \$3/hr.

Cheap was something left to lose.