



Weird City

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I saw her again today.

I had just been to score and was riding the bus home stonedly distracted, staring outwards, seeing nothing. The bus had stopped at lights when her vague form caught my eye through the condensation of a take-away window, as she lazily drew a finger picture in the moisture on the window. I wanted to bathe in her aura.

The light changed, and the bus grumbled off familiarly.

ON THE TOWN

ACT ONE begins...

There is a *screeeeeching* of tire, a horn pARrrp-ps, a bus rumb-b-b-bles by. Main Street throngs. Suzie Q turns on to bugger all on the box and finally gets something down her throat; the old greek on the register in the Afterhours store is rushed but never unpleasant; and a grizzly bear in a mussed-up raincoat grrOWls a flurry of profanities at the neck of a bottle. Local watering holes already teem with a myriad of fish, burbling with many tongues. The time is dusk.

A serious filmgoer rides the Underground home, a mystified passenger in the realm of Great Deliberation having been to the five o'clock showing of Jean-Paul Georgeringo's 'Emile et Emile'. Superlative camerawork, enigmatic script, devoid of emotion or soul. Very Georgeringoesque. Character and narrative. The passenger sitting opposite reads a book entitled How To Avoid Embarrassing Eye-contact On The Tube.

ENTER The Pub alone. People return looks; but no one is there. Beer. Comfy seat. A grizzly bear is put out, grrr ... where are they? Carl arrives late with a total stranger. Dave couldn't make it, again. The stranger's name is Instantly Forgettable. He works. A funny story about a recent trip to Townbythesea to watch the reds play the blues in The Mickey Mouse Trophy. Another?

Inches wide of the mark! And the pin-up boy of soccer puts his head to his hands. There's a defender down injured. Well, Jim, what do you make of it? A hot, fruity drink and a meat pie would be nice.

The Pleasant Restaurant kitchens are at their busiest NOW dive into the basin for pearl handle sharpknife. Chef's juggling with too many pans. The sophistry of chat bubbles livelily through the restaurant. A Customer passes a leatherbound menu to Raymond le Waiter, then re-enters social intercourse with a charming companion.

EXIT The Pub, after a couple. Carl gives some folding to a young grizzly with a sign:

PLEASE LOOK AFTER THIS BEAR

Across The Way looms a hallowed Venue. Giant pandas are glowering at a queue of ticketed punters pushing to get a glimpse of Golden Larynx. WE use the guest list. Noise from The Half-done Support grumbles through the lobby like a miserly elephant. Instantly Forgettable gets the beers in.

INTERMISSION. The theatre crowd bustles out a-hushed buzz, performance in progress: there is barely time for a cigarette.

There was a time when theatre was patronised and Weird City was confined to a few square miles of customs wall. Yet the River Time flows with trade. Hamlets made connections and alien views expanded the perspective. People communicate. There came new science and art, alternative philosophies, plague, xenophobia and war. People communicate. An unremarkable history.

NOW a couple of particularly shaggy grizzlies cuff and snarl at each other outside the Offy on Arkham Road; Randulf Jefferson III showers down after a tough game of squash with his lawyer; and a civil servant drones a fittingly dull tune on the Big Karaoke Night Out. The evening has a thousand and one stars in its firmament.

Lenny Marx ENTERs and begins his routine at the Komodie Klub: “Good evening, ladies and gentlemen ... I must say it’s a pleasure to be here tonite ... I must say it because the manager of this fine establishment has a gun trained on me from a concealed location somewhere nearby ... so it’s a pleasure to be here tonite ... in fact, it’s a pleasure to be anywhere ... seriously ... until last week, I was being held hostage by a desperate band of Christian fundamentalists ... they tried to indoctrinate me with the traditional Christian virtues ... sanctimonious airs, child abuse and flagellation ... and they tortured me mercilessly ... every day, I was strapped to a chair and forced to watch The God Channel ... and, every night, I was locked in a cell with a pleasant vicar ... it was horrific ...”

A sea of bodies thrashes and flails about a thrust stage as Golden Larynx launch into (My Baby’s Got) Big Feet. Instantly Forgettable is wrapt in half-dancing. Carl thinks they’re crap.

“They’re too heavy!”

“What?”

“BLOODY METAL!!!”

“What?”

The song ends, and the unknown Goth who’s been rifling the record collection gets his selection on. Sharon dances alone. The doorbell rings ... and several new arrivals whoo-oo-oo and frolic as they ENTER with the serious intention of partying down. Where’s the corkscrew? Julie and the two Mikes share a spliff and chat in the side room. Mary frets: her party is beginning to warm up.

Two sweaty bodies are in smouldering congress on the 7th floor of

Casanova point, the furniture is disturbed and limbs akimbo as they move to the rhythm of a primal voice, they savour the flavour of one another's juices, as well as some additions from the refrigerator, and ride the undulating pelvic waves, jolly roger flapping aboard the good ship Liberator, they lithely entwine with the tenderest feelings, sensing the deepest impulse of the other, one plus one can equal three, and this present fuck is one wholly mother, wrapt in the sacred matrix of creation, in touch with life, the universe, the city exciting about them, in crevices and on tongues, lit in neon, the electrical discharge of simultaneous orgasm.

CURTAIN

A Post-coital Cigarette ...

The theatre crowd have gone home, the final encore has echoed, Sport Stadium is dark NOW it is getting late. Establishments are closing down, and people are going to bed with a cocoa. Outside The Cross a grizzly bear shivers in a cardboard cave. But over at Mary's place the party is in full effect ... and somewhere someone is being burgled ...

Me? I'm looking for the EXIT.

THE BIG DRIP

It wuz a sloppy cold watery gray soup ova day, only fit fer fungus nd toads. And I wuz in it.

Sum fatcat frum the far cide o town ud summond me ter iz palace in cloudland fer n intraview nd guaranteed fee fer just showin up. The fatcatz naym wuz Randulf Jefferson III – stocks nd bonds, President o Life – the kinda guy oo put the I in extreeemly rich. The word woz e wantd me ter chase down a missin sumthin, yer standard case o lost nd fownd. And wen the dollar sine beckons, daddy cums.

The prospect ova bigwad frum Jefferson ud opend me day wi smiley teeth, but a broken motor nd a serious thunderstorm ud soon turnd all ter frowns.

Great gobbits ov rayn wuz poundin Weird City az I walkd the longmile frum the termibus ter the Life Corporation, drenchin waives o windwhipd icewater lashin inter me fraym, needlin inter the fabrik o me clothin nd epidermis till I wuz all wrinkl'd folds o weather red-end skin. I wuz in a saw mood nd cursin over me decision ter use shanksz mare insted ova cab; nd every sodden step forwad, thru that muther ova storm, me cholera woz gettin otter.

A smart guy oughta know ter avoyd walkin in the monsoon season.

By the time I approachd the cloudcapd phallotowers o the Life Corporation, I wuz soakin wet nd developin an empathy fer fish, pissd on nd pissd off, nd in no fraym o mind fer n intraview. And, as I stud in front ov eyedrollic doubledoors wi the luridneon LIFE CORP sign

flashin luminus red abuv, I wuz aware that the eminent Mr Jefferson wuz in fer a poor first impresshun nd me appoyntment wuz gonna be a washout.

But, I went anyway.

In a fowl mood nd drippin I enterd Life, pushd thru itz doors by n eave o wind n water, inter the sanitized atomsphere ova receptionarium. Before I cud blink I wuz grabd by two security guards in serj, wi LIFE GUARD printd on their caps, oo pushd me splat agaynst a wall. I felt a wak in the small o me bak, nd ruff ands patd me down wi the squelch o palm on waterlogd cloth.

"He's clean." sed a voyce, fellowd by n echain peal ov neanderthal laffter. The Life guards sawnterd off, clumpin their heavyboots.

Confyoozd nd soppin wet, I pulld meself together enuff ter drip errantly across the shyny waxpolishd floor o the awesumly chandelierd receptionarium, inter the gaze ova curvy receptionist, lollin behynde cownter. I tuk a damp cigarette owt nd lent forward, over the lowlevel pine RECEPTION cownter, uz littel needels o water pitterpatterd off me onter pine.

"Gotta match?" I askd, dryly.

"I'm afraid that this is a no smoking building." wuz the bored drawl ova reply.

"Proibly wudna lit, anyways." I confesd, removin the sogarette frum me mouth nd bak inter itz floppy packit.

I scand the receptionarium, takin the time ter catchup wi meself nd compoze me thawts.

"Interestin security yerv got ere," I sed, starin at a Life Guard in

the bakgrownd, archin iz sole, “just ad a couplov yer doormen abuse me rites as a citizen.”

The receptionist wuz unimpressd, “This is the centre of the civilized universe, sir. Security must be maintained.”

“I wudda dun sumthin, but I av a thing abowt getin the crap beaten owt o me.”

“Was there something you wanted, or have you just popped in to shelter from the rain?”

You wudda thunk she wud want ter shoot sum breez, sittin rownd all day doin nuthin.

Never mind.

“The name z McGuffin. I got a meetin wi yer boss.”

She ran a lazy finger over the list ov expecteds, “Ah, the private dick.”

“At yer service.”

Er altitude vizibly softend wi me list status confirmd, nd er ole body relaxd inter the erotomotion o fluid curves wich only the trooly bootiful possess.

“If you take a seat over there,” er face caym close ter myn as she poynted, “someone will be along shortly.”

I left a trayl ov shoeshaypd miniponds walkin ter the indicaytd seats, as the Life Guard stepd up behynde the receptionist nd whispurrd sumthin in er ear.

She giggld.

"Mr. McGuffin?" rhetoricly askd a yung suit, oo ad arrived uz me escort

in a twinkld eye, leavin me no time ter even ring owt me damp socks, “If you will come with me, please.”

We tuk a larjchrome elevater ter the uppest floor, nd then down n implawsibly quiet corridor, where the squeltch o me feet echoed like a badly playd accordiun. I cringed insyde. The guy escortin me kept iz mouth in nootral all the way, till e opend a door at the end.

"If you will wait in here, please."

Insyde, it wuz a plush WAITING ROOM fer fat executivs, an impresshun confirmd by a bald man in a tasty suit, smokin a nastee cigar ... the smoke got up me noze ... I ad n ot flush, nd, for a secund-nd, nd, for a sec, nd ... getin it togethuh, I breethd deeply nd slo o o owly scand the room. Nee-hi glasstables wi copies o Machievellian Business Times nd Big Car Monthly on em, sevral comftably padd lether chairs, n ugly payntin on the wall ter me right, oak dubbledoors ter me left, brown carpit, brown walls, brown ceilin, the bald man, iz ceegar ... nd a skirt cumin thru the dubbledoors, extendin a formal smyle in me direction.

I wuz gobsmakd.

The skirt lookd exactly like the receptionist. Just so, like a clone.

I wuz gobsmakd.

The saym baby blues, the saym sexy curl o the lip nd ironic intonation.

“Mr. McGuffin?” she ironically intoned.

“Ever ad the feelin yerv bin sumwhere before?” I askd, as much ter meself as er.

“That’s funny, you’re the second person who’s said that to me

today.”

“Im ere ter see Jefferson.”

“I know.” she sed patronyzingly, “Would you care to towel down while you’re waiting? You seem to be dripping on the carpet.”

Before I cud think ova witty reply, there wuz a faynt buzz frum er intercom.

“Mr. Jefferson will see you now.”

I wuz usherd inter n ornayt, capayshuss office, wi lether furnityer nd goldd walls. The skirt closed the dubbledoors frum withowt.

Standin at the far end o the room wuz Randulf Jefferson III hisself, lookin out ova big piece o dubbleglazin at the badtemperd storm throwin itz weight arownd outside.

"Only fit for fungus and toads." e mutterd, turnin frum the window.

E walkd ter a drinks cabinet withowt sayin a word, filld two glassez wi wot lookd like scotch, nd offerd me one, "Good for the chest. It'll warm you up."

I tuk the drink.

"Well, Mr. McGuffin ...” Jefferson pawsd, like eed just rememberd that e wuz ment to do the shoppin, not that a man like Jefferson ever duz the shoppin, “Erm ... you were recommended to me by a friend of yours; my legal adviser, Benedict Mason. He assured me you would be discreet."

I sed nuthin.

"I believe you have been told that your services are required to

track down an employee, missing, along with a hundred thousand credits and one of my antique teddy bears. Well," iz tone implyd a confidunce it didnt inspyre, "frankly, you were misinformed. Benedict and I concocted a little ruse in order to throw the Life Corporation staff off the scent. We wish to avoid undue chatter in the lower echelons, you understand."

E lookd me strait in the eye, "You see, my wife ..." nd iz voyce trayled off withowt compleetin the frayz.

We both stud there not sayin nuthin. All a bit weerd.

There wuz a ratatatatatat at the door, nd Benedict Mason stuk iz edd thru.

Jefferson gestured, "Come in, Ben."

E advanced inter the room, noddin formal greetins, "Mr. Jefferson." nod, "Harry." nod.

It ud bin whellin up, nd it ad ter cum out. I sneezd, nd then I sneezd agayn, nd then I sneezd two sneezes bakterbak, nd then I wishd I ad an ankerchief.

Jefferson gayv me a wry look az e pourd anuther rownd o drinks.

I snifd.

Ben opend iz briefcase, "I have those papers you wanted on the Nagasaki takeover, Mr Jefferson; and a standard contract for Mr. McGuffin to sign."

"Good, good. And the fat lady?"

"She'll sing."

They both tuk a belt ov licker.

Ben was lookin at but not talkin ter me, "Have you briefed him?"

“About to.” Jefferson replyd.

“Harry,” sed Ben, “you remember the Arnold case from a couple of years back?”

Me edd wuz jently spinnin like a paper windmill in a soft breez. I wuz findin it a strayn ter keep up. I ad ter think. The Arnold case was workin up evidunce fer divorce. So Jefferson wantd a divorce. A chaynj in the job descriphun, but fyne by me: I bin arownd enuff dirt diggin in me time, nd yer find a lot o money in the gutter. But e wuz askin fer muchmuchmore than just taykin pics nd follerin iz missus, cos the Arnold job wuz a fit up, craftsman built by yours trooly.

“I did not become the head of the Life Corporation through being shy and retiring, Mr. McGuffin.” Jefferson ad a fayce ov stone, “When I desire something, I take it by whichever means is most effective. Some people say that I am misanthropic, but those people are simply envious or, worse, naïve.” e seemd ter suddenly dominayt the room, “I do not want my wife to walk away with a single penny when I divorce her, Mr. McGuffin.”

A gild o blaksmiths ud startd poundin in me edd ter the toon o the mickey finn symphony, me mouth wuz dry nd temples ot.

"You don't look too well, Harry?"

A felt a sharp jab in me stomache frum the poyson tab ... I cud see their ugly faces watchin me, uz I fell ter the floor.

Then there wuz blak.

I faydd bak in ... me edd wuz swimin the channel, nd a guy with a wite coat nd leer wuz leanin over me with a big needel, "Just relax," e purrd,

"and everything will be all right."

Nuthin, not even dreems.

"How is he, Sarah?"

I wuz halfawake nd incaypable o movin, but aware enuff ter know I wuz brim full o drugs. It wuz Ben Mason's voyce, nd a womanz voyce wuz anserin im: "He was thrashing around a few minutes ago, mumbling something about fungus and toads. (Don't ask me.) He seems to have settled down now though. I was about to give him a sedative to make sure."

"Is he fit to move?" Ben askd, "I need to get rid of him. Jefferson's chewing my head off."

Get rid? An intrestin use ov words that ricoshayd rownd me edd like a pinball, rididridid ridrid rid ...

Ther wuz a faynt rattel ov metal, a couplov lite footsteps, nd a tingl in me arm as another sleeper was layd on the track ov me vein. I eddd down a tunnel.

"Your friend, isn't he?" It wuz a gud poynt.

"Bit of advice: don't mix friends and business."

There wuz n endless line ov greasy men in wite coats shakin ands wi me, in turn, only they began ter shake too agressivly; and then they began ter shayk me by the shoulders nd kik me legs ...

I opend me eyes.

Sittin at the foot ov me bed, a buxom blonde with baby blues and cum-ter-papa curves wuz starin at me intently.

"Hello." she whispurrd huskily.

I wudda anserd but it wuz takin all me strenth ter keep me eyelids open, nd I rekond she wuz better ter look at than ter talk ter. Besydes, she did plenty o talkin on er own.

"I'm Gloria Jefferson, Mr. McGuffin. The wife of Randulf Jefferson." she ad a quzzicull expreshun on er fayce, "Do you think I look like the property of a wealthy man?"

(With them enhancements?) I thawt.

"It's not how I would describe myself, but my opinion seems to count for very little."

She lookd over er shoulder, wi the nervussness o sumone expectin introoshun, "Tell me. Why did my husband send for you, Mr. McGuffin, a private eye?"

I tryd to anser, but only a dry retch ov air caym owt ov me mouth.

"Let me get you some water." she sed softly, risin up nd owt ov me site.

I cud visualize the sexy hip sashay frum the klikclak of highhigh heels soundin across n ard floor: there wuz the rattel nd clink ov stackd glassez, the hiss o water pressure thru pipes, nd the treblin glug ov a receptacull fillin up. She klikclakd bak inter view carryin a glass o water; and delicatly tipd the lickwid contents inter me mouth, pressin er flesh agaynst myn in the process. I gulped.

"Does that feel better?"

I didnt say nuthin, but me fayce must ov spoken encyclopedic volyoums. She allowd erself a bootiful smyle, nd then askd the pressin question agayn: "Why did my husband send for you, Mr. McGuffin?"

I croakd like a quiet frog wi laryngitis, "E wants ter get rid."

The weight ov me eyelidz woz proovin too much, nd they startd ter lower a curtain on the seen, az anuther wuman walkd in.

"Oh! Mrs Jefferson?" surpryzed, she sed in a voyce that identifyd er as Sarah, "And our patient's eyes are open? Has he said anything?"

Az I driftd inter the voyd, I cud ear Gloria Jefferson say, quietly,

"No."

It wuz better than it ad bin; but just enuff ter mayk me conshuss, awayk ter nauseatin aches. I felt bad. I groand nd rolld over in serch ov n eloosiv comftabel positshun, rollin me eyes open nd shut az I threshd me limbs. Thru the blur, I cud sware I saw Friday, sittin bedsyde; so I forced me swimin edd ter tayk a secund look.

"How are you, Harry?" Friday askd in that honeydew voyce ov erz wich mayks me wanna jump er bones evrytime she speeks, "You look like shit."

I laffd, nd then grimaced wi payn.

"Take it easy." she placed er and on myn nd smiled caringly, "You've been seriously ill."

"He doesn't know where he is, Friday. He's been away with the fairies since yesterday." It wuz Ben Mason, oo must av bin creepin about the bakgrownd sumwhere, "You're in the Life Corp Infirmary, Harry. You've been a bit out of it. Caught a chill from the rain. More like pneumonia."

"I told you to take a cab when I saw that thunderstorm, didn't I? But Harry knows best. Well, you're going to do exactly what I say from

now on."

I wuz discharjd inter the affectshunnate care o Friday, oo woz fully intent on pamperin me bak ter ealth.

Randulf Jefferson III wuz eventually divorced in n acrimoniuss court case. E ud bin twotimin iz missus wi sumone calld Melanie (or sumthin like that). I supplyd no evidunce.

That wuz one helluva paycheck I missd owt on, nd I dont think Ben ul ever forgiv me fer tipin off Gloria.

Still, Friday moovd in wile I wuz in recuvvery nd never moovd out, nd I wudnt chaynj that fer a thing.

Life, go figure.