

## Two Stories

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A Promise of Carapace    :: Ruin

### A Promise of Carapace

From the undifferentiated chaos of his bottom drawer porn collection came "Total Babe." No real woman had all the things he required, so from the tinsels of tits, cunts, clits, and tongues cut from Penthouse he'd constructed a kind of human Christmas tree, his beacon through the cold winter woods of Ordinary Girlhood. He'd sat at his rickety kitchen table for many long nights after classes snipping, styling, varying the pneumatics of enchantment until he'd achieved a hierarchy of joy that roiled at the intersection of fragmentation and reformation: the red hair (against a green pool table) of the Pet of Month for June, the smokey, kohl-lined eyes of Miss November, the lush nipples of May pasted on the ample tits of March, the cute cunt of August between the wide open thighs of July. Finally, in the midnight light of the black and white TV atop the refrigerator, he kicked back exhausted, satisfied and horny in the presence of his virtuoso declaration. "Total Babe," although made of paper, was perfectly toned and amplified, like a bell ringing in a blue summer sky. He himself couldn't believe the infinite range of his repertoire. The soft planes of slick silk had already begun transmogrifying the grid.

But, alas, there was always the sadness after the morning after. If at home he was the connoisseur, the boulevardier possessed of bold and unusual motions, on campus he was the horror of African Dance class. He looked like Han Solo with a stuffed-up nose. He had big pores and allergies galore. His favorite expression was, "Well, shock the monkey!" His favorite song, "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway." His idea of mood music, anything by Eno. His acquired belief system, vaguely Hindu. Secretly, he'd had enough of the arty chicks at school, but paid lip service to their surrealism because it got him occasional access to a fishy recess or two.

Once, it almost was two: they'd been sitting on the floor against the hallway wall, doing handstands between classes.

"Upholstered and trussed," he thought, "in an evocation of Renaissance proportion."

(He thought but didn't say; his unspoken language was his own, an imputed cubistic entanglement implied by something as simple as the planes of a kitten's face. His speech was elegant in a Machine Age way, but composed of innuendoes that most folks just didn't know. So, for the most part, it was eyes open, mouth closed.)

Their salacious buoyancy gave him an immediate hard-on, especially when they fell onto each other, giggling and tickling. He imagined the drag of breast against breast, suppleness melting obdurate outline. After class they all disco-danced, and somehow he got them back to his flat. There, he hoped, their perverse natures and deep interiors would be revealed, their layers of accretions and striations exposed by their own nimble fingers. Indeed, they would keel toward him as he sat on the couch, positioning their nipples south. And indeed, from the get-go, they aired their interstices to the window, to some guy going by outside, who right away knew what to do, and did it, right there in the tall streetlight's tallow glow.

When they turned their attentions to each other, and crawled across the floor together, he thought they were vying for their hands to be tied. But they stopped, laughed, and demanded the kind of cash he didn't have.

"I bet that guy outside'll buy," one of them said. Silence. And so they put on their clothes and went home.

He told himself they'd given him more than he'd ever hoped for. His flirtation with Buddhism would get him through if he ran into them again at school, or on the avenue. But a week later he figured, Fuck it--he was master of the day after tomorrow, he knew how to read the street while getting a handle on the night before. He could easily acquire the radiance of an absent jewel; he had already succeeded in employing pictorial taxonomy for his own audience. Now it was just a question of augmentation: iterating rectals with angles to create rectangles; fulfilling, like Dr. Frankenstein, the promise of carapace.

The new improved "Total Babe" could be ready by Friday--"Freedom Friday," he termed it: a time consecrated to the sexual insouciance that most women neither understood nor respected. He would give full reign to his natural fecklessness with a top restaurant, a fine wine, a good friend. A very good friend. He would savor the feeling of revenge against them.

On Friday he hurried home from class as fast as the bus could get him there. He even sat in the front, to get there faster. Working the whole scene up in his mind, he walked in whistling, tossed his coat on the couch, threw open the fridge, ripped open a TV dinner, shoved it in the oven. He stripped, jumped in the shower, and soon into his mind arrived Total Babe. They were in the bar of that restaurant from the Penthouse pictorial of two deprived waitresses, and she

was in a little champagne-colored spaghetti strap number, her sugary tiers suggesting confection. They were curled around each other on barstools like sea snails, they were lifting glasses of expensive chablis, she was running her leg up his leg--in short, Total Babe was steaming right into the pocket as planned. And as for those boring art chicks and castrating bitch-goddesses . . . just empty suspensions over a field free of gravity.

After the shower he ate the TV dinner, smiling like a sardonic gardener, Total Babe right across from him, attuned to his every notion. No matter the ripped linoleum, the broken tiles, the pantry door that never shut--they were where soft delineations prevailed, and her every gesture encouraged adventure. And once they were done and out of there, into a cab on a course toward the sun, she was as placid and familiar to him as a luscious still life, exciting any residual uncertainty with a tongue to his ear. While still in the cab she was peeling off layers of extrapolating strata; he didn't think he could wait. So he turned on Eno's "Music for Airports" and brought Major Babe out of the coat closet and into the light of day: the old collage of Penthouse parts now affixed to a blonde wig, a couch pillow shaped like two legs spread, and a Playtex nurser filled with warm milk. He set Major Babe on the bed, and stretched out on his side next to her. He was already aroused, and the feeling of freedom made him bolder. It was, after all, his nature to transpierce the plane, to eviscerate space, and Major Babe was his juicy still life sucked straight from a painting. She was opening herself wider, like a slimy sea flower. He sucked harder. He rolled over on her. But suddenly . . .

"Gooch," he moaned. "Gooch, you bastard, you did it again!"

. . . it was the image of Penthouse publisher Bob Guccione, true purveyor of his tailor-made desire, that floated into the probity. And then it was he and Gooch lifting glasses of expensive Chablis in the bar of the restaurant from the pictorial, and then on a long yacht vaulting over some sea, and then . . . Why wouldn't that image leave?

"Oh, Major Babe, you're a great piece of ass. Major Babe . . ."

But even with Major Babe writhing beside him, he can't let go of the idea. He and "The Gooch" are best buddies now. There's a smell of cologne, a flash of gold against chest hair. And now he's coming, his ass pumping.

"Gooch, you bastard, you fucker, you mother-fucker, you fuck! You fuck! You fuck!" he yells out as he comes in his hand cupped under him, and for the final vivid minute he flips Major Babe over to see those big soft helpless tits, but he can't, because it's the Gooch, it's still the Gooch grinning, and he's sobbing, "Gooch, Gooch . . . fucking Gooch, stupid fucking Gooch . . . I hate you mother-fucker, you stupid mother-fucking-fucker!"

Sobbing over and over, his stuffy Han Solo nose running, he pushes Major Babe off the bed and flips over, covering himself with the worn brown chenille spread that was his as a kid.

Ruin

"Only that which is without purpose can be truly beautiful"

They had that saying on a plaque hanging over their front door. They were the ruined nobility of rural Pennsylvania. The matriarch, from whom Clara Bow had stolen the whole "It Girl" thing, had a pin set in her eye to keep it inside the socket. She was deaf, and never spoke. Her two daughters were friendly enough, though. One of them had the newspaper photo from her debut pasted to a piece of foil trimmed with paper lace and pinned like a corsage to her ballgown.

"Clara Bow was once my mother's highly unreliable woman-servant," said the younger daughter, sadly. A long silence followed. We looked around nervously and thought we saw the remains of a cat skeleton next to the spittoon.

"There's not much to do here anymore," said the older daughter. "We could go sit in the garage where there's more light."

We wondered why they didn't just buy more light bulbs. The younger daughter said she was going to bring out her little girl to amuse us while she and her sister sat on the couch and smoked. As if on cue, a not-so-little girl rounded the corner from the hallway and entered the living room. I handed her the tiny colorful paper balls I'd brought.

"Fragile objects from an opera trunk?" she mused, then smashed them together in her hands and let them fall to the floor.

"That's what ya gotta do!" she shrieked. I was so mad I bent down, picked up the balls and pushed them into her face like James Cagney in that grapefruit movie. Her mother got up and shuffled her out of there quick. Then the patriarch showed up, wearing a kilt--black watch. We were certain he'd been beautiful once, like John Derek as Joshua in "The Ten Commandments." He reached in between the folds of his kilt and took a machete out. The older daughter stood up

and said, "Oh well, caw caw caw and all. That's a saying from the old Lackawaxan nightclub circuit. Let's repair to the garage!"

In the garage we sat together under the one lightbulb, at an old formica table covered with garden implements and pornographic magazines. The patriarch entered, brandishing his machete.

"I got my gimpy leg in the Africa Corps," he said, breathless from his efforts. "But that don't keep me from my gaming."

"Oh," I said, feigning interest, "you were in World War 2?"

"Nope! Fooled ya! That was the Crimea! So, where's your mousy messiah now, Moses?"

He was John Derek! Who else could've riffed so effectively on that line spoken by Edward G. Robinson as Dathan in "The Ten Commandments"? But now John Derek was swinging that machete around like a chef at a Japanese steakhouse. I had to get us out of there. I had to think fast. I mentally rifled through everything I knew about him, from his marriage to Ursula Andress to his divorce from Bo.

"You know, my diseased ovary resembles an explosion of teeth," I said. That did it. He stopped swinging, and bent his head. His tears fell like rain onto the cold dirt floor.