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Gods

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Gods

Laughing like a bunch of jackals feasting on a newly mauled wildebeest, we can't help but insert shrieks of tickle-insinuated ripples, but thank God the dark burgundy red is underneath us or else I'd probably fall. We probably look like a couple of blazing Greek gods, Apollo and Daphne united on a sofa. Something out of a Michael Jackson music video.

I pull my hands out from underneath her black skirt, and she quickly composes her auburn hair as her legs deftly retreat from my lap. Having just completed a naughty transaction, we notice the Rolling Stones resonating from the kitchen.

"I was round when Jesus Christ had his moment and doubt of pain!" she belted, Mick Jagger her accompanist blaring from the kitchen. The banshee in her pleated blouse sitting next to me kept it going, I'm sure the way Mick would have wanted it in '68.

I turn my head up from the coffee table and she's squinting at me like I'm shining a floodlight in her face. Her pearly grill stretches from one ear to the other, Marlboro Light in her left hand, her right arm wrapped across her torso and the pressure of her arm pulls up the sky-blue blouse revealing a dimpled navel, saucy and chic, so I shake my head hunched over and try to roll up the Twenty that just unraveled in my hand and do this and reclaim my high.

"Natalie, dear, it's 'Had his moment of doubt and pain.' So get it right or Mick will turn over in his grave," I declare, sniffing in the good, holding the Twenty up to the light behind me to see if I can find the stripe.

"Mick isn't dead, you idiot, I thought you knew so much about music, mister!" she fires back, flippantly smacking my arm.

"Yeah but he'll be fucking dead soon, he's an old motha these days," I say and wave my right hand at something invisible. I bum a cigarette and once again we settle into coke chat.

"So what the hell—"

She coughs lightly and I start thumbing at a veiny bulge on my hand, then pushing at my index knuckle. I flash on the image of a girl I heard about in high school who snorted a line of Ajax for five bucks, and then the whole right side of her face apparently turned purple, blood poured out from her nostril like a faucet. She wound up in the ER and, I suspect, in rehab. Stupid flaky bitch. Thinking about it sent a slight shiver through me.

"What've you been doing man, we haven't hung in so long, and this girl now you've got? We miss you back at the office," she finally gets it out this time, leaning back against the burgundy. I grow irritably impatient listening to her bungling of Sympathy for the Devil.

"Yeah, well, uh," my mind falls off the edge, half-attentively in mid-sentence while trying to remember the name of the publishing company where I just finished a year while doing a graduate co-op, working for Natalie. All the moisture begins receding from my mouth and all the subtleties of the conversation suddenly, overwhelmingly expand in my face, so I take a few breaths.

Natalie sits ensconced on the burgundy, apxious for an answer like a receptionist waiting for me to tell her my name and appointment time.

I spring up to go to the kitchen and take a drag, some ash falls onto the hardwood but I don't care, I want to hear something else, some hip-hop maybe. The dim kitchen is much more forgiving than the living room, which I quickly realize is due to the fact that the triad of floor lamps are the only thing illuminating the entire studio.

"Not a damn thing, just working on the masters, you know, it'd be nice to be a managing editor instead of a copy editor all the time," I finally echo from the kitchen, stunned by the dry mundanity of my answer. I'm not sure she hears me, but her hair bobs and I guess she's nodding. I start shuffling through

Run-DMC, Roots, RJD2, OutKast and some nondescript burned cds. Joni Mitchell's Blue surfaces in my hands and it glows with an inviting charm, but I opt for OutKast's 1998 Aquemini, always choice. I look up and shout. My heart skips a beat and I can feel my pulse racing.

"Drink?"

"What's that?" says Natalie, smoke shooting the crease of her lips.

I take a few steps toward her, stop, and now the sizzling particle train 8-ball we just snorted is rushing through my limbs and I almost jump for no reason.

"You want a drink or anything?"

"Definitely! You have any sour?"

"Probably," though I have no idea.

"Whiskey sour! God I haven't had one forever," her eyes ebullient with excitement, like a child on Christmas.

I backpedal into the kitchen, pivot on my heels and begin dancing, following my convex reflection in a brandy glass on the counter and notice my forehead resplendent with sweat...*Dancing with the voice tethered to the speakers in his trepidation, stifling a congenial condensation in my ears, and Natalie's quivering lips comment on how luxe and cozy, yet pastiche and urban the studio looks and I can't help but lick at the skin cleft on my upper lip where the stubble comes through and yeah I just shaved it this morning, but I like it just fine.*

Big Boi's ominous, soothing voice tells me of how he first met his SpottieOttieDopalicious Angel in Atlanta, and the voice materializes, shoves down on my shoulders so I squat now in front of a cupboard and it's just a beautiful thing. Okay okay, drag.

Exhale.

Make the fucking drink, you can do this okay? Okay. Come on girl I know you know what you want with that sour. Yeah, keep it glassy and keep it campy. Let's dive, and I dive into the cupboard. Oh, Natalie.

"Eh-yeah, I have-a some sour," I say with pseudo-German-Bohemian accent. Big Boi and I fetch the rest of the ingredients. *Rocks glass, yeah. Ice...okay good, now: J&B and a dash of sour, oh! And here's your lovely lime. No lemons or cherries today, Mister.* Smoke hovers over the kitchen now, serving as a nice thank-you for Big Boi and all of his help. The fridge shoots me a beer, I shoot him a wink, almost tripping over myself. *Whoa there, sailor!*

I do a quick evaluation of the situation and recompose myself, then hand Natalie her glass. She immediately sips the whiskey sour after stubbing the filter into a coffee cup.

"So, tell me about this girl," Natalie says. The word "girl" smoothes the folds of my brain and I like it. But a modicum of guilty sweat slithers down my left temple.

"Oh shit, Jill, yeah. She's fabulous, just a girl I met at school," and I forgot, but Jill's now on her way because she's off work and you can never stop someone on her way, crap. But it's okay, I'm not doing anything bad, just relaxing with an old work buddy and we all know each other, right? *Of course.*

My heart kicks it up another gear and relaxing becomes an obstacle.

Clock! It's already 12:13 a.m. and she'll be here any minute. A splash of Amstel cools the throat and it's okay, I'll just tell Natalie that I'm, uh, leaving to meet my editor for a beer with his fiancé after this? No that won't work.

"What's the matter?" she asks, apparently noticing my flustered demeanor.

"Er, you know—" I got nothing.

At that moment, I hear a key negotiating the stubborn lock—Jill walks in the door, beige Burberry purse snug under left arm I bought her for Christmas. Fucking bag was a few hundred dollars at Saks. With a deft, fluid swipe, I shove the 8-ball in my pocket and ease back into the couch, acting cool.

"Hey, Natalie, long time," Jill greets, then glances at me.

Long time? What? I anticipate a tone of consternation but she's being very warm, my angst downshifts. I flash on Jill meeting Natalie back when we all graduated, which I guess I forgot, too. The

music seems to absorb any suspicion that Jill may have carried in the door with her.

The ensuing montage of small talk and cigarette smoke tapers off, punctuated by the latch of the door catching behind Natalie, and I can feel Jill is wondering why I'm hanging out with my old boss and it's irking me but I'll make her forget about it. Al Green, help me out here. Flutes, violins and a thick bass line will make this okay, and now Jill seems unaffected by Natalie's wake. *All on a chain-gang it's a new day away back, oh, sha-clack clack, cigarette.*

Half hour or so later.

I'm sitting on the bed, sitting on my hands and thinking about how lucky I really am and I start thinking about my mom and God and my dad working in New Orleans, and I flash on Natalie leaving and how much of a reprieve it was from a potential disaster. Jill's chill, thank God. She knows Natalie and I are platonic—or not even—just old work buds. I take off my khakis and black Oxford, set them on the edge of the bed.

My heart no longer wants to burst and I'm calming down. Jill is in the bathroom and I can hear the tub filling up, the summery smell of warm water fills the apartment. I shuffle to the kitchen and put on some Al Green? No, it's Isley Brothers. Some serious baby-making music.

I trot back toward the bathroom, slowly, slip in the door and ease myself behind her as she juggles some makeup-removing type pad. My arms wrap around her bathrobe-covered mid and I draw myself against her back, press my lips on her neck and inhale her sweet aura, an amalgam of shampoo, deodorant, perfume and pheromone. I balance my chin on her shoulder and seep into her sight and her eyes flicker on mine in the mirror.

She smiles, I relax even more.

She murmurs something about work, and how it was nice to see an unexpected Natalie and how we should all throw a dinner party and then I stop listening and focus on Jill's snug physique, not a hard-body but I wouldn't want it any other way. I look up and she beams me a smitten smile, I nod and kiss her neck endearingly. Her contours complement my vague abs but I exhale and press against her even more. A swelling pulse underneath my white-black-red striped boxers rises. Though, I move away and sense the bathtub almost done filling up when the pitch of the water level escalates.

I dip a finger in. Scalding, bubbly. Wisps of dimly revealed steam dance on the surface.

A decisive slam of the mirror cabinet tells me she's done messing with her makeup. I spin around, and she's approaching me with a startling strut, but I guess I'm still just high. I grab either end of her robe's fleece belt and swing them in a loop, smirking and pulling her into me. And she undulates to Al Green this time; it's erupting from the kitchen. I slide my hands in between the folds of the fleece and my arms gracefully draw it open, exposing her lush, full breasts and humbly defined build, smoothed by the sculptor all the way down to the fold. *Sexy girl in the bathroom, let me show you how I work what I work why I work how I work* and my hands move up and down her curves like God putting the finishing touches on Eve and on up behind her arms, swooping her cool back and she pulls me closer, the warmth from her body sealed up by the fleece escapes into my heart and down around the throbbing below and now she puts a leg in between mine and it's the tender blazing that heats the mercury, Jill's amatory breath makes me feel like this Lothario but it's just fueling my looming proclivity to move into the bathtub.

Tangled in between each other we slither into the tub and our bodies disappear into the white, the alarming hot lets us know that we've submerged ourselves and some bubbly water overflows the side onto the tile, we don't care, and I can't stop thinking about how lucky I am and hands dive down gripping her plush thighs so she cocks her head back in a visceral way and the muscles inflate her breasts upward like a forgiving electric shock, so I start kissing her from the neck down the yelps of laughter come, and the

sensitive repose from the blow makes me slide her forward on top of me and she's even warmer inside, wet from the bath and herself but I can't tell the difference. Flashes of her prism blue eyes tell me she loves me and I love her so we keep going and our hands mesh together extended to either side, so I close my eyes and let my head back and she's going faster now and Al Green belts that shit out, so there goes Apollo soaring off after Daphne but so what, he'll run into her again for old times as they zoom pass Aladdin with Jasmine on their carpet, we are one now and our breaths are sonorously exchanging a strange currency that you insert into the machine and get your ticket so here it comes, and I flash on the planes crashing into the WTC but at the same time and here it comes its boiling hot and she moans like a faith-driven dignified goddess and I ease her onto me like a spoon, as they say, spooning leads to forking. She eases herself off, wraps her arms around my neck, and we swap smiles, so we lie in the not so hot water anymore, like a couple of Gods.

Like Apollo and Daphne reunited.

Nick Wright, '08