

CLEFTS OF THE ROCK

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Contents

One inflatable globe plugging a tug boat's hole
And some apple cider vinegar to kill fleas the dog brought home
And a red telephone for calling your therapist's therapist

Portrait Meets Background

Mother of blue, Russia leather
With a silphium seed in her middle
And notes to self as henna tattoos
Escaped the tarantula telegraphist
And his street car strut
Periwinkle sea shells marking the pages
Of her memory in a lamp black smoke's
Diminution of her engagement with the everyday
Picture plates of tranquil scenes
Jarred from their wall by trains and oil refinery
Explosions of fire mirrored in septic sea
Fingers searching fingers for comfort

Tape

When we were in special ed
We listened to The Doors
When we were in special ed
We codified The Doors

This was a minute deconstruction and obfuscation
Of the guy who wore his hair like a cheap dirty wig
And who
Sang in a satirically dour tone over poetic ashes
Like a Catskills singer gone into 2 a.m. daze
Trying to scare away the summer regulars
Who just wanted to hang onto to dance time

And this note-for-note breakdown of worn-out tape
Paused and repeated into time without end
Like a bicycle wheel that comes free from its fork
And dares to roll beyond the horizon line
Would start at lunch hour and leak into shower room laughter
But it was a shared meal for the mind and heart
And even the kids with the crash helmets got it
And they would close their eyes and nod their amen

Rain on Rain¹

For the *good* Phil
(You know who you are)

(This being
A stochastic psychobiography of a village of free stinkers
Condensed into two prototypes)

So in the movie
Gabino Ezeiza Pastilla
Aka E-man
Born in East Harlem and
Self-appointed king of the Saldana Enterprises mailroom
Has a thing about blue-eyed girls
Only it seems platonic or idyllic
He likes to paint their likenesses on silk neckties
And gives them to their fathers
He also has atypical bronchitis
Which manifests itself as a pair of dress pants with matching belt
When fibre from his trouser pocket is discreetly submitted for
Chemical analysis
The words
Your ensign will never leave you, E-man
Can be clearly discerned

And there's a heart-breaking instrumental
Some arpeggio thing on a cuatro
You start to cry at this point
Which surprises you

When you look up from your pretzels
You see the E-man
Stumbling around the mean streets
Mourning like a dove and roaring like a bear
Stumbling near-death into Desolation Row
Eating eggs of the viper and the cockatrice
And throwing bread and money at Gregory of Nyssa

While absently crossing the street he

¹ Published in *Misfits' Miscellany*

Narrowly escapes being hit by a commuter bus
Then this girl with eyes like headlights
And a body simply draped in a summer dress
And feet free of sandals
Pulls him by the arm
Back to the safety of the sidewalk

This heroine
A checkout girl named Penny Zippo
Sets him up in a neglected first aid room
In the department store where she works
She mothers him at break time
And spoon feeds him
Apple sauce and bacteriostatic antibiotics
And some crazy controlled stuff called Avelox
Which has to be taken with a gallon of water
You see the meds in close up
And on the video you can freeze it
And follow the links to your pharmacist

Sometimes
between pants that steadily shrink and wheezing
The E-man holds a magnifying glass to his knee
He freaks out when he reads this:

*Bloaters disintegrate
Bested great art in oils
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Regards, Theo Klutz*

It's never explained or expanded upon
Maybe they deleted another scene
So as not to offend Germans
All he can do is shake his head and say:

*Esto apesta, man
That's the twisted junk that's killing me*

And Penny
Beautiful, simple Penny
Starts crying as she notices
His pants shrink from a size 36-34
To a 32-30
And the lady in softlines tries to assure her

That 32-30s are much cheaper and easier to find

And this is where you pause the movie
Because you are crying with Penny
And you reach for some tissue
But it's all reduced to clumpy wet piles at your feet
So you open a window
And look out at snow that has turned dirty from sand
And little grey row houses

It's all very depressing
You grab a Valium and a glass of wine
And advance to the end
E-man is standing over a dead Penny
Who died in that scene you hate
Where she polishes off the out-of-date cheese dip

He's managed to tear off his dress pants at the knees
He looks like he's wearing shorts for postal clerks
And he's lifting her limp body under rosemary and lemon blossoms
There in the outdoor garden centre while it rains
And the camera lens gathers rain drops one-by-one
As E-man holds Penny closer and closer
And there is no sound but the rain
The rain in the movie
The rain outside your window
The rain you feel your eyes make as your head hits the sofa armrest
And you sleep dull sleep into evening

Judas with Honours

I'm no working class hero
I have no gift with small talk
I work part time as a working class hero
You know
Working my way through college and all
That

When I graduate

I'll drown all the working class heroes
In their insipid small talk
And eat them

Devil Pinned

Let's discuss evil
By annotating features

Playing the game

Is sometimes warming the bleachers
Feeding stolen apples
To miscreant teachers
Warming your feet
With the king's
Adjunct sock puppets
Released from tomb/womb-like wormholes
By the annotated drawer-full
Until the stink they bear is undeniable
Denying this young wolf drink
Until its thirst cannot be quenched
Your blood-stained hands part waters
Of ambiguity and definable hate of skin

Opposite yours

And soon
You shall lose your station
Like an elderly captain
Playing ring toss on a sinking ship

Lenny: Music Producer and Sound Pioneer²

After years of frustration making progressive jazz albums
That never sold
Lenny added a significant tool to his arsenal
That would greatly improve production:
A room
His subsequent albums would include the addition
Of a second technological breakthrough:
The microphone
In 1978 he began to dabble in using musicians
With instruments
But sudden death interrupted what would have been
His greatest achievement: the use of songs

² Published in *Misfits' Miscellany*

Piano and Trumpet³

There's an old elephant
Wheezing song like a gummed-up harmonica
Outside the GUNS and PIANOS
BUY-SELL-TRADE
They call him Mephibosheth
Used to perform in a small circus
He was injured in transit
Made him nervous from chronic pain
He had already been a teenage hypochondriac
He read medical journals with a flashlight
Under the covers
Came across a lovely article about
Behavioural Management of Hypochondriasis
And it stuck with him
Like everything did

After the transport truck hit his left side
He tried to divert himself by listening to Dmitri
Shostakovich but
The man was incomprehensible
So he listened to his music instead
They sat there in the Brattleboro retreat
Feet sharing tub water with torpedo fish
A phonograph playing a nice little waltz
In a Yiddish style
Simmering on the turntable like mother's soup
Ladled out with equal amount of love and passive aggression

Mephibosheth and Dmitri had this conversation
The music was their interpreter
They would sneak into the retreat tower
With a keyboard and Mephibo's trunk-as-trump'
Play some American-Russian patchwork of
Melancholy
Against the rants written on the stone walls
Piano and trumpet weeping and laughing

³ Published in *Misfits' Miscellany*. Luis Cuahtemoc Berriozabal informed editor Philip Vermaas that he found this poem excellent. No elephant, however, shared his opinion on the poem.

Against and in harmony with:

Teachers are anointed censors and controllers

Dispensers of secular catechism

Turning bright minds into toiling hands

Drawing the blind on God's infinite sunshine

Upon their discharge

They zigzagged around the country side

The Connecticut River their companion

Windows rolled down as the autumn leaves fell

Like confetti over them

Red

Red

Red

And orange like a sunset

And you may say that Dmitri was never there

But his thoughts and his music are invested

In the old elephant's memory

And he blows them out

And draws them back in

Drawing the curious from passersby

A Rich, Satirical Blow

You are not a show dog

You are not an acrobat

You are not a stylist

You are not a hare

You are not a Taoist

You are not an emancipator

You are not a Barcalounger

You are a Holy See sick host

You are a reptilian third-eye cognisance

Mother-of-Judas child killer

Choking on a burnt scone

You are a false projection of Mary Magdalene

Made from hatred prayers

Spoken by devils

You are inescapable mustard gas

Burning

Burning

And my child cannot run to safety

Arise

I sold the television
I sold the car
I purchased train tickets
That won't take us far
I bundled our baby
I hid him quite well
From a certain ring master
Nobody will tell
I took you to Cairo
And sang you a song
I'll keep with you always
And when I am gone
There will be signs in the heavens
And colours in the sea
A heart beats your love, dear
While searching the depths
Of the portrait we've left
Behind
Of you
And me

Between Job(e)s

My cash flow runs so slow
It's backed up beyond stopping
Because of me
We have no history
Except minuses and
A lonely dog left behind
He has grown accustomed to waiting
We have steadily become
Unpeople
No comfort
No furniture
No words left even to argue
We've ceased to search out
Money or food or worn-out phrases
I've left you crying in a box behind a low rent apartment courtyard
There in the North End
I've walked well past both the Pharisee and the tax collector
I've sought out the valley of Hinnom and been refused entry
And the birds that cry at daybreak sound like rebukes from my own children
And the sun heaps blisters on my skin
Even if I wanted to take back years of bitter words and misunderstandings and
Gross mismanagement of time and propriety
It's no longer mine to atone for
Even if I wanted to take my own life
It's not mine to take
My middling middle life is spent one foot ahead of stopping
And
One eye envying the dead