

*Did you ever hear about Voodoo? Hear it and
you won't give a damn what you do.*

—Marlene Dietrich, *Blonde Venus*

ICK-A-BODY

*Moin te pale' yo
Yo pas te le conte!
Ce jou ma coupe'
Tete a yo
Ce jou-la ya conte' moin.*

—Voodoo Song

(I told you, but you didn't listen! The day I cut off your head is the day you'll listen!)

STATION 1

They woke me up with murder. I had to shrug off a Nembutol. I had been up for days running around doing some goddam thing, and I was getting pretty nasty. You could say the “Help” was surly.

It was Gobert. I hate Gobert. I hated everybody right about then, but I especially hated Gobert. And I woke secure in the knowledge that Gobert hated me. It was

3AM. He'd probably asked to make the call.

“Gobert: Homicide.” A death sentence. Oh, he loved that, anyway. I was thinking about relying on something that sleeps at night, like the U.S. mail, when Gobert strangled all hope with that thin black wire. I bled into an evil phone.

“Look, Gobert. She's dead. You know it. I know it. In the morning King Mo Fo Tut is gonna know it too. Send a cop over to sit on her chest if you think she's going to fidget. You don't suppose it matters to her what time we get there do you? Huh?” I sagged. “I mean, don't you see? She's the lucky one.” Eternal rest was beginning to sound pretty sweet to me.

Minutes later I nosed out onto the avenue. It was raining. Hard. One wiper was working; the one I didn't need. When it rains in Southern Louisiana, the sky falls into the sea.

STATION 2

Back in the park, between the golf course and the zoo, there is this darling, brightly colored little toy train; sort of a children's model railroad; big enough to ride on, but with dinky open carts for cars, tiny signals and switches—all perfectly charming and harmless; and narrow tracks winding through the trees. At one point this “train” goes through a makeshift tunnel, which is really only an elongated metal shed used to house the train when it is not in operation, and which sports some phony stone front meant to make it look like a cave. 90 minutes ago two drunk kids looking for a place to screw found a woman dead in there. It's a good thing they were drunk, because they didn't find her head, and they didn't find her hands.

I made the scene. The sky was turning gray. I was growing fins. In an hour I'd unbutton my shirt to free the gills from my collar.

I slogged over to Gobert. “You're not going to like this.” I said.

“Like it? I wanna marry it. Murder in the pouring rain. Decapitation. Hell, let's us just go flash a girl by the footpath, whattya say? I'm not gonna to like it? Does a fish have a waterproof head? Whattyou mean?”

“Voodoo, Gobert. That's what I mean.”

“You saying this is a voodoo killing?”

“No, Gobert. I'm saying this is a voodoo investigation...”

STATION 3

Gobert looked blank as a pan. I'd just have to spell it out for him.

“Observe and learn.” I told him. “You called me in. You wanted a paranormal. You've been all over this case for hours and what have you got? Zip. Every cop and cub reporter's nightmare. Was it a blunt object in the library? Poison in the hall? You find me one lousy gumdrop and I can reconstruct the crime: get you the Who, the What, the When, Where, How and Why. Tell you when their ancestors first came down from the trees...”

I laughed. “Maybe somebody out there actually knows something. Maybe you can find them. Maybe you can find out what it is they know. Then again, maybe not. The killer knows. That much is certain.”

“But—”

The amyl-nitrate capsule I had cracked open in the car was wearing off fast. I was becoming facetious.

“We don't have the killer, right? And how do we know we don't have the killer? Because the killer is what we're looking for!”

“O.K. So what then do we have, eh, Lieutenant? They had to pass it to you on a platter and stick it under your nose, but you got it, and it's not short for starters.”

I leaned forward and jabbed a stunted finger at him. “Think, Gob, think! What is our necessary condition? What is the one thing we have, without which we wouldn't be here at all? Gobert, I want the body.”

The Lieutenant was eyeing me queerly. I sucked on a Lucky, then stuck it to him.

“Gobert, I want to interrogate the victim.”

geoffrey cruickshank-hagenbuckle



NYC 3AM—Yeah I want to go to Egypt, only trouble is, I want to go to Ancient Egypt! Horus (the Sun) and Set (Dragon Death) were always fighting. Set called Horus a faggot. Horus said Am not! So the Council of the 7 Gods gave Set 7 days to prove it. He kept trying to fuck him up the ass but couldn't. Then, the 6th night, Set

whacked off on Horus' lettuce. Horus got up, and ate it. 7th day Set calls Horus a faggot again. So the 7 Gods cut open Horus—it's OK because he is immortal—and autopsy him to see if he has any jizz in his entrails, and Voila! They declare him a faggot! That's not all! At summer camp Sean Vickery calls Red Ball McAdams a

bedwetter. The cabin “The Marsh Hawk” gives Sean 3 days to prove it. Red Ball doesn't wet his bed. So Sean pees into a tennis ball can and sneaks across the cabin floor at night and pours it on Red Ball McAdams! Either proving the subconscious Timeless, or the truly limited number of solutions set to one fixed problem.

STATION 4

“Every night I kill him. I don’t know why. He cries, because I kill him. That’s why I’m sad. He wears a black hat, and all black clothes and he’s sleeping, so I kill him. Sometimes he talks to me, but what can I say to Illusion?”

“Then there’s the Second Appearance. He scares me. Sometimes he chases me. He’s gray. All over. Gray eyes and gray down there, gray face. Blue lips.

“I dream in Time. I go back ten years, not a hallucination, but in the real world, this world, and I go into a house, a home. I go in daytime.

“Maybe I should call the humanoid to help me. I met him in the shopping center. He’s human too, but he makes all the dreams. He makes the voices come out of my lips, and my arm be right here.”

STATION 5

There is always a girl who works in a library and has access to just a little too much information. Let’s call her Mary, or Jane. This one was pretty spooky. Eyes occult, arms akimbo. Funny ideas about things. Like funny weird, not funny ha-ha. I used to drop around when I was stumped on a difficult case.

I told her about my problems. I told her about my dreams. Hell, I would have told anybody with tits like that whatever she longed to hear. I wanted to boil her kneecaps in my soup, and eat it with nary a spoon. Solve the case? Ha! You must be joking. I wanted bodies piled up to the roof! I’d go out and cut off a coupla heads myself if I thought the chances of me getting hum here were good as slim to none. But, you know what they say, “Slim’s left town.” Might as well leave cookies and milk out for the Lindbergh baby.

She crossed her legs. I hit the Richter scale. “Have you ever read *Beau Geste*?” she says, you know, using her almond eyes. “In any adventure story the love interest is always secondary to the action.”

I was having trouble trying to find a place to put this thing that was crawling around on my stomach. I felt like I was wearing a pup-tent, or a teepee. It was a bad day for baggy pants. It was a good day for a tie.

“On the other hand, if your plot lacks tension—put a woman in it.”

I made a mental note. She took down a book on zombies.

“Now, most ghosts are nothing but a cold spot on the floor. Others the 10 thousand year old wailing relics of Egyptian kings. I dunno, this one probably shakes out somewhere inbetween. A pretty pedestrian manifestation, but complications can develop. No postmortem!” She was emphatic. “Don’t cut her up! We don’t want her wandering around searching for her parts like Osiris all over Egypt.” Uh huh. I could just see myself explaining this to Gobert. Mary read from the zombie book.

“In violent death the very suddenness of death often leaves the victim confused. He or she simply does not have time to realize they are dying. The body dies, but the soul of the victim, mistakenly believing it is still alive, lingers in the vicinity of the corpse, hovering above the body. Once move that body, and this is how a place becomes haunted.

“In cases of dismemberment the spirit lingers on out of a certain nostalgia, harboring hopes of recovering its missing parts. With decapitation however, it is absolutely impossible for the spirit to pass without first reclaiming its head. For it is the Loa Mai Tete—the Spirit of the Head, which is the true and ultimate governor in the doings of both body and soul.’

“The body does us no good, because we can’t talk to the body. But once separate the body from its head...” and here, smiling faintly, she made a cutting noise and drew one finger sharply across her neck, “the soul cannot rest. So, if we reanimate that body, the body heads, heh, for its head...”

I could see she was onto something.

“We get the head and ask it just exactly who...”

“Fragged her,” I said.

STATION 6**WILD IDYLL**

Mary and her girlfriends used to do this thing with fire. Go far enough up the levee from pretty and discrete Prytania St., and it veers off town. You then approach a sunken woods nobody really knows, where moor-rusting river barges go to desuetude. The open iron hulls fill with rain, making clear water nudie swimming holes, where the Mississippi is oil and awful muddy. Delta land is money-green or florid.

One nocturnal prowl Mary found a defunct pickup

truck, and a cabin boat half-stuck bow out above just such lush sweating water. She and her chum Kate sat and smoked their Demon Queens, peeping from a wheelhouse window set amongst the reeds, and in their winsome reverie was born The Secret Boat and Truck Club. Admittance to the Club is by blindfold midnight initiation only. “It’s not just a boat and truck club,” insists co-founder Mary. “It’s a Secret Boat and Truck Club!”

Full moons Mary joins the “Club” as they trail like maddened maenads ‘neath o’erhanging trees, immaterial and witchy. Because the levee is a blind they can build bonfires unseen upon its shore, into which they toss their fond possessions. While they torch those things they cherish most, the girls drink and leap through fire.

Black shadow figures flicker. Each girl must construct a little boat with sea-wrack found around the Crooked Circle. At Voodoo Moon they set bell jar candles in the crafts, and send them forth brave upon old man mighty river...

STATION 7

The day broke dim. The sky looked like a border checkpoint. I was humming the tune to ‘Death-Throes of a Watchdog.’ I sat in the window of my Royal Street office with a Sazerac perched on my knee, watching the ministrations of ‘Peaches’ and ‘Herb,’ two low-grade local confidence men busily fleecing the rubes at the entrance to Bourbon Street.

“Bet I know where ya got dem shoes...”

(Answer: “On yo’ feet. That’ll be a dollar.”)

Ah! New Orleans! An American Venice! A little spontaneous human combustion, a little espiritismo. I was pleased to have breakfasted on one from each of the four major food groups: drugs, cigarettes, masturbation, and beer. My girlfriend had kicked me out of her house late last night, suddenly getting demure and referring to them as her “breasts.” Everybody had lied to me about everything forever. We were going down that night to reanimate the corpse. Gobert had the park cordoned off from the river to the avenue. The moon was full. I loaded my gun with silver bullets. Mary was coming along to assist. She had a book of hex signs, a crucifix, a body that wouldn’t quit, a mallet and a wooden stake. Fuck with the dead, I figure, better pack a lunch. It could be an all day job.

STATION 8

Midnight. Audubon Park. The cold blue light above our heads grew skittish, painting the scene with pale and spectral luminations. There was a ring around the moon. Spanish moss matted in clumps hung from the heaving Stygian branches of oaks. The earth was hot and humid, exuding a chowder fog in whorls which hid me to my knees.

With a few hoodoo ritual passes we had the victim up and moving, weaving around like a drunk, or a brown bear fresh out of hibernation. Pretty much farting from her neck. Now this was something I hadn’t bargained on. She’d been a big girl. Apparently the exertions of her Ka, or Oversoul, once alert and cruising around the after-world, were almost pneumatic, forcing a series of thunderous honks from out of the cavity of her throat. The coke I copped to keep me alive worked like it had been stepped on all the way from Miami. It was my heartfelt hope that I was gonna be able to handle this. Honk! Squawk! Bleat! She was off! Well, we wouldn’t have any trouble tailing her.

For something with no eyes this stiff was the fucking Pathfinder. Mary was right. The victim made dead for its head.

“Hydra, the unwashed. Huge, and unholy. Her anger unassuaged...”

The killer probably weren’t naw brainiac, but he had surely done some thinking. The weight of a brick stuck in its mouth kept the head sunk up until Moms here slogged out of a bog, cradling it in her stumps. Three days in a pond choking on stone and the head was in a loathsome mood; but if I was ever to have an answer, I had to get that brick out.

There’s only one way to get a porcupine quill out of your hunting-dog’s nose. Grab it and pull. I grabbed it, it growled. I pulled.

STATION 9

“A something or other that has no name in any language.” (Tertullian)

STATION 10

THE KILLER SPEAKS THROUGH THE HEAD OF HIS VICTIM

What happened next was Planet X. Blind-side unexpected to even a mind like mine, toy-toy trained on contradictory pharmaceuticals. In the heart of a violent act two souls straying through Limbo undergo radical reassignment, such that the mouth becomes a cry. What I wanted most became my big ghosty. Mary and I had dialed a really wrong number. The killer himself was on the line.

"Einstein, Frankenstein, Calvin Klein, Hong Kong Viet Cong...I dig all that shit! Whooh! I'm a nymph! I know where all the little girls live! I'm the North Pole, East pole..."

Goo came out of its mouth.

"Sure I've read the Tibetan Book of the Dead. You think you got problems now? Wait till you die. That's when they really start throwing curves. Screaming Demons from the Hungry Ghost Realm, flying around at 100 miles an hour...But they don't let you take your gun, and they don't let you take your hands.

"How many friends you have?" I ask, fishing.

"Shit," he-she-it says, "I don't know. I got friends in Europe, all over this country, this city, that city. Friends? Okay. I got a hundred friends."

"No. You can only have nine."

The dead, they're like babies. First get recognition-response, then you get 'em talking. Never give 'em exactly what they want. Never nothing now.

"So. Ok. Nine."

I was losing her.

"Gabba gabba! One of us! Your mother sucks cocks in Hell! I just ended a 16 year relationship with a 16 year-old girl! Blah blah blah bloo whooey..."

"Like, I can shoot some hoops with the guys and see the fucking sky, man. I don't deserve this. I was walking around with no teeth. Now I got a job. I got a girl. God gave me my teeth back. You understand? Look at me. I'm a nice guy right? I was doin' time at 15. Like, who taught me how to steal? I come from a good family. They don't steal shit. Me? I can steal anything. Wanna see me lie? Like, where'd I learn this shit. I can lie, and shit.

"Ah." She flagged. "You're just like the rest of 'em. Trying to get your duck sick."

She turned away.

"As soon as you speak, as soon as you even acknowledge another, there can no longer be any freedom..."

STATION 11

Lovecraft positions himself in front of a clockshop window to rest—"an eye born shut." Jams his head full of random integers in order to ward off the onslaught of unwelcome psychic info.

"—die in Mexico looking for your shoe..."

STATION 12

Spotlights, sirens, choppers. Gobert again. They'd put out a dragnet, but he-she-who-it-whatever had slipped through. I'd come to think of her somewhat fondly as Morticia. The Gob though was officially pissed. "Fucking A Jones" he bawled, twisting around himself like a hanged man in the wind. "Now I've got some freakin' amputee dead broad walkin' around town wit no head, an the guy what killed her's screamin' all kinda koo koo boogaloo gobbledy gook outta her yap. Whatdafugamygondoo?"

Yeah yeah. I lacked sympathy. It had not been an A-Type personality day. Besides, there was plenty of room for an act like Lady Nightmare here, in those questionable clubs right down on Bourbon Street. I looked at Mary's groin.

"Gobert," I said, "That's a police problem."

Less is a blessing. It was Good Friday. I went home and dreamt I was Ichabod Crane.

What do we know of this? The distance is great. The image is not our own. The soul in its cup stares at an empty moon. The crossroad is littered with diamonds.