

BACCHANALIA, BRO

The first couple go down alright. Though, truth is, there isn't consensus to what we're throating back. It's our understanding we're to do our polite best to relieve our hosts of their ventripotent cellar of wine. We can see from the top of the stairs the vault goes *way* down. There's an acute sense of "we're helping," so none of us bats an eye when our next rounds arrive in bone-white chalices adorning goat-men holding flutes and erections—their contents being only a little too viscus.

"An ingenious Port," declares Casper, the poker-faced fake cowboy.

"Sweeter'n soy-sauce!" chimes the very drunk and recently unpregnant, Peg.

"Burns like a wet one from Lucy, herself!" fires Benicia from behind the bar. She smiles and her teeth are more red than white. This is unsettling due to her otherwise egregious beauty and for a moment we wonder: who is Lucy?

Dr. Bringus pipes up after a gulp: "The future of taste is heavy metals!"

We assume he's alluding to the wine, though Doc has a manner of speaking that makes us wonder if being deaf wouldn't be all bad.

“This shit tastes like blood,” we hear from the far end of the bar, but before we can respond, Casper shoves a boot in his mouth.

“White Jasmine, what would you say the name on your shirt means to you? I’m assuming that is the community college where you became so attractive?”

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But then, out of nowhere, an enormous: BOOM.

Balls shrink. Nipples stiffen.

Another: BOOM.

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It’s like all of us have just played jump-rope with Dolly Parton and come back with black eyes. Whatever happened before this matters zilch.

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It’s then we notice The Drummer. Really it’s impossible no one saw him before and we realize he was there, probably always. There’s an emerging sense it was The Drummer’s beat that played host to our collective conceptions.

We quaff immodestly, but not White Jasmine (aka “Karen”), who notices nothing as she attempts to conceal a sudden nosebleed. She’s never tried face drugs, though the combination of her name and her nose now bleeding draws suspicion from a few Bacchants. Unpregnant Peg, for one, wouldn’t mind having someone with whom to toot *her* extracurriculars.

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Slowly rising up from behind the bar like a penitent soul ascending the stairway to heaven is the beautiful Benicia, who now has on an enormous purple-suede top-hat and silver-plated harmonica, situated: à la Bobby Z. Her long, bronze hands caress a Spanish guitar. All Bacchants are at attention and we pull long and deep on wine-skins now circulating, our doe eyes blind to the changing hue of our teeth.

For a moment, we hear only heartbeats.

We pull.

Benicia blows a soft, middle-C.

Another.

In quiet crescendo: more.

“Oh yeah, this shit is definitely blood.”

No one turns to look at the Bacchant at the far end as he stands up and tilts his chalice in the bar-light. Benicia pauses briefly and fires him a doomy glare but The Whistleblower chuckles and shakes his head. “Why would they give us *blood?*”

Benicia about swallows her harmonica. She squeezes her eyes and no one notices as she grows her instrument by an arm’s length, then cranes her neck to hit a note so high that no sound is heard. A single rusty teardrop trickles down the rump of her cheek. The Whistleblower is dead-silent now and I pretend I don’t see all the red leaving his ears.

After a moment, I reach back and pull down the lids of his eyes.

At once we're consumed by a fury of notes from Benicia that sounds something like Eddie Hazel on the back-half of 'Maggot Brain' if he'd'a plugged into Harry Nilsson's throat that night he donated blood to John Lennon's microphone.

Beguiled, you could say we are.

She solos for exactly eleven-minutes and six-seconds as a generous smoke plumes from her instrument. We follow with our eyes as the cloud skates around a Skeletal Cole Porter now accompanying Benicia on keys. His piano appears to be a reconstruction of The Whistleblower's dead body. His head is fashioned: mouth-open, face-up, as a tip jar.

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One by one we all line up, as instructed, to have our tongues removed, each by different means. Casper, drunk and cowardly, goes first. He elects (for why? we don't know) to have Ghost Ernest Hemingway set a treble hook under his speaking apparatus. Dead Hem climbs a twelve-foot ladder, pulls out his perfectly-average dead-penis and shakes it at Casper before setting the hook and removing his tongue, that way.

Casper bleeds but we focus instead on The Drummer as he now has out his brushes. He paints at his snare with a satyric grace and we wonder if Casper couldn't be more of a gaud.

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Next up is White Jasmine (aka Karen) who, after a few glasses of wine, is routinely ready for it all to go away, anyway. Following several minutes of Benicia's soulful soloing she can only feel her whiteness eating at itself and is secretly cooking up a removal technique that takes care of the rest of it, too.

Which is cute because at showtime she goes all "cultural appropriation" (no one is surprised except somehow her) and summons a genie to magically remove her tongue sans even flesh-wound. I admit, this is borderline genius, though it likely does no favors for her suspect reputation and my brain breaks a little trying to excuse myself for grinning, as I am.

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We suddenly fear we've awoken in Hell just as William Faulkner begins defending his use of the 'n' word. Not all of us sigh when we realize it's only Dr. Bringus reading from his own obituary. Dude could recite Obama's inaugural speech and still sound jingo. So imagine this shit.

Or: maybe don't.

After his obitch he goes into a minutes long Vedic prayer and we all know he's just avoiding his amputation. For Doc, we suspect, the tongue is a vital organ and we wonder if it would be better if he'd go, as White Jasmine (Karen) had considered, and quietly: *peace-out*.

Waiting patiently is none of us.

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And then it strikes me—if I'm to live up to my alleged barometer of authenticity, then I am to go now! in the footsteps of White Jasmine (Karen) and Casper the Fake Cowboy and liberate myself from the perverse Burden of Speech! I'm to take the reigns and afford myself the penultimate opportunity to, maybe one day: Abandon All Opinion!

I'm so down, but I'm short on conscience as (at this point I've had six Pinot and a half-pint of some kind of blood) I now stand in a triumphant/sadistic, frat-boy glow while the opulent pearl of a giant clitoris sensually vibrates the tongue out of my mouth.

I feel a quiver in my navel and the tip of my moon-winkle.

No more, no less.

All Bacchantes are in awe as the enormous squishy bean releases my tongue and gape as it falls, feather-like, into the tip jar with the excavated others. Skeletal Cole Porter does a little fill on the piano to acknowledge my contribution and The Drummer finds his accentual crash in a way that makes me wonder about that Big-Bang.

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We all kinda figure Unpregnant Peg will go next. She steps forward, but then shocks us all when she: *up and snatches the tip jar and makes for the door!* The musicians quickly scoot into a sardonic waltz, increasing their tempo in a kind of frenzy. The Drummer grins and the next thing we know Benicia is hailing sax from atop the piano and a Departed

Sun Ra now leads them, as well as a horn-section of Also Departeds, in a quixotic rendition of his "Space Is The Place." We look charily at one another and some of us contemplate not having tongues for the first time.

Digging into that deep trough of recently consumed liquid courage, I dart after Peg.

You might think she would be a little out of shape but, whew! it's more like the opposite! Her moves make me wonder if becoming recently unpregnant might be like cheating somehow. This notion tethers me, though, as my habit of soliloquizing subjects beyond my limited scope (i.e. magically manifesting progeny inside one's abdomen) eventually leads me to reconciliation of my prerogative as a privileged fucking pamphlemousse with fewer inside parts and a boobish brain.

Which slows my ambition (also: land-speed), due to the fact I'm largely incapable of being motivated by the potentialities of others and my preoccupation is generally to, instead, covet my own excellence.

I want to tell you how much all of this pains me but—

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In some fucked up way I am now chasing Unpregnant Peg for all minorities of all time.

And I'm gaining on her.

Well on my way to actualizing my hero-myth by saving our precious tongues from whatever indecencies Unpregnant Peg has planned, I'm suddenly accosted by a

cacophonous bawling/laughter that manifests as a troop of feral dogs disguised as my neighbor's scamp kids.

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For a minute, only: *purefear*.

Followed by: a (brief) void.

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And then I'm feeling, as I'm born again to consensual reality, the liquid warmth that's running down my leg and onto Neighbor Tim's couch. I'm wondering how I'm going to explain to Christian Neighbor Tim that I've just peed on his couch and that's either because I am a) still a child or, b) underestimated the strength of that dose gifted me by Pagan Neighbor Paul. I glance around the room for Paul but he's either left, never existed, or has perhaps become a haiku.

I'm about to confess my sins against Neighbor Tim, but then I'm picking up Junebug and sitting her on my lap, and I'm spilling her juice-box on us both, freely (what would White Jasmine/Karen do?) (w.w.w.j.k.d?), and I'm feeling Heather's death-stare ("it is neighborhood *Disney* night!"), and Junebug's asking me: "Daddy, who's Unpwegnant Peg?" and I don't know what to tell her because obviously she's stolen my tongue.