

DENISE'S GOBLIN

Sleeping, sleeping, heavy heaves, sleeping...

Sleeping, sleeping, heavy heaves, sleeping... Dreaming... Fleeting images... Daughter Cynthia in high school... Now at her job, interacting with people... My father is there, yelling at her like he used to do to me... Sleepy watery dreamy vision dreams... Light, blinding light...

Arrghh, that blasted woman left the blinds open... What's that sound? Denise rubbed her eyes softly. The maid must've come in before I awoke and turned the radio on, the one on my desk by the window. Batty woman. Doesn't she know what music does to the tortured, tenuous soul? She might very well have sent me reeling into the early hours of the day. I've no strength to get up and change the bloody thing myself.

--"Breathe calmly and smoothly through your nose. Relax your body. Try to focus on your mind and your breath. Get your awareness out of your body for now. Still your wandering mind."

Hmph. My wandering mind. The only damn thing I have left to wander with, and this silly woman wants me to do away with it? What was she thinking, putting this drab on? I'll bet she's out to make me miserable, the wretch. Well, there's nothing for it. I've been in this damned bed for what now? (She checks the calendar.) Two weeks? By Jesus, I've already lost all my hair, I'm skinny as a leper, and this damned Goblin's been chewing my ear since before I got here -

She shook her head. Bah, I ought to quit getting lost in these loops. Wasting time, wasting energy, no good. Maybe I'll finish my portrait. Not much else for me to do. Puzzles. Books. Sleep. Death. Doc says I can't drink coffee anymore. Hammer's gonna fall any day now. Pah. Painting it is, then.

The portrait to Denise's left bedside, shining in the morning sun, was of a much younger, much less decrepit young woman, with sensuous eyes and lips, bleach-blonde hair all aswirl on the canvas, and that duck-face pouty-lip smirk which she has seen so ubiquitously on the models in all her favorite fashion magazines. That's the face, she thought. That's the watery mask I see on myself when there are no mirrors around. It must be some aesthetic principle of sorts for women, this lusty pouty-face I always see on the best of them. An expression of lust. The ideal face. Like an ideal circle. You can imagine a perfect circle, but you can't draw one. I guess none of the women in these magazines are really real. Just the fantastic meanderings of some rich bloke's wet dream plastered on magazine covers all over the countryside. Whatever gets people's wallets out, I suppose. I think I'll get the nurse to grab me this month's issue of "*Vogue*".

Heave, wheeze, heave wheeze. Cough, hack, hauuuck, p-thtooie! Orange gob of phlegm and blood in the bowl by the bed. Don't look at it. O, this purple mind is wearing heavy on me. Gotta get away from it. Heavy bones. No escape. The Goblin, the Goblin! Ack! Gotta feed it. Gotta do something.

--"Try to go outside of your body. Think soothing thoughts. Don't be afraid. Go beyond the body, beyond your senses, beyond your thoughts; still the waters of your rippling mind. Find your inner self, your inner soul. Find your peace."

Denise exhaled long and slow. Find your inner self. Find your soul. Hmph. My inner self. Do I have an inner self? Is there a ghost beneath these decaying twigs? She tapped her forearm, scratched it. Not exactly solid, she thought, but it's certainly there. I'm certainly here, looking around, observing all this stuff; these blanched white curtains, the sunlight on my knees, this bald head... As far as I can tell, I haven't slipped out just yet.

She stared longingly into the portrait by her bedside. There I am, she thought. There's my soul. It was black and grey, with a slight coloration of beige for the skin, but no other outstanding colors were present on the canvas. She took the paintbrush off the art stand (nice of them to clean it for me...) and soaked it in the clear glass on the stool beside the stand, closer to her left arm. With her 'mixing brush' (damn thing's caked all to hell), she dabbed some red paint on the palette, swirled it in the dirtier water cup on the stool, and then repeated the procedure with the white paint, mixing them into a soft neon-rouge. With her fresh brush, she splashed a bright ripe-fig-pink glob of acrylic onto the lips of her painted soul-woman. Yes, she thought, there is some bright color in that airy world above my head. The ideal world. The world of forms. I don't know what this thing in me is, this thinking soul thing, but it seems to be situated in the only place that this weighty Goblin hasn't yet sunk its muck-meddlesome teeth into. It is all right here, this airy ideal world, inlaid between all the hard stuff... The purple can't touch it.

She stared deeply into her eyes. Amazing, she thought, that I can extract this portrait out of complete nothingness – this 'form' out of complete 'formlessness'. 'The Ether', they used to call it – the nothingness from which all structure comes; the chaotic ocean which gives rise to the spires of form. Formlessness... I'll bet that's what death is really like: a cascading swill of the raw, uncreated stuff of being; a plastic ball caught in the tumult of a rolling beer barrel.

This silly meditation tape seems to be working. The music isn't tainted by the Goblin either, look at that! Beautiful classical music oozing so sensuously through that tube-whatayacallit-transistor radio: yellow trilling violins; long, drawn-out, deep red and brown bassoons and cellos; that thin, watery trumpet splashing silver-erratic all over the place, like my brush on its canvas – no purples here! Maybe that batty nurse really *does* know a thing or two.

In her stubbornness, Denise had been refusing to eat her prescribed meals, and to take certain of her medications, flushing much of them down the toilet when the nurses weren't looking. She felt terribly weak. Dropping her brush, she began to sift uncontrollably into a delirious reverie as her backside rolled onto the hospital bed. Despite her aches and pains, the meditation music and words slowly launched her into her ideal world, her world of forms and soul, the realm of ideas perfected beyond their crudely represented reality. Visions of her youth and past memories danced through her mind like an art museum panorama, floating along with the gusto of the marching bands she enjoyed as a child. She felt wholly elevated, ecstatic and beautiful; she felt her 'inner self', her 'ideal self', her soul, her identity beyond that shell of a rotting corpse she knew to be her body on the hospital bed. She felt as if the beautiful woman in her portrait was the one floating above the used vessel lying dormant on the bed. She *was* the woman in that painting, and for those few fleeting moments of bliss, she felt herself to be at peace, totally disengaged from reality.

But it was not to last. The meditation tape took a turn for the worse: it had been focusing dreamily on the mind beyond the body, and now it had begun to wind itself back into physical reality:

--"We must be mindful of our whole selves – spirit, mind, body, all one. *Feel* your body, be *one* with it, accept the sensations you feel. *Feel* your innate wholeness as one beautiful being..."

Panic struck Denise out of her delirium: the tape began reeling her back into her body, back into the crude, painfully solid world; back into her cold, hellish purgatory. Her Goblin had found its way in. The cellos and soft bassoons had turned the rancid purple of her mind; the glistening trumpets became an infernal fire-red on the canvas of her thoughts. All of a sudden she could smell herself in her bed, her

inescapable rot, the stale scent of latex gloves and sterile death creeping through the tumult of the air. The Goblin, the Goblin! She saw yellow teeth grimacing through grey lips; she felt the stinging of her spine shoot daggers through her core. She twitched, she ached, she felt her bedsores tearing open against the bed sheets. She gasped, reaching desperately for something to hurl at the radio.

--“The body is as much a part of you as the mind and soul. *Feel* your legs. *Feel* your bones, your ligaments, and your powerful spine. *Enjoy* them, *enjoy* their sensuousness, *enjoy* their sensitivity...”

Ack! Go away! Denise screamed, releasing herself into a flurry of frightened convulsions. She smashed the jars of paint on the stool by the art stand as she reached for the broom by her bed. She couldn't reach it. She wailed like a banshee, throwing the palette at the painting, throwing the cup of water at the radio. The radio resumed its course. The low, sweeping horn section swept over her like a dark blue blanket, engulfing her in a suffocating mental muck. Her heart lurched in her chest. She grabbed her upper breast, trying to breathe; nothing was coming out. A sharp pain shot through her arm. Her lungs began to fill with phlegm, and she felt herself drowning in blue bassoons and glittering clarinets. The heart rate monitor pulsed like a police siren as the nurses and doctors swelled into the room in a ruckus.

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--Where were the nurses? Cynthia, Denise's daughter, was asking the head Doctor harshly. She was just minutes from coming into the room to visit. The room was a hurricane site. Apparently, another younger patient had begun convulsing two rooms down from Denise's just as she began to rave, and it required the help of extra staff to retain him. They came in too late to revive her.

After Cynthia had harangued the Doctors on duty for what she seemed like a sufficient rant, she rubbed her stressed face with her hands and dropped her arms in a great, heaving sob. She told the Doctors to let her get one last long look at her Mother in the hospital bed, and that they could then proceed with whatever the regular displacement procedure was. She walked to the foot of the bed reminiscently, and turned to the painting beside her Mother.

The painting had been splashed with the blue and green of the paint jars, and the red of the palette, as well as the water in the mixing cup. The once solid, clear face in the portrait had swarmed and swirled into an indefinite muck; only the faintest remnants of Denise's treasured soul were left intact. The rest was lost to an eddying mesh of glistening purples and blues; her beloved 'ideal' woman's form had succumbed to a transient swill of amorphous waves, a tumult of ebbing, flowing formlessness stretched forever across the wiry folio of her splotchy, ruined canvas.