

## **CONSERVATORY OF DEATH**



“Greetings, my little maggots!

Oh, I’m sorry. Do you take offense to the term maggots?

But aren’t you here for the same reason maggots squirm inside hot road kill?

To suck pleasure and sustenance from death?”

~MISTRESS EUPHORIA MORI,  
*Conservatory of Death Vol. 1*

**The car drove the sun away, chasing it behind the horizon.**

It was late afternoon, September, and as the car carried the girl farther from the safe comforting multitudes and tumult of the city, the day lost color, fading into the muted shades of dusk.

The car was old, as sound and exquisite as a rusted carnival ride.

The killers were transporting their prey in a 1972 Cadillac Coupe Deville that may have once been white but was now a dirty, ashen gray. The windshield and windows were tinted from the inside by years of cigarette smoke, and on the outside by dust and pollen and salt, so that all anyone saw of the driver was a glimpse of murky movement.

The car turned left on Amethyst Street, made its slow rumbling way up the hill, toward that part of the neighborhood the kids called “The Pine Pits” because of all the red pine trees and sand pits behind the houses.

It pulled into a crumbling, oil-stained driveway that led to a small ramshackle house. Dwindling flakes of red paint

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barely clung to the soft, sodden clapboards. The front door (which was painted black) had been rendered inaccessible by tough ivy vines. Two of the front windows were missing panes and had been mended with cardboard and silver duct tape.

An old mattress lay like a dead animal at the edge of the overgrown yard, purging its yellow guts into the weeds.

The garage door opened with a shudder and a creak. The car rolled inside.

Only after the garage door rattled safely shut did the Cadillac spill its occupants - a man and two women.

The man who came out from behind the wheel was tall and thin, around forty years old. Long curly black hair and wide sideburns framed his gaunt, angular face. A raised pink scar cleaved his chin (when he was twelve, his father caught him masturbating to a photograph of a naked woman entitled, *Smallpox in the Late Pustular and Dessiccative Stage* in an antique medical book. The old man hit him in the face with the blade end of an ice skate).

The woman who stepped from the passenger side was in her late twenties. She had long brown hair (parted in the middle, Susan Atkins style) and was heavier than the man by fifteen or twenty pounds. She wore thick, round glasses that magnified her forever-squinting, bloodshot eyes, and a pink sweatshirt with a picture of two fuzzy cartoon bears on the front and the inscription: "A Fine Pair of Teddies."

The second woman climbed out of the back seat, flicked a cigarette butt to the concrete floor. She was young - maybe sixteen or seventeen - and skinny enough to trigger the word "anorexia" in the mind of most people who met her. She wore a loose red tube top (that looked as if it would slip to her shoes if she leaned too far in any direction), and

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tight fluorescent pink shorts. Her hair was blonde (until you got close to the scalp where it was black) and teased high around her small, heavily made-up face.

As soon as she was out of the car, she lit another Kool.

The man and woman led her through a rickety screen door and into the house, the kitchen.

“So, like, you’re gonna gimme a ride back to the city, right? I mean after? I can’t stay more than an hour,” said the girl, sounding apprehensive. She wouldn’t have traveled this far with a trick if the woman hadn’t been part of the deal. To do this with just a guy or a couple of guys was dangerous, but these bisexual threesomes were usually the safest dates you could take.

“For the millionth time, *yes*,” said the man. “Relax.”

“Wanna drink?” said the woman, opening one of the cupboards. The kitchen was dark - illuminated only by the orange syrupy light that oozed through the shaded window - and smelled of rotting garbage. The sink was filled with dirty dishes and gray, scummy water, the table cluttered with plates and glasses from past meals. The girl noticed several flies scuttling over a landscape of greasy chicken bones, crusty mashed potatoes and glazed, hardened macaroni. Whenever someone took a step, grit crunched on the faded, pockmarked linoleum.

“Whatcha got?” said the girl.

“You like vodka?” said the woman. She had a teeny, child’s voice.

The girl shrugged. “Whatever...”

The man produced a joint and leaned over the stove to light it. He took a deep drag. “Hit?” he croaked, holding it out to the girl.

She shrugged, took the joint. “Whatever...”

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“Mommy?”

The woman turned. Her little girl, Audrey, stood in the doorway, still dressed in her *Goodnight Moon* nightgown. Audrey was three-and-a-half years old. Her hair was so blond it was almost white and sometimes the man called her “Little Seka” after the platinum 70’s porn star. She was clutching a worn Fozzie Bear beanbag doll to her chest.

“Audrey, what are you doing out here? I thought I told you to stay in your room,” said the woman, crossing the kitchen, scooping her daughter up in her arms.

Then they were gone, down the hall.

The girl took a long draw on the joint, passed it back to the man. She just wanted to get high, do this thing, and get the fuck out of there. She had to meet Manny and Linda at nine and was starting to get the fearful, sinking feeling that she might not make it. Her left arm still bore faint red slashes where Linda had smacked her with a car antenna. She couldn’t afford to piss the bitch off again.

After a few minutes, a door thumped shut and the woman returned to the kitchen. “Sorry about that. I put her to bed. She’ll be out for the night...” she said in her little lisping voice.

The girl said again, more forcefully this time, “I told you, I can’t stay more than an hour, I have to get back to the city...”

The woman handed her a jelly glass filled with warm vodka. “Don’t worry, hon,” she said. “We’ll get you back in an hour.”

The girl lifted the glass, noticed the scratched, faded picture of Yogi Bear on the side, and then took a long, triple-sip of vodka. She shuddered as the liquid flooded her empty stomach with heat. The man handed her back the joint.

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“Let’s mosey on into the bedroom,” he said, sliding his hand down the girl’s back. His hand was warm and damp. He gave each of her buttocks a squeeze, then gently pushed her toward the woman. The woman took the girl’s hand and led her down the hall. The man followed.

The bedroom was dark and the girl stumbled over something going in. When the man flicked on the light, she saw that sheets of plastic had been draped over the floor and bed. Uh oh. She hoped these freaks didn’t expect to pee on her because there was no fucking way.

The woman closed the door.

The girl looked around the room. The walls were adorned with thirty or forty tattered centerfolds from Hustler magazine. Everywhere the girl looked she was assaulted by a bright, glistening gynecological exam. Each one autographed by the gaping vagina in question.

They hadn’t bothered to clean up before they brought in the plastic and she could see clothes and porno magazines and empty beer bottles under the opaque sheets. The only thing not covered in plastic was a rattan hamper in the corner.

The bunched plastic crinkled and moved under their feet.

“Okay,” said the girl, trying to use her hard, business voice. “I’m gonna need my money now, before we do anything.”

The man smiled at her. He was missing two front teeth. “No problem,” he said, and laughed. He had a frantic laugh. It was loud and high and full of air.

His wallet was connected to his belt by a chain. He plucked two fifty dollar bills from it and handed them to the girl. She tucked them into her little beaded bag.

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“Okay,” she said with a resigned sigh. “What you wanna do first?”

“Take off your clothes,” the man said. Both he and the woman had begun to disrobe and were stuffing their clothes into a green trash bag. The girl did likewise.

The man’s thin body was hairy and pale and etched with several crude tattoos. Just below his belly, almost obscured by thick pubic hair, were the words, “Cannon of Love” and the girl didn’t know whether to laugh or puke.

The woman looked even fatter without her clothes, and dark bruises spotted her thighs and hips. Her breasts were big and colorless and droopy but what drew the girl’s helpless gaze were the deep red scars on her wrists. The girl had seen scars like that on some of the girls at the group home.

The woman grew modest under the girl’s stare and she turned away, kneeled beside the rattan hamper. She lifted the lid and removed a bottle of baby oil. “Here,” she said, handing it to the girl. “Rub this over yourself.”

The girl took the bottle, but: “Shit, are you kidding? I don’t want to get all greasy.”

“Just do it,” the man told her.

“Hey, fuck you,” she snapped. “A hundred dollars doesn’t buy you a fucken slave! I said I don’t want this shit on me.” She wanted to throw the bottle at him but held herself back.

“You can take a shower when we’re done,” the woman said, a soothing lilt singing through the helium, the Mickey Mouse tones. “Come on, we’ll give you an extra twenty for your trouble.”

The girl looked at the bottle of oil, then at the woman. She shook her head. “Man...” She uncapped the bottle and poured oil over her breasts, rubbed it over her stomach. “I

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hate this shit...”

“That’s it, rub it all over,” said the woman. “Doesn’t that feel nice?”

“No.”

When her body was slick and shimmering she handed the bottle back to the woman.

“Thank you,” the woman said, before leaning in and giving her a long kiss. She returned the bottle to the hamper.

The man also leaned in for a kiss, but the girl raised her hand to stop him. “I don’t kiss dudes.”

He laughed again - that tense, fluttering laugh. “Okay baby, okay.” He began to massage her breasts, pinch her nipples.

“Ouch! Knock it off, that hurts,” she said, flinching from his touch.

“Relax, close your eyes. This is gonna be fun,” he assured her.

“Whatever.” She closed her eyes.

The woman removed a carving knife from the hamper. She moved behind the girl and slid her fingers up her spine, feeling each slippery vertebra. When she reached her neck, she brought the knife around and slashed open her throat, severing the carotid arteries (which sprayed hot and wet into the man’s face). The girl thrashed and twitched and the man and woman quickly embraced, squeezing her between their bodies.

Blood splattered the plastic.

It sounded like rain hitting a canvas tent and the man remembered a dismal, drizzly camping trip to Maine he’d taken when he was thirteen.