



# Hollis Whitlock

## *Aphrodite and the Drunk*

John was lying in blissful intoxication on a thin mattress on the floor of his basement suite fantasizing about girls. Static humming of motor vehicles prevented sleep. He was dressed in jeans, a white T-shirt and socks. A sheet and two thin blankets partially covered his body. Sunlight was shining through a small window between the crack in the curtains onto the adjacent wall.

Pounding on the suite's interior door awakened him to a hangover. Knuckles felt like they were knocking on his skull. His arms and his legs shook. Cravings for tobacco squeezed his lungs. Vomit lingered from his scruffy chin. A gruff, but feminine voice bellowed from behind the door.

“Where's my rent money you lazy bastard!”

John sat up and placed both palms over his eyes. He massaged his scalp with his fingertips and blinked his eyes. His forehead throbbed like a fresh kick in the shins. He glanced at the digital clock on the floor. 1:00 P.M. clicked to 1:01 P.M. Two cigarette butts were in a tin cup next to lighter. He grabbed one and rolled it between his thumb and index finger. He placed the other in his shirt pocket. Knuckles rapped.

“I'm waiting for my check to arrive!” John yelled.

“Welfare Wednesday was yesterday! I want my money today, or you're being evicted.”

“This dump ain't worth shit!”



“Find another one asshole!”

“Maybe I will!” John placed the butt in his mouth and grabbed the lighter. He flicked it twice and inhaled. Relief was instant. A cloud of blue smoke exhaled.

“If I don’t get my money I’m keeping your damage deposit.”

“Fuck you bitch!”

“Speak to me like that again and I’ll send Quito by!” John inhaled on the butt and exhaled toward the door. He grinned.

“He ain’t nothing!”

“I guess you’re going to find out the hard way! You good for nothing bum!” John stood up and stepped toward the door.

“You crazy old bat! Can’t you wait a couple more days!” Soft slipper-wearing feet scurried up a flight of stairs. John laughed and flicked the butt into the tin cup. Grayish black ashes mushroomed.

He shook his head and walked to the bathroom, which adjoined the room. The floor was wet. The smell of vomit was putrid in the three by three confinement. John flushed the toilet and urinated against the brown stained basin. He shook his penis twice and zipped up before spitting a gob of yellow mucus into the bowl.

John turned around and looked into the mirror. Dried water droplets and whitish red dots speckled the warped image of his face. Oily hair hung over his ears. He ran a comb through it until the knots loosened.

Two day’s stubble covered his chiseled jaw and neck. A red sore protruded from his chin. He squeezed it with the black tip of the nails on his thumb and index finger. A dab of white pus oozed followed by a red stream of blood. He turned the water on and dabbed at it with a tissue. A red bump remained.

He placed his hands in the warm stream and splashed water over his face. A white towel stained with dirt was between the wall and a rail. He wiped his face and hands with the cloth and walked to the exit of the room.

He stepped into a pair of cowboy boots that elevated his stature to six foot five. A black leather jacket, which stunk of nicotine, hung awkwardly



on a peg on the wall. He fingered the pockets for his keys and wallet. Both were there. He slipped the jacket on, opened the door and stepped into an alcove. He proceeded through the door on his left, which led outside.

He winced in the bright sunlight and removed the butt from his shirt pocket. He placed it in his mouth and flicked the lighter. Three tokes lasted until he reached the backdoor of the upstairs suite. He looked through the sliding doors, which were partially open, and saw a teenager with curly blonde hair sitting on a stool facing the opposite direction.

He flicked the butt on the steps and knocked on the glass. The teenager placed an envelope opener on the counter and turned around. A hairless face with deep blue eyes stared stupefied. John shifted the glass door open and stepped inside. The teenager sat motionless like a rabbit.

“Your mum around?” John asked.

“No. My mom doesn’t live here,” Aphrodite replied.

“What?” John shook his head and walked farther into the kitchen. He turned around and looked at Aphrodite. “You sure your mom ain’t around.”

“That’s not my mom. I live with my dad.”

“Where’d she go?”

“I don’t know.” John looked into the living room and chuckled.

“Where’s your dad?” Aphrodite was expressionless like an airbrushed magazine model and spoke like a child.

“I don’t know.” John placed his hand over his mouth and rubbed his jaw.

“How long you lived here?”

“We moved in yesterday. I guess you’re here to rent the suite.” John’s lips tightened and his eyes squinted.

“What? The basement’s for rent?”

“Yeah, we walked through it the other day. My dad was considering renting the whole place, but it’s a total pigsty down there.”

John’s head rotated back and forth as he slammed his open palm into the countertop. Aphrodite sat upright and grasped the letter opener. John’s



mouth formed a tight-lipped circle and exhaled forcefully. His index finger shook in a threatening manner. Then he placed his hand on the counter.

“I guess I shouldn’t get mad at you.

“Do you want a drink?”

“No, I’m not thirsty.” John shook his head and clenched his teeth. Aphrodite pointed at a bottle of tequila on the countertop. “Oh, that kind of drink.” A shot glass was next to the bottle. “Yeah, maybe I will.” John grabbed the twenty-six-ounce bottle and read the label. “Hecho en Mexico.” He looked at Aphrodite. “What’s that mean?”

“Made in Mexico. My dad bought it last winter in Guadalajara.” John shook his head and guffawed. Metal was sporadically exposed between his teeth. Aphrodite winced.

“And it’s still around?”

“Yeah, have a drink.”

“You think he’ll mind?”

“No.” John nodded and poured a shot. He swilled it in one gulp and banged the glass on the counter. “Have another.” John stared at Aphrodite and exhaled a fine vapor of tequila. “You trying to get me drunk.”

“No.”

“Your dad at work?”

“No, He said he was going to the bank.” John nodded and poured another drink. He swilled it, placed the glass on the counter, and walked out the sliding doors to the mailbox. He placed his hand inside. It was empty. John rubbed his fingers through his hair. He walked back to the sliding doors and peered inside.

“You know if the mail arrived yet.” Aphrodite swiveled around in the chair.

“Yeah, it’s right there.” Aphrodite pointed to a pile on the counter-top. John grabbed the stack of envelopes and rifled through them. A government issued envelope was open. The remainder was miscellaneous. He slammed them down.



“Fuck! Where is it?”

“Have another drink.”

“I don’t need another fucking drink.”

“That’s what my dad does.”

John walked farther into the kitchen and opened the fridge. He looked inside. A meager amount of food was on the shelves. He slammed the door closed and looked at Aphrodite.

“You bring in the mail?”

“Yeah, what were you looking for?” John rubbed the scruff on his chin and stared at Aphrodite.

“Your dad said he was going to the bank?”

“Yeah.”

“To cash his fucking check!” John turned around in a circle. “This all the mail that came?”

“Yeah. So do you want to look at the suite or something? John shook his head and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “I can show it to you.”

“You can get in there?”

“Yeah.”

“You take my check?” John grabbed the pile and sifted through them. He removed the empty envelope.

“No.” Aphrodite clenched the letter opener.

“Give me that.” John grabbed Aphrodite’s wrist and took the letter opener. “Was there another envelop like this?” John waved the envelope. Aphrodite shrugged.

“I didn’t look at them.”

“Fucking Christ. Your mom go through these?”

“That’s not my mom.” John rubbed his hand over his head three times while rolling his head in a circle. He exhaled forcefully, clenched his teeth and placed the letter opener in his jacket pocket.

“Fuck!”

“What are you looking for?” John spun awkwardly in a circle.



“What you think?”

“I don’t know.”

John shook his head and walked outside. He placed his hand in the mailbox and swirled his fingertips all around. He removed an empty hand. He looked all along the driveway for the envelope. Food wrappers were blowing in the breeze. The sliding door slammed shut. John leapt up the stairs to the door. Aphrodite was staring from behind the glass. John heaved the door open. Aphrodite’s hand released from the handle.

“Where’s the garbage can?” Aphrodite stepped backwards and pointed at the sink.

“Over there.” John walked into the kitchen and opened the bottom cupboards. He opened a plastic lid and looked inside. There was nothing, but household garbage. “Have another drink.” John laughed.

“You trying to tell me something?”

“No.”

John grabbed the bottle, poured a drink, and swilled. He placed the glass on the counter and walked outside. The door closed and locked behind him. John walked with a warm buzz toward the basement door. He noticed a torn fragment of paper stuck in a small bush and picked it up. It had the look and feel of a government check. John shook his head and looked for more. He found two more pieces and opened the basement door. He stepped inside. Aphrodite was peering at him from the top step.

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing.”

“Come down here.” Aphrodite remained rigid at the top of the stairs. “Come on.” John smiled. I’m not going to hurt you.” He motioned with his hand for Aphrodite to join him. “Can you show me the suite?”

“Yeah.”

“Come down here.”

“Ok.” Aphrodite slipped a pair of handmade woolen slippers on and stepped down the flight of stairs. John smiled, stepped out of the way and motioned with his hand for Aphrodite to enter. John towered above



Aphrodite by a foot in height.

“You a boy or girl?”

“Why?”

“I was just wondering. It’s hard to tell.”

“Does it matter?” Aphrodite peered upward with round watery blue eyes. John smiled.

“I guess not.”

“What’s this?” John held the pieces of paper up. The paper was yellow and white with black letters on it.

“I don’t know.”

“You tear up my check?”

“No.” John shook his head.

“Fuck.” Aphrodite stood rigid like a deer preparing to run. John ran his fingers through his hair. “I want to put these pieces together.”

“What for?”

“To see if it’s my fucking check.” John tried to jigsaw the paper together. He shook his head and glared at Aphrodite.

“When does your dad get home?”

“I don’t know.” John laughed and turned toward the suite’s door.

“Come on.”

“No, it stinks in there.”

“It’s not that bad.” John opened the suite’s door. The putrid stench of vomit lingered. John shut the door. Aphrodite stepped up the stairs. John grabbed Aphrodite’s arm and pulled him into the alcove. “Where you think you’re going?”

“Upstairs.” Aphrodite’s limbs wavered.

“You a virgin?”

“No.” Aphrodite pointed to a door that led to the interior garage. “We could go in there.” John exhaled and looked around.

“I’ve never done this before.”

“What?”

“How old are you?”



“Sixteen.”

“I guess it don’t matter.”

“You won’t notice the difference.”

“You going to tell your dad?”

“No, it can be our secret. I like to ride.” Aphrodite’s smile revealed shiny white teeth and full red lips.

“What?” John chuckled.

“I can give you a massage too.” John rubbed the scruff on his chin around the red sore and smiled.

“Ok.” Aphrodite opened the garage door and stepped inside. John followed. Cardboard boxes, gardening tools, household items, a hockey bag and car parts were stacked against the walls. A retractable garage door was at the front of the house. A pile of clothing was on the floor against the back wall to the right. An old transistor radio was next to the clothing. John turned it on. “This’ll muffle the noise.” The DJ’s voice faded to the crackling of a vinyl disc.

“Lie down.”

John removed his jacket and lay face first on the pile of clothing. Aphrodite sat on John’s buttocks, placed his hand on John’s neck and pulled the collar down. He massaged the back of John’s neck. Tingling ran up John’s vertebra and released subtle opiates.

Then a blow struck like a matador’s sword into the first cervical of John’s neck. John flinched in pain, but he couldn’t move or feel anything. The song on the transistor radio muffled his pleas. Aphrodite sang along with the lyrics.

“All I can do is hope and pray, that the lord will let me live for another day.” John’s mind wondered into the darkest of horrors, as he realized that he was being stuffed into a hockey bag. “Cause I’m not quite sure what I’d do lost in some other world without you.” “The zipper closed shut. John was in darkness with only the sense of sound. “All I can do is hope and pray that the lord will let me live for another day.” His internal cries for help were unheard. “Cause there are so many things that I want to





do.”

An engine rumbled into the driveway. “Like play in the park, but most all I want to make.” The music abruptly ended. Slipper-wearing feet scurried away. John struggled to breathe through the thick canvass bag. His brain was sending signals to kick and squirm, but none of his limbs moved.

The grinding of the garage door opening and a vehicle idling in the driveway were John’s only external sources of stimuli. Tears streamed from his eyes, but not a limb would even flinch, as his body was dragged into the back of a truck. His breathing was restricted and difficult. Aphrodite’s father spoke.

“Have you got the baseball gear loaded into the truck?”

“Yeah, let’s go,” Aphrodite replied.

Time seemed to have stopped, as every moment of John’s existence was identical. An engine rumbled for ten minutes. Traffic roared amongst it. Then it abruptly stopped. John’s face hit the pavement. Blood lingered in his palate.

“Can you handle that?”

“Yeah.”

The sensation of being dragged across a grass field ground against the bruise on his jaw. The motion of being dragged stopped. The familiar voice of Quito spoke.

“What the Hell are you doing?”

“Nothing.”

“What do you got in there?”

“Nothing.”

“Don’t lie to me.” A zipper undid. Sunlight shone into the bag. “Were you planning on leaving him here in the bushes?”

“Yeah.”

“You can’t do that.” A needling sensation tweaked in John’s neck. “Why did you do that?”

“The lazy bastard didn’t pay the rent money.” John tried to speak, but



his voice was faint like a whisper and was only heard within his own mind.

“You fucking bitch.” Tears flowed like spring rivers.