



Gently Psycho
MC Radiance

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Part 1

Marion is running late.

He wraps up the last number of the early show. During the lengthy applause, he steps away from the mike, makes some cat-scratch motions onto an invisible tree trunk, waves amiably to the people one last time, and then dashes between the dining tables.

A quick pitstop in the bathroom, and then he's off to climb into the cab that's waiting. He still sports his huge, impenetrably black goggles. Oh so hip, man.

Soon, he's knocking back more than the usual at a very, very plush restaurant. This is not just any old business meeting, though.

"Okay, okay, dude. Now, about that deal you were telling me."

"OH yeah," comes the intoxicated reply from Nate, his keyboardist. "Was it Joe, or Steven? Damn. I can't seem to remember. But I bet one of the bookers I met yesterday—

"Come again about hookers you met yesterday?"

"Bookers I met with a B, as in braindead. You're losing your hearing, bub. I bet one of them bookers can cook us up a steady meal ticket. A regular, classy gig, ya know?"

"Without robbing us blind. That's all I'm asking."

Why are the rich always robbing the poor? It's so ass backwards.

A fair deal. Is that asking too much? For a band of jazz players with minimal chops and large afros, it may very well be.

These particular soul brothers had started out as jam buddies. They had converted the basement of their all-black fraternity. Soon they had settled in as a four-piece. They were kicking out trad gospel hymns. They came up with the name AMEN—an acronym of Arthur, Marion, Elwood and Nate.

Without a singer, where would they go? Not far.

However, after the addition of Delta, a powerhouse alto saxophonist, their luck changed! In fact, they got some great publicity at a step party when they busted out some crowd-pleasing secular love songs. They all stroked their chins, and decided it was a good idea to please the masses!

Delta was inspiring his bandmates to get more politically active though, so they decided to alter the band name in a way that reflected their new member, with a clever nod to the Greeks on campus.

AMEN-? was born.

AMEN-? branched out into all the usual disco classics (with a jazz twist). They sucked as jazz musicians... but when the strains of "I will survive" materialized, no girls bothered to bitch about lack of chops or tightness. Girls only want to boogie! Amen!

As predicted, the campus girls were soon all over them.

Within their first year together, the cats pooled their middle class resources and pressed up their debut LP called THE FIRST AMEN-?-MENT.

Get it? As in, 'Protect the First Amendment.'

The joke was too pedagogic for the frat crowd. But the aristocrats and Americaphiles of Europe got the joke and jumped on it. Their support made the album into a minor hit, at least in rarefied circles overseas.

Their support gave the guys a step up into a different social stratum right here in the States, too.

However, there was a price to be paid at the door of Plushland. Marion listened to his wasted keyboardist, but behind his goggles he was busy scouring the room for clues.

Musicians in plush land, listen closely: you are not gods in this country. You are just performing chimpanzees for the hoi polloi. You gotta see through any distortions in their floor-to-ceiling mirrors. You gotta carefully maintain a sense of human proportion at their banquet tables. Before the judging critics you shall parade. Monitor all these philistines with their twisted, contortionist laughs.

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The next morning, on the other side of town, cross-legged on the marble lobby floor of the Applefield mall, sits a tiny actress by the name of Frances.

"DAMN all you LEMMINGS!!!" howls Frances.

Frances is playing jax on a red chalk pentagram she has drawn on the marble. She must be focused on a creative mission, right? She is having trouble clearing her mind first, however... If only she didn't give a rat's ass about all the Parasites, all the Conformists around her!!!

Frances is busy altar-ring her mood, here in the enemy camp: here in the middle of Shoppingland.

"DAMN all you LEMMINGS!!!" Frances sputters, trying to tune their energy out.

Frances would rather avoid all these clone-people. She'd prefer to mingle with the most unique and creative people in the whole universe. But where are they? Time to consult the oracle.

What does she foretell? To find out, she throws the jax as if throwing witchdoctor's bones inside a tribal mud-hut. "Aha!"

No matter how many times she throws, the oracle is not saying what she wants to hear.

"FUCK all you LEMMINGS!!!" Frances ejaculates again and again, pointing at different passersby with accusatory finger.

To make matters worse, she spies a pair of security guards running over, just to pick on her.

"Lemmings," she mumbles to herself. She cocks her head with annoyance when they stop to hover over her.

"What's the problem, guys? What? I am just doing my job here. Just like you guys are doing yours." Quid pro quo. The guards should acknowledge her little game as harmless ... if they know what's good for them.

Will the guards see it that way? Doubtful. After all, who has been splattering loud curses around the atrium? Several customers have registered complaints about her during the last half an hour. A pectoral wall of threatening steel is about to feel very real.

"Listen up, miss. Nobody gave you permission to do that on the floor here. You'd better clean that all up and scam."

Frances wheels back around, still squatting, lip trembling, looking down at her magic circle. Upon the pentagram her precious jax have indeed fallen in an ominous formation! It's just as she feared. She should have known. Ignorant fools!

Her wise spirit is temporarily trapped by these cold swine.

There's still hope. Many of the omens of the oracle may prove to be only partially true, Frances.

"DAMN you LEMMINGS!!!" she abruptly shrieks.

"Yeah, yeah, okay, that's enough. Pipe down. Let's go nice and quiet, ya crazy witch, or we'll escort you down to the police station by force," orders the larger security guy.

Crazy, huh? They think young Frances is crazy, do they? Sticks and stones will break her bones, but names can never... can never... n-n-never...

A sob lunges up Frances' windpipe as she slowly stands up. She begins to wail. She howls to the ceiling, louder and louder still. In short order, she creates a tempestuous, weepy scene.

The guards roll their eyes at each other...

But now, many mall shoppers have stopped to observe. They're curious to see how this young lady will be handled—and maybe they're hoping to witness some police brutality in person.

With melodramatic aplomb, tiny Frances has planted the back of her hand against her forehead. Like a lost Ophelia, she drifts in a circle from shopper to shopper, moaning for sympathy.

"Alas! Do not worry about little old me! I will keep my rain to a drowning! My usual happy face? It is no longer clowning. (Sob!) My mood is bleak. Fears rise to their peak!...because big nasty men like THESE are free to attack the weak! (Sob!)"

Security is losing their patience with our tragedienne.

On to the climax: she fires off her biggest missile at the two lemmings. "What happened to free will? What happened to freedom of expression? Isn't this America, the land of the free, you motherfuckers?"

"Right! That's enough. Arrest her!" says one guard.

The security camera tape shows it all. The crowd of shoppers boos and hisses disapproval as the two burly men lunge forward, grab Frances, wrestle her to the ground, bending her girly arms behind her back. One breaks out a small ball of parcel twine and starts wrapping the harsh string around her wrists. He ties it off. They try to get her to stand, but she refuses.

So they drag her anyway across the floor to the exit doors. Every inch of the way, Frances screams and squeals like a stuck pig... secretly reveling in all the attention! This is like going for a toboggan ride!

Meanwhile, middle-aged onlookers tut-tut, shake their heads, and wonder what in God's name this country is coming to.

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Marion is excited. "Freeze frame it right there. Damn. What a scene! Nice. That one's a keeper."

"This music video is gonna kick ass," raves Nate.

"That chick's got exactly what this band needs. We got the fashion, we just need the goddamn drama already!" adds Arthur.

"Yeah, she's a winner," confirms Marion.

Ay, and there's the rub. You see, modern pop music? It has devolved into a kind of oddball theater, a strange circus driven by weirdo characters, glamorous criminals, and activities that have repercussions in the real world but none onscreen.

Remember when music videos first evolved into mini-films? How innocent it all looked back then.

How times have changed.

Fact: audiences grow ever more numb and jaded.

Fact: audiences seem to require more and more over-stimulation, less and less originality, and ever more pricey production values.

Fact: you pretty much gotta use Shock Therapy just to pry a reaction at all out of an audience these days. Whatever it takes—the end justifies the means.

So then, what exactly do these Modern Audiences desire?

They want More, Faster, More, Faster!! Faster and faster acrobatic leaps, from one circus elephant's back to the next. That way everybody can witness some crazy leapfrogging by the Faith-driven, spiraling the talented upwards, all the way up to Lucky Heaven and right into the laps of the gods! To those masters of Marketing Might, who can command a Mighty Dollar Deluge!!

"Roll some more of that screen test back, babe."

The band watches with the producer this time. The 'Ophelia' in question is in mid-improv, getting dragged away past an unsuspecting crowd.

"Roll it in slow motion, you'll see."

The editor obeys.

"Onvard ho, to another home, not mine..." weeps Frances, getting more and more hysterical. "Bye bye, my friends!"

Then she tries a different tack: "Wait a minute, you pigs can't arrest me without probable cause!" That tactic goes nowhere. Back to threats.

"You'll get yours, ya bullies. You'll see! Piggy pigs!"

She doesn't ignore the audience: "Goodbye, my friends! Vagabond issues twist like twine!! Where do I belong? Do I even fit anywhere?"

"... Stop the tape!" yells Delta, doing a little two-step shuffle. "Okay, we seen enough. Yeah that's definitely the one, our little drama queen."

"So who is she, man?" asks Arthur.

Nate shrugs. "I don't know, bro. Homeboy's got the pile of 8x10s."

Marion raises his hand. "Simmer down, kids, here's her resume. Ladies and gentlemen, the winner is: Frances Oracayenne. Some chick from Lebanon, moved to the States when she was six. She's into the Kaballah, whatever that is. Definitely knows how to attract attention, dude! Knows how to work a crowd."

"Everybody there was checking her out, damn." Nate is impressed. "Like, that shit was mesmer-i-ZING!"

"We gotta harness that kind of craziness live, too. In a sense," says Marion, starting to pace the room.

"Craziness? What!" Delta doesn't like the sound of that. "Whoa, whoa, whoa not so fast, Marion. That sounds dangerous, ya know? I mean, is this chick like this all the freakin' time? She could be a loose cannon."

"Frances Oracayenne. Clearly nuts, just like you and me." Nate smiles at Delta. "You wanna be a successful musician, right? Well then. You are obviously nuts! Now. Question is: do we dare go for Maximum Shock Value?"

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Yeah. An almighty buzz got started in the mall yesterday. The melodramatic actress had finished up her scene for AMEN-?'s first music video. The character had been "fined for disturbing the peace," and freed in the parking lot... as per the music video script.

No one at the mall besides the guards and the mall management had been aware that the whole thing was staged. And that's Reality TV for ya.

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3:15. Frances asks the taxi man to drop her off down on Tinkle Road. The door guys are waiting for her behind the velvet rope.

Like a storm in a bottle, she gets escorted between the two bouncers over to a table at the empty Trocadero nightclub, awaiting the final casting decision.

As they walk, she tries to keep the boys entertained with her Russian imitation.

"Van you seenk about eet, vat perzonality traits actually deserf ze beeg spotlight? My partner 2 be, up zere, zo cute. Sweengeeng zo free, like animated MTV."

Marion, onstage, finishes swigging a beer, sees Frances enter, and quickly scoots stage right and out the side door of the club. He needs to collect his thoughts. First impressions are important, after all. In the parking lot, he holds court with Art, the keyboardist. Art folds his arms.

“You handle this one, Marion, I ain’t doing it.”

“Look, man. Chill! It’s like I told our public relations guy. Is she a great actress, or is she a loony and a liability? We don’t know yet. We just keep our guard up, Artie boy. Stay on our toes until we find out if she is too fucked up to even have around.”

After a couple of cigarettes, both musicians stroll casually back into the echoey venue. The schmooth bandleader feels a little generous despite himself. Poor Frances. Her mascara is a mess worthy of Tammy Faye-Baker.

“Hello Drama Queenie, nice job at the mall. But it looks like your aura has gotten all messed up. Here, use my hankie. Ther-r-r-re ya go!”

Just as they are about to begin their ‘little business talk’, however, here comes more important business.

Before she can protest, Marion apologizes profusely for the interruption then quickly disappears for his appointment with the video editor, Danny.

She’s been upstaged? Nobody upstages Frances!

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Danny is like a reality surgeon. He’s the final image controller of Marion’s body. Body of recorded work, that is.

Marion has traditionally had some difficulty surrendering his creative control of the band’s product. Handing the reins over to some so-called expert who is not musical and who therefore can’t POSSIBLY understand what the divine inspiration is!

In Danny’s editing suite now, Marion chews his nails. Grrr. He periodically applauds the editor’s decisions, politely, while keeping his mind distracted. He flips through all the car magazines to pass time, but it’s difficult to read them through his dark goggles.

He tries to forget that with each editing cut, he feels like a musician who is bleeding, that all his careful production work is slipping away from him. Or rather it is being stripped from his grip. Kinda like a football play that goes wrong.

Marion glances up at the computer screens. The image editor continues to blithely slice and dice his precious body (of work). Danny keeps warping the energy of the jazz-disco piece from lovey-dovey into psycho confusion...

And soon Marion is regretting the comic addition of the Frances footage.

It doesn't hurt, it doesn't hurt, it doesn't hurt, claws the musician. But AMEN-?'s record company had only "suggested" one editor. So the band is forced to use him...

"Hey Marion." Danny smugly sips his coffee. "I think I am going to just go ahead and cut out the middle part of the song altogether. It'll make the images flow better," opines the barbaric editor. "Trust me."

As if you can keep the baby alive and just "cut out" its abdomen...

Marion screams inside. "It don't matter, it don't matter, it don't-" he mutters, trying desperately to persuade himself that the record company knows what it is doing.

Marion starts to fantasize about an emergency trip to the crack-pipe bathroom. One can never be over-prepared when your work is getting dissected to shreds by critics and ignorant commentators and overzealous editors.

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Frances, meanwhile, is still popping out of her skin. She's riding on a not dissimilar freaked-out wavelength.

Her wait to hear the hiring decision is dragging on and on into hours! It's a bad omen.

She dusts the sugar off of the donut the bouncers have given her. She can almost see the bad news coming like a black tidal wave. No, sorry, ma'am, we finally went with someone else. Good luck with your career, though.

That's what must have happened. They have decided they don't want her talents. And they don't even have the spine to come out to tell her face to face. And she was banking so much on getting this break. Uh oh! Oh, God! It's moments like this that make Frances go nuts.

She starts spewing saline rain from her eyes again.

Security scowls. "Have some Kleenex, lady. Geez. Some professional you are."

If she can't stop crying (which she can't) they'll probably squeal to Marion how she is unable to control her emotions. She must turn the tap off! She must! Think of something positive, quickly!

Marion. He is so fine. Marion. If only she could go down on her cute little knees before Marion and beg his forgiveness in person, he would not be able to resist her even in her runny mascara. "How can I ever thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Marion. How can I ever make it up to you, sir? I want you to feel as happy as I feel!"

"I got an idea." He might say, winking. "Let's go back to my place, babe. But no more teary scenes, ok?"

OKAY!

"And no kissing every toad on the road, ok?"

What.

"But – but then what would be the point of going on the road? Marion. With all due respect, Marion, I can't be having no colleagues telling me how to live my private life."

No, she's her own person. Marion might try but he won't be able to figure how to pimp her out. Is she too strong? Is her "Integrity Act" all wrong? Alpha males "fixing" girls is a very volatile subject. Especially among womyn whom it annoys... She's gotta be herself, and that's that. She's not gonna rein in her Libido just because some guy tells her to.

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In real life, Marion at last drives himself back from the editing suite. He's exhausted. He collapses on a chair next to Frances. He tries to muster up some enthusiasm.

"Alright, where were we. No, woman. No cry! What were you crying for? Are those real? Come on. Good news, Frances! We cast you in the video! Congratulations."

"You did? You cast little old me?"

A huge smile splits her face in two. Her bloodshot eyes meet.

"Thank you! Oh thank you!" She scrubs her mascara all over her cheeks. "I wish you weren't seeing me like this. I bet you probably think I'm just a big old crybaby, and you're going to pamper every deep thought I get from now on, which isn't at all what I need." She giggles. "But I'm kind of greedy like that. Okay, I guess it IS what I want. I mean, whatever works to get your attention, you know? Hey, everybody, I got the part!"

She's so pent up from all the suspense, so delighted at finally getting a break that she can't hold it in any longer. "Boohoo-hoooooooooooo!..." Marion quietly laughs his ass off.

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Marion's pimped-out van has flame decals on the outside and pink shag carpeting all over the interior. And a wet bar. And blacklights. And a mattress.

"Aren't there other ways to do this?" Arthur is in high dudgeon, venting after pulling Marion aside. "We wanna stand out from the pack while staying on track, man! You listen up, bro, there has to be some better system than adding this nutjob to our baggage! Must be something else we can do!"

"How about you," starts Marion, poking Arthur in the forehead, "How bout seeing you onstage, busting it with Ever... Greater... Intensity?"

Marion goes back to chugging his 40 while sprawling on the carpeting, running his fingers through the shag.

The keyboardist, however, has a whole different. He knows now that AMEN-? is slowly turning into a fool's mission. Artie's own plans are brewing—plans that he won't tell no one about, not even Marion—who now wants to ramble on about his painful day with the music video editor.

"It ain't right, Artie. All that crazy graphicness over at MTV, it's got everybody hypnotized. It's overpowering the, um, Essence of Harmony. You know what I mean? Gotta admit it, man: the Music Biz? They as 'bizzaro' as they wanna be. Totally wack. While trying to make it all seem spontaneous and passionate..."

Marion stops himself as tiny Frances jumps onto the open back door of the van and hangs there.

Right on cue, thinks Marion. Here she is, spontaneous and passionate.

She plops down on the mattress next to him. With a short coke straw from his shirt pocket, Marion slurps up the last of Frances' tears. It's a cute gesture. She strokes his chest. She kinda wishes he would be slurping from her tight little love canal instead...

"Oh! P.U." Marion suddenly cringes. "What happened to you, Frances? You been swimming in a ditch, girl?" That was the remark of someone over-tired and undiplomatic. A little voice in his head explains:

what's oozing out is her inner difficulty. "Something round here smells pretty fishy."

Perhaps he should keep his observations to himself.

Steam begins emerging from the girl's ears. Fishy? He says I stink like fishies?

"FISH THIS!"

The short fuse ignites the gunpowder. Frances goes crazy raving mad! Tearing at his face, just as the bouncers and Artie had predicted. Ballistic! Nuclear! In a heartbeat, Frances grows from a mild tropical depression into a full-fledged, raving storm.

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"Madness: Some say: cure it! You know what I mean. Madness: It's, like, totally insane, dude," laughs Delta whimsically. "She needs to be on meds for sure. Anyway, I hope you done rethought your decision, Marion. Unless.. unless you've gone crazy too."

"Ya know guys," Marion weighs in as if he were the elder statesman. He is certainly the most pimped-out musician backstage. "There are folks out there who are gonna invest in Madness. With lots and lots of publicity cash. They dig it. They gonna popularize it! I mean, even someone as sane as Shakespeare? He had to pander to HIS public's crazy notions. He had to kowtow to his crazy audience! He had to cater to their, and I quote, 'irresponsible delight in vigorous motion!' You wanna know why, bro?"

The sax player shakes his head in dismay.

"Because Madness grabs the eyes, man. Because it's memorable, man. Because Madness sells more tickets, man! It gets the job done quicker, man! Dig? Most people in that audience easily mistake madness for the REAL PASSION that they themselves want to feel."

"I think you got the hots for her, if you ask me."

"So what if I do? So she's a bit squeaky, so what? The squeakiest wheel gets the most financial oil, dig. That's what I'm saying. This is the perfect plan, I'm telling you, bro."

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Later that night, on the second floor of a nearby hotel, Frances is lying on her back, knees spread far apart, sealing the deal. One knee to the east, one knee to the west, and coming down the middle is Mr. Cool Ass

Marion. She's in afro heaven, here in the bedroom where management had put her up.

Speaking of vigorous motions: our crack-bedeviled musician is hitting that pussy. Who cares about her madness? She washed off the stank, and now she's getting the reward: a string of unforgiving orgasms.

It is just moments after midnight and Frances keeps thinking: Fireworks! Fireworks! They're exploding in my head, like it's the 4th of July!

1 a.m. and the little actress is getting sore from the relentless pounding by Marion's pocket rocket. Her mind is going blind from its red glare.

His Theater-gone-Brothel is in full effect.

The Devil Incarnate is definitely getting paid His Due.

Yet after the long shagging, Marion disappears away into the city lights of the underworld without even an explanation, leaving her alone and moist and sore and staring at the ceiling: wondering, wondering...

In the wet spot, disheveled, unclothed, Frances smokes the last of the Camels. She runs her hands across the black velveteen sheets, waiting for the girlfriends she had phoned earlier to arrive.

Her cable TV is alive. Remote in hand, she flits aimlessly from channel to channel.

One thing about TV that intrigues our histrionic actress is how it captures her Imagination. It then leads her effortlessly into a state of Total Fixation. It's just like Hypnosis. The fixation turns off the Big Embarrassing Emotional Tap for a while with one little click of a button.

Like when you're in pain and you just need to zone out. Or you wanna enjoy going bland. Getting the free ride. Yeah! Kicking back and letting your poor, overworked mind take a long overdue vacation. It's okay to let yourself be controlled! It's a lot simpler that way.

Be directed by the director.

Be told exactly what to do... and how to do it. How long to do I for, even who to do it with!! To act the part. It is kind of like being a hooker, in a way. To let go of all the usual hassles of figuring out everything for yourself all the time. Phew! Kiss goodbye to all those annoying decisions and just pretend to be someone else! All you gotta do is fixate on the motivation, unzip, get naked, wham, bam, thank you ma'am for no mental plan and at last: phew!

She feels the a/c whirring, caressing every inch of her skin.

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Two of her girlie friends finally burst in. Noisy, noisy!! Joy and Melanie don't seem at all surprised that Frances is naked. They flop onto the great big bed next to her...just in time to hear of a tragedy on Channel 15:

'More late-breaking news—a fighter jet went down at 6:18 this evening at Thomas Airbase. The pilot, Simon Oracayenne, wasn't hurt but he is still shaken up. He was unable to say exactly what went wrong. He claims that all the dials in his cockpit started spinning...'

"I bet he was flying past some hot chick and he just squirted himself out the ejection seat," laughs Melanie.

"Hey! Don't you know that guy, Frances?" asks Joy. "The one who crashed his jet?"

Frances is in shock. "That pilot is m-m-my brother." Tears start running down Frances' stunned cheeks. [Nothing new there.]

"Oh. Really? Sorry about that dude," offers Joy.

"I...sorry I... didn't know either," sympathizes Melanie. "Sorry Frances. That must be embarrassing for you."

"It's okay, it's okay, guys." Frances waves her hand like a limp rag. "I hate him anyway. I used to call him Dangermouse."

"How come?" her friends want to know.

Frances shrugs. "Oh, he liked to play pranks on the other pilots. One Xmas, he mailed them all suits of Gore-tex... dipped in kerosene."

"Oh my God!" screams Melanie. "What an asshole! Kerosene? What if they were wearing one of those suits and a fire broke out in their cockpits?"

"Pssss!" sneers Joy. "Not very patriotic of the dude. In wartime and everything?"

Melanie squints at Joy. "I bet I know someone who's got a fire in her cockpit."

"Oooo," teases Joy, crossing her legs. She's on her period. "Forget the Gore-tex. In this sea of blood, I need some Kotex!"

Frances, despite herself, caves in. "Ha! Kotex! To mop up the bloody Female Resistance!"

"EEW!" the girls all squeal like piglets in a sty.

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Downstairs, past the registration desk, totally high, in come two rich couples from Ohio.

"We want a single."

The desk clerk keeps a poker face. "Don't look at me, I ain't single, I'm married."

"No, silly, we mean a single ROOM. One king-size bed please."

The clerk scans their four faces. Four in one bed, eh? "Will that be cash or credit card?"

As the foursome chatter and go their touchie-feelie way toward the elevator, the clerk finishes her paper work and shakes her head with amusement. One bed? Must be some swingers who share a lot of thrust in each other. Or, at the very least, a lot of trust in one other.

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Exiting the elevator, primed for some nocturnal nookie, the swingers stop outside the groupie brothel doorway. The door is ajar.

"Hey, look at that, Josie, a bed full of hot escort girls!"

"Fine, Mitch. You go join them. We'll just go on ahead and play without you."

"Oops." Mitch tries to backpedal. "Well, no, no, that's not what I meant at all. I mean, yikes! I mean, who knows what diseases they've got? Like I always say. Who can you really trust these days?"

"Yo, pal," retorts Frances in her most emphatic, highly-offended squeak, "I ain't no diseased escort girl. I'm with a famous jazz band, see?"

"And I own a specialty cheese shop," adds Melanie.

Joy pitches in: "And I am a corporate advertising exec. So there. Now move along, all of you, move along. We are very, very busy."

Joy goes to the door and slams it shut in the swingers' faces. The three girls burst into hysterics.

Frances eagerly fills in her pals on how she landed her acting audition, which is of course far more important than the news that her brother narrowly escaped death this evening.

Then Joy maneuvers her naughty girlfriends into some giggly kissy-face. Frances quickly forgets all her troubles...

She also forgets that Marion will be back soon. How fast will she have to start juggling alibis when Marion bursts in from his downtown tour?

Or will she tell her pretty confidantes: ‘Sayonara, see ya laytah, I am in no position to choose abstinence with this guy?’

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Here he comes: 3:30 a.m. With puffy eyes, Frances shuffles to the door in the darkness. Her female friends are passed out cold.

Marion grabs her by the wrist, pulls her silently out into the corridor... and kisses her, long and hard. Wow. He’s not wearing his goggles. His eyes look bloodshot. Or maybe it’s just the hallway lighting.

Up the stairs he drags her to his own favorite oasis, the Red Room, where the lights are always dimmed and the walls and ceiling are mirrored.

“Come on, come on, baby, hurry up!”

Soon Frances is obediently shedding layers of vulnerability until she is again getting busy with him. She loves his Urgency, the way that he wants to take control. Plus, it seems like forever since the last time.

They tumble onto the red bedspread. She moans nonsensically into his ear: “It has been too long, baby.”

Marion. Her prize! Her soon-to-be-fiancé, little does he know! Once she has finished working her spider magic on him, he will be in her web forever!

Their passionate climaxes rip through curtains, blast through floors; their climaxes could rouse the dead for the Day of Redemption...

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Shhhhh. Marion sits up, vaults out of bed, rushes to the door, listens hard like a spy being tailed. Then back to bed. No explanations.

His cock slides around inside her again. He begins to whisper a tale into her ear, the story of a sorcerer and him, the story of a moment long past, a story he tells in time to the stroking of her vulva.

Frances feels like he can actually see into her, as if he were a sorcerer staring right into her heart!

Between her still-heaving breasts, she feels her silver pendant. Melanie had bestowed it on her earlier.

A gift.

Incredible. No one had ever given Frances a present of love like that before. It’s nothing short of a miracle in her eyes, and therefore it is something she must treasure and guard forever.

Still, Frances can tell that Marion wants to stare into her heart... but her prized pendant is blocking his view. And the longer he stares, the more the locket begins to tempt him.

Stop staring at my locket, she commands silently.

Frances feels a change in the wind. It's time to stop being the submissive and to start giving the orders around here. No way can a male possibly understand the secrets of the locket, for it contains magical female powers!

Stop staring at my locket. She shudders with one last orgasm. His sweat continues to drip off his forehead, down her nipples, running into a tiny rivulet over her heart... down onto her locket.

Female Powers which he probably wants for himself! Stop staring at my locket, man!

Marion involuntarily reaches for it. "That pendant is rad! Hey, let me see it."

"No!" yells Frances, also involuntarily.

"Yo, keep it down, babe. I only want to see..."

"No no no, you can't have it! Not ever! Get off of me!"

She makes a mad break for safety. She snatches his flower power pimp towel off the bedpost; and dashes out the Red Room door. "No no no!"

"WAAAAAAAAIT!" Marion hollers uselessly after her. "What the..."

The sick realization hits him that his bandmates were probably right all along. She is cuckoo.

But Frances can't look back, not even for a second.

"No no no no no!" Frances whizzes past the clerk in the lobby and through the rotating door, rushes out into the street wrapped in the pimp towel, her tears raining down and soaking into the terrycloth, her fist clutching tight around her locket, her one and only true possession!

She waits to catch a bus. To where? It doesn't matter.

What's available is an early morning owl service. Serendipity is at the very same bus stop. She's a middle-aged lady who materializes just in time to give her a dollar for the fare, and to lend her the extra robe that she has rolled up in her huge shopping bag.

They begin talking.

* * * * *

It's 6:15 am. In a swanky apartment across town, tonight's ratio is female to female. Serendipity and Frances are still awake, exchanging stories, listening to CDs, except now Frances is on overload.

"Hey, Dippity. Let's turn that shit off, can we? It's starting to give me a headache."

"OK, Frances dear. There." The apartment goes back to stillness. "Now. Where were we? Oh yes, I want you to tell me all about this relationship of yours, kiddo. With your fiancé back in town from his world tour and everything."

Frances clears her throat and cooks up some more hyperbole. "Oh, it's all about him. Everything's always about him. He just demands all my time and then some. I've got my own life too, right? I told my man, look, if I forfeit my female friends, I'm just a little old boat with no sails. And you know what? He tried to snatch away the silver pendant my girlfriend gave me. Probably to pay for his crack habit!"

"NO! And it's such a pretty one, too, it's a good thing he didn't run off with it. Men! Tsk. He must be very insecure... But they all are. And a crack-smoker on top of it? You got to dump that loser, girlfriend."

"I suppose. It's just that I love him so much."

"But are you going to let him get away with all this? You gonna be a passive spectator, or are you going to put your foot down?"

"Um ... um... put my foot down?"

"If you ask, me, I'd recommend no more nookie with the loser. Doctor's orders."

"Yep. I think you're right. He needs to be taught a real lesson."

"Sounds like a nut-case, Frances. He won't last... Men, they come and go. But women, we understand each other, right?"

"Uh huh."

"Hey, I'm here, play with me!"

"Yippie! A game! What kind of game?"

"Let's say a counselor asks you how you and I met. You reply?"

"At a bus stop, on a hill, overlooking a big... strap-on dildo?"

Frances' wandering hand has alit upon said plastic phallus, which was stashed under the living room side-table. She waves the dildo at Serendipity with fiendish delight.

"Oh, no," cries Serendipity in mock horror. "I saw you first! With your red hair aflame, like a star-bust!"

"What??"

"Yeah, like Michael Jackson! YOW! Put those goddamn flames out!"

"Okay, you asked for it. PILLOW FIGHT!"

Later in the morning, the older woman cradles Frances on her couch.

"You know, it makes me sad to hear about your fiancé. But musicians, they're a weird bunch. Just leave them alone I say. And you are welcome here anytime, babe. You know what? Unsatisfying relationships? They always gonna leave you numb."

"Don't I know. I never wanted to be second fiddle to no guy. Especially after the chemistry has gone and evaporated."

"So, Frances: suppose that same counselor were to ask you about your upcoming marriage, what would you say now?"

Frances walks to the window. The sun is struggling to climb through the industrial warehouses and train tracks and power lines, but it's not going to make it. The day is gray and overcast.

She tries to imagine actually getting wed to Marion.

She pictures Marion's expression of disgust, standing at the end of the aisle opposite her. How he will go through the motions of the service while simpering to the priest: "Oh hell! It'll be another two years before I finish digging up all her sordid secrets!"

And on their honeymoon, Marion will be wondering to himself: "What's with her fallen face all the time now? How come she never smiles no more?" While she in turn will sulk, "I hate that prick. Always carping that I'm not half as glamorous as everyone believes."

Marriage? Well... It'll probably go sour after a while, anyway.

Eventually, one partner will become the warrior bird, welded to the bow of the ship. Distant, brooding, telescope to eyeball and focused elsewhere. The other partner will alternately bitch at him and serenade him (out of key), but her tactics will fail. She'll be unable to pry any sign of love out from between the crack habits. She could get by on a little measly reaction, damn him! Any sign of sensitive feedback. But none will show.

So she'll grow colder and colder. She'll ponder if his inner lack of feeling is a feeling of inner incompetence.

At the same time, he'll suspect that her Madness stems from a Control Issue Deadlock...

Back and forth, they'll try to out-analyze each other with weapons of psycho-babble. And the Anti-Passion will ever grind their marriage oars around: until death do them part, they'll be hooked—and in their locks Bound.

Oh yeah. Bound to end badly.

* * * * *

Serendipity listens to Frances. Her new friend's stream of consciousness rambles out of control. She understands now that the girl in the borrowed robe is, to say the least, a major pessimist.

Serendipity recalls her own radical youth. Young girls can afford pessimism. When you get older, it's too debilitating though. You need all the friends you can get.

Dippity gets up and brews the pair some Folger's coffee.

Frances continues detailing her vision outloud: "On the deck of our precarious ship, there he'll be. The warrior. My pimped-out husband. He'll pace, back and forth and back, just tuning me out. He won't pay no mind to all my fake stunts, all my flopping around on the deck like a fish. He'll just step over me as if I were not even there, like I'm some pouty baby. Pacing back and forth."

To demonstrate, she paces in front of the window back and forth.

"And he'll be wondering, what the fuck did I do to deserve this crybaby? Will she ever start acting like a real grown up? Then... and then...and then he will start to disbelieve every single thing I say. Oh no. Trust? It will get all chipped away. Chipped away, you know what I mean, Dippity? Chip chip chip chip chip."

Frances makes quick little stabbing motions with her fist.

"A predictable soap opera, ain't it? Tune in tomorrow: Will Marion try to SMACK the love back into me? Will Frances make him fall for a CROCK of bullshit promises?"

Dippity makes tsk-tsk sounds while combing her fingers through her graying hair. She's been in similar straits before.

"Naw," continues Frances. "I know exactly what will happen. Marion will eventually treat me like irritating wallpaper that just needs changing. Yup. You know how it is. Why stick around with cold women who refuse to be romanced, who don't even try to bridge the trust chasm?"

Who are too busy soul-searching, too busy protecting our own space? Why should he even bother to work it out?

“That’s right. We women are all just self-serving, self-centered, narcissists!” Frances’ eyes are rolling around into the whites. “That’ll be Marion’s theory! And that’s about the time he’ll start jumping on all the other pussy out there. And THAT’S how our ship will capsize and sink.” She ends her speech with a grand, finalizing flourish of the arm, worthy of the most famous diva.

A cargo train blasts its horn. A mile of carriages takes forever trundling through the district, its klickity clack finally fading away like a dream.

Fueled by coffee, it is clear that Frances has worked herself up a real head of steam. She has fallen silent, although she can vividly see the whole scenario unfold as if it has already happened!

Well then, if that’s how Marion will really think? Then fuck it all, she ain’t going to wait around for the shoe to drop. Frances will declare her independence today! No husband is gonna hold HER back anymore!

And she’s going to tell her husband exactly that, in no uncertain terms, later today! She excuses herself from Serendipity’s flat and on the bus she rehearses her next speech, her improv scene, the one that she will stage with Marion later today.

But on second thoughts... Back at the hotel, it starts to sink in that Marion is not her husband yet. In fact, she’s barely his girlfriend. In fact, she might be not much more than a groupie in his eyes! They only met yesterday, after all.

Which is why Frances, the checked mate, plots her next moves very carefully.

* * * * *

She closely monitors Marion’s coordinates over the next few months. She notes anyone in danger of growing close to him, any girls to whom he shows any sign of affection.

Then she hunts them down, shuts them down! The weakest links will be crushed underfoot! She shall stomp down any challenger to her unbridled possession of this man! Her net is closing in!

The hep-cats of AMEN-? are worried that the isolating moat Frances is digging around Marion is taking its toll. Among the bandmates it is unspoken but suspected that Marion has been hitting the old crackpipe way too often for comfort.

Their once fearless leader has begun to stoop into depression. Marion's eyes, which once scanned the skies brightly for inspiration, are now receding into hollow sockets; his oft-bloodshot gaze sinks sadly towards the floor both at rehearsals and gigs.

And the weaker he gets, the stronger Frances feels her position is becoming. Cleverly, she has taken charge of their joint id account. She has acquired new clout on the business side of the band, too... Whatever she says, goes.

The record company peasants quiver when she storms into the room. She's a powerful force, a battleaxe, queen of the bitches. She's become a fucking tropical hurricane!

"Who's trying to steal him from us, I'll kill them yet! Who wants to get destroyed next?" she roars in her cross-eyed frenzy.

Marion's circle of spiritual friends severely regrets letting Frances get to him, but it's too late now. She's grown too powerful.

"Honey, don't k-k-kill us off! We are his roots, baby! If you cut us off from him, Marion will just fold up and die!"

Why should Frances care? If these corrupting insects can't fit into her marriage scheme, then their words shall expose them for what they truly are: Parasites!

She shall huff, and puff and may the walls of their worlds be blown down! (So mote it be.)

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Part 2

Years pass, and one night Frances puts on her makeup and orders her children to entertain the guests who are coming over. Entertain the visitors, because both Frances and her husband are going out for the evening.

But to different places. (Of course.)

“Places please, kids. It’s time for the show, time to perform. We don’t want to hear any bad stories when we come back.”

“But mommy I feel sick.” protests their younger of the mulattos, who seems to be growing up without any parental supervision whatsoever...

Whatever! In the closet, Marion grabs his tribal mask for the gig later. He’s gotta pry himself out of this domestic hell. He makes sure his crack pipe is wedged into his underarm holster.

Be the nighttime hero, Marion, you rebel! You’ll show ‘em yet!

Spreading the AMEN-? gospel by night, but dreaming a futile dream, an elusive dream of a cheerful day life... Don’t worry! Show ‘em all your pure intentions, your desire for upliftment beyond marital strife... beyond all the dreary, mundane struggles.

* * * * *

Frances, meanwhile, is steadily running out of steam. She’s not much more than a tropical depression these days.

She corners her errant husband at the exit of a club parking lot one evening and lays down the ultimatum:

“Surprised to see me, Marion? Tell me: who is revolving around whom now? If it’s our kids vs. your ‘crack’ life? I now have to decide between ME and WE, coz at this point, your kids and me are both stuck with an annoying YOU.”

In a different tragedy, this might be the moment where all Marion’s hopes and illusions crash to the ground. The tragedy in which he returns home and exits forever via a late night concoction of sleeping pills and vodka... or a rifle nestled upon the tongue. BANG! No more AMEN-? and no more family hassles. No more nothing.

Sweet oblivion.

But in this version, the depressed bandleader only steps out of her black-spider way... just moments before a speeding brown car flying down the street opens its passenger door at the wrong moment.

With a horrible cracking sound, Frances goes somersaulting through the air.

She lands with a thud on the sidewalk.

She can't speak. The blood quickly bubbles up out of her mouth. She blinks.

Marion is in shock. It's a hit and run. He tries to memorize the license plate number, repeating it to himself over and over as he juggles his cell phone to call 911.

She can just about see him. There is a shared look of pity between wife and husband. He kneels down, rolls up his jacket and gently puts it under her head.

"You're gonna make it, Frances. It's cool. Hang in there, baby."

But it's already too late.

* * * * *

A month after his final icy tango with his babies' mommy (who lived to destroy his nights anyway), a month after her unsolved murder, he's drawn back into the slipstream of the crack streets once more. He's not going to sit quivering in his room one more evening.

The police had promised him a thorough investigation. They told him that they had a couple of leads already.

Marion has smoked a lot of crack tonight. He goes riding his Impala with the 20" rims low through the concrete jungle, his gut filled with mixed emotions.

And now he has a sudden, bottomless appetite for poontang.

He's on a mission, scouting for dolls, hunting for babes, ready to spear some fresh snatch, anything to block out the memory of that terrible night.

* * * * *

In a small alley behind the Marquis, Marion pulls down his tights for his first Robin Hood exploit.

He has it all figured out. He is going to give to the poor and steal from the rich. Yes, he is going to give to his Poor Self, by robbing rich bitches of their sexual energy. Life Energy.

He flaunts his woodie after depositing his load upon the tongue of a wealthy nympho whore.

"Swallow that down and say bye bye, babelicious!"

She swallows and waits for the rest of her cash. Instead, he suddenly whips out a hunting blade and slits her throat open.

GLUG, GLUG, goes the blood down her chest. It reminds him of Frances' blood, seeping across the sidewalk. But this is what it is going to take!

The woman slumps over, dead. That was the first redemptive sacrifice for his lost wife.

He keeps rubbing his man-stick over her corpse: can he bring things back to life? Will he not perfect a pyre! More witches shall brew, soon enough, Frances. Soon enough. They shall strip for him, and fuck for mercy, and then they shall be burned alive, thrown upon his purgatorial fire!

The hookers pant and moan, one after the other.

"He's a magic man, ugh ugh." The blade flashes red, time and again.

Redemption fills Her bowl a little higher.

One good deed accomplished, on to the next in line. And the next... Even though Marion's getting paranoid that he might have been hexed that day he got exed- exed- exed...

The murder spree has the whole city on tender hooks. At home, ignoring calls from the AMEN-? boys, Marion wonders how long it will take before the cops catch him.

"Catch me? O, my dear subconscious, don't be so goddamn whimpy!" he protests to the mirror, cleaning his deadly blade. "I wield a broad sword and I MASTER my fillies."

He walks around his apartment, talking to the furniture. "I do not beg them rich whores to 'Cum alive!' if they cling to 'No no no!' Why waste my time on the walking dead? I just move along, move on to the next, better investment!"

Marion flops onto the red comforter of his king-size, not-so-polyamorous bed. He flings wide his arms, as if to embrace and enlighten the masses. He smokes another rock and talks candidly to his ceiling fan, like it is a television interview.

"See ladies: it's like this. Don't say no. Don't be saying, 'No no no, please don't kill me.' That just makes me mad. I hate that word, No. Too many no's flying around the place. The No Bird? It's just a fucking cop. The cop who maintains the fucked-up status quo. No, don't fix anything. No, just leave it all fucked up. The No cop will keep busy figuring out the next good reason to have me arrested so that nothing out there gets fixed. No no no.

Like a certain wife who just could not let go....”

No matter. Those days are over. Marion has other outlets for his final amusements. Important outlets.

The cracked musician imagines the expressions on the surprised faces of more money grubbing dancers! He can already taste how the blood of those erotic dancers will flow!

He needs more blood, more, faster, more, faster, more and more over-stimulation from faster and faster sex with the easiest sluts in the solar system... Yes!

The night is fast approaching when the crimson Cup of Redemption will be filled to its brim. And when he too is dead and gone, he will bring that precious Cup to Frances. And they will drink of Redemption together.

A whole different kind of Life will fill their veins! And they will at last be happy together.

Marion’s gritted teeth grind loudly in the dark room. Yeah, it’s that time again. Time to hit the streets.

There’s a loud knocking on his door...

* * * *

THE END

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