

Thus Spake Gigolo

by Scott Bailey

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Greyhound

I find my boyfriend, not in the future tense, but the one
I'm dating on a porn site, asking for private photos,
Poppers and bondage sex, so I jump the gray dog to visit

Mama who's sure to console me with her casseroles
And cakes, plus I'm a sucker for discipline and told-you-so's,
Whatever it takes for me to write these experiences

Up firsthand. I wish I were on that bus that overturned
On an exit ramp and slid into a field, killing three cows,
A deadbeat father and a penniless addict. According

To a survivor in a chat room, one paramedic,
Remarking about the fast-food wrappers and lottery
Tickets, said, "Chicken nuggets and gambling's a bad

Combination." But now, my fellow thrill-seeker, look at
This guy who's wearing a cap with bold letters, "My inner
Child needs a spanking." I wonder if he reads Wordsworth,

But before I ask, I'm interrupted. "Don't talk to him,"
The Goth girl next to me in platform boots, whispers,
"I know you just got on, like, and I don't want to scare you,

Like, but I've been on this bus all night, like, and it's like,
Ahhh, like a mother-fucking, like, end-of-time movie.
And Roberta, like, behind us, like, is on her way to see

Her aunt who believes we're already, like, dead." I turn around,
Expecting to see a woman bearing henna tattoos and sitting
In the lotus position, but she's pulling a french fry

From between her gorilla titties and humming "Wild Thing."
But she's not as gassy as the horse-faced man in front of us,
Quoting Cheech and Chong as if they're a part of God's plan.

When I thought he couldn't go on, he stands up and screams,
"I'm a paramedic," after a woman with untidy, gray-streaked
Hair collapses in the aisle, her hand clutching a photo

Of a man wearing overalls and holding a Shih Tzu over
A birthday cake. It's clear that he doesn't have any training.
Not the dog, but this man saying, "Work with me, work with me."

I'm reminded of a church service when Brother Roy Ulmer
Faints in the spirit, shits too, during a testimony. My cousin
Sybil, a real paramedic, and the only one to go to college

In my church, well, my entire family, says, "This ain't good.
He ain't breathing." If you look up death and excretion,
And you get a page error, you need faster cable or you

Have to reset your browser. Apparently, Brother Roy
Ulmer has a good connection. After God jumps into Sybil
And tells her to do what she's been trained to do—perform

CPR—he comes back to life only to live one week longer,
Enough time to finish refurbishing the pine pews with velvet,
And to tell his daughter that she isn't his daughter.

Luckily, we're a few miles from the Mobile terminal.
While watching this lady's body carried off the bus, I smoke a cigarette.
A man walks up to me, shakes his head, and says, "What a shame."

Surely is, but he's not talking about this lady: he's complaining
About the chicken basket he bought in the station deli.
"Shit, look at her," he says, holding up a potato log, "Ain't this

The most droopiest thang you ever saw?” “Well,” I say, “I suppose
You don’t know Ronny,” but before I finish, we’re told to board.
An army cadet sits next to me, and says, “Hell, it’s about to be

Nuts to butts up in here.” “Sounds terrible,” I say, “What’s your name?”
He’s Sam from Arkansas, and he believes in destiny,
But also the choice to fuck it up. He tells me a bedtime story:

While watching Thriller at his friend’s house, his friend told his dad
To pour his own whiskey, so his dad pulled down his friend’s pants
And whipped his hairy butt with a clothes hanger.

I’m shameful, I think, for beating my ex-boyfriend like a dog,
And telling him that I could care less if he died, but I’m devastated
After he throws himself in front of an eighteen-wheeler.

Years later, Sam visited that old man being fed through a tube.
“You’re making the right choice,” Sam says, patting my shoulder,
When I throw my cigarettes out the window, my only friends who don’t talk back.

Down Exit Ramp 69 in Eatonville, Mississippi

In Memory of Kenneth Watson

On a riverbank of muddy water with a current able to swift us under,
Unleash a longing, so deep and tired of sleeping,

He says, “That was my first blow-job from a guy.”

Sure. And ham hangs from a window of a home I don’t own, curing.

On our way home,
I’m speeding, he’s reading from a book as big as his lap,

“I am He that Aches with Love.”

I’m elsewhere, yet, there,

*Clear and sweet is all that is my soul,
And clear and sweet is all that is not my soul,*

My hands in Whitman’s pants, mapping his back with a blade of grass.

We have a blowout, speeding off an exit ramp through trees,
The grill grating the hill like a wedge of cheese,

The windows down, sunroof open, a lively, dead breeze.
Hallelujah to my downshifting, to someone other than myself, steering.

On the roadside, are we alive or dead?

We don't know as we watch a raccoon making his way to a nest,

A sparrow swooping, willing to give her life for her young.

A cardinal, a mocking bird and a speckled bird swoop, too.

The raccoon returns to the ground,

Empty-handed.

Do I Dare Disturb the Universe?

Wee-wee-sweet-pea me?

I live, I weep, a third of me
passed in sleep,
start a scene or two,
play and dance the fool,
roll back the curtain for the muse.

I live for depth, less so a lengthy life,
nor deny the natural order of things,
but must I be swept so soon
to the sweet by and by?

Life's always so, so pleasing,
so why should death be so displeasing?

O Death, so kind, so cruel, graciously unfair,
such a trump card, such a trollop, common denominator,
master and servant to class.

O Life, to live, to be a rare steak less traveled by.
Why just exist?
That's not it at all, not at all—
to the point of tears,

get-up-and-go, oomph, brio, orbit, yo-yo,
strut, fret, fetch,
keep the wolf from the door,
scratch where it itches,
pull some nothing from thin air,
rush, stir, trip, wear and tear.

I walk upon the earth, spared another day,
another hour upon the stage.

A motor with a plan,
I am man,

homo, member, party,
I bust a nut, kick, yield, recording my days,
intent, tone, heart, spirit,
a life sentence,
no shame, no game,

I question, seek, shall not always find,
I backup on a dead-end road,
look up, look down upon,
sympathize with an ant
carrying a wing over mountainous mud, dirt, scum.

in broad daylight,
do me roughly half a day but all night long,
in the quickening of the night,
the quiet, quite-loud night,
owls echoing dactyls and spondees,
thrashers tweeting thank-you's.

Bump me, I bump back,
atqui vivere, militare est,
la petite mort, each day, s'il vous plait.

I will not end it all on a railroad,
take a colossal heroin-hit,
kneel on grits,
slip on soap,
eat poisonous, cherry pie.

Amen, thunderous whisper.

We Must Save Ourselves

*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers:
some have entertained angels unawares.*

I'm looking for my savior on subways,
Is he this man pushing half himself
On a skate board, from car to car,
Singing I have no legs, I have no legs,

I'm looking for my savior in coffee shops
Of contemplation and sober hook-ups,
I'm reading the Tao de Ching,
Well, I'm reading the Tao of Pooh,

I'm looking for my savior in the waiting room
Of my psychiatrist, is he this autistic child
Chastising a middle-aged woman,
Gosh, you're fat, really fat, do you know that,

I'm looking for my savior in the checkout line,
Is he this screaming toddler in a buggy,
Slapped, spanked then consoled with sugar,
This wife back-talking her deadbeat husband,

Shit! You a damn lie, yo black ass b keeping d kids tonight,
I'm looking for my savior outside liquor stores,
Is he this man soliciting pity for a fix,
Bro, can you help a bro out, my back tire's flat,

I'm looking for my savior in the country,
Is he that suicidal heifer in the middle of the dirt road,
Chewing cud like no man's business,
I'm looking for my savior in two lanes, three lanes,

Four lanes, five lanes, six lanes, seven lanes, O holler,
Is he this guy driving a Mini-Cooper
With a gun-rack, deer horns on the hood,
His bumper sticker Gay for Pay, Whatever Way,

I'm looking for my savior among night terrors
And nocturnal emissions, during awkward,
Intolerable moments, like when I invite a friend
Of a friend to a friend's party, and he

Gets smashed, talks about his problems all night,
Then indignant when called out on his behavior,
An awkward moment, indeed, when I realize,
The next day, that I was that asshole,

That self-appointed Eeyore of the evening,
I'm looking for my savior in office buildings,
Is he this night janitor polishing the floors,
Singing It's a Mean Old World to live in,

I'm looking for my savior from within,
Is he that grey matter buried in grooves,
Is he what's happening in the hypothalamus,
Is he that voice promising to make it all better,

That drum stirring the living from their sleep,
That calm & final knock on the door,
Is my savior out there, here in this crowd,
If so, stand, introduce yourself, be proud

To pay my tab, to pay my rent, pay off
My student loans, buy me a home, a home
In my name, paid for, paid in full, not just
Any home, one that I can call my own.