

Rory Hughes

Chameleons

Bloated synths, an autotune refrain, lifeless drums; all of it salad-tossed and regurgitated through the gym PA; bearded bougie lumberjack hipsters crossfitting; meatheads skipping leg day; basic bitches feedscrolling on the ellipticals. Fucking unbearable, all of it. But it didn't matter. Because I'd been sober fifteen days, and would take these gym cunts over the eternal afterworks any day: the viagra-crunching semi-retiree Whitehall dragons; the woke-until-they're-pissed four-eyed fucking Rasputin lookalikes: the *systems management protocol fuckcunts*, the *user outlook database shitheads*—who could forget the *backend specialist* who after only four, that's right, four 3.2% pale ales, blurted out that he reckoned he could, yeah, specialize in my back end. And the other girls at work say: *ugh, old men are so creepy and gross*. They're all fucking gross, get a few drinks in them and whatever bullshit feminist mask they were wearing falls harder than a fat cock on Maya Angelou's forehead. I know, crude and unnecessary. Was Maya Angelou a feminist? Feel like she should have been.

Anyway, fuck it, I'm being positive. As I said, fifteen days sober. Out of the bars, away from the slime; away from the amniotic paralysis induced by an old suit bastard giving you the downward scan so slow he looks

like he's falling to his death, a last toast to himself; or the quick glances at all the right angles from the *chief technical soyboy* eyefucking you like he does his daily colleague appreciation emails.

I'm home with my supersmoothie, hornybingewatching serial killer documentaries and letting my free hand explore. I feel good, clear; so clear the hot thoughts could come back in easy; these interlopers crouched amidst the reeds; Captain Willard, mud-faced, emerging from the steaming water outside Kurtz's compound.

There's nothing I hate more than a so-called *evil genius*. Your Bundys, your Dahmers, your Kempers. Remember that show *Dexter*? Puke. The criminologist's mere mention of Bundy and I've not only lost my mojo, but it's thrown everything off. I chuck the rest of the supersmoothie in the sink, pour a tumbler of vodka and open Tinder.

This short glass of oat milk latte sitting across the table—*Eugene*—how I swiped right on him I don't even know. I want to swipe that stupid fucking hat off his head and burn it over the candle flame. What even is it, a beanie or a fucking thimble? I'm beyond it. But I'll drink for his sake. Because two weeks is enough, I've done my piece.

Evil geniuses, my arse. Bundy? Mama's boy. Dahmer? Pissed-up Dr. Frankenstein. Kemper? I'll have to *Murderpedia* him later.

"You're definitely more interesting than my last match," says Eugene, and in honesty I'm insulted by the probable understatement.

So I'm drinking again. Watching the chameleons change colours and extend their tongues. Disgust becomes a chore, something to tick off for the day. The nature of control boils down to orgasm. I haven't had one by someone else since the day I broke, but I'll suck it out myself, allow my blood to run.

They don't look or sound the same, but the smell is always the same.

"You'll never be able to get rid of it," I say, but he's busy with the menu.

If it was gonna happen, I'd want an Ottis Toole. Someone with retardation; with one colour; crying with glee and confusion as he fucks me and then ruptures my head with a paving slab.

I put away four tequilas, eye the old suit at the end of the bar two pints away from a stroke and tell him I've seen dog dicks more promising. He likes the banter.

You know the problem with Aileen Wuornos? She didn't have a dick. Where does all that hatred go when you can't stick it back to 'em.

They laid a curse inside me. I could have had it removed but I let it rot and spoil. So I'm here every day again, throwing liquor on an open fire.

"I'm so sorry..." says Thimble Hat.

They make your pain their euphoria; take it from you and strip it for dopamine.

You could make a monster with that cock of yours; really, you could fashion hell.

"What are you, a B-cup?" says the old suit, the emphasis almost knocking him off his stool. He's not giving as good as he's getting.

I ever get questioned by police why I'm carrying around a flick knife in my purse? Self-defence.

I go to the end of the bar and leaning over I tell the old bastard I'm a 34C. He's silent, glassy-eyed, smirking. I grab his arm and start walking him to the door.

"Where are we going?" he says.

"I'd like to take this dog for a walk in the park," I say. "See how fast he can go."

I tell Eugene: “Sorry, I don’t really know how to say this without being awkward and I hope this isn’t too forward, but I’m really enjoying the evening, and if you wanted to come back with me...”

“Isn’t this far enough?” says the old suit, and trips on some brambles. I watch him struggle to get to his feet. The moon is waning, sharp like a *karambit*—a type of curved knife from Indonesia that resembles a tiger claw.

“Cool bookshelf” says Eugene. I watch him hang up his denim jacket. I watch him walk down the corridor into the living room. I watch his reaction, one frame at a time, as he sees the face of Richard Ramirez, The Night Stalker; the mugshot like a disembodied antigod illuminating the room.

There are no curses; only viruses, plagues.

I watch the old suit, and Eugene. I watch their skin go white as an angel’s wing. I watch them pass the threshold into this hallowed domain. My skin tingles. I feel my colours changing.