

Curranvale City is having a go at Happy Hour on a Saturday eve. Folk from its segregated hoods as well as those from the ones that have integrated since the race riots in the late sixties buckle down with favored brands of brew

Some sit alone in rheumy light with a bottle in rooms that replay episode six of *Switcher*¹ on the telly. Others with flutes of bubbly hover in groups as large as fire marshals will allow while outdoors, a dim backdrop of stars mark time with imperceptible shifts by degrees. Down the hatch. Offensive remarks mingle with endearments that loosen the mood, and strangers stamp feet like horny satyrs pawing their cloven hooves before the fucking. *Salud*. Off to one side of the drinking, Jonah Ayot-Kolosha sits in a dimly lit corner of a scuzzy booty club with a pocket full o' cash, and waits among others beside a scummy main stage infested with ants.

(The plan: Don't be a punk.)²

Babycakes is tall in her black nine-inch boots among the variously colored panties who posture around her. He knocks back shots of Patron and watches her lean back against a pole in a custard sarong waiting for the sap who'll slip ducats into her garter.

1 A Nielsen ratings behemoth on Tuesday nights from nine to ten o'clock. The storyline follows a cougar (older woman) in an on-again-off-again romance with a young up-an-comer (male), liberally using hand-held digital cameras to create *cinema verité* effects.

2 These lines were cut from the second to last draft.

She waves him over to a seat at the side of the stage, lays a fleece blanket on the floor, and gets to work.

Besieged by red and green light, he watches her lift her sarong, spread her legs, and show him her pussy. In burnt umber skin, a diamond stud winks at her belly button. She mouths along to Outkast's "SpottieOttieDopaliscious," drops her bra, and leans forward to brush her black nipple against the tip of his nose. Off-kilter, he inhales the scent of peaches before she pulls back, sits sideways-longways at the edge of the stage, and lifts her turquoise garter for him to slip a folded bill against her skin. A run of funky trumpet kicks in, she lies on her back, her legs spread-eagled in the air, her fingers teasing open mulberry lips.

"You haven't been in a while?" she says.

"You noticed?"

"No. I'm asking."

"So am I."

"Asking what?"

"If you noticed."

She lifts her garter again. "And I'm asking where you were."

"Which means you noticed."

She smiles. "Well?"

"I went home to take care of my late grandfather's estate."

"Home?"

"Liwani."

"Where?"

"Central Africa. Africa. Across from the Mediterranean, left at the Atlantic."

"I know where Africa is, bonehead."

He slips her a bill.

She gets down on all fours and furiously shakes her rump in his

mug before sitting beside him, lifting her garter for another one.

“I bet you thought about me the whole time I was gone,” he says.

“Get over yourself.”

“No. Really.” He stares off into space the way Professor Iton³ often does. “I’m the swag, and you’re like an open parachute drifting in chop toward this bountiful bootay I got going.”

“So what you’re really saying is how much you wanna hit this.” She pats her fanny. “You’ve got a bad case of the Babycakes. I see it all the time.”

“Not at all, babe. I hate you.”

“I hate you too, sweetie. But we’re talking about what you wanna do with all this here.”

“Wrong, again. Don’t forget, I have a girlfriend.”

“The missionary! It’s gotta be exhausting pretending to be something you ain’t for her.”

“You got that right.”

“Aha! I knew it,” she exclaims.

“What?”

“You’re not getting enough of the kinkies. You’re upset. So you need a taste of the Cakes.”

“No. That’s wrong. It’s waaay off.”

“Which is it? Wrong or way off?”

“Is there a difference?”

“There sure is, hon. Sure is.”



3 Winner of the Tolstoevsky Prize for Literature, 1982 and 1999, and Professor of Creative Writing at Dingham University, 1984–present, whose current bedside reading is a first edition copy of the *Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie.

Da Stylus wants her first time to be just so. There has to be a Willow tree, a body of water, a full moon, a woolen blanket, condoms with spermicide, breath mints, and it should take place on a weekend. So we drive to Bull Lake and walk through a field used by dogs to shit, nuzzle amongst duck droppings at the roots of a willow, and watch the moon in the water.

"Are you doing okay?" I ask.

"Oh, besides being petrified?" she replies.

"We don't have to do this."

"Yah, riiight."

"You don't want to do this?"

"Of course, I do."

"Yah, riiight."

"Don't be like that."

"I'm not being like anything."

"You're mad."

"Not in the least," I pretend. "It's just . . ."

We've been together for eight months, and she's still dragging her feet (even though I followed through on her endless list of detailed demands just to get us to this point—spending quality time, being a quality audience for her various struggles, donating quality gifts at regular intervals, and providing evidence of a desire for a quality relationship with the Heavenly Father).⁴

Fed up, I help her to her feet, pack our supplies, and walk her to the car.



Babycakes kneels in front of Jonah, cups the back of his head, and tugs him forward.

⁴ *The Notebooks*, July 12, 2003. All future references to *The Notebooks* are in regards to the texts made available to the author with the expressed written consent of the Jonah Ayot-Kolosha estate.

He can smell her as her trim tickle-licks him.

“I *don't* have a case of the Babycakes.” He slips her a fiver. “I wouldn't do that to my girlfriend.”

She pulls away.

“Left at the Atlantic! You really are a bonehead.”

She dresses, gathers bills strewn around her, and moves her fleece blanket over to dance for a bearded fuck and his lady friend.

Jonah sits at the side of the stage drinking himself stupid as Babycakes leans in to tug a twenty from lady friend's mouth with her lips. He watches her dip her face into lady friend's cleavage and slurp up another bill; watches while Cakes turns around as lady friend smacks fivers onto the sweaty bare cheeks of her ass.

The bearded fuck wheels a deal on his cell before he sends a phone picture of “the girls” to someone in Anchorage, Alaska. Two songs later, Cakes takes a hold of both of them by the hand and together they disappear into the VIP.

Ebonay, the hustler, jiggling cellulite in a coal teddy as dark as her skin swarms Jonah.

“Wanna private dance, sugar?”

“No.” He feels guilty for rejecting one of his own. “Not to-night.” But not guilty enough.

She moves on.

What is guilty enough?

On stage, a peroxide oldie with sagging olive skin has her knees gripped tight around the ears of a 300-pound behemoth.

Jonah glances at other dancers—Desiree, Carmela, Natasha—who smile, pull aside their thongs, and play flabby customers who will gamble that if they hit the ATM machine one more time, perhaps they'll finally score. Paunchy accessorized fellas with big-ass rings and fading lookers under either arm sit at side tables that

waitresses supply with a steady stream of booze. Across the stage, Natasha, a bundle of bones, slaps a groping customer, gathers up her discarded kit, and stalks off stage.

When the behemoth with his head deep between the peroxide oldie's sagging thighs emerges to show her his empty pockets, she slides over and drapes her legs over Jonah's shoulders, her shaved *punani*⁵ a tongue's length away.

"What do they call you, darling?" she asks.

"Jonah."

"I'm Monay," she says. "Monay Shott." She looked like she was pushing forty. Whatever cash she's made in the past has gone up her nose, or toward the reconstruction of her scarred bod. "I see you here all the time." She lifts her garter as he slides in a bill. "It's fuckin expensive to get a sitter," she continues. "Two hundred bucks a night, and my asshole ex won't give me a red cent. Then I heard he got hisself an Escalade. An Escalade! You imagine? I didn't make that baby myself."

Jonah's bored outta his tree as he slips her some ones, and talks hifalutin verbiage to kill the time. Yes, he went home to "interface" with lawyers about "important matters pursuant to my grandfather's estate," and to deal with his late father's investments in stocks⁶ that "accrued more than anyone realized." Good Lord! "*De facto*, tedious is too weak a word to describe it." He's not

5 A woman's honey pot, coochie, hoo ha, yum yum.

6 During the late 1980s, Jonah's father, Phineas Kolosha, invested with Citadel Inc., an American-based technology company that develops, manufactures, and sells computer and other technology-related products worldwide. He died of an illness when Jonah was eight years old, and did not live to see the huge profits from the investment.

“built for administrative matters of pertinence to finance, being a creative writer by trade,” so he turned it over to “someone else with a head for numbers.” At least the paperwork is done, and, yup, he’s coming “into a fortune” on his twenty-first birthday, “three months from the day after tomorrow which is, in the parlance, rather expeditious.”

“Wow!” Monay says. “Don’t forget about the little guy who knew you when.”

Changing the subject, he asks about Babycakes.

“Dead end, darling,” she replies. “Forget her. She’s engaged to a fella fighting in Iraq.” Monay gets back to how her shoes kill her feet, how her hip’s been bugging her, how she wishes the deejay would play Bob Marley,⁷ mon. “Wow, an honest to goodness millionaire,” she concludes.

“Listen.” He gives her a twenty. “Could you tell Babycakes I’d like to buy her a drink?”

“You’re shitting me.”

“I want to buy her champagne in VIP *posthaste*.”

“What about me?”

“Another time.”

“Know what?”

“No. What?”

“Fuck you, rich piece—a ... prick!” Monay then rolls over to harass the next customer.

7 Tragically, Jonah’s father never got to see the great man perform before his own passing, but he left a collection of LPs that his son traded with Bingo for weed that lasted him two months. There’s speculation that many events that affected Jonah at this juncture were brought about by his growing affection for the herbal product.

*Time to get back to Colby Manor.*⁸

It takes Jonah at least an hour before he staggers into the parking lot and walks toward black plastic garbage bags heaped on the sidewalks.

“What about what, fucker?” It’s Babycakes in a dark corner of the lot, puffing on weed. “What about what?” She jaws at a fella in a white apron who stands in steam leaking out of a restaurant on the other side of a fence.

“What ’bout you, me, and Benji Franklin here do a whole lotta pokie pokie when you get offa work,” he flirts.

She gets shrill. “What about me, Smith, and Wesson here pop a round into an asshole’s asshole.”

“You threatenin’ me?”

“I don’t see nobody else on the other side of the fence.”

“I know where you dance, doll.”

Jonah interrupts them. “What about leaving her alone, son?”

“Says who?”

“Her boy. Ralph ‘motherfuckin’ Ellison.”⁹

“So go fuck yourself,” she says.

8 Named by Reverend James Tusker after his grandfather, Colby Tusker, the first of the freed Tusker clan to emigrate from Missouri to Kansas City in 1860 before they finally moved to Pennsylvania. One of the Reverend’s uncles, Colby Tusker II, played the saxophone with both Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis, but quit music to pursue a career in a profession no living relative will talk about before his mysterious death in 1958. Therefore, the Colby as so referred in relation to the Manor is the grandfather, not the disgraced uncle.

9 Alias used by Jonah Ayot-Kolosha on email and other computer mediated activities. This name is based on his admiration for the work of African-American author, Ralph Ellison (1913–94). Quint C. Murdoch speculates that Ellison’s novel, *Invisible Man*, is a proto-model for Jonah’s manuscript, a theory the reclusive Mr Ayot-Kolosha refuses to comment on.

“He had a drink,” she says. “We were in VIP. He wouldn’t stop puking his fucking guts out.” The Rev flinches. “I couldn’t leave him there, so here he is.”

“Where?” He shout-talks. “What?”

“Carnival.”

“The Gentleman’s Club!”

“On 41st,” Bingo says.

“You mean below Collins Avenue?”

“Yah,” she replies.

“Over near the Skipman’s Circle?”

“Christ Jesus. Do I look like a tour guide? Yah, take a right at the stoplight and a fucking left ...”

Their voices crowd Jonah’s overfull cranium.¹⁰

“Ellooo. Allooo,” he interrupts.

“Hold on, Jonah,” the Rev requests. “With all due Respect, are you telling me he was in the Red Light District?”

Hiroko’s brow winces as the cleric narrowly avoids banging his side of their patient into a banister.

“Eaaasy,” she warns.

“Don’t mar-marry soldier boy, Iroko,” Jonah pleads. “You, Miss, pleash you mar-marry me.”

“I’m right the fuck here, darling,” Hiroko replies.

¹⁰ Original wording in *The Lost Boy*, the first draft of the manuscript, *Medulla Oblongata*.