

Indian Girls in Miniskirts

By Ryan Hereford

Inside him there was a madness that ran, collided and broke, and in the evenings he would look out the apartment window and onto the streets that wound through Bolton Hill, letting the cloudy skies sort out his mind, hoping to see a car run too fast around the curb and hit one of the children playing hopscotch on his sidewalk.

"I can cut up some carrots and tomatoes," she called from the other room, "and if you'll head down to Jerome's before it closes, and buy us some broth, I can make a stew. Or, I can slice up some of the bread, if it's not too old, and open a can of split pea soup."

"I'm not eating tonight," he said. He took a whiskey bottle from the window sill and filled up another glass.

"You haven't eaten for three days," said the voice.

"I haven't eaten for three days, and I'm not eating tonight."

A woman emerged from the other room. She had hard skin and big freckles that the man thought looked like moles. She was Irish, but the man thought she looked Welsh.

"Will you please eat something?" she asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I'm dying," he told her.

She laughed and her belly pushed through her shirt.

"You're twenty-five years old," she said. "You're not dying."

"Do you really think that people can't die at twenty five? Plenty of people die at twenty five, and I'm one of them. So fuck off."

He turned his head away from the window and watched as the woman walked back into the kitchen. Her jeans clung tight to the rounds of her ass and he could feel himself getting an erection.

"Split pea soup it is then," she shouted.

It wasn't sudden. He had felt death coming weeks ago. The night it came was painful, a sharp churning in the pits of his stomach. But when he woke up the next morning, the pain was gone and death began to feel more like a soft intruder, a boa wrapping itself gently around his spine. He began drinking more heavily, and he spent the rest of his savings on pot and cheap cocaine, and anything else that would distract him from his unwelcome visitor. But each morning when the high had worn out, death would still be there, sitting on the corner of his dresser table, in the kitchen eating the tomatoes; for the past few evenings he had felt death at the bottom of the stairwell, smoking the cigarettes he left in his coat pocket.

Caroline returned with two steaming bowls of green soup. She set one on the window sill and brought the other with her to the table.

"When I die, I want you to keep my eyes open," he said.

"When you die, I will shut your eyes out of respect," Caroline replied.

"It would be more respectful to keep them open," he said. "I'm already starting to deteriorate and by the time they have the viewing I'll probably look like shit."

"I have beautiful brown eyes. I want all the women to see them and say 'Look at those beautiful browns. I bet he was a handsome man in his day. I wish I could have fucked him when I had the chance.' And then they will look at you and say, 'That bitch. I bet she wanted to close those beautiful browns. Doesn't she know how beautiful they are? Doesn't she know what a beautiful man she had?'"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Caroline asked. "First of all, your body is only deteriorating because you've been drinking and doing drugs, and you haven't eaten in three days. You are not dying. And if you did die, your eyes would glaze over and pale."

"Good then they can all see me in my most pleasant, peaceful state: Silent and on drugs."

Caroline banged a spoon against her bowl, but otherwise ate her soup in silence, and the man left his, cold on the window sill, and reached for the whiskey bottle. It was empty.

"There's another bottle of whiskey under the sink; will you get it for me?" he asked.

"It's gone. You drank that one this afternoon."

"Oh. Well will you get me the vodka, then?"

"It's gone too."

"Oh. Well, I have some money in my coat pocket, downstairs. Will you run to the store before it closes and buy me another bottle?"

"Fuck you."

The man reached into his jeans pocket and pulled out a blue dime bag. He took a cigarette from the window sill and rubbed his thumb and his forefinger against the paper, letting the tobacco spill out onto the floor.

"You know I wouldn't be this bad off," he said, "if you took me to bed and let me fuck you every once and awhile."

"Even if I did," she said, "you wouldn't be able to get it up."

"You could take one of the chop sticks from the silverware drawer and make a splint."

"I could pack up my things and leave you," she said.

The man took the weed from the blue bag and pushed it into the cigarette with a toothpick that was lying on the window sill. He twisted off the top of the cigarette and took a matchbook from his pocket. He struck the match. He lit the joint and leaned out the window.

"You are not going to die," the woman said.

"How the fuck would you know?"

"How the fuck would you?"

"I've known for weeks now. I just didn't want to tell you."

"Why wouldn't you tell me?"

"Because you're weak, and you would cry and whine and make it your problem instead of mine."

"I would have taken you to the hospital," she said. "How did you find out? Did you see a doctor?"

"No," said the man, "I can just feel it."

"You can just feel it?" she asked.

"Yes I can just fucking feel it, ok. I can feel it in the bedroom; I can feel it in my spine, in my stomach; I can feel it in this fucking soup; I can feel it downstairs, smoking my goddamn cigarettes!"

"Death is smoking your cigarettes?"

"Jesus Christ, yes! Death is smoking my fucking cigarettes! So would you please just shut the fuck up and let me die!"

Caroline took her bowl from the table and walked over to the window.

"You didn't touch your soup," she said.

The man took another hit and let the smoke pour from his nostrils and fog up the blue night. He saw a light on in the window of the apartment across the street. Someone had put a plant on the sill and some books, and he could hear Louis Armstrong playing inside.

"I'll put it in the fridge and you can heat it up later," Caroline said, and she took his bowl into the kitchen.

"Do you still love me," she said from the other room.

"No," he said, "I never did. But, sometimes I say nice things so you won't leave me. Never believe them."

"Why do you stay with me, then?"

"Because I need someone to grieve for me when I'm gone."

"You have Charlie and your mother."

"Charlie only comes around when I have money to buy him drinks, and my mother only comes around when I have money to help her with the rent. You stay, even when I have no money for bread."

It wasn't true, that he didn't love her. But she wasn't perfect. Her ass looked good when she wore tight pants, but when she undressed before bed, he could see the wrinkles and the little hairs; her tits were nice, but her nipples were too big; she was great in bed, but she never wanted to have sex; and she had nothing of her own to say. She only asked questions. And he was tired of answering questions. None of this had ever bothered him before. But now that he was going to die, he needed something different. She wouldn't look right, standing by his grave, weeping. Three years ago she had bought a thin black dress for her aunt's funeral and she had looked tremendous. But she had grown since then. Now, the dress would make her ass look too fat, and her breasts would sag, and her stomach would stretch the seams each time she inhaled. He wanted to leave behind something beautiful, something perfect.

He took the last hit and flicked the cigarette out his window, toward the kids playing hopscotch.

And then it hit him. It came in a puff of smoke trailing up the stairs, and he knew that death had finished the last of his cigarettes and now it had come to take him. His mouth grew dry and he could feel the tip of his tongue lifting out of his head through the back of his skull. He

could feel his toes twitch and then tingle and then grow sore, then numb. He could feel his spine sink and his bones grow cold. His eyes hung loose in their sockets.

"It's here," he cried, "It's finished all my smokes and now it's time for me to go."

"Jesus, honey, death is not coming for you." Caroline walked over towards him.

"Why don't you come to bed." She ran her fingers through the back of his hair.

He stood and then hopped onto the seat of his chair.

"It's not my time," he cried, "honey please help me, it's not my time."

"Of course it's not your time," Caroline said. "Just come to bed with me and everything will be alright."

The man was sweating and the bumps across his scalp grew dark red and purple. His brow sunk and tears fell from his eyes. He climbed onto the edge of the window sill and hung his feet over the concrete path, ten stories below.

"I won't let him take me like this. Not with you and your black dress that's too small. I'll go my own way."

He leaned his torso out into the dark sky and placed the palms of his hands on the ledge.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Caroline shouted. "Baby, please, you're not dying. You're on drugs." She grabbed the back of his shirt collar and tried to pull him inside.

"Get the fuck away from me," he shouted and pulled back, almost letting himself spring from the ledge.

"I'm calling the police," she shouted, and ran into the kitchen.

He heard her dialing. He heard the frantic sobbing of his lover, alone in the kitchen, and he began to wish that it could have ended some other way.

His mind grew hazy and the cloudy sky swirled above his head. The kids on the sidewalk began to look like different colored dots, spots of blood on the concrete. Louis Armstrong's trumpet blasted through the night air like a call to arms, and he looked towards the apartment across the street.

A young girl sat on her ledge, facing him. Dark black hair fell down over her ears and across her shoulders. She was dark, of eastern decent. She was probably Indian, but the man thought she looked Spanish. She had a long beautiful neck, wrapped in a scarf. She was sitting on the ledge, ten stories high, and she was reading a book, a big book with a dark cover. The man thought that a colored girl reading on her ledge this late at night was probably foreign. The

apartment had been for rent only a few days ago, so she might have just moved in. She might have just come off the boat. Did she know the American poets, the American movie stars, the American musicians? He thought he might tell her that he was famous and she might believe him. She was wearing a green miniskirt.

"Hello." He smiled and waved to her.

She looked up from her book and smiled.

"I'm Jim Morrison," he shouted.

"You don't look like Jim Morrison," she shouted back. She didn't have an accent.

"Can I come over?" he shouted, "Can I come over to say hello?"

She smiled again. She threw her legs back over the ledge, and as she walked away he could see her ass resting perfect and firm under the green cloth.

He jumped back into his room and slipped on his shoes.

"I'm going out for a walk," he shouted to Caroline as he rushed down the stairs.

Her apartment was dark and bare, except for the red silk tapestry hanging over the doorway, a lamp, a record player with some records, several piles of books and a torn mattress in the center of the room. She didn't introduce herself, but instead, asked him if he would like a drink.

"I would love a drink," he said, and stumbled across the room, falling onto the mattress.

"It looks like you've already had a few," she said.

She brought a bottle of red wine, a handle of coconut rum and two glasses from the kitchen, and set them on the wooden floor next to the mattress.

"What's your poison?"

When he told her that he would like a glass of rum, she winked and said, "Only the mad drink rum. I like your taste."

"I'm not mad," he said, "I mean, I might be, but that's not my biggest concern."

"Oh really?"

She bent over to pour the rum and the man could see her tits swaying under the open buttons of her shirt. She had beautiful breasts, like ripe Indian tamarinds and they moved in perfect harmony with the rhythms of her back, her spine, her hard stomach and her ass.

"I'm dying," he told her.

"Well that sounds awful," she said, handing him his drink. "What are you dying from?"

"I don't know yet," he said, "But I'm going to die tonight."

She poured herself a glass of rum and sat down beside him on the mattress.

"It sounds like you're dying of madness," she said.

"I may be," he said, "All I know is that death is here."

"He's here right now?" Her voice was soft and playful.

"He's here right now. He was downstairs smoking my cigarettes and when he finished them, he started to follow me. He followed me to the window ledge, where I had planned to end my life; he followed me across the street, and now he's here, in this apartment."

"Oh my, well we shall have to ask him to leave. I only have enough rum for two people."

"I wouldn't worry about it. He's not interested in rum; he's only here for me."

"It sounds like it. Did death smoke all your cigarettes?"

"I thought he did, but it seems that I still have a few left."

"Well, you can feel free to smoke in here. It's only proper for a man to have his last smoke before death comes for him."

The man took a cigarette and the matchbox from his pocket and began to smoke.

"Caroline hates it when I smoke in the house," he said.

"Well, I'm not Caroline," she said.

"What is your name?" the man asked.

"Joan Jett," she said and smiled.

"That's a nice choice. Do you smoke?"

"No, I never have."

She leaned back over the bed and allowed her scarf to fall and dance down her chest. She unfolded her legs and the man could see her inner thighs.

"So tell me more about this madness of yours," she said.

"I don't mean to be rude, but I'm not quite sure you've been paying attention to me. I'm not mad. I'm just a little concerned about the fact that I'm going to die."

"Well of course you are; it's only natural. But all death has its roots in madness. Besides, death doesn't really interest me anymore; I'm bored with death; I see it all the time. It's madness that really turns me on."

"Why are you so concerned with madness?"

"Why shouldn't I be?"

She let her leg wrap around his and she placed a hand on his shoulder. At her touch, he could feel an erection beginning to grow and pulsate, but his head was tired and the rum had made him all the more dizzy and weak.

"Because you are perfect," he said. "Everything about you is perfect. You have a perfect nose; you have perfect brown eyes; you have a perfect body. You have a fine taste in music; you're great to talk too; you let me smoke; you gave me rum; you're giving me an erection."

"Madness is for the weak. It is for those with defects, people with flaws. You have no use for it."

"Do you want to fuck?" the girl asked.

"What?"

"Do you want to fuck?"

"Jesus! We barely know each other."

"Well it's not like we'll ever get the chance, now will we?"

She smiled as she stood up before him on the mattress.

"I'm perfect," she said, "and you're mad. So by fucking each other, we both get what we want."

She pulled down the green miniskirt and he could see her dark, bare legs in the red light of the lamp. She had silk green panties, which she took off next. Her waist looked hard and

smooth and the opening between her legs was dark but bare. But above her waist were thin red scars that looked like they were fresh.

"What are those?" asked the man, pointing to the scars.

"Razor cuts," she replied as her fingers undid the buttons on her shirt.

She was only wearing a scarf now, and the outline of her body looked splendid in the dim light of the room. But there were more cuts, longer, deeper ones that had grown grotesque with puss and infection. They rose from her waist up to her sternum.

"More razor cuts," she said with a smile.

She unwrapped her scarf. And across her neck was a gash so thick and disgusting that the man felt he would vomit.

"This," she said, "was from a broken bottle."

She laughed and moved closer, and placed her hand on his head, letting it run over the bridge of his nose, over his lips and down around his neck.

"Like I said, I've grown sick of death. It wears me now, like a torn up overcoat."

She laughed again, harder, until she was in hysterics.

The man was scared, but no longer scared of death. Death had left the room. Perhaps it was scared, too. He felt life and only life. It was pulsating through his blood, up his spine, across his shoulders. He thought about Caroline, and the rum he drank, and the whiskey, and the vodka, and the pot and the coke. He hadn't been eating. He felt weak and drunk and tired.

"I have to go," he said. "I'm sorry to spoil your night, but I have to go home."

She smiled and walked over to the record player, her bare, firm ass, covered in scars. Louis' 'Hello Dolly', spewed from the speakers as the man tried to stand up. But each time, his legs would cripple and he'd fall back onto the mattress. Finally, he recovered and left the room without a word.

The hallway outside was swirling and it took him a moment to find the stairs.

There were twenty one steps from the girl's room to the sidewalk.

It might have been the booze or the pot or even the fright, but on the third step from the top, the man lost his balance and hurdled, face first, down the remaining nineteen stairs.

He didn't think much during his flight down. And when his head busted through the door and fell upon the concrete outside, he thought of nothing at all.

When she heard the crash, Caroline ran to the window and saw him, lying face down in a puddle of blood. But there was someone else there, too. A young Indian girl knelt at his side. She had long dark hair, dark skin, and a long dark, beautiful neck. She was wearing a green miniskirt.

The girl ran her fingers through his hair and then reached into his coat pocket. She pulled out a pack of cigarettes. She lit one and then walked on down the street, smiling like a hyena and moving like a jaguar, pacing forward toward the night.