

# Post-apocalyptic Fable # 8

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Crouching like little children in a game of hide & seek, we entered the old house, slowly. There was a muffled voice coming from upstairs, the light slap of feet. We took the stairs with caution, our KK-Caligulas drawn. Our gas masks gave off the impression of black pigs mismatched to thick human trunks. Most of us were only golly-grunts on first tour of haze-duty. Sometimes we couldn't recognize each other. At the end of the far bedroom, an old man lay on the floor, coiled into himself. We didn't check for signs of radioactive burn. Then the singing from the bathroom. We knocked, yelled out, "People's Army of the Free Roulette, Friend or Foe?" No answer. We kicked down the door, pointed our Caligulas at the old woman taking a sponge bath. She wore a joker's mask, the kind one might see in old Neo-realist films-- costume balls, lavish parties for the rich, the existentially dead. She crossed her arms, covering her breasts. "If you excuse me, gentlemen, I'd like to dry off & get dressed. Then, we can all go downstairs & have tea. I'm sure this can all be sorted out without the need for further intrusion." We obliged & closed the door. A few seconds later, the bathroom exploded, sending some of us careening against the walls & our best holo-scope sniper hurling out of a half-closed French window. We gathered ourselves & rose from the floor. Giddy at being alive, we felt light as ghosts, playful as pigs. Downstairs, we pretended to drink tea from empty cups, intact pinky, up.

