

Last Token of the New York Doll

by Adam Strong

“You're trying too hard.”

Looking at me with those eyes, facing each other, blinking the way that only body parts can blink, she lies on the couch, rubbing her feet together for warmth; we've been here for days.

The bands on the stereo sounds like the New York Dolls, but the guitars sound like drills. I manage to focus my attention on the stereo, with the accompanying LP on display. I can barely make out the words, but from my vantage point, it looks like a mess of white-out smeared onto a dark green military tarp. I think I can make out “The Drones”.

That would make sense, the drilling guitars, and the nascent Lou Reed voice that reminds me of school. I can see punks, high from huffing scotch guard, walking off school grounds, smoking cigarettes in a cloud of obscenities and unintelligible murmurings.

I fall asleep right there on the floor, and when I wake they're all gone. I'm in an empty room, beaten by the party, the never-ending party that started two weeks ago and still hasn't stopped. I'm ready to go again, ready to walk out on the street and nearly fall down from the nausea. But I don't have the energy. It's been snuffed out from too much of everything, like stuffing chocolate cake down a plugged-up toilet.

Looking out the window, I can make out the Manhattan skyline, and from the opaque smearing of the Vaseline, Deep Heat, or whatever we smeared on the windows to further distort the images of demons coming through the window. We could see too clearly into the pit of hell outside, the pushers, sex offenders, pimps and prostitutes. We needed to cloud things over, as if the speed, booze,

and whatever was in those pills at three, after we all woke up naked together weren't enough.

I think someone puked on my shoe. I look up at the window, and in its smeared view, I can make out the angelic shoulders of my father, in his overcoat, hunting rabbits in the Maine morning. He's backed up enough to fill the frame.

He's shouting orders at someone, but then the scene changes and we're moving forward in time, to the top of the poplar trees of the neighborhood cemetery. The camera sweeps downward to the red sash, elegantly draped on his coffin, my own head down, sunglasses on, and for a moment it's a reflection of who I am now, visible in the reflection of the sunglasses. A young punk, puke on his suit, pale as bones, clear tea, dirty water in porcelain, 1978.

I want to say so much to him, my dad the hunter, but I can't seem to rewind or stop the pictures, and it keeps going, beyond where I am now. I can see the decay, the way my body atrophies towards death, but here I lie on the floor powerless to even go to the bathroom, wanting and needing chemicals, electric guitars, and screaming.

I flash back to school (a sobering two years prior to this incident) and the rows of desks, with our names emblazoned on each one, last name first, always with the last name first.

For it was your name who got you in the front door, the parents who paid the bills, shutting their drug-addled children, the shitty little reprobates, locking them upstate, far away from the pushers who conspired to bring down the family name, with the Technicolor pills that fell from the sky like the colored snow before the Saturday Morning Cartoons.

The Brookstone Home was as bleak as a mausoleum, with its towering edifice creeping up from the view of my father's limousine. The bastard didn't even show himself, he had his driver take me, after vowing to never speak to me again, after finding me comatose on the floor, whacked out on my Mom's Dexedrine she was to take until the natural healing of therapy took over.

I took four of them, and put on "Heroin" by the Velvet Underground, and sat in the bathtub, filling it with warm water. Submerging myself, I watched the water level dance in front of me, listening to Lou Reed wail, dragging him under the water level. Opening my eyes underneath the water, I can hear the bass lines reverberate as the light from above softens, and then intensifies. For a few minutes I can hear the song perfectly, my ear canal soaking up not only the water, but all that dissonance as I float up and out of the tub, rub my face against the glass of the mirror, my arms and legs floating at the top of a large water cooler. Staring up inside the view from the window, lying there, waiting for the darkness to envelop me, hearing the cacophony of sound take me under its wing, the whole band there, Lou Reed, Moe Tucker, John Cale, Sterling Morrison and Warhol too.

As a side note, I didn't want to die. I took the pills as a kick, a cheap way to spend the afternoon, I didn't know that my Dad would walk in, already late for a board meeting, and discover me almost unconscious, freak out, and call the paramedics. I wasn't even aware of the possibility of an overdose, one that required a twelve hour go-around with the stomach pump.

Waking up, I felt like I had given birth to my own little drug, a bright pink pill filled with love, or something closely resembling it, a Pepto Bismol creamy filling inside, and I felt as proud as a new papa.

This was the late 1970s, the eighties creeping in with fangs and grit, and muscle tension. The streets of Manhattan were filled with every drug in the pharmacist's drug guide we read to each other at night, voices echoing off of the marbled floor. We were prepared.

And by the time we were released that summer, we tried every drug imaginable. Uppers, the cobalt-blue capsules that were engraved with and reflected the peace of the Virgin Mary, the yellow-stinger barbiturates, guaranteeing a slow evening, where the ceiling drooped down and Paul played four notes on the bass guitar over and over again, it was like a symphony, slow milky tones washing our souls clean, absolving us of our sins.

The letters on the Chinese blotter acid gave us inspiration, but we were bored by the end of the summer, with Fall on our backs and not wanting to go out swinging, we declared the month of August as Heroin month, and I'd wiggle into my jeans that were almost painted on, no shirt needed in the sweltering city, choppers overhead and cop shows on every TV, and walk over to the dealer's spot, Mexican men all around me, selling everything.

I was aware of undercover cops, but they were jokes, the Narcs on the street. They were so obvious, forty year old guys standing on the corner in hippie gear, looking for acid or grass. The new generation was on heroin, and not even the cops had caught on. At night we hurled ourselves at the walls of our flat (we took on English accents to make the scene more authentic) practicing for the real thing at the free shows in the Bowery. CBGBs.

Now one could just go to a show and have a few beers, but we weren't having any of that. We went when it was free, so there would undoubtedly be a local punk band aping the Sex Pistols. We showed up and vomited on their groupies, thrashing our way around the front of the stage, our flesh tingling each time we rubbed up against the carpeted walls, or tried to get off with one of the girls backstage, until the heroin really kicked in, and then we'd be in the bathroom, listening to the new sound, of snorting straws playing hockey on a vanity mirror.

Cocaine was the new white way, the clean way of expressing oneself. Instead of knocking one on one's ass like Heroin, Cocaine by comparison was a whole hell of a lot more fun, you could still tear society apart, but you could do it while looking and acting like a professional.

Now our gang was well familiar with Speed, and had taken everything from stepped on talcum powder to the primo shit our trust fund kids scored for us. (By this point not even my father was willing to bankroll my latest experimental phase, that ended when he came for an unexpected visit and found Steve and myself out of our heads on mushrooms, making out with each other and giggling at the way my dad's face fell into itself.)

But Cocaine was fresh, inspiring, and made the music sound so fucking good. The money ran out quickly with Coke, too much was never enough, and we burned through our funds, scorched away assets, lies that lay heavy on our backs.

So my subsidized days were over, gutting our futures, leaving them as barren as the tenements we squatted in.

So we did the only thing four men can do when they are broke in New York, we started a band. The first few gigs started off swimmingly, content to share the stage with the likes of our idols; we were nevertheless fucked to the nines on all matters of psychotropic drugs. A few lines of it and we were playing to the gods, to the rats and frozen passageways of our cold flats. Life with one Bunsen burner of a stove, and at night the apartment building would light up like a birthday cake, which grew darker when we ran out of money.

So much money poured out of our hands through the river of drugs that floated through us on the way down hill, towards our old neighborhoods; where we drifted haphazardly back to, once again in the summer of 1981.

But this weekend, staring out at the Vaseline-smearred windows, looking at the icy river, I think about going outside and walking to the deli.

Once there I'll stop by Julio on the corner, and I'll throw out the contents of my pockets, but I'll keep one silver quarter to ride the bus. And instead of getting off at 14th street, I'll let it go further, and I'll tell my father who I am and we'll embrace for the first time in ten years and I will tell him all that I've done, and I'll try rehab and fail a few times.

Eventually moving to Amsterdam, I'll float around awhile and try on different extremes of my personality, but at the end of the day I'll quit drugs not because I want to, but because that's all I've ever been, and I need to destroy myself one last time and rebuild from there.

And I'll take the path train to Jersey, and get off at the third stop, and I'll walk fourteen blocks through the rounded cul-de-sacs of my

parents new neighborhood and I will beg for forgiveness and sabotage the now for the two-weeks-from-now, when I know when my ride will end and exactly when and why to get off.

