

Attic Demonstration

by Chris Okum



Metal Music Machine

He asked his wife not to introduce him to any more of the men who worked as volunteers at her school. So she did anyway. They were at a school function and she introduced him to a man named Greg. And then she walked away and left him to talk to Greg. But he didn't talk to Greg. That's not what happened whenever she introduced him to one of the men who worked as volunteers at her school. What happened was that he listened while the men talked. And Greg talked. And talked. What did Greg talk about? Greg's dad. Greg's mom. Where Greg grew up. What kind of kid Greg was. All of the

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petty crimes Greg committed before the age of 18. All of the mental disturbances Greg was diagnosed with before the age of 18. Greg's addictions. Greg's addiction to cold medicine. Greg's addiction to weed. Greg's addiction to speed. Greg's addiction to alcohol. The time Greg had to turn tricks in order to survive on the streets after he was kicked out of his house. What the men Greg serviced smelled like. Greg's wife. The time Greg tried to committ suicide and failed. Greg's favorite bands. Greg's favorite movies. Greg's favorite books. All of the different places Greg lived. How Greg felt on 9/11. Where Greg was on 9/11. What brand of television Greg was watching 9/11 on. Greg's trip to Costa Rica. Greg's feelings about the privitization of the space program. Greg's hatred of Israel and how it was in no which way, shape or form a sign of anti-Semitisim despite Greg's belief that Israel should be taken away from the Jews and that the Jews should be punished for what they've done to the Palestinians by having them go through another Holocaust as a way of teaching them once again to not do to others what was done to them, as if that was the whole point of the Holocaust to begin with, to teach the Jews how to be nice to people. His wife came back and pulled him away from Greg just as Greg was starting to talk about the advantages of being a serf in our new age of techno-feudalism. He said good-bye to Greg, and that it was nice to meet him. His wife said she was ready to go home. In the car on the way home his wife asked him what he thought of Greg and he said, "He's okay." His wife told him that Greg had a three-year old son with Down's Syndrome. He told his wife Greg didn't mention anything about having a son with Down's Syndrome. "Oh, yeah, no, he doesn't like to talk about that," his wife said. He asked his wife again to stop introducing him to the men who worked as volunteers at her school and his wife just looked at him and laughed.

Equus

When asked by Peter O'Toole what he was working on next, Richard Burton said, "That damn horse play. And, regrettably, I'm not playing

one the horses. I'm playing the child head shrinker. Opposite a fully grown man who does not, on first appearances, resemble a child of any sort. Absolute tosh. Although I do expect I'll be nominated for one of those accursed Academy Awards again. Not that they'll be rewarding my performance, for which I will, of course, do the bare minimum, which will, of course, be mistaken for a deep, rich, and complex character study. The only reason they ever nominate me is that they're hoping I'll show up with Liz on my arm in order to inject a little glamour into the proceedings, which I can certainly understand. Liz may be a touch long in the tooth and lost a flicker of sparkle in those buttery violet eyes of hers, but her breasts are still magnificent, and besides, compared to the actresses that will probably be on hand, like that scrubber Diane Keaton, she's still the most beautiful woman in the world. I mean, good Lord, Pete, have you seen that crop from last year? Talia Shire, Sissy Spacek. These aren't actresses, they're waitresses. Not that I don't love a proper waitress every now and then." Burton and O'Toole clinked their shot glasses together and made a toast to the Queen. "Horses. Blind horses. Oh dear. If I didn't need the money, Pete. And the kicker is that the odds of Ms. Taylor and I still being married this time next year are even, I would say. I will most likely have to go it alone. Unless the lovely Ms. Jenny Agutter, my co-star in this horse flick, decides to accompany me. Have you seen Jenny in anything? Have you seen *Walkabout*? *Logan's Run*? What? You can't stand Nic Roeg? What's wrong with you, man? Nic is the certainly one of the most talented filmmakers we've got at the moment. You'll go to bat for that hack Medak and scoff at Roeg? I wanted that role in *Performance* so badly I could taste it. No, not the character played by Jimmy Fox. The Mick Jagger role. Never wanted a role so badly in my life. Nic said he appreciated my interest but that I was an actor and that he didn't need an actor. An actor? I'm not an actor, Goddammit, I'm a movie star."

The Naked Cage

One day I won't remember today. Or maybe one day I will. But I doubt it. I'm not going to remember waking up and eating a Chocolate Dough Barbell (insert trademark here) and a Trader Joe's banana yogurt (same here); or waiting outside the barber shop for a half hour before realizing that my barber was not going to show up; or reading an entire book in one sitting, *Shame*, which is now the second pop culture product with that title that I have consumed and found utterly bereft of even one single moment of levity, confirming that shame is an emotion that is simply not at all funny for the person feeling it (for example, if my wife were to find out that this morning I Googled the images from a 1999 *Maxim Magazine* spread of Melissa Joan Hart I would immediately feel a tremendous amount of shame, and probably would not, at that moment, be able to find anything funny about it, although thinking about it right now I do find it kind of funny, in a pathetic way, that I'm still looking at the same images I've been looking at for over twenty-five years, and looking, no less, not even at images of something interesting, but images of a fully-clothed sitcom actress [albeit a sitcom actress who is pretty much the platonic ideal of a sitcom actress, which is something I can't believe I just said, because I don't even know what that really means, or if it's even true. I'm actually really ashamed right now]); or, while on a long walk with my dog, listening to Gavin Bryars' 'Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet' because while on the walk I thought of something I hadn't thought about since I was in my early twenties and living in New York, which is lying in bed, listening to the Vin Scelsa show, and having an out of body experience after I fell asleep while listening to Gavin Bryars' 'Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet'; or, while on that same long walk with my dog, listening to Neil Young's 'Vampire Blues' and watching a semi-morbidly obese couple decked out in head-to-toe neon jogging mufti huffing and puffing there way down the sidewalk right towards me, practically forcing my dog and I to jump into the bushes to avoid being trampled; or thinking about calling my sister and asking her why she told my youngest daughter to change her outfit because she looks "whore-ish," and then deciding not to call my sister because my

youngest daughter is staying with her for three weeks while she attends the Barnard summer program in psychology, and getting into a confrontation with my sister might compromise my daughter's relationship with her aunt, and besides, my sister is hysterical and borderline, and getting into a fight with her always devolves into hurling insults at each other that are ridiculously callous and cruel when you compare them to what the argument is actually about; or, while on the second long walk of the day with my dog, having the following conversation with an older woman whose dog wanted to meet my dog, but which the woman would not allow: OLDER WOMAN: "She's in heat." ME: "So is he." OLDER WOMAN: "No, I said, my dog is a she." ME: "Yeah, I know, I said he's in heat, too." OLDER WOMAN: "That's not possible." ME: "It is for him. He's horny all day and all night." OLDER WOMAN: "Why I've never heard of such a thing"; or receiving a text from my dad that was nothing more than a picture of the cover of the 1989 re-print of Dean Koontz's 1981 novel *The Eyes of Darkness* next to another picture of a page from the novel with some words underlined, all implying that Koontz predicted COVID, to which I replied: "I used to read a lot of Dean Koontz when I was a kid," to which my dad replied: "I don't remember you ever reading when you were a kid," to which I replied: "What are you talking about? I read all the time," to which my dad replied: "Your brother was the one who read all the time. Not you. I think you're mistaking yourself for your brother," to which I did not know how to reply; or reading the first 30 pages of *Dissent from the Homeland: Essays After September 11*, and realizing that the language used by the Bush/Cheney admin. and the mainstream media in 2001 and 2002 is exactly (and I mean exactly) the same as the language being used by the Trump admin. and the mainstream media in 2025, making it very possible that secular time and cultural progress really did stop around 1999, was arrested in its tracks somehow by the both the concrete and ephemeral forces of late stage Capitalism, an idea that's been floated around by some philosophers and sociologists as a way to explain why it seems like nothing has really changed in the last 26 years, something I've often

felt regarding myself, as it feels like I'm still 30 years old even though when I look in the mirror I can plainly see that I am almost double that age, which makes me not want to look at mirrors ever, something that is hard to do, but which can be done, or yes, it can be done; or watching a clip from the 1981 movie *The Idolmaker* on YouTube and remembering the face of a woman my dad used to date, an aspiring actress named Stacy Shaffer (she was Amy in the 1986 women-in-prison movie *The Naked Cage*), and then texting my dad, asking him if he remembered Stacy, to which he replied, "I can't talk about that right because I'm in bed with my wife and if she sees me texting about another woman, even a woman I dated 40 years ago, she will leave me immediately and you will have to take care of me for the rest of my life." I'm not going to remember any of this, am I? Of course I'm not. I'm not even going to remember today tomorrow, let alone 10, 20, 30 years from now. It scares me, this movement through time. At some point there is going to be no more time. Not for me, at least. No more past and no more future. The last moment of your life is nothing more than a collision with the present, like you've been skidding towards it all your life, and that's what happens at the end, the present tense absorbing you as you collide with it. Gee, that's an unpleasant thought to end on. So here's the tagline for *The Naked Cage* instead: "Michelle - wrongly caged in America's toughest women's prison - alone and innocent . . . but not innocent for long."

Every Man For Himself

He had often wondered why the elevator in his apartment building was faster than other buildings. It took less than five seconds to get from the ground floor to the 45th. No one else in the building or those he knew who had ridden it with him had ever mentioned the speed with which the elevator propelled itself upwards. Like the proverbial bullet shot out of the proverbial gun. He knew he wouldn't have cared so much if it weren't for the fact that his doppelganger was always waiting for him when the doors opened.

"Hey, look," his doppelganger would say as he was getting out of the elevator and his doppelganger was getting in, "it's me again." His doppelganger was always wearing the strangest shoes. The shoes looked like sneakers but they had a high heel on the back of them. He had never seen a man wearing a pair of high-heeled sneakers until he saw himself wearing them. It didn't matter what time of day or night he took the elevator, his doppelganger was always waiting for him when he got out, always with the same witticism about running into himself again, and always wearing the same pair of high-heeled sneakers. He constantly felt as if he was on the verge of another nervous breakdown, but somehow he kept it together, stalled the inevitable collapse. On a daily basis he was subjected to what he considered the most incredible physical, emotional, mental, and ideological persecutions. He bemoaned his fragility, but admired his stamina. He also admired the stamina of society as a whole, for it would not let up, no matter how many times he asked it to as politely as possible. The world seemed to have much more conviction in its fictions than he did in his own, and for that he remained perpetually impressed, if not intermittently horrified.

