

Walking To Gibraltar, Chapter 15: In Which The Damage Is Contained

by Frank Indiana

Chapter 15: In Which The Damage Is Contained

After he found out about the affair, the first thing he realized—the first conscious thing, after the bald numbness and the feeling of all his joints popped from their sockets—was that he hated his name. He thought this upon hearing his voicemail greeting: "Hi, it's Frank. Please leave a message and I'll call you back as soon as I can." Flopping out of the handset in his own overweight voice. Nobody named their kids "Frank" anymore. He was an Ernie. A Lloyd. A Clovis.

Two messages. Broker wondering had he forgotten their meeting? Client wondering why his invoice was so late and didn't he want to get paid? He erased them.

No sign of Astrid. Perhaps she was out with the boy/friend. Perhaps she was at the grocery store. Even cheaters had to buy tomatoes. What the fuck did he know?

He knew needed a good, hot shower.

He locked the bathroom door and stripped. Jesus, he was ugly. Ten pounds overweight, at least. No wonder Astrid was trading golf tips with the painter.

The shower scalded the back of his neck. He turned his face into the spray and held his breath. Held it as long as he could. A remnant of the fire, he knew. How long can you hold your breath so you don't die?

It was all about the fire. He didn't need any more therapy to tell him that much. So much damage from a fire that didn't even kill anyone. So much damage. But he thought he'd contained his

personal fire damage pretty well. Had concealed it behind his calm demeanor and his insatiable appetite for shit. The shit that was just part of his destiny. Some people got to be happy. He got to eat shit.

He stood sopping in front of the mirror, dripping onto the limp puddle of clothing on the floor. He needed a haircut. He needed a shave. He needed to get rid of the two-fucking-inch white hair inside the helix of his right ear. He plucked it—and all the hairs from his nose. Until his eyes teared with the pain.

At first, he determined he would pull only the white hairs out of his chest. This proved to be impractical. He lathered and stroked them all off, white and brown, and watched the long hairs swirl in the oily water.

And his pubic hair? God, what a crazy, fucked-up patch that was. He took the scissors to it.

It was such a shame he had to stop there. A shame he couldn't trim up his love handles, snip snip, like cutting the crusts off a sandwich. He pinched a wad of skin and slid it in between the scissor blades.

The knock startled him.

"Frank? Is that you?"

He looked in the mirror, but the mirror did not say a fucking thing. "No," he whispered.

