

The Construction of a Deep, Black Void

by Ivan Reyes

The cool wind passed by the warm space and faraway the horizon gleamed with the thin white line of light which was all that was left of the sun. Higher on the beach, upon a mound of fresh green grass, the house where he had been staying stood, and inside it was empty. The seagulls seemed like small white chalk drawings spinning around in vortexes in the sky. Far away you could hear the mercurial titter that came from the bar, and the mellifluous music that was booming through the twilit beach. Bar Gonzo was the name of the bar. It was lit from the front with a gaudy neon light, though it's tacky presentation was intentional, and many of the drinks were overpriced to make you feel like you were somewhere that was really worth being. Callaway stood listening to the seagulls caw and complain and whine about their empty stomachs.

He walked into his house. He walked upstairs and opened up his journal. The faint stars began to twinkle in the orange and purple sky and the clouds turned to watercolor and the window became a painting.

The words looked familiar, but they had a fictional quality.

He scratched his head and cried.

He walked downstairs and put a bag of popcorn into the microwave. He walked into the living room and turned on the tv. A knock on the door startled him as he was opening his bag of popcorn so he put the bag down and walked over to the door and opened it. There was no one on the other side. He closed the door and grabbed his bag and sat down on a big maroon chair. His wife walked through the

living room and gave him a kiss and she put her purse down somewhere in the kitchen. She rubbed her neck gently and said "I'm going to take a shower."

His wife came out of the shower and steam followed her movements.

He swallowed two blue pills. Then his mind cleared. For a moment, a memory swept in and it was warm and yellow, it was a beach, but he was a boy and he breathed in the memory. "Honey," he called, but nobody answered, because his wife was no longer alive. And she hadn't been for three years. But to him it seemed like a train passed by and whistled out a long sequential series of his own memories then disappeared beyond where it bends and will whistle never again and it seemed unfairly vague to him.

He went down to the bar though his doctor advised him that alcohol would strain the process and that the success of the process was critical to his future peace of heart. "If you feel the headaches starting up again," the pale doctor said, "take one more tablet but no more after that. If the headache persists lay down and place a warm towel on your face and breathe." The kind bearded doctor began to write down a phone number, of a good shrink he said one he trusted and to call the shrink if Callaway felt like he must. He'll cater to you, he said.

Callaway took one more blue pill, because his mind felt like it was trying to chew on itself, and he lay his head on the steering wheel. Inside the bar the music was loud and contemporary. It seeped into his marrow and his epidermis smiled. My epidermis smiled, he thought to himself, what an odd thought, though it was true. Next thing he knew he was at the bar next to a young disinterested blonde, chatting her up about his passionate admiration for the art of filmmaking, dropping names into the conversation, such as Akira Kurosawa or Richard Linklater, like small fizzy alka seltzers that

made him seem more and more palatable to this disinterested blonde as his genuine self shone through brighter and brighter and for longer durations until at last she wanted to know what belied all this passion inside of him and she went home with him, and slept with him and in the morning she became furious because there were pictures everywhere of a beautiful brunette with soft blue eyes and fair skin especially for a woman of that age. And he explained he was a widower. And she left him her phone number but secretly hoped he'd never call because she didn't want to go sleep with a man ever again in a mausoleum. But she drove home and cried a little because she enjoyed the way he slept.

She lived in a big white and blue house. She owned four provocative dresses that she knew could get any man hard, in a second, and last night she wore the yellow one. She had three cats, Jamie, Alex, and Theodore. Alex was the dominant feline however it was mostly okay so long as the cats stayed in their own designated territories, the laundry room, the upstairs bedroom and the living room respectively and Chloe did her best to keep them separated and happy and in their minds they were very happy and they loved her smell and the smell of her clothes. She cooked them steak on Saturdays and cut the steak up into quarter inch cubes and they ate ferociously. For the rest of the day they purred. This was her life.

Callaway that night laid under the domineering stars and the seagulls still cawed and he fought back the urge to masturbate because he and his wife made love on the beach so many times and he felt the void of her love making as much as he felt the void of her laughter or of her comforting gaze under pristine sun kissed eyebrows, perfectly arched and somewhat eternal in their soft signaled transmissions of her priceless forgiveness and understanding and her inner warmth and the softness of her voice as she often asked how his day was and how he never tired of the question, each time she asked he felt love. And he cried, and felt ashamed for crying. The tears led to nowhere and no one

appreciated or was concerned about them, or what was behind them. His life was a void and he was filling it with sadness. Then he thought of something warm, something that smelled like almonds and perfume. What was it, he thought. It escaped him in that moment so he went into his house, empty and cold, and he put on his pajamas and prepared for a good night's sleep. The thought came back and brought with it this time a sound, a voice, a moan, it was enchanting and insane and outdoorsy and sexy.

He had a dream about a creamy purple evening and in the dream he got into his car and drove towards what he thought was a fast food restaurant like McDonald's maybe and he drove an SUV and all the clouds seemed to be filled with embers and the moon was three times bigger than it was in his non dream world and trees shrouded it and the wind howled and leaves spun in dark green whirlpools and he was scared.

And in the dream he masturbated while his wife sat next to him and she was laughing the whole time and then her face was suddenly taken by a demented fear and he felt like he wasn't dreaming anymore. And he hit a truck in front of him in the dream and the SUV flew high into the air and spun and glass shattered and dug itself into their skin and eyes and as their teeth gnashed they could feel the glass being crushed and she whipped around inside the car like a scarecrow or a doll and the wind pulled her out of the car and he thought of their wedding and that her father Gary was displeased with the whole thing and he clutched onto the emergency brake and the steering wheel and he tumbled with the SUV what felt like hundreds of times and he screamed a scream so primordial that it woke him up. He was sweating. His whole body trembled and his body spasmed. He wanted to scream so he screamed over and over again and he clutched his blanket and called out "Gracie, Gracie no. Gracie no."

"Gracie, Gracie, Gracie. Gracie, please. Gracie, please forgive me. Please forgive me."

"I only love you."

And he vomited onto his bed. And he lay in the vomit and trembled. And he tried to remember her face and he so vividly recalled that her hair had a charming tendency to fall over her face. And her face was thin, and her smile was wide and always present. And her nose had a little skin fleck almost directly on it's tip, but not quite, just skewed oh so slightly to the upper left, and she had a collection of lines that shot out from the sides of her eyes because she had a wonderful and lovely habit of smiling, and her legs were covered in little brown skin spots and he cherished that little and personal constellation, and she pointed at him with her feet and said when she did that "I love you." And he called out "Gracie." And he picked up the phone to call some presumed shrink, but he put it down again and went back to sleep. In the morning he had hot oatmeal while the gulls swam in the powerful orange ball of the sun. He burped and farted. He took a shower and sung old songs of his youth loud, he masturbated and felt better.

Chloe sat in her car. She ruminated on the nature of relationships and of their connection to the game of chess. Except it was like playing chinese checkers and monopoly and charades with someone who was playing a video game and playing the piano. Eventually the connection happened and all you had to do was wait or lose interest. One or the other always happened. Neither seemed the better of the two options, maybe in lieu of them being options. It was optional. Or you could opt out. She remembered one good fuck Red. Red understood how to treat a woman. He understood when to shut up when to smile and when to reach out and hug you in his big bear arms and hold you and when to let go. Other than that he was boring as fuck. And that was his flaw. His overwhelming menagerie of flaws. She turned the key and the car purred in the California

sunshine and she put on her sunglasses and pressed the gas and went backwards out of her driveway and she thought of Red's considerable dick. Fuck, she thought. She was en route to the local supermarket to pick up more vodka because they had the good vodka, the one hundred proof kind, and slowly being surrounded by people brought her mood out of the dumpster and into more comfortably habitable territory and she wiped her nose with her finger and the skin there felt dry because of attacking it with all the tissues. Fuck men, she said out loud inside her car as the pop music boomed. She listened to a girl singer who sounded like she had figured it all out. Perhaps she had, actually, because the lyrics were very self aware and practical wisdom ornated every verse like a veil of gems and her cell phone vibrated and she picked it up.

It was her friend Cass and she was oh so prepared to unload her man problems onto Chloe, and it was a little piece of heaven for Chloe to help navigate her friends out of the woods that were their own feelings, and she was so sweet about it, and she wasn't overindulgent about it, "Girl, he fucks me so good but doesn't do a goddamn thing right besides that," said Cass. "He has such a big heart but when it goes away, when the sun goes down on that, girl, I'm telling you he is psycho retard fucking king dick, fucking retard ass dumb motherfucker. And his ugly ass doesn't appreciate me. What am I gonna do, what am I gonna do?"

"Here's what you do," said Chloe, "You fuck his brains out, then right before he cums, you jump your ass off of him, and he'll cry and whine and maybe even get mad, but you get your sweet ass dressed, then you tell him as he's throwing his tantrum, 'I'm done with your junk, punk, lowlife ass' and you tell him to leave your house and you start throwing all his clothes onto him, and you pour yourself a glass of orange juice and watch him leave."

"What if he doesn't leave," asked Cass.

"You just stay quiet and he'll leave."

There was a silence over the phone and finally Cass wondered, "What if he actually leaves?"

"Well, if he leaves he leaves. He either leaves and doesn't come back. Or he comes crawling back. Wasn't there a young boy, Flint, you could call up or anything, the one with stars in his eyes and a six pack?"

"Oh, you're such a fucking life saver. What's going on with you, I heard you left the bar the other night with some hunk, a little heavy in his movements but I heard you were talking to him for hours, and he had a sexy face and his eyes were nice. Husband stuff, girl."

"Yea, he's got a wife who died some time ago I guess and her pictures are hung up all over the walls and I'm just not sure about it at all."

"Well, girl... you'll figure it out, you always do."

She checked out her vodka and she also bought some fruits and vegetables and oatmeal: toilet paper, paper towels, plastic cups, soap, fabric softener, and five rib eye steaks for her cats, and she felt a bit full in herself as a cloud sometimes looks poofy and full, yet doesn't rain. It looks like an archetypal cloud.

Callaway sent Chloe a text after taking his daily medication, which is two small tablets, blue in color, and he could see more clearly the threads of his reality, "I heard there's a Stanley Kubrick marathon going on this evening down by the beach, near the pier. I'd love for you to join me "

Chloe opened the text, and ignored the text. She wouldn't answer him. That was her thinking in the moment at least.

Callaway took an uber to a gym, his gym, of which he was a member and he began with a shower. There was a black man in the shower too, and he started to talk, "Man, you recall that one bomb ass little dirty blonde I took to dinner a few days ago when we went to that Italian joint with all the fountains and shit and the two floors and the fifty dollar meatballs and the waiters who all walked like they had something rammed up their asses, well she's got a man. Don't worry, I'm not scared of him, but man ain't it the shit that when you really like a woman she's actually playing you like a fucking pair of spoons."

"Maybe she wants to leave him," said Callaway.

"No shit she does. It's always that way."

Out on the work out space Callaway started on the treadmill. Then he moved to push ups and burpies and planks and squats. Then he spent the rest of his time on deadlifts.

Chloe talked to her cats and poured herself a glass of vodka and orange juice, she opened her phone and closed it again. Callaway was getting into his car, covered in sweat from head to toe, and checked his phone again. "???" he sent.

