

Sphynx Clara

by Michael Seidel

The first brick fell off the house on a Thursday. I was inside. All the rooms smelled like pumpernickel bread, but the closer you got to the kitchen, you came up against distinct portobello, fiery green pepper with red moles, and onions that made your eyes feel like the end of a funeral. The toothpick in my mouth had been soaked in tea tree oil, and something about the wood helped tame the pain some. “Clara,” I addressed the woman I'd hired earlier that day to make my house a home, “Can you do something about that smell?”

Clara told me, “You said this is what you wanted. Do you want me to order something in instead?”

“I want the food, I just don't want the smell. Do something about the smell.”

Two more bricks fell Saturday, right after I'd invited Clara into my bed. She'd said ok and we'd pitched the sheets into a tip with my cane. We were laying head-to-foot and I was licking the back of her knees as she told me about the first pet she co-owned with her half-sister, a hairless cat named Kiisu. I interrupted her as she explained curious condition of phantom furballs that always plagued the poor, awful thing. I traced the needleish surface of her leg skin with my finger. “Don't I pay you enough to buy something to take care of this?” I asked her as she stormed out out of her tent, jumping back into her tights. She was already out the door and down the hall when joked, “What, do I need to do, give you a raise? Get it, a raze?!”

A brick from the parapet splat down later as I was applying a bitter healing powder, made from the seeds of watermelons, to my raw tongue.

I was sitting on the chair Tuesday, watching Clara move the vacuum back and forth across my wood floor. Her bare ring finger kept flashing and I daydreamed of prisms of light lassoing right near the knuckle. The sound of the dollar coins getting sucked up was like a hailstorm and almost so loud you couldn't hear the shingles falling inward over us two stories up.

My wealth was not financial, my father's was. He'd left this house to me when he went to a better place—Albuquerque first, then ascended higher still to San Lorenzo. My wealth was in people, in love. After my root canal Wednesday, I professed my love to Clara, saying, “My passion for you is a prison and I want you as a bunk-mate.” Her face went like an oven under her sunrise of hair. “Please,” I asked her, “Fetch me my naproxen, for I have something more I must confess.”

She leaped up out of her chair. As she landed on her feet, the floor gave out under her, shooting her body through. In a rush, the rest of the house caved in after her sweet body, which was a positively charming magnetic thing with a positive charge that nothing, even soap dispensers, nine laptop computers, my model car and baseball collections, the four uncooked Carnival Squash in the veg hanging basket, the new dishwasher, everything, in fact, that would later show up on the insurance inventory list, could help but attach itself to.

I roiled downward too after her too. I landed right on her, then rolled off, sprawled next to her. I reached my arm out for her as the clot from my teeth went toward my brain. There was not enough time to make my confession: This cloud of afro, Clara, is nothing more than rain points of hair plugs. In truth, Clara, I am as bald as Kiisu, but balder actually, since once I had known the glory of fur, but then I came alive to the shock of loss and the self-sabotage of masking my hurt.

My very last thought was of her legs, the stab and mow that must have taken place several times a week along the surface. I felt sick I'd felt so much for her over that week, she who could be a porcupine one moment and a cat the next but who refused to commit either way, once and for all.

