

Mania

by Sam Ferree

To Charles Bukowski

"I haven't shat or pissed in seven years," she tells him, negotiating each word around the Marlboro. Because he doesn't know what else to say, Isaiah asks, "Haven't you seen a doctor about that?"

"Of course." Her words fall out white clouds against an off-white carpet and light cream plaster walls. The air is a stinking thick haze of tobacco smoke. There are only a handful of boxes next to them; they sit on the only pieces of furniture he can see, two metal folding chairs. The room is bare.

"If you don't shit or piss for a week the body poisons itself -- drowns in its own filth," she says. "The doctors said there was nothing wrong with me. One or two actually went as far as to say I was lying. But I haven't defecated or urinated for about the last quarter of my life."

"That must be uncomfortable," Isaiah says, his desire to fuck her quickly subsiding with this new bit of information, thus he had no reason to stay. He'd made his delivery -- the last that evening -- a thirty-six pack of downy toilet paper, to one Beatrice Smith who, despite his usual gamut of old ladies and stay-at-home moms, turned out to be an attractive young woman, shorts tight enough to count her change at a glance and a tight white T-shirt thin enough to see the absence of a bra. Her hair was tied back in a red bandana. When she turned to get him the money and a drink he decided she had the best ass he'd seen in months. So they sat down for drinks, he a beer and she a Long Island iced tea. Then she told him she hadn't shat in seven years.

Kill the beer and go, he thinks. Bitch is crazy. Still. "So, why order the largest and most expensive package of toilet paper?" he asks indicating the behemoth sitting next to him.

She shrugs. "Entertaining guests. I've made a rule, you see. Once I've run through three of these I move. That usually takes about a year of entertaining guests, boyfriends and whoever else walks in."

"So," Isaiah says, "you have a certain threshold of shit you take before you move."

"Exactly."

The wind blows, the apartment groans and the rain slaps the window at the termination of freezing, forming a sliding layer of ice on the glass. It looks like the whole world is melting.

"Want another drink?" Beatrice asks.

"Yeah," Isaiah says before he realizes he's handing her his empty. He calls to her after she disappears into the kitchen. "So, how long have you been doing the one-year-and-then-move thing?"

"Seven years."

"Since your problems started?"

"Since my *problems started?*" she says and it sounds like she's telling the punchline of a dirty joke. "My problems started a long time before that."

She reemerges from the kitchen, hands him his beer, sits down and gets to work on a martini. "What about you?" she asks. "How'd you end up with this shit job? Having to deliver toilet paper at four in the morning to weirdos and ass holes."

"It's not so bad when the weather isn't a mother fucker," he says. He considers hammering the beer and excusing himself; it's a good rule to keep the subject as far away from himself as possible.

She nods and lights another cigarette. "I'm surprised anyone does deliveries in this weather."

"Somebody's gotta do it. Gotta get those batteries, bottles of water, beer, groceries, nails, light bulbs or whatever to all the people too lazy to get it themselves. I nearly skidded off the road four times getting here."

She takes a drag of her cigarette. "You think I'm lazy?"

Mistake. "I didn't mean *you*. I just meant..."

"No," she says smoke. "You meant *people* are lazy. All of them. We're people too. We'd all like it if we had everything handed over right now."

"Yeah," he says. She takes a drag. They listen to the rain break. That wasn't what he meant, but better she think that than whatever it was he did believe. "That's what I meant."

She eats one of the green olives in two tiny bites, sucking off the gin and vermouth with full lips. It's arousing and Isaiah suddenly remembers his intended purpose. He hasn't gotten laid in a month and it was agony in his groin. So, she's full of shit. Most people are. He glances at her thighs, crossed, shaved, perfect, smooth.

The building groans.

"You nearly died three times driving here?" she asks.

"Yeah." He crosses his legs. "I've never seen a storm like this. The whole world's been turned to ice."

She nods, drags. "I've seen worse."

"That's rough."

"That's life. Need to use the bathroom?"

"No." He kills the beer. "You didn't bring very much with you?"

"Booze, clothes, books, games. I don't need anything else. I can fit everything I own in my car."

"I haven't moved in a long time."

"I guess so. I have wanderlust. Drink?"

"Sure."

He follows her to kitchen and sees a well stocked bar on the counter. Bombay Sapphire, Johnny Walker Black, Grey Goose and all the bottom shelves. "You're a bartender?"

"It's the one profession, besides prostitution, that you can find a job anywhere. Johnny?"

"Yes." While she pours, he talks. "I just have the odd jobs. Deliverer, chef, I worked at Toys R Us before I got this job. Manager position."

"What's the strangest thing you've ever delivered?"

She turns and pushes a glass into his hands. He tries hard to consider as Beatrice leans against the counter, close to him, pulling her shirt tighter.

"Weirdest thing? Well, this is pretty strange. Toilet paper to a woman who doesn't shit." He laughs. She doesn't. He clears his throat and thinks. "The weirdest thing. Probably the time I had to deliver for a party. At least, I think it was a party. This woman ordered three cases of beer, a dozen tubs of ice cream and a lot of mixed candy. When I pulled up to the drive, out of town in the country, she had three little kids, no older than ten. She paid me and gave me a twenty dollar tip. Didn't look like anyone was coming to a party. The kids were screaming and the ice cream was melting as she paid me. That was weird."

Beatrice stares at him, sips her drink and he watches the outline of her nipples. "Do you want to stay the night?" she asks.

"Well," Isaiah says without thinking and realizes he has nothing to say.

She moves closer to him, wraps a hand around his waist and presses her crotch against his. He sits down his drink on the counter, wraps his arms around her and imagines kissing her, but doesn't. He tries, but doesn't. The building creaks.

"I want to fuck you," he says.

"I want to fuck you," she repeats.

She pulls him to her bedroom and undresses them both. They lie on her bare mattress. He wraps around her; she is so small in his arms and frame. The window rattles and the room stinks of smoke, but neither moves, neither does anything. It is not sexual, Isaiah realizes. He has no desire; he is too tired for that. It just is.

"I want to fuck you," he says.

"Then why don't you?" she asks. He cannot see her face.

"Because it's never enough. You know, I had a nympho girlfriend once. We had sex four times a day and we hated each other. It's just too hard to break things off with someone who's the solution to your own desire."

Between her ass cheeks his penis is limp.

"All my boyfriends I've ever had called me worthless," Beatrice said. "I tried to fix my life and discovered that it wasn't worth the effort."

"It's never enough," he says.

"I smoke until I'm sick."

"Keep trying to leave and never get anywhere."

"The shit builds up until I can't take it."

"Everyday I just wish I were someone else, somewhere else, but I wake up in the same bed."

"Black out dreams are the best."

"It's never enough. Just to fuck."

"I'd love to just have sex and sleep and that's it."

"I'd love to just fuck and sleep and that's it."

They wake up the next morning and the window is royal purple stained glass. The whole world is frozen. Both are awake, but neither moves. She does not light a cigarette. He's limp. They look at each other. They see one another's breath and feel the other's warmth and fall asleep again.

