

My Date With Satan

by Stacey Richter

My date with Satan commenced at the Sanrio store by Union square where we went to browse through two stories of miniature Japanese school supplies and grooming accessories. Satan seemed kind of nervous. "All the light," he said, "I don't like all the light." It's true the Sanrio store has a wide glass facade and glass doors and a plexiglass staircase to better illuminate the many rows of miniature Hello Kitty and Ahiru No Pekkle trinkets—endless, perfectly arranged rows of tiny colored pencils, mite-sized plastic address books, barrettes as small as aspirin—a thousand diminutive products to lodge in a thousand dinky airways, what do you think of that Satan? What do you think of little kiddies choking on Sanrio brand Keroppe-Frog pencil erasers? Satan liked that very much and set to cackling and browsing and didn't seem as nervous once he had something evil to rest his mind on.

I voyaged deep into the Hello Kitty aisle and stared into Kitty's pert, Liza Minelli eyes as they gazed back at me from a giant cat-shaped plastic display case, the only large thing in the room. Inside its belly was tier upon tier of Hello Kitty dolls arrayed neatly, like a scientific model of parasites invading a host. The display reminded me of a documentary I'd seen about a shrine in Japan stocked with ceramic cats with their paws raised—entreating, liquid-eyed cats—and supplicants would bring offerings of tuna and pray to Buddha for mercy on the souls of their lost pets. They'd burn incense in hope of drawing their cats home safely. This struck me as wildly funny and I went up to Satan who was reading Sanrio product literature by the register to tell him about the shrine in Japan for wayward cats.

Satan was laughing maniacally. "Look here," he said, and thrust a magazine at me, "there's this interview with the lady who invented all these Sanrio characters, and the guy asks her, 'To what do you attribute the success of your creation, Hello Kitty?' and the lady replies, 'She has no mouth you see.'"

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Then he threw back his head and laughed maniacally some more.

A crowd of children had started to gather around Satan and me, pointing at my hair, which I had done up in braids entwined with wire so they stuck out of my head at right angles like my namesake, Pippi Longstocking, or PipiLngstck as I am known on-screen. Also, I was wearing a pinafore over a white smock and Buster Brown shoes; these may have attracted the children as well. Satan appeared more kosher in terms of what is acceptable in San Francisco. He was wearing a long ultra suede trench coat in a dusky shade of black, a black silky shirt, Gap jeans, and black Reeboks—he looked dorky, if you want to know the truth, like a brooding loser outcast guy. His Paul McCartney bowl cut was the real clincher. Still, there's nothing I love better than loser outcast guys, as I'd told Satan when I first met him in Le Chateau, brooding in the corner, trying to get someone to notice him.

"You're exactly the kind of guy I would have had a crush on in high school," I said. He threw bits of chalk at me for the next twenty minutes. Not actually throwing, as we were communicating in a computer chat room, Le Chateau the SM meeting place, which is where Satan and I in fact met; but rather, periodically typing in the phrase: *"Lobbing another piece of chalk at PipiLngstck's head."* And I'd type back, *"Ouch, Satan, that hurts. You're being a very bad boy!"* Then Satan would throw a notebook at me. So I'd say, *"Satan, do you have to be taken outside and spanked?"* And Satan would type back, *"Oh, I Love You, PipiLngstck."* I'd say, *"I don't want LOVE from such a nasty boy. I want OBEDIENCE!!!"* using capital letters to be emphatic because on-line, capitals equal shouting.

Then he'd ignore me for a while while other people in Le Chateau, Domin8U, subBoy, or LaraLee, tried to pick me up. *"Are you brooding, Satan?"* I'd ask. Satan would make weak excuses for his behavior, saying stuff like, *"Forgive me, dove, it's the solitude, the incessant solitude, that have made this way."* Occasionally he'd lapse into stilted, romantic-medieval blather: *"PipiLngstck, I see you bearing down upon me in a flowing robe, thighs flashing, a*

dagger in your hand. You strike for my neck and leave me tattered, bleeding, devastated."

"You're not one of those geeks who's into Dungeons and Dragons, are you, Stan?" (If you want to get Satan really mad, call him Stan.)

"A geek for love."

Then I shoved Satan into a private room, where no one else on the system could see what we typed, and told him exactly what I was doing to him, blow by blow.

* * *

I was hoping for something wholesome on my date with Satan; maybe not exactly wholesome, but I was wearing a stiff, white, Playtex bra like somebody's second grade teacher might wear and I wanted to bring Satan to the Sanrio store so we could look at all the miniature products in their ingenious packaging arranged so perfectly and orderly on the shelf, all the edges lining up. All of it was so cute and perky it stirred up some kind of answering violence in me, the violence of white cotton underwear, of Catholic schoolgirls, of PipiLngstck and cookies and milk. By then I had told Satan about the shrine in Japan, and also how there's a saying in Japan--people might say this of an infant or a baby animal--*he's so cute I want to hit him on the head with a hammer*--and Satan *really* liked that, he said he knew all about that. When he laughed I thought he looked pretty damn cute himself. His hair was too long and falling into his eyes; there was some baby fat left around his chin even though he claimed to be twenty-five, the same age as me. He was jumping around the store totally hyper, pointing at Hello Kitty and going, "BAM," like he was braining her and chanting, repeatedly, "She has no mouth, you see."

"Chill Satan, they'll kick us out."

"Fair lady, who cares?" Satan leered and stepped so near I thought he was going to kiss me. I took a giant step backwards. Even though I'd done everything I could think of to him in private rooms on the computer, I didn't think it proper for him to kiss me just yet, not in public. We still had a lot to learn about each other.

He'd made *that* pitifully clear on the phone when he'd said that his idea of a perfect date was to drink a couple of beers while watching *The Lost Boys* on video, a lassie in latex pants slumped next to him on the couch. My dream date, on the other hand, involved the perky sterility of the Sanrio store.

"She has no mouth you see," Satan said, again. "No mouth, no facial expression. She could be feeling anything, that's what the lady said, though I'm not convinced Kitty is a lassie, forsooth. There seems to be no indication down there," he flipped the poor doll into an obscene position, "so that little Timmy can imagine Kitty is smiling, crying, or smoking crack! Whatever so pleases him, to match his very own mood!" He leapt across the aisle and knocked a Spottie Dottie dental hygiene set onto the floor. "The secret of success. No mouth you see!"

I dragged Satan out of there with the sales staff (whose duty it was to be peppy in all circumstances) looking pissed off. We walked up Stockton towards the tunnel that came out in Chinatown. We had a plan to go to Satan's favorite Dim Sum shop. The whole date was very organized. While we waited to cross the street I tried to avoid a preacher who was berating the stream of shoppers on the sidewalk. "You deny Jesus! You deny the name in the holy book!" He was a big, middle-aged Elvis-like man, and he looked upset. "You fill up your lives twenty-four hours a day with trivia, and you're going to Hell!"

Satan reached into his coat and pulled out a stuffed Hello Kitty doll. "For you, dove."

"For me? You stole this for me?" He was wearing eyeliner. I was wearing eyeliner too. He blushed and faced a current of pedestrians flowing through the crosswalk. "Thanks," I said.

* * *

At the Dim Sum take-out shop Satan ordered nothing but those long, slimy noodles in beef sauce that have the same weight and slickness as a human tongue. I ordered a variety of items, including pork buns and shrimp balls. Satan combination snorted/

laughed when I said “pork buns.” By then, I noticed, I was starting to get sick of him.

We took our food outside and sat on the sidewalk with our shoes in the gutter. “For you, dove,” Satan said, pulling an extra pair of chopsticks out of his pocket.

“Thanks, Satan.” Satan wasn't his real name of course, it was his on-screen name, like PipiLngstck wasn't my real name. But I liked saying “Satan.” It gave me profound satisfaction, to say “Satan” over and over to this awkward, vaguely dramatic boy.

“All one thing,” I said, watching him suck noodles into his mouth, “isn't that a little, uh, extreme? For a meal intended to be comprised of a series of appetizers?”

Satan looked thoughtful. “I have an attraction to extremes, fair Pippi.”

“Oh, yeah. I second that.”

“If it's not extreme,” he continued, “I mean, what's the point?” He stared away into crates of cabbage and unripe mangos overflowing onto the sidewalk. “When you eat on the street in Chinatown,” Satan observed, “people look at you like you're a dog eating offal out of the gutter.”

It was true, I noticed, people did shoot us dirty looks, but it was nothing I wasn't used to. All the bosses I'd ever had at any of my temp jobs seemed to regard me as disposable tissue that typed: ordering me around, looking through me, seeming more amazed when I did a job well than when I did one badly. Maybe it was my unusual personal appearance—the fact that I drew freckles on my cheeks with eyeliner or daubed teardrops under my eyes with mascara, or that my braids that stuck out at right angles from my head; or maybe it was the short skirts, white bobby socks and cardigan sweaters I often wore. Or my high, little-girl voice. I don't know. It seemed like there were plenty of people in San Francisco who dressed artistically, you'd think even people with power would get over it. But no one understood.

I just wanted to look wholesome. I wanted to have some sort of access to the land of puppies and kitties and things that are good

and simple and true. I wanted it to seep inside me so I would be good and simple and true myself. This way I could keep everything in order; I could be sad at certain times and happy at others, all very organized. Some days I'd go into the bathroom during lunch and wipe off my tears and draw on a grin, or add big, spiky eyelashes and spot my cheeks with roses. That would mean I was happy. Or draw on tears--then I was sad. It all had a linear cause and effect that calmed me and made me a better worker, in my opinion.

"Satan, are you cold?" The afternoon was mild, but Satan hunched on the curb with the collar of his trench coat turned up, sucking noodles into his mouth.

"The chill is within my soul, lady."

It was sort of disturbing to watch him eat. He wasn't very good with the chopsticks. "What do you think, Satan. Now you've met me, what do you think?"

He eyed me coolly. He wasn't as eager in real life as he was on screen. In fact, he was kind of arrogant. "I think you're pretty."

"I told you I was pretty."

"Computers lie."

"Computers don't lie. People using computers lie."

"Guns don't kill people, people kill people."

"You're real snappy, Satan. A real snappy guy. Aren't you going to ask me if I like you?"

"No." He grinned that sassy grin. "I can tell you like me."

I squealed and grabbed him by the hair. He was right.

At that point, I knew about one thing for sure about Satan: he was a geek. He had the queer, stylized diction, the mannered exterior, the inability to make eye contact, that screamed of geekdom. Geek! He was, I decided, one of those guys who was obsessed with role playing games like Dungeons and Dragons in high school; misfit guys shamed into lives of fantasy by the scarlet bubbles of acne percolating across their faces. They had to take on the role of Sir Quidball or Fatemaster or Lady Annabella and pretend to seize the opal from the high tower or something if they were ever going to be able to converse with another human being.

By the time I met Satan though, all those guys needed was a computer and a modem and they could avoid showing their zitty faces altogether. They could just sign on and talk to all sorts of people through computer bulletin boards and chat rooms: starfleet academy, torah discussion, stevie nicks forum, and a lot of ones about sex: amputee love, hot tub, gay cops and of course, le chateau, where Satan I had met probably twenty times before our first date.

It was nice. Someone could type: *"I'm grinding my pelvis into your face and yanking up on your hair,"* into a keyboard, and everyone would get hard and wet and come or whatever in the privacy of their own homes. I really hate it when people, usually the older generation, say how technology is depersonalizing and makes humans into machines and the future is dank and scary. I mean, first of all, I see plenty of people in real life, and secondly, it's not like people on the computer are fake. They're out there. I knew Satan as the sweet boy who licked my boots and called me Mistress of the Doves in black letters etched against the glow of my computer screen. When he found out we both lived in the Bay Area, he was literally beside himself with excitement.

"Please," he typed, *"if I could feast my eyes on you but once fair lady, all my existence would be complete."*

"I don't know Satan," I typed back, *"it could spoil everything."*

"Lady, I think about you day and night," he replied. *"It doesn't seem like there would be any point in getting up in the morning, or that my pathetic life would be worth living at all, if I missed the chance to touch you, even once."*

So there we were, on a date, dating. My date with Satan.

We went back to his place. His place isn't the term, exactly, because "due to unusual circumstances where my presence and my responsibility are often unexpectedly required," as he cryptically put it, Satan lived at home with his mother and sister.

"Mom's out today," he said, as we climbed the stairs. "And sister's always out."

It was a deluxe apartment on the top story of a Victorian in North Beach, a very fancy address. He led me up the stairs into a big open room with a view of the bay and the Golden Gate, all that tourist stuff that looks like a souvenir map in 3D. They had a piano with a bowl of real fruit on it. Satan hunched over it and started to play "Some Enchanted Evening."

"Nice pad, Satan." I had an urge to defile the place.

"Yes, my sweet, I call it home. Come, allow me to escort you on the grand tour."

Satan began to lead me around the apartment. He showed me the kitchen, the balcony, the den and then his room. Okay: I knew Satan was a respectable guy with a job as a programmer at some hot shit firm in Berkeley but, well, I guess I wasn't surprised to see he lived with his mom with only one place as a refuge—his room. It was all decked out with Star Trek posters, shelves of William Gibson and Anne Rice books, a slick computer with every available peripheral and we're talking scanner, fax/modems, expensive speakers; the total computer universe. We made a loop and ended up back in the front room. Satan stopped on a little step below me and looked at me with hungry, velvet eyes. I grabbed his chin and kissed him hard on the mouth. He sank to his knees and began lapping at my ankles.

I have no idea why I elicit this from men. Every boy I've ever known has wanted to put on an apron and high heels in my honor and scrub my sink with Comet, or wear a collar with a leash threaded through his nipple rings and have me pull him around the floor. They want to be turned over my knees with their pants pulled down and be spanked, paddled and whipped. They want to lick my boots and roll over on their backs and pee on themselves like cowed beta wolves. There seems to be something about me. I have a markedly little-girl style I admit. I've been told I look like a little lost orphan by bus drivers, store clerks, and ticket vendors. There must be some kind of magnetic attraction in this, to be flailed at by a full-grown girl in a pale pink romper. Maybe they think I can't really hurt them.

I'll confess I don't really mind. I mean, I kind of enjoy it; I kind of like completely running the show with these guys, and it seems to mean so much to them. It's like they open their souls, they get so sweet and vulnerable. Also, I don't have to do anything really. Half the time they don't ask for anything from me. I just stand there and say, "You slut, you love it," or whatever seems appropriate, and they tell me all their secrets. They weep and tell me they love me.

In this case Satan and I had already practiced on the screen so I knew exactly what kind of twisted scenes were flitting through his mind. And I was composing a list in my head of things I was going to do to him, there on the stairs with Satan groveling at my feet, when a little girl about six years old pounced into the room chased by a frantic woman.

"Oh damn, sorry. Ivy, come here," said the woman, dropping to her knees and crawling towards the little girl slowly.

"Shit," said Satan, standing up casually, "what'd you have to bring her in here for?"

"You try and stop her."

The girl jumped into the center of the room and stopped, a distracted expression on her face. One of her blue eyes was looking at me while the other wandered up the wall. She was very pretty I thought, with wild, blue-black hair and little hands balled up in fists. She had on a sequined bodysuit with a stiff ruffle pouching out around her waist, like a ballet costume.

"She's so cute," I said. "A little fairy thing. What is she, your sister?"

"Yeah," Satan said quietly.

"Well, she's cute."

"She can't help it," Satan said. "Let's go into my room."

The little girl stared ahead with glassy eyes. "Are you a real little girl?" I asked.

"Are you a real little girl?" she said back.

"Or are you a fairy?"

"Or are you a fairy?"

"I'm the Queen of the fairies," I told her, bending closer, "and I want to know if you're one of us."

"If you're one of us," she echoed, looking at me with vacant panic.

"I get it, it's a game. What's your name, honey?"

The little girl stared at me but it felt like she was looking through my head.

"Her name is Ivy," the woman said. She had a fancy haircut and a young face but she looked so annoyed and responsible that I thought she must be an employee.

"She's a doll. I want one."

"Can we get her out of here?" Satan was nervous. He began to edge towards the little girl from the side while the woman—the maid I guess—snuck up from behind. As soon as he was within reach the girl began to scream.

"Fuck!" said Satan.

"My God, what did you do to her?"

"I didn't do anything to her," Satan said, in a weary voice, "she's just like this. There isn't really anything to do to her."

The girl sat on the floor and started doing something that looked like she was shooing invisible flies off her nose, over and over.

"Come on, Pippi. Nancy's supposed to be the one taking care of her anyway."

When we began to leave the room the little girl began to scream again; piercing, vicious, cat snarls.

"Please," the lady said, "please sing her a song." She gave Satan a long, pathetic, entreating look. "If I have to deal with this all day they'll have to put *me* in an institution."

"No way," said Satan. "I have a guest."

Long, rhythmic bellows issued from the little girl. The lady slowly sank to the floor.

Satan sighed and went to the piano. "You owe me, Nancy. You owe me big." He made some curlicues up in the high notes. "And now, ladies and gentlemen," he addressed the back of the

piano, a classy baby grand, “a serenade to the diminutive tyrant of the household.” Satan's head drooped and his hair fell over his face. He played a slow, mournful introduction, buried under Ivy's wails, then began to sing: “*Mommy's blue,*” --oh! a Billy Holiday song! “*...because her little girl is going on three..*” He had a low, trembling voice, “*but Miss Amanda she's as proud as can be..*”

Satan was swaying, his eyelids drooping, looking so natural and self-conscious at once I felt like running out of the room. It all seemed so, I don't know—complicated. Instead I looked at the little girl, the delightful little Ivy-girl, shrieking now in raspy, intermittent hiccups. The music seemed to relax her; her hands uncurled and she focused on my knees, staggering towards me, arms extended in front of her like a baby-version of Frankenstein, aiming directly for the Hello Kitty hanging out of my hand.

“She wants my doll,” I whispered.

“Oh God,” said Satan, but he kept playing.

“Just let her have it,” the woman implored.

“No!” Satan jumped up, “she'll fuck with it!”

The little girl began screaming anew. What vocal chords! The glass in the window frames rattled. Satan resumed playing and she quieted. The woman gave him a pleading glance. She looked exhausted. The thought crossed my mind that maybe she and Satan were having an illicit affair. Ivy began tugging on Hello Kitty's leg.

“All right, just give it to her,” he told me, “the little fascist. Otherwise we'll be here forever. You can't believe her endurance. Sorry. I'm really sorry.”

Satan played on. I handed the girl the doll and she set upon it like a wild rat, tearing its belly along the sharp edge of the coffee table, ripping a big gash in Kitty's stomach with a methodical violence, a strange mixture of purpose and detachment.

“*You're a big girl now..*” Satan sang, as Ivy, with muffled gasps, pulled white spun stuffing out of Kitty's body cavity and pitched it onto the floor.

“God, why is she doing that?”

“Ivy has a thing about dolls,” Satan said, his fingers moving across the keys. “She has to get inside of them. She thinks there's something in there.”

“We think she's looking for their feelings. People with her disorder have trouble with emotions.”

“What's wrong with her?”

“She's autistic,” said the woman.

“Oh. Will she always be like that?”

“I don't know,” she said, “no one really knows.”

Ivy had calmed down—she was flinging bits of fiber into the air and watching them descend through the light, enraptured. The woman was able to pick her up and carry her from the room. My Kitty lay deflated, her polyester feelings strung out across the hardwood floor.

“I regret the interruption,” Satan said. “Accept my apologies. And now, my dear, allow me to escort you into the sanctuary.”

* * *

Satan was striped with gaffer's tape and he wanted me to rip it off. When I kissed him and ran my hands under his shirt I discovered the plastic slickness of the tape encasing him like armor. I removed his clothes to discover he was crosshatched on his chest and buttocks and thighs.

“Jesus, Satan, that's going to make you yelp.”

“Fair princess, to feel pain at your hands is but the greatest pleasure.” He was spread out on top of his bed, trembling, surrounded by computers and high school banners and a big poster of a blonde lady riding a horse through what I understood to be a medieval forest.

“Well, you might flinch. We'll have to prevent that,” I said, and began to tie Satan to the posts of his bed with laundry I picked off the carpet. My braids kept getting in the way so I twisted them together behind my neck. “You look so cute, I want to hit you on the head with a hammer.”

"Don't make me wait," said Satan, a catch in his voice, so I hopped astride him and tore one leg of a chest-sized X off his skin, a clean rip from nipple to belly.

He screamed.

I turned over the tape and examined the hairs embedded in it. It had left a tender pink swath across Satan's chest. Dots of blood welled from his pores.

"That looks pretty rough, kiddo. Are you up for this? Maybe we should start a little slower."

"Don't turn pussy on me now," he said. I told him he was asking for it and pulled off the other half of the X.

Satan screamed. He had quite an erection. "We'll see who's a pussy now," I said, working methodically, tearing the smaller sections of tape off his thighs and legs rhythmically. He eventually stopped screaming and simply lay there trembling.

"I'm completely at your mercy. I'm yours. Do with me as you will. Rip me open. I am like one of Ivy's dolls if you so desire, lady."

I wrapped my hand around his penis.

He said, "I love you."

"Yeah, I know."

"No really, I love you really. God, I can't believe this is happening. I feel like we've known each other forever. I feel like you know me so well."

I slid his erection into my mouth and he actually kept talking.

"It's just a computer, I know, but it's so real. I can tell so much about you by what you write. You don't know how many times I've pictured you here with me. Ferris. My real name is Ferris."

I slipped off his legs and sat beside him. "Gee, is it really?"

"What's your real name?"

"I don't have a real name." I took a flap of silver tape without much stick left to it and put it over my mouth. "I have no mouth, you see."

"Hey, please, come on. I love you. I'd be on my knees if I weren't tied up. I'd kiss your hand. I mean," his eyes filmed over, "I really love you. So tell me your real name? I'm begging?"

My eyes trailed across the pink and trembling figure of Satan, bound. Ferris, now he'd want me to call him Ferris. I don't know why this always has to happen to me. Guys always reach the point where they want me to take out my braids, wipe off my make-up, dress like other girls, "real girls," they say. They want me to tell them my name, my address, my social security number; they want to open me up like a package and crawl around inside and find out exactly what's wrong with me and fix it and love it and I don't know why the hell they don't lay off. I don't know where they get off thinking I'm going to give up all my secrets, hand my life up over to some guy, a stupid guy who doesn't even have his own apartment. Who lives with his mother.

"You know what Ferris?" I said cheerfully, "fuck you."

His face fell. "Oh God, what did I do?"

Because there isn't any problem until they think there's a problem. There isn't any problem until they want to know what's inside me and then the problem is *they are all fucked up*. If they want a piece of me, I figure they must be empty to start with, right? Once they get started, where will it end? Before you know it I'll be married and living in the suburbs, fretting over carpet stains. No way am I getting into that. I've found the only thing to do in these cases is to leave. These situations are a bitch. I don't get anything out of them but I don't lose anything either. PipiLngstck is an expert in the delicate art of cutting her losses.

I left him on the bed, tied up and gunked with white adhesive residue. He had a decent chance, I decided, of working himself free before anyone (i.e. his mom) found him.

"Pippi," he whimpered, "you're leaving? Will I see you again on-line?"

Some guys, I've found, are like that: the colder PipiLngstck is to them, the more they think they have to have her.

As I was leaving, I decided to try to find the baby girl. I just wanted to say goodbye. I couldn't get over how adorable she looked in her princess dress, tearing up my Kitty doll in a trance. I poked around until I found her, alone in a room, staring at the pink and

blue wallpaper like it was television. The water was running in the bathroom. She was so precious. Why was I always the one to leave empty handed? I wrapped my arm around her little waist and dragged her with me down the stairs.

