

Rwanda Suite: The Wild Man Scale

by Steven Gowin

We've all got one — the Borneo man or yeti, the sasquatch, the wild one we love, the savage we desire.

Minnesota - Hubert Humphrey High

Lexi McLean ranked seven on the wild man scale, wild woman, I should say.

She had the fine skin and light freckles and the Irish curl in black hair. I loved her being Celtic, for being Catholic, for being brave.

At 16, she'd been running with the red head Farrells, her kind, I reckon, fallen papists helling around, torching sheriff's cars, drinking, and smoking the cannabis.

She'd never sleep with a Farrell, could certainly do much better, but still, her junior year, Old Man McLean, old Royal, pulled her out of "The Hump" H.H. Humphrey High and sent her to the Académie des Petites Sœurs de Sainte Marie de la Mer.

I suppose Da McLean thought the sœurs could handle his child and temper her demeanor. But around Christmas, after a party with some of the Sainte Marie girls, with one of the Sainte Maries driving, a car crash left her gimped and brain dead. It was no chance of recovery.

Bastard Royal McLean. We all knew it, why didn't he? No savage Farrell ever wrecked a car drunk. Never.

Congo - Peace Corps Training Center, Bukavu

Alex Du Prés swallowed language and gurgled it back as well as any gutter thug from the deep Paris burbs.

He taught me filthy things, but then too spoke a perfect high French from Swiss boarding school where he'd also picked up certain proclivities. Let's just say he knew his way around a pharmacy, and in Congo, pharmacists ask few questions.

During our stage, our training, on Friday nights, we'd toke up on Kivu Blue purchased from child vendors who wrapped it tight in banana leaves and also sold Bazooka bubble gum. We'd swallow a couple strong pills too and head into town.

Our formateurs called Club Marabou an unsavory bordel, un établissement non-civilisé as if bordels civilisé did exist somewhere. Les femmes libres, those not exactly prostitute but not exactly *not* prostitute bar girls did steal Alex's glasses once, but we negotiated for them the next day.

We loved Bukavu's chaos, its hustlers and hucksters and he she people and femmes libres. Something would go haywire, girls fighting or vomiting or crying, and Alex simply rolled his dead eye, lazy from birth or shot through by a prep school archer, I never knew, and mutter, "Go wild, man. Just go fuckin' nuts." And he did.

He ended running the Avis Rent a Car in Lubumbashi, haggling and loving haggling with the Congolese, marrying and divorcing a big man's beautiful daughter, and was still banging around Katanga last I heard.

I rank him a solid eight on the wild man scale, maybe a nine.

Seattle — North Gate Retail Fun Mall

After the Peace Corps, I figured to try Seattle.

Couldn't stand all white men in white Moorhead, Minnesota speaking nothing but English every day of the year forever. In the beginning, I taught ESL to Saudis and Persians and Koreans at a little tech college.

I worked half days. Then I'd jog in the rain and spend evenings with bars and weed and movies. But itinerate adjuncts often hit dead semesters and can't make rent. That's when a buddy said you could pull down good scratch terrifying brats, and that I'd figure it out soon enough. He worked it himself on weekends.

I am a fuck up, I know, but now I borrow his outfit on Tuesday and take it back Friday morning. Sometimes I throw him a little weed as a rental. My best gig is Thursday nights at the *Northgate Mall Big Foot Party and Pizza*.

Christ the costume does stink. It's my own BO and my buddy's BO and spilled tomato sauce and old garlic and pot smoke and mildew all gone bad, but it's all good too. See, the big boy himself surely smells like hell warmed over.

I usually change in the back closet where they keep the cleaning stuff. I pull on the long hairy feet and the shaggy body parts. The outfit has a mesh hole in the chest to see through, just like Big Bird's.

The arms have extensions and a little lever so I can bend the right hand to grasp stuff. I found a big cow bone, boiled off the meat, and bleached it white which I do shake around threatening like.

The monster's head's the best part, the ugliest man ape ever. One nine-volt battery and finger tap, and you light the eyes glowing and blood red. Controls in the left hand roll them in their sockets and make the lips move too.

Even when I'm slumped down duck walking Gooney Island Goon style, the head stretches up a good three feet, making me what, nine feet tall? Raising both arms hallelujah style enhances the effect.

To begin the show, the manager announces, "Get Ready for Big Foot Theater starring the Big Foot Boy." Then he dims the lights and blasts "I Put a Spell on You," over the PA. I fly in through the back like I'm rabid. I rage around a while and do pelvic thrusts and butt shimmy.

I growl and hiss, and sometimes spit out some of the filthy French Alex taught me years ago, *pute de merde* or *vas te faire foudre trouduc*, but the thing I like best is this high pitch whine I've developed. I get real still as it starts and the crowd goes quiet.

Then my uvula wags and vibrates and threatens to pop out of my mouth, and I explode in a tremolo scream that puts a howl on neighboring dogs. And that surely does scare bejesus out of the little bastards.

For the finale, I push a couple pizza trays to the floor and pound my long white bone on the tables. I knock over some cokes and burst through the double doors out front, my hands in the air climbing over parked cars, smacking their hoods, and keening into the night.

Behind me, the manager announces “There he goes girls and boys; looks like he got away this time,” and I escape to a wooded place beyond the North Gate Mall never to be seen again.

I keep a cooler out there for an icy brew and always toke up before the next show. I do well, real well. In Sharpie they've labeled a huge pickle jar by the register:

Tips for Big Hair

The Big Foot Boy

The Sasquatchie One

Abominables do roam the earth, savage ones; I know it. And we must honor them.

That's why I'm saving up for my own outfit now. I only give myself a four on the wild man scale, but I'm working on it.

I am working on it.

