

No Prada, No Burberry, No Gaston Lauvert

by strannikov

Zenobia Selmdreight—she always introduced herself as “Cozy”—had just spent her first night in the Palmer House, a consequence logical enough since this was her first visit to Chicago, even though she was not attending the convention of the American Philosophical Association, Central Division, underway on the hotel's lower levels.

Cozy and Chicago were both barely hanging on to the twentieth century, but no matter. Although it was unlikely that she would witness mobsters racing up or down Wabash Avenue with guns ablaze, she paced behind the hotel's ground-floor glass eyeing traffic for fifteen or twenty minutes before judging it safe to cross.

No threats evident other than those posed by the thousands of nasty pigeons along the ell tracks, Cozy darted down to Rose Records while it still stood there to purchase some compact discs from the third-floor section: Vladimir Viardo playing Shostakovich, Constantine Orbelian playing Khachaturian, Boris Christoff singing Mussorgsky art songs. Back on the ground floor, she zipped in for a copy of Zappa's *Apostrophe* to replace the one loaned, lost, or stolen. With furtive glances cast to the perilous street before exiting, she positively raced back to the Palmer House for safety. Elevators up and down through the mobs of academic philosophers and those servicing the book displays, she parked the CDs in her room (zipped them into her toiletries bag, truth be told) before deciding to return to the book displays: she had no interest in picking up any newspaper from any time zone and Kroch's & Brentano's would be closing forever in only a matter of brief months.

The April morning was crisp, blue, sunny, breezy, and refreshing, stimulating with an early display of spring, although a handful of gusts off the Lake through mid-morning were

brehtaking in their iciness in the Loop's generous shade: no matter, Cozy was still inside the Palmer House eyeing and pawing odd titles.

She'd dined lightly for breakfast and thought of lunch at the Berghoff: but first, of course, she was bound for the Art Institute and its new exhibit of Dadaist and Surrealist masterpieces, the authentic motive for her visit.

On this day, though, Cozy would not make it into the Art Institute, for reasons now to be adduced (which had nothing to do directly with the local pigeons):

Scores of dead but intact chameleons lay strewn below the steps before the museum entrance, and none of their colors looked healthy. Among them lay six or seven decapitated gila monsters equally of unhealthy complexion, dozens of gutted snakes of various species, some disemboweled iguanas, along with exactly ten belly-sliced skinks and no more than one gecko that seemed to've been maliciously stomped and smeared just beneath the steps. Cozy was of no mind to count them all: still, the inert forms of these various creatures showed plainly the considerable abuse they had been subject to.

Perhaps in consequence of this display, perhaps only an odd coincidence, a swarm of Goth personages in Mohawk coiffures of spiked hair of numerous shades and with contrasting or matching technicolor razor-burn, large-link chains, some half-acre of black leather, and blue jeans shredded more for style than comfort began congregating around Cozy on the east side of Michigan Avenue. Some squatted in scuffed jackboots over the pavement to lift dead reptiles by their dead tails in order to inspect their mortality. Cozy had already begun to change her mind about attending the exhibit, but the growing Goth horde was being denied entry for some reason, whether it was their appearance or their frank unwillingness to pay the entrance fee or the rank curiosity they displayed in examining reptile carcasses before wiping salmonella-tipped fingers somewhere on their jeans.

Maybe tomorrow, Cozy concluded, strolling back not dejected but with little enthusiasm to the Palmer House with its vertical zoo of academic philosophers and scholarly booksellers. A session devoted to Martin Nozick's account of Miguel de Unamuno's Tragic Sense of Life was to've convened (or at least had been scheduled to begin) at eleven, she guessed she'd be able to find a seat somewhere in the back even though it was now ten or twelve after the hour.

END

