

# THE GLOSSING OF A MAN IN THE SIDE ~ SHOW

**What she was doing there I couldn't** know. I couldn't even see her face at first, hidden among her hair stringy with sweat. I couldn't tell she was a woman until I saw, down above her ruffled brown skirt and spoiled legs, near her unusually wide hips, the smooth inverted triangle that said so.

I had to figure she was confused. Somehow she hadn't seen the sign with the pants on the door when she came in. Maybe a drunk or a desperate junkie searching for a place to fix, I thought. But even then wouldn't she have noticed the bad poetry on the stall door was written by men?

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*Tom Tapp*

Straight:

Julia's a whore/She wants some more.

Gay:

I'm a fag/I like to drag/My big lips/On your big dick.

Religious:

If Jesus was my brother I'd share my wife with him.

When I came in , I thought the place was empty. I didn't hear a sound. It wasn't like when you come in and someone is on the pot and they're trying to be quiet. It didn't have that hushed quality. It seemed empty, like a church. So I walked to the nearest stall and opened.

She hadn't locked the door. When she finally swiveled her head up at me it didn't even seem she knew she was in a bathroom (much less the men's room).

She looked Hispanic, although I couldn't be sure because somehow it was dark in there, in the stall. It contrasted with the white antiseptic of the bathroom at large. She sat how you sit after a long bad day. Her legs were spread wide in a mannish fashion, the way we watch tv and wait for the dinner tray.

"Oh," I said.

Then after a moment like frozen rope around a brittle skating pond, I tried to take control. "Well you really shouldn't be in here, should you? Do you need some help? Here, let me help you."

It was when I moved towards her and she didn't move--sitting, staring--that I caught my first real chill. I got a better angle on the seat where she was and noticed, there, on the dark whiteness, blood.

Maybe she was a patient, I thought. Someone out of her head who had wandered here and hemorrhaged. I was new at the hospital and maybe this was something that happened all the time, something I didn't know about yet. But no, she wasn't clean enough to be from the hospital, didn't have the proper clothes on. She must have come in to Emergency. But what was *her* emergency?

Thinking about it now, I should have gone for a stretcher and some help right then, but for some reason I was caught there in that dark space with her, too close to back away or move. I Looked down at my hands and then my turgid green orderly's uniform —that baggy, ill-fitting joke of an outfit they give you and ask you to wear as testament to your cleanliness, sterility.

But I couldn't leave and do things right. So, once again, with a feeling of an icy pond (where did I get that? maybe something from childhood?) I reinitiated my stalled movement towards her; gingerly, as though I might break through the ice.

When I lifted her from under the arms she screamed. It wasn't high, rather low and moaning, but it was definitely a scream.

I tugged at her, trying to get her to help me in all the ways we learned in school, professionally: "Just stand up. Come on, I can't do this alone. You've got to help me so I can get you in to where we can help you."

The screaming died down into just groans and I got her to her feet when it all came forward between her legs in a wet bloody rush: the spiralled cable, blue and gory; the spongy mats of tissue, falling.

Worst was when I realized the anchor, the thing it was all connected to, holding it down, was still below in the toilet and I had to look. There, between the injection-molded

contours of the hospital toilet seat, was something small but so large and pulling neither she, nor I, nor we, could lift it. It had weight in the water and got stuck up under the lip where they scrub with ironwool brushes.

Pulling, I slipped on the blood and water and she flew back down onto the seat. For some reason I started shaking hard. I left the woman and went outside into the halls beeping with voices.

I might have simply wandered, skimming around in my hospital fatigues for days, eventually settling into one of the wings and becoming a patient, someone seen but unrecognized and accepted for who they seem to be because they fill a place.

The first person who noticed me was an old Lithuanian woman who barely spoke English and was in charge of the new staff. She took and stopped me by the shoulders when she noticed me moving downhall, leaning against the cold tile wall. She stared in my eyes and held me at arm's length, bony tight, until I stopped walking.

I had an intense feeling of being scrutinized, searched, but my awareness was elsewhere, near the ceiling, watching from above. A bird circling matted fur on the highway.

"Whatt are you donig? Haillo? Mister?"

She had a large nose that seemed to come at me from the other side of a fishbowl. Blue spots on it. Cancer, I thought.

Soon there was a good crowd around me. Speakers overhead were booming with announcements that I knew had something to do with me. Everyone seemed to be in a huff. All I could think about were the spots on the old woman's nose, and then only the woman in the bathroom.

It was minutes before I could tell anyone anything. Actually I never really told them. All I could do was point. My shaking

elbow jerked spastically like that of mechanical circus-show clown saying, "That way! ... In there!". In fact, to this day, right now, that's all I'm really doing.