

Plante and Faure

We had to start drilling a few months back. Tonight it was taking longer than usual. The capitalists had either realized the value of their waste before locking the dumpsters or theft was all they needed to justify commodification. They were still floating the sludge down the Fox River but at least they had cornered the market. I decided to sharpen the bit as soon as we made it back to camp.

"Myth and meaning... takers and leavers... spongy lead, red lead... SG 1.280... we're the ions... the free radicals... we're the power." Plante's monologue was a little more fragmented than usual. He was obviously distracted. I wish he'd stop sniffing those little brown bottles before our capers. But, it was like he explained, the Palahniuk stupors cauterized nerves exposed by the dispossessed.

Something like that.

That was this morning when he was a little more lucid. Still, I found him shivering at the edge of camp, dazed, clutching the rumbling skin that wrapped his bowels. I found him, snot dribbled, bloody red eyes.

His gift was a tether and curse was an umbilical cord. It was proof struggle eternal. It nourished him. "The vanguard, the dialectic, the kinetic... The Ions!" His rumbling organs. The gears of industrial capitalism.

We were crouched behind a series of thick black iron dumpsters. I was supposed to be on the lookout out for drive thru cars. He was supposed to be cranking a hand drill into the side of a greasy golden vein. We needed to power our lifestyle with their refuse. I suppose that's how it always has been.

Present-continuous, we're all has been.

We were supposed to be doing work amidst the fast food dumpster. Instead, we sat dormant in filth as he wrestled with Enlightenment ephemera. I huddled in the crows nest while he lobbed harpoons at ideologues.

The caper used to be anesthesia enough. Distraction from the trade winds, the whales, the Movement. The caper kept us from a fluid event that we couldn't bare to start and definitely couldn't finish.

I am Jack's specter, the ghost of revolutions past.

"Slow yer roll, Levi-Strauss...I got it. Man belongs to the world, blah blah. Now keep crankin' so we can fuel up. This cow slurry rips me up, somethin' terrible." I stared at him as he lay on his back next to the dumpster.

He was watching a moth. Boink. Boink. Flutter. Boink. It was trying to incinerate itself upon fiery tungsten; frustrated only by a thin round globe. Boink. Boink.

"Do you know how many watts they could save by switching to compact florescent?" He was starting to sober. Just for kicks, I did the math and answered his rhetorical question in my head. "Not just the power, but the money!"

"Finish'er up fore I kick you in the joules. Imma grab the siphon, we're gonna get gurglin'."

"Ham-gurgler-burglin'." He stifled his baritone behind a slick greasy black glove. "That's kilo-joules to you." His humanity had always been most apparent when exploring language. Still, I decided to do the rest of the driving on this caper night.

I slunk back to the veggie-van, hidden in plain sight in an adjacent big box parking lot between an immaculate RV and a disintegrating Ford Taurus. "Gas guzzlers, rust buckets," I trilled to dissipate the bile that bubbled up when I was on asphalt.

I opened the back of the van and felt around for the hand crank and tubing amidst the grease buckets, stray tools and reams of agi-prop-eco-terror-lit. In the dark, I came upon Plante's sealed pint of gasoline and fingered it for a moment before flinging it back into the darkness. It thudded on the vulcanized rubber of the battery bank and ricocheted, clanging off of the bare metal floor.

The veggie-van smelled like firsts to me. My first job at the Uncle Buck Bucks Chicken Hut on Layton. My first boyfriend, Frank, assistant manager at Uncle Bucks Chicken Hut on Layton. The first liberation: a Hardee's I Sati'd. The first guerrilla theater at WiTec's photo voltaic array. The tingly agitation: the lust bred by action, by devotion...the first time I saw Plante.

It was almost winter in Wisconsin, November fifth. I sat inside a shopping mall food court drinking Orange Julius through a plastic straw from a bleached, colored, waxed paper cup. I hadn't been to school for two days and was seriously considering making it a habit.

Frank didn't graduate and he had become assistant manager, he was on his way to manager and a dental plan. It was a comfortable life with desires manufactured by television broadcasts and satiated by television broadcasts.

All we needed were consumer electronics, saturated fats and me. Subsistence bliss in the twenty first century; synthesized: the opioid of the masses.

The food court was cacophonous with crying babies, black Friday advertisements and the steady chop, sizzle, crinkle, beep of myriad fast food dealers. It was first world soothing. The industrial heart beat in a womb of mechanized apathy.

It had no beginning, only slowly came into focus, like the constant whir of an electronic motor that you can only hear if the silence is perfect and your breath is stalled. "star chambers for citizens? star lasers for senators?" It was like the tick, tick, tick of a clock; only materialized as a spot of bother, in the tombs, searching for a whirring fan or buzzing speaker over the organic feedback of long ago rock shows. Tickling my timpani.

But it built. It grew from a seed of prehistoric germination. Now to the sound of a highway separated from my ears by a forest of miles. "Plantation to Panopticon. Prisons make them Rich." The bellied up fast food tables were chewing and swallowing and tinkering cell phones. "Static, dynamic, be the charge, lead the charge..."

I heard a ghostly semi apply its compression brakes somewhere on highway 41. I heard the thud-thud-thud through wind that trembled mighty red pines. I heard it through the rustle of field mice gnawing on felled pine cones.

"Drone Warfare Ain't Fair War!" I bolted upright and stood, muscles clenched. I was alert, almost comically vigilant; awaiting comic vigilantes. I had tipped over my Macy's bag and the fringe of a soft plaid scarf fingered past me, pointing toward consumer credit card counters, waving goodbye.

The food court had become a Cavern. The deep deep discounts were muted. The back lit photos of sauced patties were dimmed. The soul-sucking hand-holds were powered down. The cacophony was a slow column of rain drops, plink, plink, plinking into my grandmother's rain barrel on a farm thirty miles east of Eugene. The food court was an invisible collaboration guided by Ken Kesey and the ghosts of revolutions present. I could hear each voice, each misguided, well-intentioned, hopelessly romantic plot echoing from the past and trickling from the future.

I was sweaty and flushed before I stood. The cotton of my t-shirt clung to my back in an outline formed of the ludicrous, ergonomic, fiberglass stack-able food court chair. A few young children noticed me for a moment. Then with waning interest, they returned to their pacification devices. I was of little interest to anyone, like a passing flock of birds or a bobbing balloon tied to a ribbon.

I righted the shopping bag and returned to my frozen corn syrup. The taste was chalk. Then the foolish, comic grin was upon me. The mustachioed shield of agitators and ideologues was right in front of my face staring shadowy slits into the organ I had just discovered.

The specter of revolutions yet to come was upon me. "THE FACTORY FARMS YOUR OFFSPRING!

So were the cops. "PINK SLIME IS PEOPLE!"

So were the electrodes of the tazer that brought him down in a pile of froth and spasm.

I returned to the dumpsters with the siphon. The knight who had liberated me from Metropolis was now swinging at windmills. He slid a brown vial back into his breast pocket at the junction of finesse and shame. The juxtaposition was tangible. Gallantry was become guile. Revolution was become Death. We would never destroy the worlds which sheltered us. The worlds which we've created. I took off my mask.

Critical mass was upon him and he shrunk. Even in his bulging mass of drugs and ego, he recoiled at my unmasked face jaundiced yellow underneath Golden Arches. The dispossessed, the drugs, the inevitable failure.

The Gunpowder Plot was buttoned up into a suicide vest. I handed him the siphon and

watched efficient turns of the crank in silence. This organic creature had become the machine: a snowflake melted into the stream that mills the wheat that bookends their Ribwiches. Globs of fat started to sputter out and we filled bucket after bucket with the precious, vile substance. We filled our buckets and bled the corporation dry.

Even in victory, we wallowed in refuse.

We drove until the lights turned to stars. We drove until the moths feared nature instead of man. It was caper night and we had won. All was silent but the creak of springs and thud of rubber and the constant faint whirr of servos.

My face felt naked and free.

He had been awake and rambling for two days. Just bulging. Veins and pupils and ego. Being pushed out by fumes and little misfired sparks. Now, those brain zaps were gone. Even the little brown bottles wouldn't bring them back. We had seen each other without our masks. It wasn't the first time but it was the first time it seemed to matter.

My mind turned to the gasoline, sealed in the back of the van. "You carried that dino-drool everywhere..." I trailed off back to silence. Our rhetorical strategies had never achieved Q. I fiddled with the impedance, looking to match his resistance. "You said we were the ions... Yer whole shtick has been about the ions..." Silence. "What's with the gasoline? Plante?" He was quiet but thoughtful.

I dialed back my interrogation.

"You've so many questions, Faure. I think I've lost my answer. Hell, I can't even point due north with the stars and a compass. So many questions," the fields where corn had been only a month previous were now undulating sine waves colored an eerie lunar blue. "Existential questions, you know?" We rode in silence for a few more minutes before he asked me, "Can you name one successful revolutionary?"

"Huh?"

"You know, not been executed or co-opted or manufactured? Absorbent learner. Standard bearer. Triumphant leader. No shortcuts. No elitism. No death bed conversions or evolutions in understanding... Can you name one, just one, who succeeded in their lifetime?"

He paused for a breath, but I knew better than to interrupt his moments of clarity. He continued in a steady tone that I found much more disconcerting than his disjointed staccato rants, "One who didn't need minions to parse out retrospective victory? Someone who really defined consensus, discovered consent, allowed others to wake up to a completely new morning? Someone who did it without paranoia or gluttony or division? No standing army or vengeful God or economic time bomb? No exceptionalism of nations, races or genders?"

I silently he would return to the vial in his breast pocket. But I could see, even in the starlight, that there was no anesthesia left to temper this realization. His critical mass wasn't a weight, it was the blinding clarity of fission that no one could survive. He had splintered and was decaying before me.

Then I was bludgeoned by the cacophony. It invaded my ears and my nostrils and mouth. It changed my lymph to chocolate syrup and my blood to gravy. I needed a 401(k). I needed black Friday sales and Uncle Chucks Chicken Hut on Layton and consumer electronics and status and new and shiny and the electric blanket of apathetic daydreams. I wondered about Frank and the greasy broaster fog that followed him, clogged his pores and filled his belly.

I dammed Plante for tethering me to this untenable existence, to dream and to fail, in cycles determined by Shiva the destroyer.

Something like that.

"No. Not even our heroes have glimpsed the dreams of adolescence. We don't leave the world better or worse, we just leave," the resignation of my words startled me even as they left my mouth. I was blaspheming the mothers and fathers of the Movement to the one who had birthed me into it.

"That's where I was. Wandering this morning, on the edge of camp. I was thinking about potential and kinetic and expectation and action. I was thinking about movement, the Movement. I was thinking about legacy."

"You were out huffin' Rush..."

"Where do you think ions go when we reach equilibrium? We don't just become part of the

cloud, we are altered. Chemically. Spiritually. Ideologically. What happens when man conquers nature? They both cease to be. Or, more directly, it's finally evident that neither really was. Or, more specifically, that they both just are. Binary opposition is a boondoggle, no?"

That word brought me off the ledge and his humanity was illuminated by his grandiloquence. I felt pinch of a binding tether around my neck and the itchy member attached and flowing into my navel.

Plante was finishing his tutorial as I picked at my belly button, "The system that man has created, that he rebels against. It lay out before him smoldering to ashes on a funeral pyre. You and me, we need to be the vanguard, the romantics, the hopeless, the dispossessed. Without the failure of opposition, we cease. So I ask you, my daughter, for a truthful answer to a simple question:

"Who has departed at the nexus of global ideology and personal conviction? Who is the successful revolutionary, the archetype of the Movement?"

I thought about a little yellow card, agi-prop-ecoterror-lit from the 1970's. "Hartmut Gründler? I guess its Hartmut Gründler."

I put my mask back on. I guess I always knew what the gasoline was for. I guess I always could hear that maniac yelling at me from the food court, drowning out the cacophony. I guess I always knew that mine was a life of irony and contradiction; as is that of every organic individual born of industrial society. I guess I have always known.

Past, present, continuous are not our specters they are our teachers. They are our parents. Something like that.