

## POETIC JUSTICE

(unfinished)

by

Daniel A. Kornguth

Having your face used as an ashtray is a very bad feeling. After the gypsy woman put out her cigarette less than an inch from my eye, she and her two hulking associates walked away with the meager earnings my companion and I had hustled playing guitar in the subway tunnel at St. Michelle in Paris France. As I lay on the dirty concrete floor clutching my face and whimpering, Randy, the spindly skinhead from New Jersey, famous for using expletives as punctuation, tried to comfort me.

“I guess they didn’t like that fucking song about Harry and the L.I.E.” he joked.

Once the gypsy muggers were up the stairs, out of sight and on the surface, a meek woman approached us. Apparently, she had witnessed the whole unpleasant incident. Her plaintive French seemed like an insult to me. Where was she, or anyone, when we were being accosted I wondered. I gestured for her to leave me the fuck alone. She left us, then, but as we were packing up the guitar and just about to leave, she returned. Didn’t she get it? I was pissed, and I wanted to be left alone, but she urged us to follow her upstairs.

Outside, on the curb, sat the three gypsies in hand cuffs, around them stood a couple of cops. The woman, tugging our sleeves, brought us to them. A rapid discussion ensued between the two cops and the woman with the occasional interjection by one of the apprehended gypsies.

Finally the paddy-wagon arrived and the driver spoke English. He explained that we had to go down to the station and make a statement. I was expecting another car to take us. You

can imagine my dismay when they put us in the back of the van with these three street urchins and a little pipsqueak uniformed officer who, somehow, amazingly, kept nodding off. I say “somehow” and “amazingly” not because of the gypsies though. Oh don’t get me wrong, they weren’t quiet. I’m certain that if they hadn’t been handcuffed to the bench opposite us, they would’ve killed us given the chance, as evinced by their straining and jerking at their shackles, their stream of obscenities, and the occasional hucked loogie in our direction. It was *remarkable* that he slept through these antics going on in the back of the cramped police vehicle but not *amazing*; what was *amazing*, to me, is that he was oblivious to the death defying stunts the driver pulled. I’m really not the kind of guy who gets scared easily as a passenger but it’s a miracle we didn’t tip over. I tried to keep my body low to compensate for the centripetal force of cutting turns at such breakneck speeds. I was white knuckled (not in the figurative sense) and that was before I made the mistake of looking out the tiny window in the front of the small compartment the six of us sat in. I’m pretty sure we went through at least one roundabout in the wrong direction.

By contrast, our experience at the station was pleasant and brief. The office was strait out of Barney Miller and the detective spoke perfect English. We filled out our paperwork, learned all the slang words for police in Paris and were sent on our way.

Two weeks later, my study abroad program was over, I flew back to the States and started my senior year in high school. A couple of months in I got a job as a secretary at a software engineering firm. I loved this job. The engineers were artists in their own right. I felt as though I was among brethren spirits. A few weeks into it I got a letter from France. No one in the office spoke French but, apparently, an Indian woman named Lalitha in the next office over did. I met her over the Xerox machine which our offices shared.

Her beauty is not the kind that is possible to miss, I mean, she was stunning. Her skin was dark and full of subtle, warm hues, which was so refreshing in contrast to the ubiquitous Rochester pallor. Here angular features were extenuated by her lustrous dark

hair. She had that kind of intense nose that I'm such a sucker for. If you like little noses, this one wouldn't do it for you, but it just killed me; narrow, but peaked at the bridge and slightly cleft at the very tip. Most distinctive of all, however, were her large, heavy lidded eyes which seemed to be veiled by some kind of shadow that was not mascara. Her eyes were brown with a hint of green but a brown that has a kind of inherent brightness.

She was more than happy to look at the letter. She explained that it was a summons to appear at the trial of the gypsies. I asked if she could help me compose a response. She agreed to help but I had to repay her by driving her home. It seems she usually took the bus and lived down town. Fortunately for me I had just bought, for the sum of \$333.33, my first car, a 1971 Chrysler New Yorker with a 440c.i. engine from my friend Sven who, among other oddities, had no eyebrows.