



EROTIC *review*

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form a single body, a single whole female. The longing to see the picture of this woman grips her, pins her to the wall.

She shuts her eyes. She understands now that she is alone again, the vast form of her life covered over as if by some mass of volcanic ash. But she would like to live more, she thinks, in the places where it cracks open, in that strange fire that leaps up through the seams.

She looks up at the sky. Tiny raindrops have begun to fall like glass stones from the grey. She sticks out her tongue and begins to walk, catching them as they fall. They taste clean and cold, like tiny windows. ❄

Phil Harvey

DEVOTIONAL

Journey's end in a city studio

The first time I managed to coax Gina away from the crowd at Herbert Berghoff Studios was the night after she did a scene as Tetzl. We were both in Madeline O'Connor's acting class down at Berghoff's on 12th Street and Gina--who weighed about 90 pounds--had chosen to portray the huge Dominican Friar, a sleazeball who winkled coppers from the poor back in the 16th century. "So strip the coats off your back!" Gina/Tetzl had exhorted us all during the workshop. "Strip it off now so that you can obtain grace!" I really loved that. Roman Catholic formalities had always struck me as idiotic and Gina's portrayal of Tetzl, the seller of indulgences, a neat little Catholic fundraising scam that let people redeem their sins for money, just put it all together beautifully.

We had some pretty good conversations after that, at Spankys on Sixth Avenue. I drank beer and Gina ate salad, French dressing on the side, and drank black coffee. We would sit at a booth in the back, at a streaky-stained formica-topped table, people at

booths on both sides eating hamburger specials or all-white open-faced turkey sandwiches with mashed potatoes and brown gravy, and Gina and I would talk.

Gina didn't seem to care what other people thought, and that amazed me. Practically everyone I meet seems to be following a script, just doing what's expected of them, whether it's going to college, starting a boring career, getting married to someone they don't care very much about, having kids, whatever. Most people just play out that script and, as far as I'm concerned, if that's all you do in life, you might as well shoot yourself. What's the point of being human if you're just going to read the lines?

Not Gina. She said she just did what she wanted to do, and it seemed to be true. She was a solderer, for example. She worked part time at a radio and TV repair place on Canal Street. She said she was a really good solderer. I'll bet it was true.

After one of our acting classes we walked over to the building where she lived, a sort of a skylighted semi-apartment near the Hudson River. On the way there we were waiting at a light for the traffic to clear and this bum walks up, panhandling probably but not actually asking for money, and says to Gina "Good evening Miss." He had about four overcoats on, the kind that are torn down the seam in the middle of the back so you need more than one to get covered up, and I caught a whiff of that awful odor of unwashed body and clothes. But Gina just sticks her hand out and says "Hi. I'm Gina Bonin." The guy is startled but he holds out his hand and they shake. Just like they were meeting at some cocktail party in a swanky SoHo loft. That's the way Gina is. She just walks through the world without thinking about whether someone is a bum or not, or whether other people will approve of her behavior. She really doesn't care.

Another night at Spanky's she asked the waiter for a cork. "Any cork?" he said.

"Any cork," Gina said.

"What's the cork for?" I said.

She looked at me as though I was a little slow.

The guy brought her a wine bottle cork that had "Monterrey" printed on the side. "I'll need it to make another one of these," she said, fishing around in her purse. She said "Ouch," then pulled out a little cork-handled needle. It was just a regular bottle cork with about two inches of bright shiny needle protruding from one end. She held it up like a miniature sword and tested the point against her fingertip. Then she took a deep breath and shoved the needle through the webbing between the thumb and first finger of her left hand.

Then she took a deep breath and shoved the needle through the webbing between the thumb and first finger of her left hand.

I spat most of a mouthful of beer into my salad, but Gina just sat there with the needle through her skin, a half-inch of the point sticking out through her flesh.

There was hardly any blood!

"Have you ever found pleasure in pain Harry?" she said.

I mumbled. Then I said, "Why did you *do* that?"

She was quiet, breathing heavily. "There's a space that pain makes, for good things to happen," she said finally. She let out a breath and pulled out the needle, angling the cork in a way that made it look like she'd done it a few times before.

"Won't it bleed?" I said.

"Usually not much," she said.

So she was a little weird. I liked that. I was tired of predictable people and Gina was about as unpredictable as they come. There was also that wiry, 90-pound body, which was very sexy in the leotards and jeans she usually wore. When I was back in my apartment alone, I had visions of her bouncing up and down on top of me, riding my old John Thomas going ooohh, ahhh and so on. But it hadn't happened yet.

The night I'm going to tell you about, I had gone off after acting class to the Glittering Ball, a huge, dark, open-room nightclub with about 800 mirrors reflecting colored lights. I had told Gina I wanted to maybe score a little coke, but Gina hated nightclubs so she went home. She told me "After the Sparkling Balls or

"...after you've done whatever it is you do in that place, any time after midnight, come on up. We'll have a little recreation. We'll play."

whatever you call that place, the Shiny Nuts, after you've done whatever it is you do in that place, any time after midnight, come on up. We'll have a little recreation. We'll play."

This was promising. With Gina, though, things were never what they seemed, and when I buzzed the intercom, which didn't work very well, she sounded out of it. I couldn't tell if

she'd been drinking or was on something or what it was, but she didn't sound right. I did hear her say, "Come on up...BZZZT... Come on up...we're ready for you" and then the buzzer buzzed so I pushed the door open quickly before the thing short-circuited, which was a problem I'd had one time before. I started up the stairs.

Who's the WE? I wondered. Of course, it was nearly two in the morning and if Gina was in a mood for recreation she wouldn't have spent all that time by herself. Still, if there were people around I wasn't going to get laid, which was what I had been counting on and thinking about pretty continuously for the past six hours. Still, it might be possible. With Gina you never knew.

After one flight, on the landing going up to the second flight of stairs, the light bulb was out. It was usually glaring bare in your eyeballs, no shade or anything, annoying, but the stairs were now pitch dark. I had done a couple of lines of coke and my orientation was tilted. It was black with those kind of blacker areas inside the black that tell you there must be some light in the picture somewhere but all you see is black and blacker.

I could see little red eyes in the corners. The walk across the landing seemed to go on and on. I could see some dim reflected light from the stairwell above, but that trip across the landing seemed endless. I felt like I was on one of those moving

sidewalks at the airport, going in the wrong direction. The sidewalk was moving against me across the landing and I was walking, walking, walking just to stay in the same place. I steeled myself for that insane metallic airport voice, saying "CAUTION, THE MOVING SIDEWALK IS ENDING," over and over.

I moved across that landing, trying to find the end of the sidewalk, but it went on. There were more beady eyes in the corners now, red eyes glowing at me. They glowered like those I saw when I walked down the dark black steps to our basement in Peoria Illinois, where there were red-eyed creatures in the dark, always, waiting for me. They were slimy and furry.

I finally got off the sidewalk and turned the corner and came into the murky light shed by the dirty bulb halfway up the third flight of stairs. This one was buzzing a little, irregularly, as though there was so much dust and grime in the socket that it was having a hard time making the connection. The metallic voice stopped. The little red eyes were gone too. Just one more flight of stairs. One more flight of stairs to paradise, to an aerie full of weirdness, to wonderful Gina-who-didn't-care.

When she opened the door she was wearing underpants and a T-shirt, period. When I looked down I could see her pubic hair, almost hair-by-hair around the edges, smushed against her white skin by the white semi-transparent probably synthetic underpants. Her T-shirt said JESUS CALLS THE LITTLE CHILDREN. "This is Mark, Harry baby," she said. "This is Mark baby."

"Hi," I said. Mark ignored me. He was looking Gina over, below the waist. Then they both turned and looked back at the flickering candles that were the only source of light in the room. Votive candles! Count on Gina to have sex for the sake of a tormented soul.

Everywhere the room flickered. There were a half dozen of the squat cylindrical candles in a semi-circle below a dress dummy she kept near the door, the dummy's body cut off right below the hip at mid-thigh, and the arms cut off just below the shoulders, a torso with formless breasts and no pubis. Pinned to the dummy was an old piece of lace, a kind of lace bib that became more

and more beautiful to me every time I saw it. Tonight, with the candles flickering around the bottom and the shadows shooting up through the intricate lattice, dancing in delicate patterns around the dummy's headless neck, it was arresting.

Other candles were scattered around the floor, dripping wax. A dozen or so were arranged on two up-ended fruit cases, illuminating the back of a small overstuffed chair as though Gina, or maybe Gina and Mark, or maybe Gina and God knows who, wanted to pay special tribute to the chair, a kind of altar.

Mark stood up. He had been sitting on one of those formless stuffed footstool things, one of about three pieces of sit-on-able furniture in Gina's loft. He was heavy, muscular. Flowery tattoo on one arm near the shoulder. Black chinos, heavy belt. He showed no resentment, and no friendliness. He stood up and went toward the kitchen/bathroom. I was still standing just inside the door. Gina slid the police lock bar into place and threw the bolt over that. Nobody would burst in on us now. But I was beginning to wonder if I would want to burst out. "Thanks for coming, Harry baby. Thanks for coming to my little play pen. I've always liked you Harry. Ever since I did Tetzl in Madeleine's class and I saw how much you enjoyed it, I've liked you. So I wanted you here tonight." She was sipping something from what looked like a little sake cup, probably purloined from a Japanese restaurant. I was pretty much overwhelmed, and I needed a drink.

"I like you too, Gina." I said, my eyes drawn inexorably to the triangle of pubic hair, flattened around the edges. "Nice candles."

"We're playing a little harder tonight, Harry. I want you to play with us. I want you to play with me." Jesus! Even with all the weirdness I was getting hard as a rock.

"Is there any booze?"

"There." She pointed to a ceramic jug on one of the up-ended fruit crates. There was a dirty glass on the floor. What the hell. The stuff in the jug was rice wine rot-gut I think, but it had a kick.

There were muffled sounds from the kitchen. Who was Mark?
Was Gina going to “play” with *both* of us? Jesus!

Now the walkway was moving again, and I was worried,
frightened.

When Mark came back into the room he was trotting. Running.
Running at Gina. He grabbed her. There was a flailing of arms
and legs and he bent her over the back of the chair folded her
over the back of that altar with all the votive candles, the well-lit
flickering chair. He pushed her over that chair so that her head
was down in the seat and her behind with the white panties was
sticking up in the air and her bare legs stretched down just barely
touching the floor with her feet. “DON’T MOVE. DON’T
MOVE,” he said.

Everything froze. Mark stood there, his face in the shadows.
Gina’s butt was raised over the chair back with her sheer white
underpants, the candles flickering off her behind and her thighs
and the backs of her knees and her calves she was now part of the
altar, she was now part of what we were clearly meant to worship.
She was it. Time to get out of here, I thought. Time to get out of
here now.

“SPREAD YOUR LEGS APART,” Mark said. Gina had
disappeared now, the Gina of Tetzels and of Jesus and the
Children T-shirt had simply disappeared. All that was left was the
nylon-encased butt and whatever (God! Whatever!) lay between
those cheeks. We could see, in the flickering candlelight on Gina’s
behind, the buttocks of a ninety-six
pound strongling. Ha ha. There it was,
the symmetrical, white, oblate object
of worship, the perfect succubus,
buttocks surrounding the dark, hot,
mysterious inviting center of the
universe.

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Mark started swatting her now. He
slashed his hand onto her buttocks through the nylon, then
pulled the underpants down as far as he could, given that her
legs were spread pretty far apart. He swatted and swished and
smacked until the bare skin that I could see above the little line

where the elastic of her panty-top cut across in the middle of her buttocks, smashed and swished until her butt turned red above that line. The sounds were smack, slap, smack. "YOUR TURN," said Mark. He looked at me for the first time. "YOUR TURN," he said.

He backed away. He actually backed away with his hand presumably smarting from the stings received from Gina's buttocks. "YOUR TURN," he said again.

I no longer wanted to go down the stairs, I did not want to go down past the metallic lady saying, "Caution, the moving sidewalk is ending." I didn't want to go through the police lock, the bar against the door and all that. I wanted my part of eternity.

Mark was in the background now, and I was afraid of him. The demons were loose.

Mark was in the background now, and I was afraid of him. The demons were loose. But the biggest presence in the room was Gina's tiny butt, half uncovered, half covered with those nylon underpants. The half that I could see, rosy pink, pink like a rose, pink above the elastic, nothing but trouble, but I couldn't help it. I went to her. I leaned over the back of the chair next to Gina. I actually put my head near hers, down where she was bent over, with her head near the seat of the chair, and I said, "Should I go now?"

She said, "You jerk!"

"Do you want me to slap you?"

"Don't ask me! The last thing in the world I ...want..."

"What?"

"Don't ask me!"

"Ask you what?"

"You idiot! Don't ask! Use the leather!"

And the leather was there, a sort-of half razor strop. Right there among the votive candles, right there among the prayers to the beloved dead, right there among the baleful vestals to the tormented spirits of the long dead was a broad strip of heavy leather.

“Use it!” she whispered.

Okay, okay, why not? The world was closing in a little now, getting more focused. It was me and some flickering light and a piece of leather and Gina’s butt, that was the whole world, there was nothing else, there was no Mark, there was no dress dummy next to the door with light showing up through the antique lace, there was only me, the votives, Gina’s perfect pink behind, and the leather. So I smacked her. Her flesh seemed to quiver, jerking a little up and down, alive and full of nerve endings. Well, all right. Pain makes space for good things to happen.

“Just a minute.” Mark intruded on my little world. He pushed me to the side, and I let him, you bet I let him. He had a pair of scissors. They were Fiskar scissors with those orange handles, the kind Ozzie and Harriet would have used in their cheerful middle-class suburban split-level home, if they’d had Fiskar scissors in those days. I froze. And watched, as Mark pulled Gina’s underpants away from her ass, and cut across with the scissors so that the crotch of her underpants was sliced in half and the bottom half fell down between her legs. He took the upper half and very carefully rolled it, like rolling a cigarette, and put in under the elastic waistband and pulled the elastic waistband back up to her waist so that now her buttocks were fully exposed and so was her cunt.

“Okay,” Mark said. “Go back to it.” This was the first time Mark had said anything that didn’t seem like an order, that wasn’t a mandate, that wasn’t a shout. He just said it quietly and simply, “Okay, go back to it now,” meaning I should go back to slapping Gina’s butt, now that there was nothing covering it, now that the remains of her underpants were dangling down between her legs, now that....

Mark receded again in the darkness, into the darkness with the

little red beady eyes. Now I pounded those white globes. I used my hand, I used the leather, making red stripes and white stripes. I was afraid, I was deathly afraid, but those buttocks got pinker and pinker and redder and redder with little lines across them where the leather and my fingers hit it, criss-crossed with horrible tracks, tracks of my own participation in all of this. Tracks leading nowhere, tracks in little lines down toward the very dark, dark spot where the lines of Gina's buttocks curved together, aiming, pointing in toward the spot where her sex began, where her dark damp mysterious scary dirty.... Dirty? No, there was nothing dirty about it. Dark and damp yes. Slippery now and wet, yes. I had checked, with my fingers. Beckoning, welcoming, all of that. But not dirty. Nothing I could think of was dirty about it. It was the center of the universe, a super nova, the vortex of life, the lines of her buttocks pointing in, the marks on her bright white ass leading down to that one place, the center of everything. "The wax now."

"What?"

"Use the wax. Drip the wax on me. Now!" I couldn't believe she wanted me to drip hot wax on her tenderized behind. But, actually, I could. Given all that had gone before, a little hot wax on the welts on her butt wasn't such a big deal. I was going to take one of those votive candles that she'd lit for the tormented souls of long-dead, turn it three-quarters upside-down and drip a little hot wax onto Gina's ass, watch her flesh jump and twitch like the withers of a horse shaking off flies, twitch against the pain, twitch against the heat, twitch, twitch, twitch. That's what I did.

"She's ready now."

"What?"

"She's ready now. Fuck her." I couldn't believe this. I leaned down again, leaned over the back of the chair so that my mouth would be close to Gina's ear.

"Do you want me to do it?" I whispered. I whispered very quietly so that only she could hear me.

"You're such an asshole. Do what he says!"

This was Gina's show, you bet it was. Old Gina could stand up and send this little drama in a different direction any time she wanted to. She had the power. It was pink butt power she was using now, directing me, directing Mark, directing those red-white tracks across her ass as if she were writing with one of those Etchasketch writing machines that make lines when you turn the knobs, and she had the knobs in her fingers.

**This was Gina's show,
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There was that round pink ass, that up-turned invitation, that slide-your-cock-in-here imperative and even the head that belonged to the body that belonged to the ass that surrounded the center of the universe had told me to do it. I took out my swollen penis that had been chaffing against various parts of my pants for probably twenty minutes now, hard enough to break plates, and was just about to slide it home, did in fact slide it part way home, just far enough in to get that velvet glove started around the end, to have the Queen of England embrace my knighthood, to get Lancelot's sword halfway into Guinevere's magnificently moist, slippery scabbard, to get the center of my being into, or partway into, the very core of the molten universe, to touch the lava with indescribably intense pleasure, when the lights went out. I was smashed in the jaw, at least I think in the jaw, and I went down and hit the floor.

I swam, swirled, blurred. There were sliding noises, feet moving around flickering flames, light dancing on someone's toes.

Icy needle of pain in my jaw. Sharp!

Sharp needle of pain. Cold.

"Are you OK?" Gina's voice.

"I'll 'ill 'im."

"You can't kill him," Gina says. "He's gone."