

# From Biofreak to Organasm

Part Four of an Eyewitness Account

by David Brody

The next thing I remember is a primordial universe of tiny golden suns streaming into the bottom half of an hourglass which contained me. Perhaps it had always contained me. If so, I'd have plenty of time to confirm the fact. Each stellar sphere was perfect — Euclidean and infinitesimally vast — and each one obeyed elaborate laws of bounce. My eyes were able to isolate the plunge of a single yellow sphere from its myriad neighbors, and every pachinko-ball path, I realized with agreeable detachment, spelled out a verse from the Holy Koran, the genetic code, The Marriage of Figaro. Ah.

Someone grabbed my shoulder and I turned to see the immense gaseous planet of Corey's face, a Jupiter with its red eye looming. I took it perfectly in stride. "Burned it," I managed.

"You shouldn't be playing with matches, amigo." Someone, you see, had bored into the bottom of a cedar vat weeks ago, attaching a valve fashioned from PVC and a studded condom. With a nasty acrid puff, which I was recalling now as from the far shore of a remembered dream, the mustard seeds had begun streaming out from the opened valve. The stream had been maintaining an impressively pressurized arc, a healthy garden hose trajectory, and it didn't look to be wavering anytime soon. But I wasn't the best judge of time.

"No, it wasn't me I think." In fact it had been a demon of some sort, indifferently disguised in the costume of a massively tattooed punker. I'd recognized him and wisely said nothing while he carried out his task. "More than meets the eye," I explained to Corey in friendly warning.

"Yeah, well, I'm glad you're having fun, man. Everything's cool, right?"

"Yes."

"And who's that guy on the platform? Doug says that's your profoundly alienated cousin."

"Yes." It was my profoundly alienated cousin. I'd invited him along for the ride and here he was assuming the controls. Every monitor, of which there were probably a hundred or so-- we'd lost track in all the intestinal branching of cable-- was animating this text: fill the Void. try Human Sacrifice.

Though it seemed like an indulgence on my part, I allowed Corey to assist me in standing, which was helpful as it turned out, since immediately a crowd rushed by out of absolutely nowhere and Corey's hands in my armpits were all that kept me upright. "Sunday drivers," I said tolerantly, like Mr. Magoo, but I edged us away from the spacetime vortex just in case they were coming around again.

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"Yeah, why don't you stand over here," said Corey, "Less traffic." He understands, I thought. How very beautiful, no need to belabor an explanation of our porous dimensionality. Leaning me against a wall, Corey took his leave to take care of something somewhere and I watched his smile disappear into the dense crowd like a twig entering a rapids. I heard a bout of cheering to my right, loud enough to pierce the electronic crunch coming over the speakers, and turned to see an aerial ballet. Hung from the rafters were a couple in black leather harnesses, masked like Tlingit sea eagle totems, beaks hinged open to reveal gold painted faces within. Otherwise they were functionally naked. More to the point, though, were the three-foot long black leather phallus wielded by one and the red velvet toroid offered by the other. Ropes and pulleys were being manipulated with Punch and Judy hilarity to arrange for the acrobats' docking, but little progress was really being made. I arrived at the controls as if by a higher power, the crowd parting for me in acknowledgment of my expertise. "Ben! Use the force!" someone was saying. With morbid gravity, I began to do just that.

A dozen ropes descended from pulleys above the human marionettes to hinged wooden levers, which resembled giant piano keys. Don't ask me how but I instinctively knew the operation of each lever, knew just the amount of weight to step into it with, and how to coordinate the combinations. I distinctly felt my four limbs possessed, and though I'd never played the keyboard beyond Chopsticks I rattled off the searing introductory notes to Bach's signature Toccata and Fugue in D minor, forgetting all about the spectacle above me. Doodle-OO...doodle oodle oo. OOOOO.... Three times with declarative variations. Then the slow ascent of that Edgar Allen Poe arpeggio of diminished sevenths, or whatever they are, a teetering stack of suspensions to overload the ears and jelly the knees. I was captivated by my sudden fluency and turned around to acknowledge the rhythmic applause with which the crowd was accompanying me. But I had forgotten all about the aerial fornication. As it happened, I had managed to steer male and female precisely and emphatically together, leather into velvet, cylinder into donut. A line had formed behind me waiting to get at the controls, and as the rest of the carnal operation was beneath my abilities anyway, just a matter of two levers reciprocating in a stupid ostinato, I stepped aside, but not before resolving the dissonance with Bach's archaizing plagal cadence. As I walked away, apparently in triumph to judge by numerous pats on the back, I heard the crowd work up into a frenzy. A countdown developed, which got louder as it descended – "...FOUR, THREE, TWO, ONE" – and then I heard the wind-tunnel roar of an outraged beast, strangely familiar, followed by screams of "Yuch!" Without turning around, I explained the cosmic spasm to myself. "Fire extinguisher." But I knew better.

I must have bounced around for awhile, but the next thing I remember is a pinkness that became the world. The noise, I noticed, had softened to a dull thumping. I must be inside, I theorized, out of traffic, sheltered from the storm, but all I could make out was an undifferentiated wall of pink. It didn't help that somewhere along the way I had misplaced my glasses. Now that I thought about it, I could recall taking them off deliberately and finding that I could see differently, better – as never before in fact, the doors of perception cleansed, the light unfiltered and unbent. It's perfectly possible that in the evangelism of the moment – I could see! – I may have decisively thrown my glasses into the maelstrom, like a lame man casting aside his crutches at a bible meeting. I had a vague suspicion of some such perfervid gesture, long ago and

far away. Now that the revival tent had left town, I found myself compulsively checking my pockets over and over like one of Dr. Sachs' case studies— The Man Who Patted Himself — and the glasses weren't to be found. Tossing them away, if that's what I'd done, had inverted some twenty years of prudent optical handling — folding and wrapping and worrying at all times over the location of those indispensable prostheses — and now I couldn't abide their disappearance. At last I resolved to believe the evidence of my hands that they just weren't there and to go on. I reached out toward the pinkness and, upon my touch, the bubbling surface receded in an elegant wave of shock, rather like a sea anemone in a Jacques Cousteau special, and this wonder drew me in inward, forward. On I went, guided as a mouse is down a snake's throat, digested by beauty.

"Welcome to the Sexo-pus" drooled a pink thing. "You are inside tentacle five. Prepare for flight. Unfasten all belts." A hand, not hers, reached for my shoes and untied them. Another clumsily tried to unbuckle my belt and gave up.

"Hey Ben. Are you all right? It's me Sharon." She was the pink thing. "You look a little spooked. You didn't eat one of those brownies did you? Shit, those Seattle assholes. I hate to think what kind of chemical cocktail they were handing out. They just wanted to get us fucked up so they could bum rush the event. You should see Lloyd. He ate three. Hey where are your glasses? I almost didn't recognize you."

"I can see," I said uncertainly. I checked a couple of pockets, just in case. Not there; I checked again.

"So who's minding the store, Jack?" She was referring me to a system monitor. One had penetrated even to here, in tentacle five, far upstream. I moved close, a dozen inches away, so I could read the words scrolling by. It took an effort of will but I managed to assemble a sentence: THEY'RE LAUGHING AT YOU NOT WITH YOU. "Whoever's up there's been on a major bumner. Glad to see it's not you," she said.

The scrolling text faded out and a vision of the cosmos was fading up that glued me to the glowing tube, astonished. It was so exact and vast that tears began to form in my naked eyes. God was separating light from dark, hurling the Sun forward and the Moon backward, the view Michelangelo must have seen. Then a jewel with uncountable facets, each one reflecting uncountable other jewels, each of these reflecting, in its facets, every other, and so on-- it was Indra's web dimensioning itself before my eyes in razor detail. No supercomputer could have rendered this scene with its endlessly mirroring mappings, no ten thousand of them in parallel, no number of them ever. How had it been filmed? Then some sort of tree took form, ancient and symbolic, a tree of knowledge. Its enormous load of leaves swayed gracefully in the wind. But this gorgeous ballet was also the branching and ramifying of a simple equation solved over and over but incorporating its own latest results, an algorithmic snake eating its tail. You could see it both ways, tree and process. You knew. The wind rustled the leaves, the leaves wiggled the branches, the branches swayed the leaves, the leaves rustled the wind.

"Oh no, not that shit again," I heard Sharon say behind me. "God, they've played that boring dance video a bunch of times already. Didn't anyone else bring tapes?" And sure enough, fading up on top of the cosmos were mere people, a dozen or so running around in skimpy costumes. "And guess what that means? Belinda will be doing her

corny routine soon. Here it goes. God, this crap belongs on the Ed Sullivan show. Right after the guy with the spinning plates.”

“You’re showing your age, my dear,” said a pink guy, tall and angular, with sharp cheekbones and enormous hands which were covered by long pink evening gloves. He was so large he had to stoop. “Ed Sullivan? Kids today wouldn’t know what you were talking about.”

“Medusa, where did you come from? Aren’t you patrolling the inner sanctum?”

“Oh yes, dear, I’m just out for a stroll. It’s quite exhausting giving so much pleasure to so many. I think I’ll go and get some beer and suckling pig. Keep it up, so to speak. I mean the good work.” To me he said, “Have fun, darling.” And he/she was off, crawling downtube.

My attention returned to the monitor. A goddess with six or eight arms, ornamented, dangerous, was conducting her retinue of scurrying sprites around her. But she was looking only at me, inches away. We spoke to one another telepathically, pixel to pixel. I had absolutely forgotten about the Dance Queen, but she had been waiting. The emotion caught up to me as if I were a cartoon steelworker who’s kept walking off the end of an I-beam and just noticed, to his peril, that he’s standing on air. Fifty stories below, the memory of ground. With the terror of resolve, with a swelling of glands, I realized I must find my way back to her. She and I were as destined as gravity.

Shadows, alchemical glyphs, crawled from right to left across her face. “FUN.” “FUN IS.” “FUN IS DEATH.”

“What the fuck is that?” gagged Sharon. “Fun is death? Ben, what the fuck is that? Who’s in charge up there?”

“No one,” I reasoned.

Sharon stormed off, pinkness disappearing into pink. The Dance Queen, too, was gone and only the words remained, cycling over and over. Then a dark furry creature holding a palette faded up underneath, and he began to paint a vision of hell so monstrous, so vivisectional, that I turned away before I got sucked into his nightmare. Just in time. That was seriously evil, I told myself as I crawled upstream. A moment longer and I would have been caught in a psychic vortex, my finger in a socket, buried alive. Two half clad young pink things wriggled past me going the other way and I overheard one say, “Hey, he’s on again. Look. My mom’s got all those tapes. He’s some kind of genius, he really is.”

“Who?” said the other.

“Shit, girl. Don’t you know about Bob Ross? I’m telling you, we gotta watch.”

“Oh my god! Look at him. He’s a freak!”

I brushed against more bodies in strange entanglements. It got dimmer and more constricted the farther in I went. A hand reached out and stroked my leg, ending by

pulling off a shoe, but I just kept crawling. Another hand undid my belt as effortlessly as a pickpocket. Another grabbed the waist of my pants and slid them down. I sat in self-protection, unable to see or move further, surrounded, overwhelmed. A slimy eel entered my ear and I suffered it to do its wet wiggling. "Welcome to the inner sanctum," the eel whispered directly into my tympanum and then it retracted in an inky swirl of velvet pink darkness. More hands, more tongues and soon I was naked and smeared with oils. They coerced me into laying flat, tickling my belly like a lobster, and then they lifted me and moved me forward into a glowing, smoky dome of light, generous in its dimensions after my dark passage. My prone body was geared into neutral like a car that's been hooked onto the tractor belt of a carwash. I rolled up my windows and submitted to a greater power.

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Somewhat later, I couldn't say how long, I found myself beached in a puddle of warm fluid at the far end of the dome. The pink condom they'd repeatedly failed to sheathe me with lay on my belly and I brushed it off cautiously, unsure whether it was alive, curious what body part might come with it. There were dozens more condoms on the ground or floating nearby, too much like snakes or worms for comfort, especially at the periphery of my blurry and over-animating vision. Around me in every direction were couplings and triplings, but I dared not stare, afraid that I hadn't escaped the furry painter's nightmare after all. Were I on the inside not of the Sexopus but of Bosch's giant pair of ears with a knife blade sticking out from between them, it wouldn't have absolutely shocked me.

I located a pile of clothes and began to dress as best I could, though I found the process of lining up buttons on a shirt, so simple really, to be worthy of deep investigation, paralyzing in its implications. Only the Möbius strip logic of a Gödel or a Wittgenstein, it seemed to me, could have solved this topology. In a burst of metaphysical insight I replaced the buttondown with a turtleneck, and in a mere ten minutes or so I managed to negotiate the booby-traps of its various orifices, and instinctively headed for the exit tentacle. I knew only one thing: that I must find my way to the video platform, to the Dance queen, to my destiny.

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Outside the crush was so intense that I was buffeted around from place to place, shoeless and myopic. Bands with names like "Hertz," "Retrograde Discharge," and "Huncke," I found out later, were wailing away, but I remember only numbing reverberations. I passed by Doug's Hash Palace, with its massive hookah and cushions and Doug grabbed me.

"You've got to sit down, Ben. Tell me what you think." He manhandled me into a seat and thrust a nozzle toward me until I grabbed it in self-defense, but his wife, the always pissed off Lola, was on the ball. "I don't think he needs anything, Doug. Do you kiddo?" I looked at her with what I hoped was a helpful expression.

"Check it out, Ben. The ceiling. I've been working on it for days."

"We've been working on it," corrected his wife.

"I mean we. Lola and I. Thank you, sweetie. Isn't it incredible? Recognize it? It's the Alhambra-- in sugarcubes. The dome of the hareem." I took his word for it and grinned. Without glasses it was a white blur. I got up off the cushion and hugged him. "Gotta go," I said.

I was beginning to feel pretty good now. Maybe losing the glasses and the shoes hadn't been such a bad idea. Nor was I the only one missing articles of clothing. Outside in the yard, where I found myself presently, there was at last a little open ground to move in, under a sky that I was free to imagine as littered with moons, though in fact it was streetlights and floods. I smelled grilling food and felt the heat of a fire, expansive luxuries of summer, toward which I shuffled uneasy with gravity in a goofy gait, trying to avoid tripping while doing just that. Looking up for a moment, I was stopped in my tracks, just like Charlton Heston at the end of "The Planet of the Apes." He stumbles upon an indelible image which balls up all of sci-fi into a single creme-filled Twinkie. And so had I, every bit as unexpectedly, for looming above, buried up to her waist, was Lady Liberty herself. Oh. Right. Of course, I said to myself, but for a second or two I felt my bare feet sinking into the quicksand of time. In all my travels I'd only gone around the block. This particular statue, I remembered, would be holding a machine gun and blood would be dripping from her spiked crown. Her remote visage, superscaled and fiercely aquiline, I recalled as accurately reproduced, and I could pretty much make it out, but in a new context it had taken on the gruesome bloodlust of a Babylonian idol. The smell of sacrificial flesh didn't help; at the statue's feet, or rather navel, was the food concession, large bodies on spits above coals that crackled into flame with each dripping corpuscle of fat.

A friendly voice revived me. "You look like you need three of these, man." It was crazy Marco, handing me a foamy draft. He had stepped out from behind a picnic table where he'd been taking a keg turn. "Do you like our corporate logo? I improved it." Draped below the table was an official banner which we'd been required to display in order to get the public event discount. "Sadder Budweiser," it said. At the time I didn't get the joke at all, but it nevertheless struck me as insanely, sickeningly funny, and I laughed so uncontrollably that I buckled and drooled. Marco watched me without moving for a time. "It's not that funny," he said. "Anyway, I stole it from an old Mad Magazine." He headed back to his post but turned with a parting shot. "If you think you're far gone, you should see Lloyd. He makes you look like Emmanuel Fucking Kant. Hey, what happened to your glasses?"

"Those guys did an incredible job with the tank, didn't they?" a woman said behind me. It was Edith, survivor of the clipboard attack. "Is that, like, supposed to be Rambo?"

"Mmm," I said into my beer. I couldn't imagine why anyone would think to drink this dyspeptic substance.

"Cause it looks really cool. You can see it from Metropolitan, and like cars are stopping and trying to figure out what's going on. I heard it was Gustave and his crew that did it. Some of those, you know, Hollywood prop guys. It's a little obvious for Gustave, though."

It wasn't Gustave's style at all, in fact, and for some reason he had kept to the background of the event. I'd pondered as to why and I kind of figured it was Lloyd's

take on things, his Barnumesque neo-sixties romanticism that had offended Gustave's subterranean cool. While Lloyd wanted the whole world to slime together, Gustave was throwing televisions off of warehouse roofs. They were friends, I guess, kindred troublemakers, but Gustave was hard to read. Maybe after Spork and Spiderweb he just felt it was time to step aside. But just then I saw something that had his handwriting all over it. "Gustave," I said, pointing it out to Edith with the flamboyant hand swivel of a courtier.

A tripedal, sparkplug-studded robot was veering toward us, and people were hopping out of the way with alacrity. They had learned to avoid brushing against him, as I had early in the evening, as would a brain-damaged dog. He was called Ouch the Sparking Zombie, and he gave off nasty little 6-volt shocks, like nettles. Edith was charmed. "He's so cute," she said.

I tried to warn her off, sort of. She went up to embrace him but a shirtless heavy metal girl girl couple got there first and started touching their tongue studs and nipple rings to various sparkplugs, again and again, hissing with pleasure and pain. Edith watched in horror as the sparks flew. "Christ! Why didn't you tell me, asshole?" I shrugged my shoulders and moved on.

It was time. I found my bearing toward the video platform and held to it as best I could. I passed by the Spiky Womb and the Echo Bender, avoided the Basque stiltwalker's dangerous limbs and gave a wide berth to his fire-eating and sword-swallowing friends. I didn't permit myself to check how far along the millennial countdown was on the odometer of the SuperNumerator, an old VW type III fastback which had been mounted upside down so that its wheels could spin in the air until its fifth 9 lined up. Nor did I say hello to the hell-bent Boris, who was strapped in, foot on the accelerator, the blood and exhaust rushing to his head. I calmly circumnavigated a pool with a giant paper maché globe floating in it, upon which people of all sexes pissed all night. They may have been inspired by the words "New World Order," a recent coinage, which were written on the globe in gothic script-- though it's only fair to point out that the Systems Mother had wretchedly underestimated both attendance and per capita flow when arranging for port-a-potties.

I was passing through the barn now. Cody, in swimtrunks, his yummy poetess girlfriend beside him in a bikini, hailed me and asked if I wanted to try his bathtub fusion experiment but I pretended not to hear. A piñata was being attacked above with thrift shop golf clubs. When it breached, condoms and bullets rained down, one of each hitting me on the head. A certain smell began to distract me, a rotten, sickly stench that was general. I'd been smelling it for awhile, I realized. Underfoot was a yellow trail of circulation, like radioactive barium marking out the intestine. Mustard seeds. I'd been seeing them for awhile now, I realized.

I heard the smash of glass, too near, too wild, and I covered up. Another smash and someone had grabbed me and was pulling me like a rag doll away from the sound.

"Yo man, you gotta watch out, it's bottle smashin' time." It was Alex, long and tall and massively drunk, but routinely. "Check out this spring wound action." Another smash. "Three o'clock rock, dude." But there was another smash, and another. "Geez Lloyd, get the fuck out of there, man. We're gonna run out of bottles. Hey watch it!"

A bottle winged Alex on the arm and thudded against a mustard vat, landing intact. Alex rushed forward and grabbed Lloyd, who was perched on the workings of the machine, and lifted him off by the ankles. Lloyd flapped his arms before falling over Alex's back, and then Alex set him down, gently for such a heavy load, sitting him against the vat.

"Barrel of monkeys?" asked Lloyd. "Barrel of bloody monkeys? Hey hey, we're the monkeys, hey hey we're the monkeys, hey hey—"

"Oh no you don't you motherfucking lunatic," said Corey, always on the spot, as he grabbed the loose bottle that Lloyd was inching toward. "Where's a straitjacket when you need one?" He was perfectly serious. One gathered this sort of thing had been going on for awhile.

I stepped forward because I knew just what was needed. "Lloyd," I said. "Lloyd, I have one word for you: Organasm." He searched my eyes and seemed to find what he was looking for. "Jesus," he said, and it wasn't clear if he was using the word as an interjection or denominatively. "Where've you been?" Then from his pocket he produced my lost glasses, unmistakably mine by the adhesive tape with the stenciled red arrow (pointing sideways this week) on the bridge of the nose.

"Take him to the Sexo-pus," I advised Corey and Alex. "Everything will be fine." They looked at each other and nodded with Laurel and Hardy sagacity. While they got to work, I passed on, gingerly avoiding glass shards by feeling with my toes. Here was the video room, home at last. I kept the glasses in my hand, unsure if I really wanted to see.

I looked up at the platform and noticed a flutter of pink, weirdly tall, exaggerated of gesture. I hailed the ladder and it was cranked down for me. Now this, I realized with a long intake of breath, was not at all as simple as it seemed. I studied the situation for some time and then proceeded with as much care as a free-climber negotiating an overhang on El Capitan. When I summited, there was a confusion of greetings, how ya doings, where ya beens, and then Brandon, with his engineer's deadpan, pulled me aside.

"That cousin of yours seems to be having fun." I thought he was referring to the party-hearty sentiments my cousin had been scrolling across the monitors all night, but then he jabbed me with his thumb until I turned to the right. Medusa had pinned the normally unsociable guy against the Amiga, pink gloves running through his hair, across his stomach, down his inner thigh. They were taking turns whispering sweet nothings, passing a joint back and forth and giggling. I guess that explained why the text rolls had been petering out. I couldn't tell if Brandon was worried or amused or turned on. For what it's worth, he himself had eccentric taste in women. He used to get drunk with a pathetic Janis Joplin wannabe who tended, after beer three or four when her makeup smeared, to resemble a clown.

The rotting smell was much more intense inside the enclosed video platform room, pressed as we were against the ceiling. A drift of yellow seeds, accumulating in the corner, had been crushed by the mob and catalyzed by their spilled beer. You had to breathe through your mouth. All of a sudden Kaptain Krunch started its set, hammering through the speakers and into my brain. Where was she? I looked for

Mavic, he would understand, but I couldn't find him either. Because I was ready now, ready to look into her eyes, ready to find out the truth. I had located the courage to believe that things could actually go well. She might want to talk with me. I was ready for anything, even that.

I asked Brandon where she'd gone. "Put your glasses on, my friend." I'd forgotten that I was carrying them in my hand.

A little apprehensively, as if I were climbing into the driver's seat of an idling Maserati, I slid them onto my nose. Brandon was pointing toward a darkened corner down on the ground, next to the video screen. Even with the glasses I could make out a dark wiggling mass but nothing more. "Here," volunteered Brandon. He turned on the color balance on the ceiling-mounted video projector. Its bleed of lurid primaries illuminated the couple as they groped, his hands inside her leotard, hers down the front of his pants. "What a women," I could hear Mavic saying in his charming Balkan accent of the Dance Queen, my destiny, a thousand years ago.

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A thousand years ago. The Organasm site, if anyone cares, was where the Barnes and Noble Multiplex is being built, next to the Planet Szechuan franchise. A Korean woman, rumored to have been a lover of Oldenburg's, hardly exclusive company from what one hears, bought the lot along with dozens of other properties in the '90's and made a killing by scamming it all under the umbrella of a non-profit arts foundation. For some years she preyed on naive artists, who paid money to hang their work in her flagship "Cultural Center," the openings of which went unheated even in the coldest months. "Heat too expensive," she would say from within her mink, condensation rising from her mouth. She even tried to charge admission to these refrigerated fiascoes, and sometimes she got away with it. Meanwhile, she worked the other end with grants, fundraisers, and tax write-offs, spinning elaborately altruistic fantasies for official consumption. Her slum dwellings molted into yuppie lofts and her vacant lots into development packages, thanks in large part to the spirit and labor of a thousand artists, few of whom can afford to live in the area anymore, while she retired to Boca Raton with her ghoulish companion, a collector of Nazi memorabilia.

IN THE PAST EVERYONE WAS FAMOUS FOR 15 MINUTES. That was the epitaph I typed into the Amiga keyboard toward the end of that long night. At six AM, as the last bottles were smashed, the sun had already risen high and the rotting mustard seeds were offering stiff competition to the port-a-potties for squalor. Some muscle was required to rid the place of stragglers, and then the Mothers were alone, whereupon we all crashed in fitful slumber over a few soggy mattresses. Some of the crew kept the place alive for a year as an occasional club, and then moved on to bigger and better things— Eric to his cyber cool virtuality, Marco to family life, and Antoine to Zoloft and Okay, his evolving cosmic bar. Sharon's in Hawaii I hear, or Seattle. Or Dublin. Sadie's got a couple of solo shows under her belt, and she's got her kid. Corey published a pictographic novel about female circumcision that won some notoriety, which he parlayed into a professorship in Dortmund. And Lloyd, after a stint in academia, became a Next Age guru somewhere in Nova Scotia, growing a beard, dispensing wisdom and Pied Piping twenty six year old girls. It's a living, I guess.

I'm still here, just trying to paint in my windowless bunker, feeling like a stubborn farmer whose three acres and a mule are surrounded by Walmarts. My rent is still cheap due to the building's toxic Superfund designation, so I stay, the cadmiums and cobalts in my pigment in harmony with the soil. I found my destiny eventually in the girl next door, though she comes from LA, and sometimes I try to explain to her about the old days. Every so often, as we walk to the train past the tourists shopping for chic, the models exercising their pedigreed hounds, and the restaurants with their parking valets, it occurs to us that maybe it's time to move on.

*Author byline.*