

Beer Mystic: A Novel of Inebriation & Light

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Furman Pivo believes he [plus beer] may be the cause of a rash of streetlight outages. This sense of empowerment transforms him into the Beer Mystic. He has a mission and a mandate. Or does he? In any case, 1987 NYC will never be the same and the rest is history or myth or delusion.

Beer Mystic Invitation: Participate in a unique literary adventure that will take you on the longest, rowdiest literary pub crawl ever. Follow the Beer Mystic's story around the world through a global network of host magazines. [next excerpt at end of this chapter.]

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Beer Mystic Excerpts #41-2

Coney Island's World In Wax Museum's proprietress – Lily, the sign said – had accented a mole on her cheek with eyeliner. The three hairs emerged from the mole like a dollhouse potted plant. Lily, for her part, had met way too many people in her life to like them anymore.

Once inside the exhibit, the Beer Mystic removed his boots. Hung wet socks from the boots in a dusty sill in the bathroom that was still filled with warm warped sun as if they'd been painted by Van Gogh, and here, for a brief moment, reality seemed to conform to the way it had for so long projected itself on the backs of his eyelids.

Inside the exhibit it was dark, empty, peaceful. Bare feet stuck to the floor. He had another Kwak in front of the Kennedy Brothers with heads too big for their bodies. The glass case was dark and yet their faces carved out of hope and anguish seemed to glow. One suspected that in America royalty was not a lineage thing but more how good looks accrued money and power.

“They're like from Leave It To Beaver.” The Rum Seer nipped from her flask.

“Before your time, no?”

“Magic of reruns.”

Some cases were on the blink. Neon flickered in the Ford Theatre. The strobe effect made the scene eerily alive. Blood gushed from a wound in Lincoln's neck. It kept gushing.

Drink a beer fast and it won't go flat. Lena Medena, “the World's Youngest Mother,” at seven years of age stood in a crisp horsehair crinoline dress with a forced and forever smile. Who was the father? Newspapers at the time suspected Lena's own father. Or brother.

Neither of them could remember the significance of Madame Chang Kai-Shek. Although her glimmering gown seemed to be reason enough to include her.

Nat King Cole crooned in the same case with the cryogenically laid-out Michael Jackson, while Marvin Gaye was caught mid-tumble, folding in half from a gunshot blast his father's pistol.

“I guess it's to save space or cuz they're black.”

Richard Speck killed 8 nurses and thus got his own case. He stood calm and smug in cuffed khakis, more famous than 99% of the museum's visitors could ever hope to be. School photos of the victims revealed no specific preference. Some had glasses, others didn't.

Elvis wore a Vegas suit against a backdrop covered in replicas of his gold records. The suit, one he once actually wore – July 28, 1975, Silver Spur Casino, Las Vegas, looked like armor made from old Christmas ornaments.

John Lennon looked like a manchild with granny glasses in the maternal arms of Madame Yoko who looked like an eggplant in a bikini. The yellowed New York Times clipping in the display noted: "In 1969 Lennon married Yoko Ono, a Japanese-American artist who was pregnant... Imagine, one fan carried a "Lennon for President" button, all the Beatles cards, and a John Lennon Fan Club comb everywhere for the past 15 years. 'The dream is over' is all this fan's fan could muster." And when Rum Seer pressed the button on the side of the display no music came out.

Idle thoughts of how his renown would be enhanced by an immense soundtrack that will fill buildings and valleys of asphalt with sound. Morricone, Hermann, Zoviet France... it will be just short of war, the sound of collapsing buildings, violins on fire, tubas blown through open wounds, a stretch limo plunging over a cliff near West Point, dashed on the rocks below...

Next to John and Yoko, the assailant, a smirking Mark David Chapman, "crouched in the archway of the Dakota," holding a copy of *Catcher In The Rye* and a .38-caliber revolver.

Then the Beer Mystic came face to face with something altogether otherworldly. The wax face hovered before him, the eyes as familiar as his favorite childhood marbles. A cowboy in black, hand in vest pocket. Who were they kidding? It wasn't the face of "Black Bart (Charles E. Bolton), legendary stagecoach robber with a weakness for verse." It was indeed painfully someone else's face! In fact, it was his own! HIS OWN FACE IN WAX! The display read: "Black Bart often left notes on the stagecoaches he had just looted. Bits of verse became his trademark":

I've labored long and hard for bread
for honor and for riches –
but on my corns too long you've trod,
you fine haired sons of bitches.

Born on the very same day as Furman, as well – July 11! Ah-ha! Fascinating. Same year! Ah Ha! Uncanny. OK, granted, different century. Eh, small detail.

Yes, beer had once again opened the doors of perception. And when he saw that Mr. Bolton had died THIS year, in fact, NEXT WEEK, 100 years ago, he felt an odd astral correspondence, as if he had just wandered into a new dimension.

"Tha's me!"

"Yea. And that's me on the throne over there."

"No. But LOOK! Really LOOK! It's me."

"Well, from certain angles it does..."

"You bet it does! Cuz it IS me! Right down to fortune-telling my last day on this here earth. Tha's friggin' next week! I got one friggin' week to live!" Was he cracking?

“I don’t get it. He was born July 11 and that is somehow your departure date?” The Rum Seer inquired. Or was he just pulling her leg. Or was he, like Jung, going through a period of mental instability during which he believed he was a prophet with “special insights.” Jung called it a “creative illness” that facilitated a voluntary confrontation with the unconscious.

“I’m NOT dead! And how can THEY know all this about me? I’m here. Touch me! I get an erection! How can this have come to pass? I mean it’s absurd.” He raised his voice thrashed about and Lily from the ticket booth came back and wanted to know about the commotion. Absurd all right.

“Listen, lady. I ain’t dead!” His hands clamped on to Lily’s shoulders. “I don’t know what gave yooz the idea. The right. How can you go ’round predictin’ someone’s death? I want this display destroyed! Immediately!”

“You OK, mister? He on somethin’, lady? Cuz we don’t allow people high on anything in here and this here’s why.”

“But can’t you SEE!?” He shoved Lily up in front of the display. “There’s no denyin’ tha’s me. How’d I get in there?!”

“I’m gonna have to ask you to leave now. Quietly.”

“But the FACE! It’s mine! How do THEY know?”

She called for back up on the phone in her booth. A brute from another concession came over. The ex-high school football stud with eyes like crushed black beetles was all too happy to toss him out. And two bottles of unopened Kwak too. The few stragglers outside stared because people always stare at anything that moves or bounces. The Rum Seer went back in to apologize, get his boots and socks back.

Sitting on the curb, he pulled them on. She crouched with some exasperation beside him. HOW to get out of this with self-esteem intact?

“Every beer kills a thousand brain cells.”

“Wasn’t usin’m anyhow. We only use 10% of our brains as it is. Other 90% god gives us to squander.” He was too out of it to notice her getting peeved, exasperated, contemplating fleeing. And not even a cold beer and a hot knish could soothe his fevered soul.

“Look, get a grip on whatever it is you call yourself.”



42 The Rum Seer regained her composure and she and the Beer Mystic wandered toward the projects as if all sense was now part of NONsense. The jangle of his loose boot buckles made it sound like they were entering the set of a spaghetti Western. He with one weapon-like Kwak firmly in hand. Ready for thirst, ready for adversity.

She continued to nip furtively from her flask, almost hoping for trouble so she could later say “I told you so.”

“No good’s gonna come to us here.” Was it her paranormal skills informing her here? Or just plain common sense – white people where they ain’t supposed to be.

“Oh, don’t go fortune-teller on me now. It’s a tour of the New York no tourist ever gets to see.”

“I’m no tourist.”

Scarification cultists, blood sellers, bloodletters, and small-arms dealers lingered about the projects showing their steel with all the street swagger of a thousand sputtering dreams. Others negotiated the war zone with hunched skulks, keeping low and out of the line of fire. Voices bounced, echoed, pierced, and were all over the place. Laundry drab and dripping. Snarling dogs in dust, tied to pegs.

A sill full of plastic flowers held a woman who keeps bacon fat in a milk carton by the stove. Her eyes resembled lakes full of blindfish, full of that peculiar American emotion – exhausted discontent.

“I’ve seen this place in an extreme-sneaker-cola-rap-metal ad.” Some aspects of commercial street culture have made these enclaves heroic backdrops. [Ed. note: “Because these neighborhoods are so dangerous, the streets so typically dark, it is commonly believed that their trouble may be insufficient lighting. Good lighting is important, but darkness alone does not account for the gray areas’ deep functional sickness, the Great Blight of Dullness.” Janet Jacobs, *The Death & Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage, NY, 1961.]

The Beer Mystic and Rum Seer wandered into a courtyard – a world: not 3rd, not 1st – of confusing swirling chiaroscuros.

Some sneering denizens inquire, “Blond Jesus, whatchu gonna do when you lost in the projects?”

“Blon’ Jesus, you need a ride to Calgary?”

“Calvary! You assholes!” Another corrected. Another offered Blond Jesus directions out to the F train – for 20 bucks! Another commenced to tinker with the Rum Seer. “I want yo’ pussy on my dinner table. Like Kentucky Fried Pussy with extra gravy.”

The Beer Mystic stood still. A frantic head cock for ways out. Somebody called him Scissor Lips.

“Gonna cut off your big swelled lips, too. Feed a family fo’ a week. Must be part nig-gah. Like me. You should hang wid yer kind. Let Blon’ Jesus find his own way to the cross. Let’m pray in traffic.” A dank mechanic’s wipecloth wrapped around a grimy fist might best describe the remains of Scissor Lips’ mind.

“Fuck off!” she said with less-than-diplomatic aplomb.

“OOh, Hey hon, jus’ this side o’ death, this here’s fo’ eign terr’ tory and you gotta live by projec’ law – mah law.” And he hauled off and punched her on the side of the face. “Bring some blood to y’r face, Vampira.” And then again. She went down on the pile of black plastic garbage bags and began throwing TV-dinner trays and garbage at him.

“I wanna stick my dick in the crack o’ yo’ ass, Bitch!”

“If you can even find it,” the Beer Mystic said, putting his own suicidal instinct into overdrive. Scissor Lips took a lurid roundhouse swing at him with his sinister bottle, but his bitter stash had rendered him a mere extension of a bad headache going into orbit – the container was actually swinging HIM, ripping him from his spot, whirling him centrifugally out into dizzy nowhere.

The Beer Mystic grabbed a bicycle chain and rapped Scissor Lips across the back and neck. This sent him staggering off. A little boy meekly pointed the way out, as if he were afraid someone would later narc on him and cut off his traitorous finger.

They retreated and washed up at a leaky fire hydrant outside the projects. Repaired themselves under a blood sunset. “Same’s happened to me in Harlem. I fuggin’ don’ get it. Same Blond Jesus shit. Happened to me in Nice and Sicily, too – Jesus Biondo. Met my ex’s family in Palermo, and little boys, whole herds, followed me into the catacombs. Little girls reachin’ out, touchin’ my sleeve, runnin’ fingers through my hair. In Harlem they made up a Double Dutch ditty about me: ‘Blond Jesus heeee’s / he’s as / white as ghosts / can beeee.’ What’s the word out or somethin’? Oh, Christ, I’m gonna vomit. Make life a big toilet. Uggggh!” An uncounted number of minutes passed before he came to, post-vomitose, staring at the Rum Seer, “The side o’ yer face looks like an eggplant.”

“It hurts. Listen, my life as a woman has seen much crap. Cuz the rituals that are installed to prove woman inferior have all come undone, cuz in the desperate ingenuity to prove man’s superiority lies their tautological failure. That don’t mean I don’t get hit and hurt. The fact of our being able to ignore yous at will is a kind of castration that causes your anxiety...”

“Not mine...”

“Anyway, it leads to yous expressing dominance via doomed-to-fail sadism. Should we just get outa here?”

“Sure. But which way is out?”

And, as if on cue, a gang coagulated around their breathing room, looking like outtakes from a Fat Boys video. They each had the word “ANDROGENS” carved into their forearms. They had long ago accepted the fact that their desperation could only be compensated by the old adage that the weapon makes the man. Pit bull growling at the edge of the end of their lives. It reacted as quickly as a trigger to their various staccato commands. I did not want to go into the fact that Health Code regulations that had taken effect just recently clearly made it an offense to even own a pit bull. That I had applied for the position of dog catcher and that a dog that bites or menaces someone more than three times within a 24-hour period can be seized and destroyed. I did not mention that I bought leather pants for the job; I did not mention I did not get the job although I seemed to make it clear that my enthusiasm made up for lack of experience...

They [as in the ‘they’ of the sad conspiracy of possible and temporary somebodies] hovered and menaced them like West Side Story extras, unsure how to end the stand-off.

“Yo. Blond Fag JEEZus! DO sompin’ for us!” These were the same kinds of kids who could pluck legs from a cricket and watch it hobble around until it died and were now thinking of a creative malice of equal inventiveness disciplining the interlopers as a way of establishing turf boundaries and psychic hegemony. Some of the kids were just nice kids afraid to show any of that niceness, which would just be interpreted as faggotry.

“Kinga the dirt pile. Kinga somethin’,” Rum Seer whispered from the side of her mouth.

“And yer Fag Hag dere. Mary Mag dere. What’s SHE gonhn’ do? Tag along on a leash? Fetcher bone? HaHaHa. What a fohckin’ Bow Wow!” the streetlights were on, burning holes of light into the broken streets.

“DO somethin’ or we end up servin’ her some REAL bone. The punk fohckin’ bow wow bitch!” They thought this would get Beer Mystic to throw some stupid fists. “Yuh know, I never done much and I’ve had lotsa egg on my face but now it’s time to fry some!” And the Beer Mystic, having dreamed and honed his act in solitude was just NOW being called upon to perform, to actually DO something for real.

He leaned over to the Rum Seer and mumbled; “I make myself impervious to hurt. Violence can’t touch me. I’ve slept with no woman. Abstention is like power – ‘voodoo armor’ they call it – like the accumulating heat inside a bomb...”

The Beer Mystic calmly walked under the nearest streetlight. [Andrenergic innervation stimulates release of epinephrone into the blood stimulating localized sweating – hands, feet, forehead.] And in a moment of dramatic genius beyond his ken he stretched out his arms, raised them, then dropped them as if conducting an orchestra of light. Every second of silence was draped in gooseflesh, every gesture suspended between two sighs. And POOF – out it went, the absolutely most important black-eye of his life. He moved deliberately, silently down to the next light and with the same bravura dipped in desperation, doused that one as well. And then three more for good measure. And it was darkness, the dramatic arrival of it, that ultimately saved them.

“That be weird fohckin’ shit!” Declared one of the astonished.

“You be wid Con Ed?” another wanted to know. And the Beer Mystic and the Rum Seer walked unmolested to the “F” through a wasteland of abandoned sofas, torched motor vehicles, and cement stoops that led to nowhere.

Mid-hegira, the gang was still lingering around under the black-eyes poking through the shards for sleight of hand or tools or whatever. “Yo! How you do that sly shit?! You a freaky magician?!”

““All things in nature possess a particular power which manifests itself by special actions on other bodies.” The Beer Mystic yelled, mischievously shrugging his shoulders as he turned to the Rum Seer. “That’s Franz Mesmer.” Thanks Nice. [Ed: See also pareidolia, sympathetic magic, telekinesis, voodoo, synchronicity, mind over matter, grandiose delusions, psychosis, delirium, the creative process.]

They rode home on the “F” with not a word between them – just stunned fields of silence. Like drifting continents. Staring out the windows at nothing, darkness, their own overlapping reflections. No sleep in the sky; nobody, nobody... read the subway posters. She had managed up until now, this crafty and lyrical avoidance of definition. Her intangible skin refracted light the way a speeding bullet leaves its mark while obliterating its own identity. No one lies sleeping...

The rattle and sway of the “F” lulled them with the remainder of the ambient racket propping them up in a state of hypnagogy – out and away from one another. Landscape of drought that he held on his knees... And she got off at her stop in her vampirella squatter chic, looking misshapen, distorted by the window glass or by the disenchantment that his dramatic success had awakened in her.

She didn’t acknowledge him, she did not wave but neither did he. She did not look back over her shoulder – any disappointment was fully his responsibility. She did not know him. Had never known him. And vice versa. Kisses that tether our mouths...

He continued on into his Manhattan, leaving her to reign as queen of Brooklyn. He no longer cared.

He wrote something on a wad of paper: If a human exposes his head to a magnetic field of specified frequency and strength he will see flashes of light and be capable of bringing its corollary darkness. Look up to see who said that. Further explanation: Atoms from one surface – the light – have their electrons torn away like entire scraps of charged material exchanged between light and air. Like mind suspended in air because bioelectrical charges have been extracted from the synapses to saturate this air – a surge, in other words.

The Rum Seer and Beer Mystic never crossed paths again. Each disappearing into his and her own nurtured claims to darkness, a darkness that obliterates all in its embrace. The subway billboard continued and a stillness of boats... by Gabriel Garcia-Lorca, brought to you by the MTA.]

He missed his stop and when he got out it was a station he had never been in before. A broom stick stood in a corner. With this broom stick he did his best baseball swing and knocked out some dozen subway lights before running away, away into a place where he walked around and around until he was again I.

Beer Mystic Excerpt #43 To Be Announced >>

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