

David Samis / TWO STORIES

CAFÉ ON THE EDGE OF TIME IMMEMORIAL

Several days ago, I was wandering aimlessly along a strip-mall in an oceanic suburb of my old hometown. Having just turned the corner on Younge Street, I decided to duck into the shadowy Alley of Lost Innocence for one last peek before heading for home in Future Commons. Strolling along, admiring the old alley's irretrievable charms, I noticed a small sign over a saloon-style door that read: Café on the Edge of Time Immemorial. Having just been dumped by my fiancée due to an apparent "lack of soul," fired from my accounting job over an incident I would rather not discuss, and recently turned the age of thirty, I thought I had nothing left to lose but my last double sawbuck and the remnants of my boyish good looks when I went in for a cup of coffee and a slice of vanilla cake.

The café was nondescript, with white-washed walls, checkered floor, stained yellow ceiling, wicker stools set against a linoleum bar. There were a half dozen picnic tables each with an ashtray, salt and pepper shaker, and sugar packets in a plastic bowl. An ancient jukebox played an old Beatles tune, but the needle kept skipping over the same six notes: "She loves you! Yeah, yeah, yeah! She loves you!" Yeah, yeah. White-winged flies hovered in a halo pattern over the food display, which consisted of half an apple pie and two slices of chocolate cake. Coffee drooled into a large, glass thimble at the far end of the counter. A ceiling fan circled languidly.

The dozen or so customers were all travellers, that is to say, none of them appeared comfortable enough to be considered regulars. They all wore smiles like tired sheep dogs. Those who talked spoke in whispers. Those who listened seemed bored with incomprehension.

The buxom woman behind the bar wore a green flower print dress and had a garland of thorns tipped over her forehead. She was extraordinarily ugly, except for her eyes, which were extremely large and changed colour each time she blinked. She nodded imperceptibly towards a setting to her right, where a small cup of black coffee suddenly appeared beside a plate of vanilla cake. I took my stool dutifully and tucked in, feeling remotely grateful for the first time that day.

I cannot recommend the café on the basis of its fare, for the cake was so stale and dry that when I put the fork in it disintegrated into a pile of crumbs and dust. That which did not immediately blow away I was forced to lick up from the plate. The coffee was so tepid and bitter that each sip curled my lips and brought tears to my eyes. I would have tempered it with milk, but all that remained in the jug was a small lump of mouldy cheese. When I tried to pour in some sugar I found all the paper packets, though sealed, were empty. I wanted to complain, but was inexplicably unable to open my mouth when I spoke, so what I ended up saying was, "Mmmmn." This observation seemed to please my hostess immeasurably, for she smiled with such sincerity that my cold thoughts were warmed, then extended her callused right hand across the counter and introduced herself to me:

"My name is God. You must be Mary."

Her strong handshake emitted sparks that shot up my arm and mended together all the pieces of my shattered heart. I felt like I was free-falling on a roller coaster, except that I was rushing upwards instead of down. My name, of course, is not Mary, it is Noah, but who was I to argue such trifles with God? Not wanting to spoil the moment, I said, "I am honoured to finally meet you. It is very reassuring to know that you do, in fact, exist."

She laughed heartily at my presumption, as if to say, "As if." I could have sworn she winked and blew me a kiss, but that would belittle the act, for I now found myself big with child.

And God, of course, was right, as always, for reflected in her eye was me: the Virgin Mary, looking as placid as any woman could who finds the miracle of conception to be neither painful nor pleasurable; simply immaculate.

My pregnancy carried a nine second term and, about three minutes after giving birth in a straw bed behind the bar, I was confronted with an adolescent shepherd who left with all the other customers trailing behind him in intervals. He was not yet a philosopher, and I was no longer a woman, but once again Noah Plimpton: single, unemployed; former existentialist.

THE DOG WHO DREAMED OF FLYING

I'M A GOOD DOG a really good dog really I am my name is Archibald I live in a ground floor flat on Prinsen Graat in the beautiful toilet called Amsterdam with my best friend Ingrid Van der Vixen Ingrid gives me food and a place to crash she clicks a leash on me we stroll out in the toilet two or three times a day and when she gets home from work late at night she puts on jazz lights a candle lets me lie on the couch with my head in her lap blows sweet smelling smoke at my nose softly strokes my ears some nights I even get to sleep with her.

Ingrid's a babe just ask Frank Frank's a great guy he's my best friend too he says I'm a good dog Arch yeah a really good dog he takes me out in the toilet once in a while but never with the leash on like Ingrid does he gets to sleep with her too but where I snuggle and sniff he mounts her and humps Frank's moved in now though so I don't get to sleep with Ingrid much anymore but that's O.K. cause Frank is what they call an American and he says all dogs should be free so he cut a hole in the alley exit and put a swing door on it just for me I simply push with my nose and am either home or free.

Frank's buddies drop by the flat at night when Ingrid's at work they're all my best friends too we get stoned lounge around eat crisps drink beer I really like beer they fill my bowl we watch music television listen to videos compact discs play computer games roughhouse on the floor when Ajax plays Ingrid doesn't like coming home from work and finding us all stoned and drunk she clamps the leash on my collar tells everyone they better be gone when she gets

back or else then she drags me gagging and boozy out into the toilet I guess I can't blame her for getting so mad cause she works a lot almost every night whereas Frank and I do nothing but sit around the flat all the time and buy and sell and take lots of drugs and Ingrid works long hard hours over on the other side of the toilet bowl in one of the narrow rows of red-lighted windows called Dutch Alley where she sits on a stool without a coat on it's kind of like a butcher shop with hungry-looking men shuffling around and staring at all the flesh I know cause Frank and I went by one night and checked it out and Ingrid got really really mad when she saw us shivering in the rain across from her window feeling depressed and cold like all the other men milling around generally the job looks kind of boring and when a fat drunk went in and the curtain closed Frank sighed said the money is good but he must have no sense of smell cause when Ingrid gets home from work she always reeks of aromatic oils, perfume, Vaseline, spermicide and the colognes of a dozen nationalities of sweat and of course latex.

One day about a week after Frank moved in he went out and I spent the whole afternoon sniffing around in his stuff Frank's stuff smells frankly a bit foul and he has a poor taste in books but I found his dope stash in two shoe boxes in the back of the bedroom closet there is white powder grey powder baking powder all sizes and shapes of plastic baggies pills dried mushrooms acid sheets pot hash and oils that stick to the roof of my mouth I delicately nudge things open with my nose take little sniffs licks and nibbles ever so carefully cause Frank is very particular about who gets how much of what drugs and I don't have money like all his other friends so when they're partying and I need a fix I have to do stupid tricks beg or when I'm really desperate knock things off the table with a wag of my tail and lick and sniff quick before enduring a mean beating from Frank cause like I say I don't have any money although one day I stole a fifty guilder note off the kitchen counter and with the brilliant yellow sunflower clenched between my teeth I headed for the butcher's on Lieds Graat to buy me some meat but everyone on the street tried to rob me it's scary how people change when you've got money even old people and little kids get nasty I had to run all

the way and when I got there and pointed my nose at a juicy-looking roast beef dropped the note on the counter and barked my order Balvert the butcher threatened me with a meat cleaver so I high-tailed it home haven't stolen any money since nor tried to buy nothing no I exist on Ingrid's constant charity trash cans the benevolence of those more fortunate than myself discarded French fries and of course cunning.

What can a handsome dog do I look really really good when I'm cruising the street in my shiny black coat deep brown eyes large wet nose strong jaw sharp teeth perceptive ears big tongue long tail O.K. I admit I'm attracted to female Black Labradors like me the most but who wouldn't want to fuck a Poodle or a Pit Bull once just for kicks?

I love crapping in a cool breeze I either hide behind parked cars at the edge of a canal or do it real conspicuous like right in the middle of the sidewalk where someone's bound to tread on it why don't humans shit they say they do but I never see it sure I smell it occasionally when I drink from the water bowl in the bathroom is it invisible or what I'm kind of a connoisseur but this is one of life's great mysteries and as for me I find it a bit embarrassing going on the leash these days I mean I'm a lot more independent and self-conscious now that the trap door is in so why does Ingrid expect this from me she won't take me home until I do of course oblige but with much effort and straining up on my haunches with shaky legs quaking we both sheepishly look the other way occasionally checking to see what progress has been made and Ingrid makes me do it next to designated trees practically standing in other dog's shit sure I like to LOVE TO smell dog shit but I don't like to step in it.

The world used to be black and white and all shades of grey until I first did drugs not pot or hash or beer but hard drugs like those powders and pills and acid is what turned the world yellow and green and blue and pink and that's when I started to notice shooting stars during the day and stared at the reflected sun shimmering off the canals and finally mastered the computer and realized that the people of the toilet are more like cats than dogs I mean they all smell different but they aren't so drastically differentiated as dogs sure Asians are generally shorter but they aren't really yellow blacks are

really brown Americans too loud the English act like I think the term is wankers unlike those sweet Canadians or the indifferent South-East Asians but really these differences are minute compared to those between say a Chihuahua and a St. Bernard or a Basset and a Newfie so like I said people are more like cats than dogs except for the fact that they change their coats a lot and they are dumber for instance every dog and cat knows a myriad of human and animal languages but humans can't even understand each other half the time and the majority of them don't have the faintest idea what the most rudimentary bark or meow means yet the toilet is more colourful and everything is more beautiful and frightening because of people not black and white and grey grey grey now the sidewalks start to shuffle the walls wave the toilet seems organic cars and bicycles become less predictable trams more monstrous everything seems a million miles away then suddenly it's right in your face ringing and honking and yelling all at once I got so freaked-out I jumped into a canal and as I paddled frantically for the closest dock I got hit by a cruiser full of tourists and almost drowned then spent two nights at the veterinarian's eating intravenously while doped-up on injections of dreams.

When I dream I dream of flying I'm always getting chased by people with guns packs of rabid honking cars Frank a pride of hungry lions monsters I don't know I have to try to jump higher jump higher and usually but not always my body starts floating up over telephone wires trees trams I am able to dog paddle through the air for a canal or two before I float down to some new and unforeseen danger then I have to jump higher jump higher and eventually I'll either fly away or else stay grounded and get caught by whatever has been chasing me then just before they kill me I suddenly wake up all sweaty and scared those are my bad dreams in my good dreams I fly just for fun Ingrid clings to my tail in a luminous white nightie singing in her sweet voice about love everlasting as I howl at the moon and we float around checking things out from above people rarely look up too many windows and flying things looking down on them I guess we go pretty much undetected whereas on the ground everyone notices handsome dogs

with good-looking women we must look so guilty as if we are hiding something for instance me I am stoned on the powders again have been for days now barely get out of doors just drift off on nods or stare at a shoe until Ingrid hauls me out but I seem to be constipated of late and she just gets impatient tells me she's worried going to take me to the veterinarian because I barely touch the food she puts out for me anymore and like I say Frank is particular about drugs even when he's on them unlike others for example me right now I'm not particular not me now no so when Frank realized how much stuff was going missing he blamed Ingrid hit her hard once in the face yelled awful things for an hour shook her and shoved her around normally I would have torn him apart with my teeth or at least barked some nasty names at him for hurting poor Ingrid like that but I was so stoned at the time I just lay there and whimpered a bit and even though I had bad dreams later I was still kind of thankful he blamed Ingrid cause if he had suspected me he would have hit me lots more than once and kicked me and locked me out but Frank found out it was me anyway when he and Ingrid came home from their makeup dinner a week later and discovered me passed out in the closet covered in powder slobbering deliriously and surrounded by a shredded shoe box crushed capsules bits of baggies blood shit piss and puke they both hit me then just to get a heartbeat I was dreaming of flying but crash-landed at the veterinarians.

If I had hands I could use more practical technologies than the television or computer with a pencil in my mouth pressing buttons I get a crook in my neck where is evolution when you need it? with hands I would stand up and let myself out or pick up that crowbar and smash my way in cause the drugs are in there I can smell them wafting under the door every couple of hours but when I got home from the veterinarians two days ago after my overdose the trap door was boarded shut I was locked into the entry hall with a bowl of water and an itchy blanket to ward off the draft and the shakes and the monsters I don't know Ingrid drags me out twice a day for a pathetic little squirt and a humbling attempt at shitting and every dog cat pigeon and human looks like they are laughing at me I'm too weak and paranoid to make a run for it anyways where would I go so thank

goodness for Ingrid my saving grace in one of my infrequent moments of calm she put my head in her lap sweetly stroked my ears just like in the good old days before Frank came along I tried apologizing and pleading for her to let me out of this prison promised I would be a good dog a really good dog really I would but Frank got so sick of my whining he locked me back in and cranked up the music so like I said if I had hands I could control things like money and guns or that crowbar to smash my way in to the drugs but I've just got paws to scratch and teeth to gnaw my way through the door both bleeding my nose full of splinters after what seems like eternity the door starts to rattle I am hurling myself desperately hurling myself at it is almost ready almost ready to give

When dogs kill people we are condemned to the Penalty of Death no questions asked no trial no plea the veterinarian gives you one last massive injection that puts you to sleep forever which would be O.K. unless it's a bad dream or they really do incinerate you afterwards or the dog is a cop in which case they are simply retired but I'm no cop not me no so after I broke through the hall door was tackled by Frank and ripped his throat out with my teeth on the way to the drugs in the closet only to find they were gone so I tore apart the flat searching frantically at last finding the brown and white powders hidden in the freezer just after midnight I licked snorted and gobbled them up including a hunk of Frank's leg in the frenzy and now I am sleepy and sick and shall be condemned but what's worse is that Ingrid gets home from work in an hour.