

Part 4- The Nun and The Neophyte

There were five of us in that one compartment. The train pulled out and before long we were rolling west into the dusk. The beauty from Texas sat beside me and pulled out a mirror checking her lipstick and her eyes. She beheld herself one more time holding the mirror at a distance, then put it away. Everyone was looking at her with varying degrees of interest.

She looked across at the Buddhist with his loose garments and his shaved head, and saw that he was staring at her.

“ Nexter?”

“ Yes.”

“ When we get to Santiago...”

“ Yes.”

“ ...we’ll find a room, right?”

“ Sure.”

She was uneasy, almost nervous, I recollect. A blonde on her own in Spain.

“ OOOmmm,” the Buddhist chanted. Now everyone looked at him and probably wondered the same thing that I was. ‘How long is this chanting going to last?’

Sitting next to the window was a nun, holding the beads. Across from her, on our side, was the shaman wearing a colourful African khaaftan, a little headpiece of a hat over his greying, nearly bald head. Regal and handsome. There was a leather bound book on his lap.

“ OOOmmm.” chanted the Buddhist.

The young seeker in white sat lotus, really taking up part of the empty seat between him and the Nun. His hands outstretched to the above and his eyes closed.

“ So what takes you to Santiago de Compestella?” I asked him.

His eyes remained closed and I was answered with,
“OOOmmm.”

Well I guess that didn't work. So I tried again, sensing that everyone wanted me to make him stop.

“ So what takes you to Santiago?” I asked a little louder this time.

“OOOmmm.”

" Best intoned when stoned, yea...yea...yea. " said the shaman deeply and quietly.

Slowly the neophyte's eyes opened but he remained in lotus, untouched.

Then the shaman stood up. He reached over head for one of a few pillows and took two down offering one to the Nun. I couldn't help asking myself, "What's behind those manners and fine clothes? Best intoned when stoned...hmmmm."

“ Oh. Thank you, but I won't be sleeping.” She spoke English with an Italian accent and smiled politely. The gentleman nodded and sat down giving one to the Texas girl.

“ How kind,” she twanged.

“ OOOmmm.”

“ Do you mind?” she drawled at the Buddhist.

His eyes opened quickly this time and he looked right at her, taking his hands and placing them palms down on his knees.

“ I am at peace,” he responded.

She looked at him up and down and said,“ Real men don't sit like that.”

This southern belle had no fear after all.

“ Really? Tell me, miss, what's a real man?” he asked condescendingly.

“ A real man wears boots and a hat.”

“ A real man gives away his boots and his hat,” he responded.

“ A real man drives a truck and knows how to handle a gun.”

“ A real man needs only his own legs and is beyond violence.”

“ A real man drinks and smokes.”

“ A real man transcends vice,” he answered.

“ I’m Candy.”

“ I’m Butch,” he said.

“ Butch?”

“Butch.”

“ Well I’ll be...” she twanged obviously charmed. “ Where did you get a name like that?” she asked.

“ My Daddy was a surfer in the sixties. He brought me up on the beach...”

“ Where?”

“ California and Mexico.”

“ You don’t say...” She shifted her position and stroked her hair.

“ So why in tarnation do you dress like a fool?”

He looked over his clothes and looked back at her. “ Why do you wear fake fingernails?”

“ These are real, honey,” she said proudly, holding up all ten fingers.

“ That must take a lot of work.”

“ Not as much work as that damned chanting.” She smiled and he apologized by nodding his head sideways.

“ I am on the path,” he responded.

“ What path is that, Butch?” She loved saying his name and now was obviously coming

onto him. I watched the Nun sit motionless, staring out the window. The shaman across from her ran his fingers from one edge of the cover of his book to the other.

“ The path of transcendence.”

“ And what pray tell, do you transcend?”

“ The material.”

“ So you don't surf?”

“ I sacrificed surfing for the path.”

“ And you don't like girls?” she flirted.

“ Woman is a distraction.”

“ A distraction? From what?”

“ The path.”

“ So you're path has no children? No family? No sex?”

“ This is weakness.”

At this point, Candy turned to me and said, “ I love a good challenge, Nexter.”

Then she put her head on my shoulder and took my arm with both of hers pulling it against her breast so that my hand fell on the inside of her thigh. The surfer looked for a second then closed his eyes and went back to lotus position.

The sister looked over and smiled at me. The shaman engaged the Nun in polite conversation.

“ You work in the orphanage?” he asked politely looking at a pin on her habit.

“ Si.”

“ I play for the children. I play just for the child.”

“ God be praised,” she said gently.

" And you sister...where do you come from?"

" I am a child of the Great War."

" Yet you have faith."

" I sleep with Him" she said holding her cross. "Si."

" And I see you are beautiful," he said in a most graceful way.

She nodded and gave him a bashful smile.

" Once I married. He died on a beach in 1942."

" You lost him. I am so sorry." He bowed his head for a moment, closing his eyes as if in memory of something personal.

" We have both lost," she said.

" Yes."

"And you are?"

" They call me G."

" I am Sister Maria."

There was silence. Both looked out the window into the darkness.

The hours began to tick by Roman time. Candy and Butch both slept but the Nun, and the gentleman sat straight up, showing no signs of fatigue. I should have been resting, but Candy's head was on my shoulder and I didn't want to embarrass her by waking her as she would notice her drool on my sleeve.

Obviously Butch had things on his mind, his head slumped further and further to a more and more obvious hard on that poked eagerly against his loose garb.

Yep. These two were made for each other.

Without warning the conductor rapped on the door, slid it open and walked in like he was good friends with Franco. What's with these guys anyway.

The elders turned ready with ticket in hand and Candy and Butch attempted to focus in on this disturbance to their various dream sequences. She wiped my sleeve, he tucked his pants just so... but then everybody was awake again.

An hour later I was sitting between the Nun and G. Candy had fallen asleep with her head on Butch's lap, taking up the entire other bench. Nobody minded. Butch was awake now, and losing the battle with sleeping beauty.

Obviously troubled, Butch asked the Nun, " So how do you do it?"

" I pray in my sleep."

" No how do you stay alone."

" But I am not alone. I sleep with Him."

" So you use your imagination."

" No need. He is always inside me and all around. I breathe him and drink him. He is the lover that I mourn and he is the son I never had. I am safe with Him. I enjoy my sleep."

She said this in quiet but nearly factual tone. There was calm in her words, and there was acceptance.

Butch sat silently just staring at her. He didn't know what to say. G nodded and bowed his head slightly.

Finally G said, " You are Zen?"

" Yes," said Butch.

"Yet you give head to the mirage. "

There was stunned silence at his quiet but firm dismissal. Who is this guy? Or rather who does this guy think he is? Even Candy lifted her head.

" I am to take my teaching only from my master." said Butch.

" Who pretends to be your master?" he said slowly and curiously.

" I accepted him."

" So you're the slave."

" I am a neophyte."

" You are an embryo. " said G kindly.

" Who are you?" asked Butch defensively.

" I am the dark soul of rock n roll...but then, heretics burn brighter," he replied with a smile.

There was silence. The train swayed once then jerked violently.

We waited for more.

" I am the N-king, " said G.

Whew! Man! Hit me.

Butch swallowed hard, widening his eyes and lifting his eyebrows.

Touched.

" Oh please don't say that word!" said Candy putting her hands over her ears.

" You give head to the mirage," said G looking at Candy.

Again, there was silence.

" That's a bad word, for whatever. I don't care what you say. Don't say that word," commanded Candy.

" That I am your brother is clear." he said to Candy. " But would you have me as your friend?"

"What are you saying?"

" I am nothing but a story." he said looking at Butch then back at Candy.

" You are very old," said Sister Maria.

" I am also very young," said G.

Then Butch kicked in, " How old are you?"

" I am a flash in Zen. I am ancient in the aboriginal."

He looked at Sister Maria "Fifty of your Roman years..." and snapped his fingers.

"...sucked into the black hole." Then he looked at me, managing a half smile.

A playful but eerie laugh emanated from G. I immediately thought, "He is at play. The shaman is at play."

Where are you from?" asked Butch.

" Down there."

" Downunder?" asked Butch.

" The happiest is the saddest, the highest is the lowest, the kindest word is the cruelist word," he said as he looked to Candy again.

" Then you are a poet?" she asked.

" Ah! Musician though. Trombone. You know?" he said moving his arm once like he was working his slide. "I have played the passions, and now the passion plays me." he said lifting the book slightly off his lap.

"What are you?" he then asked.

" What am I?" repeated Candy, rolling on her back. Her head was now on Butch's thigh.

Slowly and deeply he asked, " Are you the cold princess, or are you the welcoming whore? Are you the barren one or are you the bitch in heat?" His eyes were fixed and unwavering.

She let out a joyful yet astonished cry followed by a long stare where her mouth hung open. She sat up and covered her mouth not knowing what to say.

" There is nothing in between?" she asked finally.

" Such nastiness it seems. But then manners and humility both mislead...don't they Candy?" he continued.

" You seem polite enough. Do you mislead?"

" I am G. I am the beating drum in your womb. How could I mislead? You name yourself, child." said G.

" Then I am the whore and the bitch," said Candy simply lifting her eyebrows and shrugging.

G smiled. " You are a quick study."

I have to admit...the way she said it made me want Candy all for myself for a second. But it was Candy's newly erect nipples that said it all.

I couldn't keep the smile from appearing on my lips. What a radical was this man G. Sister Maria was especially charmed. Life is full of surprises.

" He is the slave. She is the whore-bitch and you are the N-king," said the Sister, pointing at each. She smiled. "What am I sir?"

" You are the black mistress."

"Oh, I like that."

"You are the mistress of a ghost who wreaks havoc on mankind as retribution."

" Why not his bride?" she asked smiling.

"Ah!" laughed G. " A willing participant in the great destruction."

His laughter was met with another amazed silence. "What the fuck is 'the great destruction'?" I heard myself ask. "Excuse me sister."

As if I had cued him , G turned to me and said, " Destruction," he paused. " You have thoughts and beliefs...opinions, even words...that you hold sacred. They are a tired temple waiting to be rebuilt."

" To whom am I mistress?" asked Sister Maria, suddenly aware that the ghost was not in

her image.

" The rebellious one in the goat skin. The reveler."

" Oh dear." she said smirking like a naughty schoolgirl.

" Retribution for what?" I asked.

" Ending the orgy. Castrating the rebel."

Heavy, man.

"Eoooh," whined Candy.

I felt a strong urge to cross my legs and couple my hands on my lap. Just then, Butch did and I saw the humour. Suggestion... head to the mirage.

" Oh heavens," said the Sister.

" He is not a kind ghost," he said looking at the mistress. " He spins, then drinks the wine of the wayfarer while he is marked for betrayal. He accuses and detests. He is accused and detested." he said looking back at me.

" Ghosts are an invention," said Butch.

" The ghost that invented you plays the fool. Nothing is as it seems."

There was a pause. Butch retreated.

Then Sister Maria pointed at me. " What is he?" she asked the shaman.

" He expects nothing. So I give him nothing." said G.

Now Candy cut in. " He must have a name like the rest of us."

I sensed no animosity, but a competitive desire not to be out done. As far as Candy was concerned, whore-bitch was the highest. Hard not to agree. And now Butch was sitting askew once again embarrassed by his own excited state.

" He is something from nothing. Such a fate. " G laughed quietly.

I was curious how this stranger, this man G... meant this. But there was no malice in his words.

Butch was getting excited again. " Something from nothing. Impossible." His eyes turned to skewers as Candy leaned against him.

" Ah! But words. Too many words." G said, once again lifting his book from his lap. " I cheapen my heart."

They all wanted me to say something.

"I am an untouchable," I admitted.

" Like a beggar?" asked Butch.

" All I asked of you was why you were going to Santiago."

" I've been to India. I know your caste. You're a beggar," he challenged.

" I play for change. "

Everybody squirmed except G. Candy looked at me like I smelled. Butch, now certain that his caste was higher than mine, buddhist or not, smirked and touched Candy's thigh.

Sister Maria quietly started to repeat words from some psalm.

" Yeah, ...thank you sister. Best intoned when stoned. Yea, yea, yea." said G, ever so slowly.

But I sensed G understood. He looked over at me nodding.

Butch wanted approval. He took on G again.

" I give head to the mirage?.. No... my path... is to transcend the material."

" What an interesting use of words," said G.

" You laugh."

" It is impossible not to have humour with moronic misconceptions," said G.

Now Butch was struggling..

" You see your denial as real. It probably hurts sometimes doesn't it?"

" Yeah it does " said Butch.

" It hurts you not to have women, doesn't it?"

" Well, yeah."

" It hurts you not to surf too."

" Well, yeah."

" Yet you deny more and more and feel what?"

Butch looked down at Candy who had stretched out again and tucked her head back into his lap. Then he stroked his bald head. "I dunno. Maybe, I don't want to feel anything."

"Then you must hurt alot." G let his voice trail off as he stroked the spine of the book.

" Fuck it," said Butch, now clearly frustrated.

" And so you give head. You give head to everything you deny," said G, this time tapping his right temple.

" But the other is to be seduced by all my weaknesses."

" What weaknesses? asked the man.

" Everyone has weaknesses."

" And you give them head?" asked G.

" I have to know what my weaknesses are, don't I?" said the neophyte.

" Well you've got to learn to breathe. That's the only way you're gonna blow." said G.

" Is that some sort of code?" asked Butch distrustingly.

" It's all code, boy. You 've got to learn to blow. Play out the passion."

There was a good minute of silence. G was finished. Candy, feigning discomfort, suggestively rolled her head sideways, towards Butch. She placed her left hand in front of her nose and squarely on his groin. This seemed to give him confidence.

"Once I was at one with the wave. That was awesome." said Butch sadly.

"There you go," answered G. "The wave demands you to surf her... mind, body and soul..."

"'You pretend', says the wave..." added Sister Maria, looking at Butch like she was the matron.

"...you die," laughed Butch. "The beach will break you in two. You die on a beach just like your husband." he said turning to the nun.

"He wasn't a surfer young man. He was a sacrifice."

"He was a missionary?" asked Butch, suddenly serious.

"No. But he did die for you."

"Ah. C'mon Sister," he responded somewhat disgusted.

"You're all the same...you young people," she said shaking her head.

"Nobody died for me," said Butch defensively.

"You are angry," said G with a half smile.

"No. It's just that my father used to say that to me about my mother. That's why I left."

"She died?" asked Candy in a soft, compassionate voice. She kept her head still, but tugged slightly on his garb with her left hand.

Butch didn't answer Candy, but he was angry alright. "I owe nothing to anyone," he quipped.

The compartment suddenly seemed too small. It felt claustrophobic. We had a mad budhist on our hands. But G was unforgiving at this point. He leaned forward and looked Butch square on.

"Young man," he whispered.

Butch twitched his head.

"Anger... and denial..." His eyes went to the nun, and then back to Butch. "Anger and denial are sisters."

After a tense moment, Sister Maria quietly cut in.

"My lover was part of an experiment...and about your age when he was cut in half by bullets...from machine guns...but yes, it was on a beach. You are a surfer, trying to be a Buddhist, with a beautiful girl's head on your lap, on a train in Spain. Of course he died for you."

Her tone was kindly and edifying. There was no harshness.

Butch was stunned. So was I. She and the shaman looked straight ahead and nodded.

Now the surfer was careful in saying anything more. He was uncomfortable. What could he say.' I'm so sorry' wouldn't convince.

Candy moved and snuggled her head again, moving more deeply into Butch's lap. I think that is about when we started to lose them.

After awhile, the train pulled into a small town. It was dark and late. We had to get out and stretch our legs for a few minutes. We looked for Butch and Candy when the whistle blew... They got off...but never got back on.

Meant to be. It's a beautiful thing.

The train rolled us off again towards our destination.

We still had a few hours to go, but I was getting tired. I had to ask him about the book he held on his lap...rarely did he let it go.

He called it his life's work. A Fake Book.

What is a Fake Book? Learn something new everyday.

G told me that every musician has a Fake Book. Hmmm. Cool. Sort of like a collection of favorites, but all standards. Then there are Real Fake Books ... with hundreds of tunes.

But the one he held up from his lap was different.

He showed me briefly.

Every song was scrawled over with notes...and dates...sometimes hard to read the music underneath.

He cut in as I flipped through it.

"The idea is that you only see chords and a melody that begs...you know about begging, don't you?" he laughed. "...a melody that begs for interpretation...nothing is written in stone. You play it the way you hear it. And never the same way twice."

"Man. Where can I get one?"

"This is the Key of G. You can't get it. It's not for sale. There is only one of these." he said taking back the book gently.

"These are your songs?"

"They aren't songs...they are passions my young friend.." said G.

"But did you write them?"

"Ha! The wind wrote them, my friend. And I give the wind a little focus."

"Any rock n' roll?" I asked.

"It's all rock n' roll. And you play the six strings of life?" he said looking at the palm of his opened hand.

"I play the guitar... for change, you know?"

"Your own songs?" G asked.

I looked at the book on his lap. " No. People only throw change for songs they already know. It's all been done," I replied somberly.

"Another moronic misconception...Ha! You give head to the mirage."

"Oh."

"Ah! The wind wails...a soul begs...she will give it to you...and they will call it yours."

"But it won't be mine?"

"Every song ever sung belonged to the wind."

"And how soon before this song..."

"Too soon..." he responded, snapping his fingers again. "The passion will play you...and you too will play the fool...." he laughed.

I couldn't help the smile. I nodded. I'm sure I will always wonder how he meant that.

"Ah, young man. You make me want to play. You expect nothing. You are the untouchable. Someday I would like to hear your work, I am sure," he said kindly. "Tell me your name again."

"I am A. Nexter Niode."

"Best intoned when stoned...yea... yea...yea." he growled softly.

How I ended up with this book seems strange. Like a spell, sleep overcame me. I awoke alone in Santiago. G and Sister Maria were nowhere to be seen. Sitting by itself beside me was the Key of G.

At first I panicked. How could G have forgotten his book? I grabbed it, along with my shoulder bag and guitar, and ran through the station. Like a ghost, he was gone.

I was alone with the Key of G.

I opened it and saw a few words inside the front cover.

"To the untouchable,

of the tone

'naught written in stone'."

Stranger things...

I go to the south tonight. I'm making my way to Marrakech.

Yes it is.