

"I was a Sex Fiend for a great Metropolitan Newspaper"

I The Perfect Man

The *East Village Other* succeeded in offending even me with the first article of mine they ever published, in February of 1967. It was a perfectly uplifting and wholesome article commending the bunny-waitresses at the 57th Street Playboy Club for joining the Teamsters Union and picketing their joint, in the snow: precious little college girls with lots and lots of teased-out hair flowering up out of their shaggy Navajo parkas, bright-cheeked and steam-breathing in the February frost, splashing through the slush bearing picket signs and flir-

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by Dean Latimer



Illustration by R. Crumb; Photo by Steve Kraus

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ting with the big dumb Irish cops in their outsize blue peacoats. Nearly every sentence in the piece was that long, and twice as positive.

Two weeks later I gingerly bought a copy of the paper at the Needle Park newsstand and ever most gingerly began leafing through it on the downtown IRT. And by heaven, on page eight lay my story, unchanged, whole and entire, illustrated with a very powerful cartoon of a mostly-naked blonde woman lashed to an Inquisition stretch-rack in your classic, strained, agonizing bondage position. On the top of her head had been sketched, feebly and obviously by an alien hand, a pair of stilted bunny-ears.

"Who," I asked ad manager Peter Leggieri later that day, "was the foot fetishist who illustrated my article?" Leggieri only knew that it was some huge, savage-looking Buffalo biker who had in fact muscled into the *EVO* office out of the Avenue A slush the same day as I had, two weeks before, bearing a sheaf of outsized cartoons, man. "Spain," said Leggieri. "I think he said his name was Spain."

Unbelievably, they were into paying me around \$50 a week, in ones mostly, just for writing a couple of articles every issue and doing odd shitwork around the little railroad flat storefront office. It was newspaper shitwork—I was in heaven. Especially when I opened the very first reader letter, the very first day there. In it were three color Instamatics presenting a very comely young woman in flashy lace underwear, posing provocatively. This was the first *EVO* letter I ever opened, some of the witnesses are still alive to attest to it: the unsigned note with the letter expressing confidence that the *EVO* guys would appreciate the gesture, and we certainly did.

Leggieri and I did, anyway, the other guys around *EVO* just then being rather more obsessed with mega-mike LSD illuminations and portents of the impending World Flipout than with women's underwear. It was Pete and I who did the day-to-day newspaper shitwork, along with three women. Peter's old lady Missy, small and perfectly clear all over like a sorority plebe, was the bookkeeper; Anette was the receptionist, a Jewish-American paradigm Princess, straight nose and Isis eyes with black hair she could sit on; and the editor was Lorraine Glennby, six feet tall without her spikeheel boots, torrid auburn hair, and the same elegant body with which she had challenged *corrida* bulls—absolutely no shit—in Mexico a couple years beofre. What sort of women worked for the *East Village Other*, you were wondering?

They were all top-shelf women, they had to be, to work for that ridiculous avant-porn hippie paper for nearly nothing, in that roach-blown firetrap office on the Lower East Side. Magic women, they intimidated the hell out of me until we got into smoking dope together. Dope in the office is a great palliative of sex, class and age anxieties, all of which I had to cope with as a barely-21-year-old street urchin. I never would've suspected they might harbor insecurities of their own, until the Perfect Man happened along.

This guy started advertising in the *EVO*

"Wheel & Deal" classifieds just as I began proof-reading them. Each week he mailed in, and paid for out front, precisely enough copy to jampack-fill an 13" tabloid page column nine picas wide. He made no bourgeois sham of modesty, this guy; he challenged women to accept it that he was a handsome, broad-shouldered, swivel-hipped swain, somewhat over 30, a "professional" forsooth, self-employed and making plenty, endowed with exquisite artistic sensitivity and broad worldly experience, with a great big shiny car and a penthouse, and a yacht and a house in the Hamptons . . . week after week this went on.

"This guy's unbelievable," Missy began by marvelling. "How does he expect anybody to swallow that? Nobody's that perfect." Even Anette, whose whole existence was otherwise unrippled competence, was moved to perplexity: "He must be crazy," she speculated: "He's sure to get plenty of answers, but what sort of girl does he think is going respond to that sleazy snow job?"

As time went on, and Mr. Perfect's light pulsed ever more incandescently from under

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his bushel; even Lorraine fell gradual prey to it. "This is so weird," she started telling the other girls. "He's been paying nearly \$400 an issue for the last two months to run these ads. He has to be getting hundreds of answers, but he just keeps on buying space. I don't care what kind of wimp he really is, nobody's that desperate."

"I wonder," offered Suzanne, "what happens when you write to his post-office box?"

Missy thought a moment, then sat up like a host. "Do you think it's a white slave ring?"

So the three of them drafted a curious letter and sent it to him, on *EVO* stationery, and we never heard from Mr. Perfect again. All three girls were visibly disappointed about it, too.

II Virgin Honeymoon

We only slept together for the warmth, strictly for the comingled body heat beneath her long black witch's cape. She said she was a witch and I did not disbelieve her; she answered the description in more ways than two or three. She had a long face of frown and pout, downward-tending at the sides of her mouth and suspicious black eyes. But she was a young witch withal, not uncomely in a young-witchly way. Her name was Mary, and I have better words than hers allow that the 1966 bumper-tune "Along Comes Mary" had been written in specific reference to her.

This was in the following March, mind you, the soggy doorstep of the Summer of Love in New York, and we were nightly swapping

body heat strictly out of necessity, and undoubtedly out of a weird karma that was clearly mostly hers. She had a lot behind her in her young-witch life, she didn't mind letting you know, and she was headed for lots more, without a doubt. This is just what she happened to be doing right that month, and that lent it all a special substance.

She was hanging out days in the *East Village Other* storefront, having been referred to us by friends from the *Los Angeles Free Press*. Her mission here, I gathered, was to arrange a cozier out-of-court paternity settlement for her child, gotten on her a couple years before by a famous folk-rock musician (though *not* the one you undoubtedly thought of immediately). That is, that was the *why* of her hereness, though in those days it was easier to recognize and effortlessly accept the holistic notion that person's experiences were conditioned by a much greater variety of factors than simple intention. Everybody was stoned that spring.

People thought she was my girlfriend, since we were together so much. This worked out swell for both of us. With me she avoided getting hit on by men, which she abhorred, and it got her entry to all the very interesting and influential people with whom I was hanging out as an *EVO* reporter. I was meeting then and smoking dope with a grand array of East Coast artsy people, international dealers and acid philosophers, community politicians and probably a lot of police undercover agents, though that never occurred to me. To them I was just a skinny beardless kid in his threadbare college-dropout gear—ski sweater, patched pegged cords and medium short hair—and Mary was a rather older witchtype, clearly from the Coast, dropping impressive names with an intensely snotty air. If people today remember either of us, they remember Mary.

I got more from her than she from me, I'm sure. I was on my virgin honeymoon with marijuana at this period, see, continually and equally enchanted by everything that happened. Just to walk through Tompkins Square Park in the rain at 3 a.m. It was as marvelous as any kid in an amusement park for the first time, with the smells and sounds and colored lights reflected in the water sluicing over the pavement. Interviewing Tuli Kupfberg in his Avenue B loft, with the wife and Js and sweet tea, it was as a pilgrim welcomed to a temple-shrine on the Ganges. Ridin', to Brooklyn at dawn with a stack of *EVO* pasteup flats in the back of Walter Bowart's station wagon, munching pirogi with a real honest-to-Asmodeus Los Angeles witch in a Ukie joint; by heave, not an instant of it was less than wholly fulfilling, and I will be forever grateful to her, just for making herself a part of it.

Also for her cloak I have to be grateful. Together we made enough bread to get by the days. I recall getting maybe \$50 on a good week from Bowart—it was still a bi-weekly paper, after all—and Mary every few days dropped by a certain awning on the Upper East Side, where a uniformed doorman handed her an envelope given him by her folk-rock performer. Together we might even have had the

bread necessary for a Sam Scime, Inc. railroad flat on Avenue A—Sam was still letting places go for \$50-\$70 per month—but that only occurs to me now, 12 years later. We were just not that sort of people.

How it would work is this. After a long heady day of traveling up to Columbia University to cover the riots, back down to Center Street to twitch out a conspiracy-to-riot trial, interviewing a Japanese woman who orchestrated nude be-ins in churchyards around the Village, I would reconnoiter with Mary at the *EVO* storefront and type up the day's adventures, while she held forth from the next stool on what phonies all these people were I was writing about. And by and by—along about 10—the local art heavies would congregate in the tiny back room with Bowart and whatever Millbrook people happened to be in town. Mary and I also would gather back there, generally on a moldering stack of back issues next to the chain-toilet cubbyhole, and smoke dope with everybody.

The reefer at *EVO* was the best in the world, for the times. Largely it was Vietnamese, exquisitely hand-rolled by little old ladies in the Mekong, with maroon filters securely glued on, packed neatly by the twenties in copywrited Kool packages, cellophane-wrapped with the bright red tear-string and everything. You just don't get that good old Imperialistic packaging with dope these days. We would sit there till the wee small hours smoking this delicious truck, and undoubtedly the rap got very heavy indeed, considering who-all was present. I don't remember any of that—cannabis is notorious for deranging the specific short-term memory of first-time tokers—but I do recall really *seeing* cockroaches for the first time, and marvelling at how honestly guiltless it was to kill them after all. Mary did most of the talking from our corner of the shop, I'm sure.

Afterward we generally crashed together in the Grass Gallery. This was the interior of a shed which had been erected by parties unknown between two tenements by Avenues A on the north side of Tompkins Square. An audacious entrepreneur had dubbed it thus, after installing in it a couple of mattresses, a light-show device of his own design, and a tape recorder with plenty of Mothers music. The prospectus was that people would get stoned in their homes and come to this shed to savor the excess garnish of serotonin in their brain tissues. It never made a penny, but by a virtue of a write-up in *EVO* I got title to the mattresses after business hours.

This is where we slept together, strictly for the sake of the 98.6, for about a month straight. In that time, I maybe thrice forgot in my sleep that I was not still in college upstate, sleeping with an erstwhile main squeeze from Utica. Mary handled it well; she suffered the groping; and the sleep-slurred compliments as long as they pleased her, and then deftly wrapped the cloak around herself, leaving me in the cold, until I woke up and apologized.

To this day, I really respect that woman like *all* hell. Worth twenty years of marriage.

III Pioneers of Free Expression

Proofreading for the *East Village Other* was a grave responsibility. The typesetters we had in 1969, who operated four hot-lead linos in a 21st Street loft, already partitioned with evil disregard for the municipal fire regulations, were fresh off the boat from Argentina, and only the wife of the boss knew any English. So besides being deaf and dumb from years of inhaling blue lead in the air, the poor guys on the lines were further inconvenienced by having to type out the copy letter by letter. Any error overlooked in the copy editing therefore got scrupulously put into print, and stray marginalia—telephone numbers jostled down by the writer in mid-composition, mash notes to the secretary, idle doodles—were typically incorporated into the galley proofs at odd spots. Also, even deaf and dumb, the typesetters had a Latino inclination to strike “j” for “h” and vice versa, so that but for my eagle eye a lot of dope pieces might've come out looking like NIDA monographs—“marihuana” for “marijuana” and so on.

I'd go on composing smut *al fresco* to the deadline. I loved it.

At least one eight-hour night per week, then, I'd be snorting down the blue lead myself, along with rafts of cold coffee imported from Ratner's on Second Avenue and a pile of their unsurpassable cherry danishes (these sessions were the *only* times I ever willingly got north of 14th Street, so I made picnic occasions out of them), penning corrections onto the galleys. Once the whole paper had been set in lead type, see, we'd just run off a few sets of newspaper proofs from each galley, pasted them onto mechanicals at the *EVO* office and photostated them for printing at Marty Balan's plant in Brooklyn. The whole linotype operation was only useful for giving the lino crew (and me) brain damage and black lung from the blue lead.

It all would have been interesting enough, except that I'd always already copyread the feature prose in manuscript, and how many times can a normal person read A.J. Weberman's latest manifesto on Bob Dylan's garbage without coming to despise both of them intensely? The only part of the proofing *new* to me, then, was the classified ads, so in staunch Presbyterian fashion I always saved them for last. For dessert:

Great Ray muff dives! Why are all chicks waiting around for Prince Charming? I'm a six-foot-tall guy with a beard that will raise goosebumps on your stomach while I twist my tongue around your clit and send you screaming up the walls six times in a half hour. I'm a hungry man! I can eat pussy for *days* without coming up for air! Get the lead out, chicks! My place or yours: you spread, I munch.

And so on. As a pioneer of free expression in America, Great Ray of Chester, Pennsylvania

has been grievously overlooked. Every week for three years running, from 1966-69, Great Ray would lease half a column in the *EVO* “Wheel & Deal” and stuff it full up with prose like that. Nobody had *ever* done this sort of thing before. Great Ray's monomaniacal muff-diving essays actually set the fundamental tone and style for *Screw* and *Hustler*, and he is thus to be credited with inaugurating a whole new trend in American letters. Whether he should be *thanked* for it is another matter.

See, along about December of '68, we began missing Great Ray's pussy-eating ads, which I'd always saved for the dessert of desserts, among the *EVO* galleys in the cloudy blue lead. It was pretty shocking: no Great Ray. By this time the “Wheel & Deal” was florid with his imitators, guys literally trying to *gross* girls into sleeping with them, but nobody ever achieved quite his depth of pure maniac obsession with orthodox cunnilingus. Issue succeeded issue, but there was no Great Ray on the “Wheel & Deal” galleys. Finally, one proof day, rummaging through the ad department rough copy to confirm a phone number, I happened across a neatly typewritten letter from Chester, Pennsylvania. An apology, forsooth: “Sorry I haven't been advertising lately, guys, but I came down with the old Hong Kong flu, I guess. Sure would hate to give some poor chick the flu up the ‘flue,’ ha ha! Be seeing you, Great Ray.”

What had *really* happened, I divined much later, was even less wholesome. Al Goldstein was just then peaking over 100,000 circulation with the eighth issue of *Screw*, and that bastard had lured Great Ray *away* from us with the promise of free sex ads in exchange for a first-person article on cuntlapping—with the stipulation that he no longer run ads in *EVO*. In fact Goldstein was stealing all our sex advertisers, those who were too dumb to go over to *Screw* of their own accord. *EVO* salaries plummeted to naught before another six months was out; without the sex ads the paper made it by flimflaming the distributors for another couple years, but we were all doomed to be writing pussy copy for Goldstein before very long.

On the proof-day of which I speak, though, all unsuspecting of the horrors that lay in wait, I blithely resolved to replace Great Ray in “Wheel & Deal” with something equally lunatic. So I wrote right there on some galley paper, and handed to the typesetters, this:

Big Dean grabs ass! Charming, intelligent, cultivated hip young libertine, well-versed in the Portuguese and Yucatanian arts, will grab *your* ass for *nothing*! I'm an ass man! I don't care if your butt's tiny and trim or huge and gobby, I wanna grab it! No fucking or sucking involved, just gimme a couple handfuls! No fags, perverts or nymphs need apply. Just call Big Dean at *EVO*. 255-****.

At the time, mind you, I was cohabiting exclusively with a perfectly splendid woman on Second Avenue, who really tore my ass up when she saw that ad. “Aw, don't get your bowels in an uproar,” I assured her. “Nobody's gonna be able to make *sense* of that



drivel, let alone answer it. I mean, who wants their ass grabbed? That is *not* a fetish, even among human beings."

You were wrong, Bartholin-breath! Before that day was out, Big Dean must've gotten three dozen calls on the *EVO* line from would-be ass-grabees. "You're just into grabbing ass, right?" a number of women suspiciously asked. "No funny business. I can keep all my clothes on, you promise? And all you want to do, nothing else, is just—well, you know—grab around a little? Great. Your place or mine?" I always made the date for the girl's place in these cases, and forgot to show up.

One memorable woman, though, actually deduced that I was the selfsame "Dean" who wrote stuff for the paper, and showed up in the office one day the following week with a couple of girlfriends, all to have their tushies grabbed on a lark. Very sweet and pleasant they were, all conveniently attired in tight dungarees for the occasion, but

I confess I couldn't get it on at all.

Writing about this sort of thing has always been great fun for me, but I honestly have never been able to see why anybody would ever want to really *do* any of it. I was awkward. The groping was clumsy, perfunctory, self-conscious. But the girls got to meet some top-notch San Francisco underground cartoonists who were in town just then, and I think they all got lucky.

The calls went on and on forever, literally until Bill Graham pitched us out of our Fillmore East attic office during the bombing season of spring 1970 and we had to change the number. The only onerous part of it for me were the gay men, a good half-dozen of them, who called repeatedly, obsessively, *insisting* they were really women no matter how their plumbing had been installed. One of them tended to get downright butchy and belligerent: "God damn it, you're gonna grab my ass if I have to beat you into it with a belt! I'm coming down there to your office tomor-

row with some friends, and we're gonna *make* you grab my ass, Big Dean, until you come in your pants! Put up or shut up, Big Dean."

Two woman callers in particular, though, I got very fond of over the months. Both would call very late at night, in the wee small, which is when I was generally working in the office alone. One was a 15-year-old girl from Long Island, who invariably spoke against a background of hysterically giggling girlfriends. God, she was sweet. "Whatcha doin', Big Dean? Grabbed any good asses lately?" After some prurient raillery of this sort, inciting gales of teenage giggling on the other end of the line, we'd settle into a nice chummy chat. I actually got into helping her with her history and math, and at a couple points I actively discouraged her from running away from home. The last call I got from her was exactly one year later—she remembered the anniversary of her first call. Gee, she'd be 25 years old now . . .

The other woman was *horny!* "Is this really Big Dean?" she would always ask, with husky anxiety. "No kidding? You're not just somebody putting me on? Well then . . . If you had me here—I'm in my bedroom, all alone, with just a sheer see-through nightie on—what would you do to me?"

"Did you remember to wear your bikini panties this time?"

"Yes, yes I put them on. What do you want to do with them?"

"Well, first I'd take you over my knee, face up this time . . ."

"Face up? Oh my God."

"Yeah, face up. And you have to hold both hands over your eyes so you can't see what I'm doing. And I'd kinda reach around under you with one hand and slip it up under your bikini elastic and get a nice big handful of tushie . . ."

"Oooo. Oh yes . . ."

"And then with my other hand I'd cup your crotch real tight, and slide the fingers *slowly* down in between your thighs, nudging them apart, really gently and slowly . . ."

After a few minutes of this Scherehazade she'd hang up on me, sometimes so softly I'd go on composing smut *al fresco* to the deadline. I loved doing it, and my old lady always deeply appreciated the state I'd be in when I'd get home afterward. But this very horny lady, for some reason, never *would* let me get her off.

Presently, after a few months, it began to bug me. So one evening when she called, I really got her into it. This time I withheld any reference to my own joint—she always hung up, I'd noticed, just *after* I'd nudged it into her—until I could tell, by the husky little noises she was making, that she was right on the Goddamned edge. Then I slipped out the chocks for good and all: "Then I'd take your knees inside my elbows and pull them up to your tits, and lean over and bite you sharp on the side of your neck and just *push* it into you—"

She detonated. "AAOOOOWWW! Oh God! Awk- Ah— . . . I think you're just *horrible*." And she slammed the phone down and never called again, ever. ■

