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*Marietta's*  
**EXORCISM**

DANIEL BURNELL

# Marietta's Exorcism

*Daniel Burnell*

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Marietta's Exorcism  
by Marietta Kensington Cobb  
Daniel Burnell, Editor

*What follows, with certain small changes and omissions to assist the narrative flow, is an intact journal entry written in 1878 by the San Francisco writer and water-colorist Marietta Kensington Cobb, originally of Liverpool. As you will see, it is a story she could never have published in her or her husband John Paul Cobb's lifetime. Marietta's writing and drawing journals were recently discovered in an old trunk behind what proved to be a false wall in the cellar of the family house on Nob Hill in San Francisco.*

*The trunk survived the earthquake and fire of 1906 and the earthquake of 1989 and those in between, and the house has stayed in the Cobb family all these years. I am grateful to the family and especially to my friend Ferris Cobb, whose parents still own the house, for choosing me, a relative novice at such things, to read, edit, and possibly publish the entry, if I saw fit. A romantic himself, Ferris agrees with me that the story has something to say about its times and contains many timeless lessons about the dangers and rewards of liberated female passion.*

*As D.H. Lawrence wrote of Lady Chatterley after the gamekeeper Mellors made love to her with a savagery she had never come close to experiencing before: "She thought a woman would have died of shame. Instead, shame died." A warning: This story, like loving Marietta Kensington Cobb, is not for the faint of heart. Also, that John Paul Cobb shares the names of two other famous boys from Liverpool, a fact Ferris had to point out to stupid me, is a happy coincidence that put a smile on my face.*

*D.B.*

## Chapter One

I thought John Paul had come to my city apartments that fateful night, at half past nine as was his habit, to have supper with me and make a supper of me afterwards. I was waiting for him as usual, having given cook and Antoinette the night off so John Paul and I could do whatever we wanted to each other in all the rooms. Mother had just gone to the country for a month's stay. John Paul and I were both twenty years old, madly in love and always in a terrible heat for each other, like nothing I had ever known. I loved him like a tigress and like a kitten and like every cat in between, wild and tamed, dangerous and submissive, growling and purring. With John Paul, I felt completely natural in myself, able to act on all my impulses and submit to all of his.

But this terrible night he walked briskly in, without a kiss and clearly unable to look me in the eye. Keeping his randy striped cap on his head and his hands clasped behind his back as he marched the lanes between the chairs and couches, John Paul proceeded to tell me that he had taken a posting as sailor on a ship to set sail for America in the morning. That day, a representative of a trading company was

looking for able-bodied men, at a table set up in the city harbor, and John Paul had signed a year's contract, he said. Because he couldn't look me in the eye as he told me this news and quickly turned his back whenever I got in his path, I was sure his resolve was weak and could be easily overcome with such ways as I had at my disposal.

"But you don't know your own heart, my darling," I said. "How sad."

Admittedly I was mocking the poor boy a bit because, in truth, I didn't believe he would go.

"Whatever you think, so be it, Marietta. What's done is done. The contract is signed and can't be broken."

"I want proof."

"You shall have such proof tomorrow when I'm no longer here."

"No, I want proof that you no longer love me. Tell me you don't love me."

He couldn't say it. Instead, looking off, as if reciting a planned speech, he said, "The weakness is in me alone. I love you madly, but I am no longer up to the mad trial of loving you anymore. Loving you has stolen my strength and made my name sound strange in my own ears. I don't feel truly alive unless I'm with you, and that just can't be for a man."

"Only for a weak little woman like me, I suppose."

"I don't know. Yes."

"So you're running off to be a man among men when you know in your soul that it's only our love that will make you into a real man."

"You are a succubus, sitting on my chest every night, whispering nightmares in my ears while you drain me of the sap of life, my very being."

"What are you saying, dearest?"

"I'm saying our lovemaking is a deadly drug, that it has addicted and weakened and withered me, that I'm fading away. You are too much and you know it."

"Enough. You are trying to demoralize my soul with these lies, and I won't listen to another word."

I wasn't angry though, yet. I was determined. I began to hum a childish song as I often do, like a girl at solitary play. It's a signal between us that I am about to enter my trance and that he must submit to me and let me enjoy his body as if he were a doll of mine. I grow calm. My eyes cloud over with desire and the trance comes on. It has always been thus and thus will it ever be, with me.

I undid the buttons of my blouse, slipped my arms from the sleeves and let the garment fall away, exposing my breasts so he could feel them quiver with desire in his gaze, like fresh flowers in the warmth of the sun, and feel their magnetic heat with his eyes, desire and beauty incarnate, swelling with what I wanted. I knew that for John Paul, my breasts



were the most delectable flesh on this earth and so, in his resistance, he couldn't allow himself even a glance.

"I must go. I have a few more people to visit before tomorrow," he said weakly, almost to himself.

John Paul studied the floor, flushed, downcast, torn. I took his hands in mine, stretched up to kiss his lips, but he presented his cheek to me, and I stopped.

"I still don't believe you. I know your heart better than you do, my darling."

I began to strip him. To my surprise, he didn't put up a fight. Little did I know that he had planned for this scene, but he had. John Paul told me when I saw him again a year later, that he had taken himself in hand three times that day in order to prove his intention in the only way I would accept, and so when I pulled his leggings down, he didn't have an erection and that was a shock. We were so madly hot for each other; he always got hard from the first moment we were in a room together, just as it made me hot and wet just to see him across a room or even to hear his voice. He told me later that to keep from responding, he imagined me a monster, projecting demons onto me. He imagined the grinning skull of death behind the flesh of my face, my ripe red throat ripped inside out, imagined me with a frothing rabid mouth and insane teeth about to rip through his flesh.

Softly though and moaning, like a blind nuzzling animal, after I had stripped him naked, I sucked on his nipples which always drove him mad, the way I know how to do it, my tongue dreamily licking, my lips grazing, clinging, setting off wild currents throughout his body. Not this time. John Paul willed himself into numbness, into the shadow of self-death he felt falling over him, standing there still as a post. I ran my hands up and down his smooth, strong back, buttocks and thighs as I kissed and licked his chest and his well-muscled stomach. I moved slowly down his body, so his cock would know I was on my way and stand up tall to greet me. But it didn't. It just hung there, stupidly. Still, I put his penis in my mouth as I always loved to do, sometimes even in my sleep, he'd told me. This time, because he wasn't hard, I could take most of him in and then I sucked with a long, strong pull as I drew my head away letting the shaft glide ever so slowly my hot sleek tongue. John Paul well knew the electrified heat of my mouth's inner walls and the exquisite pressure of my silken tongue, the white light of my focus and my scholar's attention to detail. Because both of us liked fellatio so much, I studied the art far more assiduously than I ever practiced the piano or painted water colors or acted in theatricals, practicing often on him, always questioning, "Like this? John Paul, like this?" and experimenting with ice cubes in my mouth

and warmed liqueurs and exotic spicy candies, techniques from India and salves from China. I lived to serve his pleasure as he lived to serve mine.

But this time, no, his gorgeous cock didn't respond to anything I tried, and John Paul, his blood thin and unwinding, exerting the power of his mind over that of his body, shuddered not with pleasure but with the cold shivers of his demon visions of my teeth biting through his softened flesh. Much as I kissed and licked and suckled in my trance, his cock stayed half-wilted and announced the death of our love in my mouth.

I looked up at him from my knees, tears running down my cheeks. John Paul told me later that this image of me with his flaccid cock like a fat white worm between my lips, the pathetic, mute plea in my eyes, and my soft crying infuriated him and that was why he smacked my face so hard. He hated himself for what he was putting me through but took it out on me because he was new to such a passion as we had and not up to it yet, the stupid boy. I lost consciousness, not from the strength of the blow I don't think, but from the shock that he, the one I loved with all my heart, had actually hit me. It startled my soul into the coma it wasn't to wake from for almost a full year.

This John Paul told me later: That once I was out cold and couldn't fix him with my gaze and the light

of truth in my eyes, his cock got hard as a rock and pulsed his wild heartbeat into the air. Ablaze with his fevered confusions and delusions about how our love was destroying him, he said I was so vulnerable and beautiful then, an angelic whore, a lusty saint, he felt the sudden need to penetrate me everywhere, fuck my face and my throat, my cunt and my ass, as I lay in a death-like state. He wanted to avenge, with passion, the passion that was killing his manhood. But he knew I would have welcomed any defilement, any sodomy, to keep him there with me. He was right, of course. I always submitted to John Paul's need to have me submit to whatever he could dream up. We played many games and hadn't nearly reached the point of no return and never would, I hoped. He could fuck me anywhere he wanted and had. He could shoot bullets into me and fuck the wounds. He could fuck me to death, if he chose. John Paul, though, was able to resist the temptation and leave me, out cold on the floor, to set sail the next day, for good, he thought, a coward fleeing the truth.

## Chapter Two

When I came to consciousness some time later and John Paul wasn't there, I didn't want to live anymore. I was swallowed up by misery and thought I must die. I saw his face in the patterns of the rugs and on the bare walls too. I heard awful grinding voices in my head and started guzzling wine in order to quiet them. I didn't want to see another soul. I kept Antoinette, cook, merchants, and other future visitors away with a note tacked to my front door announcing a sudden trip to visit mother at our country house. I shuttered my windows and covered them with blankets so there was no day or night as far as the light or my habits were concerned. Every hour was the same as every other hour. I couldn't bear to go near the bed John Paul and I had shared. Nor could I sleep anywhere else because, for the last half year, we had fucked ourselves blind on every single piece of furniture. Our passion knew no bounds, and my rooms were the haunted diary and map of our lovemaking. I was their ghost.

As the days went on, wracked by exhaustion, I would sometimes fall asleep standing up, caught in a still moment between bouts of weeping. In the mirror,

I watched dark circles form under my eyes and my face become stained with shadows and fever blotches.

I will be ugly, I thought. What does it matter now?

This is how I am, how I love, with complete abandon. A man lucky enough to be loved by me must have the courage to face up to it and love me back, even when he knows it will overwhelm him and he won't know who he is for a while before he comes into his own, like John Paul. One must be lost in the fires of passion for the soul to find its way to the light. Surrender what you know and become your true self, I say. Let others be men among men; to love me is to be a real man.

I wouldn't eat a bite. I grew thin, bloodless and translucent even as I continued to drink myself into oblivion with wine and liqueurs, whatever was around, into more and more violent weepings that shook my body like seizures until I fell into a heavy torpor, sorrow weighing on me like the dead moon. I walked around naked to multiply the torture in my mirrors. My heart ached as if someone had taken a hammer to it.

If my heart is so close, I thought, why can't I rip it out and be done?

I touched myself but felt nothing, not a glimmer of desire, and it scared me. Not only was my soul destroyed, my body was dead, a piece of wood, a

lump of coal, I might as well caress the lamp, the doorknob, the pot handle. Maybe I was dead. I wanted to call Mother and ask, Am I dead, Mother? Was there a funeral? Is the corpse always the last to know?

The only thing that worked to provide some relief was a shirt of John Paul's that still held his sweet milk smell and then, inhaling it, I could bring myself to orgasm with my hand and gain an hour of rest. But it was a double-edged sword. Afterwards, the smell was considerably weaker, I believed in my deteriorating mind, and I was afraid that soon I would use the smell up, another death. Of course, I had gone mad.

For friends, a week or so of silence is not the cause for alarm it is for a mother, and it was Mother who got suspicious when my letters stopped, and she came in from the country to see about me. She found me emaciated, unbathed, weeping, light passing through my skin. I had become a skeleton, an ugly, splotchy, red-eyed ghoul stalking the shadows of my rooms, insane.

"Mommy," I said weakly like a dying little girl.

In five minutes bath water was boiling, the blankets torn down from the casements, the doors and windows thrown open, servants contacted. Mother had stocks of food delivered. The hearty meat, noodle, potato and vegetable soups prepared

by cook became the order and ritual of every day, plus eggs for breakfast, more meat for lunch. I had no appetite, but Mother coaxed me through every difficult spoonful just like she had when I was an infant.

After a while, Mother and I were going out for walks together, adding a few minutes each time to gradually build up my strength. I wore dark glasses and held her arm like a blind person. When I caught a glimpse of myself in a store window, I was aghast at what a ghost I'd become. At home, I covered all the mirrors with the blankets that Mother had taken down from the windows, and she told me later she thought this a good sign, a sign of my animal pride in myself. I would not tell Mother when she questioned me about what had happened to bring on my wretched state. To tell it would only bring it back.

"I understand perfectly. It's that fool, John Paul," Mother said. "You and I are people who must live out our passions completely, no matter where they take us. In love, we have our reasons that are not reasonable to anyone else, even to our own mothers."

Being only twenty years old, a few weeks of motherly love and care and my body was restored to health. My heart and my soul were another matter, shuttered as they were against the light and joy of living, armored against emotion, insulated from attraction and pleasure. I didn't want to feel anything.



It felt too dangerous to me after my misery, as if I would suffer a relapse. With good reason; I was still afraid of my feelings.

I decided I would never love again. With the shuttering of my heart and my soul, the light went out my eyes, and they became as dead as cinders, and lovely as I still was, men shied away from me as if I were ill with a deadly contagion. But I didn't care. It was true. I had a contagion; one must be in love with me unto death.

Many months went by like this. I was like a ghost walking through the parties and salons I used to happily attend, a mere shell of myself. Then slowly, as if by magic, the light began to return to my eyes, desire to my body, joy to my spirit, laughter to my soul. My life force, so strong in love, wanted to live again.

## Chapter Three

As is well known, every October, the city of Liverpool holds a wild, all-night revel and masquerade to commemorate its founding, and the legendary deal our founding fathers had made with the devil to settle the place—a myth lost in the fog of time but celebrated all the more wildly for that. Mother and I decided to dress as courtesans, both with piled and dyed wigs of unnaturally red hair, much too much face paint and no tops to our dresses. To cover our breasts we would wield devil's masks on the ends of wands, a funny game of hide and seek in total keeping with the revel. We practiced with each other and found we could manipulate the expressions of our chests as if they were faces. What fun it would be to flirt in this fashion.

As fate would have it, that was the night John Paul returned from the sea, early because of favorable winds, and knocked on my door.

The second I saw him, my face flushed, my cunt swelled and grew wet, my heart beat wildly. I knew at once that neither time nor grief nor pain had cured me and that I loved and wanted John Paul Cobb just as much as before. He was the light of my life, the fire

in my soul, the heat in my body. His beckoning eyes, his plush sweet mouth, the various tastes of him, the strong line of his jaw, his beautiful form, and the dreamer in him, all his ways, especially the way he knew how to make me love him—he was the man I was made for, yet he was also the man who had abandoned me and caused me so much pain. I was furious at him for what he had put me through and for proving himself so stupid and undeserving of my love. I was also furious at my own heart for being so stupid in choosing John Paul. Though I loved and wanted him, my pride and my pain wanted to avenge what he had done to me. You can say this is not love, but it is how I love. Be warned, you faint of heart, to stay away from women such as me.

John Paul was freshly bathed and dressed in brand new clothes he'd bought with his seaman's wages—a tapered black coat that showed off his broad shoulders, strong chest and slim hips, new shiny boots. He was ruddy from salt and sun and cut quite a handsome, dashing figure with his new work-hardened body and manly stature. John Paul came laden too with presents for me from foreign lands.

“Marietta, dearest, I'm here to confess how wrong I was to leave you, my darling, how much I've missed you every moment we've been apart. If I am bewitched, so be it. I don't care. Through every arduous day at sea and the long night watches, I have

learned I can't live without you. It's a truth written by the stars into the darkness of my soul. I know now how weak I was to leave you, that my love must match yours strength for strength and it will this time, if you will have me back."

He reached out for me.

"Don't you dare touch me. You don't deserve to anymore," I said, my eyes flashing white-hot blades. "I touch you."

I began to undress him, repeating our last encounter on purpose, slowly undoing his buttons and belt as he stood there trembling with desire for me. I took off his new coat of fine Irish linen and his white silk shirt. I saw by the muscles of his arms and chest that John Paul was no longer the boy who didn't know what he wanted but the work-hardened man who had suffered and longed for me. I unbuckled his belt and took down his pants. His penis sprung out huge and hard, pumped up by his vigils those lost, starry nights, proud and beautiful as ever.

"Hello again, Terrible John," I said, a term I had never used before about his cock, spoken with the subtle, cutting edge of my deepest hurt. "You awful monster."

It was early evening, and I was dressed in a plain white shift. Later, I was planning to drive out to our country house so Mother and I could put on our dresses, wigs and face paint together. I let the shift fall

from my shoulders and the front drop away to let John Paul see my breasts, dreams come true for him at last, I could see by his flushed face, my apple blossom nipples, bunched and magnetic, the perfect roundness of me, the aching swell calling to his aching lips. I let the shift fall to the floor. I was just a foot away, naked, and satisfied to see the longing in John Paul's eyes just before I reached for the table lamp and smashed it across his face. John Paul let out a horrid yell. He reeled and tumbled to the floor, his cheek deeply gashed by the glass of the lamp, bleeding profusely. The last I saw of John Paul, he was down on all fours like an injured animal. I threw on my cape and rushed out the door.

## Chapter Four

I tumbled into the street and a light drizzle, my heart aching as if someone had taken a hammer to it, just as it had when John Paul left me the year before. The gas lights were lit and the street shone like a street in a dream, the lamp posts festooned with ribbons and streamers, with rabbits, ducks and stray cats strung upside down, with paper mache masks of the city's demon, three-eyed, hook-nosed, with hundreds of square little infant's teeth.

I stumbled around so, it must have looked to all the world as if the street was a storm-tossed ship. I tore at my hair and smacked myself across the face cursing. I threw myself into a wall, rose and threw myself into it again and again. I fell off the curb and sobbing, crawled in the gutter, my knees scraped to bleeding by the cobblestones. I was insane with the opposite of grief, a love that can't be borne. Grief drives a woman insane, and the opposite of grief drives her insane in the opposite way. Grief requires the long mourning I had already done over John Paul; the opposite of grief needs exorcism.

I heard the sound of the sea and then distant singing, a sailor's song, roughly and badly sung,

coming closer. The world seemed to be conspiring against me with the noises of the ocean that had taken John Paul away. I turned to the singing, expecting to see sailors' ghosts, but no, it was two early revelers out in the drifting fog. I rose to my feet, laughing at my fate, mocking the mocking world.

Across the street, the men, each with a bottle, continued their asinine song. I rushed over and accosted them in the drizzly shadows, holding my cape tight around my body to conceal my nakedness.

"Give me a drink, lads," I commanded.

They were hardly lads but men from John Paul's ship, it turned out, Metcalf and Camp, grizzled, whiskered, craven, the most insufferable louts of the entire crew, John Paul told me later, drinkers and loafers, braggarts and cowards, liars and thieves. They were terrified of the captain's lash, and whenever they received it, the two cried like babies, pathetically and comically in each other's arms, and the other men laughed until they couldn't laugh anymore and begged the captain to repeat the show.

"And why should we give you our drink, pretty lass?" said Camp.

They were so far gone already, I was able to snatch a bottle from Metcalf, take a long swig and keep it away from his pathetic swipes.

"Give it back, you bitch," Metcalf said.

"You two are disgusting and ripe," I said and drained the bottle with a long draft, like a man does. "What was that stupid song you were singing?"

I tossed the bottle away. Camp comically clutched his own bottle close to his chest.

"It doesn't have a name. It's just a song."

"I'll have the two of you for that song."

"Pardon, miss."

I opened up my cape and revealed the naked body I wanted them to defile.

"Pardon, what?"

"I'll have the two of you for that song. Now sing, if you want me."

Metcalf and Camp took it seriously and started singing for their sexual supper, two besotted fools, together not as smart as a single pinecone.

"Sing, lads, sing."

There were many verses, most of them concerning drunken foolishness. As he sang, I was able to grab Camp's bottle and took a long swig of the burning rum. I couldn't get it into myself fast enough for what I was about to do. Metcalf laughed to see his friend bottleless too. Camp, confused, swiped at his bottle and missed by a mile. They both stopped singing.

"Here," I said, opening my cape for them again in the sudden quiet. "Slap my breasts around."

"Pardon, miss?"



“Slap my beautiful breasts around with your calloused hands. Tan me.”

“I’ll have myself a good handful of those,” Camp said, coming forward.

“Idiot,” I said, stepping aside. “Are you no good for anything?”

Emboldened by the rum now, I fell to my knees and shoved my face into Camp’s crotch. I pulled his leggings down and began to suck on him but to not much avail because his penis couldn’t seem to decide one way or the other, could only get but halfway there since the man was terrified of me, no doubt. Clearly, even to besotted fools as Metcalf and Camp, a beautiful woman acting like this was mad and capable of anything, castration being uppermost, no doubt, in their dim minds.

As he was just back from a long voyage and hadn’t bathed yet, Camp’s smell almost made me faint, but I shoved my face deeper into his hair as his cock swam and slid blindly in and out of my mouth. What did I care? This had nothing to do with sex. It was sex’s opposite, beauty’s opposite, life’s opposite, madness.

I sucked and I pulled, I licked and I gobbled, moving my head like a machine to bring the foul thing to life. I wanted to gag on the pig’s bitter seed, to wipe it all over my face and have it cake and to wear it like leper’s skin for John Paul, but Camp’s

frightened cock was in purgatory, neither here nor there, like a cold dead eel in my mouth.

While I sucked his flaccid shipmate, Metcalf got behind me. He hoisted me to my feet and his cock plunged into my cunt, banging me hard as his calloused hands held me up by the hips. I was bent into a human bridge, my mouth sucking the half-tumescent worm of a cock at one end, my cunt being savaged by a drunken battering ram at the other. I imagined I was John Paul taking the pounding deserved. Pay attention: This is what goes on sometimes in the hall of mirrors of fated love.

I stopped sucking on Camp and called out into the dark as loud as I could, "John Paul, John Paul, John Paul."

But it was Police Sergeant Stanton, a corrupt, rough-knuckled bruiser, who showed up instead, attracted by my cries. The still flaccid Camp, frightened out of his mind by police uniforms, fainted dead away. With a quick nightstick to the head, Stanton dispatched Metcalf to the ground and took his place fucking me from behind.

Stanton was a horse. I could feel him way up in my insides and knew there would be blood and permanent injury and maybe death as a consequence. That was what I wanted. I was fully drunk now and out of my mind and driven to destroy myself in the most degraded way possible.

Stanton, for his part, didn't know it was me, or else he never would have had the courage to do what he was doing. He groveled before his betters like Mother and me because he wanted to be a captain some day and socialize with elegant people. The bully had a large gang under him, was completely ruthless, and just might pull it off.

Good, I thought as Stanton fucked me, good, the absolute worst of humanity. I shall tell John Paul all about it if I live. If only he were here to witness the line between pleasure and pain, love and shame, life and death, obliterated for all of time. Body and soul I gave myself to him and body and soul I am taking myself back.

Stanton smacked my ass as he rode me and, when he came, he lifted me high in the air on his rod and pumped his seed into me as he roared like the savage beast he was. Finished, he threw me to the ground, a discarded rind plucked of its fruit.

Then he looked down at me and his eyes widened in shock.

"Miss Marietta..."

"That's okay, Sergeant. I'm of legal age now, and the state must have its share. You have provided good service. And don't worry, I won't tell Mother."

He mumbled something I didn't quite hear as I stood and headed away from him. It started to rain much harder. The streamers and ribbons drooped

heavily from the lampposts, the dead animals killed again by drowning, the devil's masks crumbling like pie crusts. The street was empty of people, no more prospects for me in either direction. I ached from Stanton's pounding, but the pain made me want more pain to obliterate the real pain. Did I think of John Paul just meters away in my rooms? Truthfully, I thought of nothing else. But still I wouldn't go see him. Bleeding to death or not, he should know and come after me.

I wandered my street in a daze of memories, love and shame. From distant taverns, I heard roaring songs and drunken shouts, the revel beginning to take on more momentum. Should I go inside and despoil myself further with strangers or wait on the street to see what John Paul would do? On a whim, I followed a walking path that led up to the graveyard where my father was buried.

I trudged uphill in the slanting, blowing rain, my curls straightened into thick hanging cords, my cape flying open, the ground sucking at my bare feet. Out of breath, I threw myself onto Daddy's grave, weeping. I had loved Daddy fiercely, but he had died ten years before and this thought tortured me: Daddy had never gotten to know how accomplished his daughter had become at the arts and languages and social graces or to see how her beauty had blossomed and every man around desired her. My life was

shadowed by this early loss, and I had loved John Paul doubly to redeem Daddy's love through him and yet John Paul had failed me. Love had failed me. I rolled sobbing in the dirt and mud, the grass and twigs, the leaves and petals of the gravesite, until my body was covered from head to foot with pieces of detritus and I resembled a white corpse dredged up from underground.

I ran back down the hill from the cemetery and stood in the middle of the street to get the carriage I saw coming to stop for me. I had no money but was ready to do whatever it took to earn a ride from the driver. Soaked and filthy, drunk and forlorn, I was about to open my cape and expose my naked body when I recognized Riley, kindly old Riley, whose cab I had ridden in many times and the very one who had driven John Paul to our apartments that evening.

"Evening, Miss Marietta. Are you set on drowning yourself this devil's night?" Riley called down.

"Yes."

"There are blankets inside the cab. Get yourself in there. I'd get down and help you but my legs, you know, aren't what they were. Where to?"

"I don't know yet, but I'll ride up front with you, Mr. Riley."

Yes, Riley too, I thought, as I let the idea take full shape in my twisted mind. To degrade myself with

lowlifes and brutes in the befogged shadows was one thing, but to do it with a kindly old gent I had known for years quite another. I was ready to destroy my good name and standing, my history, my entire life, and then be sent away to an asylum or a convent, if I lived.

I climbed up into the driver's seat and, shivering, tucked myself under Riley's arm to get warm first before I did anything to him. He clutched me to him in a fatherly way.

"And what have you come out as for tonight's masquerade?" he asked.

"My true self."

"No mask, I see."

"No mask at all."

"An original idea," said Riley. "You know, I drove John Paul to your flat just before. He was much changed for the better and I wonder if you've seen him yet."

"You must be mistaken. John Paul is dead, drowned at sea."

"But..."

Instead of doing anything dirty, I broke into weeping against the old man, sobbing into his coat.

"I understand," he said, patting her shoulder. "Many years ago, your mother cried in my arms in the same way and probably for similar reasons, over some young man. It's a good thing your passionate

blood is rare, or such loving would drive all men out of their minds."

"What am I to do?"

"Perhaps you should go visit John Paul at your flat where he is surely waiting for you."

"No, never. He is dead. Take me to The Raven, Mr. Riley."

"But, Miss...John Paul is so anxious to see you, and he is laden with gifts from abroad."

"I don't care. To The Raven, please, Mr. Riley, before I go somewhere far worse."

Feeling the strength of my will, Old Riley acceded.

## Chapter Five

I struggled to pull the heavy wooden door of The Raven open against the driving wind, and after I squeezed myself inside, the door sucked violently shut behind me with a loud, dull thump that had a certain finality to it. All the patrons in the room turned their gazes in my direction and the man on the small stage stopped his recitation.

There were about three dozen people inside, mostly men, a few women. The warm, low-ceilinged room was lit mostly by candles like a sacristy, and a fire burned in a bright hearth behind some tables at the back. The room gave the impression of being smaller than it was, the patrons enmeshed in shadow drawn together by a closing purse of darkness, huddled yet separate. The shadows hardened the faces into masks robbed of detail, except for deep eye sockets and blank, stitched mouths.

The only sign of the revel was a man wearing a gold paper crown and holding a plain stick for a scepter. He sat in the largest chair in the room as if it were a throne and he the king, in actuality a dwarf sitting up on many pillows.



The Raven, suitably named after the famous poem by the American Edgar Poe, was populated by musicians, poets, writers, artists, actors, vagabonds, romantics, alchemists, philosophers, homosexuals, lesbians, runaway soldiers cured of war by war, opium addicts and other outcasts. With no family but each other, they were sustained, accepted, bound closely together by the world's rejection. I had heard of the place for years and always wanted to go there.

"Go on with your poem, George," said the dwarf king. "If the ax be truth, let the chips fall where they may."

"You'll get nothing but the truth from me, ever."

"Is that your beloved at the door?" someone asked. "Such things happen. Maybe you have conjured the past with your poem."

"No, it's not Jacqueline but she was just as young and beautiful."

I acknowledged George's compliment with a smile. Seeing the light of the hearth, I went toward it to get warm. I sat on a bench off to the side of the fire, my back against the boards of a wall.

George stood on a small stage holding a manuscript, a squat, round-faced man with bright gleaming eyes and thick curly graying hair springing out wildly around his head. He read a long narrative poem in rhymed couplets about Jacqueline, who had broken his heart when he was young, and how

exactly she had done it and how he had won her back and how she had done it again and how he suffered and was suffering still, as if life had stopped for him at that time, frozen forever. George spoke with a resonant voice, melodic but hard to understand because of his tremulous emotion, but no matter; it put me in a trance of remembering my own sufferings. George was better than a droning organ for sailing away into sad memories and I quickly sailed there, thinking of John Paul. A deep sadness came over me. I needed drink again and plenty of it and signaled to the bar maid who came over with a tray.

“Yes, Miss.”

“I want brandy but haven’t a penny.”

I opened my cape and exposed my body for all to see. Conversation ceased and poor George fell silent again and, stuck in time, hung his head, unable to stand this sight which reminded him so much of the past. The others, who revered beauty, drank me in with their eyes.

What have we here, they must have been thinking. A naked beauty intent on extremes. A dark force in our midst. They respected the power of emotion and would stand back in obedience of its will. They were not lowlifes like Metcalf and Camp who would commit any sin they could get away with, nor were they like Stanton, spurred to brutality by

any weakness. They were dreamers sensitive to the needs of the soul. To them, life was a dream. If a girl needed to act something out, they would let her act it out, but they would not force their wills upon her. It was her dream, after all.

"Oh my," said the young bar maid, who was the daughter of the owner of The Raven, when she saw my naked body. "But you're stained with mud and littered with grass and leaves. I'll bring you a drink and a warm cloth to clean your face and body."

"Continue, George," commanded the king.

George did, and the bar maid returned with a shot of brandy that I swallowed in one gulp.

"Another, please," I said. "Though I have nothing to pay with you but my true self."

"Don't worry about that, Miss. My father told me to bring my lady whatever she wants this night."

"Thank you. The whole bottle, please, and hurry."

The girl returned with the bottle, and I put it to my lips and slugged down a long draught.

Up on stage, George finished reading his poem.

*the door closed that night with her leaving  
and closes every night since with my grieving,  
Jacqueline Jacqueline Jacqueline*

A strange reaction. Silence. Alone among them, moved by the poem, I clapped, and then surprisingly the others clapped with me, though silent absorption, I think, would have been their usual reaction. My presence was changing things as if I were visiting royalty. A man with a guitar mounted the stage and sat in a plain wooden chair and began to play in the Spanish fashion, a slow, graceful bolero infused with underground heat.

The bar maid returned, knelt down and began to wash me, first my face and then, shyly, my chest with a hot wet cloth, and the people in the room hushed at the scene. The young girl cleansing my breasts inspired these people who loved beauty and also inspired transcendent skill in the guitarist on stage. In fact, he silently wept at his own songs.

The bar maid, a pretty girl with a raccoon's mask of freckles, took such gentle care, that my heart and memory were touched. I remembered how, as a young girl, when I was ill and bed-ridden, my companion Lucy took such care of me, applying compresses and rubbing my feet and hands, feeding me lemony tea with a spoon and telling stories about animals who could talk. How happy I had been then, I thought, and how innocent and, even when Lucy and I explored each other's bodies and I had discovered my powerful inner drives, there was no

shame, not like tonight when I was using shame to kill loving.

"There, Miss," said the girl, blushing, unable to look me in the eye. Now my skin glowed with a fine heat and my brain was on fire the infusion of brandy.

"Come closer."

The girl leaned in closer, still looking down. I put my hand under her chin to lift her gaze.

"Look at me."

"Yes, Miss."

The girl did and I saw a candle flame in her eyes, dark rooms illuminated by desire, and I envied the girl her freshness.

"Always remember, loving is all. Never, never give up on love. Even my defilement is proof of my love," I said and kissed the girl briefly on the mouth and stood, pulling her to her feet. We danced, slowly to the bolero, my cape open, the girl's warmth along my naked body, and every person there watched us and longed to take the bar maid's place, I knew.

I put my lips to the girl's forehead and, reminded of Lucy, inhaled the fresh scent of her hair and scalp. The girl's body warmed, a light sweat glazed her skin, and she, confused by new desires, I think, began to squirm in my arms like a restless sleeper, sliding and pushing against me. My flesh came alive. My nipples hardened and ached to be touched, my cunt was

suddenly hot and wet, the first inkling of desire I had on that debauch. I clutched the girl to me.

"Daddy," the girl called in distress to her father behind the bar.

Her father and a few other men came over and wrestled the girl out of my arms. As the bolero rose to a passionate crescendo, I fought to get away from them, hot, crazed, thrashing wildly.

"Stop the music, Rodrigo," said the dwarf king. "She's going to hurt herself or someone else."

The music stopped and I desisted. The men let go of me when I relaxed, but then I grabbed one, young, handsome and sleepless-looking, by the front of his shirt and kissed him on the mouth. He touched his lips with a tentative hand as if they didn't belong to him anymore.

"Fuck me," I commanded the young man, who backed away.

"No, sorry, no."

"Well, then, someone else fuck me. I'll take anyone. I'll take everyone."

No one moved.

"What are you, monks?" I cajoled them. "I said, you may all have your way with me. See how beautiful I am and made for pleasure. Now get busy."

I stood up on a table and shed my cape. As flames and the shadows of flames played over my body, the patrons seemed awestruck by my beauty and form. I

put my arms out and turned slowly round, in order that all could see and want me in my fullness, and then with an uncanny melting, I spun myself down to the surface of the table and lay back down so the ravishment could begin. But no one did anything. They looked at each other, questions in their eyes.

"What is wrong with everybody? Must I find another altar in another tavern where I can undo the marriage of my soul to stupid John Paul?"

"That's a terrible idea," said the dwarf king. "The Raven is an island of calm and civility tonight while the wild sea of the revel boils round. There are savages out tonight who will devour you alive."

"I'm not afraid of that, I welcome it."

"Who are you?"

"My true self. Now get busy on me before I seek what I want elsewhere."

The dwarf king stood up on his throne and addressed everyone.

"I'm no king for giving orders. Let's put it to a vote."

"She should be held safe with us until she regains herself," said a sturdy man without a single hair on his head. He had a deep, commanding voice and clear authority in that place. This was Simon Burton, a traveler, writer, and frequent contributor to the city's journals and newspapers, respected by everyone there for his knowledge, kindness, and good sense.

And it turned out, he had been a lover of my mother's, once upon a time, and would be again.

"I agree with Simon," said someone else, and all chimed in, voting for my safety. But the vote didn't matter, because at that moment the door swung open, and Stanton came into the room to collect, as was his habit, his protection money from the owner, to bully the men and grope the defenseless women.

I thought, Stanton, good coup de grace. I said, "Hello, again, Sergeant." I lay on my back and pulled my body down so my cunt was at the edge of the table to give him easier access. I spread my legs. Stanton didn't waste any time. What was excellent once was better twice, and the penalty, if there was ever going to be one, just the same. His erection sprung huge. He placed it at my vagina's opening, but before he could shove into me for the second time that night, Simon Burton smashed a bottle on top of his head. Stanton fell over backwards, out cold on the floor. A pent-up cheer sounded in the room. Stanton had bullied them for far too long, and though later there would be hell to pay, now they cheered.

"Now what is this talk of altars and marriages and stupid John Paul?" Simon asked.

I told everyone the story.

"But surely there are other men besides this John Paul, any man in the land for someone as beautiful as



you," said a pretty woman, very desirable in her own right.

"No, he is my fated one, the stupid idiot, and when tonight is over, he will be dead in my heart and I will be dead in my body and join a convent."

"I understand," said Simon. "I think I know who you are. You must be a relative to Estelle Kensington."

"I am Marietta Kensington, daughter of the late Charles Kensington and of my mother Estelle Kensington. The passions of my family are well known in the city. If I had loved you or you or you instead of John Paul Cobb, it would be the same, but he is my fate."

"We have all heard of you, of course, and I know your mother," Simon said.

"In the biblical sense, Simon?" asked the dwarf king.

Simon laughed. He wasn't telling.

"I know that none of us, if we had gained your love, would have been foolish enough to throw it away like your John Paul did," said the young man I had kissed.

"Fuck him out of my heart then."

The door was locked. Stanton was roped to a post.

With a sly smile, Simon Burton asked me if he might taste of me first, before the fucking began.

"I'm sure you taste like the sweet dew of morning," Simon said.

"So I've been told," I said. "But before you fuck me, I want you all to know that I paint and play the piano and perform in theatricals and write poetry and stories, that I believe in the transformative power of art, and that I had always heard about The Raven and felt a kinship with you before I ever came in here tonight. Indeed, this is why I came, because I knew you would understand me."

Ah, I was naïve, but a girl still.

"I have one more question: Would Mademoiselle Kensington be disposed to enjoying herself?" Simon asked me.

"No, this is something else than that."

Just as I had before for Stanton, I lay back on the table with my cunt at its edge, the triangle of fine hair covering my soft labyrinth of flesh presented thus and accessible to anyone who wanted me. Simon knelt before the offering.

"Beauty is truth and truth beauty, that is all ye know on Earth and all ye need ever know," he said quoting the great poet John Keats, long since dead at a terribly young age.

Simon, a well-traveled journalist and trader in exotic goods from Persia, Afghanistan, India and China, places he often visited and had just returned from, was a practitioner of Kama Sutra, the Hindu art

of contemplative lovemaking. He blew his warm breath over my cunt announcing his presence, showing the others the proper reverence for such an encounter, and providing me a hint that I was about to enjoy myself when before it had not been at all about my pleasure. Simon was a master sensualist and a natural teacher who believed the flesh was a divine gift, a manifestation of godliness that should never be defiled, and he was intent on teaching me a lesson.

Simon kissed and gently bit my thighs. He licked and kissed the creases where my legs joined my torso and nuzzled the hair on my cunt with his humming mouth. He opened his mouth wide and took the hair and flesh of my cunt between his teeth, clamped gently down and moved his head from side to side, making my clitoris come alive without directly touching it. The image of a jaguar clamped on the neck of his mate as he mounted her came into my mind. Biting that wasn't biting. Devouring that didn't consume but replenished. The power to do harm and the choice not to. To my surprise, I was getting hot and there, in full public display, surrendering to pleasure with a man for the first time in a year and the first time in two years with any man but John Paul.

With gentle, practiced fingers, Simon spread the petals of my cunt. His tongue slowly swabbed my

opening and swabbed and smoothed its way up, following the intricate folds and crevices to my clitoris, briefly and coyly stopping there, *Hello*, and then, *Goodbye*, he kissed many kisses back down along the curved path of my pubis to my opening again and then back up he went with his tongue, *Hello again, my pet*. Teasing, flirting with my clitoris, a master I was bound, not just to obey, but to follow every one of his subtle, intricate movements. I reached with both hands and held Simon's bald head, to feel his intense, apt concentration, and finally when I couldn't stand it anymore, when he brought me to demand it, I guided his mouth up to stay fully focused on my clitoris and he obliged with a knowing smile I could feel as his lips spread across my folds. Oh he was a sly torturer, was Simon Burton.

Thus commanded by my grip on him, Simon's lips and tongue had a long conversation with my clitoris, my thimble of wild delight as I had christened it, born first in the warm seas of girlish pleasure with Lucy. My eyes closed, my lips parted, my breath quickened, a thin glaze of sweat painted my forehead and cheeks. With his mouth opened wide around my pubic bone, his lips fully pressing my flesh atop and below my clitoris, Simon licked my flesh thimble rhythmically and widely, creating a double sensation, of suction and smooth exquisite friction, and starting an urgent sensation in stronger and stronger waves

deep inside my body. The warm glow turned to burning heat inside me, my nerves hummed and throbbed, my cunt condensed into a tight bud ready to burst into blossom and then as the currents exploded into orgasm and showered my womb, I screamed but didn't know I was screaming. I became my own scream and only recognized myself in its final echoes.

After that, aglow, tingling, nerves humming, I subsided for many minutes in a warm dream, my clitoris too sensitive to be touched. When I was ready to receive the others, each person ate of me in their own fashion, the few women delicately, the men more widely and generally, their moustaches tickling, those with day old or two day old whiskers scraping, the poets more poetically, I imagined, the painters more painterly, the musicians musically, the defrocked priests with requisite awe, but each person for a short time only, because there were so many in line, and my pleasure was always cut short until the dwarf king, who didn't have to kneel but stood at the perfectly right height, took his royal prerogative and, kissing my cunt as if it was a mouth kissing him back, brought me to orgasm by putting my clitoris behind his teeth and flicking it with the tip of his powerful tongue. Dwarves, concentrated in their persons, are well known for delivering such sexual charges. In all, twenty-seven patrons ate of me that night. I counted

in order to be able to torture John Paul with the number later on.

Coming to myself again, the brandy clearing my brain, I felt something totally new; a loving bond with humanity, at least the good people, not the Stantons, alongside my love for John Paul. Maybe this is how a Christian sister feels, I thought, doing her good deeds of love and care and why they can practice celibacy. Maybe I am in my convent here at The Raven, a convent suited to my nature, I thought, ruled by passionate permission instead of pious prohibition.

This meal of me hardly seemed a defilement but a ritual sacrament at the shrine of my body; the people lining up like penitents, a little guilty, perhaps, not quite sure, the men with their hats in their hands, to wait their turn. I was touched by their politeness and seriousness to perform well, like choirboys at Sunday mass with me as the holy mother, the opposite of a virgin, but the nurturing holy mother just the same. I felt calmed by my bond with humanity and wondered if I should actually go through with the fucking of me that was supposed follow.

First for that fucking was Simon Burton again. He put my thighs on his shoulders and placed the head of his cock at my opening between the petals of my cunt. He was a strong sturdy man in his fifties who could no doubt outwork and outhike men half his age.

"Before I start, is it still all right, Mademoiselle Kensington?"

"Yes, Simon, go ahead. Do with me what you will."

"One thing," he said. "We must look in each other's eyes the whole time."

"But why?"

"Trust me."

As Simon and I locked eyes, he pushed into me just a bit, an inch at the most. I smiled at him. I liked Simon. He seemed kind, considerate, manly, and like a sage in sexual matters, trying to bring me around to a more positive view of life and my body again. Simon's cock exited me so the petals of my cunt barely touched its head, never losing contact, pausing at my opening, before he entered me again a little further this time and then back out, and then a little further in and back out, slowly increasing the amount of penetration each time, dipping, then wading, then plunging, which had the effect of riveting my eyes to his as if we were partners in a slow dance of passion. This Simon was really very good and wise in the way he went about something other than lust and the quick satisfaction of the body's needs, something deeper and more lasting. In his wisdom, I was to think later, Simon wasn't exorcizing John Paul but was exorcizing Metcalf and Stanton and my fury too and making a new place for John Paul Cobb again.

Simon's cock was long and thick with a big round head, a thick rimmed helmet, perfect for stimulating my vagina's entryway and long enough to reach all the way to what felt like heaven inside me. The effects were remarkable, a slow, intense orgasm of which I was completely conscious in all its detail, while looking Simon in the eyes, more like a slow, peaceful drowning than the wild flying orgasms I had with John Paul. I thought, I'll have to teach this to John Paul, before I corrected myself, since of course, this fucking was the exorcism of John Paul. I didn't scream when I came but laughed softly, like the water of a brook over its stones. My fluids gushed and warmth spread through my body along with love and generosity toward mankind. Simon, strangely, didn't allow himself to shoot his seed, but merely backed away with a smile after my orgasm. He had trained himself to do that and claimed it would allow him to live to be a hundred years old, if he wanted.

Each new man, following Simon's example, put my thighs on his shoulders and asked permission to enter me. Some fucked me gently and deferentially, some fast and grunting, their faces distorting, until their seed showered my insides and I was as the earth under a rain. I didn't feel sexual pleasure, as I had with Simon, just this great harmonious warmth as if I were a goddess taking care of her realm, her dominion in the pantheon of love. In all, nineteen



men fucked me that night, that's the twenty-seven who ate of me before, minus the three women and minus five men, including George, who didn't feel able to perform in public. When it was over, I stood up, my legs shaking, my rage quieted, my soul at peace. I kissed Simon on the forehead and collapsed.

## Chapter Six

It was sunup when Simon Burton and I returned to my rooms. John Paul was there, as I knew he would be, the gash on his cheek stitched by a surgeon, the long scar to be our ever-present reminder of the dangers of not heeding love's sacred power. John Paul had been waiting most of the night, hopeless and hopeful, bereft and beautiful in his suffering. He had suffered dearly for loving me halfway. Did I want him to suffer? Yes, I did, apparently, and I have often asked myself, is this true love? I don't know, but it's how I do it. My heart will not be toyed with by uncertainty or cowardice. You are either ready to love me or you aren't, man enough or not. No games. No halfway measures. Or you shall reap the whirlwind.

With Simon standing at the ready to defend me should he need to, I sat down close to John Paul on the couch and inhaled once more his smell that was so very lovely to me, a scent of sweet milk akin to the flower baby's breath. I then told him what I had done that night in all its terrible detail and then, looking hard into his eyes, eyes so much wiser and sadder

than they ever had been before, said to him, "Love me now, John Paul. Will you love me now?"

John Paul covered his face with his hands and wept. I put my arm around his shoulders and felt them shake with sobs as he accepted his fate.

"Yes," he said into his hands. "Yes, I will."

"And truly forgive me?"

"Yes, I will."

Later that very morning, John Paul told me he wanted just one wedding present from me in return: that we sail to America and live there together first because he couldn't imagine staying in Liverpool among people who knew of my debauch, and second because he had just been to San Francisco and had fallen in love with the city. It would be a new start for us. And, of course, with no hesitation, craving adventure, I granted him his wish, and so it was that John Paul, Mother, and I came to reside here in 1878.

~ The End ~

## ~ About the Author ~

Daniel Burnell's literary erotic stories have or will appear in many of the foremost literary erotic journals including Fishnet Magazine, MainStream Erotica, For The Girls, The Erotic Woman, Coming Together, Lyrotica, and several anthologies from Cleis Books. This is his first novella.