

STEPS

**a novella by
Steve Hussy**

1

Working in that bar started it. I had to drink hard to slide through time more easily.

The problem was the bar was linked to a holiday centre. You see some real humanity serving people whose idea of a holiday is to eat the same food and drink the same drink, go out to the same type of place and watch the same shit... Spend the same time with the same people in the same country.

Those lazy-eyed mouthbreathers just felt they were “away” – a notion reinforced by staying in the shithole holiday homes and drinking more than usual. Trying to keep them happy with booze was like firefighting with kerosene.

No right-minded good-looking woman would visit there when they could get a holiday funded by a decent job or a loose-pocketed guy. So even that pleasure was limited to the rare developed and undeformed daughter of a fuckwit...

“Can I ‘ave an Archers ‘n’ lemonade?”

She’d be about 16. Short skirt with “ANGEL” written across her ass, make-up that part-destroyed a decent enough face.

And I’d look quizzical and she’d grow alarmed.

“Err... puh-leeese?”

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And she'd lean over the bar and bare some greying teeth and her cleavage would be presented on a wonderbra shelf.

Ah, fuck it... "You wanna double?"

20 hours a week in that bar, watching the same types over and over. That crushing feeling of always having your expectations lived up to. With each dullard, each pubescent whore, each bland dead-eyed wife, I hated being proved right. Cynicism is mostly laziness but in that bar it was all there was.

Time given and time wasted to buy space elsewhere... Enough to make my eyes bulge at times. Enough to eventually wake me up... at the boarding house.

So I'd blast out of my job at 12pm, back there... home.

Ms. Devgan would be there most nights cleaning the lobby... watching out.

"Hi baby!" She'd smile and her bright eyes would flit around: "You ok?"

She was in the groundfloor flat, behind a tapestry screen she'd put up. "How has your tummy been? You looked so pale, I could see it yeah?"

"Hey, Ms. Devgan... I'm ok thanks... Thanks though."

I figured she was the mother-in-law of the landlord because he'd sneered at her when I looked around. But I liked her.

"Here, baby," she rushed in, popped out again, "take this." A little baggie of ginger.

"Thanks, that's really good of you."

She twitched, looked at me slyly, whispered... "Come here, baby." I went closer. "Emma's got a boy up tonight so be careful ok, yeah?"

"Ok, Ms. Devgan."

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“Night, baby.”

She loved it, mothering the people there... Young, travelling, doing some part-time college course... She liked to watch proceedings rather than intrude, often the mark of class.

I guess she was trying to keep the riff-raff out.

I didn't have the heart to tell her they were already in.

2

---We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.---

I climbed those stairs with the thinning carpet, went into the toilet.

“Oh!” came out of me.

Emma was riding some fat dick in the tub. He looked astonished, monged out... all wide eyes and bland flabby features. My eyes found Emma's pimply ass peeking out from under a black shiny top... all these bright red pimples on a big duck ass. I couldn't see any other forbidden skin, just that ass, that ass she juttled out and wobbled when she walked.

“Want me to shut the door?” I asked.

They nodded quickly and I shut it.

I pissed in the toilet, desperately needing to let out that night's booze. It took a while.

Halfway through I heard them starting to fuck away again. It was dry... desperate.

It wasn't all bad. Ms. Devgan cleaned the shared toilet

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facilities... she did it almost psychotically. You might catch a stray pubic hair if you went in the morning but mostly you were fine. And I usually pissed in my room anyway...

The room is still there, stored in my head. 12 by 12 of detail. The cheapest I could find in the area but plenty good enough... a decent bed, no rats, only the odd cockroach. Burn mark riding up the right-hand wall, stains on the shit brown carpet - all offset by having that sink... good enough to piss and jerk off in. I liked it... my own cave.

I'd lay down in my bed and feel it, feel something different. I didn't know what. I'd draw up the whisky to my mouth and let it slide down. "Why did I say that?" I'd ask myself over something trivial at the bar. "What if you did this?" I'd analyse it until my stomach churned.

I reached over and took some of the ginger from the baggie.

And the bats would start to crawl above from the roofspace and I'd hear them talking to each other chitterchitterchitter crawling over each other chitterchitterchitter probably fucking away but still chitterchitterchitterchitter. They'd keep going until five, six... I didn't know how many were up there, but it felt like thousands. I'd open the shit brown curtains and watch them, these dark angular forms flying erratically, lurching up down around while the rest still chattered away, above, sometimes just in my head.

And my mind would crawl with them as in the room below someone would start fucking away. Fucking in the bed or fucking against the door, some poster rustling away... stroke, rustle, stroke, rustle. Erg Erg Erg Oooo Erg Erg Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh... Quick, desperate fucks. Quick, desperate people.

I knew I had to keep going. Had to keep going to sleep and

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try to wake the next morning... try to knock down that chattering in my head with booze, with porn, with anything.

I wanted to hug, to fuck, to have anything so they would be close to me. I felt lost, swimming in the shit, confused, with that need, that fucking need... That voice inside, loneliness, that voice that was tired of my right hand, that was raised by the whisky. I disliked my feelings, they twisted my cynicism, the truth I'd created, but they were there... they SCREAMED.

Concentrate chitter-ahhh concentrate chitter-erg
CONCENTRATE chitter-aaaaah mmmmmmm FUCK IT FUCK
IT FUCK IT.

3

***---We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human
being the exact nature of our wrongs.---***

I heard him first through the wall. He was jerking off, talking to his cock:

“Come on, COME ON.”

The walls were thin, thin enough to smell the cum if my sense couldn't stop me.

“Yeah yeah that's it, YEAH!”

I tried to block myself off. I listened to music through a personal stereo, tried to use the shared kitchen and the shared toilet as little as possible. But it was impossible. I needed human contact, even in some tiny sense. I'd beaten it down but it was bred into me. A social animal.

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I met him in the kitchen, cooking pasta. My microwave couldn't manage that. It was 12.30, I'd got back from work and felt the hunger pangs. A bottle of red was already open.

"Hi," I said, feeling myself shrink, wanting to get away.

"Hey there... Brad..." American accent.

Brad extended a hand. He was big, tall, muscular. Grey-blue fixed eyes... Scary.

I shook the hand: "Err... you want a drink?" I motioned at the bottle.

I'd drink two or three bottles of wine a day. Or a half-bottle of spirits. Far from heroic, trust me. It was mostly whisky... seemed better than the paintstripper gin or cheap vodka that reeked like nail-varnish remover.

"Sure... Merlot?" he said. I liked that.

We went back to his room. Same box as mine... cleaner though. A few books on the shelves, a tapestry on the wall, incense burning. Huge army-style kit bag in the corner.

"What do you do?" he asked, the question everyone wants to know.

"I'm training to be a teacher." No response. "You?"

"I'm travelling... Through Europe."

We talked a while. He had a half-bottle of whisky himself and shared it happily.

"What'd you do... before now?"

"I was a Marine," he said.

"Yeah? You were in the Gulf?"

"Yeah."

"What'd you do?" I'd never met a marine before. "There, I mean."

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“Everyone asks that... I worked comms. Behind shit. Keeping stuff together. Nothing much, no fighting.”

“You see anything?”

“Yeah... everyone asks that...”

“Yeah?”

“Ok... Look, we worked cleanup. Bodybagging, that shit. So yeah I saw stuff... Shit... One guy in a cab, the top half of him. The other half was laying in the road. We had to... shovel ‘em up... had these little fold-out shovels... stick ‘em in the same bag, you know?”

I sat. I wasn’t much good with conversation, sometimes words would catch in my throat so I’d end up just sitting there. So I tried to listen more than talk, but then words raised up anyway and I’d think I’d said the wrong thing. I sensed people’s feelings. Put them on myself.

“You want another drink?” he asked.

“Errr, yeah... ok.”

He poured it.

--- END OF SAMPLE ---

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