

# THE PARROT

by Jon Boilard

I was drinking Jack & Cokes in the back with Pablo. Scotchie was a painter and he lived in a van with two dogs that he referred to as his kids. He knocked on the door and tried to see inside. He'd heard the music blaring even from the street. Uzo let him in. Uzo used to play rugby in New Zealand. There was bamboo everywhere. Pablo was going for an island theme in his cafe. He thought that would attract more customers. We were taking a break from creating paradise. Scotchie told us they threw him out of the Ocean Avenue Club again. He could hardly stand up. He said he wanted to finish his parrot. It was a mural in the middle of the floor, about ten feet by ten feet. It was magnificent. Yellow and green and red and ocean blue. He was an artist. He painted signs and houses too but mostly he was an artist. I mixed him a vodka tonic when he went to get his brushes. Pablo turned the Hendrix down a bit and made ham sandwiches and we sat around and watched Scotchie work. He liked to have an audience. Uzo fell asleep.

Jenny Two Drinks came by. She had a thing for me. I took her in the back and closed the curtain. We sat on Pablo's mattress and talked for a while. She was in a foul mood. She was waiting tables and she wasn't very good at it. She didn't like getting things for people. I told her that was going to be a problem in her chosen line of work. I told her that with her body she could be a stripper. She could dance at Crazy Horse or Centerfolds and make five hundred bucks a night. She didn't know if she should believe me or not but she was already feeling better. I got her to strip for me right there even though she was nervous at first about somebody walking in.

Uzo had to take a piss so we got dressed. He said he was sorry. Jenny Two Drinks blushed. She was so embarrassed that she left and asked me to come by her apartment later. I told her I might. She lived just around the corner. Scotchie was in rare form. He was barefoot now and the legs of his pants were rolled up like he was some kind of beach comber. He was holding a bucket of black paint over the parrot that was almost finished, tilting it so the paint was almost spilling out, telling Pablo he was going to kill it. I'm going to kill the fucking bird, he said. Pablo just laughed. Uzo dared him to do it. Scotchie looked at me like I was his last hope. He wanted somebody to tell him not to do it. He wanted somebody to tell him that his parrot was beautiful. It was beautiful. It was a perfect bird and I didn't want him to do it. The guy really had talent. I don't know why but I didn't say anything and he spilled a little bit of the black paint on the short hooked bill. Then he lost his balance and slipped and the bucket overturned completely. Then he was covered in black paint and his parrot was ruined. He tried to get up but he slipped and fell again, only making it worse. He laid there like that and sobbed. Then there was something in his eyes that I hadn't seen before. A clarity. His dogs were barking in the van parked outside.

Pablo told him he was a disgrace and made him leave. He physically dragged him outside by his belt, leaving a black trail to the front door. He gave him some of the cash he owed for the tropical scenes on the walls, actually throwing the money at him, but wouldn't pay for the parrot he'd wrecked. Uzo got a mop and tried to clean it up. It wasn't totally gone. But we knew that nobody but Scotchie would be able to finish it the right way and he said he was never coming back. He'd worn out his welcome on Ocean Avenue and was probably going up north where he came from. He had Oregon plates on his van.

He stood outside the cafe and shook his fists at Pablo. He screamed at the top of his lungs and left hand prints on the glass storefront. Then the cops pulled up and we hid in the back with the lights off until they had taken him away. He was maced and hog tied. They left his van there and his dogs were going nuts the whole time.

When Jenny Two Drinks let me in I could see where her boyfriend hit her again. She told me he was waiting for her when she got home and he could smell me on her. He told her he was going to kill me. I told her not to worry. He was just a kid like her and he always bragged about carrying a gun and running with a gang. I remembered those days. He just needed somebody to teach him a lesson. The one about keeping your hands to yourself when it comes to women. I hadn't showered in a few days so she let me use hers and she got in there with me. We were playful with the soap and shampoo and she used my hair to give me horns like a devil. Afterward we stayed naked for a long time and watched television and smoked a little grass. Studying her pretty face in the blue light that flickered I thought about that parrot and wondered how it was possible that an old drunk like Scotchie could create something so lovely, with such vivid plumage.

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