



Lead Valentines for Wang: A Dick Burns Minit Mrdr®
William Garner & monkeyrotica

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Chapter 1

The Scotsman from Shanghai

I was burning ants on my windowsill with a magnifying glass when the office door flew open with a satisfying crash. In the sunlit doorway stood what looked like a sumo wrestler in a plaid skirt. He wore a Black Watch cap, a green wool kilt with sporrans, plaid knee socks. His head was wide, orange, flat and oily, like a block of sweating cheddar. I recognized the O’Houlihan tartan, but this joker was about as Irish as the Dalai Lama. He smelled like a well-used gym sock full of badly fermented tofu.

“Yew Dick Barrns?” His brogue was thick enough to spread on a rice-cake.

“That depends. You from the student loan company?”

He thought about that one for a while, enough time for me to put a hand on my .45 in case Rob Roy got any ideas. “Ahm nay from ta stooden loon coompane, Misser Barrns.” This goon was not quick on the draw; one point in my favor. “Me name’s Wang. Me friends, thay call may Black Irish.”

“That ain’t my fault.” I brushed the smoking ants from the sill, wiped my dirty palm off on my seersucker slacks.

“I’ve need o’ yar sarvices, Barrns.”

“That’s MISTER Burns to you. Have a goddam seat.”

I motioned him over to my elephant’s footstool, torched up a blunt. Black Irish was a massive lug, six-foot-eight of bulky Asian. He was the worst kind, too: bald, butt-ugly and an accent you could pound nails with. His knuckles dragged little grooves through the shag carpet as he crept to the stool. It made a pathetic, drowning sound as he sat on it, like a sinking barge. He definitely ate his share of Wheaties, though. Either that or he was getting steroids pumped in places most people have a hard time washing. His size didn’t scare me, but the lump beneath his kilt made me consider renewing my insurance policy.

“Well, Mr. Wang, I charge a hundred bucks a day, plus expenses. In

your case, I'm charging you for the door you pummeled."

"Name yare price, Misser Barnes," he replied. "I need ya ta be findin' me niece, Lola. Lass week, she done...disappeart."

"The name's Burns. OK? Not Barns. Shit."

The Chinaman reached up his kilt, handed me a grainy snapshot. The girl looked like the typical runaway teen prostitute that humps the 14th Street corridor, hitting up on out-of-town conventioners looking to get their hoses stretched. When those types aren't getting their skulls whacked open by their pimps, they're spreading diseases that make a john's shaft look like a boiled squid. Lola looked like a midwestern metal bitch: burnt peroxide perm, powder blue denim dress with moccasin fringe, and a make-up job that looked like it came from the K-Mart blue-light special box. It'd be a damn shame if a girl like her was muling the streets. The thought of Lola doing the horizontal tango with some morbidly obese Shriner made me want to abandon my lunch. I pocketed the photo.

"Niece, eh? Can't say that I see the resemblance?" I puffed at my blunt and offered one to the Chinaman. He shook his fat, oily head. It made a sound like a hot water bottle.

"She's me adopted niece, Misser Barns," he sniffed. "Ah ware lonely. Ah needed a companion."

"Why didn't you get a parrot? You look like the kind of jake who needs a parrot."

"Ah parrot kin nay make a mahn happy lahk a wee lass, iffen ye git me drift."

"Straight UP."

"Ah ware sitten alone in me 'partment, watchin Newt on C-Span when 'e started a talkin' bout orphanages. 'At got mah thinkin. Ah rooshed town an'picked Lola outta a dozen blonde lasses 'tween ta ages o' fourteen an' twenty-six. Aye, she looked so dahrlin' in 'er lil' french maid outfit wi' tose black fishnet stockins!" The Chinaman was lost in a reverie.

"You got the number of this 'orphanage'?"

The Chinaman snapped out of it. "Well, eh, after tat farest night wi' ta oatmeal and ta clogs, ah... ah got real attached to 'er. Ah asked hair ta marry me ta next day." He seized up, stared down at his sweating white-knuckeled fists like he was squeezing out yesterday's porridge.

I ran my fingers through my goateed chin. "Lemme guess. She laughed in your face and told you she was saving herself for a real man, right?" The Chinaman nodded silently, made a pouting noise. This was

the part of the job I hated. I walked around my desk, patted him on the back reassuringly. "I feel for ya, Holmes. If I had a nickel for every time a woman pitched me that line. First there was Sister Annette, then there was the babysitter..."

He looked up with tears in his bloodshot eyes. "She said ah could ne'er give 'er wha' 'at lousy Red gives 'er."

I knocked him across the back of his head with my forearm. "Don't interrupt! Who the hell's Red?"

"E's me half-broother, Misser Barns," he growled, digging his fingers into his hands. Blood squirted from his chubby palms onto the crusty shag carpet. I was beginning to like this guy.

"Mind where you're bleeding, Paddy. Took me a week to get my last client's bloodstains out of that carpet." Fucking foreigners. Let them in the country, they start bleeding everywhere. "And quit calling me 'Barns.'"

"Sorry, but ah gits so mad tinkin' 'bout it! 'Im and Lola been doing it on ta sly fare weeks now. Ah thin' they've doon run away togethah."

"You gotta picture of this Red?"

The Chinaman reached into his kilt again, produced a grainy Polaroid. I got to thinking that Felix the Cat had nothing on this guy's kilt. I sat back in my tubular steel recliner. Wang's brother Red lived up to his name. The guy was albino and looked pinker than a tabasco-soaked Anabaptist lobster in hell. He wore Armani sunglasses, gel in his white hair, a pinstripe Versace double-breasted number with a gardenia in his breast pocket. I slipped the photo on top of Lola's.

"So how old is this Lola of yours?"

"She doon be fifteen thees Januaray."

"And you're her legal 'guardian,' huh? Hmmmm." I picked my nose, leaned back in my chair. "Mr. Wang, what we have here is statutory rape and a potential violation of the Mann Act. That's transporting an under-age female across state lines for immoral purposes. Possibly kidnapping, too, but I can't make that stick unless we get something in the mail like a ransom note or a severed finger or something. For all I know, she could be another runaway. Judging by your cologne, I'm inclined to go with the latter."

He shook his head wearily. "Ah'll geev ya wha'evah ya need. Jess git me lil' garahl back!" He handing me his business card with his phone number and e-mail address. I was tired of looking him. His type made me sick; poking little kids and when they walk, hire an idiot like me to reel them back in. I hate women. I showed Black Irish Wang to the

doorway.

“Ah means it Misser Barnes. Ya name eet, ah’ll get it far ya.”

“For the time being, I only need one thing from you, Mr. Wang.”

“Jess name it, Misser Barnes.”

I aimed his blubbering frame towards the empty doorway. “Say my goddamned name right.”

Chapter 2

There's No Free Naked Lunch

Babbling at Confucius got my gut barking for some chink grub. I snagged a waterlogged copy of *The Divine Comedy* out of the office crapper, walked over to the Hunan Dynasty on Pennsylvania Avenue by the Library of Congress. The kowtowing maitre 'd showed me to my usual table overlooking the Liberty Lobby offices.

The geriatric waiter shuffled over, handed me a stained menu, snapped, "Mix drink? Mix drink, Meestool Burnzoo?"

He looked older than Methuselah's pecker. I had some time to kill so I decided to play along. I ordered a vodka gimlet. As usual, he made me a Krakatoa Sour and sent it to the wrong table. I walked over, grabbed the drink from the bewildered German tourists. Reliability is an asset in this business; a waiter that consistently fucks-up his drinks is OK in my book. I ordered some crab rangoon, skimmed through Canto where heretics roast for eternity in open sarcophagi. That got me in the mood for some wor bor barbecue so I ordered that, two plates of boiled squid, some live crabs in a bed of rock salt and a gallon of hot tea. After lunch, I scrawled some graffiti in the bathroom, left a juicy tip, pocketed a fistful of mints and headed southeast.

I needed to rap with my main man Huggy Bear. Word on the street had it that he was still squatting in the abandoned Marion S. Barely dwellings beneath the Southeast Freeway. Named in honor of the former Mayor-for-Life, the place looked just like its namesake: burnt-out, packed to the rim with crack, and almost as useless as nipples on men. I hopped the collapsed fence, booted down the front door, and headed upstairs to Suite 16. Huggy Bear was in the corner taking a dump. He wiped his butt with a copy of *The Plain Truth*, yanked up his extra-extra large stone washed denims and torched up his monogrammed crack pipe.

"Yo, Slim," he choked. "Word on 'at detective tip, G?"

"A to the muthuhfucking K." I sat down on a tattered mattress,

brushed off the lice. "I need some dope on this joker." I slid him the photo of the Chinaman's half-brother.

The geezer squinted through the smoke, hacked up a greenish wad of tubercular phlegm. "Heh, heh, heh. Ol' Red Pinkman? Ain't seen 'at chump fo dog's yeahs. Heel yeah-uh, 'at niggah owe me some ducats. Damn, boy-ee, he just ad ugly ad evuh. Heh, heh, heh."

"This ain't a beauty contest. What's Pinkman's grift? Who's he working for?"

"Whudduh ah looks lahk, Burn? Yo bitch? What you got in yo pocket?" The gaffer cracked a toothless grin. I reached into my suit pocket and tossed him a mylar bag of crack, a VISA gold card and a Snickers bar that I shook down off of a black-clad art faggot at the Fifth Column. "I remembered that sweet tooth of yours, Bear."

The gaffer cheerfully pocketed the gifts, took a deep, satisfying toke from his pipe and exhaled. "Pinkman be holed-up at a houseboat on tuh fah end o' duh soufwess pier. Be throwin' parties and such. Think he Mistuh Badassed Bigdicked Muthuhfuh. Look lahk he made a wad o' change runnin' somefin' fo' Stinkaman an' duh Norfwess Crew."

"So happy powder's the name of his game. Thanks Bear. Don't spend it all in one place."

"Shee-it, ah gots kids to put through college, Burns. This goin' in they truss fund. An' you bess watch yo ass 'round Stinka man, Burn. Dem niggahz id crazy."

"Skip it. You're talking to the G what invented the tip." I got up to leave, tossed a ratty Lincoln at him. "And go buy yourself some Mitchum. You stink."

I took the Orange and Green Lines down to the Pinkman's houseboat off of Maine Avenue. I spotted it just where Bear said it would be: two blocks from the Titanic memorial.

Stinky, scum-topped waves slosed against the hull of the houseboat. It looked like a gutted semi-rig minus the wheels and was sandwiched between a pair of yachts with women's name's painted on the stern. I stepped on board, rapped at the galley door. Nothing. Just for kicks, I tried the door handle. It wasn't locked. That was funny. People who leave their doors unlocked in Southeast might as well run a "free tv" ad in the classifieds. I pulled my piece, locked and loaded, and went inside.

The waterlogged boards creaked with each step. Below deck, the hold was blacker than a coal miner's lung. The only sounds were the steady rhythmic lapping of the Potomac tide against the hull of the boat and the occasional commuter flight landing at National. I fumbled for the light

switch. I felt wood paneling and little else. I reached into my jacket pocket, pulled my pen flash, twisted it on. The thin beam of light fell on the worst mess I'd seen since Jonestown gut-blowout party.

The place was a shambles: porno mags, soiled underwear, dead blunts everywhere. Dressers were overturned and empty bottles of T-bird rolled along rhythmically with the tide. Party residue, I figured. I flashed the light to the far end of the houseboat. It was Pinkman, but he wouldn't be throwing parties anymore. Someone had shot him through the heart with a speargun. He hung like a slab of chilled albino bacon from the cheaply paneled wall.

Chapter 3

The Raft of the Medusa

Pinkman was deader than last Christmas and colder than a penguin's ass. The blood around the entrance wound had long since cogaulated. Rigor had set in. He'd been hanging there for a while, at least since the night before. Judging by the mess, the man knew how to throw a shindig. Like Pappy used to say, it ain't a party until someone boots a hole in the drywall or gets shot with a speargun.

I kicked some of the garbage around, found an autographed photo of Lola. She was standing in front of Tippetinas in New Orleans, probably during Mardi Gras or Jazzfest. She was sloshing a Hurricane onto Pinkman's shoes. The note on the photo read, "Baby needs a new pair of shoes. Love, Lola." I cracked open the frame, slipped the photo into my breast pocket. I pulled a hankie, wiped down everything I could remember touching, left the rest of the bloody mess the way I found it. I headed back to the office.

Somebody wanted something out of Pinkman. My first suspect was the Chinaman, but I got the impression that, despite his size, he didn't have the brazen gonads to shoot his half brother with a spitball, let alone a speargun. According to the Bear, Pinkman was up to his ass in the crack trade, but this didn't have the earmarks of a rival dealer hit either. The majority of gangstahz in DC were functionally illiterate, so reading the Spear-o-matic instruction manual was out of the question.

I got back to the office. My old buddies Lieutenant Jackson and his partner Pynchon were waiting to grill me.

"Where ya been, Burns?" Jackson yelled, swigging my bourbon and cleaning his nails with a butter knife, "We been worried sick about you."

"I was at the Insect Club having a cricketburger. Ask the bartender if you don't believe me. And get your feet off my table. You raised in a barn or something?"

Pynchon chuckled to himself while he mindlessly played with the bowl of wax fruit. He looked just as I remembered him: small, hairy,

stupid. The ill-fitting police uniform made him look twice as moronic.

Jackson smirked, "You're so full of it Burns, the Port-o-let company ought to name a model after you. A cop on the waterfront beat found Pinkman's body an hour ago. We've got witnesses saying they saw you leaving Pinkman's houseboat. How does that add up?"

"Fuck should I know? Just because I'm from Tokyo, I'm supposed to be good at math?"

Pynchon got up, loped over, slugged me where a man shouldn't get slugged and screeched. The pain went through my gut, up my ass, and out the top of my skull like a steamboat chimney. I felt a hairy set of knuckles grab my collar and whip my head back. Another fist slammed into my jaw. Ropes of spit flew out of my mouth. Pynchon let my head drop into a puddle of my own drool.

"Alright, pardner. There'll be time for that later 'round my place," Jackson purred. He stood up, straightened his uniform. "You need to play straight by us, Burns. Who are you working for?"

"Maybe the Pope. Maybe the Antichrist. Depends on what week this is. I keep forgetting."

That crack didn't get me anywhere. "We know Pinkman was running rock for the New York syndicate. We know you was looking for him. Give it up, else we haul you in as an accessory. Or maybe you'd rather have Pynchon do the nightstick number on your lily-white ass?"

"If this is your way to get me to buy policeman's ball tickets, you'd better go back to selling Fuller brushes to skinheads." I wiped the blood from my split lip, got back on my feet. "And tell that butt-buddy chimp of yours I ain't got no bananas. He'd best keep his hands to himself or he'll be writing shoplifting reports with his teeth."

The monkey sneered, went back to playing with the wax banana.

"You're a funny man, Burns," Jackson chuckled, swigging my bourbon. "You'd be better off writing stand-up."

"Unless you have something better to go on than the testimony of a few paid drunks, you're barking up the wrong totem pole, kimosabe. Take me down and grill me if you like. I'm pretty good with a little marjoram and tabasco. Otherwise, go back to boning your partner up the ass and leave an honest citizen like me the hell alone. And you can tell the Chief I said so." I straightened my tie, stumbled over to my desk and fumbled through the drawer for a blunt.

Jackson didn't seem too excited at the prospect of confronting his boss, a loser I'd had in my pocket so long he was covered with lint. "I'm getting a little sick of hearing about how much pull you have on the chief. I

don't know what you got on him, but it must be pretty damned big."

"Big enough to have him and his dog locked in a rubber room 'til PBS goes porno." I shoved a blunt into my mouth, bit down hard.

Pynchon rifled through the liquor cabinet looking for some melon liqueur. I walked over and snapped a match on the back of his ear, lit my cigar. He didn't like it, came at me screaming. Jackson caught him by the shoulders just as I pulled both of my stainless nines out, leveled them at the chimp's furry head. I could have nailed the primate, but I was already in hot water with the S.P.C.A. over the Rent-a-Dingo fiasco.

"Tell banana breath to chill with the booze," I said. "He's still on duty. And while you're at it, you can both get the hell out of my office."

Jackson chuckled to himself, said "You've won this round, Burns." He grabbed the screaming monkey by the collar and the back of his belt, made him walk spanish towards the door. "But remember, we're keeping our eyes peeled for you. You so much as fart in this town, we'll have a detective there to smell it and write up a report."

Jackson screwed on his hat and barged out. I'd been through their good cop/bad chimp routine more times than I'd seen the Dead Parrot Sketch. It was like an old, predictable friend who kept betting on the wrong Lotto numbers.

The impromptu visit from The Man meant that I didn't have much time to sort out both the Wang case and the Pinkman kill. The two were related, sure as ice cream gives me the Hershey squirts. I couldn't figure who had called the cops in, but the whole affair stank of the setup. Luckily for me, the jokers down at HQ couldn't catch a legless jaywalker.

I went after my only suspect: Black Irish Wang.

I pulled the Chinaman's business card and gave him a buzz, told him to meet me at the Brickskeller in an hour.

Chapter 4

I Lose My Client

I went to the fridge, held an icecube to my busted lip until I couldn't feel it. After sewing it up with a needle and some tooth floss, I humped the Red Line out to Dupont Circle, hoofed it over to the 'Skeller. Sam Barre and I used to hang there in high school and take the taste tour of the globe, starting with Orangeboom from Norway and ending up somewhere in southwest Africa. Right around closing time, we'd stumble back to his car, hopped to the gills, and drive out to Raphael's Silver Cloud Lounge in Suitland. We'd hang in the bathroom like a pair of faggots and wait for the dealers to mess with us. Then we'd beat the shit out of them with toilet seats, shakedown their dope money, and get lit on Shaefer until sunrise.

I walked downstairs to the bar expecting to see the Chinaman crying into a Guinness. No dice. The joint was quieter than the Pope's secret anal love bead bunker. The place was empty except for a pair of haggard-out barflies and Stumps Lonnegan spit polishing shot glasses. I ambled over to the jukebox and searched for Drinking Wine, Spodee-o-dee and Earl Bostic's Harlem Nocturne. The bastards had pulled them off of the juke.

"Where the hell's my music?"

"C'mon Burns," Stumps sighed, "We been getting complaints about you sticking twenties into that machine and playing that crap thirty times straight."

I cursed, lit a blunt.

"The usual?"

"Make it a double. Yom Kippur's coming up and I promised my yenta I'd fast."

"You feeling alright, Burns?"

"I'm happy, and peppy, and bursting with love. Pour."

Stumps poured four fingers of bourbon into a dirty highball glass, splashed some grenadine and tossed in a lit match. The drink went up

like a road flare, shooting sparks and spitting flaming liquor onto the bar. It got the attention of the blonde over-the-hill barflies at the end of the counter. A mushroom cloud of pomegranate scented smoke billowed towards black asbestos ceiling.

I lifted the drink to my aching lip. "Here's to crime."

"What's eating you, Burns? You're not your normal cheery self." Stumps hocked a ropey one into his glass.

"Gotta case that's burning me a new ulcer," I replied, puffing out the dying flames of my drink. "I'm meeting a client here, Stumps. I trust him about as far as I can pyroflatulate."

Just then, Black Irish loped up to the bar and idled next to me. The stool groaned beneath his pendulous ropes of lard. "Beamish an' Powers, if ya don mind, professor?"

"Well, if it ain't the prodigal Chinaman," I said. "You were supposed to be here an hour ago. Lissen, Wang. I got bad news for you. Your brother's..."

"Dead. Yeah, ah knows it. An hurry wi' tha' Powers, man?" Stumps poured him a shot, slid it down the bar.

"How did you..."

"Who tha hell did ya think did it, eh?" He gulped his drink, motioned for the bottle.

The Chinaman was lying through his teeth. I figured I'd ride this for all it was worth. "So why did you do it, Wang?"

"Ah... ah couldna take it 'na farthar. He called me up, sayin he was running off wi' Lola tonight. If ah wanted ta see 'er, ah should say goobye ta her face. Ah wen' down ta tha boat an' met 'em. Red an' ah got into an arguement about Kierkegaard. Ah grabbed tha speargun offen tha wall an' shot 'im. An thass that."

I stuck my nose in my drink. "Yeah. Right. And the Holocaust never happened. Nice story, Wang. Makes about as much sense as voting Libertarian."

"Wha ya mean? You jess bettah git offen tha case, eh? Ahm takin' ta fall. You'll git yare money, jess lay off, man."

I toyed with a coaster. "How many times did you shoot him, Wang?"

"Ah... ah dunno. Tree or four tahms. Wha difference do it make, man?"

"Makes a helluva lot of difference at the inquest. You're full of it, Wang. You're covering up just as sure as Hillary's got an ass out to Tuesday."

"You're offen ta case, Barnes! Ya need me ta spell it out fur ya?" He

reached for the bottle. "An don't yoo try messin wi' me. It's settled, d'ya hear may? I'vean already callt ta cops."

Like a Mod Squad rerun, DC's finest crushed in, guns drawn, with a herd of camera crews that made the O.J. trial look like Sunday morning at traffic court. Kleeg lights flashed everywhere. Chet Chumpley, anchor for DC cable access, shoved a mike into my face and started the cross examination. The mike looked like it should have a pair of straps and a bulging red vein on it.

"Mr. Burns! Mr. Burns, is it true your client Black Irish Wang is behind all of this year's 387 murders in DC?"

I grabbed Chet by his silk Armani tie. "You want anything from me, talk to my lawyer. Why the hell don't you bother Jackson over there? He'll give you everything you want to know about the patsy."

Pynchon grabbed Black Irish by the waist and led him to the big black mariah wagon parked outside of the bar. Chumpley and crew turned to Jackson who was straightening his tie for the cameras.

"I'm pleased to announce," Jackson yelled, clearing his throat, "that after a twelve-month sting operation, Black Irish Wang, notorious waterfront agitator, is now under police custody."

A blowdried blond talking head yelled, "What's he accused of?"

"Mr. Wang is the prime suspect in all of DC's 387 unsolved murders. A press conference is scheduled for nine o'clock at the Zei Club. Drinks are on the mayor."

The bar cleared out faster than an elevator full of incontinent claustrophobics. I reached behind the bar, pocketed a pint of Ballantines. Sure as shit, the Chinaman was being set up neater than Oswald and if I knew my conspiracies, there had to be a Jack Ruby lurking in the wings. If I didn't find him, Black Irish was leaving town in a box.

Chapter 5

A Chinaman Scorned

There was no love lost between me and the Chinaman. I just didn't like clients dying without paying their bill. It set a bad precedent. Just hire Burns, have him solve your case and then pick lead out of your navel before he cashes the check. My charity days were over, so if I wanted to see any of that money or get a crack at that rubber bitch he called a niece, I was going to have to save the Chinaman's sorry ass myself even if it killed us both.

Finding Lola was the key to scraping away the crap from the Chinaman's story. I headed back to the office to make some blackmail calls around town to try and dig the girl up, which is what I should have done in the first place.

I got to the office around closing time, tossed my battered porkpie onto the jackelope hatrack. I reached for the cigar store indian next to the temp secretary's desk. The temp was sitting just as I had left her that morning: bulky black earphones on, transcribing the notes from my one-act feminist morality play. She was a cute little barely-legal girl: bobbed hair that was blacker than sin, lips like raw liver, a tight Charlie's Angels t-shirt, black velvet choker with a victorian cameo dangling against her throat. I flicked my Zippo and she noticed me out of the corner of her bloodshot baby blues.

"Hi, boss. I didn't hear you come in," she chimed, removing her headgear. "There's a woman to see you. I told her to wait in your office. She's a real looker."

"You're not so bad yourself, hon. Why don't you head on home, it's late and I wouldn't want that big greasy boyfriend of yours to worry about you."

"Great! Thanks, boss." She smiled as she went for her wool coat and scarf. "Dwayne gets anxious when I don't show at the massage parlor on time." I could smell the anticipation waft from beneath her black elastic skirt as she minced past me for the door. I didn't have the heart to tell the

poor girl that I'd left Dwayne bound and gagged, hanging from a chain ceiling harness over at Maxim's Leather Chest.

I hustled into my office. Lola was sitting on my desk with her legs spread, mindlessly stroking my stuffed corgi Roger. She looked better than her photo which must have been taken a few years ago. She certainly filled out her vinyl brassier by a few sizes since that snapshot was taken. She'd turned into a brunette with a cheap pair of Ray-Bans. She tried to flash me the "won't-you-help-a-rabid-raccoon-in-distress" look. I wasn't buying it. She knew it.

"Ms. Wang, I take it?"

"Yeah," she purred, eyeing me from head to toe. "You can take it."

I clenched my blunt between my teeth "You sure saved me a lot of frustration by just showing up unannounced."

She hopped off of my desk and minced towards my bookshelf, her spike heels tapping a snappy tattoo on the warped linoleum tile. She placed Roger back on the shelf, minced over towards me.

"Well, well, well, so this is the great Dick Burns," she snarled, poking my crotch with a long red fingernail. "I can't say I'm impressed with what I see."

"First impressions can be deceiving."

She lit a cigarette, gingerly placed it in an ebony holder. "So can used car salesmen."

There was nothing in that for me, so I let it ride. "What prompted you to show up here, Ms. Wang?"

"Call me Lola," she whispered breathlessly as she idled up close to me. Her mouth was inches from mine. I could feel her moist, hot breath on my throat. It smelled like garlic. From this distance I could see how bad her teeth were. She also had a big green thing in the corner of her right eye. I tried hard not to fart.

"Your stepfather's been worried sick about you," I said, backing off and taking a deep breath.

"The hell with him." She turned her back to me, dragged a fingernail across my desk. "He's getting what's coming to him."

"You don't like him, then?"

She shrugged.

"So what's his problem anyway? Eevree thin' ee says ends oop sound-in' lahk a queestion?"

Again, she said nothing.

"Well, you wouldn't mind coming clean with me then. What's your relationship with Red Pinkman?"

"Never heard of the guy."

"Guess you're deaf, huh?"

"What?"

"Yeah. Figures. Black Irish confessed, if that means anything to you. He says he shot Pinkman out of jealousy, but that story has more holes in it than an orgy scene in a John Holmes film. What's up with that tip?"

Lola cocked her head to the right, spun around on her heel, stared up at the stucco ceiling. The dying light of the setting sun was starting to play wierd patterns on the walls. She looked at me over her shoulder, gave me the eye. "Suppose I told you what happened to Red, what's in it for me?"

"You'd be saving a fat bald guy's life and doing an old dick a favor."

"I like old dicks, Mr. Burns," she giggled, "I like the way they they just sort of hang there all limp and wrinkled. Do you ever shave your pubic hair, Mr. Burns."

"Eh... no?"

"Would you like to shave me, Mr. Burns?" she said hiking up her skirt and pointing to her shaggy crotch.

"Hmmm..." I said, looking at my McDonalds watch. "Lessee... it's half past Grimace. What the hell, let's eat."

I leapt on top of her, screaming. I quickly mounting her left leg and proceeded to hump enthusiastically.

Half an hour later, I was still hovering tiptoe over the sink scrubbing bits of crap off of my dick. Lola searched through my l.p. collection in my bathrobe and rubbed her butt.

"You sure do have a lot of Kansas albums, Dick," she tittered.

"Shit, are you still here?" I hollered. "I thought I told you to get the hell out?"

"But, but... you told me you loved me, Daddy?"

"That was twenty-minutes ago. And quit calling me Daddy." I returned to my lathered cock.

"Men. They're all alike," she whimpered. "You and your big cocks." She toyed with the turntable, flipped it on. Wayward Son clawed its way out of my Realistic speakers. "I thought when I first saw you at the houseboat, you were some kind of man. I guess I was wrong."

"I guess you were," I snapped back, emerging from the bathroom naked with a straight razor and a lather-covered dick. "Look baby, I'm onto your little game, see? You waxed Red and set up Black Irish to take the fall. It's as clear as Zima."

"I don't know what you're talking about, fool. Why don't you put some pants on?"

She turned away and reached for her purse. I grabbed her forearm and whipped her around.

"I'm talking about this." I jabbed my finger into the string of needle tracks that went halfway up her arm. "Red wasn't just your pimp, he was your pusher. He strung you out on junk and pimped your ass to out of town conventioners. Sucker that you are, you really fell for the old albino, even though he treated you like last week's shit. After that last cheesemakers convention, you'd turned your last trick for him. You came after him with the speargun."

She struggled free herself from my grip, flailing her arms like an epileptic at a Fugazi concert.

"Yes... yes," she sobbed, collapsing in my arms, "I did it. I nailed that bastard. I was willing to go to jail for it too, but... but... Black Irish showed up and... he said he'd take the rap for me. It was all his idea."

I slapped her around a dozen times. She started coming on my leg. I threw her on the couch. Just as I was about to slam my fist into her face, the door flew off it's hinges. I reminded myself to buy some better hinges. Black Irish stood in the doorway.

"Lola? Burns? AAAAAAAAAAAGH!"

I guess the sight of Lola in my bathrobe, her pud shaved, and me with shaving cream on my johnson made Black Irish a little anxious. Or maybe he just didn't like Kansas. He lunged at me, blood and spit flying out of his shrieking mouth.

"Whoa, I didn't think you'd make bail until tomorrow, Chinaman," I said, diving behind my desk. "This ain't what it looks like."

There was no talking to the him. In his state of mind, the only thing he'd understand was a couple of slugs from a .45. He took a flying leap at me and landed on my desk, smashing it into splinters. I leapt over the Chinaman's bloated frame and hid behind Lola.

"No! No! Stop it! Listen to me!" she begged him. Black Irish got up, brushed off the sawdust, growled and lunged at the two of us. Lola snatched her snub nosed .38 from the coffee table, levelled it at the Chinaman's head. "Back off now, you fat idiot!"

"Listen to the bitch, Chinaman" I cried, cowering behind Lola.

"Yew bastids! I shoulta known that she'd try 'an seduce ya, too. Yoo'd bettah bewares, Misser Barns," he shouted, pointing a bloody finger at me. "Yoo won' be ta first, an ya willna be ta last!"

"Lemme get this straight. You're telling me that you have to kill her

before she betrays more men. Right?" I slowly shuffled towards my shoulder holster that hung from the chair. "You got it all wrong, Othello. Drilling Lola for mud bunnies was all in the line of duty." I turned to Lola. "You don't think I actually enjoyed sticking my..."

"Burns!" she cried. "I thought... I thought..."

"Like I said, baby, you thought wrong." I snatched my gun, pointed it at her head. "You're going downtown. You're gonna pay for what you did to Red." Covering them both, I made for the phone to call in the cops.

"No! No! You can't do this!" Lola screeched, running towards Black Irish, "You must help me, honey snuggle wumpus! You said you'd prove how much you loved me! You'd go to jail for little Lola!"

The Chinaman sat motionless on the creaking elephant footstool. He stared at his fat hands and wept bitterly.

"Ah cannah dew eet, Lola. Ah wilna take ta fall ferya! But ahll be awaitin' ferya when ya gets outta Sing Sing." The Chinaman rose, made to give her a big fat Buscaglia hug.

"You fat, self-centered fuck!" she screeched. A million years of botched relationships rang in her voice. "Stay where you are! Don't come any closer!"

I pointed the gun at the Chinaman, squeeze the trigger. Three shots rang out, then three more, none of them from my gun. Lola had emptied the magazine. The Chinaman stood motionless towering above Lola's tiny frame. For an instant, something flashed into their eyes, something they desperately wanted to tell each other but through trial and circumstance were never able to confess. Now it was too late, there was nothing left but the inevitable pull of time and gravity and all that physics stuff. The Chinaman's lumbering frame hovered for a moment that seemed like an eternity, then fell down on top of Lola with a crash that was heard in Singapore.

I dropped my empty piece, dug beneath the layers of fat around the Chinaman's neck, searching for a carotid. Either he didn't have one or he was dead. I tried to lift his corpse. I might as well have tried to lift the Guggenheim. I gave up, sat on the coffee table and stared at the scene. Lola's delicate, needle-scarred hand jutted lifelessly from beneath a slab of the Chinaman's obscene fat. I wept for the first time since John Bonham died. I reached for the phone and cursed the fate that led them to this end. There was no one to hear my plea, no one but Roger the corgi, who stared down in mute judgement, a stale Milkbone dangling from his

dry grey lips.

I put on a Blue Oyster Cult album and waited for the cops to show.

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