

Satyricon



atyricon was a pen name, of sorts. A nickname if you will. He had been given the name at school, but not by his peers. In fact, he had given himself the name one day whilst playing truant. He was fourteen years old and bored with idling around the shops in the dead of winter. He had seen the name on a fruit box, grapes as it so happened, liked its crude little logo, and had named himself on the spot – it had simply felt right.

He had not previously had a nickname for the simple reason that no-one would dare. They had their private nicknames for him, of course: Weirdie, the creep, which they used behind his back, but never to his face. Perhaps he felt that the possession of a nickname would popularise him, make him more acceptable, gain him friends and influence people. Even as he moved away from the shop, turning his collar up against the wind, he'd been smiling at the notion.

There were lots of things that alienated him from his peers, not least of which was the way he looked. Tall, dark and possessed of odd vacuous blue eyes, one piercing, one with a caul; a milky white dead thing, tissuey, transparent, still eerily showing the blue beneath, as if you could tear it away, like some wilful obscuring, and have a perfectly good eye beneath. But you couldn't; the eye was dead, completely unseeing. And yet, the feeling persisted when he looked at you that he was seeing you with that eye, seeing you *better*.

The blind eye was on his left side, and everything on that side seemed to follow its perverse direction. The brow that grew above it was sleeker, fuller, darker. The musculature of his left arm was heavier, more defined. His mouth turned up the tiniest flick at that side, giving him a look too old for his years, too knowing, like he understood things about you he shouldn't, and that you didn't. His left foot dragged slightly when he walked, giving him a slightly loping look. In fact, there was something vaguely wolverine about him altogether, like some human caught mid-change on a moonlit night; some Jekyll and Hyde eternally frozen in the sweep between good and evil. And all this at fourteen – what then was he like at twenty-five?

Scary.

That was the verdict at Smith & Wainright, manufacturer of fine fabrics to the Queen. It was something of a mystery to the staff how he had got a job there at all, looking, as he did, so obviously deformed. It was almost a disappointment to them when it was discovered he was in window dressing, not sales at all.

“Still, he’s kind of sexy.”

“Ooh, yuk, you’re joking. He’s disgusting.”

The consensus was general, after this brief exchange, that he was indeed disgusting, and imagine having to sleep with him. As the remarks got deeper, and the revulsion more furtively shivery, the subtle nuance of pleasurable fear could not escape even Percy Nugent, no matter how hard he tried.

Percy Nugent *had* had a nickname at school, *not* self-chosen. Fatty. There it stood in all its glory. Not original, not glamorous, and requiring all of two seconds to think up – which just about summed Percy up. At nineteen he was still fat and unglamorous. It was plain to see he had not come on far.

Percy worked in Linen Sales because it was felt he lacked the imagination to sell anything beyond tea towels. He would not have been taken on at all if his middle class upbringing had not imbued him with a superlatively effete accent and an absolute terror of Ultimate Authority. To the customers, Percy was arrogant, offhand and obstructive, but to the management he was sycophantic and humble. Besides, he talked like one of their sort; good enough for them.

Percy retired to the kitchen department, behind the new Italian glasses, and thought about the lunch time conversation. Doris and the others might have been making all the right noises but he had seen the way they leaned over the table towards each other, Formica edges biting deep into their bellies, breasts straining and flattened inside their blouses, as if they couldn’t keep their very bodies under control. Legs twined tightly round each other, as if they were bursting to pee, or trying to surreptitiously squeeze their pussies without touching. They were *writhing*, that was the word, writhing about in their seats like little girls on a coach trip, dying for a pee and knowing they were all going to do it together in the bushes and see bums.

He found himself lost in that fantasy and pulled himself back

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sharply.

This character in the display department looked like a weirdo to him. He was going to keep an eye on him. Starting right now.

Doris Stowe.

Like Percy, she too had been born in 1977, and like Percy, she too had been landed with a generational hand-me-down for a name – it was often joked you didn't get into W&S without one. She was also thinking about Elmer Grant, a.k.a. Satyricon. Doris was wondering about that left arm of his. She had seen him yesterday in a T-shirt, the sleeves rolled up like Bruce Springsteen, building a display board. The display staff were allowed to wear green jeans and matching T-shirts. It stemmed from some trendy American notion of deluding the public into thinking W&S were not still firmly entrenched in the English Arts and Crafts movement, but all it succeeded in doing was making them look like misplaced horticulturists from the royal gardens.

His left arm had been unnaturally powerful, which at first had deceived her into thinking his right arm was shrivelled. Then she'd realised – the right arm was perfect; it was the left that was diseased. And that was the word that had sprung to mind, so much so she had scurried off to her department (Scarves and Accessories) and told Laura that *he* was over there, and that he gave her the willies.

Laura had gone over to see the legendary arm, and come back and whispered, "Bet he got that wanking off all the time", and sent Doris, bright pink, into a desperate rearrangement of the William Morris Silk Collection.

Margaret Snipe.

Snippy was twenty-eight years old and had not been in favour of Elmer Grant's being taken onto the display team – his portfolio was too outlandish, *he* was too outlandish – but of course they didn't listen to her; she didn't have the *experience*. Didn't have the experience? And what about him? Correct her if she was wrong, but wasn't he only twenty-five? And in over her head? Yes, quite. No, the fact of the matter was Jaclyn fancied him, and she wasn't being bitchy either, she

had practically been squirming in her chair at his interview, *and* she'd undone the top two buttons on her shirt, with her face all flushed like she was too hot. My arse.

Jaclyn fancied him, and *that* was how he'd got the job.

Jaclyn Smith.

Jaclyn was thinking about Snippy. She did have a hair up her ass, didn't she? Well that was just too bad, Jon had agreed with her. Grant might be young, but some of the stuff in his portfolio was nothing short of genius, *and* he'd worked for Macy's. You didn't get that kind of job in New York without being worth something - they were lucky to get him. Autumn windows would be going in soon then he could strut his stuff. That ought to change her tune.

Hopefully.

Monday. Another day, another dollar, or to put it a different way, same shit, different day. Either way, Percy was pissed off. Not that he'd ever have expressed it like that. He'd been at a work's do in a city disco on Saturday and been taken for queer - twice. It wouldn't have been so bad, but it hadn't been a gay night. The others had found it really amusing. Especially that little thug in the stock room, thought he was a real lad. God, they were never going to let him forget it.

He sighed as the train pulled into the station and picked up his Paisley scarf (10% staff discount) and slipped it on.

Jaclyn Smith was in a mood of barely repressed exuberance. It was a beautiful sunny day and she was starting the new season's windows. Already, London was clogging up with impending heat and irascible drivers, but Jaclyn didn't mind. W&S windows were an event (Harpers and Queen had once called them an art form) and she was responsible for them. With Grant on her team she was going to be unstoppable.

She turned up her radio and drove on.

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Doris was thinking about the night out on Saturday. She stared out into the odd ghostly shadow of herself hurtling along the tube window and thought about Laura. She was an odd one, Laura. She'd been in the ladies with her, waiting in the interminable queue, and when it had been her turn she'd come in with her, but instead of just doing it quick with her skirt well down she'd barely squatted over the bowl, hiked her skirt up and let rip, a big thick stream of it, looking down at herself and saying, "Did I need that or what? Look at it."

Doris had looked. Her front had been all shaved, and she could see all her slit and all the pink flesh all curled and showing in it, and the big gush of fluid spurting out. If she hadn't been drunk, she'd have died of embarrassment. As it was, she was consumed with a guilty unease now; there had been something so fascinating about it.

The train hurtled into the light and the familiar under-earth smell of the station. Time to go to work.

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