

# The Green Bird

By Kenneth Lifshitz

The window gave forth little bursts of air, like a respirator which was hooked up to a two stroke compressor. It woke him up. He once had been young and eager to please. A clean cut kid with a smile so big it ran off the page. Once they had said to him, 'Look kid,--you can't get by in this life with just a smile.' He tried to frown, but the smile kept sneaking back like an unwanted cat. Finally he had given up. The joke, he thought was, secure,-wrapped tight in the blanket of memory, featureless.

He peered out among the fraying ends of the blanket at the wreckage of the room. She must have liked his smile. Their Levi's lay tangled atop the chair where they had been thrown the night before, languid and somewhat indistinguishable. They, emptied of their occupants, seem to have acquired a passion, yet it was a frozen passion as if in some moment of ecstasy they had been catapulted out into the deeps of space, into a frigid ocean that had immortalized them in the icy paean of some eskimo poet, whose poems congealed as ice crystals as they dropped from his lips. Perhaps, the same one as had carved the green bird that sat on her night table. Perhaps not.

The pre-dawn light filtered into the room, painting it a grey that so closely resembled laundered sweat socks that you could believe you smelled that light, convinced you that morning had been fished out of the bottom of someone's laundry hamper,-then the sun flooded the room like pink detergent. At once, a million pre-pubescent nodules appeared on the slightly grimy walls,--but the pinkness clearly evident as the baby flesh on a young man's face,--just before he starts shaving.

He looked at the battlefield of the night before, surveying it with that calm that comes from having lived through something and not knowing why and thought,--the lives of one's clothes may be considerably more tragic than that of their occupants. He tried to assume the air of indifference that he knew would be crucial to him when she awoke. He peered out through the blinds at the school's chimney across the street.

The perfect gentleman he thought. The chimney always seemed to him to bear an uncanny resemblance to Sir Walter Raleigh. That hat and fastidious moustache, but no eyes. What did a man with no eyes need a hat for he wondered. Then he thought it was a stupid question. He tried to go back to sleep, but the sun had driven a red wedge between his lids and the best he could manage was a vague resentment about being awake. He thought about the bank, the night before, how driving thought the rain he had seen the golden glow of the nodules atop it's austere facade, how they beckoned to him, repeating, the message of hope, 9:43, 53 degrees.

How strange to remember the calm satiety of the bank belching forth these messages that carried no blame hidden in their equitable bowels compared to the need that traveled through his groin and up and down his spine like a trapped animal trying to free itself. Trapped in his own immobility.

As he rushed through the rain seared streets he thought how tired the automobiles parked along the curb looked,-how glad they seemed to be to be relieved of their diurnal passengers. He looked out of the window at the line of dreary buildings. They looked as if they were slightly embarrassed to be there. Like out of work men, who had waited on line all night to be first and nor found that they didn't know which was the end and which was the beginning of the line. They seemed to fidget,--paralyzed by an unwanted sense of community. Stoic, yet nervous.

The cold breeze now blew steadily in from under the window. He shivered. God, how he hated to shiver he thought. That's the difference between him and Sir Walter Raleigh he thought. Sir Walter doesn't shiver, and his moustache would never bend. It was always the small persistent pains that had bothered him the most. Like untied shoelaces and cats that always came back.

He had brown hair and a short nose that was engaged in constant warfare with the rest of his face. His nose refused to remain indifferent. It was defiantly twitching under his cool glare.

"It's seven thirty,--you'd better go." The voice seemed to unwind the taut consciousness of distaste that he had nurtured.

He acted surprised.

"Oh really?" He growled.

Sensing his resistance she reiterated this time emphasizing the statement by placing her hand above her eyes as if she peered into the great distance into which she hoped he would shortly disappear, all the while keeping her thumb securely wedged against one closed eyelid..

"You've go to go. You promised."

"Why,-"he asked with feigned innocence. "I don't have to work today. It's Sunday "

"You promised." She said collapsing back onto the pillow.

He was not taken in by her ruse and knew she was ready to join battle.

"I said I don't have to work today."

"What does that have to do with it?"

"Keeping promises is work."

"You're a jackass." She said and turned over.

"What time is it?"

"7:30 Goddamit." She answered with annoyance.

" Oh are we on Goddamit time then?" he asked..

"Is that something like Daylight Savings Time.? Every Sunday morning after you get laid you set your clock to half past Goddamit.

She didn't say anything. He knew that he hadn't stepped over his bounds yet, but felt he no longer had the will to push it.. He always liked to step over his bounds before he got kicked out. That way he knew that he would find somebody else the next night to sleep with. He prepared to get out of bed when the bird caught his eye. It was sitting indifferently on the night table, wings outstretched. A green ptarmigan. He wondered whether even the Eskimo who had coaxed this figure from the glossy stone knew whether it was taking off or just had landed. He traced the flowing lines of the bird's back and at that moment would not have been surprised to hear a shrill cry issue from its beak. The bird looked at him with polite inquisitiveness.

"Are you going to move?" It seemed to ask him with its' one eye slightly cocked.

"No,--are you?" He answered mentally.

"Not in a million years." It replied.

"Goddamm macho bird." He thought.

He began to nuzzle her back. She moved away and pulled the blanket over her. He heard a gate rasping in the distance. He felt himself standing on an icy precipice. He began to slip when suddenly something reached out and grabbed him. Somewhere in the back of his frozen brain he recognized that green expanse that blocked his entire vision.

At first he had loved her with no regard for images, then suddenly, as if he had stepped into Wonderland, there were only images, and he was locked in, -into a frozen pond in the dead of winter. At first he had tried to thaw it with his breath, then, he realized that fish do not breathe and that he was only spitting water at the ice. And there she stood on the other side of that ice. And he had burnished that ice, scraping against it with his scaled body till it glistened like a mirror. He saw the dark green speckles that gleamed from her back.

"Go way!" She -cried. "Leave me the mirror with nothing in it."

Then he felt himself lifted. He reached out for the long coolness of her back. But something was tugging at him, like an over eager puppy ready to be taken for a walk. It persisted with vagrant little teeth,--wanting to have its way. To be in the 'outside' once again,--causing enough pain to make its master see that it was eager to please.

The green speckles showed as multitudinous islands in the deepening light. A piece of green vomit, he thought coughed up from the bottom of some green sea,--the breeze was chill. He looked down at the dark ringlets that crowded the pillow, their surface now barely stirred by his breath. ,--a beret still clung there, like some storm tossed ship in a darkling sea. He heard seagulls fighting over their breakfast.