



“Halls of Residence” & “Jimmy”

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Halls of Residence

‘What’s that?’

‘Oh, nothing.’

‘There’s someone there.’

We hunkered down under the covers, clinging together in the single bed. There was a knock on the door. Christ! We pulled the sheets up over our heads and played dead. After a moment, we emerged giggling.

‘This is daft. You locked the door? Didn’t you?’

‘Of course.’ I said.

They’ll go away in a minute. What could be so important at ten o’clock on a Sunday night? I thought to myself. It went quiet.

‘Let’s have a cup of tea.’

‘No. I’d better get going.’

He got up and started to get dressed. We heard a jangling of keys outside the door.

‘Nurse Watkins?’

‘Shit!’ It was the warden. I scrambled out of bed. ‘Give me a moment.’ I looked around at the sparsely furnished dilapidated room, awful old Victorian place. Where could I put him? The wardrobe was the obvious choice. But where was the wardrobe? I couldn’t see it. Then I

remembered, it had been taken away for the refurbishment. There was nothing else for it; I shoved him, half naked, through the window, onto the roof. It was snowing.

'I'll freeze to death!' he said.

His clothes were strewn around the floor. I hastily grabbed a handful and chucked them after him.

'You'll have to stay there 'til I get rid of her.' I slammed the sash down.

Bloody hell. What did *she* want? I hastily got into my dressing gown and went to the door. Miserable cow. She was always prowling round with her bunch of keys, letting herself into the rooms and snooping through our personal things. What she didn't know about her girls, wasn't worth knowing. I opened the door. From across the corridor, a blast of *I can't get no Satisfaction* bombarded my eardrums.

'You've got the sewing machine.'

'I'm sorry. What did you say?' She mouthed something, and waved her hands about, She poked her nose in and looked around. Before I could stop her she'd stepped inside. 'It's nice and cosy in here.'

The gas fire was hissing merrily in the grate. My rubber plant artistically climbed the wall in the corner. Oh Lord. Where were the rest of his clothes? I couldn't see them, but I could feel his shoes behind my feet. I remember shuffling subtly backwards and manoeuvring them under the bed.

They looked just like ours from the back, black duty shoes; his were much bigger than mine. But the bigger bits would be hidden under the bed, I reckoned. Help. She couldn't smell him? She couldn't smell the sex in the air. Could she? Hope not, wizened old spinster. I expected she was still a virgin.

Quick, make some cocoa, I thought. That's a nice familiar smell.

'Were you going to make a cup of cocoa?'

She was bloody telepathic. 'Erm. Just about to.' Here we go. She wanted to sit and gossip, tell me about my friends. I'd heard it all before, silly old beady eyed sprouting hairy rat face. Then I remembered Peter. I saw him, over her shoulder, wildly gesticulating at me through the window. His face was blue, a few shades darker than his eyes, and his blonde hair stood on end in spikes, just like the Statue of Liberty - or perhaps they were icicles already? I mimed to him to hide behind the chimney pot. She caught me open mouthed. I pretended to yawn.

'Are you tired?'

'I'm up early in the morn - '

She sat down in the only easy chair and made herself comfortable. I made the cocoa and perched on the end of the bed. I attempted some conversation. I shouldn't be mean, I told myself. Just look at her, poor thing, diminutive little creature. Pepper and salt hair scraped back. Flat chested, or I supposed she was under that baggy white coat. Why didn't she wear her uniform dress? It would have been slightly more flattering. Mind you, she probably belonged to that brigade of hospital personnel that aspired to be something medical; liked to make themselves look important. She prattled on. Five minutes, ten minutes later.

'Actually, Miss Longridge, I'm on an early.'

'What?'

'I said I've got an early shift tomorrow!'

'Of course. I'll be off.'

'I'll get the sewing machine for you.'

'Oh? Don't bother about that. Thank you for the cocoa.' I let her out, jangling her keys. I let him in. He was frozen.

'Bloody hell! Has she gone? What time is it? I've got to go.'

'Wait until I call the lift,' I told him.

It was one of those antiquated contraptions operated by a lever. Only the expertise of the hall porter could prevent it getting stuck between floors.

'While the porter comes up with the lift, you can slip down the stairs.'

'Ok.'

He struggled into the rest of his clothes, hopping about trying to get his shoes onto his frozen feet. 'Are you ready? He'll be locking up in a minute.' I went out on to the landing. 'Hurry up! The lift's coming,' I called. The Stones were still blaring out. I went and knocked on the door. I knocked again. The music stopped.

'Who is it?'

'The warden,' I said. 'No music after ten o'clock!'

I went back to my room. He'd gone. I turned the fire off and settled down for the night. There was a knock on the door. Oh no. What's the matter now? I thought. I got out of bed, but didn't bother with my dressing gown. I'd put my pyjamas on in a minute. It had suddenly gone cold now that the fire had been turned off. I opened the door.

'Nurse Watlins?'

I stood there shivering in my slip. What on earth could *he* want? He scanned the room.

'You got it nice an' cosy in 'ere, ain't yer?'

I grabbed my dressing gown and pulled it tight, folding my arms across my chest.

'I was in bed. What do you want?'

'Come on Nurse Wattles. You know what I want?' he said leering at me.

Oh help, I thought. This is all I need.

'I 'eard you was makin' cocoa.'

I tried to close the door on him, but he niftily thrust his big boot across the threshold.

'I think it's my turn now. Don' you?'

With a flash of inspiration and terrific presence of mind, surprising myself, I said,

'I . . . I . . . I've got to feed the rabbit.'

That confused him. He looked more stunned and stupid than usual. I glided slowly backwards to the window, and I don't know how I did it, but I managed to flip round, jump out onto the roof and pull the sash down. He stood the other side gawping at me for a moment, and then shambled off muttering to himself.

Relieved, I was just about to go back in, when there was a hand on my shoulder. I nearly jumped out of my skin.

'What are you doing here? '

'Old bastard's locked the door. And I needed a pee'

We went back in. He snuggled down in the bed. I lit the fire and made some more cocoa.

'God. Is it alright? They won't come back. Will they?' 'Not until tomorrow,' I said.'

Jimmy

'Who's a pretty boy then? Who's a pretty boy?'

'Shurrrup! Shurrrup!'

'No need to be like that. Come on my pretty baby. Come to Mummy.'

The little bird turned its back on her and puffed up its feathers. Splat.

'Oh fuckin' 'ell, ' said Norman, who was tinkering with his motorbike on the kitchen table. 'Look at that. And I've only just cleaned him out.'

'It's alright. I'll do it,' said Cynthia, picking up a cloth.

'Put that down. That's for my bike, that is. For Gawd's sake, stop fussing over it.'

'He's stopped talking.'

'No 'e ain't. He's telling you to piss off,' chuckled Norman.

'Piss off. Piss off,' said Jimmy standing on his perch studying himself.

'Perhaps he's got worms,' said Cynthia concerned.

'Worms? Birds don't get worms, Birds eats worms.'

'I know that,' snapped Cynthia. 'But you're talking about wild birds.' She pressed her face up against the cage. 'My little darling here doesn't have to hunt for worms. Do you? Do you? My precious?'

Norman chucked an oily rag on the table. 'Sometimes I wish I was a bloody parakeet.'

Cynthia opened the cage door. 'Come on my little sugar plum fairy. If you don't want to talk, come and stretch your wings for a bit.'

'Bloody 'ell I'm out of 'ere. You know I can't stand that damn bird flitting about the place. And it craps everywhere.'

'Don't be like that Normy warmy? You know that means good luck.'

Norman ran a greasy hand through his hair. 'Come 'ere Cynth.' He grabbed her arm and pulled her onto his knee. 'Forget that bloody bird for a bit. Let's go for a burn on the bike.'

Cynthia surveyed the bits of machinery strewn across the table. 'But it's not fixed yet.'

'Well, let's' He squeezed her ample thigh, and stroked her voluptuous breast.
'Let's do it, anyway.'

She jumped up. 'Oh look. He's flying,' she said, clapping her hands with delight.

'What did I tell yer? Damn thing's crapped on my engine now.'

'Crap engine. Crap engine,' said Jimmy, and flew back to his cage.

'I'll 'ave to start again.'

'I don't know what's upset him, but something has. He's not normally abusive,'
said Cynthia.

'Perhaps he's bored?' suggested Norman, and went back to polishing his exhaust
pipe. 'bout time we got him some new toys.'

'It's not toys he needs. It's company. *Love* from us.'

'Don't talk daft. He's only a fuckin' bird. He don't care about us. Let's go upstairs.'

'I got him a new bell only the other day.'

'A bell?'

'A boredom breaker bell'

'A what? 'ow much did you pay for that? You daft cow. You've been 'ad, you
'ave. Come on. Let's go and make babies.'

'It's the middle of the afternoon.'

'It's another kid you need. Take your mind off that soddin' bird'

'I'm 55 years old!'

'Just a quickie before Beryl gets back,' he said, leering at her.

'He's gone quiet,' she said.

'Well there you are then. He don't want all your fussin' an' attention.'

Norman went over to the cage. Cynthia came back and sat at the table.

'What's he doing?' she said.

'He's preening. Come and look.' Who's a pretty -?'

'Shut up' said Norman. 'You'll make him crap again'

The little bird was batting its wings and cocking its head from side to side.

'Who's a pretty boy? Who's a pretty boy?' it said.

'I'm a pretty boy. I'm a pretty boy,' it said back to itself.

Just then, Beryl walked in. 'How's my little Jimmy?'

'Beryl. Beryl.' The bird tweeted excitedly.

'Who's a pretty boy then?' she said, walking across to the cage and putting her face up to the open door.

'I'm a pretty boy. I'm a pretty boy,' said Jimmy, hopping about frantically. He thrust out his chest, puffed up his feathers, batted his wings and jangled his bell wildly with his beak. With all the activity, he overbalanced, shat again, and fell off his perch.

'So he likes his new mirror then?' said Beryl.

'New mirror?' said Cynthia grabbing her glasses off the table.

'She's just spent a bomb on a bloody boredom bell' said Norman.