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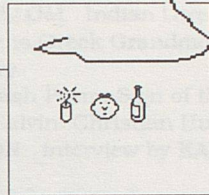
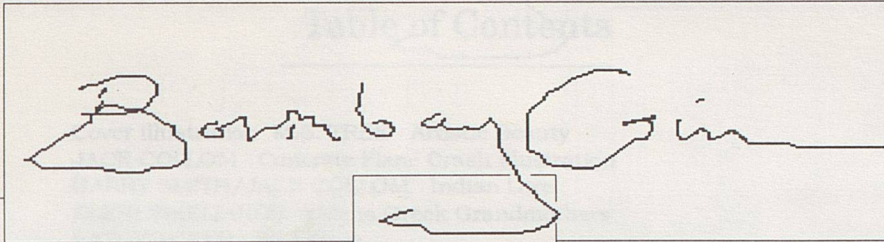
BombayGin



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War Story

Kathy Acker

But babies. You've got to admit that it's women, not men, who have babies.'

So an artist whom I know, not well, told this story about babies:

He had had this girlfriend, see. Whom he had sent to some rehab center to be rehabbed, or whatever happens to people. Instead of being rehabbed, she had fallen in love with another addict and they had run away from the rehab center.

He, the artist, couldn't stand losing love.

He had had the habit of hanging around Coney Island. Before the girlfriend disappeared. Buying things there. Relics. After love left him, he went back to Coney Island like murderers are supposed to to the scenes of their crimes.

Boarded-up windows of apartment buildings more decrepit than the old men who work in and work this section of the world. Fleas living on sand.

Tears neither present nor absent 'cause no one cries for junkies.

Slabs of pissed-and-puked-on wood rose out of the sands. Or the smell of dead semen over which water passes, now and then, but never erases. Dead seagulls don't venture to this spot.

It's the dead season so the freaks are ghosts. LEDA, half-swan, half-woman, no one could guess which half was which. It was all and it is all dead fish.

As the artist's walking past one of the rotting buildings, the kind that knows how to stand, an old man, not standing, across the street says his name.

The artist looks and sees a wiggling finger. 'I've got something for you.'

The artist crosses the street to see what the man's got. The kind of old man that likes little girls.

'Come here.' The artist has come here: he's been here before. Buying. His whole family was touched by cancer.

Down a few streets, there's a sort of building next to an empty carnival tent. The kind

of building that houses those between the living and the dead. The United States has been here before.

'It's the pride of my collection.'

Then down some stairs where there were holes in the wood that didn't exist, but it was too dark for the artist to see the holes.

'...Pride of my collection. A few months ago they declared it illegal. Declaring everything illegal these days. So I have no use for it.'

Between the living and the dead.

'I'll give it to you for 500 bucks.'

The room below was filled with crap. Refuse of carnivals. Halves of stripper outfits; green and bleached-blond wigs; posters of Madonna and geeks; cigarettes that died in flesh; a dead, stuffed cockatoo in a huge iron cage swung by a life-size iron woman; tattooed skin preserved in formaldehyde. The formaldehyde had seen better days.

In the back was an antique or old table. A large bell jar stood there. Some sort of thick bubbly fluid filled the jar.

Tiny fingers splayed in the liquid. Some of the fingers were closing, rigid, as if they wanted a cigarette. Other fingers pointed to the artist. The huge fish mouth was open.

The artist could smell the dead fish that were outside this room.

He gave the man 500 dollars.

The room upstairs reminded the artist of one in a museum in his recurring dream.

This part of the natural history museum was filled with aquariums. Inside their cages, fish moved as if alive.

Fish tanks ran from floor to ceiling. Their glass began to shatter. Fish, monsters, and all sorts of debris lay on the floor. Every monster imaginable. The artist, trapped in this museum, felt only horror. The waters began to rise.

The museum was an inescapable labyrinth.

As the artist was walking down the street of dead-fish smells that led to the subway, he looked down at the jar he was carrying and thought that his girlfriend had left him a present.

