

THE DORM ROOM
By Paul Lambrecht

The dorm room in the Hloubetin Hotel enjoined a female bathroom, where the girls would go in and out all day long, and Peter could see all of what was happening.

The girls would brush their hair in front of the mirror in their bathrobes. Peter would be reclined in his bed reading a book, never following a sentence with another, just itself over and over again.

And the beautiful woman would be stroking her hair in the mirror. Peter had been assigned to this room for the duration of the semester.

His reading, as you could see, had been suffering. He showed up, bedraggled and ghostly to class, unable to participate in classroom conversation, yet wanting to impart a lesson on to them. That of access, that of wisdom, at staring at the coifed and made-up women all day, some of which were in the class with him.

They had read their assignments, he knew, because he saw them in their bunk-beds, leafing through their books with such raw assurance, and heady self-confidence.

And they had such bitter and aggressive comments in the class. They never quite looked at him, but all of their commentary seemed aimed at the preeminence of the white male in culture and society. Peter just solemnly nodded, dreaming in his own mind, partaking of the dream he was inhabiting for a life. At least for the remainder of the semester.

He was far too timid to go into the bathroom while the girls were bathing, showering, grooming, dressing etc. even though this had not been expressly prohibited. And there was a never-ending streaming of other men through the dorm room, many of which nodded at Peter, and freely moved

between the bathroom and the sleeping chamber. Peter nodded back, and knew his page-reading attempt was doomed. Not one page had he read in a month, but he dreamed of catching a glimpse of one of these nymphs in the buff, in flagrante delicto.

At night he couldn't sleep, except for in fits, but he heard the grumbles, starts, and subtle snores of the bevy of girls, and knew they were twisting and twirling in their pajamas under the sheets, and thinking of everything under the stars, except for him. What a privileged life it was, like a constellation just beyond the horizon, to be so thoroughly ignored and unconsidered.

The day in which his future would change, inevitably for the worse, was looming and fast approaching. He looked with wist and failing wonder at the girls as they came in from class, and made use of the bathroom, always emerging changed, cleaner perhaps, as they went about their day.

If only once, he could get a taste of the parade which was driving his submerged spirit wild. Take his submarine above the waves, so to speak.

The hissing of the shower was calling to him one evening, a week before his dorm transfer would be going through. He was all alone in the darkened room, and the coed in the shower was his only company. He had finally

made it off page one, but it had been a purely cosmetic perusal, he hadn't grasped anything of the author's intent or nuances, so he set the book down.

He approached the aperture of the bathroom door. Light was shining out in a triangle over the varnished wood floor. The moon was shining a circle through the window. All the girls had left to a party, but Peter, finally succumbed to a perverse love, a burning yearning for ignominy, felt sufficiently bold to test the tense and tenuous netting of the situation.

He passed through the door and looked into that mirror with new eyes. He neither liked nor recognized the animal eyes he saw staring back, but it was too late.

It was just Eve in the shower, brooming herself of water with her hands, eyes closed, through the frosted glass. Her pink shark skin, her dark thrust back splattered flattened hair, her dripping dimples, knobs and nipples, the dark thickets of her pubic hair.

Peter stood stock-still as if in a dream, and Eve slowly ached towards him, then her duck-wet eyes opened and caught him in his trance, and the harsh screaming started.

Peter backed up and out of the room, but the screaming continued like a siren.

Why was it so wrong for him, thought Peter to himself, dense and lowly, depressed like a felon in the throes of confessing.

His guilt was screaming at him. His lust was accusing. But why?

A tide of drunken girls sauntered in at this point, chatty and bow-legged. They immediately sobered up at the prospect of all this screaming.

The moon thrust its jagged fingers into the room.

"What is it, Eve?" yelled Bitsy.

The other girls were staring at the horrified Peter now, as if he should have had some better place to be.

He lamely ventured that he would be leaving soon, he was sorry, everybody just calm down.

But there was to be no calm.

Eve emerged sobbing from the bathroom clutching her robe.

"What happened?" shouted all the girls.

Eve collapsed on her bed, showing quite a bit of juicy leg, but Peter was so mortified, he could barely bring himself to notice, to acknowledge this salacious epitaph.

She rose to a half sitting, half leaning position, the facing sides of her breasts cross-eyed plumply sticking out. She pointed at Peter.

"He violated our trust."

Peter put on looking shocked by this revelation, but he was already tainted by the accusation. His pure and unblemished past seemed like a piece of art in a museum, beautiful but he was unallowed to touch it. Yet it belonged to him, somehow, his humanity.

How to regain it?

The girls all sat in stony judgment of him, half-dressed, sopping wet, all clammed up, some drunk, all horrified.

Peter blushed from his bed, unsure of his next move. Wanting to smooth it all over, to make them love him.

Not a single one would love him, he searched their eyes.

Nothing in God's Providence to bring them close, to learn from them.

"Ladies," he said. They were all ears. Standing at attention, he'd never again have such a rapt audience. What could he say? He'd committed the world's most unforgiveable sin, that of pursuing a woman, in the sanctimony of her cave, in the vulnerability of her nakedness.

"Ladies," he said again.

"What am I supposed to do?" he asked.

That was it. This was the dream bubble being popped. The improbable room assignment, the contrived shared bathroom. It didn't work. It was not a pleasant environment for learning.

"I'm sorry, ladies, I want to die, I really do."

This seemed to strike a chord. Peter could perceive a sudden wave of relaxation tremble through the assembly, though minor.

He went on.

"It's just that it's been hard living with all of you beautiful ladies, and seeing you go about your lives, and me not get any attention. So my dark side got the better of me, and I walked in on Eve."

He spared none of the connotation of such an egregious act in his description of his own aberrant behavior. This convinced them, brought some over to his side.

Peter was just winging it, but saw the reception and receivability in their eyes.

He was getting away with this, by putting himself down on a subhuman level. It was as if he had made them all sirens and himself an Odysseus who had just escaped his lashings on the wings of his sexual motor.

Why not go for broke? Don't just weasel out, parlay this into a little game, said Peter to himself, realizing he was on the spot, that he was just wheeling in the wind.

He looked at Eve. She was the most traumatized, but these other girls, especially the drunk ones, maybe he had a shot. Two of them, had already lolled their eyes back in their heads, and were snoozing towards slumber, laid back on the bed.

He looked into the eyes of Amy, the girl he'd previously admired most, as if he had a smoldering Errol Flynn gaze and they'd just danced cheek to cheek in a red velvet-draped ball room.

"Can I do anything? Can I make it up to you?"

Would they take the bait? Was he at all desirable? He was admitting now to being man-putty. Did anyone want him for anything?

He looked searchingly at Amy. She looked at him with disgust, the other girls looked to each other for affirmation.

The end hive consensus was Amy's disgust.

Peter was dejected, though he had somehow headed off the shame at the pass. Everyone seemed disposed to forgive and forget at this tired point in the night.

Amy looked at Peter, and though a distant kinship existed, the gulf between them could not have been wider.

Peter barely returned to the room during the final week before they moved him out of the dorm. Nothing ever came of the transgression he had committed, the fool he had made of himself, apart from the embarrassed glances askance he engendered when passing Eve.

But that next semester, comfortably ensconced in a single, at least he was reading again. He was suddenly very interested in human nature.

End.