

Shamanspace

by Steve Aylett

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*Caught by the mortals in old age,
an angel scattered itself like leaves*

SIG

To those who know that the inhabitants of heaven and hell are political prisoners, that the law is as preventative as next year's weather, that the post-human's too predictable, South London has always been a playground.

'Don't think so hard - he'll hear you, if he's bothered.'

The younger, the boy, tipped his head back in a bone-flavour rain, seeing air rich in nocturnal swirls.

'What about you?'

'He won't know I'm here,' the French girl told him. 'He never knows.'

'You must be good,' said the boy - good, if she could screen from Alix. They said Alix could enter the face of a guitar without making a sound. Melody had once seen his body splitting open as he bleached out behind geysers of infra-red, lightning in the blot of his mouth and angel blowback gusting stuff off the breakfast table. And as he reversed out of the human bandwidth he pulled depths into the house, furniture exploding into blurdust and splinters. He could lose it across to otherspace as soon as think about it. He stared and it was hell that blinked. Back at the Keep, Alix featured in heavy books, his icon head in colours kitsch as Indian firework art.

She said they were near but the boy couldn't feel anything strange in the traffic-jam of structures. He ran his hand along a pedestrian subway's paracetamol walls as they ascended into an angled wasteland where a traffic-light hung like an earring. Melody was now a more stripped-down version of herself, invisible to anyone but the best edgemen - Sig saw a flicker of her wrapped in protein mapping. They said he had the gift but no brains. Bad steering.

Mood rang across the slamming street, abandoned. They stopped at a metal door covered in rust like coffee grains. Alix's door and still no energy signature. They valved through, and the boy found himself clattering up the dodgy stairs alone. Glancing back, he saw the girl had sat down sadly to wait.

Sig pushed carefully into the dim room. It was as cold as stone and slowly became a distinct space of calloused books and abraxia. Everywhere, softening, withered and dead flowers were arrayed in the gloom. Seated near the hollow fire of this dry worry shrine was Alix in clowntorn rags faded to a pupal grey. How old was he meant to be? Twenty-seven? But his hair was white, his face empty. Not cloaked - just not producing any energy. Was it a new, deeper sort of disguise? Living right down in the detail?

His eyes were turns of liquid gold, glistening and unseeing.

'What's this,' said the living legend without looking up, his voice that of an old man. 'A little novice godstopper, ripped to the tits on righteous fury.'

'I like to think so, sir.'

The eye-gold shifted, meaningless. 'Well answered. I had a dream just now. Bomb season rushed in, flinging back loose particles of the house, blew bodies into me like leaves. Then you swanned in. You and your neurotrash friends getting on alright? Teaching you to fieldstrip and reassemble yourself like a gun? Watch yourself. You think being permitted is the same as being free? You're allowed to siddown.'

Sig pulled a wooden chair over and sat down, staring in silence past Alix at a bug which jotted across the wall.

'D'you like stories? They say our enemy likes stories and that's why we're here. Well, we haven't provided it with anything interesting lately, have we.'

'I've heard a lot of stories about you, Alix.'

'So you drop by to sip my ghost. Like I've plenty to spare, the hero. Expected a couple hundredweight of angels entertaining me? Established to heroic glory in a Sistine scene, right?'

'I don't know what I expected.'

'You're lying. Or the next thing over. Lying still reveals stuff because it's directly connected, they haven't taught you that? I used to be that way - all of six years ago. Thought truth was the stone in the snowball.'