

[EXCERPT]

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE, INTERRUPTED

Tuesday, February 11, 2014

The envelopes containing copies of all my keys and account numbers and passwords were now all filled, labeled, stamped, and sealed and ready to go out to my beneficiaries and executors. All credit cards and debts have been paid in full. I owe no one anything. The cat's toys, grooming aids, and veterinary records were in their respective mailers, along with instructions to the adoption agency that under no circumstances should the two little sparring partners ever be allowed to co-habit again. Email "vacation" messages announcing my departure were timed to go out to any and all who might write me on or after the 14th.

With some trepidation, I was leaving my cacti, avocado tree, and ivy in the care of my ex, whose dog Cerberus would surely do her darest to turn them into a mixed green salad, once she sniffed out that they had belonged to me. The ball chain lanyard that would go around my soon-to-be-stretched-out neck was strung with USB jump drives containing the content and layout for my unpublished photo and art books, screenplays, cookbook, and the start of the memoir that I said – like Grace Jones – I'd never write. I had rehearsed the script, tested and re-tested the actual apparatus that I had devised – which, I have to brag, is perhaps one of my cleverest inventions, and unfortunately, the thing I will most likely be remembered for. It is so original and cinematic – not to mention tidy - that I took the precaution of filling out a patent application for it, accompanied by the last check I would ever write. That will go in the mail with the rest of my farewell announcements to the world.

The bottles of vodka, Vicodin, and Zofran were sitting next to the rocker, in the hallway underneath the reinforced pull-up bar, whose attached ropes were now being repurposed from BDSM to TATA! To assist cleanup, I am going green with a Bagster™ for easy removal. My ultimate music playlist will be on endless repeat, a masterfully balanced mix of both self-pitying ditties and raucous rockers. And just to please those who liked to characterize me as a Narcissist, I also printed out a self-penned obituary to my lapel, both a long and a short version, being that I can trust no editor to include what I consider to be the most important highlights of my not-terribly-long but eventful life. I even cleaned out the fridge and freezer and strew air fresheners about to reduce unpleasantries. The process of elimination of me was in spec and on track, thanks to the practical advice contained in *IEF: Intentional Existence Finalization* (by A. Martin John).

And just to show that j-No is not going down without a party, I will be heading out shortly for one last swank Manhattan champagne event tonite, just to keep up my reputation and snag some parting shots to be posted to anti-social media, mere days before my Swan Song.

It's a combined photo and art exhibition and magazine launch in the Flatiron District. I got the invite from the liquor distributor, who, of course wants me to provide them with unpaid documentation in exchange for not having to stand in line with the hoi polloi when I need a refill. I don't mind this time, since I have absolutely no use for money now. Which is a pretty liberating feeling, I have to say. I do not know a single person who intends to attend this soiree, which is perfect. And, if I am uncharacteristically lucky, I won't see any acquaintances there, either. There is no danger whatsoever of running into any friends, because I don't have any. Okay, I have two friends who live in Texas and my ex who lives in the neighborhood, but she is not talking to me presently because I supposedly insulted her dog.

And even if she wasn't hating on me, she detests public events and parties.

Enough chatter. Time now to get spruced up. I have to allow enough time not only to shave and shower and vacuum cat hair off of my Ferry-esque dinner jacket, but to trowel sculpting cream into the dense network of fissures and crevasses that constitute my alcohol and pain ravaged face so that I don't resemble my deceased grandfather - at least for a few hours. Gotta add that to my Valentine's Day itinerary also. Definitely want to leave behind an exquisite corpse.

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I hate to admit it to myself, but if every party was of the caliber of this one, I just might be inclined to stick around a little longer. How often is the art and photography this interesting, the dj this un-boring, the specialty cocktails this tasty, the fashions this fabulous, and the women this drop-dead gorgeous? My arthritic index finger was getting a cramp from so much Nikonic action. Even more unusual, I was not the perennial ghost in the machine. People were actually talking to me. Female people, even. My pocket was full of calling cards. For us soiree-diggers, this thing is pay dirt.

I complemented the hostess, the always-glamorous Diamond Strang, on throwing such a successful and fun party, as well as on the extensive, intricate tattoo that started between her shoulder blades and disappeared under the fold of her dress, the scoop of which stopped tantalizingly just below her intergluteal cleft. She then inserted a bejeweled talon into that inviting cleavage, and pulling the stretchy fabric further down, revealed that the artwork continued its journey even further south. I thanked her perhaps a bit too profusely for that private gallery tour, as can happen after a quartet of vodka gimlets.

Having finished number four (I had been limiting myself to three cocktails per hour, but given my Estimated Time of Demise, what could another hurt?), I revisited my favorite bartender of the evening to top off my empty glass. My VIP access to the bar did not sit well with all of the thirsty boozehounds, given the fingers shot my way by a couple of them. Just as I turned to depart that clot of humanity, a strange tingling paralysis fell over me. Was I sick? Going to pass out? I hadn't had *that* much to drink. In my peripheral vision there appeared a focus of light at the far end of the long room, barely visible through the shoulder-to-shoulder stockyard of drunkards. Slowly, I turned to see what the source of this luminescence was. There, beneath a halogen spot, stood a tall, dark, raven-haired figure – female – the only hint of 'color' breaking the gothic image was a Stacy London-ish streak of white. Because of the vignetting effect of the lighting, the rest of the room seemed to disappear. Even the laughter and chatter melted into a low muffle. Suddenly, as if pulled by a fleshly supermagnet, I found myself moving towards the figure, though I knew I was not consciously controlling my feet. Did someone slip some acid into my drink? Despite the dense crowd, I moved effortlessly, people parting voluntarily like the Red Sea before Moses. Now, here I was, standing directly beside this woman. Though a fan of the Bride of Frankenstein, Lily Munster, Morticia Adams, Elvira, and Diamanda Galas, in reality I have never been attracted to the whole 'Every Day Is Halloween' faux death goth look. Yet, I could not take my eyes off this woman. She was slender, and through her diaphanous black lingerie cover-up I could see that she was bra-less. Below the belt, which she was not wearing, were legs squeezed into tight sequined stretch pants and perched atop laced closed-toed shoes with at least an eight-inch wooden wedge.

"Excuse me, miss, but if you wouldn't mind, I would love to take your photo. You look stunning, especially in this light."

She turned to look at me and I felt my heart begin to race. She had on tons of makeup, not entirely flattering, either, but I could tell that beneath it all was a very attractive face, set off by mesmerizingly large dark eyes. Though I felt I could stare back into those dark pools forever, it was impossible to avoid noticing the well-crafted chest on display under her low-cut mesh tank.

Lavender lips parted to say "Sure. You want me to stand here?" she said, with a curious hint of a smile.

"This is great. OK, look towards me, but turn your body slightly to the left." She placed one hand on her shoulder, a hand with at least half a dozen silver rings on it, which tapered into long dark purple nails. There was something uncannily familiar, yet totally alien about her. I felt as if in the presence of a newly discovered species - a very sexy one.

"That was a nice touch. Do you model?"

"I used to, but now I design clothes." the erotic mouth informed me, with a curious grin. Why do I feel like I know this person? If I had met her before somewhere, I surely would remember it.

"Is this ensemble of your creation?" I asked.

"Nah. These are all thrift store purchases, or shop-lifts. Haw!" OK, even her voice was evocative of someone I had known, but I could not place it.

"I see you are without libation. May I get you a cocktail?" She tilted her head, which I took to be an affirmative response, and I turned to head for the bar.

"I thought you'd never ask – *JAMES!*" I stopped dead in my tracks and I felt my jaw drop and mouth go dry. I did know that voice. *Very* well, in fact. I hadn't heard it for a good long while, but it was not one that could be forgotten – or mistaken for anyone else.

I turned back around, almost fearfully for some reason. As I looked at the exotic creature before me, she reached into her skull-imprinted bag and pulled out a little ornate case. She removed a pair of eyeglasses and leaning down, put them on. Her head shot up and despite the near impossibility of this being the same person who it nonetheless had to be, I choked out "K'will?"

"Who the fuck else did you think it was, motherfucker!"