

## Enclave

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

Stapleton was a port city of roughly two million inhabitants with a high density of students and young professionals who lived in the Youth District, also known as 'Posh Ghetto'. This enclosed village with its elegant old brick façades and century-old cobbled walkways was like a magnet for those with means who were looking for a trendy part of town to call home amid the hipster pubs, coffee shops, night spots and dining patios. 'Posh Ghetto' was also only a short walk from Milestone Beach and the ocean. While it remained a lodging of idyllic privilege, a slew of missing person cases reported within the last three months in the Stapleton Chronicle had recently rocked the vibrant seaside community. A day after the fifth victim was reported missing, the Chronicle announced that a male suspect had been arrested in connection with the cases. The press source claimed that a silk scarf belonging to the young Ophelia Harris was retrieved in the suspect's rear alleyway garage following an anonymous tip sent to Stapleton Police Services forensic investigations unit.

Reverend Rutting came across as a kind and gentle person. Skilled with the talents of an orator, his voice would carry from the pulpit all the way to the entrance of Christ's Sanctuary and then out into the crowded main streets of Stapleton. While quick to lead congregants into confession with quotes from the Book of Proverbs and other parts of the Bible, Rutting himself would put forward the appearance of moral propriety and even a certain proudly defiant incorruptibility. After the service, he would lead his faithful into a dismissal, urging them to go out into the world and to be active members of the body of Christ in unique and diverse ways.

While most ministers preaching from the pulpit would often retire early in their sleeping quarters with their nightly prayers and obligations done for the day, Rutting would dim the lights and flick a switch in his flat to turn on a pink neon light sign that read: "Christian Bordello". After downing a swig of straight Russian vodka, he would change out of his pastoral garments and put on a more illicit hipster garb. This particular Sunday in the month of June was not just a usual night out for Reverend Rutting. On this sixth day of the sixth month, he was invited onstage to be a guest speaker at the annual 'Klan Klashers Rally'. After leaving his flat, he activates his front door security system and gets into a dark Cadillac luxury car parked out front with a driver well dissimulated behind the tinted driver's side window. After driving past Milestone Beach and through 'Posh Ghetto', the Cadillac enters a gated lot to the trendy Beach Breeze Nightclub.

Upon entering the nightclub through the staff and VIP entrance-way, Mr. Rutting—who was accustomed to drop his title of reverend for such nightly escapades—enters a dressing room and readies himself for the rally.

"Jake, we're ready to go live in four!" A six-foot-four inch bouncer with a sumo wrestler build shouts out through a crack in the door.

“It’s show-time!” Jacob Rutting hollers.

Soon after, the keynote speaker leaves the dressing room and heads through a series of concrete corridors and a darkened stairwell sandwiched between a duo of security guards wearing wires to communicate with event stage personnel. Finally, after leaving the backstage areas, Mr. Rutting arrives to the stage and waits behind a red curtain.

“And now, the man you Klannies have all been waiting for... Give it up for one of your favorite magnetic personalities JAKE RUTTING!”

“Thank you, thank you, ladies and gents... Pleased to be here tonight in my favorite part of Stapleton. My own stomping grounds, as you will... Let me hear you Posh Ghetto! I know some of you tonight, came straight over to Beach Breeze from the super sexy Milestone Beach!”

After delivering the last few lines, Jake Rutting removes his belt, swings it like a lasso around on stage and undoes his pant button, letting his trousers fall to reveal a pair of Hawaiian themed bathing trunks.

“Are you ready to party, Kladies and Kents?”

After another loud cheer from the crowd, Jake delivers a short and profane set of rap verses as a beat boxing loop is cued backstage. He then sends a few more cuss words out toward the throng with his lips pressed against the cone shaped microphone and begins his comedy routine.

“What do you get when you hire a vampire in a blood bank? A severe blood shortage! What about what you get if you hire a werewolf as a coroner? A killing spree! What about if you dress up a wolf in sheep’s clothing and let it into a pasture? Lots of wool and no mutton!”

After delivering the last punch-line, Jake Rutting kneels down on the stage and does his final routine which involves feigning being a minister while giving a loud and morally deficient confession, which causes the audience to send out another noisy clamor of approval.

“It was great to be on stage with you all here tonight! Hope you all find your way back to your caves, nests or burrows. Remember that Milestone Beach never closes and you can head right over there when Beach Breeze boots you out! Goodnight folks!”

After some arm gestures and a deep and theatrical bow, Jake Rutting leaves the stage with the audience on their feet hollering and clapping. Wearing the same brightly coloured bathing trunks, he walks through a maze of corridors to get to the parking lot where the same Cadillac is stationed. Upon reaching the passenger side, his chauffeur opens the door and Rutting gets in, noticing a bottle of rum stashed in a compartment by the seat belt buckle. He grabs the new bottle, opens it and takes a swig as the car begins to pull out of the parking spot. Soon the sleek luxury car leaves the nightclub’s outer confines, and heads back past Milestone Beach and ‘Posh Ghetto’ like a

pendulum swinging back along an almost identical semi-circle to reach its original point of energy charged stasis. Upon reaching Rutting's abode, the driver parks the vehicle and opens the passenger door, letting the slightly tipsy reverend out of his seat. Rutting then reaches in his pocket and hands the driver a few charcoal and mauve coloured bills, then stumbles up the walkway to reach the front entrance, where a set of digits is clumsily entered to unlock the flat. After opening the main door, he crashes on the couch and falls asleep as the same familiar "Christian Bordello" sign flickers in the earliest hours of Monday morning.

Waking up with a splitting headache from his usual end-of-the-week boozy hangover, Reverend Rutting quickly throws on his casual Monday dress and heads out to his weekly shift at Giant's Monocle Curiosity Shop. With the shop opening its doors at noon, the reverend was accustomed to a considerable sleep-in on most Monday mornings before becoming assistant shop-keeper for one of Stapleton's rarest collections of occult and enchanted objects.

"Hello Jacob! You put on quite a show last night!" A middle aged man behind the cash register says as the small bell tethered to the door rings gently upon the reverend's arrival.

"Got a bloody hangover again from being so liquored up last night!" The reverend replies.

"Last night when you finished up your act on stage a few of us boys headed below the bridge by Milestone Beach to see if we could come up with another catch. As the moon crept behind the clouds after one o'clock, we snuck up on a young couple by the water, seized them both and dragged 'em alongside the edge of the bridge all the way to our vanny." The gray-haired shop-keeper with a grizzled beard and dark brown suspenders says with an ominous glint in his eyes.

Suddenly, the same bell rings and a customer enters the shop after being lured in by the showy window display.

"How much for the green orb on the small dark table there?" A man with a pronounced streak on his cheek and a slightly balding scalp enquires.

"That piece is a dragon's orb. A real rarity. You can connect it to a light source and some say it tells the future when it illuminates." The reverend explains.

"The orb is 1300 dollars. I've been told it was an auction piece that once belonged to a renowned fortune teller some 200 years ago." The same co-worker behind the desk says.

"I'll take it! What about that book there? I like the gold-leaf on the cover." The curious customer prods.

“That is an enchanted volume on toxic fungi. Apparently, Doctor Wilbert Goffman had a first edition on hand when he first experimented with ergot fungi.” The reverend says in a knowledgeable tone of voice.

“I think I’ll pass on the book, please put the orb in a box for me. It’s a gift.” The customer says, pulling out a credit card to make the purchase.

“Here you are Sir! Thanks for stopping by today!” The cashier says as the man turns to exit the store with his boxed purchase in a large and sturdy brown paper bag. After the door closes again and the small bell steadies, the secret conversation continues.

“Did you bring them down below late last night?” Jake Rutting asks.

“Yes, but we got them out by six o’clock this morning. We only had time for a two hour séance. We knew by the way the Chronicle headlines are going out these days that we had to rush them out of Stapleton first thing in the morning. Besides, our key set-up man has just been caught.”

“Danny, I’m a bit worried about that print. We can fake the forensic evidence for only so long. Later on someone is going to notice the print is still out there when our John Doe is in his jail cell.” Jake says in a mildly concerned tone of voice.

From a stout white jail van with the insignia of the Stapleton Police Services on its doors, the key suspect in the disappearance of Ophelia Harris and the Stapleton Vanishings is transferred to a high-security prison, tethered by the wrist to a small gang of prisoners caked with dirt and perspiration. In the front of the van’s passenger side, a law enforcement officer reads the daily headline of the Stapleton Chronicle: *“Couple vanishes from Milestone Beach—Loft in ‘Posh Ghetto’ being searched for leads in the case”*.

The End