

Viewing Pleasure

by Sawney Hatton

Steve climbs the subway stairwell, emerging from the deserted bowels of the city into its dark, dirty asshole. Closed for hours, the shells of autobody shops, secondhand appliance dealers, and ghetto churches line the block. The footsteps of his Doc Martens echo off their weathered brick facades. Towering streetlamps hazily illuminate the pavement, still wet from an earlier rainfall. Used condoms and hypo needles litter the gutters, graffiti and puke spray the walls. Downtown, a haven for the lost and the hiding.

Over the past six months, Steve has become a proud connoisseur of body modification. He'd pierced five holes in each lobe, strung dangling chains from them attached to the gold bone plugged through his nose. His forehead was dotted with chrome-plated studs. Kaiser spikes jutted out from his eyebrows. A pinkie-thick bull's ring punched through each of his nipples. He'd treated himself to nine lip hoops and a tongue barbell for Christmas, making the holiday uncommonly joyous for him.

And tonight, just picturing that ribbed loop inserted through the glans of his cock excites him. He fantasizes about hanging tackle weights from it, stretching it to its snapping point.

Steve's heavily tattooed with vivid images of death and damnation, a gallery he had begun a decade ago when attending community college, but that sort of shallow decoration does nothing for him anymore. He wants to push his flesh to its limits, not just mark it.

He supposes he's a masochist, though he doesn't like leather whips or hot wax or even clover clamps.

He *needs* to feel the ecstasy of pronged metal puncturing his skin, sliding through meat and muscle.

Yeah, it's way better than fucking. And he has to admit, he likes the attention, be it from the shocked old fogey on her way to church or the rocker chick with a taste for the weird and wild. He loves any looks he gets, because he hates not being noticed. Can't stand being ignored.

By now he figures he is pretty impossible to ignore. But that doesn't stop him from adding more shiny embellishments to himself.

He's hooked.

Steve learned about *Body and Soul* from a flyer handed to him by a stunning platinum blonde at the Volcano Club where he bartended. She told him they specialized in exotic cosmetic piercings at affordable prices, no appointment necessary. And, being open until four in the morning, it fit Steve's afterhours lifestyle.

He fishes the flyer from his back pocket to recheck the address. One block down, on Carver Street.

The parlor is housed in a squat tenement, identified only by a small plastic sign designating its name and business hours. He almost walks by the entrance.

Steve, sporting a black T-shirt and leather pants adorned with superfluous zippers, steps into the sparsely furnished lobby, a half dozen empty folding chairs set along the pastel-colored walls. A slim young receptionist with too much mascara, her raven hair tied up in a bun, sits at a desk, focused on filing her purple lacquered nails with an emery board.

Steve gives the area the once-over and, with an approving nod, swaggers up to the girl.

He fake-coughs to get her attention.

The girl raises her eyes from her manicure. "May I help you?"

"Yeah," he answers, feeling more awkward than he expected himself to be. "I'm here to get my penis pierced."

"Are you alone?"

"Yeah," he smirks. "Just me and my weenie."

"Through there," she directs Steve with a gesture of her thumb. "End of the hall. Mister Holland will service you."

"Thanks, babe." He winks at her.

Steve slips through a beaded curtain and advances down the long, narrow corridor. A naked light bulb on the ceiling flickers, its harsh glow casting his blurred reflection on the glossy wood paneling.

Steve peers into a spacious white room, antiseptically bright. In the middle of the room is a vinyl-upholstered table, bolted to the floor, about the size of a twin bed. Maroon drapes cover a substantial portion of the far wall. In one corner is a tall metal cabinet with several shallow drawers. Hunched at the cabinet rummaging in a drawer, Steve presumes, is Mister Holland, tall, lean. He turns toward his customer.

"Hello, sir!" he greets Steve in a hotel-hospitality tone. "Come on in."

Mister Holland wears brown suede shoes, expensive ones, a pair of baggy beige trousers and a white buttoned shirt, the sleeves rolled up just above his elbows. He has a permanently furrowed brow above wire-rimmed glasses. He is older than Steve had anticipated, well into his fifties, his dark hair streaked with gray.

"Please. Lie down on the table."

Steve hoists himself onto the table while Mister Holland shuts the heavy door to the hallway.

"So you're interested in the Prince Albert?"

"Yeah," Steve replies, casually adjusting himself.

"All rightee. Put your arms at your side please."

Steve thrusts his fists to his thighs. Mister Holland fastens one of his wrists taut to the table with a looped thong, pulls a connecting tether across his midsection, then binds down his other wrist.

"What ya doin'?"

"Just relax, sir," Holland reassures him. "It's only a precaution. Some people, as a reflex, try to knock my hand away as soon as I puncture the

skin." He chuckles, circling Steve. "Don't want to make this any more difficult than necessary."

Makes sense, Steve supposes.

Mister Holland then, more forcibly, straps his ankles down.

"What the hell?" Steve squeals. "Is this really?... I mean, I can handle it. You don't have to tie me up like this."

"It's part of the ritual."

Steve scoffs. "What ritual?"

"Preparing you," Holland informs him as he lastly straps Steve's head down so he can hardly move it.

"For what?" Steve barks.

"To be a star."

"Get these fucking things off me!" Steve yells, his every muscle rigid from anger and alarm.

Mister Holland ignores him, tearing off his T-shirt with the quick snip of a scissor. He then rotates the table, tilting it upward at a sixty-degree angle. Steve, now facing the drapes, watches Mister Holland flip a switch by them. There is an amplified pop, followed by the faint hum of feedback. He tugs a cord next to the curtain. It parts to reveal an enormous window. Beyond it is a company of elegantly dressed people, middle-aged men and women, some seated at a counter at the window, others standing behind them. All gaze at Steve, applauding him gleefully.

"Can you all hear me all right out there?" Holland bellows.

The crowd whoops in affirmation.

"Excellent," Holland announces, displaying all the zeal of a ringmaster. "It's showtime, folks!"

The audience cheers and claps.

"Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, for your viewing pleasure, I present to you... What's your name, son?"

"Fuck you!"

“Mister Fuk Yu. Must be of Asian heritage.”

The crowd laughs.

“Tonight’s theme, suggested by our Madame Corva, will be the eminent German author Franz Kafka!” The audience nods. “In 1915, Kafka penned the seminal work ‘Die Verwandlung’ — ‘The Metamorphosis’ — about a man’s transformation into an insect. What better inspiration could we have for our production here, yes?”

His audience agrees.

Mister Holland again consults the cabinet, rubbing his chin while scanning the contents of the open drawer.

"Hmmm. Where shall we begin?"

With an air of theatricality, he snaps on a pair of latex gloves. He then lifts from the drawer a pneumatic riveter.

Mister Holland looms over Steve, squirming in his restraints.

"I'll kill ya, you crazy fuck!"

Holland stoops to whisper into his ear. "Clear your mind of everything but the pain. Concentrate on the pain. Experience it. Express it. Let your pain *speak* for you." A broad smile stretches across his face. "Now let's give 'em their money's worth."

Mister Holland steps away, returning moments later wheeling in a large steel cart set with a variety of strange golden accoutrements. He parks it beside Steve.

“Please. Whatever you’re doing... don’t...”

“You’re gonna be fine, son. Better. A work of art.”

From the cart Mister Holland picks up a near perfect replica of a bug’s leg. Near perfect except for its size—four feet long. Fit for a human.

He raises the object for the audience to behold. “Ladies and gentlemen, I shall begin with the midlegs, modeled aptly enough after *Blattella germanica*, the German cockroach. These will not be functional as

the replacement limbs will be, but we never skimp on authenticity here at *Body and Soul*.”

Holland places the flattened upmost portion of the leg against Steve’s flesh, between his fifth and sixth ribs, and with the riveter fastens the piece onto Steve’s body.

Steve’s pain screams for him.

The audience applauds wildly. As they do when the next leg is attached to the opposite side of Steve’s torso.

Tears stream down Steve’s face, the unbearable agony beyond anything he has known before. He begs for mercy, but even he can’t make out his own words now.

Holland pats him on the head. “Great show, son! We’re killing ’em.”

From the cabinet drawer Holland produces a rock hammer and chisel.

Steve’s eyes widen in terror.

“Now to give you a proper mandible,” Holland chimes and begins to chip away at Steve’s jaw...