

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 7 | Issue 2

Article 56

December 2008

Attack of the 49 1/2 Ft. Woman

Alexi Zentner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate>

Recommended Citation

Zentner, Alexi (2008) "Attack of the 49 1/2 Ft. Woman," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 56.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol7/iss2/56>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Zentner: Attack of the 49 1/2 Ft. Woman

ATTACK OF THE 49 1/2 FT. WOMAN

Alexi Zentner

Most of my husband's girlfriends run away as soon as they see me, but this one gets all mouthy, so I pinch her head off. Needless to say, this causes a riot. It's bullshit, really. We're in Wichita, and I've got to think that most of the crowd has seen worse; it's farming country, after all. Have you ever seen a man get tangled up in a baler?

Mickey, the ringmaster, doesn't dispute that the girl had it coming, and he even goes so far as to call my husband an asshole, but he still says that I've got to stop killing the customers. It's bad for business.

"You're not still giving me shit about Yuma, are you?" I say.

"I don't want to talk about Yuma," he says, and then shakes his head and tells one of the carnies to put more sawdust down over the bloodstained dirt.

Yuma wasn't my fault.

Stewart is waiting for me when I get back to my tent. He hasn't bothered to get the blower going to inflate my mattress, and when I ask him about it he doesn't look up from his book. He just takes a sip from his glass of gin, turns the page, and quietly says, "I don't think you deserve a bed tonight."

I know he hates it, but I pick up the couch with my left hand and then cup it in my right, holding it in front of my face so I can look him in the eye. He tries to ignore me, but I bobble it a little and he spills some of the gin on his pants. He finally looks up and shakes his head. "Come on, Ellie. I'm not in the mood. You fucking decapitated her. Her parents are going to shit a mongoose about this. You know how much this is going to cost us? For God's sake, they'd come after you with tanks again, if it weren't for the Titan Incidental Casualties Act."

I rub my finger on his leg, and he grimaces like I'm hurting him, but I know I'm barely touching him. "Big deal. I can

afford the fines," I say. "I've got that demolition job next week in Kansas City. That'll cover it."

"Do you really want to be doing this for the rest of your life?" he says. "What about saving for retirement?" He holds out his hand and then lets go of the glass. We both watch it tumble, the gin streaming out of it and dissipating in the air. When it hits the dirt, forty feet below, the tinkle of the breaking glass sounds muted.

"You don't seem to mind the money," I say. "You haven't had to work a day since this happened."

"Yeah, it's a fucking fantasy land," he says, and then picks his book back up, as if he's going to keep reading.

I love when he pouts. There's something about the way he bites his lip under his teeth that gets me all rumbly and ready. I move my finger over a little, off his leg, touching him the way he used to like it, but he makes a point of staring at the book, as if he's actually reading.

"What's wrong?" I say, though we both know it hasn't been the same since I got caught in the particle accelerator. "Have I gained weight?" I say, trying to joke.

He looks up from his book and gives me the old up and down. He doesn't say anything, but in his not saying anything it's as if he is really saying, "yes, you've gained weight," so when he does say something, when he says, "are you going to put me down now, or are you going to pinch my head off instead?" I really do think about pinching his head off for a second.

Instead, I put the couch down. It's possible that maybe I let go of the couch when it's still a few feet above the ground, and it's possible that I maybe hear the sound of the wooden frame cracking as it hits the floor.

I lower the tarp that's hanging from the ceiling so that the spray of my shower won't get all over our living area, and then I strip down. Mickey keeps promising me that he'll figure out some way to get me a proper bath—I'm tired of chlorinated swimming pools and muddy-bottomed lakes—but tonight the fire hose feels good. It's hot enough in Wichita that the cold

Zentner: Attack of the 49 1/2 Ft. Woman

water is more refreshing than bracing. I soap up and take a nice little look at my stomach, my hips, my boobs. I don't think I've gained weight at all. If anything, I've lost a few pounds, toned up since I grew. And I swear to God, my breasts are perkier, which seems to break all of the laws of gravity. What it is, I think, is that I'm getting a lot more exercise, what with all the traveling, the shows, the demolition work on the side. I think I look good. I'm height and weight proportionate. If anything, I'm kind of petite. Like the kind of pretty, pert-nosed blonde woman that certain men used to dream about in the fifties. Only ten times as big.

Later, Stewart apologizes and says he was a little freaked out seeing me pop the girl's head off, and I apologize to him in turn and tell him that I was jealous. Neither of us actually says anything about having make-up sex, but while I'm setting up my bed, Stewart changes into his wetsuit and gets out the jackhammer without me even asking.

He can be really thoughtful that way sometimes, like when Mickey fucked up the booking and we were in Yuma, Arizona the same time as Harley McQueen and her circus. Harley seemed really nice when I first met her, but there were all these things she slid into the conversation. Nothing I could really call her on, but the sort of snide little remarks that cut me down. She wasn't as bad the few times when it was just the two of us, but when we all got together—Mothra, Gargantua, The Amazing Colossal Man—it's like she couldn't help herself. For instance, she couldn't go a day without casually mentioning that she was a giantess because of a nuclear waste spill, like nuclear waste trumps a particle accelerator. We're both 50-foot women, does it really matter why? And that's the other thing. Harley couldn't let it go that she was just a little bit taller than me. She was always really subtle about it, saying things like, "You'd look great in that flowered, blue dress of mine, but oh, it's probably too big for you." It was ridiculous. First of all, she's only five inches taller than me, and anyway, before the chemical explosions, the atmospheric anomalies, before there were a dozen or so of us

titans, she was already like six feet tall, so it's not as if she had to grow as much as I did.

It's funny, because when I first realized she was a bitch, when we all used to hang out together as a group, I thought that maybe she was just lacking in self-confidence, or that she was threatened because she wasn't the only woman among the titans anymore. Maybe I was naive, but I tried to give her the benefit of the doubt, and I decided that if I made a real effort to be nice to her, to kowtow a little, that she'd relax and stop with the snippy comments. Sometimes I still disagreed with her—I mean, Jesus, how many times can you eat at Han's Chinese Buffet before you want something a little more upscale?—but mostly I went out of my way to back her up. If she said something in front of the other titans and I agreed with it even a little, I'd say, "I think Harley's got a good point, some people really do need to get stepped on." And when she wanted to sleep with Mr. Mammoth Man and she started wearing short skirts and tops, I'd say how sexy she looked, even if she did look like a cheap little whore with that belly roll of fish-pale flesh bulging out when she sat down.

But of course, she took my being nice as some sort of a weakness. Instead of keeping her little jabs quiet and subtle enough that I couldn't really complain about them, she started saying things outright to my face and rallying people against me when I wasn't there. She even told people I sat on that nest of bald eagles on purpose, even though she was the one who had told me that it was okay to sit on the ledge.

Things cooled down for a while, because we were all touring separately, but then all of a sudden we were both in Yuma, and I found out she had stolen my poster. She didn't even have the decency to call me and ask—I would have said yes, sure, if she had called me, it's just a poster—and I found out from Mickey, who had gone over to check out the competition. He'd torn one of the posters off a wall downtown and showed it to me, and sure enough it was a blatant rip-off: Harley in the white skirt hiked up on her thighs, the white-cupped, cotton bikini top, the flowing

hair, even the seductive, half-closed eyes. The only difference from my poster was that instead of straddling an overpass and holding a car in her hand, like me, Harley was standing over elevated subway tracks and holding a businessman in a suit and tie. The worst thing, though, was that she'd stolen the tag line, too—Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman—with the letters in crimson, except that the number fifty was popping off her poster, filled in with black and emphasized, like it wasn't just about getting paying customers in, she wanted to send me a message.

I suppose I got a little drunk and threw a water tower at Harley, and we went on a bit of a rampage. We knocked down a couple of houses and maimed a few people, rolling around, punching each other, pulling hair, all of that, until the Air Force scrambled their jets and broke it up. Afterwards, Stewart was really sweet about the whole thing. He told me that the way Harley acts isn't about me, it's about Harley. He pointed out that Harley's husband had been cheating on her even before Harley got doused in nuclear waste, and anytime he was interviewed, the ex-husband referred to Harley as a giant freak. Stewart didn't say anything about his own indiscretions before the particle accelerator, but he did say that no matter what he did during the day, he was always back with me every night. He said that he knew I was still the same person, only bigger, which made me cry. Stewart let me carry him back to the tent, even though I know he hates it when I carry him while I'm drunk. I think he's afraid I'll accidentally squeeze him.

Stewart's mostly been supportive about my career. I think about the time the Japanese magazine put together a photo shoot for the two of us, and in the end, they airbrushed him out. Later, I overheard him telling somebody that he was kind of glad, because I looked so good in the picture that he didn't want to be a distraction. Stewart's the one who encouraged me to start reading my poems during my act, so the audience would know I was more than a physical marvel, though I'm really a language poet, so sometimes I think it goes over the audience's head. And if it weren't for Stewart there's no way I would have

entered that chapbook competition.

So the day after I pinched the girl's head off, when her father storms into the tent in the middle of my show, I'm not even a little pissed off at Stewart, even though I know he already has another girl lined up for after the show; the girls can't seem to resist him, the way he looks in his lion tamer's suit—complete with jodhpurs and a pith helmet—flicking his whip at me, like he's controlling my anger.

The father has some sort of a hunting rifle, even though everybody knows that bullets bounce off the skin of us titans. I had just plucked some teenaged boy out of the crowd and I'm holding his shirt between my thumb and my finger so he's dangling there in the air, kicking his feet and windmilling his arms, screaming in terror while people in the audience are either gasping, laughing, or cheering.

The shots don't feel like much, as if somebody is trying to pluck a hair from my arm, and I'm concentrating so much on the boy, pretending like I'm going to eat him, that I don't even realize the father is in the tent and trying to kill me. But then the people who are laughing and cheering start screaming, and I hear the sound of the rifle bouncing up to me. I put the teenager down in the grandstand again and turn to the father.

I don't know who he is at first, which isn't that surprising. Every few months some local decides I'm a monster that has to be killed; even though I don't like the bones snapping and the squishy feeling, I usually just step on them and end the whole thing. For some reason though, I don't step on this man, I just watch him point the rifle at me and shoot and shoot and shoot. One of the bullets hits me in the eye, and that smarts a little and makes me tear up. I reach down and pluck the rifle out of his hands, crushing it.

The man is crying and screaming at me, and he looks so small and insignificant in his rage, that I forget for a moment that he is human, like me. And that's when I realize that he is the father of the girl whose head I pinched off the night before; suddenly he looks so sad, so forlorn, so alone, that before I can even think

about it, I pick him up, cupping him in my hands.

The screaming from the crowd pitches up, and I know they must all have heard about this man's daughter, and they are thinking that I am going to kill him too. But I don't want to hurt him. I'm terribly gentle, all too aware of my fumbling fingers. I cradle him against me, trying to comfort him. He beats at my breast with his fists—I can feel his anger, a tiny, physical, little thing—and I just hold him, containing him. When I feel him stop, I look down and he's curled up in my hand, his eyes closed, like he is either praying, or waiting for me to kill him. I don't look down on him with curiosity or pity; I understand that even though he just tried to kill me, he isn't some murderous monster, but only another person who is mourning for what is lost and can never be regained.