

## The Party

By Dean Meredith

I've just been watching Charles Bukowski on YouTube and he's inspired me to try and write a short story. At first I was going to describe one of my many journeys to the peep-shows, but having already had my morning wank, I thought I'd turn my hand to something else. What came to mind was the night I went to a feminist poet's birthday party. I have a swig of Smokey Bishop, down a few Red Rock Deli potato chips and remember.

It's a long story but I'll keep it brief or I'll bore you, and more importantly me. The sweet chili and sour cream makes me thirsty, so I take another mouthful of brown malty beer. There's an old movie on TV, it's Sunday, hot and humid, and my old air-conditioner struggles on loudly, breathing in and blowing out and doing its best for me. Oh yeah – the party – I'm getting to that. Don't worry; this isn't going to be any Proust-like thing that drags on. However, I will give you a bit of necessary background info.

Some months earlier, for all sorts of crazy reasons and going against my better judgment, I'd joined Facebook. Now, this was a very strange thing for a loner like me to do. Anyway, one thing leads to another and before too long I had all these so called Facebook friends. I didn't know most of them and they didn't know me. I'm not one to open my lap-top every day. Maybe twice a week or so I'll spark it up and look at some porn, and every now and then check my emails. I generally find this part a chore, because they're invariably mostly spam advertising dubious adult websites or invitations to poetry events on the other side of the country that I couldn't possibly attend and probably wouldn't want to anyway.

So this one time, there's a message from a girl inviting me to her birthday party. It wasn't a personal invitation, just a blanket invite to all of her social media friends. Normally, I being in hermit mode wouldn't have given it much thought, but I remembered her from the Spring Poetry Festival and she seemed engaging and interesting when we spoke. She also mentioned Bukowski and recommended a documentary she'd seen. Maybe this was what my

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sub-conscious hooked onto in choosing to write this?

My beer's empty, so I get another. As the name suggests, it has a slightly burned taste, but it's cold and goes down well. I make the mistake of looking at the clock and notice that expectedly time has sped up. The impending dread of work tomorrow hits me. Another swig of beer and the ink flows freely onto the page once more.

Anyway, I RSVP to maybe attend the party, but would leave it to how I felt on the day. As it turned out, I felt ok, so I went out and bought a \$20 gift voucher from Borders Books, which had an excellent poetry section. I thought this was the right amount to spend, not too much, not too little and it meant I wasn't a bum. Besides, she was supplying food.

By the time night came around, I'd forgotten about the food part, so I ate some spaghetti at home and drank half a bottle of wine. After which I wasn't too sure about attending any party. But for some unknown reason, I had a quick shower, spruced up slightly in my flannelette shirt and cargo pants, put on some boots and carefully placed my pith hat in the car. I just happened to have half a bottle of Pernod at home, so I took that with me. A couple of swigs on the way, along with a few Codeine-Fortes and the long drive didn't seem so bad.

I wasn't sure what to expect when I got there. I hardly knew her, didn't know any of her friends, and wasn't too sure if she was just a feminist or a lesbian as well. Not that it made a hell of a difference to me, but I think it humorous that one of my female poet friends described herself as an eco-feminist when I could easily call myself an ego-chauvinist.

So the scene is set – I'm half drunk, a little numb on the Codeine, dressed like a backward hick, except for my rose-coloured glasses and pith hat. I find what I think is the address and park at some small business place on the corner. After carefully locking the car, I stagger, Pernod in hand, towards the light. Music and voices lure me through the back gate and into a lovely fairy garden. I zigzag through scattered people in dark clothes, offer vague greetings and make my way into a smallish town-house with a loft.

I pause in the kitchen and look around for the birthday girl. Within what seemed like seconds, she sees me and comes from the lounge room to say hello. Of course she has no idea

who I am, so I remind her of the poetry festival and wish her happy birthday. I give her the gift voucher and she seems genuinely chuffed. She asks if I'd like a drink or something to eat. She'd bought Indian and had all this food to choose from. I say thanks but I'll just grab a drink for now. All the glasses and cups seem to have been taken, so I happily settle for a mug. I pour a strong Pernod and Coke, and wet my lips. Speaking of which, the Smokey Bishop's calling my name as I write. Mm: not bad.

Back at the party, the birthday girl thanks me for coming and ushers me into the lounge. More people arrive, so she excuses herself to go and greet them. I see sitting on the couch, one of the ladies from the poetry committee I was on. She's surprised to see me. I say hi, take a seat and strike up a conversation. Then she introduces me to her daughter who's young, cute and friendly. We talk about this and that in the usual awkward way people do when they first meet.

She works in a bookstore so I ask her what her favourite book is. She's not sure if she has one, but mentions she's reading Tim Winton at the moment. I tell her a friend of mine's listening to one of his books on audio-disc, and as coincidence would have it one of my former house-mates does the narration. She asks me if I have a favourite. Now by this time my mind's not working at maximum speed, so I just go into default mode and tell the truth. This would normally be a good thing, but I'd forgotten I was in a party full of feminists.

My answer comes clear and fast like a true confession, and I tell her my favourite writer is Nabokov and I adore Lolita – the book and the movie. At that stage I'd only seen the original Kubrick version, but had just finished savoring every word of the audio-book narrated by Jeremy Irons, and didn't realize he also starred in the later version of the movie. Well, somehow other people had noticed me in my flannelette shirt, cargoes, boots, rose-coloured glasses, pith hat and the strong smell of aniseed. This was obviously news to me.

A lovely looking young thing with long curly black hair, snow-white skin and bright red lipstick suddenly appeared from nowhere, and said something along the lines of how could you possibly like that book? I proceeded to tell her about what a great story it is and how poetically Nabokov writes, but she wasn't having a bar of it. To her it was a book about a pedophile, and

here I was in her friend's feminist party talking sacrilege. She scared me, but her beauty was worthy of the best clichés my deranged mind could conjure.

In stumbling defence mode I proceeded without caution, mentioning that Lolita was no complete innocent and Humbert genuinely loved her. Oh talk about putting the cat among the pigeons – my Facebook friend's feminist friend was now well and truly on fire. How dare I overlook that the nymphet was still a child, and how could I have the audacity to imply she was partly to blame? I refilled my mug and somewhat miraculously, diverted the conversation to Socrates and his alleged corruption of the youth of Athens. The Pernod didn't taste like Hemlock, but part of me felt like the old guy in his cell during his last few moments.

Desperate and clutching, my mind drifted. There I was dressed as a wild-game hunter, trudging into the heart of darkness, when all of a sudden this giant female panther leaps out at me. My guard is down, my gun is unloaded and my wits are slowed by fatigue and old-age (among other things). But she's a magnificent beast, her claws are sharp as needles and her fangs like young ivory, and all I could see was that jet black hair and those ruby-red lips. She had real heat about her – what a passionate kitten, and smart as hell with it. How could I not admire that?

After a while and she'd realized we'd moved from Lolita to ancient Greece and wondered how that had happened, we talked about relative truths and points of view, and she seemed to simmer down. Someone interrupted us and the wild-cat skulked off to another part of the jungle. I went outside into the cool night air and noticed two girls sitting and having a smoke. I sat down and joined them and we talked for a bit.

I wasn't sure if half the feminists were lesbians or not, and these two weren't wearing any obvious t-shirts or badges. One girl talked about *The Day Her Cunt Went Psycho* – a performance poem, and the other smoked and listened intently. The panther came out and joined us briefly, providing examples of her own performance art, consisting of random pieces of dialogue which could be used in any conversation. Before I knew it, she was gone again. The performance poet asked for my phone number, I gave it to her and then she went too.

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The other girl and I remained in the garden and I ineptly recited one of my Tom Waits inspired poems, which she seemed to find completely inane. As the night wore on I met more interesting arty types - fellow poets, a photographer, another performance artist and a psychologist. The birthday girl read one of her academic intellectual poems, which also happened to mention her cunt. Before she left, the photographer surprised me by kissing my hand, and I kissed hers back. By this time it was quite late, I was old and tired so I said my goodbyes.

Funny thing though, as I was leaving I noticed the panther out the front about to get into her car, and she gave me this look which seemed like she was half expecting me to come over and ask her something. But I didn't. I just kept on walking to my car, got in and drove home. It was a long way but the time seemed to pass quickly, and soon enough I was collapsing on my bed.

As I closed my eyes, I wondered if I might dream of her - leaping out from the jungle and attacking me at first, but finishing up licking me with her soft pink tongue. I was too exhausted to realize I usually don't remember my dreams or at least that's the feeling I get. Surely I'd remember that one? No such luck - when I woke up and opened my eyes, I simply wiped the drool from my chin and surveyed the mess.

The End

**Dean Meredith bio:** Dean Meredith is an Australian poet, and short story writer. He is a graduate of the University of Western Australia; and his various works have been published in chap-books and journals domestically and abroad. Love, loss, and human nature are common themes. Major influences include Alfred Noyes, Sylvia Plath, Edgar Allan Poe, and WB Yeats. Dean's collected poems are due for release some time this year.