

Disco Party

I woke up with the imprint of Murphy's plaid couch on my cheek, and the slight crust of dried drool on the corner of my mouth. Slowly I rose to greet the day...it was 1pm.

The neighbor in the next-door hovel was blasting James Brown's album *Body Heat* "...bodyheeeet-hah-ahhh-payback!" My head pounded and the smell of mold, un-cleaned cat box, and stale beer was alerting my body to either puke or *feed the beast!*

"Murphy, yo' man!" I called out. No answer. His cat Duke meowed from the cluttered 50's Formica kitchen table walking over its slippery surface of unpaid bills, cigarette burns and old weed seeds. Murphy was our sometimes roadie-full time drug dealer for my band, his constant lament was, " only earth bound substances-no chemicals."

Murphy lived in unincorporated Theonia, a scratch of land outside of Gary, Indiana, not far from Miller Beach...yes, there was an actual beach in Gary. This house at onetime had been hot property but now it needed a security system. His next- door neighbor was a prostitute, real name Alvia. She had done a lot of Blaxploitation films in the 70's until the genre faded out and then she used her good looks to make a buck. I was always bugging her for cool stories about Dolemite, she was on the cover of his album, "This Ain't No White Christmas."

I walked across the scabby yard of poorly cut crab grass and sand that separated the houses and knocked on her front door.

"Alvia-it's Clint," I said loudly, "want to go get breakfast." I could hear her heels clicking on the wooden floor, as she *cat walked* up to door. She was peeking at me through the frosted glass.

"Clint- oh, oh yea..." she unlatched about three locks and there she was all decked out in her pink velour jogging suit and matching heels. Her long brunette and blond highlighted wig made her look younger than her years as she shook it dramatically, off of her very large still firm looking chest.

"What's up sweet stuff," she said, inviting me in. We walked to her far too cutie patooie looking country kitchen and she made me a cup of coffee.

"You boys playing late last night?" She asked pulling out a chair for herself and motioning for me to sit down.

"Yea, some dump in Valpo, tonight we're going up to Chicago for a gig."

"You do your own stuff right?" She nodded like she knew the answer.

"Oh, yea...but we always do a couple of covers-Stray Cat Strut and Across 110th Street."

She gave me the side-eye, her long lash's fluttering dramatically. "I got mixed feelings about that last one...I was a working girl for awhile...I don't like that line, ...*trying to catch a woman who's weak*..." I wasn't weak, I was broke, honey. I had bills and a kid and no man. "

She and I shot the shit for awhile and then drove up to **Hot and Fresh** for the all day breakfast special.

"Wonder where Murphy is...I can't catch him on his phone, left a couple of messages," I said stuffing my mouth full of runny eggs.

"He left early with some loud muther fuckers, woke me up at about 6am...that's when I decided to get up and put the coffee on."

Murphy at 6 am? No way- that guy couldn't get his ass up unless we threatened him. I checked my phone again. I had a message from Kile, drummer and booking agent and Stew, bassist. Stew said, "call me now," and Kile said, "gig going on early be there at 6 with Murphy."

I excused myself and called Stew. "What's up man?"

"Something is wrong- Murphy butt dialed me or some shit- he was screaming, man, fucking screaming- like someone was killing him."

"Did you call the cops?" I asked.

"Fuck no Clint- he's got all that weed at his house, man and those plants in the basement."

"Ohhhh, shit, yer right." My shoulders dropped. This didn't sound good.

I went back to the table and told Alvia. We decided to go look for him. "When I saw those guys this morning, they was headed down to the beach," she explained.

Driving back to Murphy's I had a bad feeling. Ya know that one in your gut, when you just KNOW shit is wrong. We pulled my rusty white Astrovan into the gravel driveway. Murphy's weather beaten red Sunbird was still sitting there with the windows open...Duke was in the front seat...meowing.

"Why is the cat out?" I said to Alvia. "He was inside when I left."

"Don't get all spooky on me Clint, cat's get out." She said, calming me a little bit.

She changed her shoes to sandals and we began walking toward the beach. Sad old cottages, some boarded up, with smoke smudges where a fire had been, others just beaten up by time and lack of care- lined either side of the hill we were walking down. The streets had deep potholes and were poorly patched from time to time. The closer we got to the beach the better maintained the

properties but they still were barely hanging onto their former 1940-50's glory... when factories were pumping out steel and aluminum like it was gold,

I pointed to a hidden trail where Murphy and I would go to get high...it was a great spot with a cozy view of Lake Michigan.

The place was over grown with ditch weed, tall swaying grass shielded us from the wind and blowing sand and sudden pops of orange rough flowered but beautiful Indian Paintbrush- poked our legs. I could see the big rock up ahead with two rusty lawn chairs tipped over, their nylon seats shredded and blowing, from the pushy gusts of wind puffing off the lake.

"What a great spot," Alvia commented, as we looked down on the long expanse of lakeshore...the waves were iron-side blue with a dirty froth of lip slapping the muddy looking sandy banks. Far away some little kids were shouting and giggling and an old man was walking with a stick- he was so far off he looked like a human scarecrow. Gulls squawked overhead... the desolate landscape prevailed. Across the lake you could see Chicago's skyline to the left or the last vestiges of Inland Steel Mill to the right...and that's when I saw a shoe...attached to a foot, sticking out of the brush down below.

I knew from his Birkenstock's it was Murphy..."Alvia, " I pointed down. She saw it too. We made our way down the sand hill...*Please let him be passed out, please.*

Alvia got there first and I heard her shriek and I knew he was dead. Murphy looked broken, the human body can't be twisted like that and live. Already flies were swarming...fuckers. His eyes looked vacant, not terrified...his soul had left the building.

"Lets clean up the weed in his house and call the cops." I suggested.

She nodded, in shock- hugging onto me like I was a strong, brave man...but I wasn't, I was shaking and scared... this wasn't TV, this was my friend and he was beaten so badly they killed him. It takes a lot of pain and brute force to destroy a person who was once alive.

"What's in his hand," Alvia, said quietly.

I walked over to his body, afraid, like he would pop up and like a zombie but I knew that was stupid. I didn't want to touch him- I'd seen too many cop shows- but I tugged at a turquoise paper and dislodged it from his hand. It was one of those flyers you get on your windshield advertising a concert at a club.

It said "**Disco Party**" at 1733 N. Helm- ***You Know IT!***

"What the fuck," I said under my breath. "Alvia, do you know a N. Helm Street?"

“NO...oh...wait, well...sort of, it’s gone now. I mean, my dad use to take his car to a shop there when I was a kid...it’s an old side street behind the mills- there’s nothing there...it’s all condemned.”

“Well, “ I said climbing back up to her, “there’s a disco party there...”

She shook her head in disbelief. I showed her the flyer. No date, no time.

And when we got back to Murphy’s there was no pot either. All the plants had been removed- even the seeds on the table were gone and the bills on the table neatly stacked...Duke was gone too.

We called the cops. I cancelled the gig. And Alvia and I made a date for the Disco Party- at midnight, to see what we could find.