

Cherry Bomb

A Novel by
Willard Thurston

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PRÉCIS: A protestant minister is in the grip of an incestuous infatuation with his smart, pert daughter who performs in a ‘confrontation theatre’ troupe that stages scrappy exchanges. One performance turns ugly, prompting a disgruntled muscular male in the audience to come on stage and begin beating up the cast. In the mêlée the daughter manages to leave a livid scratch on his face. A gawky, struggling writer in love with the minister’s irreverent daughter, plays a daring trick that further embarrasses the robust ‘theatre critic’ and sets in motion a deadly cat and mouse game played out during the staging of the fireworks at an international fair, particularly the final night’s, prompting an explosive reckoning for all the above.

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PART ONE : TREE HOUSE

He was dimly aware of another body count. Already three that evening. The spectacle of murder and mayhem fetched a large audience. The stylish TV announcer had a dulcet voice, pains-

staking makeup and hemorrhoid-ready composure. Then another young body, this time found nude, the sometimes condoned art form, in a quiet ravine — a pastoral still life. Incendiary, do-it-yourself assault seemed to be working its way up-stream.

Randolph Glasser's ailing wit then abdicated: the national audience, him included, was treated to a series of carefree snaps of the murdered youngster, one a knockout pinup with arms rapturously outstretched. The use of Eros to assist, if not solicit, compassion, struck him as the gratuity added. A libidinal beat to caress calamity. To gentle Eros we commend thee. He was, of course, not then flush with latter-day ecumenicism, with wholesale tolerance. The maxims of Proverbs and Einstein came to mind: The curse causeless shall not come; God does not play craps. Gamely, a later estimation, to quote Steven Hawking, averred that God not only played craps but sometimes threw the dice where no one could see the numbers.

The slick chromy news hour often did this: duly palled or purpled his sensibility and composure — put him at indiscriminate risk. He might acquire an immune deficiency — become susceptible even to radical notions. Sex can sometimes endanger human life folks! Or, less demurely: rid the world of love mongers — join a devout terrorist team! Eros, after all, was a fine old leveler, full of quirky designs, brutality the least conspicuous when sexually energized. Every canny ravisher knew that. Somedays the news hour, in its stintless tumult and luminous glow, seemed imbued with the editorial dash of Heavy

Metal (amplified distortion), such that needy wastrels like him must leastwise take note of a modern axiom: the certifiable maniac got the publicity, a large audience and, pertinent to his own scribbling, many readers. Purveyors of kinky pandemonium, of method assault, were hiring, openly, without quotas or ceiling. The media flogged all manner of sensational bods; bookstalls and news stands often burst with dewy fresh crowbait; even discretion and propriety got routinely spiked at comedy clubs...undeniably, solid assured fury was booking.

He recalled then an inaugural moment on Canadian television: the interview of three able Canadian lawyers, then joint authors of a picturesque novel about a nervo who left his victims stuck up on totem poles without their heads. The book was dedicated ‘for all the Fathers/Mothers’, the ‘slash’ symbol germane, Randy mused. The interview closed with one lawyer taking notes while studying a pretty female nude being drowned in a transparent bathtub (a fussy waxwork tableau), observing his subject with the intensity of an ornithologist as the take faded. During the interview the pleasant host (Peter Gzowski, in his brief tenure as a CBC television caddy) unearthed one bone of concern — sections of the book were smutty and gratuitously sadistic he thought — an offering the dedicated authors sniffed disparagingly. One was especially disappointed when a good writer didn’t ‘go for it.’ Restraint was thus a drag, and stateliness, restraint’s old handmaid, coy and unwieldy. Indeed, handmaids were then in great peril themselves.

At one time, on witnessing such alert entrepreneurial hazing,

supercilious Randy would have immediately risen and dashed off yet another *oraculum*, a speaking-for-the-gods letter. But that reflex was now quite dead. He could read the writing on the wall as well as anyone: either he languished as a nerd or helped oil the adrenalin glut: a hack or rake. Toned news would go on regardless. He could see the scenario all too plainly: when the crazed psycho came at last to his household, ***It*** may have found the latest mindblower lacking in convulsive hideousness, and come to upgrade the raw inspiration.

He decided he must get down to real bodies. Fiddling with concepts while the state burned was getting him neither riches nor solace. Humor itself was now slasher frenetic. Everyone was suitable only as shark bait, knife-edged fish tailings.