

The Acid Trip

By Kenn Hartmann

My intention's to kill the bottle of rum, but instead I drop a tab of acid & thus the trip begins. Forget teetotalers & tittle-tattle narcs. This is for the mean mutha-Hubbard citizenry. Get my brain scrambled & jump my sickle & ride. The barman kisses a chrome skull & whispers, "Death be not afraid." A women rider named Oily asks, "Wot zat? Macbeth or sumthin?" The barman places metal skull behind bar & replies, "What planet are you on? It's Halloween-Eve, unseasonably warm tonight, that's what brought you here." 'Tis true – thirty October twenty-ten & we're way out there. Wino fidgets against bar & points at Oily & says, "Whar'd we done get brought? Whar the fuck are we? Ain't we headed to Homan & Lake?" Yeah, party under the el-tracks. Acid kicks in quicker than rum – scary Shit, Holy Wow. The barman asks, "You like my window clock?" I shrug, I'm writing on a napkin by the blue clock's dim neon glow. Oily lights a joint & coughs. She says, "The right time outside but wrong time inside." "It's backwards," says Wino. The barman sidles up to Wino & asks, "Are you Westside Wino?" Wino shakes head no. "The Original Wino?" Wino shakes head violently, "No, I'm Wino Billy." The barman turns to Oily & growls, "Who said you could smoke?" Oily puts it out between her fingers. Oily taps the window clock gently with her fingernails. Wino says, "Don't look at that thing, it gives me a headache." Oily turns & in an eerie voice says, 'Let's close the joint children.' Another rider named Pudge stretches out in the middle of an old beat sofa, his head tilted up yawning, legs sprawled wide on floor, joins Oily in his own eerie voice & says to the ceiling, "We've come for your cheel-drun! Give us your cheel-drun." He raises his arms & shouts, "Yo'r faw-king cheel-drun!" The rider kneeling on the floor moans, "Make it stop." I look up from scribbled napkin notes - the riders look at me & burst with laughter. The barman asks, "What's with him?"

Oily shrugs. Wino says, "Why you clinging to that barstool?" The guy on his knees shudders & whispers, "I'm skeered to get on muh sickle." Oily says, "We ain't goin' nowhere soon." Wino swings round, "So what you doing down there?" "I thought God was here!" Wino looks around, "That's the clock! That gull'damm clock. My head feels like a vice." Pudge says, "It's the TV doing that to him." Oily says, "No, no, no it's the fridge – it buzzes when open." The barman waves his arms, "You guys are stoned." I write on a napkin, "Mount'n ALLEY basement wash – Graffiti UP!!!" When I read it later & even now have no idea why I wrote it or what it means. I get up & look out greasy window at our sickles randomly parked at odd angles taking up the drive. The translucent clock reads 2AM inside & 10PM outside. Wino Billy says, "That gull'damm clock!" The guy on his knees, rocks & clasps head & moans, "We're trapped in a shithole." Now the barman bursts. He takes a swig from rum bottle. I ask if he has anything other than rum, too sweet, syrupy, I need bitter with a bite. The barman says, "I'll make tea – twigs you might like." He places a pan of water on a hot-plate, "won't take long; let me dust up." He grabs a broom handle with a piece of cardboard nailed to it. He drags is beneath a stool & comes out with a string of dust & collects it in hand. He shuffles zombie-like across room to a waste bin & lets the dust draping from his fingers fall slowly into trash container.

A three-piece band wearing costumes comes out of a back room, talking to each other through Shakespeare tragedy masks. "Django 2-fingered Reinhardt man!" says a voice high-pitched like a piccolo or clarinet & repeats, "Django, I'm telling you true." The masked musician sits at piano & strikes a discordant tremolo, quietly, barely audible but sustained like something big is going to happen. The barman hands me a warm cup with twigs floating. I ask, twigs? I thought you were kidding. "You'll like it," he says, "trust me." It tastes bitter. I like it. The guy on his knees whimpers, "Whar'd they come from? Who they?" The bass player teases the upright & says through mask, "we'll call this Brutal Halloween Fade-Away." The other two musicians chortle through masks. Oily says, "you guys suck, you sound like Beavis & Buttthead." The guitar player joins the bizarre tremolo, still a whisper. My leg shakes & my body squirms like a snake. I write on a napkin, "Give me anti-VENOM!" That I remember. I sip tea through clenched teeth to strain twigs. It's 11pm outside, 1 AM inside. I see how time is going, forward, backwards, converging at magical midnight. "It's forever," says Wino, "it seems like forever." The guy on his knees pleads, "Do something!" He addresses the band. "Quit rehearsing – just play." Everyone laughs, the musicians, the riders & even the barman. "Just play! Just play!" The tremolo rolls into an Oscar Peterson-like riff; the guy gets up from his knees & slaps the bar, "Whiskey! Whiskey! A-ha!" But he's ignored. The barman is sharing a joint with Oily in the corner. Oily fixes her hair in a ponytail between puffs. Wino is involved in an animated rap hovering over Pudge still sprawled on sofa. Wino says, "let's get stoned & ride home!" His voice is loud but mostly absorbed by music. He shouts, "hey Oily don't bogart that joint babe." At midnight I stand in the drive beneath dark October sky, unseasonably warm night trying to get my bearings. In the backyard an old lady rakes leaves into a smoldering fire. The smoke goes straight up – nary a breeze. I feel I can breathe again, a weight lifted.

The first time I took acid was October of 1970 – 40 years ago in a little dorm room in St Paul with my old buddy Andrew P Jones. He freaked-out, bad trip, took him to the hospital. He recovered when the drug ran its course. Forty years later, today, I tried my second trip. Unbeknownst to me a world away in South Africa, my lifelong friend, filmmaker, author, violinist Andrew P Jones had just put a 9mm pistol to his head & pulled the trigger.

-Kenn Hartmann

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