

Valerie On The Stairs

A Treatment

Part Five

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Rob stands his ground, aiming for his head. He fires. This time he blows out one of the Fiend's eyes. For a moment that stops him in his tracks, his head thrown back. He doesn't move. Rob watches him, daring to think maybe the eye-bullet finished him off.

He takes his gaze off the Fiend, and looks at Valerie. She's sexier than ever, her naked body glossy with sweat. He very cautiously moves around the Fiend to get to her.

"It's okay..." he says very softly. He reaches out for her.

As their fingers touch, her eyes grow huge with terror. Rob starts to look over his shoulder. And the Fiend comes from the other side, its claws raking Rob's shoulder and back. The rush of adrenaline gives Rob the strength to turn and fire at the Fiend's face again. This time he opens a hole in its cheek. But it doesn't stop the Fiend from coming after him, ready to finish Rob once and for all. He swings at Rob again, slicing Rob's chest open in five long wounds. Rob's shirt hangs in blood-red tatters. He's dizzy with pain and blood-loss. He has to use both his hands to hold the gun up.

He backs towards Valerie.

"Get up." he tells her, weakly. "Please...get...up."

He's having momentarily lapses of consciousness. And in them he sees Neely on the stairs, speaking his last words, the words Rob could make no sense of. Now, in his half-hallucinating state, Rob's mind focuses on Neely's lips. *What was he saying?*

And now, finally, he "hears" it.

"The Fiend loves her. That's his weakness. He loves her more than life."

The Fiend is almost on top of him.

“All right, wait –” Rob says, “ – just let me do what I came here to do.” He takes his gun off the Fiend and puts it to Valerie’s head. “Let me kill this cock-tease. Then you rip me up and eat my eyes. I’ll be happy as long as this bitch is dead.”

“No.” the Fiend says.

“You’ll find another woman. Christ, look at the harem you’ve already got. Let me just kill her and then I’m yours.”

He presses the gun hard into Valerie’s cheek, the expression on his sweaty, pained face seemingly touched by a little madness.

“Don’t...” the Fiend says. “...Don’t...hurt...her.”

“What the fuck does it matter to you? She’s just another bitch to grow your babies in.”

“No. Not Valerie. I’d never hurt Valerie.”

Behind this dialogue the noise from the wall gets louder and louder. And finally, the officers are through, their flashlight beams cutting through the smoky shadows and first finding the girl’s head on the stairs, and then the Fiend Children, two on the stairs and one still being born from the neck of a dead girl.

One of the officers pukes in response to what he’s seen. Moorhead has no sympathy.

“Oh for Christ’s sake, what are you fucking pukin’ about? Give me that flashlight.”

“Are we going in, sir?” says one of the men.

“Of course we’re going in! Don’t fire until I tell you, you understand me?”

Rob, meanwhile, has slowly moved Valerie to the bottom of the stairs. One of the officer's flashlights finds them.

"Stay out!" Rob yells. *"He'll kill you!"*

Moorhead says: "Just put the gun and the girl down. We can sort all of this out. Whatever problems you've got –"

Moorhead and a second cop, McNiece, have actually clambered through the hole and are standing between the Fiend and the bottom of the stairs, where Rob and Valerie are standing.

"You don't understand –"

"Understand what?"

"I'm saving her."

"Sir, you have a gun to her head."

"That's just a bluff."

"And who are you bluffing, sir?"

"The thing behind you."

McNiece turns, and sees, by the same ever-moving light, the Fiend.

"Mother of God!"

The Fiend moves towards him. McNiece fires, over and over and over. The Fiend is jerked around by the impact of each shot, but they don't stop the creature coming. It opens its arms wide, almost as though it's about to surrender. Then it brings his hands together at great speed. McNiece's head is caught in the middle. It erupts in a welter of blood, brains and bone. His body sags against Moorhead's back.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Moorhead says. And as he speaks, he too turns.

And there's the Fiend, blood pouring from all his wounds, but still ready for more mayhem.

"Jesus fucking Christ." Moorhead says.

"Don't use that damnable name!" He grabs hold of Moorhead, who fires into the Fiend's belly.

Rob and Valerie, meanwhile, are heading up the stairs. Rob fires at the Fiend Children who get in their way.

Meanwhile, Moorhead screams: *"Somebody get in here and get this motherfucker off me!"*

There are three officers scrambling through the hole in the wall right now.

One of them says: "Bartlett! Get after those two!"

Officer Bartlett pursues Rob and Valerie up the stairs. He doesn't get very far. His heel slips in the blood and birth-juice covered stairs, and he goes down, his head inches from the head of the first woman we saw give birth.

"Oh Christ."

Then one of the Fiend Children raises itself into view behind him, and bites down on his face. Its teeth pierce his brain. He's dead before he can scream.

The Fiend, meanwhile, digs its claws into the back of Moorhead's neck, and lifts him off the ground. Then he calls to his Children, like a farmer calling hogs.

"Chil-dren! Chil-dren! Come on and get it! Chil-dren! Chil-dren!"

Rob pauses halfway up the stairs and looks back.

The Hell-Hole is exactly what its name suggests, the shifting lights showing us terrible, sickening glimpses of the scene below. Bartlett is being strangled and smothered

by a Fiend Child who is wrapped around his neck and head. Rob watches Bartlett's last struggles die away. And below, Moorhead is lifted high up, like a side of beef on a butcher's hook.

"No, God Almighty, no!" Moorhead sobs.

There's a seething pool of Fiend Children beneath him. They raise themselves up like cobra, snapping at his feet which are just out of reach. The one of them makes the leap, and starts to crawl up his leg. Another one, on the other leg.

Moorhead is begging incoherently for mercy. The Fiend Children bite into his groin.

Then the Fiend tosses Moorhead down amongst the other Children. His screams are quickly silenced.

Now there's nothing standing in the way of the Fiend. It comes after Rob and Valerie, his mouth wide open, roaring:

"She's mine! Mine! MINE!"

Outside, on the stairs, more officers with their guns at the ready climb the stairs. They're nervous, despite their guns. They can hear the Fiend's curses and demands.

One of the officers says: "What the fuck *is* that?"

Another has pulled his crucifix out of his shirt and kisses it. "It's the fucking Devil, man." he says. "You better make your peace with God."

Back inside the walls, and the Fiend has halved the distance between him and his victims.

"You can't save me," Valerie says to Rob. "He's right: I do belong to him."

"Bullshit. We're getting out of here, and we're getting out together."

They're at the top of the stairs now. There's no door. But Valerie knows the secret: a tiny button which when touched makes the wall slide open effortlessly. And they're out, at the top of the stairs.

The officers have their weapons leveled on them.

"Put your weapon down! Right now!" one of them orders.

"Sure."

Rob drops the gun to the ground. The weight of it is enough to make the rotted boards cave in beneath it in a cloud of dust.

From behind Rob and Valerie, the Fiend yells:

"MINE!"

And an instant later it appears in the doorway.

In response to this awesome spectacle, one of the officers says *fuck* over and over, another starts to pray in Spanish, a third – the rookie on the team – fires in panic. The bullets all hit the Fiend, but of course they don't bring him down.

Rob, meanwhile, tests the boards they're walking on and then makes a life-or-death decision. With bullets flying and the Fiend right behind him he grabs Valerie's hand and says:

"*Jump!*"

They jump together, landing on the other side of the hole on boards which are only partially rotted. Their weight makes them crack and start to give way. Rob pulls Valerie after him, until they reach solid timber. We see pieces of rotted board dropping away into a seething mass of Fiend Children. Hundreds of them, living in the

foundations of the house. They raise their heads, hissing hungrily, the boards creaking above them.

Now, at the top of the stairs, we have a three-way drama: the armed officers on one side, the Fiend on the second, and Valerie and Rob on the third.

One of the officers is calling in for more help. “And I want everybody who isn’t a cop out of this house, right now! You hear me? Out!”

“I can’t leave without my novel,” one of the writers whines below.

“*Get them out!*” the officer yells. Then to the Fiend: “And you, take off that fucking ridiculous costume and let me see your face.”

“It’s...it’s not a costume...sir.” Rob says.

“That’s crap. It’s a costume. It’s fucking plastic. I can see it from here.”

He steps to the very top of the stairs. As he does so the Fiend’s huge tail snakes between his legs, and then strikes upwards, sinking between his buttocks.

“Oh Christ Almighty.”

“Don’t. (Thrust) Say. (Thrust) That. (Thrust) Name. (Thrust)”

The bloody tip of his tongue appears from the officer’s mouth. The man sags, dead. The Fiend flicks his tail and throws the corpse against the other officers.

The Fiend turns to Valerie, its tail whipping behind him.

“What are you going to do now, lover-boy?” the Fiend says. “Because whether you kill her or you don’t I’m going to get over to you sooner or later, and I’ll make you pay for all the harm you’ve done.”

“I’m not the murderer here.”

“True enough. I’ve got plenty of blood on my hands. But she loves me for it, don’t you baby? And she knows how much I love her. There’s nothing in the world I wouldn’t do for her.” He looks at Valerie. “You do know that, don’t you?”

“I know.”

The Fiend reaches out for her across the hole in the floor.

“We can be whatever we want to be now. We’re free.”

“Are we?” Valerie says. She reaches towards the Fiend’s preferred fingers. They *almost* touch. A matter of an inch or two.

The Fiend moves over the boards ‘til his knees are over the crumbling edge. The boards creak ominously beneath him. He doesn’t care.

Rob puts a possessive arm around Valerie.

“I’m not going to lose you.” he whispers to her.

“It’s not your choice.” Valerie replies. “We’re not free. They finished it, don’t you understand? They finished it.”

“And how does it end?” Rob says.

“Like this.” Valerie replies. She wriggles to free herself from Rob’s grasp. Then she leans forward and grasps the Fiend’s hand. He grasps hers in return.

“No, Valerie!” Rob yells.

The Fiend topples forward into the abyss, pulling Valerie after him.

“*No!*” Rob yells again.

But it’s useless. She’s gone, out of his arms and into the pit with the Fiend.

Rob steels himself and looks down. There they are, Valerie and the Fiend, lying side by side on a perverse marriage bed of Fiend Children. They sink into the writhing

mass of serpentine monsters. At the very last moment Valerie turns and looks up at him. There's love in her eyes, and on her lips a strange, ambivalent smile. Then the sea of monstrous forms and birth fluid closes over her face.

Rob gets up, the gun still in his hand. He turns his back on the hole in the floor, and heads for a door at the end of the landing. Meanwhile, the surviving policeman is calling in for reinforcements.

"You!" he says, pointing up at Rob. "Stay where you are." He fumbles to get his gun out, shaking with fear and disbelief.

"Sir! I'm ordering you to set down your weapon!"

Nancy Bloom gently puts her hand on the officer's gun and pushes it down.

"Haven't enough people died tonight as it is?"

"But he's getting away."

"That door just leads to the roof. He can't go anywhere."

It is dawn as Rob pushes open the door that brings him out onto the roof. He raises his hand, which feels strange to him. There are scraps of text on his hand, as though he's made up a collage of newspaper excerpts. He looks at them more closely. His name is in all of them:

"Rob Hanisee was a late arrival at the house..."

"Rob sat down to stare at the empty page..."

"Rob had failed..."

We cut closer and closer to the word *failed*, until the blackness of it fills the entire screen.

A dreamy finale begins.

And now, out of that blackness, Rob is taking off his shirt. His body and now his face are covered with more excerpts from newspaper articles.

Now Rob is naked. The wind gusts, and he starts to disintegrate, the scraps of paper that were his *life*, his very *being*, are caught in the wind and carried away. At that moment the pursuing officers kick open the door. There are three of them.

One, a woman, finds his clothes, and scraps of the novel. She looks up. For a moment she thinks she sees the remnants of a human face made of paper cuttings, hanging in the air. But then a stronger gust of wind comes along and carries them up and away into the brightening sky.