

## The Lurid Relationship of Gothboy and Side-Show Bob

Side-show Bob was a girl. She had a striking resemblance to The Simpsons character of that name. It was fortunate of her to know it, though, and was typically of jovial character and method.

Self-knowledge on the streets is currency. Side-show Bob was dating Pretty Gothboy. From what I have heard, he lives up to his street name, being a transcendent beauty to the girls and the boys who can tell. The two made quite the pair, seemingly molded for the top of a punk-rock wedding cake. They were also the happiest couple, to my knowledge, on "The Ave" because they knew that most beautiful people know they're beautiful, which makes them boring. Gothboy knew he was beautiful but didn't care, and was decidedly not boring because of it. Self-knowledge.

"The Ave", and the "Ave-rats" who live there, is the largest family unit this side of Utah. We're all of some pseudo-decent, Nephews and Uncles, Father-figures and "kids." New-comers typically have someone to watch out for them within a day of arrival. I've never felt as close to anyone as I feel to my street Brothers and Sisters. That's how we survive.

On "The Ave" back then, we used a lot of highfalutin words to describe stuff. "The Ave", circa 1998, was, nearly undoubtedly, the center of the role-playing game world. It spilled onto the street. We fashioned ourselves after D&D characters. Some were fighters, some mages, some rogues. I was clearly a bard.

Anyway, so in the vain, we called the older crowd, "Methuselahs." Methuselahs were the street mothers and fathers, the defenders of the peace. Side-show Bob and Pretty Gothboy were of this ilk, and so if something were to become awry in their world, the social fabric of "The Ave" could be made to rip. This is why, when it was rumored that Side-show had slept with Dallas, Clark felt he had to see what was going on.

Clark is always our hero. His life was one of impeccability. One could argue whether things done by him were moral or healthy or beneficial, but there was no doubt that that which Clark did was done from a place of purity. Clark was himself. There is no greater compliment I can give someone.

So, like any proper Methuselah, Clark started asking around. Seems Lone Raven had seen Gothboy hugging some pretty chick on 45th and Roosevelt. Yeah of course he was sure it was like that. He waited for like five minutes to make sure. No, no kissing, but they held hands and hugged. But, dude, they held hands! That can't be kosher. Yeah, and Reaper, Little Bear, Johanna... of course, saw it too. Johanna sees everything. So, if anyone needed to know it was Side-show Bob.

Clark thought, "fuck." He knew it didn't really matter what Pretty Gothboy was actually doing. The insinuation was enough to end the relationship by sheer inertial force. But Side-show was in Bremerton, at Rhino's place. Tank Girl said she had done her hair before she left, and painted her toes at the squat down on Lakeview Ave. No, she hadn't noticed how Side-show was doing. She was there about two hours. No, she wasn't high. Not at all. Just acid and some weed. Gel-tabs. Great shit. Five dollars a hit.

Clark put down \$20, fer personal, and took a bus down to the ferry. He spent the two hours before the next departure making some cash. He sold some CD's he found by

the student housing dumpster. Probably, some chick was mad with her boy, put all his shit by the garbage to get back, expecting him to pick it up later, but Clark had got there first. Pretty sold-out shit, but good, like Pearl Jam and Nirvana. He dropped 7 of the albums for \$35.

The ferry ride takes about 45. 15 of it, Clark spent in a bathroom stall, trying to roll a J. Smoking a joint on the ferry was something he never missed the opportunity to do. Yeah, it was illegal, but no one was around on the observation deck, and with a cigarette in the other hand, it was never a problem to spark one.

The problem, of course, was that now he was stoned. Rhino's place was across town, a walk of a mile-and-a-half. In the darkness, it took Clark three hours, much of the time spent buying useless food products at corner markets. Finally, he arrived, sweaty and disheveled.

"Fucking damp-ass mother-fucking shit, yeah?" Rhino had a way with words.

"Side-show Bob around?"

"Fuck yeah. Down in the basement, with that boy of hers."

"Pretty Gothboy?"

"I donno. That's disrespect. Most Goths don't like to be called that. Goths. Think his name is Marvin."

"Pretty Gothboy's real name is Marvin?"

"Disrespect, fucker. Don't call him..."

"We're down. He understands. If it's the same kid."

"Yeah, so, just so you know. Watch yer hair. Some of the kids got lice."

"Fantastic."

There are a number of undesirable places where people on the streets sleep. Rhino's basement was perhaps the worst. Street people have lots of dogs. Dogs are useful out here, like they were useful to cavemen. But there wasn't a place to put all these dogs here. Rhino was actually squatting. Barking dogs at night would get the cops called. So Rhino had his guests keep the pooches in the basement, no leaving for personal business.

Clark knew the smell of weeks-uncleaned dog excrement, but the scent still made him gag. His ordeal was fruitful, though. Pretty Gothboy Marvin lay comfortable on Side-show's tummy. She looked up.

"Fucking Clark, man. All the way out here. I thought you were staying with that one chick. Hey, lover. Get up. Clark's here. What's the name of his girl?"

Clark said, "Julie."

"Clark, man, you shouldn't'a come, what, with your illness."

"There are rumors going around that he," Clark indicated Marvin, "was messing around..."

"Oh, that shit. No worries, man. I was just scouting girls for a three-some. Meet Vixen."

Vixen rolled over, said, "Hey", went back to sleep.

"You're fucking shitting me," Clark said.

"You're sick, Clark? What's wrong?"

"I don't like to..."

"He's dying," Marvin said, mournfully.

"Fuck." Bob let this syllable stretch to a full five seconds.

"Only the good die young. He comes all the way out here to see if we're ok. No one does that for him. A lot of us know, but we avoid him more for it. Fucking shitty. But human."

"It's all good. No problem, Gothboy. I just wanted to make sure, well, we need you, man. You're always looking out for the... And, when I'm gone..."

A tear ran down Gothboy Marvin's cheek, though it didn't appear like he was crying. "The best people I ever met are out here, you know? Sure, there are brigands and thieves and murderers. But even they got our backs when the shit is real. And then there's you. There ain't been no more legit mother-fucker in the history of the streets. You think you're being martyred for our sins?"

"Am I blushing?" Some of the kids snickered.

Side-show pulled one of the comforters flat. "Lay down, dear. We'll make you feel better."

Clark watched as the new Vixen girl scratched her scalp. "Maybe next time. I'm gonna head back to town."

Side-show Bob followed Clark's gaze and understood. "Yeah, I'll have to shave my head again tomorrow. Avoid that."

"With all possible vigor. I'll let you guy's crash. Late." Clark turned to leave.

"You know we love you, Clark."

"Yeah Gothboy. Stay real."

"No other way to be."

Not much to the story. Guy tries to make sure his friends are ok and that's it, but we see the streets as they actually are, not the bums-on-parade some movies tell, and we see why Clark will always be my hero, for things like this and everything else. There are some terrific people who just got unlucky, like get sick so they can't pay their rent. This society screwed Clark, and it screwed Side-show, and Gothboy, and all the rest, but no one ever talks about us. Politicians only concern themselves with the middle class. Sometimes they mention the working poor, but the plight of the homeless is forgotten, people thrown away by the US government. So, it is only by writing this that Clark will be remembered, and maybe, someday, eyes in Washington will open, and some real pain will be made to recede. But there is no holding of breath, since you'd die before a chance to inhale. No, it's just pain, unrelenting and callous, and we all just watch, and maybe donate a dollar.