



Bosch Street  
by Mark Anderson

Antoine walked slowly into the small room that the other tenants called the lobby, careful not to spill his coffee. It wasn't really a lobby. It was barely more than a wide hallway with a few chairs and benches. There were plain plaster walls, no windows. The edges were littered with dead roaches and dry moths. A pervasive odor of old urine and sweat hung in the lobby. Antoine walked to an empty space on a bench and sat next to a fat man he knew only as Rags. The handful of tenants were not speaking.

Rags did not acknowledge Antoine, and Antoine did not acknowledge Rags. They both sat, staring at the floor and the walls in silence. Antoine sipped his coffee, which was already tepid and tasted like a vacuum bag.

Antoine, Rags, and a few dozen others lived in a tall, narrow building on Bosch Street. It was, in its proportions, like a tower; not much bigger around than most houses but looming fourteen stories. There were four cramped apartments on each floor, with a winding staircase in the middle. Dead rats and pigeons were common among the litter on the stairs. The property was filthy and damp. The rooms were always either too cold or too warm.

The building had the usual fluctuating pest problems: ants and spiders, rats and shrews, drug addicts, and perverts — the latter being the most persistent but least problematic for the tenants. The fluctuating range of smells- stale beer, sour sweat, old cooking, vomit, garbage, and decay — all were drowned in the homogeneous funk of sad, abandoned lives.

A moth fluttered through the air, tracing drunken arcs in an idiot spiral around the lone bare bulb. Antoine watched the moth without interest. He glanced at the other patrons of the lobby.

Daniel Fluchs was filling out another crossword puzzle with a black pen, brow furrowed in determined concentration. Antoine knew that Daniel couldn't read or write but had left hundreds of scattered crosswords around the neighborhood, filled in with random letters and numbers.

Myriam was hunched in a fur lined purple coat and men's winter boots, even though it was late May and unseasonably warm. Her face was caked with makeup and a thin trickle of drool traced the wrinkles between sagging cheek and bony chin. They said Myriam had been beautiful once, but she'd been used up to breaking point and

was now a scowling, muttering den of diseases and parasites, wandering in a confused and frightening dream.

There were others, but they were familiar strangers to Antoine, nameless and meaningless, faces void of person. There was no chatter, no comradeship, no hope. Only grey empty faces. Nobody lived on Bosch Street who hadn't given up on themselves, and this was perhaps the saddest residency the street had to offer.

The moth cycled lower, landed on the dusty floor and was still. Antoine wondered if it was dead, or just waiting to die. It was almost nine in the morning. He smiled a bored, sad smile.

It occurred to Antoine that he may be the only person in the building who had any joy left in their lives. Antoine, who had for many years been battling a mysterious ailment, was finally starting to feel better. In time, if things continued the way they were going, he would be able to get his life back together, a phoenix from the ashes, a moth from the floor. The illness, whatever it was, was losing its grip on Antoine and he was, in his own quiet and flat way, quite elated.

Jerry, who lived directly beneath Antoine, stalked in through the front door and glared at the huddled cluster of lost and lonely souls. He was a skinny, walking scar with small teeth in a wide mouth. Jerry was a Bosch Street success story, which meant he was able to support himself and his habits through crime. For the other tenants, he was a source of terror, admiration, and perverse pride.

Antoine, like the other tenants, looked towards Jerry and nodded. To his surprise, Jerry nodded back. The definite, albeit slight, affirmation confirmed Antoine's faith in his treatment program. Even a psychopath like Jerry could see he was on the rise.

Jerry spit on the floor, glared baleful bitterness into the lobby for another moment. His fists clenched and unclenched at the end ofropy arms mottled and dark with faded homemade tattoos. Sweat and grease shined his skin. The moment soon passed, Jerry's head dropped, and he staggered up the stairs to sleep away the hateful light of day.

It was hot outside already. The sun glowered down on them all with contemptuous indifference, a promise of sunburns and skin cancer, sweaty crotches, sticky sheets.

It was the kind of day that made maggots hide at the bottom of a corpse, as far from the terrible sun as they could get.

Antoine would wait till night before he left in search of his next treatment.

The malady had plagued Antoine for as long as he could recall. He had seen scores of doctors: specialists, hematologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, and hypnotists. None of them could help him. They all had their own complicated ways of saying the same thing: you're making it up.

His dick didn't work. That was the worst part. There were other symptoms, of course. He got dizzy, had digestive trouble, appetite problems, hives and rashes, scabs that appeared from nowhere that he couldn't stop picking at. But most importantly, he couldn't fuck or even ejaculate.

He had come to believe that it was because his body couldn't maintain enough blood. That's all an erection was, really, just blood pushed into a sponge.

He traced this back to an encounter he'd once had with an old Romani woman. In his youth, he had stolen underwear from her line. By means of revenge, the woman had crept into his room at night, taken his heart out and replaced it with the feeble, leathery pigeon heart of one of her old gypsy friends.

Ever since about that time he had been weaker, sicker, and always tired. He had started having night terrors, intrusive thoughts, and uncontrollable compulsions to say and do things he'd never had before.

He'd lived with this disease for years with no help or hope before the treatment occurred to him.

It had been a few years before he'd moved to Bosch Street, in his early twenties, that he'd tried the rabbits. His blood, he'd been especially low, and he was weaker than usual. A drunken attempt at fucking a girl had ended in humiliating failure. Having long since given up on the usual idiot cures, everything from crystals to anti-anxiety pills, in a desperate bid to increase his levels, Antoine went to the pet store.

The two rabbits had responded to him normally enough, as would be expected of any domesticated prey animal. They were small and white with blood red eyes.

While Antoine opened and drank the first, it's brother trembled to death watching. A heart attack perhaps.

With the exception of a brief bout of vomiting, Antoine had felt much better afterwards, and even managed to masturbate with his cock almost hard, not his usual pulpy raw-sausage.

It hadn't lasted as long as he would have liked. Antoine went back for more rabbits just a few days later.

Within two months, the nearby pet stores were refusing his business. Within a year, all animals responded with fear when they saw him. They recognized him by his smell to be a predator.

He had to take the bus down to Pisce Bay or Barrington to get the animals, which would take up his whole day. He would drain dogs, cats, rabbits, even rodents in a pinch. Soon, there were no cats left on Bosch Street.

As with any addiction though, the appetite outgrew the fix. Antoine knew he needed something more effective, something compatible with his own blood. In addition to being less and less potent, the animal blood was rotting his insides. He could feel the black bubbles of pus burning his stomach lining, the microscopic worms from the foreign blood tickling at his feeble old bird heart, itching in his spine and brain, and writhing inside his limp, useless genitals. It was dirty blood, and not at all suitable for his organs.

Compatibility. That was the key.

Finally, after a day trip to every pet store in Barrington had yielded no results and a threat to call the police had been made, Antoine found a way to up the dosage of his treatment.

Walking home from the bus depot, he crossed through Kettlespout park and saw a lone teenager sitting atop one of the picnic tables.

He approached the youth, cautious but casual. The girl wore a backpack and army boots, both too big for her. The sleeves were cut from her shirt, the knees ripped from her jeans.

“Got a smoke?” he asked.

“Fuck off,” was all she said.

“I can pay you,” he said, “I just left mine at home.”

She pulled a cigarette from her pack, passed it to Antoine. He passed her a quarter, then lit, and puffed.

“Got any beer?” she asked.

Antoine shook his head.

“Got some whiskey,” he said. “It's home though.”

“Gonna invite me over?”

Antoine shrugged. Looked at the tree line. Looked back.

“Alright.” He started walking. She hopped down and walked with him.

“What's your name?” she asked.

“Antoine,” he said. “What's yours?”

“Shelly.”

“Where's your friends at, Shelly?”

“They all went out to the bluff for a fire. I couldn't get a ride.”

After the sweaty effort of four flights of steep stairs, Antoine held the door open for her. She stepped ahead of him into the apartment, taking in the cramped cave of clutter and refuse. The walls and ceiling were brown and stained, sweating like he was. The windows were papered with sheets of newspaper. A feeble bulb dangled over the couch, barely lighting a patch beneath it.

Antoine quickly unfolded his buck knife and punched it through the girl's sweater, into the meat of her back. She faced him and screamed. As she tried to pass him, he dragged her to the floor and clamped her hands around her throat. As he strangled her, she kicked and bucked and fought. He lost his grip repeatedly, and his arms burned with the effort. It was considerably more difficult than he'd imagined killing a small girl.

By the time she stopped struggling, half an hour had passed. Antoine was dripping with sweat and had unloaded a surprising shot of semen into his pants.

Antoine pulled the knife from beneath her and dragged it through her throat just under her chin. He pressed his mouth to the wound and drank the blood as it flowed. She still hadn't been dead, it turned out, and he could feel her waning pulse spitting the last of her life into his mouth.

He had killed a teenager and then drank her blood. This was a new and invigorating step for Antoine. He had always assumed he would kill somebody someday, but it was still a bit of a shock.

No time to dwell though, he thought. He felt it would be neglectful of him to not test the efficacy of his new treatment. He had already ejaculated once but hadn't been aware of any successful erection. As he eyed the girl's corpse, he felt the stiffening already.

He pulled Shelly's clothes off, parted her legs and felt her growing cold around his cock.

The treatment had been a success.

By the time he was finished playing, it was deep night. Still, he knew he couldn't carry her out or throw her away in the trash. It worked with rabbits, but even Bosch Street had limits.

If he left it too long, the smell would attract more attention than Antoine wanted. He dragged the corpse to the bathroom and began the dismemberment. Like the killing itself, this proved to be more labour intensive than Antoine had anticipated.

Finally, Shelly was reduced to six hefty but manageable parcels of dripping meat. She was still too messy to escort from the building, but Antoine had an idea.

At the far end of his apartment, he pried loose one of the floorboards where it met the wall. He used his knife to hack through the plaster wall. As he'd expected, other than the joists and beams, there was a hollow cavern behind the plaster wall, a tunnel that dropped down into the shadows below.

Antoine lowered Shelly's arm into the abyss, then dropped. It slid, scraping against the interior of the walls, and then hit with a distant slap. From the length of the

drop, Antoine judged it must be the ground floor, maybe even the basement. As long as she was still inside the wall and not on his floor, he couldn't care less.

He taxied her other limbs into the chute, then the head. He had to expand the aperture in his wall to accommodate her torso, but soon that had slid down into the darkness and landed with the rest of her.

This was the first time Antoine was thankful for the cheap construction and lack of insulation in his building.

With this final chore complete, Antoine laid on his couch, drifted in a deep sleep, and dreamt about his childhood being devoured by ants.

The treatment continued for weeks, then months. Sometimes it was only one or two people a week, others it was almost every day. Antoine would find a victim, bring them home, drink them, and dispose of them behind the hollow wall.

What amazed Antoine most was that killing people seemed to raise less suspicion than the animals had. As long as he stuck to runaways, junkies, and sex workers, nobody seemed to notice.

Once he'd discovered the treatment, he couldn't stop. More to the point, he had no interest in stopping. He had finally found what everyone was looking for: a way to feel like everyone else did.

Eventually, of course, the whole lobby smelled of corpses. The other tenants complained constantly, but this was par for the course. Antoine could track the smell to where the bodies had landed, and he noticed a pale brown stain creeping up the wall there. The wet rot behind the plaster was seeping into the wall, becoming a part of it.

Nobody else seemed to have clued in to where the smell was coming from. They had assumed it was a sewer issue.

Antoine suspected it was only a matter of time before they came to take him away, but nobody ever did. He assumed every day was his last as a free man, but nobody seemed to care that he was collecting living bags of blood from the streets and parks.



During the day, Antoine would sit in the lobby with the other tenants. While they complained and coughed and wiped snot and drool on their sleeves, Antoine would imagine the carnival of maggots and decay behind the paint and plaster.

The entire west wall of the lobby began to look moldy and damper than the others. It had a darker brown tinge than most and the stain was climbing in tendrils like vines.

Antoine watched the process with fascination, marveling that nobody else noticed it, amazed that nobody was stopping him. It must be that they didn't care.

Eventually, Jerry, the psychotic drug dealer who lived beneath Antoine, started complaining that the smell had spread throughout his apartment. Apparently, the reef of rot had risen as far as the third floor.

"Friggin' stink of shit is everywhere," he said, collapsing into a frayed, dusty couch. "Sticks to my clothes. My skin. Everywhere I go, I smells that same shit smell."

"It's disgusting," agreed Antoine. "I can barely sleep from the fumes. I just can't believe the owners haven't had a plumber in yet."

In truth, Antoine's apartment was fine. It seemed safer that he should also complain, though, so he joined in.

"You mean it smells this bad, in your apartment?" asked the Captain. He looked horrified at the thought. "My apartment smells no worse than it always has. If this vile musk continues its climb I can assure you gentlemen, I shan't be staying to bask in it."

The Captain stood and shuffled his senile way up the stairs.

"Do you believe him?" asked Jerry.

"What do you mean?" asked Antoine.

"How come my apartment stinks, your apartment stinks, and his doesn't?" Asked Jerry. His tone was accusatory. "It's like shit on a shoe or a fart in an elevator. This stink's been coming from somewhere, and I think we're narrowing down the source. That sick old fucker's up to something, and whatever it is, I think that's where the smell's coming from."

“I think you might right,” said Antoine. “I think maybe the Captain's been tampering with his plumbing, making a mess and sending it down to us. See how fast he cleared out when we brought it up?”

“If it don't clear up soon,” muttered Jerry, “I'll be having words with that old fucker.”

Days passed. Riding high on the virility he had gained from the blood of his victims, Antoine watched unfazed as the stench grew from a nuisance to a potential hazard. Most of the tenants avoided the lobby altogether, and nobody ate there anymore. The West wall weeped visible trickles of milky brown water. It sagged out into the room, a bulging wave of rot held in place by a veneer of plaster.

The prevailing theory was that a sewer pipe had broken and was leaking shit into the wall. With a few nudges from Antoine, most rumors pointed toward the Captain as the cause.

The pot boiled over one morning when Jerry reeled into the lobby after a cold night of drinking and huffing on the streets. He stalked into the center of the small room, reeling under the burden of chemically exaggerated gravity, stood for a moment and then pointed to the Captain.

“A five buck whore just told me to fuck off,” spat Jerry.

The Captain stared blankly at him.

“She said I smelled too bad to fuck,” Jerry continued. “Said I smelled like rotten meat.”

“What have your hygiene problems to do with me?”

Jerry grabbed the Captain by the collars of his blue coat and pulled him from his seat.

“What the hell have you been doing up there? What's making this smell?”

Indignation and fear fought over the Captain's face like dogs over meat. The old man gripped Jerry's shoulders and tried to push the young drunk away.

“I’ll have you keelhauled for this,” he said through gritted teeth.”

They began to struggle against each other, shuffling in a drunken dance of aggression. Neither man could easily overpower the other and their jittery progress across the floor was a stuttering, grunting embarrassment to both sides.

The Captain was far stronger than he looked and fueled by terror, but Jerry was practiced and comfortable with violence. Finally, in a smooth maneuver, Jerry rotated his body, using the older man’s momentum to throw the Captain against the wall.

There was a crack, a creaking groan, and the wall split open like a paper bag in the rain. A tumbling wave of brown watery rot, liquidating flesh, and adipoceric froth buried both men.

As the fleshslide filled the lobby with fractured bones, strings of muscle and ribbons of wet skin, Antoine sat where he was and rocked with laughter. He laughed until his side's hurt, and his vision was blurred. He roared watching the shrieking Captain struggle and trip and slip. He bellowed at the skinny legs kicking the air as Jerry slowly drowned in putrid meat. He laughed at the moth, seen months before, laying yet upon the filthy floor as creeping pools of putrefied fluids approached.

Jerry slowly stopped moving. Antoine stood up, still laughing hysterically, and took the five-dollar bill from the exposed ass pocket of Jerry's jeans. Then he climbed the stairs to his room. He sat on his couch, rolled a smoke, lit it, and waited for somebody to come get him.