

**Our Lady of
Perpetual Realness
& Other Stories**

Published by Metatron
www.onmetatron.com
Montreal Québec Canada

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ISBN 978-1-988355-09-2

Publisher and book design | Ashley Opheim
Editor | Jay Ritchie
Cover art | Fraser Wrighte

First edition
First printing

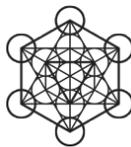
We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts,
which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians
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Canada Council Conseil des arts
for the Arts du Canada

OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL REALNESS

CASON SHARPE



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& Other Stories

MONEY SUCCESS FAME GLAMOUR	9
CALIFORNIA UNDERWATER	19
SCAM	27
DARLING, IF YOU LOVE ME	41
THE COMING ATTRACTIONS	51
OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL REALNESS	61

“Everybody wants to leave something behind them, some impression, some mark upon the world. And then you think, you’ve left a mark upon the world if you just get through it and a few people remember your name. Then you’ve left a mark. You don’t have to bend the whole world. I think it’s better to just enjoy it...pay your dues and enjoy it. If you shoot an arrow and it goes real high, hooray for you.”

—*Paris Is Burning* (1990)

“There are three important things in life: sex, movies, and my career.”

—*Outrageous* (1977)

MONEY SUCCESS FAME GLAMOUR

BAND SUCKED. I didn't want to be a professional flutist anyway. The other kids in the orchestra didn't even drink. I wanted to be more like Sid. In grade 10, Sid got sent to the office for being drunk in second-period science. He told the vice principal to go fuck herself and then he puked all over her desk. Sid rarely came to class, but he was always roaming the halls with this big rainbow Louis Vuitton handbag dangling from his arm. Beth said it was probably a knock-off.

Sid was the only other gay kid I knew in school. We were both tall, lanky, and brown, but Sid was louder and everyone knew who he was. I wanted to be known like that, even though everyone thought of Sid as this big joke and would imitate the way he swished down the halls behind his back.

I bleached all my jeans and shredded them with a cheese grater to make them more distressed. I started wearing eyeliner to school because it felt like something Sid might do. Beth was like, "OMG, are you trying to

be punk now?” Sid started waving at me when we passed in the halls. I waved back. One time between classes he blew me a kiss from the top of a crowded stairwell before disappearing out of view.

Sid never showed up to the third-period English class we had together, but then one day he did. Even Mr. Lyons looked surprised to see him. Sid sat down next to me.

“Hey babe,” he said, swinging his big bag onto the table. “What’s even going on in this class?” he asked. “I haven’t been here in forever.”

After school that day I skipped band practice and went over to Beth’s. Beth wanted me to help her pick out an outfit. I sat on her bed, under one of those princess canopy things. Beth studied herself in her full-length mirror, alternating between a blue top and a green one. She was going on a date with some 23-year-old she’d met at a club a few weeks before when she borrowed her cousin’s ID.

“What do you think about Sid?” I asked her.

“Why?”

“He sat next to me today in English. He called me ‘babe.’ I don’t think he even knows my name.”

“He probably wants to fuck you,” she said. “Don’t go for it. He probably has AIDS or something.”

Beth’s braces had been off for a year and a half but she still had to wear a retainer at night. She hooked up twice over March Break when she was visiting her cousin, who went to film school in Montreal. She was always handing me unsolicited pieces of advice, especially about guys: who I should and should not hook up with; when I should text them back, if ever.

I'd only ever had sex once, in the summer between grade 10 and 11, with Peter Tony from Oakwood, after a party on St. Clair. We were both very drunk. He had a wooden Ikea bed with drawers underneath and a Biggie poster on his wall. He said he didn't suck dick but I could suck his. It felt like a slippery dim sum roll in my mouth. His pubes smelled like Axe body spray. In the morning his mother made us pancakes and fruit salad, presumably unaware of what her son was doing with his sleepover buddies after dark. When I left his house he told me not to tell anyone what had happened. I saw Peter at parties after that but we never talked. Beth told me he'd said some weird things about black people and he wasn't even that cute so I should just forget about him. She said that I was technically still a virgin because blowjobs didn't really count; it wasn't really like fucking.

We chose the green top. I went home for dinner. Beth went on her date.

Sid started coming to English class more regularly after that.

"I'm trying to get my grades up," he said. He always sat next to me and asked for a pen, or clarification about homework. He told me that he worked at the all-night Rabba on Bay and Charles and that's why he was always late for school and why he sometimes left in the middle of the day, to take a nap. It made it hard to remember homework stuff. "It's all so confusing," he said. "But you seem smart. I'm gonna stick by you and maybe it'll rub off on me."

I started stealing loose cigarettes from my older

sister and smoking them, crushed flat, with Sid every morning outside the school gates. I tried to make sure I was smoking the right way, the way that makes the smoke go down to your lungs and not just swish around in your mouth like hot toothpaste. We talked about trying to quit. We talked about other shit, too. Sid said he was thinking about getting snakebite piercings or maybe a tattoo, but he couldn't decide what he wanted. I told him I was thinking about dyeing my hair blond.

“You should come over sometime,” Sid said one morning. “Everyone here sucks, but you're actually kind of cool.” I wondered if he saw in me what I saw in him.

Sid lived by himself in an apartment on Church Street, above a Pizza Pizza. I skipped band practice to go over there one day later that week. I wondered why Sid lived alone, or how he could even afford it. He didn't mention his family that much, and when he did, it was cryptic. He said his mom was totally chill and he got his pot from an older half-brother.

His apartment was one open room with a small kitchenette sectioned off in the corner. His futon bed was covered in laundry. Books and DVDs on a shelf, an ashtray, a circular shag rug on the bathroom floor, a Georgia O'Keeffe poster, a plastic lime-green coffee table—it was hard to believe that all of it was Sid's alone.

“Do you think Mr. Lyons is gay?” he asked me. He was lying on his side on the futon, his head propped up on his elbow.

“Maybe,” I said, staring out the window that looked out onto Wellesley. I could see men with grey beards

walking around in short shorts, rainbow flags draped outside storefronts, a TD Bank.

“Come here,” said Sid. He grabbed my hand and pulled me down to the bed so I was lying on top of him. We made out for a while. Two fruit flies boxed overhead.

Sid abruptly pulled away from me and stood up.

“Do you want a cup of tea?” he asked. I felt I had disappointed him in some way. I never learned how to kiss properly. I was a bit taller than Sid, which made it difficult to get comfortable. My height was an issue with Peter too; my legs had dangled off the edge of his Ikea bed. Maybe it was my lips or my tongue, too wet or too dry, too little or too much of something.

“Yeah, sure,” I said. He put on the water for tea, lit a cigarette, and sat next to me on the futon.

“School is really some bullshit, eh?” he said. I didn’t know if he wanted an answer, so I nodded. “I’m going to move to L.A. to be a porn star.” He said he’d been fooling around with a video camera he’d bought for cheap at a pawn shop in Chinatown. He already had his porn alias picked out: Jack Spooner. “What are you going to do?” he asked me.

“I don’t know. Probably university or something.” The kettle whistled and we drank tea. I asked him why he wanted to be a porn star.

“I guess I just like it when everybody’s looking at me. And paying attention.” He asked me if I understood what he meant. I mentioned something about my flute solo in the winter concert. Sid got up and looked out the window like I wasn’t even there. Then he turned to me and said he

had to get ready for work. Sid bought his own cigarettes and lived in his own apartment and was going to L.A. to be naked all the time. I felt super dumb about the whole thing. I had to get home for dinner anyway. He said he had Saturday off, so I should come over again. I didn't know whether to kiss him goodbye or shake his hand so I just left.

I skipped band practice again after school the next day to go over to Beth's. I sat on her bed with the princess canopy thing and she stood in front of the full-length mirror, debating blue top or green top. I figured that if I missed enough rehearsals they'd eventually kick me out of band.

"So what, are you guys like dating now?" Beth asked me when I told her what had happened at Sid's.

"No, I don't think so. I think we're just like, friends." I didn't tell her that we had plans to hang out on Saturday.

Beth was going to meet up with the 23-year-old for drinks on Queen West. "It's so nice to hang out with older people," she said. "You know one of his friends DJs at Wrongbar like every night?" She said older guys were better at sex than younger ones, but she didn't know if that was true for gay guys. Beth knew I didn't have a fake ID and she was always meeting these new people at bars. It was like she was purposely leaving me out so she could tell me about it later and gloat. This time she chose the blue top.

On Saturday I went back over to Sid's. He said he was in a bad mood. He spoke really quickly and chain-smoked. He said that school was such bullshit, they were trying to