

Human-Shaped Hole

HUMAN-SHAPED HOLE

Christmas break, everyone gone for the holidays except a few stragglers whose parents lived far away who didn't have a place to go or were hanging around to keep working or just didn't have anything better to do. Myself, I fell into all those categories, luxuriating in the slacker pleasures of sleepy San Diego in late December. Heard through the grapevine or got a call about Joe's plan for a shindig at his house in Clairemont. He and his roommates lived in a seen-better-days 1970s suburban house with a pool in the backyard, kind of far from campus but a good deal and it had an ironic, en vogue John Waters-style kitsch aesthetic, shag-carpeted, wood-panelled, a three-bedroom house with a yard in the solidly blue-collar, middle-class neighbourhood of Clairemont, up the hill and east of the freeway.

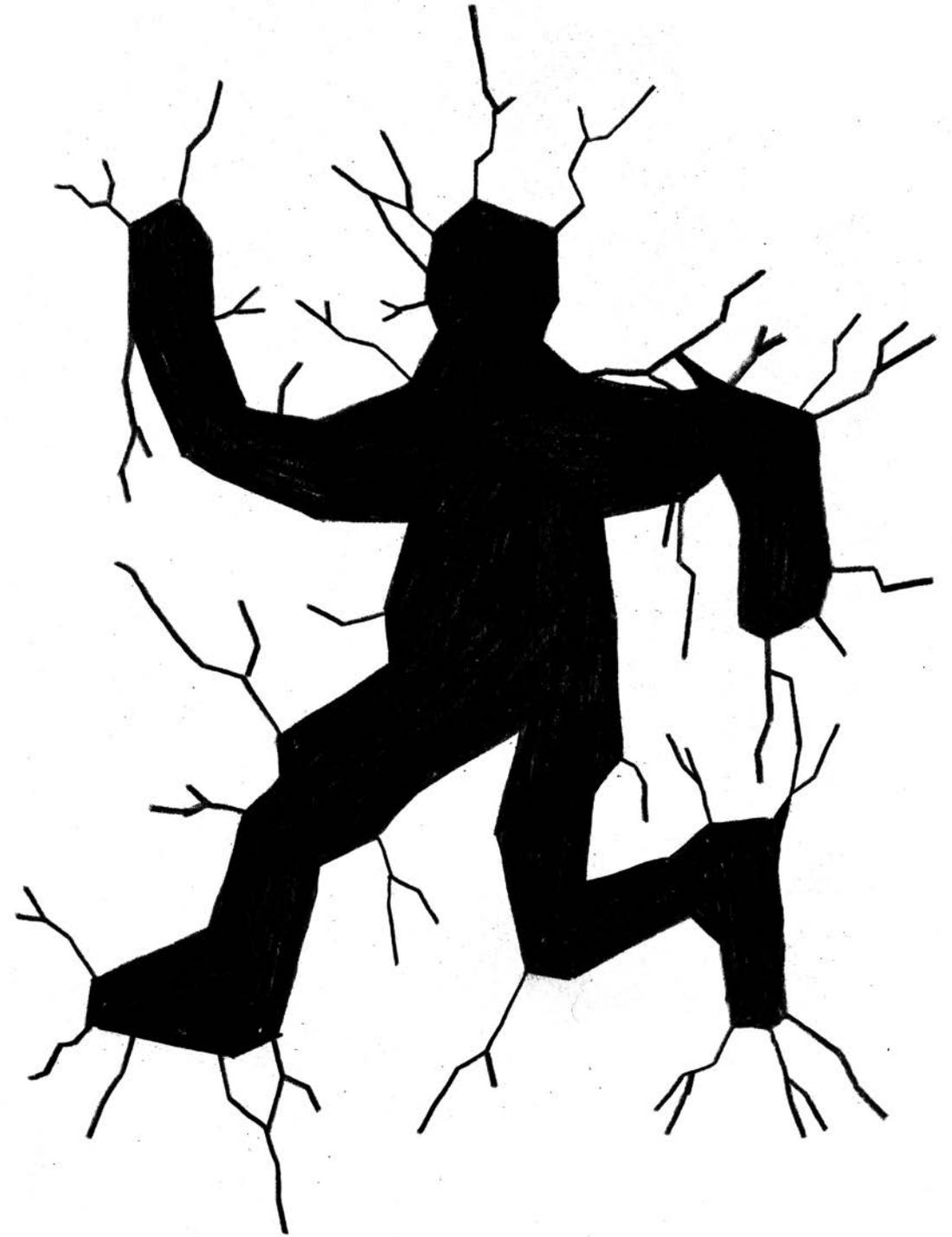
Dense mist driving on the 5 and then up Balboa Avenue to Clairemont. For such a temperate place with a Mediterranean climate the woolly fog, especially at night, makes it inordinately chilly and creates a ghostly, slightly ominous atmosphere. An exotic dwelling, that house, an actual 'home' that once housed a family now inhabited by college-age punk rockers with their weird dyed hairdos and exuberant antics freaking out the neighbours. Undoubtedly they were regarded with suspicion and alarm by the people who lived on that street. Greeted by Joe and Clarisse at the door, Joe, a sweetheart, a big, lanky, physically fit mensch with an alternately blue green orange Mohawk, full of life and laughter, fun, smart, and personable. Possibly a biology major, and later went on to become a flight attendant. An odd trajectory. He and Clarisse were made for each other, constantly fighting then fucking then fighting then fucking in public places, ferociously squabbling and completely in love. They were a couple of years older and I looked up to them as an example of tempestuous, turbulent, and true unequivocal affection.

Clarisse originated as a JAP from the valley (the San Fernando Valley, that is) but by this time undeniably feral instincts had become dominant, a mixture of innate tendencies and a strong-willed reaction to her conservative, assuredly comfortable upbringing. Her behaviour was wild, though in hindsight probably more a product of delayed teenage rebellion than true radicality. No matter, her reckless and untamed conduct could be simultaneously thrilling and frightening. Always pushing towards outrage, picking her nose and ostentatiously eating it, incessantly talking about sex in the dirtiest terms possible, dishevelled, unclean and smelly (and proud of it), and down to cause trouble at the drop of a hat. Which she did, often, like the time at a party while I was distracted she tied my shoelaces together so upon standing up I totally ate shit, sprawled across the floor. Guffaws ensued. Obviously I bore responsibility by being too wasted to notice her subterfuge. Open game. Quite funny, and gives one an idea, on the more innocent side of the spectrum, of her shenanigans. Infectiously unruly and one felt very alive in her presence. All that sounds childlike and inconsequential, though other instances were less guiltless, darker, and led to all sorts of malignant mayhem. Which, to repeat, could be exciting to be around and kept things spicy. Clarisse, at her most unnerving, had an impressive propensity for sowing disorder.

Ten or so revellers there that night but Joe and Clarisse are the main characters herein, as subsequent events will show. Events that in Clarisse's gamut of deeds and misdeeds fall in the mean between harmless and wicked. Nobody died or anything, but there was blood. First though bonhomie, chatter, and drinking, a lot of drinking. Clear stuff. Vodka. Or it could have been brown stuff, whiskey. Not so sure. Mixed with soda or another liquid, though no doubt alcohol made up the lion's share of the resulting concoctions. Music blasting, of course, Circle Jerks, Society System Decontrol, The Lewd, Suicidal, Teen Idles, Sin 34, they all still held sway, and some Bauhaus and Joy Division too. Early- to mid-decade angst, angry, snotty, and loud, or depressive, gloomy, and droning. Voices got louder, the volume went up, and down the hatch with the hooch.

Muddy brownish-yellow carpet, one of those hideous combinations of hue and material bizarrely popular in the '70s, in the living room. And a fireplace. San Diego does get surprisingly crisp during the winter so it could have legitimately gotten used along the way and it most positively did that night because as things progressed sections of 2x4s and plywood and 12-pack boxes and sundry inflammable objects got tossed in precipitating a cosy albeit volatile fire and the new thing was to swig straight out of the bottle and blow your alcoholic breath as hard as possible at the flames causing a terrific WHOOOSSSHHH and eruption of flame shooting out of the hearth into the room and everyone roared. Singed hair and

Illustration by Tim Lehan.



clothing, fun with fire. That went on for a while and it's a wonder none of the partygoers went up in flames and the house didn't burn down. The exhilaration segued into the next phase, when instantaneously everyone began jumping around, bouncing into each other, pogoing, slamming, pushing, and pulling with the utmost ebullience in the throes of sloppy drunkenness. Boys and girls, everyone involved, a whirling entanglement of bodies crashing and bumping into each other, yelping, screeching, and hollering. Clowning, roughhousing, fucking around, call it what you will.

During a dog pile slowdown everyone ended up on the floor, the aftermath, or this possibly happened just before as bodies toppled and dove or tried to disengage. Difficult to deduce the particulars and then things sped up and my feet were off the ground as someone strong lifted me up, and cradled in the arms of I surmised Joe I got carried in a headlong rush towards the sliding glass door that was the barrier between the living room and the patio and swimming pool outside. Which for the whole time had been wide open. In a flash, one, two, three, fuelled by brawn, alcohol, joy, and who knows what other urges, Joe transported me out of the living room across the threshold to the patio and heaved me into the air sending my body in an arc for what seemed like a long time before splashing down into the pool. Suddenly I dropped down and pierced the surface of the water into the shallow end, thankfully feet first. Fully clothed, drenched, and also the water wasn't heated so it really woke me up in the second or two that my body compressed under the surface and my feet met the bottom. And what was going through my mind besides the jolt of what had just happened? To get out as fast as possible and grab Joe (though he was much bigger) and throw him in the pool. Completely harmless horseplay, what he'd done, and I wanted to return the favour in the same vein.

Impulsive, a normal primitive reaction. Gasping underwater with my legs bent, gathering strength, hands on the coping, I thrust upwards with force into a crouched position on the deck to start running towards the living room. Five or six feet from the edge to the opening with the vault out of the water providing momentum to hurl myself back into the melee. Two long loping strides and this might be an afterimage, an implanted memory, but during that speck of time I believe I barely registered Clarisse standing off to the left with an indiscernible expression on her face that could have been interpreted as mischievous amusement, fear, or even horror. I'll never really know.

Hard to accurately recount since it happened in an instant. A transparent yet solid wall, an impenetrable barrier that turned out to be not that I forcefully collided with and penetrated. An eight-foot-long by seven-foot-high glass door, burst through in a loud, discordant, shrieking explosion, charged through gung-ho because I didn't know it was there and thought

it was air and whatever the practical strength of a sliding glass door that size is it's no match for 175 pounds of 19-year-old drunk wet just-dunked supercharged locomotion. The memory is not that it hurt, more of the dramatic angry sound and a furious jangling of shards scattering every which way crossed with a gnawing awareness of having been sliced open, the slashing of the delicate scrim of skin on the face and hands and a blood-splattering tumble right into the middle of the party zone instead of the triumphant arrival to scoop up Joe I'd been expecting, and screams, howls, and yells, some of which certainly emanated from my own throat.

All one action accidentally and assertively puncturing the obstruction and flying into the living room as clear splinters sprayed everywhere right into the arms of Joe who in one continuous movement caught me and ran out the room down the hallway out the front door to deposit my mutilated body, gently, onto the backseat of his car and hopped in, started it, and motored off towards the emergency room. An uninterrupted, flowing course from the scene of the perforation and bloodletting leaving the pandemonium and anguished cries of 'OH SHIT' and 'FUUUUUUUUUUU' from the living room fading into the background. It must have been more hectic than that but that's what it seemed like, that Joe with prescience was waiting for me to barge through to catch me in his loving, nurturing embrace and without any hesitation get me to the hospital pronto. Then speeding through the quiet streets of Christmas Clairemont, Joe at the wheel, and this guy John, and most definitely not Clarisse, in the passenger seat with me in the back bleeding all over, in shock though luckily quite drunk so more a trance panic state than all-out hysteria. Face oily, sticky, and wet, that iron taste filling my mouth, dripping water and a whole lot of blood. But I was alive, at least for the moment. Hard to ascertain in those situations the seriousness of the situation. Final moments? Or just major, albeit repairable damage?

'It's going to be OK man, we'll be there soon', Joe and John both said, anxiously, many times. 'Hang in there', 'Stay calm'. So much blood though and they were worried and I was scared. Not really in pain, but afraid, very afraid, and feeling faint. Slipping away. Blood flowed freely from my face and hand as Joe gunned it through the tranquil residential streets towards the nearest hospital that fortunately turned out to be only 10 minutes away. Again in one smooth motion swooped up out of the car by Joe and John and rushed through the entrance into the lobby where the state I was in got us immediate attention and blurry visions of other people waiting with lesser ills danced by and then straight into a room onto a bed lying on my back writhing, shaking, scared shitless as Joe and John relayed what had happened and a nurse and doctor looked me over and told me I was going to be fine. Wanted to believe, but didn't feel fine at all. Cutting

off of clothes, needles into my face, and the anaesthetic began working and things went numb as they got to work. Starting to breathe, slowly ratcheting down the terror, and gave myself over to their ministrations. Then came one of those odd experiences that appear comical in retrospect but at the time aren't that funny and a bit bewildering. The nurse had a sort of Louise Fletcher as Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* look and manner, severe, no bullshit, and she didn't seem to like me from the get-go. I lay there looking up at her, my saviour, and trying to explain the circumstances said, 'The door was open. I just assumed it was still open'. Looking down at me sceptically, she dryly asked, 'You know what happens when you assume, don't you?' 'No, I don't'. I honestly had no idea what she was talking about. Chuckling sternly, with a straight face, she replied, 'You make an ass out of you and me'. You? Me? Ass? Who? Huh? I'd never heard that aphorism before. So, I'm an ass? Well live and learn. I guess I am, because I'm the one lying here bleeding all over the damn place like an idiot and I guess Nurse Ratched here is going to tell me what's what. She wasn't nice, but she put me back together.

In the end not that injured but, man, close. Big x-shaped cut on my cheek, slashed right nostril, and a gash over my right eyebrow. All in close proximity to the eyes but what had happened, and why there was another big cut where my right pinkie finger met my palm is that thanks to a spatial sixth sense right before I went through I'd thrown my arm up in front of my face, thus saving my eyes. Unthinking survival instincts. Was at the hospital for two and a half hours and then extremely sober we headed back to the scene of the crime, relieved and in high spirits, the three of us cracking up and recounting the incident in detail like it had all been fun and games. When we got back everyone except Clarisse had departed because my dive through the door had effectively ended the party. The craziest thing was the glass door remained mostly intact, with an elongated human-shaped hole where my body had gone through. The whole pane didn't shatter, a marvel. Clarisse apologised over and over and we all laughed because everything was fine, right? Though I've often wondered just what was going through Clarisse's mind when I was underwater and she must have guessed what I was going to do but decided it was a good idea to slide the glass door shut right then.