

Trish

Adam Fieled



Preface

Very few artists or art pundits in America would consider Philadelphia sultry until recently. Oddly enough, mainstream media in the States has created an image of Philadelphia as obese, hairy, ugly, and about as sultry as the Super Bowl. Yet, for those of us born in the 70s and 80s who lived through the Aughts in Center City and West Philadelphia, our perception of Philadelphia will always be skewered by the sexualized over and undercurrents which animated, charged, and lit the Philly arts scene on fire with sexual energy during that time. Many of us were annoyed by the misperception the media created of a fat, ugly, asexual Philadelphia; but we were disarmed on that level. I have said elsewhere, and it bears repeating, that if the city of Philadelphia has a sun sign it is Gemini. It is another way of saying this: Philadelphia from within looks and feels vastly different than Philadelphia seen in a cursory way or from a distance. The sultriness around our scene was warmer and more human than the scenes we had all read about in New York and L.A.: we weren't motivated by money as such, or the desire to create and maintain images of/for ourselves. The hot blood that ran through McGlinchey's, Dirty Frank's, the Good Dog, and all our other hang out venues had some actual romance in it; we all went so far as to care about other people. The Gemini twist, as ever for Philadelphia, is that if the seeds we plant ripen correctly, Philadelphia may go on record as one of the hottest scenes in the history of the arts, thus overturning a century of bad press, neglect, abuse, and widely spread misinformation.

Art and life have a way of comingling which can be difficult to finesse for an author. Because I dared to place her image on the cover of this book/pdf, I might as well announce what will be obvious to those who knew me and the Philly scene during the Aughts: the female protagonist of "Trish" is modeled on Philadelphia painter Mary Harju. The life I built with Mary (and with the Philly Free School) was highly unusual; we were artists without being rich kid dilettantes; lovers without being mutually exclusive; Penn students and graduates who went out of our way not to be academic; and human beings who tossed and turned on our own emotional waves without trying to fake balance or calm. It was a scattered life we had, and a haphazard one; but the love and affection we shared was intense. In fact, if I have ever had a Laura or a Beatrice, it is Mary. The difference, of course, between myself and Plutarch and Dante, is that Mary and I consummated our relationship very fast. The heat we had for each other never quite let up, either. The picture on the cover here was snapped at a party thrown at Mary's house (4325 Baltimore Avenue) in the early Aughts. That house was an experience in itself— it was filled, always, with artists, musicians, and other bohemians. On certain nights, everyone in the house would be intoxicated on something or other. Many nights I spent there, I felt as if the entire house had ascended into deep space, into some other, more germane part of the universe than West Philadelphia. I have memories of floating down hallways and stairs. Mary was a wonderful playmate and an excellent mate in general. She was never boring. And, to the extent that I hope this piece conveys the intense electric excitement I felt in her presence, it is a reminder that these elevated feelings are always possible, even during a Great Recession. It is the Gemini stare of Philadelphia down the barrel of a shotgun.

Adam Fieled, 2013

I.

The story starts here: PAFA has its yearly opening, and I explore it with Lisa. I am looking for Trish's paintings: she has invited me. She is nowhere in sight. There: it's her self-portrait on the wall, called *The Vessel*. Sepia, brown, colors that have Spanish resonance. Trish's in blue, half-profiled, wearing an expression of pensive angst. She looks at me from the painting. She is my soul sister. She's under my skin.

Our first date: Lisa still in the dark. An operation I enact covertly. We are going to see a movie: *Amelie*. She is merely cute. I sit through this for you, Trish. I dialogue with Bukowski while I sit there: *I deserve a blowjob for this*. Hank is amused but reticent. Trish wears a green winter hat which now sits on her lap. Her hair is pony-tailed. She has had a salad at Cosi. I am hungry, I enjoy my hunger: mind-fucked.

Back at my place: 21st and Race. I play Trish "Sweet and Dandy" from *The Harder They Come*. She dances without restraint on the tan carpeted floor. Something is becoming loose in us. Then she lays down on my floor, in blue as in *The Vessel*, and lets me paw at her. Skyrocketing giddiness overtakes us. We are drinking grog (rum and water) from capacious blue mugs, each other's new toy. Look: I have, in my pocket, a copy of Aleister Crowley. It's red.

I am in an artist's studio: winter, long broad windows, sunset, it's

going down. I am in a wife-beater with braces, mustachioed, jack-in-the-box. There is a portrait of Apollo on the wall: nude, in a field of purples and blues. He carries a fiddle. Trish and I are drinking cheap red wine. There is no one else (it seems) in the building. Pipes drone steadily. Warmed by the wine, we sneak into a dark bathroom. I crash through several floors of myself.

Pull-out couch: we are down for the count. I have my hands on her sex. She is shushing me. I make no noise. There is no sleep here. The windows represent being into a new space. Morning: we will walk back to my 'hood. We will eat at my diner. I will feel, on Cherry Street, that I have never flown this fast around the universe. I will be all the worse for being happy (Lisa). Pancakes do not taste as they ever have before. They are ambrosial.

Phone message: "the first kiss of love." Now I cannot avoid telling Lisa. She takes it on the face but not without a fight. Word has spread around the store. I wake up to find myself a bookstore Byron. Trish wavers. She aims to please everyone. She says she doesn't know. Then, there is another that shows up. He is older. He dives headfirst into paint, but without painting. I have no defense against this first onslaught. I hold on tight.

II.

First night at my place: I am able to have Trish to look at up close. I notice

how different she is from
Lisa: long, lean torso,
tiny breasts, narrow waist,
flaxen straight hair that
reaches down her back.
She loves me wildly and
with feeling. "Hair upon the
pillow like a sleepy golden
storm," Trish slept late. Yet
she was out as soon as she
was in; "I'm with Roger again,"

she said, and pulled the plug. There
was a period in which we could
not talk to each other. I either
had to have her totally or not
at all. There would be no grey
for us. Was this karma for the
manner in which I treated
Lisa? Closing shift: Roger came
to pick up Trish. I heaved against
the glass doors before the manager
came to let us out. Romantic poems
were being written, informed by a
kind of desperation. I read Donne
for a Penn class and extrapolated

his stance (metaphysics abridging
Romanticism) and remembered
that first night, in which Trish
and I read "The Ecstasy" to each
other. Now, she horded her body
where I could not see. I have my
own conceits, I thought to myself,
walking home from Penn in rain.
Spring rains; Trish returns. She
seems chastened. There is a part
of her that needs me. It is a part
of her that she rebels against, so
that her manner towards me takes
the form of an interior war made

exterior. My folks take us to the
Pink Rose bakery on Bainbridge
Street, and Trish and I share a
big brownie. We go to the Eyes
Gallery on South Street and my
Mom learns Trish's eye, tastes.

There is a loaded sky bearing
down on us: Trish's eyes water.
We are to spend the night at Trish's
place. She lives with a handful of
artists at 4325 Baltimore Ave.
James is bi-polar and always causing
problems. Trish is turned on by him
but pretends not to be. Her room is

uncarpeted, wooden slat floors, big
wooden dresser, overlooking a quaint
West Philly courtyard. There is a cat
named Zooska, a preternaturally
intelligent girl-cat that plays with us.
For some reason we do not make
love that night, and when I wake up
I am fit to burst. I send red signals.
Trish's compassion overtakes her: I
am getting sucked off. Her glasses
remain on. She is doing this because
she loves me, and love-waves are
communicated in oral gestures. She
means it. I can sense James

in the courtyard, listening. Will Trish
close around me at the right moment,
or will she miss? As I go off the edge,
I feel her miss slightly and then hit,
and I have left the planet. She is so
far beneath me that there is no seeing
her. She swallows me, and I will never
leave her mouth again. It is sealed.

III.

It happened again: Trish found
someone to replace me with.
She broke the news over the
phone. I betrayed no emotion.
Why was this happening? I
felt I had already repaid my
karmic debt of suffering to
Lisa: this was "overtime."
This dude was a concierge at
a fancy hotel: "Byronic," Trish
said (the first Byronic concierge
ever, I thought). Trish insisted
on telling me the story, and it

was sordid, drunken, dumb.

They met through a mutual friend at a bar. This concierge made a blatant play for her and she accepted it. They stumbled drunkenly to his apartment and slept together. At that point they made a pact not to sleep with anyone else for the time being. They were saving each other from what they were already doing. I found the whole thing incoherent and lame: why did Trish need to be “saved” from me? Why was this guy so eager to make a pact?

Silent mode: I had Trish like a disease, but it helped not to talk to her. I needed to be cured of her just like she did of me. One day I had an appointment in Manayunk, and I met a woman on the R6 train. She was a tall brunette, medium build, with black eyes and freckles. I was wearing my Shelley shirt (“I am as wayward as Shelley”) and that started the ball rolling. She was lively, easy to talk to. We made a date to meet soon after.

Franklin Institute steps: there she sat, in a long sleeveless dress that was tie-dyed, and had earth-tones of “hippie” all over it. We are at my apartment. Her legs fall into my lap. We are naked. We feed on each other in the summer heat, as the sun goes down. That’s it: I am cured. I can go after Trish again because I do not need to. I can want Trish again because I do not want her. Flesh equals flesh. Somehow Trish is open: we make plans to see a movie. I do not ask

about the concierge: she offers no

information. When she arrives at my pad (I help her out of a red cab) she is either drunk or stoned, or both. She is in a frilly white skirt, hair bunned, languid, droopy eyelids. My body reacts: now is the time I must claim her. She must be taken. I touch her in a hesitant way and she pulls me on top of her (living room floor, lights on, sun setting, skirt hitched, shirts on, tan carpet). For once: I worry not about pleasing her. I need to place myself in her as

quickly as possible. I do so with a huge sense of triumph. She is my animal bride and we have just been married. She tells me she is cheating on the concierge, but there is no remorse in her voice. It is the voice of one possessed. Interposition will not happen again. The only flesh that need be equaled is mine to hers. So, the marriage begins. Yet I live in fear: at any moment the rug can be pulled from beneath me. Am I replaceable?

IV.

How we establish ourselves: every night is spent together. I prefer to spend as many nights as possible in West Philly, where rugged old houses sport ample foliage that is ripe with the flush of late August. We make love at least once a night, so we can be fully animal and happily married. Green herb follows us around as a mode of relaxation and to get our moods in sync. Trish is developing my palette: I taste pesto for the first time, vegetarian stews.

At 4325, there is a party all the time, and it is like finding an adolescence that I never had. Jackie was another painter who lived on the ground floor (Trish's room was upstairs.) Trish and Jackie had

fooled around and Jackie painted in a far more violent manner than Trish (lots of smears, grays, blacks, more abstraction), but he was a farm kid from Carolina and a gentle soul. His girlfriend Grace was from a well-connected Connecticut family and knew J.D. Salinger personally. She had a bit of an attitude, and her lips were often curled in a sneer.

The rest of the 4325 crew were rock and rollers and into doing Ritalin lines. By October I am an honorary member of the household. At that time I was recording an album of spoken-word stuff in South Philly. I would zoom on a trolley up to West Philly and that night there was a party. The kitchen had awful yellow wallpaper and a blazingly bright light and I did shots there with Jackie. I wasn't a big drinker but that night Trish both went to town, and got rowdy.

Trish and I adjourn to her bedroom and have loud, drunken sex with the door wide open. Her diaphragm got stuck but we just kept going. Later we heard another couple hooking up down the hall. The air was mild and clean and it was warm for October and there was no way we could go to bed. We staggered down to the front porch and sat on the forest-green swing-bench that was held up against Jackie's window. Branches hung between us and the street. Leaves were falling in Clark Park.

That night was one peak of 4325. There were many. We began to develop our rituals beyond just pot, food, and sex. I always cherished the walk from Penn (where I was finishing my degree) to 4325. At 40th and Spruce was the University

Pinball Arcade, which I liked to call the Universal Pinball Arcade, but neither of us ever went in. We also liked to walk late up to Fresh Grocer at 40th and Walnut. We'd buy

French bread, because on pot there is nothing better. We were also spending lots of time with Tobi, who at that point was Trish's best friend. She was another painter, less into mythology and more into precisely detailed figuration. Tobi was tiny, with exquisite cheekbones, bright blue eyes, wavy brown hair, thick bow-shaped lips. She was hilarious but turbulent and wont to cause scenes. There were to be lots.

One night Trish and Tobi came with me to the studio in South Philly where I was recording. We drank Paisano (cheap red wine) and listened to the recordings. Tobi wanted us to walk her home, but she was on her bike and it was completely out of our way. She was drunk and upset and started yelling and abruptly left. Trish and Tobi tended to mirror each other and so I wasn't surprised that Trish also started to freak out.

Trish ran into moving traffic on 18th and Walnut (right by B & N where we worked), and I had to drag her back to the sidewalk. Then she attempted to strangle me when we had almost reached my pad on 21st Street. I managed to tear her off, but it was my first inkling that being Trish's established boyfriend could be onerous.

For the first time that night,
I went to bed tired in a bad
way. This wouldn't be all roses.

V.

Fertilized, loved, I began
to write songs again. Yet
I remembered what came
to seem like a curse: the
feeling that I would not be
heard. I was in the wrong
place at the wrong time.
So I spiraled into depression,
even as songs tumbled out.
"Midnight Blues," a dirge
in A minor, was the best,
written during witching
hour, snow coming down,
Trish dead asleep in bed.

At one point I even began
to consider suicide: I had
given so much time to my
music, why was I being
held back? How could I
live under a confining
curse? Trish is my lover
but not very good at
comforting me: she is too
lost in her own blues. Too
many colors swirl around
her head, she is lost to
images, tints, hues, shades.
Wood creaks beneath us.

By X-Mas our mood lifts.
My folks take us to dinner
in a Vietnamese restaurant,
and we order pad thai for
the first time. Trish for me
means new tastes and the
color of these noodles is
matched to her hair that
is grown out, no longer
bunned. We are near
home in West Philly
and West Philly does

begin to feel like home.
No sharp pangs linger.

New Years there's a party:
Tobi giggles over Indian
food that we have delivered,
everything is voluptuous
luxury. I jam with Matthew from
Eris in the music room (Josh's
bedroom) on Velvets tunes,
play the new songs for Jackie
who says "Bowie." Trish is a
bright fish swimming in a
school, green waters around
us. We are two fish together
and we are ripped to the gills
and the floor is soft coral.

Trish is unhappy: parties are
starting to wear on her. By
February she moves into a
new pad in a rugged old
brown brick building, also
in West Philly, with Tobi.
The doors to Trish's bed-
room are glass, not very
substantial, so Tobi has to
listen to us make love all
the time (a night with no
love would be unworthy
of us). I love the view from
Trish's windows: placid

looking 42nd Street, trees,
large houses, it could pass
for suburbia. It reminded
me, also, of the England I
have always imagined, the
ideal England which gave
rise to so many early heroes
of mine, and which once
produced giants of the pop
song. I would look out the
window, pretend we were
in England after Trish had
gone to sleep, and if Tobi
were out or in her room.

VI.

Tobi begins to reveal her character. Her painting style is not unlike Mary's— she's a formalist. But Tobi has no taste for mythology and loves quotidian objects— balloons, curtains. She paints with absolute precision and detachment. Her personality in life belies this— she has two frequent faces, both of which are constantly bubbling over onto the surface (Trish is reserved in comparison, and a secret voluptuary). Her moods dictate either kitchen-sink humor or paranoid rage. Her tininess necessitates loudness. By this time she has put on a good amount of

weight as well, so that her exquisite cheekbones and startling eyes are offset in a negative way. Simply put, Tobi is jealous of Trish on a number of levels— Trish has looks, academic distinction, and me, while Tobi scurries among potential lovers, never able to appease her conscience and settle on anyone. Between that and our amatory antics, Tobi becomes unsettled with us. When Tobi throws little parties, I act bullish— partly because I'm stoned, partly because I feel a manly sense of owning Trish and Tob. But when I leave, Trish and Tob get in big fights.

Happier now are times when Trish stays with me. Trish still enjoys experimenting with chemicals, and when she does, I oversee her. But our routines are not that different than anyone else's. We makes plans to visit Montreal at the end of the summer. By the time we get to Montreal, I realize that letting Trish plan the whole thing herself was a bad idea. We're trapped in a closet on Saint Catherine Street. It's hot. But I put on a game face and we see the sights. Trish's tremendous breakdown has been documented elsewhere. Suffice it to say it was a tense

time. Something began to break between us. Trish's freak-outs were spaced about a week apart, and were regular. It became more and more difficult to find energy with which to cope. I was burned out on her sexually as well. I dreaded having to make love to her. I was repulsed. After a certain point, I couldn't take the strain of dealing with her any longer. In early November, I broke off with her in such a way as to suggest that I needed to be harsh. I did. Her fits had taken something from me that would take some time to repair. They imposed soul damage.

I had learned that Tobi liked to bounce around. About a year after I split with Trish for the first time, I had occasion (finally) to know Tob the way I'd always wanted to. I was upstairs at the Khyber, doing my rounds (I was in charge of an arts collective, the Philly Free School, at the time), and Tob was there with her friends. Me and Tob were dancing and we started grinding. It was intense and pleasurable and it had been building for a long time. I took her home and knew a few things at once—this wouldn't last, wouldn't be a

relationship, and it might not even be pretty (Tobi's paranoia never being far beneath the surface). We had traveled the length of Center City and were cold, so I drew a bath. What happened in the bath and afterwards in bed was not terrible or great. It was done, for both of us, just to have done it. I couldn't say, then or now, that I regretted it. But Trish was still around, had taken up with a new guy, and though I wasn't jealous (I had many lovers at the time) I still loved her. I didn't know if the story was over or not—turns out it wasn't.

VII.

All through intervening years, Trish never fully left my mind. Many encounters I lived through were pointless— one-night stands, flings, all half-felt or not felt at all.

When Trish reentered my life, she did so directly. Simply, we wanted each other again. Trish now lived in an apartment building, with roommates, on 49th off of Baltimore. The apartment had a fire escape large enough on which to sit, and smoke. I was in the process of beginning to publish seriously, and would often devise new strategies as I stared

off over the clotheslines and windows.

We were older, less demonstrative— but we still made love almost every night.

The problem was, this was interspersed with consumption of cannabis. I am soon to learn that mutual intoxication cuts off intimacy. What used to be sparks between us were now ashes. There were even times when the “little death” was a bore. So that for six months we’re in a holding pattern. This time, it’s Trish’s turn to do a sudden break. Moreover, she has an older man waiting in the background. I see them together in Rittenhouse Square. I’m numb;

I believe (as is the case) that Trish is mostly frigid. She uses her sex to ensnare and bind. But making love to a frigid woman does eventually wear thin. Still, my attitude is that Trish and I could still work something out.

This time, Trish never gives me a reason.

The next summer there’s a fresh confrontation—

Trish is very wary, and I’m more perfunctory than I seem to be. We’re buried in each other as something to express. This time, I eventually realize, Trish is gone for good. But I make a conscious decision to still love her.

When I look back on the time
I spent with Trish, it occurs to me
that we never knew each other that
well. We were “mad for it,” the passion,
the romance, without being mad for
each other. What’s worth exploring is
what I know about her now. Like
this— that her aims were more strategic,
less organic, than mine. She wanted
to take me and mold me, and I
wouldn’t let her. But this was
buried beneath other imperatives. She
wasn’t strong enough to enforce her
strategies and I was too wild to tame.

The pressing question that follows is—
was it worth it? I’d say it was,
though it could’ve ended in two
corpses. We participated in these scenes
at a time during which there was little
romance left in America. Bohemian
America has never been a particularly
well-populated locale, but we set up
camp there and in the process confounded
structures that we could’ve let crush us.
Our dreams weren’t especially original,
but our improvisations created a new
context for them. Neither of us came out
of Bohemia— it was a new realm for us.

Is it only because I can still sit
here, writing these lines, that our
escapades still seem like good ideas?
If we did end up corpses, who would
be the wiser? On this account, I
have no solid answers. I can only
say that for some reason, some humans
need the charm, the sparkle, the electricity
of romance, and will put their lives
on the line to attain it. So it was for
us. Those that are kith and kin to us
will understand. Those that aren’t may
choose to laugh at our foolishness. But
it must be dry, accursed laughter to us.

