

FIGURE WITH MEAT

By Ron MacLean

figure 1.1 (uncooked)

Poor Otto in the infinite desert.

“Don’t come to me this broken puppy dog,” says Horst. Pie-faced Horst.

Heavyweight picture of eternal youth. Short, sandy hair. Pale pink flesh. Parked in a leather armchair in a dark corner of his posh parlor. “You disdained Floriana from the beginning. It’s a mystery what she saw in you.”

Spring sunlight illumines gaunt, nail-biting Otto. What can he say? Floriana. Perpetual hair. Endless flowing ego. Despite himself, he can’t shake her. “I don’t want to talk about Floriana.”

Dark wood. Rich leather. A regatta sun through tall draped windows. “What, then?” demands Horst.

But Otto cannot get to it so quickly or directly. It is not unusual for Otto to forget why he came. Otto struggles to make eye contact. Otto is here to talk about purity. To wring his hands before his old friend and seek sympathy. Instead, peevish: “She won’t sleep with you. You reek.”

Horst hugs a slab of raw meat to his chest. Slaughterhouse-sized. A vein runs through the rich red face of it. A second slab propped in the leather chair beside him like a talk show guest. “Floriana is turned on by hostility. If you’d seen that, she’d still be with you.” A leathery layer of ecru fat under Horst’s hand. He’s practicing poses. His

new discovery a portraitist. A graduate of graphic novels. “She’s trying to have the painting stopped. People for the Ethical Treatment of Raw Meat, or some such.”

“Her art is insipid.” Otto paces. Prematurely gray.

Horst smiles. “You overlooked that when she was fucking you.” Otto starts to speak, but Horst cuts him off with a wave. “She’s a woman of her time. She knows how to speak to the public.” The room carries the faint odor of aging meat. Horst shifts in his chair without losing his grip on the beef. His fingers discolored, vaguely burgundy. “I’m glad she hurt you.” He slaps the slab. “Perhaps it will toughen you up.”

The words sting. Otto stands on a carpet crafted from some sort of animal fur. He is a painter whose talent easily draws interest from galleries – interest that tends to fade when they see the fullness of his work. He stares at his feet. “They’re not going to do the show,” he says.

“What are we talking about?”

“Christ in the Wilderness,” Otto says. A series of abstract oils based on Jesus’ bedeviled desert days. “Kroner Gallery. They passed.”

“Of course they passed. Abstractions on temptation and suffering. How much would you have people endure?”

On the wall, a framed newspaper photograph of alligator races, Horst presiding proudly over a roomful of revelers. Everything Horst touches finds favor. Otto looks away. “They called it *stubbornly difficult*.”

Horst’s laugh echoes around the room. “Perfect,” he says. “True.”

Otto sulks in Horst’s sunlight. “I’m not sure how much more I have in me.”

“Good. How old are you Otto? Are you nineteen? Do you suffer for your art? No one cares. People make paintings. They sell them.” Horst’s face turns a slow, comfortable crimson. It’s impossible to tell if it’s a reflection from the beef, or him warming to his subject. “Let me tell you something. A pair of pigs from a commercial have been moved into luxury retirement quarters in the next block. They flew on television, so now they’ll never become bacon. And you. You can’t pay your bills. Their concierge would not receive you. You have to face facts.”

Otto takes a series of quick, short breaths. Opens his arms in a gesture that encompasses Horst, the sides of beef, the parlor. He squints into sunlight. “This is not art. You’re recreating a 1950s Francis Bacon painting.”

Horst’s face contracts, a sour pickle scowl. “How many people know that painting? Besides, the reference – the humor – makes it work,” says Horst. “Bacon. Meat. All the compelling work today is done by carnivores.” Horst’s scowl segues to a smile. He cocks his head subtly. “The painting has already sold, Otto. Based on a sketch and a bio. This is my skill. Should I apologize?” He pats the meat. “I could describe this to any Jew at the supermarket, hug a roast beef to my chest and double the market price. I could sell and re-sell the idea and live well for five years without ever having the painting done. Think about that Otto. Why are you here Otto?”

Otto strains to remember. Can’t. “Keeping tabs on the devil.”

A belly laugh. “Bless you.” Horst blows him a kiss. “And who are you?”

“The voice in the wilderness. Witness to temptation.”

“Christ,” says Horst. “Snake charm. Paltry promises. *Bread*. Who couldn’t say no. Think if your Christ had been offered steak. Not hypothetical bread, but flesh and blood

meat, dripping in front of him. I question whether his response had been so noble, would it have survived the centuries if he'd been offered meat.”

fig. 1.2 (how they met)

Up Your Alley – bowling lanes, bar and grill. An art opening on a frigid February night. Festive crowd. Finger foods. Flash bulbs. Paintings adorn three walls. A DJ spins dance tunes, the lanes decorated as if for a county fair, lined with streamers in green and gold. A Horstian extravaganza-in-the-making.

Otto, in black mock turtleneck and jeans, sips red wine from a plastic cup and suffers. Horst's latest discovery a flame-haired hipster from the heartland with this series of acrylics: boys – brothers – at play with pet alligators. The reptiles distorted. Their alligatoriness exaggerated. Vaguely sexualized. No sign yet of the boy artist, or his handler. Otto, making the effort to not appear haughty, hangs at the periphery. The crowd in clusters, the usual people in the usual conversations. The room's edges fuzzy in Otto's vision – too much wine? Otto sees a stunning woman in a shiny dress. She's new. The dress, festooned with a giant bow in the back, the same color –the same fabric – as the streamers. Otto suspects the hand of Horst: a hired hottie. Nonetheless, he's on his way to ask her about color coordination when he hears a voice in his ear.

“It's Waldo, isn't it?” A woman stands before him. Long face, high cheekbones, flowing burgundy scarf tied loosely about her neck. A dancer's body. A chignon of thick silver hair. A shade that somehow Otto has never seen.

“Otto,” he says.

“Of course.” Long fingers touch his arm. “I’m Floriana.” An air of casual sexuality. Otto takes it in. “Horst insisted we meet. Otto will amuse you, he promised. But I’m bad with names. I’ve been asking everyone, ‘Where’s Waldo? Where’s Waldo?’”

Otto finds himself captivated by the knot of hair. Silver, not gray. There’s a lushness. A purity. And Otto nearly a year without a woman.

A reporter from the *Globe*, a young woman Otto recognizes as the paper’s second-string art critic, hovers within striking distance. Blunt-cut, high-gloss black hair. Long legs. Messenger bag slung across her shoulders. Some nights the whole world is seductive. Floriana stands close beside him, regarding a painting of a boy holding a dwarf alligator aloft for his young brother’s appreciation.

“What do you think?” Floriana asks. She wears a thin cotton dress. She touches his arm so softly he shivers.

“Skilled,” says Otto. “Still, flat. I long for texture. Accumulating paint. Something to arouse desire.” Otto aware of her closeness – the delicate hair of her arm touching his. “You?”

The *Globe* reporter starts toward them. Otto puts his back between her and Floriana. “Like you,” Floriana says, “I admire the skill.”

Voices behind them. One he recognizes. Alice, a young artist whose last project involved coordinating the lights in a dormitory – on, off, on – into simple geometric patterns, has intercepted the *Globe* reporter. “My next project will be more conceptual,” she says. “M&M candies grouped by color.”

“Really?” The reporter’s voice. “Interesting.”

Otto hates this. Give him a spirits-soaked rag and paint under his nails. A solo spotlight where he can beat his breast. He focuses on Floriana's delicate ear. The silver strands tucked behind. He bulges. Feels his face flush.

"Horst tells me you make paintings of sand," she says.

Otto flushes. "Meditations on temptation and desire. Studies in virtue."

She nods vaguely.

Otto remembers now hearing her name around town. A New York transplant. Horst represents her. Delicate watercolors and ink. Facile work that sells well. A rumor she's an ex-nun. Otto finds this inexplicably sexy. He wants to dismiss her but can't. Instead, he imagines her cloistered. Feels a stirring in his pants. "Didn't Horst tell me you work with animals?"

She tosses her head. A stray strand of hair crosses her forehead. "Have you ever experienced monkeys in the wild?"

"Come again?" Otto leans forward, hungry. He can scarcely focus.

"Monkeys," she says. "The squirrel monkey is endangered in Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay." Floriana's head moves slightly as she speaks. Her cheeks red, inflamed.

"Fascinating," Otto says. "Tell me more."

"There's an intelligence," she says. "A dignity. I find myself drawn to animal advocacy, more and more."

"But your art?"

"Where to focus one's energy," she says. "It's always the question. My art is respite. Relaxation."

Otto tastes acid. He works to keep his face impassive. Despite disgust, his erection grows.

Then, a trumpet fanfare. A buzz of voices. They turn to witness a parting of the crowd. Horst in waistcoat, green and gold, arm linked with the flame-haired boy wonder. Behind them, a procession set to a throbbing dance beat. The crowd claps to the rhythm. A series of alligators, wearing silk sashes with names and numbers, each accompanied by a handler in waistcoat and color-coded cummerbund. Laughter. Applause. Otto blanches. Floriana drifts closer to the action, toward the lanes where the reptiles prepare to race.

Horst beams. Greets the throngs. “Laaadies and gentlemen.” His best race-track announcer voice. “Welcome one and all. Here are the entrants in tonight’s feature race.” From somewhere, a drum roll. The artist engrossed in conversation, surrounded. All others engulfed in Horst, who straddles the center lanes. Behind him, by the pin setters, gators and their grooms at the starting gate. “In lane one,” Horst announces, “sporting a gold silk sash...” He introduces each gator. Wendell. Wally. Warren. Wilfred. Waldo.

Betting sheets emerge and are collected by Horst minions. Otto stands frozen. Voices, music echo as if in a dream. The voice at his ear pulls him back.

“Well?” Beside him, Horst beams.

Otto’s mouth dry. “You’ve outdone yourself.”

“Thank you.”

“It’s obscene.”

Horst puts an arm around Otto, his smile undimmed. “Twenty bucks says I’ll have fucked Floriana by the end of February.”

A reporter grabs Horst's arm and he's gone. His head minion announces one minute to post time. Then Floriana is beside Otto again.

She hands him a slip of paper. "I've bet on Waldo, for you."

Otto grunts. The room fades. His sightline fixes on Floriana. Scorn fuels his nascent passion. His bulge belies his beliefs. He licks his lips: "You repulse me, in a way I find irresistible."

fig. 1.3 (shadow)

"The world is fading, Horst."

"Blah blah blah the end of history blah blah blah. Tedious postmodernism. Assemblages. A little Horstian wisdom: live today, breathe the air, fuck the women. Make paintings if you must, but Christ, Otto, get over yourself. Look around you. What do you see?"

Otto sees water, the reservoir, gentle hills thick with pine. You'd never know you were within a hundred yards of a highway.

"Oasis," says Otto.

"Wrong." Horst stabs a finger in the air. "Opportunity." He gestures across the water. His eyes behind the sleek sunglasses athletes wear. "What would you say if I told you that yesterday I signed onto a development deal – townhouses and artists' lofts. A little left bank theme park starting at 750k. What would you say to that?"

Otto says nothing. What can Otto say that will not make Horst laugh.

A mockingbird calls.

Even in the open air Horst smells vaguely of raw meat. “You know, if you could pull your head out of your ass for five minutes, I’d hire you to manage my affairs.”

“I mean literally, Horst. My vision. It’s hereditary.” Birch trees. Buds verge on blossom. “An unusual form of optic neuropathy. The loss of central sight, yes, but more. The slow fade of color. The encroachment of shadow.”

Horst, leather-gloved hands at his side, surveys the area. The distant whoosh of highway traffic. “The *fuck* are you talking about?”

“I’m losing my vision.”

“See an optometrist. Get glasses.”

“In two years, I could be legally blind.”

“In two days, we could both be dead. Is this a diagnosis? Have you seen a doctor?”

“You know how I feel about doctors.” They have history together. Otto knows that Horst is Harold from Englewood, who changed his name and provenance for art school. “I know what’s happening, Horst. I had an uncle...”

“You’re a piece of work. A mediocre painter loses his sight. How romantic. How convenient if it were true.” Residual chill in the air. “What are you working on?”

“Are you listening? I’m losing my sight.”

“Last year it was Parkinson’s. You had an estranged half-sister.” Horst squeezes his gloved hands into fists. “You can’t paint, can you?”

Otto, shamed, shakes his head.

“You’re sulking because the gallery didn’t like your sand paintings. Wake up, Otto. Buy property. Cut down trees. Save the fucking reptiles.”

Did Otto believe he would find a sympathetic ear? Truth is, he's terrified of the blank canvas. Always has been. Now more than ever, what will he paint, and why?

"By the way," Horst says, "did I introduce you to my boots?" He points to each foot in turn. "You remember Wilfred," he says. "Waldo."

Otto feels his face pinch.

Horst beside him. "*Kidding*. You are so goddamned earnest. It will lead to erectile dysfunction, if it hasn't already."

Otto lost in the romance of his own imagined demise. Objects on the periphery less focused than last week. Less true. The birch silhouetted. The carpet of pine needles camel-colored. Shouldn't they be more vibrant, coppery? "What if this is the end?"

Horst has shifted his gaze. Head and torso in slow panorama. Surveying possibilities. Converting land to cash.

"Let me tell you a story, Otto." It is as if Horst is dictating into a tape machine. As if Otto is not there. "A man in my building, Slovak, he's in the hospital. Tried to kill himself." Horst pauses for effect. "He'd been creative with his taxes, but not clever. IRS catching up, he's afraid he'll lose everything. Decides to off himself." They stare at the reservoir, the woods beyond. In two years, what will Otto see here? "He sticks his head in a homemade guillotine. Homemade fucking guillotine. Botches the job. Of course, he'll live. Do you see my point, Otto?"

Otto sees March wind stirring pine boughs. Otto has always looked older and felt younger than he is.

"This is the future I see for you, Otto. Some cockeyed romantic demise and you'll fuck it up."

fig. 1.4 (rust)

Otto and Floriana. A late-night walk. Misted moon just past full. Main Street. Soft shadows, shops and restaurants. Dimly reflected silhouettes. The river, where within weeks the boat tour season will begin. Before he dies, Otto determines, he will go on a booze cruise with Floriana. First, certain things to address. A hint of rusted steel in the air as they approach the old bridge.

“You can make more substantive art, Floriana.” A black lacquered chopstick holds her hair behind her head. Otto does not tire of touching it. “Watercolor is frivolous. Make a shift. Get serious.”

He wraps an arm around her. Pulls her close. Historically he has done well with women, for periods of weeks.

She pulls away. Gives him a look that says, *I’ve been reviewed in the New York Times*. “What is art, Otto? Narcissism. I can’t look past what needs to be accomplished in the world. Be of service.”

“No,” Otto insists. “Artistic vision, faithfully cultivated. We’re prophets.”

“Naïve, Otto. Endearing at 25. Tedious at 45.”

“John the Baptist,” Otto says. “Moses in the wilderness.”

“Please, Otto. I have no patience.”

“But the nunnery?”

“Two years of Catholic school. An exaggeration. An air of mystery on a bio.” Her breasts roam free under a thin dress. Her coat open. “Goodbye, Otto. Introspection leaves you flaccid. I want jousting. A lance.”

“It’s been a month. I’ll evolve. Stiffen.”

“We live in a postmodern age. Time accelerates. The past is dead.”

And that was that.

Otto recalls this moment weeks later, walking alone across the same steel bridge in an unforgiving April wind. He cannot bring the moment, the evening, his life into focus. He has taken to squinting, as if that will increase acuity. His field of vision *has* faded some. He feels his age. The rush of a river waterfall to his right. The glint of streetlights in the water. Ahead, by the railroad tracks, a fat man in a wool Cossack’s coat, a pair of pink leashes attached to waddling pets. Are the pets pink? Does he see curly tails? Otto blinks and stares, but can’t discern. Which would be worse: to lose vision, or to view the world through Horst eyes? Otto looks at the river. Smells sulfur. Lifts his eyes to the street. Leashes lead the Cossack’s coat around the corner, out of sight. At home, Otto will reconstruct: what does Otto see (experience) and what (world) does he create for himself, in the shadows.

fig. 1.5 (featherless)

Otto in the world of men.

Horst moves briskly beside him in the early evening. Clutches a paper coffee cup. Long strides along the cinder path behind Town Hall, where white Christmas lights in

stunted beech trees twinkle in mid-May. It seems to Otto that, despite spring, darkness is forever descending. He is painting, but tentatively. Joylessly. He finds the background of a new canvas going red-black. Intense darkness that attracts the eye, swallows vision. Bells in the clock tower chime seven. Horst in mid-monologue.

“She’s traveling. Involved. Photo ops. London. India. I get headlines – ailing bluefish saved by homemade life jacket. Elephants used to demolish illegally built houses in Benares.” They moved to this former mill town for the novelty. Now they blame each other, and secretly revisit the city for their favorite restaurants. “And her beloved monkeys. Pawns in a political game. Global economy versus biosphere. This is what I get, Otto. Tabloid headlines. Stories instead of sex.”

Otto half-listening. Pondering a question his Jesuit therapist had asked him, weeks back: *which are you, Jesus or John the Baptist?* Otto broods. He is the voice in the wilderness. But if the Baptist, who or what is the Christ to which he points? What coming does he foretell? If these were Horst’s preoccupations, Horst would display himself in flowing robes, subsist on locusts and wild honey. Horst would have an answer.

“And all this meat,” Horst says. “It’s tiresome. Someone should study the psychological impact of prolonged exposure to rotting beef. I admit, much of the charm was the idea of Floriana’s reaction. The anger. The acrobatic sex. Without her, it’s just so much rancid meat in the hands of a tepid painter. He lacks your skill, Otto. There, I said it. Plus, it’s costly. I have prospects that need my attention. Which reminds me. I want you to do something for me. I’ll pay you. Make a house call on the pigs. Present your card to Gaspar, the concierge. See will they receive you. I want to commission a portrait

– pigs in retirement. Don't say no. It's for your edification. You think you're better than everyone. It's one reason people don't like you."

Otto finds it impossible to tell when Horst is serious. What is speculative and what is real. "Pigs," he says.

Horst a belly laugh. "A small matter, Otto. A temporary zoning variance. Do this for me. For you. I need to reach Floriana. I need to know her stance on the pigs. Where is she on luxury retirement units for pork. Meanwhile, Otto, I have projects. A man approached me, a geneticist or so he says. Wants to increase the poultry populations in warm climates. Claims to have developed a featherless chicken. I'm intrigued."

fig. 1.6 (*miserere*)

Otto paints at Horst's place. Gorecki's saddest music behind him. Horst on the road, following Floriana – deeply smitten, despite himself. Otto earns extra cash house-sitting. Dawn Upshaw's voice rises above cellos, violas. Otto daubed in late afternoon sun. A trio of pages hang from a wire atop his easel. He works from old watercolors. Child's bible images. Christ crowned in thorns. Moses wandering. Paint what you see. What does Otto see? How to express that no matter the cause, the light is fading. There is no doctor for this.

Otto has met Gaspar, the concierge in the neighboring building. Gaspar denies the existence of the pigs. Overcoming his personal horror, determined to validate his vision, Otto wears dark glasses, adopts a pre-WWII espionage air. With a firm grip on his arm,

Gaspar shunts Otto into a corner, and in an urgent whisper demands, “What pigs? Who sent you?”

Gaspar a gulag survivor from the former Soviet Union, an Uzbeki émigré who shuts down talk of the past. But Otto doesn’t know this so Otto persists: “Everyone knows.”

A glare from Gaspar speaks of darkneses Otto cannot imagine. Gaspar’s face, inches away. A sardine smell. “What do you fear most?” he hisses. Otto wavers. His knees knock. Whatever fear Gaspar felt fades. “Get out of my building before I bite your leg, little man.”

Otto returns days later, with a broiled chicken and a bottle of house red. Lobby visits lead to lengthy conversations. Over time, Gaspar does not deny the existence of the pigs. But does not acknowledge. Will not provide introductions.

Now, brushes beside Otto in a jar. His fingers tell the story of that day’s work in reds, browns, blacks. He tastes linseed oil as he nibbles his nails. The canvas began as sand and sky, ochre and azure. Layers of paint. A topography of textures. Otto alone in a room as the sun fades, Otto squeezing paint from a tube, color and heft on canvas to capture something he cannot put words to. Floriana accomplishes things. Makes impact. An injunction stopped Horst’s alligator races. The judge has become a partner in the housing development project. Otto paints. The colors grow darker. Thicken.

fig. 1.7 (pigs in retirement)

“Clever, Otto. Very clever.” Horst beaming. Cobalt blue shirt, red ascot, raw rump roast tucked like a football under one arm. “The three-dimensionality. The nod to meat. Compelling. Contemporary. I didn’t think you had it in you.”

Argyle Skirt Gallery, a cool August night. Cosmos and cranberry martinis. All the drinks this season are pale red and pink. There is a healthy turnout. More, of course, than Otto had expected. The whole event surreal. Dimly lit. If Otto’s eyes do not deceive him, two women dressed as Colonial soldiers play foosball in a distant corner. Why are they all here? Otto has done a series of paintings – assemblages – each one a tiny plastic pig glued onto a dark, abstract background. Blood red, brown, black. Otto marvels at the blur of bodies. The work embraced. Otto, wary, wonders why. Themes he has long wrestled with contained finally on canvas? Groanings too deep for words? Or this: he has glued plastic pigs to failed paintings. People smile. Otto, tortured, tries to understand.

Now Floriana, standing next to him. Floral scarf. “Are you happy, Otto? Do your pigs give you pleasure?” He cannot gauge her sincerity.

“Welcome home,” he grunts. They stand side by side, evaluating the crowd as if a painting. A press of people. Otto squints to see his pigs at the party’s periphery. “What species are you saving now?”

“Be that way,” she says. “Do you have any idea the number of birds dead from avian flu the last 10 years? The number of humans? And your friend, with his unroasted beef.” Arms folded beside him. She regards his paintings. “I like them,” she says.

“They’re festive.” And floats away. Otto would have hope if he did not know from Horst, vivid details of furious sex.

Horst works the room. Otto overhears him spinning a story about a device that can convert a dog's emotional states into language. A crowd, captivated, Horst always at its center, those around him fuzzy. "Bow-lingual," Horst says.

Nine paintings. Nine tiny plastic pigs. A gift from Gaspar. Otto had discovered them aligned on his bathroom sill, basking in late afternoon light. It was two days before he'd had the courage to touch them, to gauge their material reality. Concierge and caretaker, Gaspar waves from amid a knot of young women, red hair, mini-skirts, boots. Otto raises a rose-colored beverage in toast. Paintings begun in desperation, reflections on an increasingly shadowed world. Paintings that had become increasingly abstract. Otto had wallowed, almost happy. Until a day – inevitably – Horst came by to see. "Maybe I was wrong," Horst had said. "Maybe you are losing your sight." Otto had escaped to the bathroom to regroup. Nestled chin on sill. Near his pigs.

Now Horst, *sotto voce*. Conspiratorial. "A trace of humor, Otto. Don't let it get around. You might end up with a career." The same smirk Floriana's face had worn. As if they were in on a joke.

The woman from the *Globe*, with a notebook. Long legs under a black skirt. Mop of raven-black hair. Lively eyes. Head cocked thoughtfully before Pig #5 (Prophet).

"Then where would you be, you and your disdainful pout?" Horst with a death grip on the meat. He has taken to carrying raw garlic in his pockets to combat the smell. Horst winks in the reporter's direction, receives a mischievous smile. Otto blanches – is there nothing Horst doesn't get his fingers on first? "Don't worry," Horst says. "You're safe. Sullen. Fundamentally unlikable." Horst wraps his free arm around Otto's shoulder

and squeezes. Otto feels loved, like a side of beef. “But you may yet have a future free from self-inflicted wounds.”

They watch Floriana approach the woman from the *Globe*, making notes at Pig #6 (Electric Fence), Otto’s favorite. Floriana: “Isn’t this delicious?” Reporter: “I like.” Otto strains to hear the rest of her response. He catches the words “playful” and “tortured innocence.” He turns to Horst for a reading – sarcasm or sincerity – but Horst’s head is filled with Floriana.

“Chickens, Otto.” A sadness in his voice. “We are at a crossroads. Pray for us. There is absolutely nothing sexy about chickens.”

The women have moved on. Otto watches people peruse his art.

“All this is yours.” Horst a wide grin that says, *you’ve given the world amusement.*

Otto’s stomach rumbles.

“Christ,” Horst says. “You look consumptive. Enjoy tonight. Be miserable tomorrow.”

Would it be a crime to sell a painting or two? A taste of recognition in tribute to fading vision. He’s stirred by the attention. The buzz. He stays near the middle of the room, to take it in. Ponders ways to punish himself later. “Pleasure is a piece of the human experience,” Otto argues. “Authentic.”

“Fine,” says Horst. “Whatever.” Eyes scanning the room. Gaspar has found the Colonial soldiers. Floriana flits by in the foreground. “She colors her hair, Otto. Which I find fantastic. Why anyone would choose gray.” And Horst glides away, beef cradled under his arm, trailing a red-haired young mini-skirt.

A figure skirts the edge of Otto's vision. The reporter, back again in front of Pig #5. A stance at once engaged and aloof. There is much to ponder, but Otto can ponder tomorrow. Drawing on deep reserves, he pushes aside angst, narrows his gaze to this woman. Lingers on her legs. Her stark black profile. Her intensity of focus. Her smile. What does she see? She looks over. Catches his eye. Her smile widens. A hint of wickedness. Otto trusts his eyes and moves toward her, through the crowd.