

# THE WOODWORK TEACHER

by

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## 1.

## Perverse

“When death comes a-calling  
I shall not fear her gaze,  
Nor shall I shun her gentle touch.  
Though wanton eyes must wrest my soul  
I will not be afraid  
For in the fading twilight  
Where morbid thoughts prevail  
I sense there will be wonder  
A beauty, pure and brave.

The author, gentlemen. Who might the author be..? Mr Selby-Winterton; still texting..? No matter. Multitask! Amaze us with your boundless knowledge and penance will be light... No..? Anyone— Ah, the Head’s beloved bell. Recently acquired, digital, calming and, most important of all, non-threatening. Herald of this day’s end and the start of Christmas break... Homework. Some of you may recall that next term there be girls among us...

*Settle down...* God help the unsuspecting and God help me..! In light of this auspicious event, your homework is... To cleanse the “puerile you”. Think more Mr Darcy; less Denis the Menace... .. Be gone!’

‘Mr Non-hyphenated Jones. What can I do for you, young man?’

‘The author, sir. You know, “pure and brave”? Was it Shelley?’

‘No, lad – not Shelley. Alive this very day, would you believe: he is a man of style, grace and learning but, alas, of absolutely no consequence... Not an examination topic, though, so no need to worry.’

And they are gone. Off to task the demigod Google or titillate the lithesome limbs of Laura Croft. God bless them all.

Girls, women, females... Set to roam the corridors of this bastion of adolescent ‘posh’ boys. What problems do I foresee? Mr Bakhresa, cameras on his shoes, ‘up skirting’ to his heart’s content. Mr Cholmondeley forever whipping out his willie in search of adoration, praise and awe. Mr Wakatsuki, holed up in the toilets, ‘beating’ his way to blindness... Then, in truth, nothing to be concerned about – at all.

Approaching mid-December. I feel like a falling leaf – again. Sycamore this year, I think. Dry, spun around and heading for the cold, hard earth. What is a man to do? Self-confessed pervert, 45 years old, about to be surrounded by my singular weakness – 15-year-old girls. A cruel twist of fate indeed. I should really fire up the old jalopy, go home, get drunk and dream it’s all a dream... But no. Gear selector jammed, car park empty, no mobile... Of course...

Regret. 'Should have; shouldn't have'. One of life's quintessentially vexing dilemmas. A brisk 55-minute walk along a hissing, seething A3 should have delivered me home. New Malden, bright lights; welcoming, enviable life. But no. Obsession in league with my innate perverseness rallied its forces to propel me ever onward to the station and another train journey into the heart of Gomorrah – Waterloo.

I reach the terminus bar before turmoil – the emotional kind – drags me inside; and so here I sit among my fellow men (four) and women (two).

Frankly, I feel quite at ease. We are alike. Miserable faces, eyes glued sightlessly to a five by three pixelated screen spewing forth 'vital' information specifically designed to enrich our lives – or so 'they' say.

Why am I here? Ah yes – obsession. The compulsion, nay, imperative to acquire 'detached' female company. A desire efficiently and conveniently met by the simplest of formulas. I pay coin for them to feed my demons. In return it is coin that helps them feed theirs. Poetic – in a turgid, soulless, pathetic sort of way.

I wonder. The young lady seated to my right: the one casting the occasional furtive glance in my direction. Is *she* a demon feeder? Do I know her; does she know me..? No, I think not. Nothing more than a youth prematurely aged by the scourge of cosmetics misuse. Hmm...

Drifting again. I must follow 'designated guidelines'. It is the only way to subdue the 'beast'. I shall leave this place, stride, medium pace, along Waterloo Road, Exton Street; cross Cornwall Road and enter the fascinating locale of Roupell Street. There the terraced rows of compact Victorian dwellings, gables linked, will captivate my attention. A giant saw blade, I shall imagine, forever ripping through the London haze. Then my destination, the curiously named premises, *Hooks and Co*, will lie before me: a stylish bordello concealed behind a façade of incongruous emporia: haberdashers, milliners, victuallers...

Yes, I like to romance. Yes, I savour anticipation. What fault in that..?

So, cloaked and comforted by my plan of familiarity, I complete the journey without incident. House registration formalities are flawless, but now there seems to be a problem. None of my three preferred companions is available. Unprecedented... Thirty minutes have already passed. Five more and I shall leave thoroughly displeased.

'Excuse me, sir.' A Management minion speaks! 'Please, if you'd accompany my colleague to apartment seven; someone will explain.'

Explain what? Oh well, here now; and dissecting a 'pacification' strategy may prove amusing...

And behind door number seven we have... A lady in red! Tall, slender, attractive, sophisticated – all these and I suspect much more. Intriguing.

Hmm, no greeting, no eye contact. A game perhaps?

Turning away now, collecting papers from an ill-positioned bureau and...

‘Mr Ivan Jacob Kurst.’

What wonderful tones! Plaintive, coercive – all but siren song.

‘A valued patron of both this and our sister establishment for quite some time I see.’

Interesting. Should I respond?

‘A “good man” by all accounts; a little “out of time”, but polite, genteel and, crucially, remarkably generous.’

Actually I should—

‘Private school teacher by profession, but also a man of independent means, courtesy of father – deceased but never mourned. Heterosexual. Prefers the company of educated women, especially those capable of appearing to be still within their 16<sup>th</sup> year. Conservative in fact...’

Question. Why do I still not respond? Something very strange here. My mind is formulating and transmitting words yet the ‘business end’ of things refuses to function. What cause? First siren song now sorcery?

And still the monologue continues.

‘This seems important to you.’

Enquiry? Statement..? Enough! I will break this spell if—

Gone. Replaced by Lucinda: my favourite, my *ben my chree*. She is apologetic, contrite, and dressed convincingly as a teenage EMO – pink hair to boot. It suits her. It suits me.

But what of ‘the lady’? Nothing more than a ‘stopgap’, a caretaker to the disgruntled. If so, an odd technique.

‘Handled’, ‘restored’, the remainder of our evening proved agreeable enough. Lucinda is a performance artist second-to-none. Possessed of uncanny abilities, she knows exactly when to affect a particular gesture, smile, or change tone or mood – all achieved seamlessly and in perfect concert with her client’s needs. Tonight we dined expensively. I was feeling generous. I also take great pleasure in observing ‘five-star’ serving staff unsuccessfully attempt to suppress ‘five-star’ disapproving glances. It improves the digestion. Over liqueurs I talked of Armageddon – Venus vs Mars, or, more colloquially, Saint Trinians invading an all-male Hogwarts. Not a pretty notion.

Lucinda thought I was being amusing, then remembered my fabled lack of humour and tried to change the subject. How did I like the house fluffer? Needs work, I replied, after puzzling over the description. A great deal of work.

A ‘contract’ girl by all accounts, willing only to undertake specific assignments on an ad hoc basis she is known only as Baubo. The word ‘only’ clearly has significance here.

Lucinda then deftly moved on to more risqué topics related to the pleasures awaiting me once we retired. I was unreceptive, my mind firmly fixated on Baubo.

Few believe that a classical education has any relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, but not me and especially not at that moment. Baubo – Grecian goddess of mirth, known for ribald behaviour, inappropriate lifting of her skirts and being a rarity within the annals of ancient mythology: a good-hearted crone. As an adopted name for a part-time fluffer it is a bold choice and no mistake.

En route back to base I paid Lucinda twice my usual consideration. The poor girl had endured a difficult ‘session’. True, when it comes to sexual antics her ingenuity and creativity are worthy of song. Yet, despite her best efforts tonight, I could not be extricated from the deepest of distractions. Two intertwining images repelled all other thoughts, sensations and emotions. Baubo and the Venusians...

Due to the late hour I engaged a taxi for the journey home. The driver proved to be a taciturn fellow which, for good or ill, afforded me the opportunity for yet further reflection. I returned to my earlier musings vis-à-vis regret. Perhaps I really shouldn’t have forsaken the ‘hearth’ for *Hooks and Co...* But no, I did not regret the decision. I’d had an experience, so to speak, and when I came to think of it, a moment of amusement. Yes, I even smiled.

Lucinda’s unsolicited parting salvo of what little she actually knew or had observed about Baubo was illuminating. The ‘lady in red’ apparently wore only red – nails and lips included – and, like me, was neither a ‘barrel of laughs’ nor a prime candidate for a starring role in *East Enders*. Sounded too ‘posh’ it seems.

Within striking distance of New Malden I think it wise to check my wallet – make sure sufficient cash funds remain to avoid angering my silent ‘chauffeur’. Blight of the credit card tip, you might say.

A-ha! What bides within? A stowaway no less. Overlooked during my dealings with Lucinda but now revealed: a name card.

*Duo Virginal. Private club, London.* No address, no phone number, not even the ubiquitous URL.

Now then, how did it come into my possession? Magic, sleight of hand, or... Or Baubo..? A puzzle second-to-none.

Why, I have no explanation, but discovery of this insignificant trifle triggers my ‘weakness’. I am as kindle. Once ignited, conflagration is assured.

For the second time, then, since darkness fell this mild December eve, my quest to reach home is thwarted. With the allure of forbidden excitement firmly in command, my revised destination is SW10 and the ineptly-named venue, *Club Traumer Dome*. God help me.

I arrive. Twenty pounds on top of the base fare and, quite frankly, a very generous gratuity prove sufficient to mollify my driver for the impromptu route change.

Chelsea waterfront: fashionable, expensive and home to numerous refurbished structures from our glorious past. To my right we have Lots Road Power Station offering apartments to buy for a mere king's ransom... Or two. And to my left one decommissioned gas holder built originally in 1872. Unfortunately, in this instance, irksome planning squabbles have temporarily prevented its rise to the same heady heights of opulence. While the bickering of the past five years continues to bubble and boil, a section of the ground floor has inexplicably been transformed into the 'CTD'. Best not to enquire too deeply into such matters I find.

Although one of my cherished destinations, it must be more than three months since I last visited this incongruous Victorian site.

What prompts my return now? Instinct and a sense that before dawn clips the Capital's skyline a great 'find' awaits my discovery.

A strange club even by my bohemian standards, all ages, sexual guises and 'classes' are welcome here if thoughtfully attired.

I am remembered and, for the second time this night, my admittance 'experience' is flawless.

Inside, the 'set' has changed from 'post-apocalyptic calamity' to 'late Saturday night A&E chaos'. Monitors, gurneys, mock medical equipment and staff posing as doctors, nurses and worse-for-wear patients effectively underpin the theme. Costumery, decidedly not NHS regulation, is imaginative and well thought out. Not bad, not bad at all.

To my relief the 'private members' mezzanine floor has been retained. Transformed into a series of adjacent booths, I fancy it represents the students' observation deck typically found in teaching hospitals. The units are open fronted overlooking the dance floor while the sides and rear are draped with robust 'examination cubicle'-like curtains. Only one remains vacant and available for rent. First, however, I must speak to the assistant manager: a passing acquaintance of mine...

And yes, the bar has recently been expanded to more closely match my eclectic drinking choices. No, the anti-drug policy I support has neither been abandoned nor diluted, and yes, the latest incarnation of Trance music currently rattling my brain cells is still considered to be non-hazardous, at least to lemmings.

Finally ensconced within my viewing module, I survey the scene. Below me good creatures of the night huddle and writhe together like half-blind mice. Visibility is actually quite poor. Of many contributing factors I could name, the house lighting system, upgraded and enhanced, command's pole position. Red/Amber 'flooding' augmented by swathes of golden yellow collide with clouds of spent air creating effects akin to twilight mist and morning fret.

Opera glasses, specially adapted, aid my endeavour to some extent, but I need more. Magic I require and magic in the guise of a ‘double orgasm’ is to hand. A perfectly fiendish ambrosia fashioned from Irish cream liqueur and white sambuca, it is the ideal remedy to rectify compromised night vision...

Still, it is difficult to make out individual faces clearly... But I shall persevere. My goal is, as always, to seek and locate ‘paired’ young ladies. One of said pair must meet my exacting specifications; her partner may, however, pass without restriction. In this particular establishment I am acquainted with an unusual practice. Such couples often present as an underaged teen accompanied by a woman in her early twenties. They arrive together, separate then mingle but invariably reunite at evening’s end. Fascinating. How this process came about, how it operates or indeed why it is even allowed I have no notion and truthfully no interest. The game is to find the perfect subject – that is my only concern.

To aid me in my quest I am blessed with the gift of intuition... But should this for some reason fail, ‘payroll’ scouts among staff members are more than willing to ‘tip me the wink’ if prospective candidates cross their paths. Such skills – to determine and confirm personal customer details – I find quite uncanny. In this, yet again, I do not ask *and* they do not tell.

Thirty minutes surveillance supplemented by an additional shot of ‘ambrosia’ and I sense elation on the rise. My intuition bolstered by cast iron intelligence prompts me to commit. Stage II...

The art of ingratiating oneself into the confidence of another is as complicated as it is perilous. One slip, one ill-judged remark, and a painstakingly constructed house of cards can collapse entirely. Nevertheless, in this field of skulduggery I possess both natural advantage and experience. Although teetering on the cusp of middle age, I am physically presentable, affable and polite. ‘Weird’ is a word frequently employed to describe me, but so far none consider me ‘creepy’. At school my nickname is ‘Vampire Bill’: a reference not without merit. Upon investigation I discovered, to my surprise, that the *True Blood* TV character *Bill Compton*, a.k.a. *Vampire Bill*, and I bear a striking resemblance. Probably an insult to the actor Stephen Moyer who plays the role, but then... Admittedly my dress sense is a trifle eccentric. For example, I do favour elaborately lined, fine silk waistcoats, but only because fob watches and their restoration are a hobby of mine. When ‘reborn’, it is only fitting that such exquisite pieces be housed in their traditional environment. Besides, it is a well-documented fact that 21<sup>st</sup>-century females respond well to a man who can still fathom time from the position of the hands on an enumerated dial. Is it not?

On then to my approach. The partial truth, I find, yields the best results. I am an artist. I sketch. Young ladies are my forte, obsession and passion. I strive to

capture their unbridled youth and, if possible, a fleeting glimpse of their latent sexuality. But most important of all I crave their 'essence'. My 'terms and conditions' are clear and simple. I require two ladies, known to each other, who freely agree to be sketched in my home studio. I guarantee that there is no hidden agenda, no intent to harm, abuse, sexually mistreat or blackmail. Either guest may elect to abort the arrangement at any time; but should this happen the protocol is clear – one out, both out. No special skills are required; only that the couple in question relax and try to behave 'normally' as they might during a routine 'get-together'. Two hours is typically the time required. Transport is provided and a fee of £100 per person is payable upon completion of a successful session. Copies of my humble efforts may be retained if so desired. I have only two additional rules. One – all mobile devices must be switched off and set aside for the duration, and two – the event never took place...

This evening's choice is inspired: exactly as I had envisioned. The ladies are evidently very close. The elder, Petra, protects the younger, Evie, with a vengeance. It is hard not to stare, for my prize is a true vision. As the seconds pass I become more convinced than ever that in another life she must have played the role of artist's model. Yes, that marvellously ethereal painting of *Sappho* by Charles Mengin. Depicted as a contrast: a woman of grace and innocence torn apart by sultry desire. Perfect in 1877, still perfect now.

My 'pitch' is particularly arduous, alcohol having affected the pair in quite different and unhelpful ways. Both are suspicious; but while Evie regards the entire episode with mirth, Petra sees only a 'dirty old man' hellbent on engineering a threesome. Yet still I am not summarily dismissed. I glance at my watch for effect, talk authoritatively of art, reference women's rights and a future in which clubs such as CTD will no longer exist. Rise of the bland. All are risks... But then I detect a glimmer of hope. Evie whispers in her partner's ear and, in doing so, exposes her Validate card, carelessly concealed within her waistband. Fifteen years old until Valentine's Day. I am reborn!

'Frivolous youth' finally triumphs over the mature, sober-headed and the deal is struck.

Petra gives a stern if somewhat slurred warning. Err and genital mutilation will be inflicted with swift and decisive precision. She means it. I believe her. A woman hewn from solid oak; who would not?

Noise, music, dancing, suppressed by my senses these past minutes, resurface. Normal function resumes. I lead the way out into the cooling night air. In this moment a change of heart is at its most likely. But no... We go forth... And so the spinning wheel turns.

Money can't buy everything – agreed. But what it can buy or, in this instance, hire is a chauffeur-driven town car, post-midnight. I have contacts, standing and, crucially, a Black Opel VIP card. *Client Privilégié* it states, and thus it is so.



We wait but moments. I insist that my ‘subjects’ occupy the rear seat while I ride shotgun. In my considered opinion, it is a much less threatening arrangement. Additionally, in carriages of this ilk passenger windows are invariably tinted – heavily – which, if nothing else, leaves the curious outside... Curious; while leaving the gentle souls inside oblivious to any prying eyes and with only the vaguest awareness of the myriad sights and signs flashing by. Also, it is less threatening for me... These are hardly presidential-standard security measures, I am first to admit, for the whole idea of covert behaviour is abhorrent to me. They are, however, the simplest of the many precautions I should employ, as anything more would, quite frankly, render the entire exercise pointless.

Abhorrent, pointless: the impact of these two negatives cause me to glance back at my companions.

Petra seems unnaturally calm while Evie’s unearthly resemblance to Mengin’s *Sappho* ever increases. If this be the work of backstreet chemists, I am amazed!

Yes, chaos is mounting in my brain, cavorting madly with unquenchable excitement and desire. Why I am driven like this I shall never know, but driven I am... So risk be damned. Reckless, foolish, naive: these are my descriptors, but I injure no one. Why then must I suffer so..? But I cannot escape reality. Should I be exposed, ‘kindly’ is not how I will be perceived. My day of reckoning will come. Of old there have already been perilous encounters, the narrowest of escapes and, God forgive me, tragedy. Abhorrent. Pointless. I may be judged abhorrent; this I can accept. To stop, to deny myself the indubitable pleasure of transforming one of Nature’s greatest creations into tactile art is inconceivable. I must go on in my own way, in my own environment. The muse will tolerate no deviation, no substitution. And tonight, her prowess is aflame. I... I feel it... She is waiting... Waiting...

Not long now. Petra oscillates between dream state and swoon. Evie has begun to chatter. She pretends to be interested in my work. How many girls, the frequency, the mysteries of erotic art? I smile. She is nervous, excited, but most importantly eager still to explore the odyssey I seek to offer.

My not-so-humble abode. A sprawling mausoleum of a dwelling. Victorian in origin, it is one of a trio of discreet monoliths commanding pride of place amidst a private leafy lane encroaching upon the boundaries of New Malden. Extensively refurbished, isolated and obscenely expensive – a mirror image of myself. I forget how many rooms, baths and layers of insulation. Such details are for the property hounds, not the ‘twisted’.

Once inside I am at pains to point out that their ‘chariot’ awaits below. I maintain three functional floors of which the second houses the kitchen, lounge and entertainment areas. ‘Be at ease and enjoy the hospitality,’ is my message. I insist on preparing food; a wide selection of alcoholic/non-alcoholic beverages

is available, but only after stomachs are lined and satisfied. A proposal for omelettes and pancakes receives a positive response: a quick and easy solution to an oft thorny issue.

After 'dinner' I allow the girls to roam as they please. Only one area is restricted...

For a while they show some enthusiasm for my various curios and trinkets, but boredom soon begins to weave its insidious spell. Meandering through an exhibition hall – not always to the taste of younger, more modern minds. Finally, the pair settle side-by-side on the largest of four antique sofas. An ideal choice from an artist's perspective. I can occupy many a shadowy corner from which to observe my 'nesting doves'. I experience no difficulty in selecting 'acceptable' mood music – an Oriental theme: contemporary, subdued baselines, hypnotic melodies. Alcohol consumption resumes. They are ready, as am I.

I am forgot. I can ask for nothing more. Wrapped in rhythmic sounds and warmed by liquor, my ladies have entered their own mystical land of carefree wonder. As I watch my earlier suspicions gain ground. These two harbour an unspoken attraction for one another. They talk, laugh and accidentally touch. It will not happen tonight, I fancy, but soon... Soon the inevitable will make itself known.

In response my hand begins to draw, the fever building, and, with it, images proliferate before me, each more vibrant than the last. Vigilance is key. At any moment the movement, expression or gesture I crave *will* flicker into being. Then it must be captured... Instantly. I will have only seconds before the essence fades... But this is my gift, my talent.

While I wait I fulfil my promise – an intriguing portfolio of sketches. 'The girls together; each girl alone'. I shall render them more vivid, more sensual, than either of their own insecure perceptions could ever dare fashion. They will be pleased: delight in marvelling at each other's form.

Task complete – that ignoble half-truth of my initial seduction – I focus on Evie. Dark ageless eyes, flowing chestnut hair and skin as pale as an Irish May Queen. This girl exceeds perfection.

At such times it is not unusual for me to sense an entity close at hand. Hovering at my back, it does not interfere, it does not interact. A mere voyeur, I wonder. A phantom from the alter world, companion to my muse, fleetingly unleashed by my force of passion. Content with its all too brief reprieve to witness the capture of pure feral beauty. A punishment perhaps, to all but touch that which it can never again possess? Is it a vision of my own morbid future..? Cruel indeed. And yet an even greater madness taunts me. I have come to suspect that this spiritual presence not only spectates but, in truth, heralds the imminent approach of my sublime epiphany... Hah! Fact or fancy I know not

which, but I detect no malevolence. And even if I have misjudged, no matter, for as a lowly sage once penned: ‘when death comes a-calling...’

It is over. My inspiration gone; my fever vanquished by exhaustion. I am favoured among men for the *elan vital* Evie finally revealed to me was magnificent beyond imagining. An oblique glance, nothing more, yet it harnessed the sum of her primeval self. Wild, unfettered, lustful, loving, gentle. Tempestuous: I can think of no better word to describe its power.

The hour is no longer late. Daylight already haunts the rooftops. The city that never sleeps forsakes another restless night in favour of a bristling dawn.

I must rest now, but before nightfall I am honour bound to commence the final stage of my obsession – the closely guarded secret I keep meticulously hidden from both my subjects and a disapproving world.

It is hard simply not to forge ahead, yet I require the skills of Hephestus if I am to achieve my goal with valour. Perhaps a few moments of preparation may quell my overzealous soul...

The third floor in its entirety is home to my workshop and glorious exhibits. There, every single nymph I have ever drawn resides, carved in the finest Italian walnut and to a level of detail I consider without equal. They are truly real to me. As I caress their ‘skin’, their features, there is warmth, life, running through youthful veins.

I know they see me as I see them... Am I insane, a candidate for redemption or a monster, fit only for the pit?

So many years and still these questions plague me.

Yes, I hear you calling, and yes, I shall confess: speak the words so you, my silent chorus, can clarify the debt.

Come hear me one, come hear me all. My name is Ivan Jacob Kurst, and I... I am perverse!