First published in Great Britain in 2024 by Paradise Press, BM 5700, London WC1N 3XX. www.paradisepress.org.uk

Copyright © Leigh V. Twersky 2024.

The moral right of Leigh V. Twersky to be identified as the author of his work has been asserted by him in his acceptance of the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or be transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-90-458595-4 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

Cover design by Charlotte Mouncey, www.bookstyle.co.uk

Designed and typeset by Ross Burgess.
Set in Baskerville Old Face, with pop-ups in Calibri and headings in Clarendon.



For Farilla B
and the memory of Evris Tsakiridis

Part One
Niceboys

ONE

Inside the Recycling Centre, the queue came to a halt.

There were liquid noises and human voices. Distant babbling, cries...

Samina clung onto Irene's arm. They said nothing and waited in the darkness.

They were in a large unlit chamber, which housed the long coiling line of D-classified gynos, and had grown immune to the smell of stale sweat and BestcoeDisinfex®.

The windowless walls, as far as they could see, were bare concrete, like the floor. Neither the opposite end of the room, nor the ceiling was visible.

'I'm sorry,' started Samina, 'I didn't know what you meant when you said you had a son.'

'Drop it.'

Irene had spoken without thinking. Not like me to lower my guard. She wasn't ready to talk about him. Her head boiled with confusion. How could she love that thing, that monster? It was easier to accept he was dead, died @ seven, than contemplate having any remotely maternal feelings for an insect.

'Whenever you want to talk, I'm here for you. You know that.'

'I said drop it.'

'I mean it.'

Every two or three deci-minutes they snailpaced forward in silence. A groan from far ahead of them gave Irene second thoughts about progressing any further. He warned us, didn't he?

Gynocops in pink dungarettes were patrolling with torches.

‘What’s gonna happen to us?’ asked Irene.

‘Reassessment,’ said a gynocop.

‘Which means what?’

‘Which means you don’t piss us off with stupid questions.’

The gynocop shone her torch full in Irene’s face and moved away.

‘Bitch. This is all cz I was eighty or so Britz short.’

‘Whatever happens, we’ll face it together.’ Samina put her arm round Irene’s shoulder. They moved on again, aware now that there was light in the distance.

In front, someone screamed. The mass of gynos stopped dead.

More shouting followed. From the rapid movement of the torches, gynocops could be seen racing towards the commo- tion, which quickly died down into sobbing. And then all was quiet again. The gynocops returned to their patrol stations.

Irene gripped Samina’s hand. ‘What are they doing?’ she whispered. ‘We gotta get out of here.’

‘How? The gynocops are everywhere, and without Eye-Ds... I thought we’d get new ones.’

‘We’ll think of something.’

Hours passed in the gloom. The D-classifieds had taken to sitting on the floor, although the cold concrete rendered that not much more comfortable than remaining on their exhausted feet.

It had to be night. Irene grew very drowsy, but somehow staying awake and vigilant kept her going. If she surrendered to her natural urge to sleep, it would be like giving up the fight, even though she knew deep down that resistance was futile. But she did succumb, and woke to Samina tugging @ her arm.

‘Get up. We’re being moved.’

Irene opened her eyes slowly. In the dimness, she saw Samina’s bleary face urging her to get to her feet. All around were bewildered gynos stretching and yawning.

There'd been a reveille, and gynocops were raising any still slumbering with slaps round the face.

'Thanks. Well timed.'

Irene heard moaning and hushed conversations. A long queue formed for the excretorium. People left items of cloth- ing to reserve their place in the main queue while they waited their turn to relieve themselves.

There was nothing to eat or drink. The morning passed as intolerably as the night, if not worse as the Ds had not been refreshed. Only woken from sleep, their sole escape from their D-classified world.

If Irene didn't have food or water soon, she would pass out. Her mouth was like sticky plasticon and tasted of death.

First came a scream that pierced the stale air and was succeeded by shocked silence, and then shouting and whistles. But these voices were behind them this time. And deeper. Andro.

Once more the gynocops rushed about, but Irene sensed the spreading panic. Some went towards the scream, others back to the andro voices.

'Run,' said Irene, as softly as possible. 'This is our chance.'

But the mass of bodies in the chamber worked against her plan. And as the crowd surged first this way and then that, Irene tripped over something, or someone, and found herself on the concrete, scrabbling desperately for Samina, who was borne away by the sheer weight of numbers.

'Samina!' she shrieked, only to hear her name yelled back, but could not move. More and more gynos were falling around and on top of her, and she struggled to avoid being crushed. The din was unbearable. It was difficult to see what was going on. Mustering all her strength, she managed to slide out from under the gynos lying on her, and ran, she knew not where.

Samina was nowhere to be seen.

Irene moved back, but the way was blocked and she fell. There seemed to be fighting.

There were more andros now. Androcops, pressing forward. The first andros were pushing them back, preventing them from coming further into the chamber. One of these andros called, 'Irene...'

How does he know my name?

‘...get out...run...join us!’

But she couldn’t. She was too far inside. She got to her feet and stumbled away from the dark crowd threatening to engulf her. There was an open door. She went

through.

@ first the light dazzled her. A voice spoke, but she understood nothing. Her eyes adjusted. And as she advanced further into the room, closer to the light, she saw.

And what she saw made her scream too, just as all the other D-classified gynos had done when they finally understood what awaited them.

What recycling meant.

TWO

My Eyelid-screen alerts me in the middle of the night.

BESTCOE-MENDOZA INSTITUTE OF ENTOMANTHROPY

UNIVERSITY OF COCKNEYTOWN

Department of Sphecanthropy

Training Manual page 7

A Brief History of Sphecanthropy: Concerning Sphecanthropes[1]

[1] Greek sphex/sphecos wasp, anthropos, human being, vulg. wasp-men/sphecoids.

I start with a fright, banging my head on my kip-cell, spheco- heart a-hammering. Pre-metamorphosis pages should've been archived. For a second I fear someone might suss me. If they find out...but all is slumber-still in the Combs.

I know what I am for fuxache.

Blinking like mad to close the page, I try to catch my breath and get back to sleep. 'It's just gone 14 deci-minutes. Don't need this. Tomorrow's inspection day.'

A grey box appears @ last over the paragraphs growing in my field of vision, line by line.

Read | Save | Close

I left-wink on Close. Nothing happens. Panic casts its net over me. Cold sweat tickles down my chitinex back plates. I right- wink. The text vanishes. I phew and breathe out. But a new box flashes up.

I left-wink on the middle one and drift off. But instead of peaceful spheco-kip, I have another dream.

About the old place.

I wake to syrupy birdsong piping across the dawn sky. The tannoy crackles into life, its sweet gyno voice filling South East Cockneytown District 13.

'Good morning to all on-duty customers! Just coming up to 22 deci-minutes, that's 5.30 am accu-time. Thank you for rising and shining in BestcoeBritain®. Enjoy your day.'

I emerge from my hexagonal kip-cell tube and run my fingers the entire length of my tingling I-brows. No messages. Not quite rested, I yawn and shake my sleep off before gliding down the timberex corridors past the Combs to our excretorium. Other sphecos are already squatting. Worried about the monthly inspection. Like me.

The excretorium is a square room lit by a skylight in its domed ceiling. Slightly raked gutters surround the damp slushy floor, where there is space for up to five sphecos to wait their turn. I wince @ the smell of sewage and BestcoeDisinfex®. When somebody leaves we get into position and lower our arse-slits over the gutters. The acid-hot fluid spurts out, cauter- izing me, and flows down to the drain. We don't need to clean up afterwards, unlike humos...I mean humans, even though they call us spheco-freaks.

V157 greets me as he straightens. 'Good luck, V159.'

'Chizz. Likewise.'

I'm too nervous for chit-chat.

We slap I-brows in a sort of vespine high-five, and float out together towards the syngastrion.

The syngastrion is housed in a much larger, similarly vaulted chamber. Daylight squeezing through a ceiling porthole illuminates the grimy black and yellow walls. A huge circular vat, spider-legged by ladders, dominates the space.

To save time, I ignore the steps and fly up to one of the little platforms @ the brim, where I don the black and yellow mask. The suction tube slots between my mouth-part lips, and, ever concerned about spheco viral outbreaks, I'm relieved to smell the BestcoeDisinfex®.

One press of the cheek nozzle and a warm, phlegm-thick fluid floods my mouth. We don't consume solids. Having got used to the oral inundation by now, I am able to control my swallowing mechanism, and get it down in manageable quantities, no longer in danger of choking, like on my first few attempts.

I taste nothing.

Portion control ensures I imbibe exactly 998ml of pre-digested soup. Another press on the nozzle releases the mask and I am more than full. With a light buzz of pleasure, I fly down to V157 to fling my arms round his neck and cover his mouth with mine.

As I snog my regurging partner, I cud 499 ml of broth into his mouth. He gulps it down and hums with satiety, grateful he can trust me not to cheat on the measures like some sphecos do. We slurp up the ribbons of mucus drooling from our mouth-parts, indifferent as to whose spheco-innards they issued from, and link I-brow-antennae for a quick stroke. @ fourteen inches his are the longest in our swarm, and the envy of us all.

Tanked up for the next 50 deci-minutes, we glide through the corridors to the South East Cockneytown Police Station (SECOPS) reception area. As swarm Queen, I take morning roll call.

Vs103, 108, 122, 133, 138, 146, 157, myself and 161 are all present. I remember those no longer with us, and wonder if the others do.

I hope to find out if I am still viable. Not everyone will be observed today, and the agony may be prolonged another 100 deci-minutes.

As each felony comes up on the securicam screen, we are led away in random threes with a couple of humo cops in blue dungarette uniforms.

South East District 13 is a typical C-class area with a high crime rate. As more and more sphecos are taken away, I realize my turn will come. Fear of failure gnaws @ my simplified spheco-guts.

The securicam image shifts to a narrow alleyway shadowed between the high-rise dwelling unit blocks C-class humos call DUBs for short. The lens zooms in on a

scantily dressed, nubile gyno scooting backwards on her arse as a scrawny, C- class andro-youth punches her and throws himself @ her.

The nubo slaps his face. He laughs.

Close up of his throbbing reddened cockhead sticking out between his curled thumb and forefinger, as he wanks it harder to readiness and precum milk drips out.

She screams.

He has her backed up against the breezeblock DUB wall next to a BESTCOEBRITAIN® ERADICATING POVERTY slogan defaced with graffiti. He hits her once more. Doesn't want to just force his sex on her. He wants to punish her too.

And I feel the same way about him.