

## *Wilderness House Literary Review 2/2*

### ELVIS OUT OF THE MEDITATION GARDEN

"There's got to be a way to get my teeth whiter," Elvis is saying, running a finger across his top row. "I'm *The King*. All those young punks have whiter teeth now than I do. Do somethin'."

I look over at my boyfriend Ramey, who says, "He's right, you know. He is *The King* — we have to do something. We stole him. He's our responsibility."

Ensnconced on his throne backstage at the Elm Street Community Theatre — a throne banged out of scrap lumber leftover from a prior show and spray-painted a shiny gold by Ramey — *The King* is looking less than pleased. He's been out of the *Meditation Garden* a total of three days and four nights — (think of this as a motel stay Ramey told him).

Elvis staying most of the time on his throne tucked between the racks of costumes, while Ramey and I are doing our darndest to keep Elvis happy. Me in the skimpy outfits. Both of us bringing in all his favorite foods. The backstage area set to look as much like Graceland as possible — several wooden trees, from our *Peter Pan* production, have been placed in Elvis's line of vision; as well as a scrim from the opening scene of *Showboat*.

Ramey at first disparaging the scrim, saying: No way, no way would a riverboat come into play at Graceland. I had to convince him. The big white Showboat, I said, with those white posts along the rail, it's highly reminiscent of those big white columns that grace Graceland. Elvis will relate, I assured him. "So what do you hear of Priscilla?" Elvis is saying. His head is cocked to the side, he's flashing that famous grin.

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Jeez, I'm thinking; my heart palpitating from all the Elvis energy sparking the dingy backstage. In his skin-tight, white satin jumpsuit with the fringe he's bare to the waist.

"Priscilla? Why I believe she's doing just fine," I say.

Before we brought Elvis back, we made a pact — do not tell anything that could be construed by Elvis as even mildly upsetting. We wanted Elvis to enjoy his stay; for however long that might be. We also made another pact. If necessary, we were in this for the long haul. Ramey adding: It's kind of like taking the vows, for better or worse... I knew what was going through *his* mind. Not yet, I had told him, turning away in bed.

"Give me that mirror again, will you darlin'," says Elvis.

"Sure, Elvis." I run to get a swivel mirror from the dressing room.

When I return, Ramey is standing behind him, massaging one of Elvis's shoulder rotator cuffs. It got banged a little when we lifted Elvis out.

"That feels real good," Elvis is saying. "You know, in the early days, Colonel Tom Parker used to massage me every night on the road." He winks.

Ramey raises an eyebrow.

"I saw that!" Shrieking with laughter Elvis flips his white cape over the back of his throne.

"What do you mean, Elvis?" Ramey's playing dumb.

"I saw that eyebrow go *pop*, boy."

"But, Elvis, I was standing behind you."

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"That's the neat trick about comin' back. I can do all kinds of stuff I couldn't do before."

"No kidding, Elvis?" Hoping to appeal to his kingly nature I kneel before him as a supplicant. "Do you want to share?"

"You darlin'."

Elvis grabs my breast quite matter-of-factly. Because he's used to getting anything he wants, I take this as the supreme compliment. It must mean Elvis wants me. I must be at least as desirable as the long list of babes in Elvis's love arena.

"Wow, Elvis," I say.

Looking stern, Ramey clears his throat. "King, it's time for your lunch." Trying to divert Elvis's attention away from my breasts and onto the thick shakes and burgers and fries he missed so much while being away.

"Priscilla had a nice pair, too," Elvis is saying, screwing up his face in some old memory.

"Go on, Maura, go get Elvis his food." Ramey jerking a thumb toward the lit EXIT sign between flats.

"I'm sorry, Elvis," I say softly. Smiling, I gently disengage his hand.

I am sorry. Elvis had a nice way of holding onto my body. Not rough, or demanding. Just natural. Like you'd hold a doorknob on a door you meant to go through.

"Extra cheese!" shouts Elvis, forgetting me right away.

That's the thing. He's back with all these supernatural powers — like seeing what you're doing clear on the other side of the wings. Then he can't remember where he put his comb. It's eerie, I told Ramey, it's like he's possessed of certain powers and dispossessed of common knowledge.

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Ramey saying: It's all that boozing and doping from the old days, plus the constant TV watching that killed off too many of his brain cells. In Ramey's opinion.

I'm not so sure. I think there's more to Elvis than meets the eye; though I'm not inclined to say; not till I have more proof. That Elvis has kept his incredible sexual prowess alive, there's no denying.

"Onions?" I ask him, swinging my purse onto my shoulder.

"The works, darlin'!" Elvis winking at me.

I leave through the stage door, climbing the cement steps up to the parking lot. Accumulated wet leaves make the steps treacherous. Next to a Chinese restaurant that borders the parking lot there's a cycle shop. I picture Elvis astride one of the big black Harleys and get all tingly in my crotch. We tried some General Tso's chicken on Elvis's first day back. It gave him heartburn. Ramey believes we should stick to basics — what Elvis was used to eating; at least for the time being. He wants *The King* in tip-top shape for his big performance.

I get Elvis his food and bring it back to the theatre. A light mist has dampened my hair. I hand Elvis the McDonald's bag because he gets a big kick out of unwrapping each food item himself, like a kid unwrapping his Christmas presents. I smile, smoothing the frizz in my ponytail.

"Priscilla had bootiful dark hair." He says this with a mouth full of burger.

Standing next to the throne, Ramey's body sort of jackknifes. "Did you say *bootiful*, Elvis?"

Elvis nods, chewing happily.

"That's because he had a mouthful," I add quickly.

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Elvis swallows, grinning at both of us.

"Say it again, Elvis," Ramey tells him. "Say what you said about Priscilla's hair. That it's *boo...*" Ramey is gesturing, coaxing it out of him. "C'mon, Elvis, say it... *boo...*"

"Bootiful."

"Whoa!" Ramey shoots me a look.

"He's just putting us on," I say, "Isn't that right, Elvis?"

Nodding agreeably, Elvis rips the top off the fry's container, chucking it over his shoulder. Eating the fries so fast I don't think he's bothering to chew.

"There could be a problem," Ramey is saying. "There's song lyrics to consider. People might expect certain lapses, on account of his personal history and all. But they'll want Heartbreak Hotel to sound..."

"Hotbweak Hotel," Elvis chimes in.

"Fuck!"

"That's not necessary," I tell Ramey, bending to pick up the empty fries container Elvis has chucked along with the lid. "You're going to upset him. Then what?"

Ramey takes a swing at one of the wooden trees from Peter Pan. It sways but doesn't fall down. "We made an investment in him." Ramey is rubbing his knuckles.

"I'm *The King*." And Elvis gets up from his throne, stretching, picking food out of his teeth.

Knowing that Elvis would need certain things, Ramey bought an acoustical guitar from a re-sale shop. Getting it

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now, I walk toward Elvis offering the guitar.

"Look, Elvis, look what we bought you."

Elvis stares it down like I'm offering him an orangutan. He clicks the heels of his white go-go boots, stepping back, putting up his hands as if shielding himself from danger. "No, no! Not that."

"I don't believe this," says Ramey.

Pressing forward with the guitar I say, "We wanted to get you an electric one, Elvis, but they ran a little too high for our budget." I apologize some more. Then I step closer, noticing Elvis's face has turned an unnatural shade.

"You look a little pale," I tell him.

"He looks like a ghost," Ramey mutters. "What a disaster."

"Make-up covers a multitude of sins," I say.

"I have sinned before God and man." And Elvis staggers, and we both rush to grab his arms, pushing him back on his throne where he slumps with his head dropped forward. Very un-Elvis-like. If he were an actor in our troupe, and I was directing the scene, I would have to say he looks dejected.

"Poor Elvis." I kneel in front of the throne. Hoping he won't be able to resist me, that he'll take hold of my breast again. Being Elvis-ish again. The Elvis we all knew. The Elvis before lunch.

"It was premature to give him that guitar," Ramey is saying. "He needs more time to adjust. It's been what — how long?"

"I been dead twenty-eight years," Elvis says.

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"You ain't dead now," says Ramey.

"Who says?" A smile flickers across Elvis's lips. Not his usual flashy wild grin but a shadowy secretive smile.

"I am dead in the eyes of God and man," says Elvis.

"Well, we're man. And we can see you. Well, not Maura, that is, she's a woman."

"So glad you noticed." I glower up at Ramey, picking at the guitar on the floor beside me. I have failed to entice Elvis — he just looks tired on his throne. Maybe the sounds of the guitar will reopen some buried instinct. I pick at a few more strings.

But Elvis has shut his eyes. In a moment he's snoring loudly.

"Well that worked. You put him right to sleep."

"You put me to sleep every time we go to bed," I say evenly.

Frowning, Ramey pulls himself up tall. "What are we gonna do about him? Something's wrong. For sure he'll flub the lyrics."

I sigh, shrugging; watching Elvis sleep. He looks sweet with his head lolling a little to the side, drool forming in the corner of his mouth; though his color is still way way off.

"Elvis," I whisper leaning into him, "I love you."

"Priscilla," he says with his eyes shut tight, "I'm sorry."