

Claire Massey

Through the Door of Perception

My dates with Jim Morrison begin in college. One night after beer-fueled dancing at the Stoned Toad, I'm deep-sleeping in my army-cot hard, dormitory bed. Astonishingly agile in his skin-tight black leather, Jim leaps from his poster on the wall, shakes me awake, suggests we talk.

"I dig that blues band you heard. That hip song about Robert Johnson at the crossroads? I can relate. You should lose the boyfriend though. He's not into it, just going through the motions. He's a frat-bully. Hazes pledges."

"How do you know about him?"

Jim smiles like a Cheshire cat. I gaze at his brazen, serpentine lips, from which no more words usher.

"I guess the dead just know things," I prompt, but Jim's already returning to two-dimensional incarnation as my rebel décor's leading man.



He materializes five years later, through the back door of course, on a fitfully lonesome whippoorwill night. Cloistered university life, and the man I had hoped to marry, were behind me. Adventurous friends had scattered to the four winds. Having settled for a starter job in a bewildering town brimming with wanna-be Phyllis Schlaflys and Jerry Falwells, I'm wondering if drudgery lies before me. No energy to weave stories. No Friday night excursions to hear coffee-house poets.

The Sagittarius super-moon transforms my shabby bedroom. Jim's ruffled pirate shirt glows unnaturally white. "A girl's gotta make a living," I tell him, when he asks why I no longer write.

He moves close. I watch the pulse at the hollow of his throat, inhale his woody, Jim Beam breath. "Why not date me?"

"Why would you want me? I'm just a kowtowing, bourgeois girl. With embarrassing relatives who canvassed for Nixon. I've never been abroad, never even dropped acid."

"Don't be ridiculous," he says. There's a tingling, titillating, pregnant pause.

"You can kiss me if you wanna."



Roughly every half-decade or so, for the thirty-something years that follow, my liaisons with Jim recur. When I finally retire and resume writing, these nocturnal visits taper-off. But he surfaced one evening last week, after a raucous, lit-journal launch party.



"Congratulations," he says, filling my bedside water glass with rum. "I saw your poem in Pleiades." I stare at his leonine mane of glossy dark hair, his fleshy, come-hither mouth.

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“Oh Jim, I’m so old. Don’t look at my spotted hands, my thinning lips.”

“It’s all cool. Poets get better with age. Like a keg of fine whiskey.”
He winks. “And you got to Paris, after all. Left a sonnet on my grave, as I recall.” He downs the Bacardi in one gulp. “Hey, if you still need me, I’ll be your midnight dream. But I warn you—I’m getting grey at the temples and flabby in the middle.”

“I understand. Thanks for everything, Jim. Feel free to go. I know now that all things mature, evolve. Even shamans and rock stars and iconic ghosts.”