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TRUTH THE STRIPEASE BY JEFF ROUGH

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After feeling bad for having diminished the achievement of David Strauss with his attack on *Das Leben Jesu*, Fritz finds himself at his favorite bordello, The Chicken Ranch.

The PA system broadcasts, "Didn't Socrates say something about sending his wife a rooster?"

The other PA system broadcasts, "You're just saying that because Deputy Fred said, '[T]he girls begin accepting poultry in trade: one bird, one lay.'"

Cosima says, "I thought Fritz would have gone to Paris to be with the girls. Why would he want to be Deputy Fred?"

Toulou says, "I'm the aristocrat at the *Moulin Rouge* often under my mother's care."

The PA system broadcasts, "Fritz was under his mother's care too."

The other PA system broadcasts, "Don't bring Mary Magdalene into this discussion, *peccatrix*, *meretrix*, or disciple."

The PA system broadcasts, "Is that because you wrote your doctoral dissertation on Hugh Hefner and Calvinism?"

The chorus director says, "Listen, I need a piano player for the lobby."

Abstaining from beer, because beer is indicative of all that's German and in bad taste, Fritz tries to make small talk with the whores, but the whores don't like Picasso. After all, it's hard to wear such masks and show up for choir practice at church.

Fritz is drinking green tea.

"That god-awful mask," says Lou.

"Not much of a man, this Fritz. Last time Ernie was in here," says Emma, "he wanted macaroni and cheese, and he had me feed him with my tits."

"It was almost eighty-years ago when Willie wrote about me in Memphis," says Drake.

Drake is now marketing a skin care product. She's been born again, twice, since Willie wrote about her.

"*Les Folies Bergere*?" questions the other PA system.

The whores aren't much interested in Fritz, but Stephen Daedalus is there, already drunk, and Harry, not Leo, is trying to make sure the madam doesn't get the best of him.

Helmut Newton shows up, and he praises Fritz for one of the first fully-clothed pieces of erotic photography. It's the picture of Paul Ree, Lou-Andreas Salome, and Fritz, and Helmut has a copy.

We are surprised that Helmut does not complain about the lack of leather and latex, but then again, we are pretty sure that this picture inspired the ironic and, as usual for Fritz, completely misunderstood, comment, "When you go to the women, take a whip." Lou is, of course, riding in the wagon, holding the whip--apparently aiming it at Paul's right butt cheek--, and Paul and Fritz are serving as the horses. This wagon ride is a point which brings us to another consideration, and no it's not about Heidegger's poet Hoelderlin. We're talking about Fritz's fabled breakdown in Turin, which supposedly has him hugging the neck of a horse, a horse whose owner was beating him. We have been instructed that this story, as have so many others, has been de-bunked, but then too, we never heard Helmut talk about the Cult of the Houynymns. See also *Al di là del bene e del male, ménage à trois*.

The PA system announces, "The Shroud of Turin Room is now open," and Fritz gets up to go there. Unfortunately, Stephen Daedalus is dead drunk and snickers, "Ibsen."

Behind the scenes, the marketing agent wonders why the Shroud of Turin needed to be mentioned at all.

Dr. Leonard Sax disagrees with the syphilis hypothesis, but we keep it open because it explains the way the ladies at the bordello react to him.

David Lynch has not yet agreed to cast Fritz as the *Weihnachtsmann* in his forthcoming movie, but *Blue Velvet* begs the question as does, even more directly, *Wild at Heart*.

The PA system counters, "Isn't Mister Reindeer in a warehouse in the Big NO?"

The other PA system counteroffers, "Isn't Fritz Cousin Dell and every day Christmas?"

Miss Mona walks in the dining room and says, "Just don't call me Mona Lisa."

"Dolly is not allowed to play the part of Lou-Andreas Salome," says a voice behind the curtain.

"Why not?" interject the PA system and the other PA system.

One of the girls whispers, "Fritz has the clap," and Tom remarks, "In the room the women come and go talking of Michelangelo."

Stephen Daedalus snickers when he hears the word *come*.

Thus begins a long story of girls betrayed by their fathers and sold into the sex trade and a much more literal interpretation of "The Case of the Wolf Man," "*Ewige Ruckkehr*," and "Nude Descending a Staircase."

The Chicken Ranch is rather peaceful until Aubrey Beardsley showed up to paint Salomé.

Someone tries to pin a beard on Fritz to get him to play John the Baptist, but he laments that no one accepted his offer for marriage.

The marble statues of Florence are not present on the lawn.

Stephen Daedalus draws a picture of pussy hair and Aubrey Beardsley snatches it from him and pins it to his face so that he has to play John the Baptist.

"What's another marriage to Lou?" shouts Fritz.

The PA system announces, "Toulouse has entered the building," but Toulou takes a hit of the hard stuff and says, "I've been here a long time."

Fritz, not making it to The Shroud of Turin Room before the door closed, finds himself instead in The Totally Nude Room.

The act here is a pleader going by the name of Judy, who says, "I had my first baby when I was thirteen, my next when I was sixteen, and my boyfriend beats me."

Fritz, realizing he's never going to be able to make small talk, says, "If Truth is a Woman, how have we known her?" He then exits the room and listens for the cabaret.

At the door of The Cabaret, Stephen Daedalus says, "A woman is not a cannot, but a can-can."

Toulou snaps his fingers, and a red light flashes blue: The Immanuel Kant Room.

Fritz scribbles a note—"How does the Golden Rule operate in a bordello?"

On this remark, we could embark here on the philosophy of the "*Ewige Ruckkehr*" and explain how the universal is simply history operating as a clone in disguise, but why bother? We have yet to find a good striptease, and Fritz certainly promised us one.

Fritz touches the scar on his face.

The PA system announces, "The doctor is here with penicillin."

Fritz snickers, "Statues, not statutes," and Burt says he likes the moustache.

For no reason whatsoever, a TV, made to look like an aquarium, turns on.

The Lesbians Anonymous Club, smoking cigars, drinking brandy, and wearing beards and business suits, is hosting an exotic dancer party, and Fritz tries to enter The Lesbians Anonymous Room, but the TV distracts him.

On TV, Fritz sees a football game—Texas versus Notre Dame—and threatens to commit suicide.

Albert says, "They should have translated my Myth of Sisyphus, the Myth of Syphilis."

We believe that this statement hurt Fritz's feelings, and he was then allowed to check out of The Chicken Ranch.

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