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Ben Katchor’s THE DAIRY RESTAURANT

THE DAIRY RESTAURANT

BEN KATCHOR
A naked man, devoid of all iconographic markings of rank, arises out of the dust of a parched road. The spark of life is kindled in him by the scent of a garden. He's permitted to enter this walled garden as a sort of unpaid employee/guest, to work it and watch it, but is also encouraged by the owner to enjoy all the fruit that grows within. This is possibly the greatest narrative invention of the story: to postulate the existence of a man before the existence of social and class categories — a new, yet unnamed, category of guest or unpaid employee — not a slave or a guest of royalty or a family member, and not a god, just the first man who's permitted to enjoy the fruits of a private pleasure garden.

The “Garden” in Eden is the first private eating place open to the public that’s mentioned in the Bible. Rather than be guilty of ignorance, the authors of this best seller cloaked the origin of the human condition in terms of an unpleasant incident in a fifth-century BCE Persian fantasy of a 3000 BCE Sumerian pleasure garden.
Within the Garden is an orchard of date palms. A fountain of fresh water produces a cool atmosphere, the first air-conditioning. The light is filtered through the fronds of the date palms, the first indirect lighting. In later legends, the Garden is described in greater detail. The trees retain their leaves all year, it is a perpetual spring — the model for artificial plants as decor. The water of the fountain is flavored with ginger — the first mixed drink. They were not trying to describe a state of unspoiled nature, but a paradise, or enclosed park, in the midst of an arid desert world.
The choice of food is already limited to the fruit that grows in this enclosed garden, but, in a gratuitous display of proprietorship, the owner points out one date palm, growing in the center of the Garden, and tells the lowly employee, who until then thought he had the run of the Garden, not to eat the fruit of this one tree under threat of death. This one palm is called the Tree of Good and Evil. He says that death will occur on the same day he eats the fruit but does not say whether these particular dates will cause death through poisoning, or whether he will be put to death by another agency in punishment for eating the dates, nor does he mention that the visitor will die eventually whether or not he eats from the tree — it is the prototype of all nebulous threats. In fact, later in the story we learn that this guest/employee lives to be one hundred. A threat made just for the sake of establishing a hierarchy of power, ownership, and control. As the Garden is filled with other trees bearing similar dates, there's no reason for the visitor to take this threat to heart. This one tree is hereafter off-limits, but that in no way hampers his enjoyment of paradise.

With the words “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat,” the proprietor establishes a vegetarian menu.
All pleasure gardens built in the midst of a desert were for the enjoyment of royalty and their court. This pleasure garden, “Eden,” was open to the public and naturally attracted a crowd. Adam awakens from a nap to discover that he has company — a woman — perhaps an employee, a dancing girl, or just a visitor.
To be closer to the cool of the fountain, they both gravitate toward the center of the Garden and sit in the shade of the Tree of Good and Evil. An upright creature approaches and begins to taunt them. “So, you’re not allowed to eat the fruit in this garden,” he says. The woman corrects him by explaining that they are guests/unpaid employees and can eat from every tree in the Garden except this one Tree of Good and Evil — this tree, they are forbidden to touch, much less eat.

The creature goes out of its way to make the same tree seem more appealing than the other date palms in the Garden. He is the first waiter: an intermediary between the fruits of nature and the eater. This is the second great moment of narrative invention: a middleman in the business of human nourishment. Through the sheer power of verbal description, without so much as giving them a taste, the so-called deadly quality of the fruit is transformed into a beneficial quality. He appeals to her sense of status. The fruit will imbue the eater with “wisdom” — a nebulous concept — but, more important, make him an equal to the owner, a veritable god, capable of constructing and owning a garden.
The woman is convinced and her excitement infects the man and they both eat the dates from this tree. The date is known to be a powerful aphrodisiac. To further stimulate their growing lust for each other, they partially cover themselves with palm fronds — the first account of dressing for dinner. This scene is depicted in a Sumerian seal from 3000 BCE.
Pat Dorian’s **LON CHANEY SPEAKS**
For five years, with fierce determination, I toiled in the trenches at Universal.

I searched for something that other actors couldn’t...

...or wouldn’t do.

I invested a small fortune in wigs.

I hired a dentist to make custom dentures...

...for my more macabre roles.

Which required checking for moths monthly.

A cast of my hand, made by a sculptor, gave me another canvas to experiment with.

I spent hours in front of the mirror thinking out my parts.

Breathing life into each role with unique gestures and expressions.

I figured I’d find you down here.
The Phantom of the Opera

Universal Pictures, 1925

The new managers of the Paris Opera House are enjoying their brief respite even though a mysterious Phantom (Carlo) is haunting their theater. As the spirit of music, the Phantom tutors Christine, a promising singer, in her dressing room. With his help, she rises from chorus girl to understudy for Carlotta, the theater’s prima donna. Radu, Christine’s lover, tries to convince her to give up her career and marry him. But Christine, obeying the Phantom, refuses.

Christine, tonight I placed the world at your feet!

But I warn you, you must forget all worldly things and think only of your career and your maker!

Soon, Christine, this spirit will take form and command your love.

I shall be waiting.

At last you have realized your ambition. My dwelling, and now we shall be married.

I can never leave the opera, Radu. You must forget our love.

Carlotta also receives commands from the Phantom in a mysterious letter warning her not to perform the next night so that Christine can play in her place. Discovering the Phantom’s wishes, Carlotta performs, and all is well until the opera’s chandelier crashes onto the audience. In the panic that ensues, Christine is led down to the lower depths of the opera by the masked Phantom.

In his lair, the Phantom professes his love for her but warns that she must never look behind his mask. Unfortunately, Christine’s curiosity gets the best of her.
LOOK AT HIS FACE... ...IT'S SO HORRIBLE!
Christine promises to be the Phantom’s slave forever if he allows her to return to the surface. The Phantom, to prove his love for her, allows her to sing for the opera once more. But during the annual masked ball, Christine betrays him.

I have seen him, Raoul! I have seen the Phantom!
He is a monster, a loathsome beast! You must save me from him, Raoul!

Tomorrow I will take Carlotta’s place in fault. After the performance you must take me away!

I shall be at the stage door. We will flee to England.

Underground to the couple, the Phantom overhears their plan. The next night, the Phantom causes a blackout and kidnaps Christine. Raoul and a policeman try to rescue her, but end up trapped in the Phantom’s torture chamber. Christine then has to make a difficult choice.

You have your chance of saving him. Will you be my bride or do you prefer to watch your lover die?

Turn the scorpion, and you have said yes and have spared Raoul. Turn the guillotine, and the opera house is blown to bits!

After Christine chooses to marry him to save Raoul’s life, the Phantom decides to kill the two men anyway, but then relents when she begs for mercy.

Finally, an angry mob discovers the Phantom’s lair. The Phantom flees with Christine in a carriage as the mob pursues him through the streets of Paris. Christine escapes and the Phantom, cornered by the mob, is killed.
I've been a forest monster most of my life.
MY PARENTS ARE FOREST MONSTERS.

MY SISTER IS A FOREST MONSTER TOO.

I WANTED SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

I'M A CITY MONSTER NOW.

AND THAT'S PRETTY MUCH IT.
THAT'S YOUR WHOLE LIFE STORY?

MOST OF IT.

HAVEN'T YOU DONE ANYTHING INCREDIBLE OR NOTEWORTHY?

NOT SO FAR.

BUT I'M GONNA MAKE MY MARK ON THE WORLD.

HOW?

I HAVE NO IDEA.

YOU BARELY LEAVE THE HOUSE.

I'M ACTUALLY LEAVING THE HOUSE TODAY.

AND YOU SMOKE A LOT OF WEED.

YOU'RE SMOKING WEED RIGHT NOW.

I'M A GHOST. I'VE GOT NO AMBITIONS.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU WERE ALIVE?

I CAN'T REMEMBER. I'VE BEEN A GHOST FOR TOO LONG.

I CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER MY NAME.

EVERYTHING FADES AFTER A WHILE...
KNOCK
KNOCK

IT'S OPEN.
IT IS?
COFFEE?

YEAH, LET ME GET MY JACKET.
HEY, NICE TO MEET YOU.
WE'VE MET, LIKE, THREE TIMES.

OH. SORRY.
THIS IS KIM, SHE'S OUR NEIGHBOR.

WE HAVE NEIGHBORS?
MY PARENTS ENROLLED ME IN ART CLASSES AT PRATT INSTITUTE. I LASTED ONLY A WEEK.

MY FATHER LOST HIS JOB, SO WE COULDN'T AFFORD THE TUITION.

I HAD TO PITCH IN. I GOT A JOB AS A NEWSBOY. YOU HAD TO FIGHT YOUR WAY PAST A CROWD OF KIDS.

WATCH YOUR ELBOWS!

WAIT YOUR TURN LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE, SQUIRT.

THAT'S A NICKEL.

PUT IT ON MY TAB.

I SAID FIVE CENTS.

GETCHA PAPER!

GIMME ONE, KID?

LOOK IT UP!
Next I took drawing lessons at the Educational Alliance.

You draw very fast, Jacob.

You might be better suited to a different medium.

My father took on odd jobs. Sometimes I'd help him sell produce on the street.

Say, kid! How would you like to become a citizen of the BBK?

The boys' brotherhood republic was different from other boys' clubs. It wasn't run by grown-ups. The boys made the rules.

I'm Leon.

I'm Morris. Put 'er there.

It was a miniature city within the city.

I made a couple of bucks as an errand boy for the Hearst newspapers.

My boss at the paper seemed like he had an easy setup.

Me and some pals at the BBK started a newspaper. I was the editor.

I was also the staff cartoonist.

It was my first published work.
I was raised by the cinema. My mother used to take me there when she was looking for me. I watched Chaplin and Buster Keaton.

I saw the Marx Brothers perform live at the Academy of Music on 42nd Street, before they were film stars.

The crime pictures, every bit as fantastical, seemed closer to home. These were attainable fantasies.

Public Enemy

My neighborhood produced real-life gangster types and the actors who played them.

I seriously considered going into show business. I needed an Irish-sounding name like Jimmy Cassedy. I told my mother I wanted to go to Hollywood and be an actor.

Violence was what we knew, and we took it with us to school. One of the teachers got us playing basketball in the morning just to wear us down a little.

I used to hide behind a brick wall, wait for those guys to pass, and I'd beat the crap out of them and run like hell. At the BBC, I channeled my meanness in the gym. I was a good boxer.

My pal Morris was an aviation nut. He had his own plane. He maintained himself, he took me up in it once. We were held in our seats with ropes.

I took a low-level job at Max Fleischer Studios, doing cleanup for the animators. I wanted to do more. I caulked them into letting me take the test to be an in-betweener.

He did loops over the city, we laughed our asses off.

I had to draw the moments in-between the main moments. The animators drew. I spent my days working at a light table. The whole place was rows and rows of guys working at light tables.

It began to look a little too much like my father's garment factory. I got bored with in-betweening. I wanted to draw the main action.
HEY!

Let Go, you homo!

I'm sorry, but…

<Oh my god. SORRY! SORRY!>

I'm sorry, but...

* IN ENGLISH
I'm sorry!
You just looked...
So much like Ryoji...
No, it's fine.
Anyway, welcome.
Please come in.

So...
I'm...

50...
it only occurred to me once we were in the water. it made me happy. but also embarrassed for my old self.

ah ah ah... so? it feels great. thank you so much, YACHI-SAN.
I just want you to have good memories of Japan. I want to try it!

I want to try it!
I was born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, in Talbot County, Maryland, on a plantation owned by Colonel Edward Lloyd. More than twenty years of my life were spent within the peculiar institution known as slavery. The name by which I am best known, Frederick Douglass, was taken after my escape from slavery, as I embarked on a new life as a free man.
The journey that I call my life has been one of suffering and celebration. I have been kept in chains, and I have conferred with presidents. I have been beaten, and I have fought back. Some would say that I have led an incredible life, an assertion I am not willing to make, for I am just a man. I do not know my age, for I have never seen any record of my date of birth. This is not uncommon for slaves, most of whom know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs. I do not recall having ever met a slave that could tell me of their birthday. Most masters I have met prefer to keep their slaves ignorant of such things, depriving the slaves, by bits and pieces, of that which affords them humanity. Yet all men have a story, and this is mine.

I was raised by my grandmother, Betsey Bailey, knowing little of the conditions of slavery in my early years. Still, slavery cast an ever-present shadow upon me, taking me from the arms of my mother, Harriet Bailey. Slavery cares not for the family. The relationship between a slave mother and her child is no different from that of the cow and her calf—all are property, and subject to their masters' whims. In my life, I saw my mother no more than four or five times, and then it was only for brief, fleeting moments that allowed for very little by way of familiarity or comfort. She died when I was still quite young, and though it pains me to say this, she exists for me as little more than a few vague, fragmented memories.

I do not know the identity of my father, though possible names were spoken in whispers. I know with certainty that he was a white man, and I suspect that he was my owner, Captain Aaron Anthony. It is not uncommon for the master of the slave also to be the father. Indeed, many white men satisfied both lust and greed through the rape of black women. In my life, I saw my mother no more than four or five times, and then it was only for brief, fleeting moments that allowed for very little by way of familiarity or comfort.
NOT KNOWING THE DATE OF MY BIRTH OR THE IDENTITY OF MY FATHER, COMBINED WITH THE VAGUE, FLEETING MEMORIES OF MY MOTHER THAT MOCK MORE THAN THEY COMFORT, HAUNTED ME AS A CHILD, AND REMAIN AS BURDENS I CARRY TO THIS DAY.

I estimate that my age was six or seven when my grandmother led me from her cabin to the Wye House Plantation, the home of Aaron Anthony.

GRAN’MAMA, WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

FRED, THIS HERE IS THE HOME OF OL’ MASTER...

The Great House? I ain’t never seen anything like this before.

FOLKS CALL IT THE GREAT HOUSE.

They’s my kin? That’s right. Now, you go on and play.

They were people previously known to me only in name, suddenly made real. It was both invigorating and overwhelming.

We played, I suppose as all children play, too young to be fully burdened by the reality of what we were—the property of another.
It was not the first time my grandmother had delivered a child over to the world of slavery. Perhaps the pain of doing so had taught her that words would bring no comfort to her or to me. I suspect this to be the reason she left without saying a word.

How many children and grandchildren can any one person lose and remain unbroken?

Hey, Gran’mama, look at . . . Gran’mama?!

Where’s Gran’mama?

She gone freed this here yer new home.

Although I had been born a slave, it was not until my grandmother left me that I started to become aware of what that truly meant.

Before we left my grandmother’s humble cabin, making the long walk to my new home, I was, as far as my limited understanding permitted, simply a child.

But by the end of that day, my childhood had vanished. Circumstances I could not comprehend or control had become a slave.
ONE — The Myth of the Panthers

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A GROUP KNOWN AS THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY FOR SELF-DEFENSE, FORMED IN OAKLAND, CA, BY HUEY P. NEWTON AND BOBBY SEALE IN 1966. THE PANTHERS DENIALLY STOOD IN STRIKING CONTRAST TO THE NONVIOLENT PHILOSOPHY OF THE MAINSTREAM CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT.

THE BLACK PANTHERS TOOK UP ARMS, MARCHED IN THE STREETS, AND STOOD UP TO THE POLICE. THEY CAPTURED THE ATTENTION OF THE NEIGHBORHOODS THEY PATROLLED AND EVENTUALLY OF THE WORLD.

SOME PEOPLE ADORED THEM. SOME HATED THEM. IN TIME, THE BLACK PANTHERS BECAME MYTHIC. AND IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE MYTH FROM REALITY.
THE HISTORY OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY IS ONE LACED WITH VIOLENCE. IT IS LARGELY VIOLENCE THAT THE PANTHERS ARE REMEMBERED FOR—THE MOST ENDURING PART OF THE MYTH.

But violence is only part of the Panthers' story.

THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY WAS AN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO SERVING THE COMMUNITY.

The Panthers created more than 60 "survival programs" to help communities all over the country, including the free breakfast for school children program, which fed thousands of children every week.

THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY WAS A COMPLEX ORGANIZATION THAT HAD AN EQUALLY COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITIES IT WAS DEDICATED TO SERVING.

TWO — Before the Panthers

In order to understand how an organization like the Black Panther Party could come into existence, it is important to understand the history of oppression and the struggle for freedom endured by Africans and their descendants in America.

The first Africans were brought as slaves to European colonies in North America, South America, and the Caribbean in 1525.

In the U.S., the forced enslavement of Africans and their descendants would not end until 1863—and it would take a bloody war between the states to end it.

During the Civil War, more than 300,000 Black men fought for the Union to ensure the freedom of millions more held in captivity. And while their fight helped bring freedom, it did not bring equality.

The legacy of racial oppression that allowed slavery to flourish in America for centuries continued as Black Americans struggled against discrimination and segregation, looking to find their place in the land of the free.

Having been subjected to centuries of demeaning attitudes largely in the Southern states, many Black Americans began to migrate to the North and West starting in 1916.

Known as the Great Migration, Black Americans fled the South by the millions looking for a better way of life away from legalized discrimination, sharecropping, and lynching.
Life outside of the South was different in many ways, but oppression, intolerance, and limited opportunity were pervasive. Discrimination in the workplace and housing persisted. The threat of violence was everywhere.

In what is known as the Red Summer of 1919, angry white mobs instigated more than 40 racially motivated attacks throughout the country, killing hundreds of black Americans.

This senseless violence and killing of the Red Summer was not the end of racist terror in America.

One year later, the all-black community of Greenwood in Tulsa, OK, was attacked by an angry white mob after a white woman accused a black man of assaulting her. Greenwood, which was known as "Black Wall Street," was destroyed.

The predominantly black town of Rosewood, FL, was completely burned to the ground in 1923 when a black man was falsely accused of attacking a white woman.

Between 1882 and 1968, there were 3,446 recorded lynchings of black people in the U.S. In the early 20th century, lynchings had become a form of public entertainment, with postcards created to commemorate the murders.

For decades, activists and politicians fought for anti-lynching legislation, only to be stopped at every turn by Southern politicians.

Discrimination, oppression, and racial violence in the early 20th century gave rise to a civil rights movement that sought social and political equality for black Americans.

This time would see the birth of organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois. It would also see the beginnings of Black nationalism, a movement that sought more than sociopolitical equality—it demanded economic power.

Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and Wallace D. Fard, founder of the Nation of Islam, were early examples of black nationalists who espoused racial pride and emphasized the need for black financial independence.

Black nationalists like Garvey challenged the established racial caste system, and as a result were seen as a threat to America, especially by government agencies like the Bureau of Investigation (the precursor to the FBI), which deported Garvey in 1927.

For those seeking to keep black Americans in a place of oppression and inferiority, there would be no difference between civil rights and black nationalism—both were threats to white supremacy.