

Look, See...
An Original Hellraiser Short Story
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Look, see: I was, am, The Chatterer. A stand-up comic, right? I mean, I was the most successful guy you're ever likely to meet, and then some. Your ma and pa would remember the act and at least half a dozen of the movies. They were smash hits when they were released, people were literally fighting to get a ticket. Look, in my home town, New York, in 1931 they had to call the police to stop a riot when two hundred people couldn't get a ticket. And that was only my second film and I was only 19.

Look, have you ever noticed that all stand-up comics are ugly? Think about it. Name me a really good-looking stand-up. A guy who you'd cream your pants for or who you'd want to look like. You can't. Right? They all look odd and most are under five six. That's why they're stand-up: to compensate for their ugly mug. Look, see: that's why they all started cracking jokes -- I mean who cares if a guy's ugly if he's making you laugh? I guarantee they all can tell you how they started cracking gags to stop being picked on in school. Hope, Durante, all three Marx Brothers, Abbot and Costello ... not a single good-looker amongst them. Beauty just ain't funny.

Excepting me, of course. I was beautiful in bold type. That was my gimmick, that and the way I could talk forty to the dozen. Look, see: those other guys were always as pure as the driven snow in the material they used on film. They saved the other stuff for the after dinner appearances and cabaret circuits. Not me, though. I'd tell jokes about niggers and cripples, Jews, spics and commies right there on the celluloid. And because I was beautiful I got away with it. The funny and the beautiful are always forgiven.

Look, I didn't go so far that the Hays Office was going to throw me out of Hollywood, but in every film there was always a couple of gags the other guys wouldn't have touched if their cocks were on fire.

When I told one of these gags I had this way of looking at the camera. It had the women wetting the seats and the fairies passing out on the floor. Okay, so I didn't have a lot of regular guys as fans but I had more than half the population who thought I was a saint. Besides, the speed I said it you were never sure you'd heard me right.

My face advertised more products than I can remember and it was analysed time and again by critics. It was my green eyes that really got them. Okay, so you couldn't see them in black-and-white, but they still doubled the sales of any product who used me. Look, some professor made measurements from my publicity shots and said my features were in the same proportions as Michaelangelo's David. The gossip writers said my eyes were 'piercing', or 'looked right through people'. One even said, 'he can skewer the soul of anyone he meets with a single glance.' Pathetic, right? But it kept the offers rolling in. And that kept me in Beverly Hills.

Look, see: I had a wicked line in practical jokes. At one time I found it funny to inform the House Un-American Activities Committee of people who were entirely innocent, but who had upset me. It was a great joke: innocents defending themselves against my paid witnesses who swore blind they weren't. The beauty of the gag was in watching the jerks suffer and the pompous bastards of the Committee being fooled into punishing them. But even that was too easy. People like believing the worst of anyone and the 'witch hunts' were the perfect way to settle old scores -- and you were called 'patriotic' for betraying your friends. I suppose I ruined half-a-dozen lives directly and destroyed as many families. Since then, one or two have proved their innocence but I wasn't around to suffer the consequences.

I was twenty-eight when I got bored. Look, see: I'd done it all. I'd made over thirty films in ten years -- with time out to entertain the troops during Hitler's attempt to re-organise Europe and, although I was paying alimony to two ex-bitches, hush money to three under-age aspiring actresses and was supporting a coke habit, it was all *too easy*. I could throw money at any problem and away it trotted. Yeah, some came back snapping at my heels but it just needed more money and way they'd go again.

Like I said, I was bored and that led to my escape. Aw, but you want to know about the Box, don't you? The puzzle box: Lemarchand's Lament Configuration. Perhaps one of, no definitely *the* greatest practical joke I've ever seen. Firstly, it's not a box. No siree. Look, see: a box has a space inside where you might put something. Even the Chinese puzzle boxes all have a compartment inside to contain a reward for solving the puzzle. But not the Lament Configuration: it's solid, I don't mean it's solid because of the working parts -- there aren't any. None. It's just a hunk of wood with some pretty fancy brass inlay work.

Unless, of course, you want it to be something else. A key, for instance. That's what I wanted it to be. A key to new experiences. Look, see: I'd had everything money could buy -- tasted every forbidden fruit, dallied with every degradation and, like I said, turned to sheer viciousness as a form of release. I'd heard of Lemarchand's box and what it meant and I wanted to know if it was true. Look, see: if you've tried everything the world has to offer you must turn to another world.

I don't know why I was chosen as one of the Order of the Gash. One of the Cenobites. Perhaps I was prettier than most of those who solve the box. Perhaps I was just plain nasty. Who knows? I'd long since learnt that the world is casual in its choice of victims for brutality. Anyway, a Cenobite is what I became.

There were three who answered my summons. The big boss, the 'Lord of the Configuration'; he wore a crown not of thorns but of nails. Except it wasn't just his head they were in, but all over his face; at the intersections of some criss-cross scars. Very nice too. Their symmetry fascinated me. That and realising they must actually be

hammered into the bone of his skull. I let out a low whistle of admiration. This was obviously one mean guy.

His lady friend weren't too pretty either. Her throat reminded me of a biology lesson where I'd had to dissect a frog and pin the flaps of skin to a board. Again I noticed the pains she'd taken to get her jewellery just so. Just like any other broad. Not my type, though. I mean she was bald except for a few wisps of hair and she didn't exactly have 'come to bed' eyes, more like 'come to the grave'. I guessed she probably took 'rat poison on the rocks'.

The other guy reminded me of Greenstreet. He didn't say anything, just kept licking his lips and fingering the wound his belly. That's when I noticed they were all wearing these nicely-laced outfits -- nicely-laced to their skin, that is.

Sheesh, I wished I'd thought of having a bottle of Jack Daniels handy. Look, see: I'd always accompanied my love wrestling with it and it felt appropriate for what these guys were obviously about to offer. As it turned out I was way, way out in my estimation. And, buddy, it hurt. I mean, the sort of pain you dupes can't even begin to imagine.

It was all the handiwork of The Engineer. I suppose he might have been human once -- if he was it must have been eons ago. Look, see: if you can imagine a large scorpion, with the skin of a leprous baby, the eyes of an angry tiger and the mouth of a great white shark. You can? You must have met the mother-in-law. Anyway, not the sort of guy to meet in a dark alley, which was exactly where I did meet him: in an alleyway of Hell.

The worst was when my eyes went. He slit my nose and twisted the flaps of skin across; so my eyeballs were crushed back into my skull. He smashed the exposed bone and gristle and covered the mess with a patch of skin from the back of my head. He hacked off my ears and fed fish hooks into my mouth so that my lips were pulled back. These hooks were attached by wires to other hooks which he put in the edge of the wound in the back of my head.

The punchline is: I don't know if I died. I should have done. No-one can survive that sort of treatment and he didn't stop with my face. His taste in leather costumes ain't the most comfortable. (I felt every wound, they've never healed and I'm still in pain. I'm still chattering alright -- it's the only companion I have here, the noise of my teeth.

It makes me real mad. I want to destroy everything in sight, well reach, anyway. There's nothing like tearing someone to shreds for taking your mind off your troubles. But, it's only every so often I'm allowed to play with those who open the Box. Those who don't interest the others -- the dull and the stupid, mostly. I'm not as choosy as they are. But there are never enough. So I spend most of my time mad. And in the Labyrinth.

Sheesh, you have to admire the architect of that place. His sense of humour us terrific. Should have been a gag writer. Better than a half-a-dozen I could name.

Those of you cognizant with your mythology will know that Labyrinth is a fancy word for maze. And that's all Hell is. I mean I've seen those pictures about that guy Dante's Inferno. He must have been on some good stuff because it ain't anything like the way they showed it in the movies.

I mean, I do like his gag about Hope. You know the one? Where he says above the gates there's a motto. 'Abandon Hope all ye who enter here'. Well let me tell you, there's more hopefuls here than on a casting couch. They're all hoping to get out. Poor saps.

Look, see: Hell is a place of corridors. Right? All the corridors are similar, no two are the same. The walls are damp, grey stone, the floors sand. The roots of trees frame arches to break the monotony. There are no windows to the outside world, but don't go thinking there ain't any light in Hell. There's plenty. At the end of every tunnel there is a light. Around every corner there is a glow suggesting freedom. A tantalising promise that an escape exists. It don't. Its builders must have found every possible way to build a junction, so that a guy is always confronted with more than a simple choice of left or right. Of course, once they've chosen they're always left wondering: 'What lies in those other directions? If I'd taken that other tunnel wouldn't I be free now?' So they hurry back to where they turned to find a new set of choices or a dead end. Look, see: the architecture of the Labyrinth ain't static. Unseen hands alter its routes so the Labyrinth has no maps, no system or logic for a mind to grasp and apply order to the chaos. And they search on, all thought of previous choices is confounded by the new quandary presented. And still the glow of freedom beckons from every avenue. Look, see: you never find someone huddled in a corner, having giving up, full of despair. That would be too easy and it ain't allowed. Despair is a release that only flickers at the edge of consciousness. Nice gag eh? You might say they all live hopefully ever after.

Of course, there are others in the Labyrinth, aside from them that wander the corridors. The wanderers are the stupid ones I told you about before. The ones whose flesh I get to play with.

For the others, there are more complicated torments, more ingenious reflections of their life deeds. The greater the intellect and the sins, the more subtle the torture. They have their own private chambers with their own particular type of room service. The punishment they earned in life is acted for the amusement of the hierarchy of the Labyrinth. And it's all in perfect flesh-toned Tormento-Vision.

Look, see: there *are* stock sufferings, kind of 'off the peg' torments: disembowelling and evisceration, gouging out of eyes, ripping out of tongues, hanging by the thumbs or hair, stretching on the rack, thumbscrews, strappado, squassation, tearing out of nails and teeth, flaying of skin, burning the soles of the feet, insertion of red hot pokers, tearing the flesh with red hot pincers, severing and crushing of limbs, dipping in butts of boiling pitch or scalding lime and scrubbing with wire brushes (all without the aid of anaesthetic).

Then there are the more complex (some would say gratuitous) sufferings: slitting open an eye with a cut-throat razor, driving stakes through the heart, putting a guy's hand in a chip fryer, stabbing people through shower curtains when dressed as your mother, splashing acid in the faces of composers, skewering vicars with lightning conductors and decapitation with sheets of plate glass, feeding critics 'pet poodle pie', turning the heads of 16-year-old girls through 360 degrees, feeding great white sharks on bimbo bathers, cutting up teenagers with a chainsaw, invisibly hanging a guy with the bed linen in his jail cell, drowning a guy in a vat of gumbo and -- my personal favourite -- pulling a guy to pieces with hooks on the ends of chains. You get the picture?

Of course, now they've made movies of some of the Box's stories. They're quite good. They've got lots of things right and most of them wrong. I mean, they've tried to say I was a kid when I opened the box -- nice try, but no Kewpie Doll. But what can you expect from movie people? In the scale of things a movie writer's soul is roughly equivalent to that of an inebriated gnat. A movie producer's is worth slightly less. I bet you can imagine some of the things we have lined up for them when they get down here. In fact, you know CB? Look, see: if you see the guy, you can give him a message from the Order of the Gash. Tell him: 'We're waiting'.