

BOLO: Alfred Chester's Wig

by Katrina Gray

The wig was nowhere in sight. They thought it might be in a trunk or a closet, but all they found in the closet were his pair of ravenous Greek dogs, clawing to get out.

When neighbors smelled him, and then found him, in a rented piece of an Arab-speaking suburb of Jerusalem, Alfred Chester was entirely bald, brazenly so, including brows and lashes and pubic hair, thanks to a bout of childhood scarlet fever. He had been without the wig in question for years now, but it was never clear if he had kept it or destroyed it or discarded it. He stopped wearing it during his long stint in Morocco, where he could have tossed it into the Mediterranean. It was there, and then it wasn't, the victim of a magician or a swooping seabird. Fish could inhabit the wig now, perhaps even as far as the Spanish coast, living in it more happily than he did.

The glass beside his exquisite corpse said that in his last moments he was either thirsty or drunk, or wanted to be drunk. There were the barbiturates too, but those held no mystery. The glass, however, was empty. Not even half-empty, just empty. It was as if the wig were a cap on his life, keeping in whatever kept him going, and having removed it, some vital something seeped out over time and finally fizzled as he tried to fill it again. The scene could not have been sadder.

His final friend with the last name Friend could not even bring himself to identify him. His landlord had to do it. He hadn't yet lived in this place long enough to be late with even one month's rent, so he and his landlord were still on good terms. This was perhaps the

only landlord in his history who would recommend him again.

I want that wig.

I want Alfred Chester's wig, and I'm going to find it. The wig has magical powers. Anyone who wears it will write stories for the New Yorker and have many friends that will be charmed and then pushed away, charmed and pushed away, charmed. Susan Sontag and Cynthia Ozick and Paul Bowles will be among them, but Norman Mailer will be shunned forever. The wearer will get to live in New York and Paris and Tangier and Jerusalem, and will have to escape each for various reasons. He will be simultaneously underconfident and overconfident, and will enjoy flings, affairs, and full-on relationships with equal passion. He will live fully, exuberantly, horribly, faithlessly, haplessly, wonderfully, exhaustingly, lovingly, but never boringly. And the critics won't have to guess this time: the matted orange curls, caked with traces of sweat, semen, and kif, will be recognized as a crown that signals the coming of something truly special. And this time, they'll bow.

