

## Asking Around About the Jungle Bat Woman



Erik Beck

*[unsupervised pre-adolescents skateboarding around the high school parking lot]*

*Short one, t shirt:* The Jungle Bat Woman is very disgusting, and just very scary. She looks like she's made out of old thrown out animal parts. And she has this face that's, like, a skull with just skin on it.

*Short one, hat:* But even though she looks all fucked up and, like, mother-stealingly scary, she's still always getting pregnant. It's because she's a whore who sells herself to the highest bidder.

*Smiley one:* Convenience store clerks.

*Short one, hat:* Yeah, like Brady. She let Brady fuck her for fifty dollars.

*Smiley one:* She came up to me one time and told me that she had just taken an abortion pill and that the pill made the fetus stop growing and bust up into pieces and that parts of it were washing out of her. She said I could see it if I paid her five dollars.

*Short one, t shirt:* Oh my God, that's sick.

*Smiley one:* Yeah, but it wasn't a fetus though. It was just snakes. She was giving birth to a hive of snakes, all knotted up.

*Short one, t shirt:* Aw, foul.

*[excerpt from the medical files of Mona Plume]*

...missing three teeth, two of the top incisors and the lower right bicuspid. These teeth are essential to the mastication of fruits and vegetables and may be a contributing factor to the deficiency of nutrients yielded by these food items in the patient's diet... ailment relating to ostial integrity likely to be ongoing. \*\*\* bacterial infections... likely to be venereal in origin. Patient, however, has no history of venereal disease. \*\*\* *Sept. 19, 1985:* patient treated for mild pneumonia... *Feb. 27, 2002:* Irregular menstruation cycle documented... prescribed hormonal supplement.\*\*\* patient admitted to intensive care unit for severe hernia and dehydration...

*[misparented pre-adolescents, unsupervised, breaking shafts of burnt-out florescent lighting behind the bowling alley]*

*Short one, hat:* You think that the Jungle Bat Woman isn't so bad sometimes, but then you find out that she is. Like, for a while we'd see her with this kitten. And, I guess she

was like feeding it and taking care of it. And she taught it all this weird shit: like, not-normal stuff. She taught it how to talk, and how to read. Jeffrey said he saw her trying to show it how to ride a bicycle, which could be bullshit, but—

*Smiley one:* It's not.

*Short one, hat:* So, this cat was a complete freak and everyone wanted to see it, but she wouldn't bring it out ever. Then she sold it to this guy my brother knows named John Carl for a bunch of crack, or something. And John Carl's a dick. He would like burn patches of its fur.

*Short one, t shirt:* He took pictures and showed them to us.

*Short one, hat:* Yeah. Like, this cat looked ragged. So he had it for a week, just torturing it and shit. Then, finally, he cuts it's legs off. And I guess he just, like, threw it away in some corner of his yard for the animals and birds to get at.

*[chauffeur to the Jungle Bat Woman]*

I was downtown, and I hadn't been able to get anybody in the cab for a while. Then there's this lady flagging me, so I was like... alright. So she gets in, and I look her over: classic hag, fucking dog of a woman. I ask her where she wants to go, and she doesn't tell me at first. She just wants me to start driving south until I get to the edge of town. Well, I tell her, Look, I don't operate like that, and that she can either tell me where she's going or she can get out of the goddamn car. Well then she says to take her to the dirt bike dealership that's out there, and I do as she says. We get there. I pull into the parking lot. She opens the door, gets out. I'm thinking she's coming around to the driver's side with the fare. No, she's walking away in the other direction. So I roll down the window and ask her fairly nicely what she's doing: She ignores me. So then I get out of the car and start yelling at her, 'Hey you fuckin' bitch!' and all that. Then, out of nowhere, these moto-cross guys show up, surrounding the car like they're getting ready to do something. So I jump back inside and try to get it started, but one of them pops up next to the driver's side and grabs me in the neck through the window. Then all of them got a hand on me, and they yank me out. Now they have me out, and they all start going to town on my head and in my ribs. I guess I remember them stomping on me a couple times. It didn't take long for them doing what they were doing before I was out. I woke up a week later in the hospital. My head was the size of a fucking basketball and for a month it just hurt.

And that's why I like to carry a big knife with me. Next time somebody sticks a hand through that window trying to do something I'm gonna chop it. And that woman, if I ever see her again I'm gonna slice her to fucking pieces. Swear to christ.

*[the Jungle Bat Woman's social worker]*

We lost track of Ms Plume after she stopped showing up to the job we had arranged for her at the airport. I suppose she'll show up again soon. Clients who have problems like this will often disappear into what I think of as a wilderness of fate. This would maybe involve an extended period of non-tenancy, residing in what we call a "nondomestic

living situation.” That could mean squatting in abandoned buildings or even sleeping on the street. It’s possible she may have found a place in a house used in the drug trade—given her history of drug use, that isn’t out of the question. Maybe she’s working in a prostitution ring or a similar relationship that entails an exchange of sex. This happens to people. Every day it does. And, unfortunately, we can’t do anything until the client seeks help. Now, if a client in Ms Plume’s situation survives, she will inevitably wash ashore. She could show up again at job services, or she’ll renew her application with her food subsidy caseworker. She could seek treatment for addiction, and we’d find her in Methadone. The services are available but there simply isn’t any outreach program in place to deliver them proactively. The client has to come to us. The initial step for someone trying to reclaim his or her life is always deciding that you need real, substantive help and then going out and obtaining it. We can’t solve problems for anyone who refuses to admit they have a problem. What we will do is provide tools for people can use, if they want to do that.

*[persecution of the Jungle Bat Woman]*

Ms Plume, is it not true that you have kissed women and young boys on the lips and face and in other inappropriate regions of the body?  
And Ms Plume is it not also true that you have participated—possibly willingly, possibly unwillingly—in the irreligious act of sodomy, and that it can be clinically proven?  
And has it also been the case that you’ve allowed into your body the hot demon fire of intravenous narcotics and that you have witnessed the apex of satanic evil, whereupon you engaged this presence in a battle of wits only to have it induce life threatening pneumonia upon you, which (let the court note) was cured at the expense of the state, and that this presence is still within you, lurking?  
Ms Plume, could you tell us how you obtained those narcotics? Was it from the blacks, Ms Plume? Ms Plume, did you kiss those African Americans on the mouth? And how many of them?  
And Ms Plume, did you engage in the act of love making with no less than a half-dozen African Americans simultaneously in the hot summer night?  
Are you going to deny that, Ms Plume, because we have witnesses who have agreed to testify against you here? Understand that we require your utmost cooperation in this matter. The charges before you are quite serious; we have an interest in getting things right.

*[the Jungle Bat Woman’s art dealer]*

We understand that the airbrushed images of the breaking heart, the unicorn, the kitten playing with twine are trite. We see that immediately. We call them cheap because when we see them they are often affixed to inexpensive merchandise, like t-shirts or commercial posters. The commonality of these items—or vulgarity, I suppose—dilutes their worth and their power. No matter how emphatic the gesture of a breaking heart may be, it is not something we can respond to emotionally. So why should we continue using

it as an emblem for sorrow? Has it not outlived its usefulness? It has not, I think. We use it, and it cannot be useless if we continue to use it. But it is interesting how, because of this impression of worthlessness, we automatically designate the brokenheart-unicorn-kitten-with-twine emblem as a trash object, even if newly minted. Think of it: a thing is just born and immediately becomes trash. Why should it have been made in the first place? One can try to reinvent the images using different scenarios and combinations like, for example, a unicorn leaping over an urn which contains inside of it a beating yet broken heart. Say the unicorn was wearing a wristwatch. Say it was bearing on its back an human-size strand of DNA, within which might be contained the genetic code for a noble continence. Something different is made then. That's something different entirely. But then the singular concept of the unicorn, the sole concept of the broken heart, is lost. We deem it to be inadequate, so we kill it. We throw it out. We used it to make something else. The question is how do we resuscitate an spent emblem without shattering what it fundamentally is? The answer is Mona Plume. Still a relative unknown within outsider art circles, Ms Plume's work is authentic and uncooked. When I first saw her horse drawings on motel letterhead the experience ravaged me. The images remain etched into my memory. I often see them in my sleep. It is little wonder that the market price of her prints on t-shirt continues to climb...

*[Dean Gerke, consort of the Jungle Bat Woman]*

I'll eat dog, that's just another animal to me. I eat chickens, pigs, cows; the dog isn't any different from those. It's meat; it just tastes different. And it doesn't taste bad, either. It tastes different. I'm not gonna eat spoiled meat, or something that's rancid and smells. If it makes you sick, no. I won't eat that, because you can't eat that. You spit it back up. And sometimes something can taste good and will smell just fine; you swallow that down and all of the sudden your stomach starts sloshing and you start feeling sick in there. Then, you know, you get that froth in the mouth and out it comes. I've eaten terrible things: orange peels, carp, crab apples, wild onions, dandelion. Yeah it tasted bad. I don't care. It's good for you. Just taste's different. And, you know, pussy's no different. Shit's always good unless it's poisoned with the HIV or the gonorrhea or whatever. I'll take a woman and love her. Don't matter who it's attached to: pussy's pussy, man. Pussy's pussy.

*[Jungle Bat Woman v. Safeway Grocers, Inc.]*

It is the opinion of this court that Safeway not to be held liable for any sickness suffered by Ms Plume from eating raw meats stolen from the store's deli aisle. Ms Plume's assertion that the store's "open offerins" style of meat display invites customers to devour compulsively raw, packaged ground chuck and pork chops is invalid. Nothing about the Westbrook Safeway's deli aisle suggests that it should be treated as a restaurant buffet. There are no tables, no plates or utensils. The meats are packed and labeled. Labels bear messages informing the customer of temperature range within which the meat may be served safely. What's more, the unpurchased meats were not Ms Plume's to eat in the

first place. She was shoplifting, and she caused a mess in the store which Safeway had to clean and sanitize at great expense to itself.

*[the Jungle Bat Woman's spiritual advisor]*

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that Christ healed close to a dozen men of leprosy. I imagine their spongy, rancid tissues falling from them like a snakeskin to reveal the rosy and white baby flesh beneath. Leprosy does to the body what sin does to the human soul. It begins as a minor blight on the surface of the skin then spreads in all directions. Portions of the eyebrows may disappear. Fungus-like swellings grow on the face and limbs. Then the malady turns inward and begins compromising the organs. Marked deformity of the hands and feet occur when the ligaments between the bones deteriorate and disappear. The afflicted might carry with his plague for as long as twenty years before being offered the release of death, and all the while he remains deathly infectious to anyone he touches, the disease being transmitted on the skin through its own excretions. Christ cured those men of more than just their disfigurement. He cleansed them of a contamination. He made it so that they could once again embrace family members and loved ones in their able arms without the fear of polluting them with their affliction. Those that received the miracle were given this gift: to touch others and to exchange love freely. There is not a soul on this earth that is refused all possibility of the loving embrace.

*[unsupervised pre-adolescents riding bicycles down the center of the street]*

*Short one, t shirt:* I dare you to go to where the Jungle Bat Woman lives and ask her for a handjob!

*Smiley one:* She lives in a self-storage garage.

*Short one, hat:* In the summer she lives in the weeds and bushes along the disc golf course. I've seen her stashing her bags and shit and drinking from empty beer cans out of the garbage.

*Short one, t shirt:* I dare you to steal her cloths and wear them.

*Smiley one:* Wear her bra.

*Short one, hat:* I dare you to invite her to take a bath in your house, then take a bath in the same water after she's done.

*Smiley one:* And drink it.

*Short one, hat:* Agh.

*Short one, t shirt:* (cough).