

**Sid Vicious Is Dead by Ruben Carbajal**

MASON, a man in an immaculate suit, sits upright on a simple, modern couch. He smokes a cigarette. Next to him in a matching chair, is CARPENTER, a man in a cardigan. He holds a notepad, writing as he listens. An aquarium behind the couch, subdued abstract paintings on the walls.

MASON

The worst thing i've ever done?

(takes a drag from his cigarette. Pause)

Is that supposed to be a *therapeutic* question?

(pause)

CARPENTER

You *are* on my couch. I *am* a therapist.

MASON

That's what you suggest.

CARPENTER

Hmmm?

MASON

Yes, the couch, the gurgling aquarium, the subtle and tasteful prints on the wall. Your worn-but-not-too-worn cardigan sweater...all fine *suggestions* of a therapist and his office.

CARPENTER

Suggestions...

MASON

That's why I picked you. Or why I seemingly picked you; it's a fine...semblance.

CARPENTER

What is that supposed to mean?

MASON

That's your job, isn't it? To find out what I *mean*?

CARPENTER

I'm going to need your help. Will you help me?

(Pause)

MASON

(taking a drag, starting anew:)

"The worst thing I've ever done". It sounds more voyeuristic than therapeutic. Are you sure you aren't asking out of a sick curiosity?

CARPENTER

I don't have sick curiosities.

MASON

You have a master's degree in psychiatry. Therefore all your curiosities are healthy.

CARPENTER

Does my question make you uneasy? Is it discomfiting to think about?

MASON

I once placed hallucinogens in a man's breakfast cereal. A software expert who was selling very elegant, very advanced encryption programs to the Chinese. I had bugs everywhere; in his house, his office, bathroom, his car. I listened to him as he drove his shiny, black lexus into a tree. Before the moment of impact, he asked his son, "*Why is the steering wheel **melting**?*"

(Pause)

CARPENTER

What did the son say?

MASON

Nothing. He wasn't old enough to speak.

(Pause)

MASON

Do you believe that story?

CARPENTER

Is it a lie?

MASON

Do you believe anything I say?

CARPENTER

Are you lying to me?

MASON

Do you think I'm delusional? I don't say I'm Napoleon. I know I'm not Jesus Christ. I have no messianic imaginings, whatsoever. I do, I admit, know a think or two about conspiracy.

CARPENTER

Yes?

MASON

Ever read Pynchon? Ever talk to someone obsessed with conspiracy theories? The Grassy Knoll? The Masons? Skull and Bones? Let me tell you something. Cartoons. These ideas are cartoons. When you're on the inside of these matrices. When you're a drone in a hive...it's complex to a degree of illogic.

Let me venture to guess that you're a liberal democrat.

Yes?

CARPENTER

Perhaps.

MASON

You like to lift the societal rock, and address all the squirmy, crawling things underneath. This makes you feel good about yourself. Am I right?

What astonishes me, is the fact that no one seems really interested in looking *under* the underneath. It's an ugly, complicated place. It's where, for as long as i can remember, i've lived.

(As if remembering:)

I was once in Central America, keeping tabs on a general we were providing in arms and money. I once watched one of his men stick an iron spike in a man's left ear, all the way in, until it came out the right. He sweat and screamed more than he bled. It takes a lot of time for an iron spike to go in one ear and out the other. Iron spikes weren't made for such things. Human heads, for that matter, weren't either.

CARPENTER

What *are* they made for?

MASON

Iron spikes or human heads?

CARPENTER

Human heads.

MASON

Human heads contain infinite depths of mystery. But isn't that *your* domain?

I said I didn't think I was Jesus Christ. But, I did work with a man, sometimes along side him, an operative, who did believe he was Jesus Christ.

CARPENTER

Is that so?

MASON

It's staggering the kind and level of atrocities that are capable of a man who thinks he's Jesus Christ. When a man thinks he's Jesus Christ, every action he commits, by definition, is without sin, is of the highest moral order. Even if he happens to be pulling fingernails out of a human hand, or injecting a bubble of air into the veins of an uncooperative detainee.

CARPENTER

Did he do those things?

MASON

He did a lot of things. We both did a lot of things. I can tell you one thing he never did. He never, as long as I knew him, walked on water.

CARPENTER

Did he ever turn water into wine?

MASON (Suddenly vacant)

I wonder, sometimes, if I wasn't programmed to come here.

CARPENTER

Programmed?

MASON

How would I know?

Is this an interrogation?

Am I interrogating you?

(Pause)

Up and down have no meaning here. The sliver, the thin, jagged point on which i've been mounted, the dancefloor of angels. I am without a compass. I am without a ground floor, a frame of reference. The checkpoints have been all re-arranged. The codes have become indecipherable, have been refracted to the realm of gaga.

Is this Las Vegas or Jerusalem?

(Lights quickly out. Lights quickly up. MASON and CARPENTER both stand behind a BOY, a teen-ager, who is bound to a chair. His face is a little bruised. He has spiky, hair. Torn jeans, and a bedraggled "Sex Pistols" T-Shirt.)

BOY (Anger and fear)

I'm not speaking! I'm not speaking to either one of you assholes!

MASON

We don't give a damn whether you speak or not.

What gives you the idea that we want you to speak to us?

CARPENTER

"The tongue is a little member and boasts of great things."

MASON

We'd prefer you kept your smart ass mouth shut.

CARPENTER

"How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!"

MASON

Didn't your mother say if you didn't shut that wise mouth of yours, she'd shut it for you?

CARPENTER

"The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body."

MASON

Your maw must've meant business; she hired us to do the job.

BOY

That's a lie! You lying motherfuckers!

MASON

Such a big, nasty mouth.

CARPENTER

"Setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell!"

MASON

Ooh, that's good. What's it from?

CARPENTER

It's biblical.

MASON

Which book?

CARPENTER

James.

MASON

You sure?

CARPENTER

I should know, I wrote it.

MASON

Jesus didn't write the bible.

CARPENTER

*I know I didn't.* I dictated. The first draft was done in shorthand. There were twelve of them. They'd follow me around. A fabulous a cappella band. They did all the standards; the Sha-Lites, Delphonics, Sam and Dave, the Supremes...they sang beautiful do-wop numbers all over the holy land. How do you think we converted so many in so little time? They were a fabulous band. They called themselves-- The Disciples. Catchy, huh?

MASON

You realize you are quite ill?

BOY

Where are my parents? I want to talk to my parents! Get me out of here!

MASON

Your parents? You only have a maw.

CARPENTER

Your paw don't know where you are.

MASON

Nor does he care.

CARPENTER

Your paw is out filling some other toothless barmaid with his drunken seed.

MASON

And your maw, well, like I said, she hired us.

BOY

Liar! You fucking liars! Let me go back home!

MASON

Listen, all we ask of you, is to stop wearing these clothes. Start dressing sensibly...and that hair...

CARPENTER

"Do not let the hair of your head hang loose, and do not rend your clothes."

MASON

Do you know what rend means?

BOY

No.

MASON (plucks at his torn clothes)

It means tear.

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CARPENTER

All those paintings you've seen of me...the DaVinci, with long hair, a beard and robes. I am not, and never was a fucking hippy! Always a crisp, well-pressed suit, and a short, tight, crew cut. You can ask my mother!

MASON

(An aside to BOY:) You'd better be careful. He thinks he's Jesus Christ. He's crazy.

CARPENTER

What are saying to him?

MASON

(To Carpenter) Nothing. (To BOY:) You put on a nice sharp suit, let us give you a real hair-cut, and you'll be home free.

BOY

Why are you doing this?

MASON

In case you haven't noticed, the world doesn't give a rat's ass about your rebellion.

CARPENTER

The world doesn't care if you spike your hair.

MASON

I like that. It has a certain music to it. (sings:) The world doesn't care if you spike your hair, the world doesn't care if you spike your hair.

CARPENTER

(joins in)

The world doesn't care if you spike your hair.

BOY

(Through angry tears)

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

(Lights quickly out. Quickly up again. The BOY is gone. CARPENTER and MASON are back in their original positions.)

MASON

The Organization had a lot of disposable income. Money was never a problem, and we were encouraged to spend it creatively. We had an immense entertainment budget. The games we played ranged from extravagant and esoteric to gratuitous, and downright ludicrous.

There was an old game, a classic, that agents have been playing since the Organization had been founded. The name changed through the years, but it stayed basically the same.

What you'd do is, you'd find a pimply-faced kid, a teenager with a chip on his shoulder, something to prove. They're a dime a dozen, you know. Middle-American shopping malls are crawling with them.

My partner had a particular dislike for the little punk-rock kids, you know with the hair and the anarchy symbols drawn on their jeans with ball-point pens...I think they offended him on an aesthetic level. It was a deep hatred, really.

We would pose as police officers, toss them in an unmarked van, and take them to a holding facility, in a cell, for days, sometimes weeks. We would have contests to see who could make them snap first.

My partner and I were particularly good at it. We were champions.

My partner called the game, "Sid Vicious Is Dead".

(Lights quickly out. Lights up. BOY is bleeding from the lip. CARPENTER is wiping blood off his hands with a handkerchief. The BOY is worn down, more beat-up, but still defiant.)

CARPENTER

What burns me, what really bothers me, is this T-Shirt. *The Sex Pistols?*

BOY

Fuck off.

CARPENTER

This band. This band was a publicity stunt, you ignoramus. It was a corporate creation, a pre-fabricated, English rip-off of a truly great, all-American, revolutionary *movement*. Don't you get it? It's not to be taken seriously, you dumb shit. It's a fucking lesson in the worst kind of callous, calculated, money-grubbing, sarcasm! Don't you see a joke is being played on you?

MASON

You don't know your history, little boy. What you need is a history lesson.

CARPENTER

On top of that, it's so fucking tired. So fucking hackneyed, done-before, altogether pre-packaged, mundane and unoriginal. The *Sex Pistols? Anarchy In the UK?* I know you live in bumfuck cowtown main street america, but can't you find some better way to tell mom and pop they just don't understand?

MASON

I smell a history lesson coming.

CARPENTER

Punk started in New York City. The lower east side. CBGB's. Roots in the Velvet Underground. Do-it-yourself-ethic. The Heartbreakers, Ramones, Richard Hell and the Voidoids Ring a bell? Helloooo? "I belong to the blank generation?" Patty Smith? **Television** for the love of God in Heaven!? You with me, little Johnny Rotten?

BOY

Television were a bunch of art-rock faggots.

CARPENTER

What did you say?

(MASON must hold him back:)

MASON

Now you've done it. Oh boy. There's only one thing that my partner here likes more than early-sixties motown, and that's Tom Verlaine and Television.

CARPENTER

Let me go, god-dammit, I've had it!

(CARPENTER Frees himself of MASON. Takes a breath, brushes himself off. Gets in BOY's face)

I've tried to reason with you. I've tried to lay it out for you in a simple, straightforward manner. To give it to you like a man.

But I've run out of cheeks to turn. (Slowly raises his hand to strike BOY) I've simply run out!

(Lights quickly out. Then, quickly, a light that only allows us to see MASON and CARPENTER's faces)

MASON

He let that kid have it. Worked him over good that day. But he didn't crack. He resisted until he was unconscious.

He held his ground for another two weeks, as I remember it. He truly won our respect.

When he finally did put on that suit, it was solemn, almost religious. I actually saw a tear fall behind my partner's mirrored sunglasses. He looked invincible in that suit. And his hair was orderly, organized, at attention in short, single files. He was beautiful, that child. Only he wasn't a child. He was a man.

We loved him, and he loved us. We called him our own. We adopted him. He considered us his family. He became one of our top agents.

He became the backbone of our Organization.

(Slight pause)

CARPENTER

Can I ask you a question?

That child, in the car that crashed into a tree...

MASON

Yes?

CARPENTER

What did he look like?

MASON  
Look like?

CARPENTER  
Could you describe him to me?

MASON  
He wasn't...

that is...

I can't...a baby, unformed, really...

CARPENTER  
Or the man with the iron spikes in his ear. Who did he resemble?

MASON  
Resemble?

CARPENTER  
Yes, could you discuss his physiognomy for me?

MASON  
I...it's so strange...I can't...it...

CARPENTER  
Or the rebellious boy...

MASON  
Ummm, I...it's odd...I really...can't...

CARPENTER  
Calm yourself. Concentrate.

MASON  
Uh...it's dark...

CARPENTER  
Place yourself there...*remember*...

MASON  
Uh...

CARPENTER  
Are you there?

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MASON

I...yes...I'm there...

CARPENTER

Do you see his chair?

MASON

Yes.

CARPENTER

What do you see?

MASON

A body, sitting in it...

CARPENTER

Can you describe it? Is it clear?

MASON

It's odd, fuzzy...

CARPENTER

That's good. Relax. Look directly, straight on.

(At this point, lights very slowly up, in tiny increments)

MASON

It's so peculiar...reflective, like a mirror...

CARPENTER

Yes?

MASON

Yes.

CARPENTER

What do you see?

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MASON

It's familiar. The face it's familiar.

(Lights are fully up. MASON is in a chair, his hands are tied behind his back.)

Very familiar...

Very...very...familiar...

(Lights slowly out. Curtain.)

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