

*Fex, Avonna, Chrysler, et al. ...*

Once Fex had made a name for himself in the Big H—*changing* his name in the process to Fex Firestone, which, Maury agreed, was a “terrific moniker”—doors opened for him in the most prestigious circles of Hollywood’s biggest players. In fact, Fex himself was one of those players—a heavy-hitter, it was generally agreed.

Maybe a little psycho, it was widely agreed, but, *whatever!* This is the ‘big H.’ Fex was having a great time.

One door, however, remained obdurately closed to Fex, and for obscure reasons that the most expensive, sought-after shrinks—TV and otherwise—could not illuminate. It was like Fex’s own Enigma Code that not even Alan Turing himself could crack.

“Maybe it has something to do with your mother,” opined one high-priced shrink with a client list a mile long and an Associate Arts degree in sociology from Santa Monica Community College. Her name was Avonna. Nobody knew her last name—it was just *Avonna*, period.

“Have you asked Avonna yet? Go see Avonna, *if* you can get in, that is,” people would say at parties, trying to be helpful and dropping names at the same time. “Avonna really helped me a lot,” they would continue. “She’s got this System, kind of a Buddhist thing, but not really—you know what I mean?”

“Yeah, yeah, I know whatcha mean,” Fex would reply, before turning away and saying to himself and the potted palm, “I don’t know what the fuck yer talkin’ about.” But the next day he would have Gladys schedule an appointment with Avonna, or “Larry B.,” or Johann,” or, in one case, “Chrysler.” It was always first names only. In the Big H, nobody used last names, which was so bush-league. “Gladys, would you get Bobby on the line for me, please?” was a favorite of Fex’s.

“Yes, Mr. Firestone,” Gladys would reply, and two minutes later Fex would be joking with Bobby DeNiro, trotting out the same old joke.

“Hey, Bobby, ‘jever hear the one about the dame with the big hooters comes up to me—” and, no matter how worn-out, crass or locker-room the joke, tears would soon be streaming down Bobby’s cheeks, he was laughing so hard.

“Chrysler? Are you kiddin’ me?” said Heather one morning, who had a nose for bullshit.

“Yeah,” said Fex, “that’s his name. Chrysler. What’s the big deal?”

“It’s stupid, that’s what,” said Heather, smelling a rat.

But in the end Gladys, who was good on the phone—among other things—would schedule all those appointments, and no matter how much money he forked over, the results were all the same.

“I think it’s something about your mother,” the shrink would say, before asking Fex to hyperventilate or something similar, “every morning at sunrise, like the Incas used to do.”

The fact that Fex never wanted to talk about Foxy always proved their theory or, in Avonna’s case, “confirms my System, don’t you see?”

But what *was* this big door that never opened for Fex, and that caused him so much “angst,” as all the therapists put it? (Never “pain” or “anxiety” or any other thing in English—always *angst*, always German, especially Johann, who at least *was* German.)

It was the *door to dreams*, which had always been open for Fex before, ever since childhood, but had been welded shut, like a slab of plate steel, ever since he moved to Hollywood.

“Did ya get a dream, Fexie?” Heather would ask every morning.

“Nah,” was the usual answer

Not until one morning, that is.

“Did ya get a dream, Fexie?” Heather asked again, concerned.

“Hey, yeah, yeah, I did! I got one. Finally I got one!”

“Well, what was it?”

“Lemme see—” said Fex.

“Hurry up, Fexie, I gotta meet Shirley today. So what was the dream?”

“So I was walkin’ somewhere, like by a marina, ‘cept there wasn’t no yachts or nothin’, just big old square-riggers. You know, whalers, like New England. And I seen a sign in front of a bar or somethin’.”

“Yeah? So? What’d it say? The sign, I mean.”

“It said—get this—it said, ‘The Pouter Inn!’ Whaddya think?”

“I think yer nuts, Fexie. Who cares about that? Sounds like Freud bullshit. Did you go in?”

Fex hesitated, then cleared his throat, obviously uncomfortable, even in front of Heather.

“Yeah. Yeah, I went in.”

Heather used up most of her make-up time, her “foundation-and-blush” time, trying to get Fex to say what was inside The Pouter Inn. But finally she succeeded.

“It was babies, baby. Lotsa babies, and they was all cryin’ and whinin’ and screamin’ and poutin’ so’s you couldn’t hear nothin’. All puttin’ on a big show, poutin’.”

“What about the mothers?”

“Yeah, they was there, but they couldn’t do nothin’. It was all cootchy-coo and that crap, but the babies just kept poutin’.”

“Are you gonna tell Avonna?”

Fex thought for a moment.

“Fex?” said Heather.

“Huh?” said Fex, startled.

“You heard me,” said Heather, getting impatient.

“Uh, nah, I don’t think so. It’s just a bullshit dream anyway. Avonna will just say it ‘confirms her System’.”

“What about Chrysler?” said Heather.

“Yeah, maybe Chrysler.” After a pause, Fex said, “I’ll think about it.”

And Heather rushed off for her plain yogurt and muesli breakfast date with Shirley.

Fex called Gladys.

“Gladys, honey, I’ll probably be a little late this morning. Hold my calls, please. Just take messages.”

“Yes, Mr. Firestone,” said Gladys.

Then Fex went to the fridge to see if there was any milk left. There was, but it was sour.