

Chocolate Crack on a Stick

If you steal my idea I swear to God, well, I'll be mad at you. It's a moneymaking machine this idea, and I came up with it when I dated an actor named Christopher. He was very New England-handsome and therefore able to find work dressed as a hot revolutionary war soldier for tourists at Independence Hall. I loved seeing him in his uniform, my sexy Philadelphia hero in his tri-cornered hat, knickers, and of course his gun. I loved his gun. He would be cleaning it in the park and I would watch from behind a tree hoping to keep my gun-cleaning voyeurism a secret, but he always caught me. "There's something wrong with you," he said. "Yes and I LOVE IT" I said.

He liked that I always wanted to see the Liberty Bell. He liked it because he never met anyone who loves it as much as I do. It's one of my favorite things on Earth and I think he secretly wanted to like something, anything, as much as I do the Liberty Bell. He squeezed my shoulder lovingly in his vicarious bell love. I asked, "can you draw the bell's crack in the air?" "Yeah, sure" he said. "Okay then, do it." "There," he said, "like that." "Not even close," I said, "if you mean to actually know how such a consequential crack exists in the world you need to give it the dignity of seriously studying its character as only the character of such a crack can possess." "I don't know why I put up with you," he said. "We're talking about the crack of Liberty, Christopher, stay focused please, you have the attention span of a goldfish sometimes."

Practicing the crack in the air that day is when the million-dollar idea came to me. The crack, it's the crack of the bell that matters. If you draw the

Liberty Bell's crack on paper without the bell it's a waterway map, a chocolate stream with chocolate frogs and salamanders. "I KNOW WHAT TO DO" I said, "I'll create chocolate treats in the shape of the crack, sell them on a stick, a chocolate crack on a stick! I'll sell them outside the Liberty Bell on a table and call out CHOCOLATE LIBERTY CRACK ON A STICK, GET YOUR CHOCOLATE LIBERTY CRACK ON A STICK, like the poet Gil Ott when he first moved to Philadelphia taking his magazine PAPER AIR out to the corner yelling PAPER AIR PAPER AIR GET YOURS NOW. And then one day a wealthy candy factory owner will be in town with his children and they'll love my chocolate cracks and he'll take me on board. And then we'll have different kinds of chocolate cracks, ones with crushed nuts sprinkled on the crack, or peanut butter injected cracks, cinnamon dusted cracks, delicious DELICIOUS CHOCOLATE LIBERTY CRACKS! It will make millions," I said excitedly! "Well what do you think of my new idea?" He shrugged and said "I like how crazy your ideas are, but it's not a good one this one." "I don't know why I put up with you," I said.

Philadelphia is where you move to when you love the Liberty Bell. It's the reason I'm here and only the National Park security guards have seen it more than I have. You would think after years of seeing me standing at the velvet ropes to gaze at the bell's crack that we would be on familiar terms but the guards always act like I'm al Qaeda. "He's on his way in again," they say into their radios as though I can't hear them. The bell needs more than Taser guns, rubber bullets and paranoia to protect it; it needs liberty in the best sense of the definition. Liberty is a serious word, born from too many examples of tyranny, "The state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one's way of life, behavior, or political views." If we U. S. Americans are going to actually enjoy the freedom we boast to the world about having, then we should be giving the bell a place of openness.

I've most definitely seen the bell more times than anyone alive who is not being paid to be there everyday, and there is a performance idea I'm getting down onto paper, one where I fill the crack of the bell with rich dark chocolate, then eat it out from the bottom up, give it a good tongue licking to get every delicious bit of chocolate. Then I would walk around to the tourists and hand out leaflets on safe sex. This could be a terrific project. Or maybe the other project would be about what happens when I submit the paperwork for the proposal, the project about the project. The project about the official National Park Headquarters reacting to the proposed project I already know they won't let me do. Write the president, that's what I'll do, I mean if it's okay to drop bombs on unsuspecting families in Afghanistan and Pakistan, what in the hell could be the problem with allowing me to eat out the Liberty Bell of its chocolate filled crack? To be "free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one's way of life, behavior, or political views." It's important that I'm ready to answer the National Park Headquarters when they ask if my project is a way of life, a behavior, or a political view. I'm not sure which it is, but I'll be ready for them!

When I stand in front of the bell I have so many ideas. It's like a magic idea factory. For instance one day I was standing near tourists with their tiny American flags posing for pictures with the bell when I thought, HEY I want to work in a laboratory doing research on high-powered soul-matter transference lampshades. Not lampshades that cure cancer or AIDS but lampshades that extract some of the creative powers from artists to perforate the armor of those believing themselves undeserving of the Muse's unction. The light through the lampshade that can sell everyone to themselves, light where we finally get it, we get it that it's of magnificent importance to be creative each day with something we want to do. Cancer and AIDS are going to sever us from this world no matter what, it's the

way we spend these remaining days, it's the only thing I want to matter to us. When I look at the Liberty Bell this is one of the things I like to think about, lampshade laboratories of the future of wild unleashing.

Christopher HATED that he was a faggot. I understand that, I mean why on Earth would anyone choose to be queer, it's very hard. With most families in the world it's very hard. With most governments it's very hard. With all monotheistic religions it's a terrible sin. You deserve whatever you get if you choose to be gay, you're just asking for trouble. But as far as I know no one chooses it. It's something to learn to enjoy in our own way and feel beautiful and loved whenever and however we can. I love being loved, don't you? Of course you do, and we all want to thrive in that love and we should do so whenever possible! When we were together I was the only one with the patience for Christopher's hard shell and it's because I got it, that disappointment in yourself that the family who loved you flipped the switch off when you told them you're a faggot, and it was never going to switch back on again. There are a few faggots and dykes who are lucky enough to have understanding families, but for the rest of us we tenderly fill those dark spaces in one another the best we can.

I decided to make his brooding cold sadness sexy, as much as for me as for him, and it was a dark and lovely task I made for myself. After sex he was always perkier and jovial, and that satisfied me very much knowing I was doing something good for the world. He was always going to New York to try out for plays, and once for a musical. He never got called back, and I knew he was secretly upset that he might be a failure at the only thing he really wanted to do. One day I brought us lunch while he was cleaning his gun and he didn't look up, his brow furrowed with anger. "Hey hot stuff" I said, "what's the matter?" "What's the matter is you pissed off the Benjamin Franklin impersonator again, why can't you

leave that guy alone!” “Look,” I said, “all I did was point out that he was getting Franklin wrong.” Christopher looked up, “yeah well he’s a mean old bastard and he’s giving me shit because he sees us hanging out together and now refers to you as my girlfriend.” “I don’t care what he calls me,” I said, “he has no fucking clue how to play the role of Benjamin Franklin, I mean just because he looks like him and dresses like him doesn’t mean he GETS Franklin!” “But nobody cares,” he said, “people come from Tokyo, Paris, Buenos Aires, and they want their picture taken with him, that’s it, that’s all they want and he doesn’t need to do anything else.” “Well,” I said, “all I told him was that Franklin wasn’t a goofy buffoon the way he portrays him, Franklin was a GENIUS, and a Lady’s man, he liked beer, he LOVED LIFE, c’mon, he invented the swim flippers as a teenager, he invented the glass harmonica which is the most extraordinary sounding musical instrument ever invented, AND he charmed the French and that’s not easy to do no matter what century you’re talking about!” “Would you please leave the old man alone, when he gets on your bad side he makes your life fucking miserable and I don’t like being in his gun sights frankly.” “Well I think it’s a disgrace,” I said, “to take the only decent founding father we have and turn him into a bumbling goofball, but I’ll stop it, for you I’ll stop it, I’m sorry.” “Thank you, please leave him alone, he hates you.” “Well the real Benjamin Franklin wouldn’t hate me, he would like me very much, and you, he would like us both, and give us some beer and ask us to get naked for a proper ménage a trois the way they taught him in Paris.” Finally Christopher smiled, “I’m not sure why,” he said, “but I do love you.” “Well you better,” I said, “I’m your boyfriend, I’m the man you’re supposed to love and you know what I think is that our odious Benjamin Franklin fake wants to fuck you.” “STOP IT, no he does not!” “Oh yeah, yeah he does.” “Do you think I should fuck him?” “I think you should fuck him, OH YES, his asshole needs to be loosened up, Christopher my man, that opening is as small as a sesame seed.”

Most bells are in buildings, you go to the buildings to see the famous church or playhouse and the bell there is the bell that is there, nothing more, and no one cares about the bell. The Liberty Bell is one of the only bells with a building no one goes to see. Who goes to see the Liberty Bell's building? It was built to house the bell, nothing more and we don't care about the building, we don't even remember it. It's the bell, it's all about the Liberty Bell and you know as well as I do that when you go to see it you're going through security, having your bag checked, being frisked, waiting in line, and walking the long corridor of short films and giant placards filled with historical trivia because it's for the crack. You're there for the finale at the end of the frisking, and that finale is called the crack. No one ever goes to the Liberty Bell to avoid seeing the crack. Millions of people come to Philadelphia each year to see the bell and I bet you not one of them ever averted their eyes from its delicious crack! Not one of them I tell you! Who would do that? Why would you look away from it, you WANT to see it, you know you do, c'mon now! It's a beautiful crack, look at it with me a second, okay a few minutes more. See in there, it's a portal into another dimension if we stare long enough. If we were allowed to get closer, touch it, we might just discover it's an oracle, a sleeping oracle that's been waiting for us to waken its divinatory powers.

Early one morning after park rangers finished a tour of the bell twenty-six-year-old Mitchell Guilliat jumped over the velvet ropes and hit it five times with a hammer. Ringing out to the four directions and with one more for the spirit head. JUST BEAUTIFUL I remember thinking that day, wishing I had been there to witness this prophetic act of ringing out liberty. Tourists being interviewed said they were stunned, "I WAS STUNNED I WAS SO STUNNED OH MY GOD" they said. "SHUT UP" I thought, "you are going to remember Mitchell Guilliat for the rest of your lives, and you HEARD the ringing, you got to HEAR it and

you have Mitchell to thank!” He was tackled by security as he yelled out, “I didn’t do anything violent!” I believe this former high school football captain, I really do. I was the only one in Philadelphia who believed him and I was defending him everywhere I went. I was on the verge of making tee shirts with his picture and the words “MITCHELL GUILLIATT WOKE THE ORACLE,” but when I realized I would be the only one to ever wear the shirt I scrapped the whole idea. It’s lonely being the only person in the world on one side of an argument, but I didn’t mind. I held my own at Dirty Frank’s Bar and wherever I met those calling out for justice to have poor Mitchell locked away forever. My good friend Frank Sherlock didn’t agree with me, but I think he liked that I was willing to champion the drifter from Nebraska with a mighty hammer. The federal magistrate charged Mitchell with “causing damage to an archaeological resource.” Resource is a word derived from Old French, meaning, “rise again, recover.” Awaken the oracle, AWAKEN THE ORACLE! For weeks we peered through the glass to see if we could see his hammer marks. We never were sure, I mean it’s a broken old bell.

Christopher called very excited and told me to meet him by the Commodore Barry statue behind Independence Hall. I did, and he held my hand to tell me he got a role in a play he loved and it was to be directed by a director he admires and we were both so happy! It was a fantastic day! We talked about me bringing all our friends to New York for opening night and where we would go to eat afterwards and how much his life was about to change, and it was the best news I had ever heard about someone I loved. I asked if he could tell the director about my idea for a daytime television soap opera where all the actors are terrified of squid except one little girl they all turn to when their squid fear is too much. Each episode would have the squid terror rise and rise between various sexual dramas in the script and the little girl would laugh and bring them back down with

a sigh. She would have a dried squid with red and gold glitter glued to its head that she would pull out of a pocket and wave into the camera as the end-credits rolled each day. “Yeah, maybe,” he said, “but promise me if you visit me during rehearsals that you won’t talk to him about this until the show is on stage.” “Okay,” I said, “and now it’s time to celebrate your first real job as an actor!” “Okay,” he said, “what should we do?” “Let’s sneak into the Liberty Bell’s building tonight and have sex against it, what do you think?” “NO, we can’t do that!” “Oh come on,” I said. “NO,” he said, “there are security cameras in there since that crazy Mitchell guy hit it with a hammer.” “He’s not crazy, he’s a prophet!” “Fine, I know you think that, but it’s still not possible, forget it.” “Okay then,” I said, “how about Independence Hall, we could have sex where John Hancock signed his name!” “NO WAY, that place is like Fort Knox in there.” “Hmm well then,” I said, “how about Betsy Ross’s house?” Christopher paused, thinking, then said, “let me check it out and I’ll call you later this afternoon.” We kissed at the foot of the Commodore Barry statue. The big dumb Benjamin Franklin impersonator saw us, shook his head in disgust and I gave him the finger while lip-locked, I mean why would Christopher care, he was leaving this stupid job tomorrow to become a real actor.

In the 1970’s a naked hippy ran through Independence Hall and right past the Liberty Bell, and that sounds glorious to my ears. When I heard about this I thought to myself it might have been the first naked human being the bell ever saw. “So THAT’S what they look like without their soft fabric shells!” Streaking is something hippies do when they have a certain amount of sunshine and marijuana, and normal citizens like to complain about these celebratory acts, but they don’t look away either, and they point at the television news seeing the naked hippies running with their private parts blurred out, and they yell “THAT’S SICK, SICK

FUCKING HIPPIES!” But they don’t look away either. This hippy had a lot of sunshine and pot and was happy and took off his clothes and ran past the Liberty Bell, but a Philadelphia police officer shot him. The cop said he thought he might have a concealed weapon, now how stupid is that? The police commissioner at the time was Frank Rizzo, and he defended the officer, of course, but I’m sad that liberty is such a foreign thing in America. Is it really threatening to anyone to have a naked hippy take a bong hit and run down the lawns of Independence Hall with his arms held to the sky singing songs from Jesus Christ Superstar? What a bunch of bullshit, shooting streaking hippies with impunity! I mean yeah they’re annoying, stinky, nobody likes a hippy unless you’re another hippy, always mooching food and whatever else you have, but there’s no reason to shoot them! I was appalled by this story. The Liberty Bell got to see firsthand one sunny day in the psychedelic 1970’s that the human species is forbidden to go outdoors without their soft fabric shells, punishable on the spot with bullets apparently.

When Christopher called all he said was to get over to the Betsy Ross house on the double. I biked there in ten minutes, nearly crashing into buses trees and a pizza deliveryman. “Wow,” I said stepping into her parlor, “you’re ready to be a bad boy tonight aren’t you?” Her bedroom was uncomfortable, but this was celebratory and we were going to have fun no matter what! If you’re going to have sex on a national monument it might as well be someplace with a bed, not Mount Rushmore or Plymouth Rock. Her bed was okay but I insisted when he was naked that he still wear the tri-cornered hat. “Now scowl a bit,” I instructed, “yeah, nice, very hot, you look like Marianne Moore’s angry nephew!” “Whose nephew?” “I swear your ignorance of American poetry amazes me sometimes.” “Poetry is boring,” he said. “Okay” I said, laughing, “now you are going to be punished as only a poet can dish it out!” It was exciting and we were there

for almost two hours. Christopher was even perkier after sex than usual and poked around Betsy's things. Her snuffbox, glasses, then he started opening drawers and doors, and I finally asked what he was looking for? "A bra, a skirt, you know, something fun to wear." "Well I think that hat and not a stitch of clothing is something fun," I said, "now get over here!" He became worried when I mentioned how excited I was to tell everyone about having sex in Betsy Ross's house. "What are you worried about," I said, "it's not like we stained the sheets, we were careful, besides, I'm a writer, I might want to put it in an essay one day." "Well whatever you do don't use my real name, use any name but Christopher." "No problem dear," I said.