

# Movie

He had a room, and that was all-important.

He had a room and red typewriter and a plastic daffodil in a Fanta bottle.

Times had changed, and one must have a base.

He'd breakfast on cigarettes and cheap port.

As the days and weeks went by, the glass from which he drank got more and more sticky, besmirched. Began to look rusty, brownly bloody, as if stained by ancient gore.

On steel-bright, fragrant mornings, he'd open his door and survey the scene without.

Cowpats of concrete. Crude, tilting, asymmetrical steps.

Men had died on those steps. Drunkards had broken their necks on those steps.

His name was Joel Stella.

One of the few books he owned was Samuel Beckett's *First Love*.

When winter came, he sat at his red typewriter and

worked on his screenplay. It was all about rain and night, the dismaying sweetness of light on sodden asphalt.

Walking the wet streets, he planned elaborate tracking shots.

His movie would incorporate the music of Steely Dan and Neil Young.

Of course, the filming of his script was never more than the most remote possibility. Like winning a huge sum of money, say.

Lying in water green and curry-hot, he dreamed a snowy, piney version of China.

His doctor collected dolls in national costume.

‘I live in fear of withdrawal,’ he told the physician. ‘My fear of the horrors keeps me drinking.’

He visited Dave in his flat just down the road.

Long-haired and olive-skinned, Dave was a sort of window-cleaning ninja. A Jesusy abseiler. And Dave wore tights which enhanced his incredibly shapely legs.

The guys were talking Herman Hesse and night-blooming cacti when Dave reached into his tights. Probed his tights and plucked out his erection. ‘Can you help me with this?’ he asked.

DEKA sold capguns and liquorice allsorts, fireworks and methylated spirits.

‘I’m painting Our Lady on glass,’ the Skull told Joel, ‘and I need a load of glittery blue for the robes. Where do I go for glittery blue nail polish?’

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Joel combed his beard, his chestnut locks. Dressed himself in candy-striped shirt and white tie.

His publisher posed him against a neutral background. Lit him from the side and shot him with a Pentax. (The picture would come out dun and Rembrandtesque, making him look like a rogue probation officer.)

And there in his publisher's loft, he was interviewed by a with-it female journalist. How dark and fair, willowy and buxom, forward and coy and boyish and tender she seemed! Penetratingly lovely, in other words.

She gave him one of her uni-ball pens. Ultramarine.

At the well-attended launch of his slender book of verse, Joel comported himself with tipsy aplomb.

A junior diplomat, an African drummer and a man dressed up as a chicken were among those present.

His publisher kept giving him money. Joel went home to discover crumpled banknotes in all his pockets.

Returning to the venue the following day, he found his unsold books inside the piano.

He woke one morning with a pain in his stomach. A pain between his stomach and his spine.

He felt more than usually faint and sweaty.

When had he last eaten anything? He recalled the flaccid pie of a fortnight ago.

A golden meltdown was taking place in his innards. Important tissues were fuming, dripping goldenly.

He managed to get to his doctor's and lie down on the

floor in the waiting-room.

‘Pancreatitis,’ said the physician. ‘Has it ever struck you that drinking is a low-level search for God?’

With the crystal sludge of pethidine scudding through his veins, Joel lay in hospital and thought stupendous thoughts. Slow-motion thoughts as plumply poised as moons. Colossal thoughts as light as helium.

*They’ve shot me full of sings,* Joel thought.

And he dreamed a distant beach he knew did not exist. And here was freedom indeed, the blissful melting away of every inhibition, every smallest worry, and he stripped and was proud of his body, impossibly.

He filmed his movie using an old treadle sewing machine.

Its inky gloss concealed a little hole, an oblong aperture which functioned as a lens.

The antique Singer whirred, ingesting light. Marrying light to brisk, acquisitive emulsions.