

Excerpt: *Ravi Patel and His Holidays Take the World by Storm*

When I first saw Loretta, my sense of shame as an erstwhile nice Indian boy was stronger than I had ever before experienced. That kind of tawdry behavior was unknown to me. The bare skin, the gesticulations, the histrionics, and...much more. And all on stage, no less! Of course there had been houses and nightclubs of ill-repute back home in Surat, but nothing like Loretta.

I was sitting in the greenroom of CBGB, making the best of a frightful case of the flu in the midst of such squalor. (This was 1977 and squalor was of course very chic.) So I sat there sharing one of my beedis with a chap named Curtis from Belfast who was either a roadie or a groupie for our opener that night, an Irish group called Spy Wednesday. Despite my illness, the beedi in fact made me feel rather better. And the coughing it caused merely made me nostalgic for my first drags of unfiltered cigarette smoke when I was about eleven.

So this Northern Irishman Curtis, he told me, had been all over North America at this point with Spy Wednesday, which consisted of a pair of identical, saffron-haired twins named Connelly. Their drummer was a great bearded bear of a man, whom Curtis referred to as simply “The Beast.” Curtis intimated that the Beast might be a distant cousin of John Bonham but this was of course absurd; I’d been to Bonzo’s wedding and would’ve, at the very least, heard tell if there were yet another epically percussive kinsman present there, no doubt, from one of the drunken, gregarious aunts and uncles that Pooja and I had been tabled with at the reception. They certainly regaled us with everything else of note regarding the gnarled and thorny boughs of the Bonham family tree.

As Curtis was bumming a second beedi off me and simultaneously about to launch into yet another astronomical lie about his mates and relations, Loretta Vendetta sauntered in.

According to her FBI dossier, Maureen Abigail Van Houslan was born in 1955 in Hoboken, New Jersey to Bruce and Winifred Van Houslan (née Buxton). After attending a Quaker boarding school in rural Pennsylvania, Maureen -- Abby to her friends -- rather than matriculating at Princeton University as a mathematics major in 1973, instead took the spending money her parents had given her, hopped on a Greyhound, and dove head-first into New York City. Within two weeks she had dyed her hair pitch-black, moved in with a morbidly obese, 47-year-old Maltese pornographic filmmaker named Tom Bones in Hell's Kitchen, and legally changed her name to Loretta Vendetta. She neither saw nor spoke to her parents again.

Now don't get me wrong: I am not a prude. You've had enough about me thus far to know that I've kept up with the best of them, from heroin-era James Taylor to any-era Keith Richards, and back again. And while I shall forever be devoted to the memory of my dear, sweet, beautiful wife Pooja, at times the life of a swinging cat such as Ravi Patel descends into what might be referred to as epicurean tendencies, if not wholly dionysian. I've had my fun. But Loretta Vendetta and the Whores were a horse of a different colour entirely. You see, this group of four, ahem, ladies had met while on the set of one of Mr. Bones' illustrious motion pictures in 1975.

Loretta, of course, was the lead singer. While not particularly tall of stature by nature, with the assistance of four-inch stiletto heels she was a formidable sight. She often took the stage wearing nothing but those heels, a leather officer's cap, studded gauntlets, and a riding crop. The rest of her Whores -- Mary Widow on drums, the upright-bass *virtuosa* Flattery O'Connor, and

Mistress Hex on electric guitar - were just as daunting in their leather S&M gear, spikes, and copious amounts of makeup.

“It smells like a goddamn coolie palace in here!” Loretta screeched as she kicked open the door to the greenroom. I was rather impressed that she could match the correct racial epithet with the smell of my beedis. But then, she was Ivy-League material after all.

“Would you care for a smoke, my dear?” I inquired, sniffing and looking up at her from that flea-bitten excuse for a chaise longue.

“Who the fuck are you?” she spat.

“Why, I’m your headlining act, Ms. Vendetta.” I stood and smoothed out my sea-blue blazer before extending my hand. “Ravi Patel. How do you do?” She just stared at me for a moment. Did I mention that at this point she was only wearing a jade-green kimono, her hair done up in a multi-colored beehive worthy of the Bride of Frankenstein? Then she really spat. Right into my hand.

“Who do you think you are making us open for you?” she rasped. As calmly as I could manage given my shock, I wiped my hand upon the disgusting chaise longue.

“Well, you know, we’ve been around for quite a while now,” I said. “*Top of the Pops* and all that rot. I wouldn’t take it too personally.”

But, sadly, Ms. Vendetta did take it personally.