

PHASE 3

Link raised the inevitable question, –Are you going to Phase 3?

Of course, everyone would end up at Restless. In a somewhat confusing fashion Restless became transformed into Phase 3. If Lucky's was the stage before Phase 3, then it was obviously Phase 2. But then what was Phase 1? The apartment. A quick visit to Restless to start the night. Hence the confusion. No one was sure what was the initial stage.

The notion of Phase 3 ratified what had long become a foregone conclusion. No one went to Restless anymore until late in the night. However, with the afterhours license, everyone gravitated there once Lucky's closed at 3. But even at 1 on a Saturday morning, the dance floor was pretty empty at Restless.

Some people, expecting the influx at 3:30, would rush over there at 3 or so. But this was considered very uncool. These were people who really didn't appreciate the exquisite symmetry of Lucky's and could not take the requisite chances that the night demanded. Sure you could hedge your bets and go directly to Restless, but if you bet too much with the sure thing, then you were locking yourself out of what really made the night stupendous. Finding that parking place just behind Lucky's. I discovered a special magic by making my way in between the moonlight and the glow of the Westin. This was downtown in all its imposing character. And Lucky's was the jewel of that denizen. It was a both wasteland and

By the time we finally stumbled into Phase 3, there was always the risk that one of the new employees at Restless would not recognize the inherent cool of the late night regulars and not grant us our special privileges. After all we had gambled by eschewing Restless in the beginning of the night and heading for Lucky's. For a very few of us, our privilege went beyond club membership. We were the truly initiated for whom no organization could encompass our true significance. We existed in an almost metaphysical suspension. We floated on air. When recognized for our rightful position in the hierarchy, we were almost absorbed into the inner sanctum. This description really captures the ordeal of entry because after we were inside, we'd look at each other and wonder why we bothered.

Link seemed to extol the whole process. He thought of himself as a trailblazer even in his coining of the term *Phase 3*. In fact, he lagged very much behind the cresting wave. He had recently arrived from Memphis and was eager to establish himself as a fixture on the Atlanta scene. He was like so many newcomers who had a plan to infiltrate. They all used Lucky's as the backdoor to assert their new vision for club life. In a sense none of them were much different than their predecessors. Just as the VC had replaced the Imperial Set. The VC felt their reign to be short as they were replaced by the Buford Kids. And so it went on down the line.

In a sense, no one has any special understanding what made things tick. That's why anyone with a plan could feel himself at the heart of the action. Often for a short while, he made his way. So Link was just an adventurer in a long line of rogues. And he was ready to take his place as the darkness unfolded.

Link believed himself specially endowed for the task. A recent car accident seemed to give him psychic powers. At least, he felt that way. Even with the headaches and occasional blackouts, the upside seemed to offer him a unique destiny. He felt these powers alone were enough to ingratiate himself to the scene.

If Link was ready for Restless, there were questions whether Restless was ready for Link. He could make his presence known in that brief transitional moment from Lucky's to Restless. But his sluggish mannerisms hardly made him a necessary player in the action-filled late Saturday hi jinks. And he seldom appeared during the week to take up the slack. For the time being, he needed to content himself with supplying the necessary footnote to the night. That was that.

THE WEEKDAY GROUP

If the Imperial Set had been an exclusive club, the newcomers longed to shine with the same kind of brilliance as the gods of old. The Imperial Set no longer reigned at Restless the way that they had in the earlier days. All that action had been a only a short fling. Besides, the Imperial Set had long been dispersed with the prominence of Lucky's. They had shifted their allegiances downtown. Restless had been abandoned in favor of the latest takers. The Weekday Group emerged when a group of Lucky's regulars wanted to assert their commitment to going out far and above the apparently more hip crowd downtown. They naturally settled into the weekdays, hence their name.

The Weekend Group were far more pedestrian in their origins than the Imperial Set. And their ambitions were far more limited. The artists and fashion designers were quickly replaced by abdicated prom queens and

They had none of the same commitment to decadence as was observed in Thea or KÉ. But there were willing to put their careers on the line just so that they might be thought of as the latest in cool. Even if their fashions never reflected that same panache, they could be sure to put their bodies on the line for the pleasure wars.

Shed their blood

If I had some doubts about my powers to influence the scene
cross over to the
cross over to the underworld

night has a special power to transform sexuality

9:30 AM
either had experienced the transformation
or something inherent had been robbed from me

MAKE UP

If the eyes were the window to the soul, the face was the convenient mask to protect this passageway. With the sculpture of emotion, it could be shaped and reformed into a distinct

essence. Even personality could be transformed by the minute changes of gesture and feeling. Once the face began to float down the gentle currents of metamorphosis, the soul was whiled away by the journey. Looking at oneself in the mirror, the self adapted to the new being. Age, identity, even gender suffered the changes of the artist's brush.

Ultra's Death Queen offered an image to stop any observer in his tracks. I watched him and longed for that unique ability to mesmerize with a glance. He seemed to have stepped off the screen of a silent movie. Time froze all around him. It was with this impression that I was inspired to pull out the powder and the brush. I needed to evoke the sharp lines of seduction that formed the aura surrounding this marvel.

From the moment that I donned the face paint, I entered this alternate reality. It was a place that the Imperial Set courted. And it was a torrid locale where Ultra basked. Now the spotlight was turned hard on me. If Ultra had already noticed me haunting the shadows, he was particularly struck by my emergence. My eyes seemed to flutter in mid-air even as I moved away. The sharp contrasts were even more hypnotic than Ultra's impression. And he needed to find how a bright star could burn so close to him. There was a special affinity that we now shared.

One night KÉ leaned over to me and remarked, –You're even more frightening than before.

–Of course, I am. I've been to hell and back. It shows in my face.

I felt privileged to have exchanged few words with her. But already she could feel the changing of the guard. She hardly wanted to abdicate. But a new wind had been blowing for quite a while.

Since I knew that my eyes were the key, I took extra care with the shading. This was the art. A yellow gave the eyes depth. A dark purple gave them weight. I also accentuated my cheekbones to achieve that gaunt look so desired by Ultra. I hardly suffered under the Death Queen's regime. But I met the same prerequisites with the pale of the face. With my tight leathers and flowing shirt, I looked ready to face any opponent in a duel. And in a meditative night, I might take the air and fly from room to room. My vampyric transformation was complete.

Often when I put on the make up, I could feel myself slip beyond the mirror. The requirements of image caused me to abandon the any hesitation on my part. This was the preeminence of being. This force that burned inside me. All ambiguities seemed to fade once I committed myself to the mask. I was now simply who I appeared to be. There was no longer the questions about the will. Words lost on the lips, too afraid to speak. Everything was said succinctly by the change. And I left behind any allegiance to the world around me. I was committed to the journey, and I would not turn back.

Once I underwent the change, the electricity started to spread all around me. I went from being the witness to the witnessed. I balanced these roles in the giant mirror upstairs at Lucky's. I looked down at my shadow and followed it to its merging with my reflection. What I had always seen was starting to be observed by everyone else. And I took care to evoke this effect. As they watched I pirouetted across the floor. Each spin, each leap corresponded to an intersection of these vertiginous angles flowing from mask to reflection and back to gesture. I rang in the night.

You could feel the wave as we rolled into Restless from Lucky's. We commandeered the big table. Meaningless chatter blended with the music. The Weekday Group tried to assert their place. But they filled out the table. It was as if we were waiting for something. Everyone wanted to capture the infinite joy and madness of Lucky's. But we were already teetering off the edge of the world right here.

–What are we waiting for?

Restless had none of that danger that was the flirtation of the night. It just seemed as if we were doing a terrible and premature post-mortem.

–Is he coming?

I looked at them. I was already there. What was missing?

Link had ushered in the crowd. But his was now a faint voice lost in the crowd. Others tried to pipe up. They wanted to risk their identity for a name. Or a memorable phrase.

–Did you say that?

–I'm just repeating what I've heard.

The reports still circulated around Portia and Ultra. And if they weren't here yet, it still wasn't happening.

–Did he raise the dead tonight?

–He was the dead tonight.

The music refused to cooperate with our mood. Another light dance number got everyone shaking in the other room. We all held to our seats. None of us would give in to the mediocre clamor. We would be fortunate to hear a song reminiscent of the days of the Cube. The producer's art had already trumped the dance floor grooves. So we let them have their brief minutes while we contemplated eternity.

Ultra had performed by his sheer negativity. Sure he was working by picking up glasses and returning them to the bar. But for a brief second, he stood completely still so that his existence became perfectly thin and he just disappeared. It was the negative crossing over into non-existence.

–I saw it. I mean I didn't see it.

And even if none of us had observed the phenomenon, we all believed that we had. So we waited for Ultra with more anticipation.

When Portia made it through the doors, there was this low roar all everywhere. It was about to happen. Once Ultra appeared, there would be no distractions. Every eye would be focused on him.

–He's getting off soon.

It was an announcement with theological overtones. His appearance would necessarily occur in the next few moments. Belief extended over the room. Nothing had approached this anticipation since the early days of KÉ. And in a way this was bigger. KÉ had only tempted Olympus. This was the real thing. The Imperial Set had always craved such a transcendence. They had celebrated. But nothing really approached that fervor.

It may have been more upsetting that Ultra had nothing to do with the Imperial Set. Ultra wanted more than a costume party. He was in touch with a supernature. He did more than dabble in magic. He lived in the cold wilderness of the beyond.

When he finally made his way into Restless, hearts missed a beat.

–He is here!

A path seemed to open from the other room all the way to our table.

–I saw you at Lucky’s. You were even more frightening than I was. Who are you?

He was about to sit with us. And he was addressing me. More than his sleight of hand, he was impressed by my power.

–Sit down. You are among friends.

Ultra, The Titans, Jaz, Crucial—we were the new breed. We all live in the underworld. We could feel the electricity crackle when we heard our music call us to the journey. We had all accepted that vocation.

THE FACE

The regulars at Lucky’s were already somewhat aware of my metamorphosis. But all of its import was integrated in the wonderful magic that was Lucky’s. Everyone tried to add to the spectacle. If I was more provocative, it only propelled a general feeling so that I became only one performer among many. I may have been more observant. I may have offered a flamboyance. Both Ultra and I offered a new symbolism to the experience. We were both creatures of the world beyond the mirror. That outrageousness was expected.

It was only when my face was displayed on poster form that the significance donned on the crowd.

–Do you live here?

–We’re visiting for now.

Dissect was to play a show in three weeks. Everyone felt that they were being visited by a prophetic apparition. And I played along. I was willing to offer them the expected promise. Lucky’s was already teeming with the curious. Our show would fit nicely in the calendar. For the few weeks of anticipation, the face loomed over the crowd with even more suggested than we could ever deliver. But that would work in my favor. Even those who missed the show would remember the face. In fact, our performance would have little to do with the actual events going on here. My true performance occurred night after night. The stage execution would only be a vague attempt at capturing all this excitement in our music. It was not quite the same.

The poster allowed me to live a greater existence. And I adapted to the new power. I was already surpassing Ultra. Ultra had given me credibility. He did not dabble. He lived in darkness. He risked his existence. And benefitted from his casting and his script. He performed the role in the flickering lights of Lucky’s. And now I would carry on that legacy on stage.

I now spent my time putting into effect the appropriate synthesis for the evening. My studied image would undergo transformation in the mirror. I filled the canvas at home or in the car. At times, I almost went off the road by concentrating on the face in the mirror and missing the changes on the road. Nevertheless, my realization started to seem complete. It had worked from idea to image. And now this image attained a universality. It linked my idea with the ideas of everyone else.

The brilliance of the poster could not be overestimated. It made me appear *WANTED* for my crimes. This added to the mystique. Ultra had already provoked a new kind of thinking about how the phantoms were finally being liberated in the night air. Everyone had been waiting for a presence like Ultra’s. But now his function seemed clearer. He was paving the way. And it was my obligation to take up the mantel and carry it further. Ultra had called me to action. Now

I was ready.

This was about more than will. At first, I did not recognize how deeply committed that I was to this transformation. It was the very thing that took me out of myself and made me fully aware of the power that had already been pulsing in my veins. I had undergone this transformation. But I thought that it was something that had only occurred on the surface. It was now clear that I was surrendering to a process. This was the pull that I had already felt in the night. And it was now more powerful than anything. I could not resist as it was now part of me.

The poster bore testament to that force that moved through these sites. I was now only a vessel for its currents. I had been taken from my complacency and given over to a vigilance. The photo said as much. It spoke for the desperation in my face. I had already seen the future. And anyone who observed my image knew as much. The photograph had captured the trajectory of the metamorphosis. It explained the story for anyone who wanted to take the time and absorb its message.

For a while, I wondered about the bizarre effects. Was I ready for what was happening? It would not have been an exaggeration to observe the impending cataclysm. I thought that I was only a witness to the coming changes. Instead, the shift was focused on my actions. And I was hardly doing anything.

The power of the night had been obvious to me. I surrendered to its energies. This was something new. I was being asked to marshal these forces to take the process to the next stage. Only my efforts could apply intention to the spectacle that already swirled around me. I hardly felt up to the task.

PHASE 3: THE AFTERLIFE

Hugh rather curiously posed the question, –What if Phase 1 is life?

There was an unintended genius in his inquiry. That made Phase 2 a sure and excruciating death. And Phase 3 was certainly the afterlife. This dip into a life after the life was only apparent after a few lengthy nights at Restless. It wasn't just that nightlife was raised the apex. The daytime began to see this faded thing. It yielded readily to the abstract dictates of the night. Even work was only a delimited set of tasks that prepared for the inevitable.

there was no escape from this morass

He had been to the other side. The devil had come to our house

THE DATE

I'm standing near the benches in the back of Restless. It is as if I'm hardly here.

–Jeanne, what are you doing here?"

–You're not going to believe me. I'm on a date.

Come on! Please!

–He brought you here. Doesn't he realize it could turn into a real mess here?

–He's getting me drinks right now.

There is no rescue possible from HERE. She is not alerted to the secret. Jeanne is fighting for that morsel of time that can be spirited away from the Master Hades. And she feels that she is doing just that. But for what she has taken away, she will have to give back in the form of servitude. Torture. Commitment to public performance.

She is trying to create a private moment. But it is already way more public than her previous experience. This is her date.

–He bought me flowers.

NO YEARS, NO DATES, NO NUMBERS

amnesia

time is eternal here

go out on a date

take you number to plan to come here

THE BACKLASH

If there was an early reaction against Lucky's, it was voiced by Pat. He found the garish ostentation of Lucky's in stark contrast to the more Spartan style that he had marked out for himself at Restless. With the social butterflies having vacated the location, he was free to assert his new program. He also reestablished the more decidedly gay character of Restless. Lucky's was still too much of a mix for him. He felt that his sexual identity got lost in the sea of heteros. The management at Restless was gay. Most of the employees were gay. And it flamed up in Midtown so the question of pride was clearly an issue.

Pat's attitude was clearly more polemical than the other habitues. He wasn't the sort to cruise Piedmont Park. You would never catch him in flagrante delicto in the park woods. And he frowned upon Mark's crush on the underage Wayne. "It's totally illegal. It just gives us the wrong kind of reputation." But he used Restless to assert his lifestyle. While other gays might be more comfortable in one of the traditional bars along the strip, Pat was forging a new culture. He invited others to follow. While he may have not been flamboyant enough to start a movement, he offered a constant role model for the more committed at the club. Slightly fashion-conscious, but not devoted to the mirror, he was young, fit, and confident. he served as a an occasional confident to [Bobby designer from Indiana

He and his friends would react quite negatively to the new Janet Jackson. They felt pretty much the same way for anything else on the mainstream dance charts. They were all hoping to hear something like the new Smiths album.

The backlash would never yield. There was really nothing that Lucky's could offer them. Restless was in sought-after corner of darkness where they could act out the liberation. The crew would twist away in the flashing lights. Each stab in the air was concrete and desperate. This was a new history. It was articulated one second at a time. They fashioned a new mind out of a new body. Their constant work proceeded without rest.

Lucky's implied promise. It lived on mystery and ideals. Those who prowled Restless

early in the night consoled themselves with a meager reality. They would not bargain it away for the magic of downtown. They clung to their rewards in Midtown. They could walk from their apartments to the club. This itself was a blessing enough. Even if the future would offer a more golden rescue, it was always the result of a constant application. They traded sacrifice for the immediate. It was stark, but it left no doubts about the present. On the other hand, those lost in Phase 3 played a different game with time—much more radical and upsetting.

The Dead-Enders were committed to Restless and its fading glory. This was enough. Many had struggled to assert their sexual identity against the mainstream. That was a sufficient challenge. Everything else needed to be more automatic. They could never imagine spending hours just to ready to go out. Putting on the right face. Finding the perfect outfit. Getting all the players in place. All they needed to do was show up. Restless and the night would take care of the rest.

They were cynics. They had been deluded by myths when they were children. And they had overcome the illusions to become themselves. They weren't going to exchange one wonderland for another.

I KISS MY FATE

—Ganglia doesn't want to believe that there's a girl who won't go home with him.

—You know what his motto is *If you don't want to fuck me, fuck off.*

—It's surprising that he still can get away with what he does.

—There's always some naive type hanging around waiting for someone to say hello. He just picks them and out and makes them feel special. I think it's because he plies girls with drugs.

—I thought it was that charm of his. He gets close enough to whisper in their ear. Then he just pours on the flattery.

—He thinks it's his chemistry.

—I know what it is. His body just radiates passion.

“I guess it's a little intimidating to watch new blood walk in the door of Restless and see him just scoop her up.

—You want to believe that she'd see through his charm.

—He's tall and thin. He's debonair. He wears clothes well. He has a continental flair. If you get too close, it would probably take a year before the magic wore off.

Everyone could see that same thing about him. Some guys longed for those suave mannerisms. Others just wanted him to go away.

—I think that he has a tendency to get in other people's business.

—You know when you first see him, you think that he's at the center of the action. And he does want to leave that impression. But something else is going on her that has nothing to do with him at all.

Rose has all the inside info about Mr. Wonderful.

—Sure I found him friendly at first. He has his whole routine. He flatters a girl. He whispers in her ear. He starts to touch her. Then she just feels overwhelmed. One kiss and she's overwhelmed.

—Were you overwhelmed?

–For about a half hour. And then it dawned on me what was going on.

–What do you mean?

–His kisses seemed so gentle. I just fell into his arms. But as it began to get more intense, I was having trouble holding back. But I didn't want to go home with him. When he realized that, he started to treat me like shit. He went from slobbering his kisses all over me to cursing at me.

Her kisses were sweet. She went from being all huddled up to stretching out on the couch. Her long legs hung over the side. With each kiss she seemed to refresh herself.

–How long can this last, I wondered to myself.

Forever. She didn't hold back. As if there was an element of trust.

I first met Rose with her friend Sherry. To be honest, Sherry was the one who actually struck my fancy. Her dark eyes, her luxurious black hair, and her striking features made her a joy to behold. I was truly overcome when I first saw her. I can't remember whether she was actually with a guy. Or she just talked about some guy that she was with.

They had seen the image. They were drawn to me. And I remember that give and take between Sherry and I. But Rose was part of the same team. So I accepted the resolution of things. Rose had her own appeals. It's just that Sherry seemed to know what was really going on. She almost had the world on a string. Rose was lulled on that slow boat heading aimlessly on the river.

–I love to kiss.

How long could these kisses sustain either of us?

The answer came much easier to me a couple of weeks later. I arrived early hoping to see Rose. She was hanging around Felipe. It was really nothing. I almost wanted it to end that way.

–I loved kissing you. We're not going to do it anymore.

I really didn't have an answer. I couldn't. Not after seeing her with Felipe.

I had suspected that she was going out with Felipe. Something more steady. This was how I first saw her. In the distance by the bar talking with him. I wanted to get to know her then. But I thought that they might be together. So I didn't do anything.

Only after that, the magical Thursday night at Lucky's with Rose and Sherry.

Ah Sherry.

THE LONG NIGHT

–What are you, gay or straight?

–What do you want.

The night started to open up long and deep. I could feel myself falling in.

THE PERFORMANCE

–*You know too much now to tell the story.*

–*That hardly diminishes the fact that I have to tell it.*