

## The Chimera.

HOMER SIMPSON of Detroit (no relation to the cartoon character Homer Simpson) was the first person who saw the Chimera that summer of 1980. It was July 16, the next to last day of the Republican National Convention. A news junkie, Homer was enjoying his first cup of coffee over the *Detroit Free Press* when the storm sewer grate in front of his house started spewing steam. Homer went out to investigate. Before he reached it, the grate popped off and, in the expanding hot fog, a grotesque, muscular, four-legged creature materialized. It had three animal heads – a lion’s up front, a goat’s in the middle, and a serpent’s at end of its tail. All three heads looked right at Homer. One of its mouths, the lion’s, told Homer that his lottery ticket would be a winner. “*The realm of fulfillment awaits thee,*” the mouth said. Fire blasted from the mouth of the goat’s head, and the Chimera raced off in the direction of downtown. The stench of methane hung in the air.

Shaking his head, Homer went back inside and called the city to complain about the sewer system. He had no illusion that they would do anything anytime soon. He returned to his coffee and the *Freep*. An above-the-fold, front page headline proclaimed: “Storm wreaks wide damage, blackens sky.” Hmm, thought Homer Simpson. Maybe that explains the sewer creature. The storm blew it in.

The Chimera roamed Detroit for the rest of the summer. Time after time the scenario was the same. A cloud of steam, appearance of the Chimera, and its lofty prophecies:

*Before the sun sets, the love for which thou quests shall quest for thee.*

*The gods shall smile on thy family.*

*Tread tenderly and grasp good fortune. Tomorrow, treasure shall fill thine abode.*

*The scales of destiny shall tip in thy favor.*

*Thy power begets thy fate, and Fate shall beget thy power.*

*Chosen for healing thou art.*

*Luna shall bring the sleep thou craves.*

*Cast thy lot with me.*

The animal control office went on alert. The city dispatched crews to search the sewers, but all they found were rats. Swirling shapes rose from the hot shimmering pavement. Something alive seemed to form, but when the crews reached the spot, the shimmering had moved down the road. They could no more catch the Chimera than dogs could catch the moon.

Despite the Chimera's fearsome appearance, fiery exhalations and noxious odor, Detroiters fed it their dreams. Detroiters longed for the happiness that the Chimera foretold. Indeed, many were soothed, and some tripped ecstatic. Others became less happy and angry.

At the Simpson house, Homer kicked back after work on his porch with a cold one and the *Detroit News*, the second front page recounting yet another day's reports of Chimera sightings. There seemed to be more than one of the creatures, especially in the

Cass Corridor. "Good Lord," Homer said out loud. "All the guns in Detroit, why hasn't someone shot it by now? Someone ought to do something about that thing."

His words were barely out of his lips when the clippity-clop of horse hooves startled him so badly that he knocked over his Stroh's. In the street, a white winged horse slowed, trotted to Homer, and stopped. Astride the horse sat a middle-aged, balding, round-faced man with owl eyebrows and a fat cigar. In his lap nested a lemur. The equestrian addressed Homer: "You have summoned me?"

"Not me," said Homer.

"Yes, you. You distinctly implored, 'someone ought to do something about that thing.' I am that someone. Allow me to introduce myself, sir. Cyril Connolly."

"You sound British."

"Truly, sir. An observation, sir, you do not appear to be Greek."

"You trying to get to Greektown?"

The lemur purred dismissively. Cyril Connolly, as if he hadn't heard the question, drew deeply on his cigar and exhaled a cloud of realism. "You may beckon the Chimera now, if you will."

"The what?"

"The Chimera," said Cyril Connolly, "'that thing' of which you wish to be rid. I am here to dispatch the Chimera." He sounded full of promise.

"Where's your gun?"

"Firearms will not be needed," said Cyril Connolly.

Homer crossed his arms. "This is Detroit. You ain't dispatchin' nuthin' 'roun' here, no how, without no gun."

"I will conquer the Chimera with reality and my wit, as Pegasus" - he nodded to the winged horse - "is my witness and Polyp" - he nodded at the lemur - "is my scribe." Polyp's tail twirled above him as if he were writing.

"You may now call the Chimera."

"I may now call the police!"

"You need merely state a desire, and the Chimera will come to you."

Homer looked blankly at Cyril Connolly. Polyp's tail floated laconically. Cyril Connolly frowned, his eyebrows dipping to the bridge of his nose.

"Forgive me this estimation, sir; your station in life appears menial."

"What the - menial! My station in life! I'm on track to make foreman!"

"Thank you," said Cyril Connolly. "That will suffice for an entreaty. I'm sorry to have manipulated you in that manner." Polyp stood like a periscope, his reddish-orange eyes searching the horizons.

From the storm sewer grate in front of Homer Simpson's house, steam shot and the grate flew off. Pegasus reared. The Chimera took shape and the serpent mouth addressed Homer. *Thy benefactors shall bestow upon thee an esteemed and gainful title.*

"Poppycock!" exclaimed Cyril Connolly. "For all you know, you could be the Village Idiot. In the past the clods were the peasants, now the brute mass of ignorance is urban. The village idiot walks in Leicester Square." \*

*Today I shall prune the vine, intoned the Chimera, such that thou shalt reap grapes of pleasure tomorrow.*

“No, no, no,” said Cyril Connolly. “Permit me to quote Sainte-Beuve’s *Mes Poisons*. ‘The wine of remorse is trodden from the grapes of pleasure’.”

*Seek pleasure, and pleasure shall seek thee! Thou shalt pluck feathers of prosperity from the wings of wealth!*

“Nonsense!” sniffed Cyril Connolly, tapping ash off his stogy. “How valuable unhappiness can be; melancholy and remorse form the deep leaden keel which enables us to sail into the wind of reality; we run aground sooner than the flat-bottomed pleasure-lovers, but we venture out in weather that would sink them, and we choose our direction.” \*

The Chimera dwindled in the barrage of words. Polyp’s calligraphy was exquisite.

*Return to nature, said the Chimera, and nature shall return thy love.*

“Who said anything about nature?” Homer asked.

“Well stated,” said Cyril Connolly to Homer Simpson, and to the Chimera: “You’re drifting. I need rebut you nevertheless. Nature doesn’t love us. Nature doesn’t care about us. Return to nature for a few days and doubtless you will pray for civilization. For our part, we’ve obscured our nexus with the physical world. If another learned quote may be excused, from Father Hopkins, ‘nor can foot feel, being shod.’ ”

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The Chimera shrank some more.

*Within the fortnight, life dawns anew for thy taking. Carpe diem!*

*"Diem perdidit,"* retorted Cyril Connolly. "Another day wasted."

The Chimera seemed as tired as its rhetoric. "Cheer up, things could be worse."

"I cheered up," Homer said, "and things got worse." Cyril Connolly and Pegasus beamed approvingly. Polyp wrote an exclamation point. The Chimera drooped and shrunk to the size of a cat.

*Mounted one,* said the Chimera in all three of its voices. *Thou differ not from the mortals. Thine ambitions doom thy potential and condemn thee to bitterness. Thou art a venomous and cursed orator. Thy failure and sorrow shalt boil from thine own mouth.*

Cyril Connolly hung his head. "That's the first true thing you've said. But no matter my failings. I refuse allegiance to your trumperies. You are garish and vulgar. You are delusion, figment and fantasy, a banal bromide. The record is writ. Q.E.D. BE GONE!"

The Chimera was diminished to the size of a rodent. With one well-placed kick, Pegasus knocked it back into the storm sewer. Cyril Connolly pressed Polyp into his lap and spurred Pegasus. With a majestic spread of alabaster wings, they took to the air in the direction of Greektown.

Homer plopped in his chair, picked up the *News*, and rested his feet on the porch rail. He didn't know the city had a flying white horse. Now I've seen everything, he

thought. Keeping no illusions, he could not be disillusioned. It was enough that his lottery ticket had been a winner.

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\*Cyril Connolly, *The Unquiet Dead*.

\*\*Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur."