

Kirby S. Holland

“Jericho: Spring & Lafayette”

1953

Oil on canvas

68 x 46”

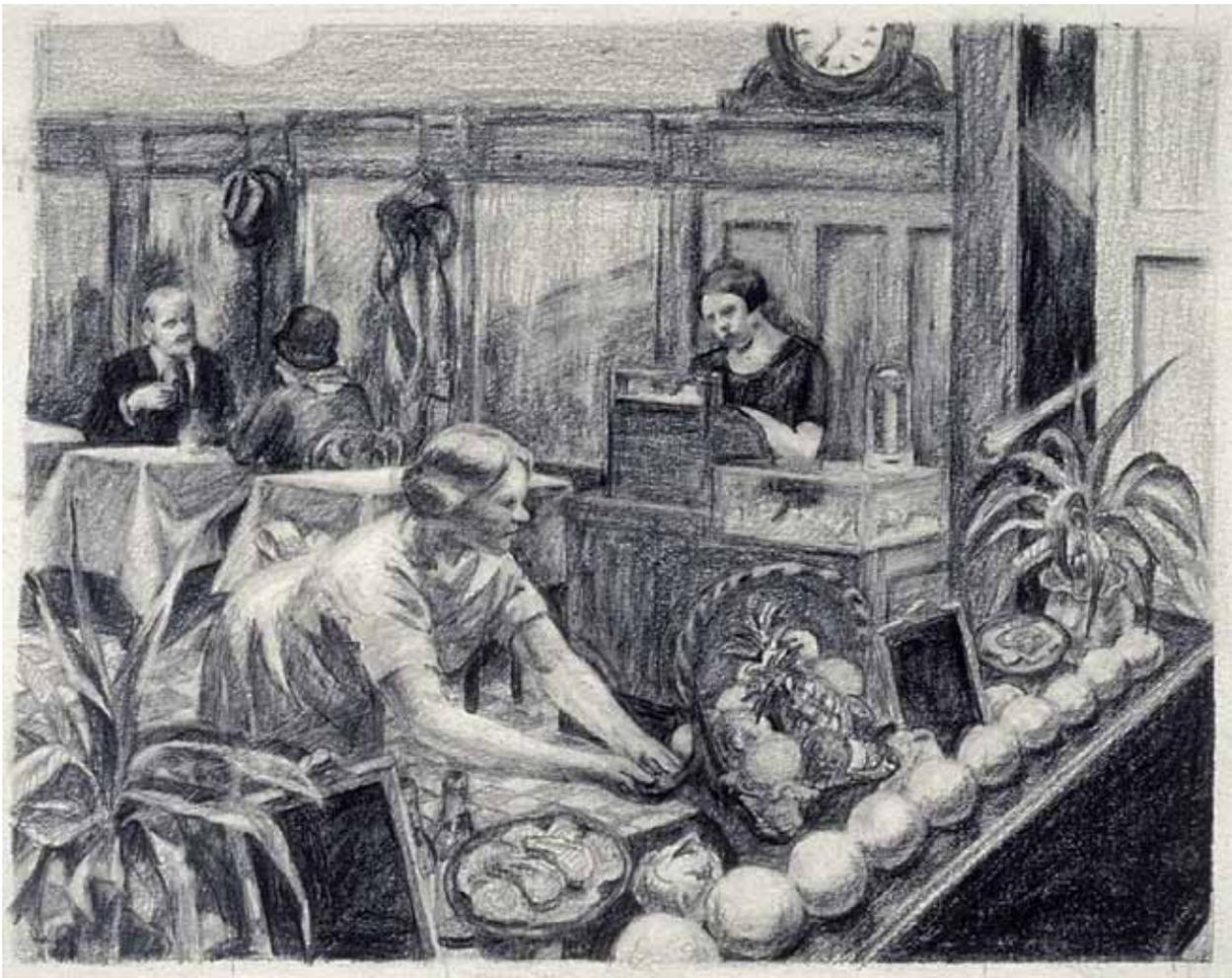
Estes Carey Collection, Madisonville, Tennessee

Part ii

# Smashin' Pumpkins

*"For some goddamn reason Republicans can't write."*

—HENRY LUCE



Kirby S. Holland  
"After Hopper, 'Tables for Ladies,' 1930"  
1952  
Pencil on paper  
5 x 6"  
Color photograph of lost original

Opposite:

Kirby S. Holland  
Halftone typeset test: "Kool/Look"  
ca. 1952-55  
Dye on acetate  
1 x 5"  
Ross Alexander Collection, Las Cruces, New Mexico

25.

# The Tikis Are Angry

*Am trying to be a good guy, but it's a difficult trade.  
What you win in Boston, you lose in Chicago.*

—ERNEST HEMINGWAY

KooLJooK

“Barkeep—settle a bet. What’s the name of this dump? The Cool Cool or the Cool Look?”

As he glanced at the bar to gauge Gundersen’s level of belligerence, Kirby was only half listening to Springer, ranting next to him at the crowded table. The neon sign flashed rhythmically from the narrow window set high in the dark-paneled wall, edging the tops of their rattan chairs first with lime and then magenta.

“If you’re always thinking about it it can’t possibly happen because then you won’t be surprised. The bomb can’t go off if you’re expecting it.”

Kirby turned back to Springer. Everyone from the bullpen was there, crowding three tables. Tinsel and other Christmas decorations hung off the bamboo growing in planters set around the bar. Gundersen dragged a chair over and shoehorned in next to Kirby.

“So when Danny changed . . . whattayacallit—motifs—what’d they give you for that hoity sign?”

“It was just a quick idea,” Kirby said. “I made him a matchprint at Lyon’s one night.”

“How much? They got it in neon in all the windows.”

“20 bucks.”

“God, you’re an idiot.”

“And you’re a drunk, so we’re even. Let me buy you a Mai Tai so I can finally break that twenty.”





Kirby S. Holland

"Barn upstate"

1955

Ink on paper

4 x 6"

Ruth Traheme Collection, Boston, Massachusetts

# Coming Attraction

*"OUCH!"* —SHEMP HOWARD

Kirby was sketching panel layouts for another of Grell's six-pagers, "The Tomb on Blood Moor," a one-shot running in "General Jones—Ghost Hunter," when the subway doors clattered open. It was 2:30 on a Thursday morning, and the car was empty except for a sleeping man tented inside his overcoat. Kirby had been drawing in an all-night diner, his meal of chicken potpie and coffee pushed to one side as he worked on ideas for a new painting. When he realized the time, he'd packed up and headed home, using the ride to begin layouts for the story.

A slash of pale leg against scarlet-trimmed black wool caught his eye. She sat down catty-cornered from him; he couldn't see her eyes under the brim of her burgundy felt hat, but her chin was smooth, her throat lithe, and the dress was beyond nice, heading somewhere into sumptuous. Emerging from wine-red heels, her ankles were long and slim, leading to longer legs in sheer stockings. The dark coat hugged a figure right off the cover of a true-crime mag, confirming his initial flash—gorgeous, and stinking with money. Through soft, gray leather gloves he noticed a bulge on her left ring finger.

Kirby burst out laughing.

The brim lifted and he saw dark eyes narrow with anger. She was in her mid-twenties, at most. This only made Kirby laugh harder.

"What's so funny? You some kind of drunk?"

He tried to stop laughing, but coughed until his face turned red. The train rattled and the car darkened for a moment as it switched tracks; light bulbs in metal cages strung along the tunnel sent shifting trapezoids of yellow light bounding through the car. When the overhead lights returned, Kirby wiped a tear from his eye and said, "I'm sorry. Really. I'm not trying to be rude. But it's three in the morning on a train to Queens, on a weekday no less, and there you are—this . . . stupefying—I mean it—

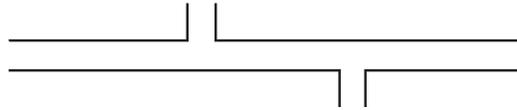
just heart-stopping, gorgeous lady on a train to nowhere. C'mon, it's . . . ridiculous. You're all by yourself, and you're pissed off, but you should be in a big red Lincoln going somewhere—anywhere but Queens. We both know that. I could make up a story right now of how you should be married to a millionaire and not on this rattletap train. And no, I'm not drunk."

Her eyes traversed his clothes and came to rest on his sketchpad.

"Go ahead then," she said.

"Go ahead what?"

"Tell me the story. Tell me the story of my life."



"So, yeah, in school, before the war, I did some life drawing—it's the greatest thing in the world if you want to know how to draw. I still go to classes occasionally, to keep my hand loose."

"What's it like to draw naked women?" she asked, lighting another a cigarette. Under the diner's blunt fluorescents her violet eyes were a fulcrum between cream skin and raven hair. "Are they beautiful?"

"Some are, I guess. But the thing is, there's nothing harder than drawing the figure—man or woman—because everybody already knows the shape. So you can sense in your own body if the proportions are off or something, even if you can't explain it. You feel it."

"But is it sexy? Do you enjoy looking at the girls?"

"Sure, for the first couple minutes or so. But it's hard work, so you're concentrating—how many heads high is she? How long's her arm compared to her thigh, her feet to her waist? The proportions. Then the shapes in relation to each other, the curves, the angles. Plus, you have the body in relation to the background, and that's a whole other headache."

"Suppose it was me up there on the—the pedestal? Suppose it's me up there with nothing on, and you're drawing me?"

"It's not a pedestal—just a wooden platform so the whole class can see you. But if it's you up there, sure—I'm gonna notice. Like I said, you're a looker. But once I really get working, I'd just be interested in the shape of your hair and where it falls across your shoulders—you have really dark hair and it's thick and full, so that would make a great shape against your white back—and how that would lead into the curve of your spine and then into the bend of your legs—the composition. You follow?"

She ladled a spoonful of sugar into her cup. Then another. She stirred the coffee for a moment before looking up.

"You're a real sweet-talker, you know that?"

"I'm not trying to be," said Kirby. "I like talking about art, I guess." He nodded at her diamond. "When's the big day?"

She covered it with her other hand, the cigarette angled between long, tapered fingers. "I haven't decided yet. Like you said—I'm a looker. Maybe I want to look around a bit. He'll wait."

"Doesn't sound very promising. Does he know?"

"If he doesn't, he should. He's old and wise. And he doesn't push his luck—he's already used up a good bit of it. Just when he'd started to despise his wife, she took ill and died. Now his son and daughter despise me in turn—Prudence is older than I am."

She lifted her arm and twirled her wrist, the cigarette tracing orange circles in the air. "Monica Hrynczewski, the brassy young secretary from the incorrect side of the 59th Street Bridge, the one who's gonna marry their loaded old man, Brewster Horatio Just, of McKenna, Finch, and Just. I'll admit, though, that we probably should have left a bit more bereavement time before announcing our engagement." She looked over the rim of her cup. "Do I shock you?"

Kirby shrugged. "I've heard worse. He didn't kill her, did he?"

"Good lord, no! Jesus—you're a blunt one, aren't you? Like I said, he was just lucky."

She seemed to swish a thought around in her mouth with the lukewarm coffee.

"A girl could maybe get to like you, I think. And who would that lucky lady be?"

"No one. I'm recently divorced."

Monica waited. Kirby took another swig of coffee.

"What was she like?"

Another shrug. "Nice enough. She just wanted me to live a life I couldn't live."

"What kind of life was that?"

"I don't really know. Just not any one I wanted."