



THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK  
*(and Other Short Stories)*

*R. J. Stanchfield*

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AND OTHER STORIES**

**R. J. STANCHFIELD**

# The Little Black Book and Other Stories

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## PROLOGUE: MY CLOSE PROXIMITY TO MARK TWAIN

**IT** ALL STARTED with “The Devil’s Racetrack” and why a certain character in Mark Twain’s story goes by the name Stanchfield Garvey.

While Stanchfield isn’t my first name, it is my last name.

Twain switched it around, and why I don’t know. Garvey Stanchfield seems just as good as Stanchfield Garvey. But again, I know for certain he took the last name of Stanchfield and made it a character’s first name.

Here’s why I know all this.



Fifty years ago, a man by the name of Roger Stanchfield published the Stinchfield Stanchfield Family book. It was basically the genealogy of the Stinchfield and Stanchfield families, one family with two names. I’m personally happy that I got the Stanchfield name because, as it was, I got mocked by other kids who called me “Stinkfield” or “a Stinkfield” or “the Stinkfield” many times. I’m sure had they had raised me in the same New York City with the name Stinchfield, it would have landed me in jail for murder of that person who called me a “Stinkfield” one too many times. My hope then would have been that they would have given me the death penalty, because without doubt I would not have survived in prison with the Stinchfield name. In actuality, the Stinchfield name came before the Stanchfield name — probably for that same reason, but I don’t know for sure. (Do you think kids called other kids “Stinkfield” a hundred years ago?)

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My branch of the family, and many other Stinchfield family members, adopted the Stanchfield name. There are very few Stinchfield members left because most had the good sense to change the name to Stanchfield ... just to survive.

I have seen Stansfield, which my father adopted for years, and Stanfield, which many adopted. I'm not crazy about the name Stanchfield and have tried to avoid thinking about it most of my life. Even this explanation is more than I can stomach. I also find it rather ironic that, although the Stanchfield name is an old English name, my other primary family names are McGlynn, Quinn and Faulkner — all of which are Celtic. I relate to a Celtic tribal past more than I do to the Anglos or Saxons. Moreover, my grandfather Guy Stanchfield was an O'Teague on his mother's side. I consider myself seven-eighths Celtic.

When the Stinchfield Stanchfield Family book first came out, I treasured reading about all my distant relatives. What I really loved was all the hype that Roger added to certain names and synopses. There were comments about those Stanchfield sons and daughters who became close friends with the indigenous people. Reading between the lines now, I take it to mean they robbed the poor Indians blind. And my heroes who I especially liked were the brave Stanchfields who bit a piece of leather while a cousin or uncle Stanchfield amputated an arm or leg. I know without knowing the guy must have also been drunk out of his mind when it happened.

Aside from these minor champions of the family, there was one Stanchfield who stood out from all the rest. His name was John B. Stanchfield, and he was, curiously, from New York, not from Maine or Minnesota where the two main family branches originated in the United States.

John B. Stanchfield, my great, great something was an attorney. He also ran for Governor in New York State, ran for US Senator from New York, lost both races and then became the leader of the New York State Democratic Party. (Oh, those Democrats, they love making the loser of a major races the leaders of the party ... when will they ever learn?)

John B. Stanchfield's New York City law practice had among its clients the wealthiest people in the United States. His most famous case was that of the son of a railroad tycoon and baron, William Thaw. Harry Thaw murdered the well-known architect Stanford White at Madison Square Garden. It was the "Crime of the Century" claimed many newspapers.

Thaw was expelled from Harvard. He knocked around in New York City, gained a cocaine and morphine addiction, and became a regular at Broadway shows. Thaw fancied chorus girls. So did Stanford White. As the two competed for the company and service of the girls, White made some nasty remarks about Thaw to one of Thaw's girlfriends. She turned a cold shoulder on Thaw and he blamed it on White's remarks. They then both fell in love with the same woman, a chorus girl named Evelyn Nesbit. Thaw used his father's wealth to impress Nesbit and her mother. He bought them gifts, took them on vacations, and did whatever he could to win Evelyn over.

But, I digress.

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My point is that Stanchfield became a good friend of Mark Twain because each of their wives were life-long best friends. They spent many of their days together. Twain also hired Stanchfield from time to time on one legal matter or another. Enter the character, Stanchfield Garvey.

Anyway, when my dad, Herm Stanchfield, spent twenty-plus years on the road with many famous big bands, he labored with his professional name, just as I am also engaged here and now with the same problem. Born Herman Alton Stanchfield, he knew all three names would not cut it in the world of professional entertainment. He tried many different versions of his name for years looking for a name to call himself professionally. Thanks to the internet, I uncovered this truth. I found a number of names he used in the recordings of old songs. I know he went by three last names, Stanchfield, Stansfield and Stanfield. He only used his middle initial, but mostly he never got close to Alton. But he still had to handle “Herman”. I’m not crazy about Ronald, but it is head over heels better than Herman.

He came up with two first names he used, depending upon which big band he was in. The two names were Herb and Stan. He tried Herb for a little while, but too many of his fellow musicians, singers, dancers, and comedians knew him as Herm, so he ditched Herb. He settled on Stan, teamed it with Stanfield and, soon after that, Stansfield. So, if you ever come across an old big band era record, you may find my dad’s name as Stan Stanfield or, more likely, you will see Stan Stansfield.

My dilemma hasn’t been as hard. But it challenged me before I accepted Ronin James Stanchfield, having been born as Ronald James Stanchfield. The state of California took part in my concern. They mucked with my Driver’s License, which renamed me Ronald James Stanfield. I considered having a nom de plume of Ronald Stanfield. The idea lasted 7 or 8 seconds. I thought about Stansfield to honor my father. But Stansfield flew out the window not too long after the Stanfield name. So, I knew I would keep Stanchfield.

But I still had the problem of Ronald and James. I solved it by realizing my favorite author was J. P. Donleavy. That settled it. I would be honest and make my pen name R. J. Stanchfield.

The issue was closed; at least I thought it was closed. But I, R. J. Stanchfield, don’t have a clue about these kinds of things. I even created a Facebook page to promote my writings: R. J. Stanchfield, Storyteller. I chose “storyteller” because the term “author” troubled me. To me, “author” sounds too much like “Arthur”, and I was never fond of the name Arthur. Arthur and Irving as names gave me a lot of trouble as a child. And “storyteller” fit fine, because I’ve told stories on the stoop for years.

But my managing editor, who is helping me transition into becoming a professional writer, asked me what I wanted as a first name. I avoided the question because I had, months ago, settled upon R. J. Stanchfield.

He pushed back on my stalling tactics.

James would be okay; But what do I do with Ronald. Growing up, I was perfectly fine with my friends, my mom and dad calling me Ronnie. But as I hit puberty, Ronnie wasn’t



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cutting it as a “man’s sounding name”. I asked my friends Pete and John to please call me Ron, knowing it wouldn’t take too long to get everybody thinking Ron and not Ronnie.

One more thing, but it is important to mention: my email account at Hamptons.com saved the day. Almost thirty years ago, while living in Southampton, email came into my existence. Because I had my classic Mac, I needed to get an email account. I called Hamptons Online, and they were giving out free email accounts. “Ron” and “Ronnie” got chosen by others. Reasoning I lived in the Hamptons, I asked for “Ronin” as in “Ron in the Hamptons.” I chose the email address Ronin@Hamptons.com. That was my very first email address, and it is an address I still use regularly.

When the managing editor pushed a little harder, it justified Ronin. It is familiar. It is a version of Ron. More, it is a Gaelic name. And that did it!

I went for it. My professional name will be Ronin James Stanchfield.

You now know the whole story on how I went from Ronald James Stanchfield to my new professional name Ronin James Stanchfield, also known as R. J. Stanchfield via Mark Twain. If you don’t believe me, just ask Samuel Langhorne Clemens ... whoever he is.

## IT WAS CLARKE SMITH'S FAULT

**IT WAS MY SECOND SUMMER IN SOUTHAMPTON.** We had moved into a small country cottage on a bucolic street. Halsey Street ran from Hill Street all the way over to the large water tower. It was not a through street, ending at the tower; it was a street lined with trees.

The houses were forty to fifty feet from each other. Each parcel was a quarter of an acre. Everybody had a backyard, and the backyard they had was private. Every house had a car. In every house was a child. It was a young block. Everybody knew everybody else. And everybody watched out for everybody else. My next-door neighbor and my first friend was Blair Poirier. He had a younger brother, Bruce. Bruce had polio and could only walk with braces. He was three years younger than us and so we did not include him. Blair's father, Dick, worked at Hildreth's in Southampton. Mrs. Poirier was a housewife. Women didn't work in those days. It turned out that Blair was a mother's boy and, because I wasn't, I didn't play with him that often. I know his father wanted me to play with him, but I wasn't desirous of spending my time with him because if I wanted to play hard and climb trees and play ball. He was more interested in playing checkers or board games, as he loved his younger brother, so stayed at home with Bruce. My guess is they remained close throughout.

Diagonally across the street was where Clarke Smith lived. He became my second and best summer friend. I didn't realize why then, but I knew that his family and my family were the same with drinking and partying. His mother and father, even though they tended their construction company during the day, loved to go out at night to eat and then to have some cocktails. My mother had taken a job at Saks Fifth Avenue on Main Street in Southampton and worked part-time from 10 AM, so she was very willing to join them each night. By this strange coincidence, they most always went to Herb McCarthy's Bowden Square, where my father

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played and guaranteed that they got a good table near the band and the waiters and the bartender slipped them drinks.

Clarke and I were the benefactors. We could play together, not just during the daytime, but at night too. Though we were six-year-old boys, we took off whenever we had a good idea to do something, and that occurred at least once a week. Otherwise, we sat at his house and played in the den or out back with his pony.

In mid-summer, Clarke's father surprised the family by bringing home the first television set on Halsey Street. It was a Dumont TV, which became the gold standard of the industry in the 1950s. Because I was Clarke's best friend, I got a great seat right in front of the television when the other kids came. We watched Six Gun Playhouse, Buck Rogers, and Little Rascals.

Clarke and I preferred playing with the Bonner girls and Emmie Pierson. They lived across the street from each other three long blocks up Hill Street — a ten-minute walk or a three-minute ride on our bikes. We took our bikes mostly.

My first crush was Emmie Perone. She was blond, and I thought she liked me. That doesn't mean I did or not like the Bonner girls; I did like them.

One time, Clarke and I decided that we should talk the Bonner girls to go into the woods, and then to see if we could talk them into taking off their clothes. It was awkward and, while I wanted to see how a girl looked, for I had heard stories, I didn't push the issue. Clarke had a way with words and, if anybody got them to take off their clothes, Clarke was the one. He was good with words, but not good enough with them to convince the Bonner sisters.

They were much better than both of us at gabbing because, after fifteen minutes, they had convinced both Clarke and me to take our clothes off and when they said "off," ... we took every piece of clothing off.

We had agreed we would take our clothes off first and then they would take off their clothes. But the Bonner girls reneged. More than reneging, they grabbed up our clothes and sprinted off with them, laughing as they went.

We chased the Bonner girls as far and as fast as we could, but without our sneakers there wasn't a chance we could catch them. So here we were, Clarke and me, naked as jaybirds, and stymied as to what we do next. What was worse, neither of us had seen another boy naked and, while I can't speak for Clarke, I can tell you, I wasn't having much fun! I couldn't look at him and I didn't want him looking at me. The only good thing about the predicament we were in was that the part of the woods we were in linked to the woods behind Clarke's house. We only had to cross two streets from this section of the woods to the other section of woods. I knew Clarke knew the way, so off we went, as the Shinnecock Indians had done hundreds of years earlier.

I followed him as best I could but became distracted because I tried not to look at his ass as I was running. A few times I lost him and had to listen for him running past bushes, which made the sound I followed.

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As we reached the edge of the woods on the first street we had to cross, two old ladies stood there jabber-jawing. We watched for a while. Then we sat.

“What should we do?” Clarke asked me.

“We should wait until they finish talking,” I rejoined.

“But what if they talk for an hour?” he asked.

“Then we will wait for an hour,” I said. Our little sit-in reconnaissance took less than five minutes. Without notice, Clarke showed his inability at patience.

“Come on, Ronin,” he said while walking around antsy. “Let’s just run. They’ll never catch us.”

“Do you have no fortitude, Clarke?” I asked.

“I’m going!”

Without finishing the words, he darted out of the woods, balls naked, and ran right through the two women who had been talking, not quite knocking one woman to the ground.

The other woman brushed by Clarke, trying to grab his chest, while the first woman turned and lifted her cane toward him. Within a second, Clarke had made it across the street into the other woods and safety.

It was up to me to get home on my own. Even though the section of woods I was in was the same as the set I had to get to, I recognized the fact that, without Clarke, I may not find my way home for hours. The sun was near setting and it was getting chilly.

Without considering the situation entirely, my conclusion was to run for it. I followed the same path as Clarke had and through the women who were still trying to compose themselves.

The women knew enough to trip the second scoundrel that crossed their path.

Head over heels I fell, over their outstretched canes, and scraped my knee on the road. One woman started to whack me with her stick, while the other lady screamed holy hell at me. I managed to get myself back on my feet and ran after Clarke, who was running and laughing his ass off at the tight spot I had been in.

Clarke and I made it home and hoped we had heard the last of the affair. We never learned what happened to our clothes, as we never dared to see the Bonner girls again.

But three days later, when my mother was home, the two old women knocked on our front door.

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My father had gone downtown to buy reeds for his saxophone, so it was my mother answered the door. I should point out that my mother had already consumed two drinks, for it was a Sunday.

My mother was listening to “Chattanooga Shoe-Shine Boy”. When I saw the two women standing outside the doorway from the hallway window, I went to my room and listened, hoping the music was too loud for my mother to hear the doorbell. I learned that this was a wasted hope.

The women told my mother that her six-year-old son was living in the woods with other six-year-old boys and spending their time frightening old people. My mother responded with silence. I took that as a good sign.

The women told my mother that the boys tried to rob them and that, if it were not for their quick thinking and willingness to thump on the boys, they might be in the hospital right this minute. My mother remained silent.

The women continued to embellish upon their story, suggesting that it was part of a conspiracy of a sort and that only they understand it. During this time, only one of the women was speaking. I could hear the other woman chanting, “They were naked. They were naked. They were balls-ass naked.”

The women built the story so high that my mother couldn’t take it any longer. She broke her silence with the loudest guffaw humankind had ever voiced. It was a special sound: a combination of cackle and hoot with a touch of snorting. My mother continued to giggle to the point whereby, and no bullshit, she began to roll on the floor laughing. She was literally down on the foyer floor laughing her ass off.

I knew the cause was the rye she had been drinking, but her silence didn’t give her away. So the women thought the woman on the floor laughing was just as evil and sinister as her little boy.

They backed away toward the door but didn’t take their eyes off my mother. They reached the door and went outside still staring.

As they walked away from the front door, they left open. I heard one woman say something, “I wonder if we’ll see the little trollop herself running in and out of the woods naked tomorrow or the next day.”

Moments after, my mother composed herself and came to my room.

She looked at me. “Did you go running through the woods naked?” she asked. I looked up from the comic book I was pretending to read.

“No, mom.”

Clarke and I stayed friends throughout our lives, but later we only saw each other now and then. When I owned New Orleans, a nightclub, he owned a place called the Blue-Collar. He

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would occasionally come to my place for a few drinks. I remained friendly and concerned for him and always made sure I treated him respectfully. I learned he had left town and bought a horse farm in upstate New York. He was riding a horse one day, had a heart attack, and died.

Clarke is running naked now through the woods of heaven.

## THE REPLICATION OF LADY TEAL

An Excerpt from The Odd Profession of Jeremy Scratch

**S**OON HUMAN TAXIDERMY will be a practical and profitable business. They will not know it as “Human Taxidermy”. They will know it as “Replication”. The following is an event that could take place.

Hugo Teal had been a great maestro. He had been the Philharmonic director and conductor of Carnegie Symphony Orchestra. At retirement, he had been at the helm for forty years. Known for his long, wavy hair which followed the motion of his baton, the short, musical genius was now bald. With his interest in the new science of replication on his mind, he went into Enchanted Endings. Teal contemplated the exciting new method of preserving the human body upon death. He and Lady Teal vowed if one of them died, the other will arrange replication for both. They didn’t want to be six-feet deep or cremated as a cigarette.

Body Works introduced maestro and Lady Teal to replication. It was a show that featured the science of preserving animal and human bodies. This procedure replaces body fluids with liquid plastics. Animal and human bodies solidify as the plastic hardens. The main use of this process is for educational purposes. Medical schools and science have specimens of the deceased humans.

In “replication”, Dr. Jeremy Scratch mixed plasticized polymers, tilapia, texturing, and detailing. The result is a complete interior and exterior specimen of the human being. However, the resulting top layers are as soft as real skin to the touch.

Lady and Maestro Teal couldn’t read or hear enough about replication. They let everybody who listened know how great the procedure is. Friends, family, and guests couldn’t attend a cocktail party without a lecture about its benefits. The Teals made a vow to always be together, and it made them younger and more invigorated. “They walked on air,” the gossip columnist Rita Conklin wrote about the Teals regarding this phenomenon.

It was while Maestro Teal composed The Replication Catharsis that his wife began to fail. Signs of what turned out to be a long and bitter bout with cancer began. Even in sickness, she reminded their friends and families of their decision. In her last week, Lady Teal told her students at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music what to expect. The students applauded her bravery.

She finally passed.

“How should we pose Lady Teal?” asked Luke LaForge, the manager at Enchanted Endings.

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Maestro Teal wanted his wife “playing a grand piano in a room next to the bedroom.”

“You don’t want her singing?” Luke asked, somewhat stunned at the decision.

“Well ... uh,” said Hugo Teal. “It is grander if she is playing the piano.”

Maestro Teal tried to avoid operas, especially the operas of Lady Teal. The classic music circles knew she was a better piano player than a singer. But only a few knew Hugo Teal got angina every time she played her piano.

“I prefer the piano,” Teal said, “with her looking out the window at nature as she plays.” There was a pause. “Did you get that, Mr. Luke?”

“Yes, sir.”

Maestro Teal said he wanted Enchanted Endings to do the general contracting for the whole job.

“How large do you want the room?” Luke said.

“Ten by ten feet with glass walls on all three sides?”

“It is up to you, Maestro,” Luke said. “I think a baby grand is more correct.”

“We will use Lady Teal’s,” the maestro said.

The Maestro paused and started to walk around between the caskets. He allowed their presence to take his thoughts in another direction

Walking back toward Luke, he balked, but finally got the strength to speak up, “I have a sensitive question.”

“What’s that, sir?” asked Luke.

“My wife suffered a terrible, hard, year-long fight with an awful disease,” he said.

“I can imagine, Maestro Teal.”

“She lost weight over this period, and she lost more weight in that awful final battle.”

“Oh, I see,” said Luke. “Can you make her lose more weight?” Teal said.

“Sir, we can do whatever you ask,” Luke told the bereaved husband.

“Take off an extra fifty pounds, please.”

“We can do that,” Luke said. “What else?”

“That will do it, Luke.”

“Give me a few minutes, and I will have a written proposal for you.”



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Luke went to the office and worked up a proposal. In the meantime, Teal again walked amongst the caskets. How long they were, he thought. Maybe people will remember me as taller.

He told his attorney he wanted a standard-sized coffin.

Will people who know my actual height dare to open the lower lid to see where my feet are?

Luke returned holding the proposal.

“The total price is \$342,000, of which \$42,000 is an allowance for the extra room attached to your house. I will need a first payment of \$200,000.”

Luke tried to give Maestro Teal the written proposal. But Teal resisted, as though if he touched the paper, he owed the bill. He pulled his hands away.

“Oh, I see,” said Maestro Hugo Teal.

There was a long pause. It started to get uncomfortable for Luke, but he knew what was coming.

Teal looked at the caskets, one by one, not realizing he hadn't uttered a word in ten minutes. Then he remembered the promise he made. And more, there were the friends and family. And there was the columnist, Rita Conklin. What would she write if he buried Lady Teal?

“Can you do heads only, and I won't need a room either? I'll put her head on a player piano.”

“We can,” replied Luke. “How much?”

“It will be \$72,000.”

Another pause. Teal walked back a third time toward one casket.

“How much is the coffin?” Hugo Teal asked.

“It isn't a coffin; it's a casket, sir,” said Luke. “Coffins have six sides, and caskets have four sides. Coffins are smaller at the bottom to save on the cost of wood.”

“Sorry. Will you take \$50,000 for the head? Otherwise, I'll bury her in a coffin ... I mean casket. To hell with it,” Teal said.

“Maestro Teal, Enchanted Endings can preserve Lady Teal for no less than \$63,000,” Luke said.

Maestro Teal took out his checkbook and wrote a check for \$31,500, the first payment.



One morning, three months later, Luke called Dr. Jeremy Scratch from the loft. It was there that they performed replications.

“I can't find Lady Teal's head,” he said.

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“What!” responded Scratch.

“I cannot find Lady Teal’s head. It isn’t with the others,” said Luke.

“Did you look everywhere?”

“I looked everywhere.”

“Okay, where is Lyle Clements and Dennis DiNardo?” said Scratch.

“Here, where they’re supposed to be,” Luke said.

“I’ll be up there in a few minutes.”

Scratch arrived and went to the freezer to see Lyle and Dennis. He repeated the actions that Luke had performed two hours earlier. He looked throughout the loft, behind the curtains, under this and that. Scratch went one more step. He got the ladder, climbed up and opened a skylight to see if Lady Teal’s head was on the roof of the loft. It was not.

They looked in every casket, opening the top and bottom lids.

At the end of the search, they agreed it was foul play. They could not find the head of Lady Teal. Neither Luke nor Scratch mentioned calling the police. They didn’t dare.

Scratch started to think of enemies they may have. Luke couldn’t think of anybody. Both men got along with everybody.

At the exact same moment, they looked at each other and said, “Maestro Teal.”

The next step was to list reasons why Teal took the head. Maestro Teal hated Lady Teal.

“Who knows ... ? Teal may think we have insurance for loss and, if she doesn’t show, he could get his money back,” Luke said.

“Yes, he doesn’t care whether Lady Teal’s head arrives. If her head arrives, it will go to the basement anyway,” Scratch said. “He might pay to steal her head. It sure would risk his reputation. And he is too inept to know where the head was.”

“Maestro Teal didn’t steal it. We need to keep looking,” said Luke.



Three months later, Luke called Scratch again.

“Scratch,” Luke said, “Hugo Teal called and needs a call back.”

“Damn,” Scratch said. “I totally forgot her.”

“We still have the pictures of her,” Luke said. “Pablo can help. He could sculpt Lady Teal’s head in less than a week.”

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“Good idea, Luke,” said Scratch, “Pablo is perfect. Look, if Teal calls again, tell him you’ve passed on the information, and I will be back from France in a week ... and tell him Lady Teal’s head is on its way. Is Pablo at the Long Island plant?”

“Yes, he’ll be working today.”

An hour later, Scratch’s chauffeur drove him to Long Island. With him, he carried twenty-five photos of Lady Teal. When they got to the Long Island studio Scratch asked his driver to get Pablo.

As he waited, he looked at the photos of Lady Teal. *Lord, is she a challenge to see?*

Pablo got in the back seat. “Good afternoon, Professor Scratch.”

“To you too, Pablo,” Scratch agreed. “Okay, I have a special assignment for you, and there will be a nice reward. You are the most talented sculptor and artist we have.”

“Thank you, sir. I appreciate your confidence,” he said.

“Let me explain the predicament we are in, and how I think you can help us out,” Scratch said.

“Yes sir,” said Pablo.

“Great. We had a customer many months ago. He is a famous musician. His wife passed, and he wanted a bust of his beloved. Luke and I finished the replication and were ready to hand it off to you. But we misplaced Lady Teal’s head,” Scratch said. “We looked everywhere. No, Lady Teal. Now her husband has called.”

Pablo knew what he had to do.

“So, you want me to sculpt, paint, and texturize Lady Teal. I can do the job just as good in clay.”

“I’m hoping to complete it in ten days,” Scratch said.

“Did you bring pictures, by any chance?”

“I did.” Scratch pulled out the photos and handed them to Pablo.

Pablo studied every photo and asked, “Do you know her hat size?”

“No!” Scratch panicked. “I don’t know. We’ll tell him heads shrink or enlarge and nothing can be done.”

“Don’t worry sir,” Pablo said, “I will get a sense of her size once I start the sculpture. I will start the first thing in the morning.”

Three days later Scratch called Pablo. “How is the sculpture coming?” Scratch asked.

“It will be ready tomorrow,” said Pablo.

“I’ll be over in a day or two.”

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Luke saw Scratch later in the evening over dinner.

“He called today,” Luke told Scratch.

“Who called?”

“Maestro Teal.”

“Pablo finished the sculpture and will start the texturing and painting,” he told Luke.

“You should call Maestro Teal,” said Luke.

“Why me?” Scratch asked.

“Well, I told him we may have his wife next week, and he just hung up on me,” said Luke. “Something’s on his mind.”

“I’ll call him as soon as I have her head in hand,” he said. Two days later, Scratch went over to the studio to see how

Lady Teal was coming. Sure enough, Pablo came through. It was perfect in every way. Scratch admired Pablo’s artistic ability.

Scratch paid Pablo \$3,000. “Thank you, Dr. Scratch,” Pablo said.

Scratch took the art and held it on his lap. After a moment, he turned Lady Teal’s head to face the front. He then noticed his driver adjusted the rearview mirror, presumably so as not to see Lady Teal.

Scratch called Maestro Teal and received voice mail: “Good day, Maestro Teal. Please know we have completed Lady Teal and will have it delivered on Friday. I am leaving for Spain. Oh, and because we were tardy, we will not charge you for the balance of the work. Happy holidays.”

Scratch had lunch and went back home to do more paperwork.

He saw he had a call and listened to the message.

“Mr. Scratch, this is the new Lady Teal. Please consider this. If you or your confederates dare to bring a bust of Emma, or Gloria, or Eve, or whatever her shit ass name was, I will take that thing and start banging the head of any delivery boy or girl you send. Do what you want with my husband’s dead wife’s head but keep her the fuck out of here. I hope you understand. Please call if you have any questions.”

Scratch took three quick shots of bourbon and watched the news. The following day, he asked his driver to bring Lady Teal’s head to a landfill in Connecticut or New Jersey and not to tell him where.

## The Little Black Book and Other Stories