

# Kill Grey

Henry Malone

1967

In Detroit, the skies are the color of lead most of the time, a sordid color that sweeps everything else along like a dynamo.

On these bleak days, all the houses are grey, the ground is grey, the buildings are grey, and for those who live in such a purgatory it is likely that the heart will also look very grey indeed. The physical environment, the very atmosphere, seems to invite leaden thoughts.

We systematically erect grey skyscrapers. We create grey industries. We are notables throughout the world. Henry Miller and Celine have made their case for Detroit. We think Grey.

During the last couple of years there has been talk of something new in Detroit—the promise of some great maelstrom, some sudden reversal in all this tedious antiquity. Color has become the big thing. Everywhere the motto has been: Kill the Grey!

For the Flower People it has meant one thing, and for the Black Nationalist it has meant another. But The Grey must go, they have said. Make the city bright orange with flames! Or paint everything psychedelic! But kill the grey.

Such a beautiful notion begs an important question: is it the climate itself that breeds all this? Or is The Grey a reversible attitude, a spirit that may be educated and enlightened?

If it is, as Baron de Montesquieu had long ago suggested, all a matter of climate, then perhaps we really ought to stop the Flower Power and Burn, Baby, Burn sermons and vacate the place, cause it to become a ghost town, make it a haunted legend.

We could tell our grandchildren: well, if you go to Detroit you'll go mad, it's the climate, it's Grey! We could make the color Grey a new kind of evil omen, perhaps symbolic of all the midwest. A whole new ethos could develop out of all this: every color is Good, except Grey which is Evil. We could say that Grey is the work of the Devil!

In fact, there are especially fertile areas in Detroit where Grey Ghost Stories could evolve. How about 'Down-river,' or in Hamtramck, or 'Conner and Jefferson?' Excellent sites for some of the greyest ghost stories in the universe.

These host stories could have certain kinds of classic' surroundings, something like the velveteen saloon in a movie western. All these Grey Stories would take place in and around a bar that was identified only by a glowing neon sign that said BEER.

Around the bar there would be American Legion halls and vacant lots and gas stations. It would be like a little town, a perfect setting. Of course the sky would always be lead colored, and the gas stations and the used car lots would always be flying those peculiar plastic streamers that snap and flutter in the howling gales of winter.

In the distance one could see, like a snow—capped mountain in a movie western, an icy detergent—filled lake.

And all around, wherever the eye traveled, there would be high-tension wires and telephone poles. It would be a terrific setting for some real nightmare tales.

I can't think of one just now, but some ideas occur to me. It could all begin on a rainy night with the accidental appearance of one of the Flower People, a bright green and black and orange person.

Let's say his Honda has broken down and he can't fix it and he has had to go for help. He wanders around for a long while and finally stumbles upon this tomb like building made out of dismal cinder blocks in the middle of this misty forest of high tension wires.

Slowly he opens the door and walks inside, and immediately he is met by the noxious odors of American death: beer suds, deodorants, and sweaty overalls. An eerie voice comes out of the smoky confused glare of subhuman faces—"Whaddya want!"

You can take it from there. You could have these prematurely hunch backed zombies performing all manner of strange rites in pink bowling shirts. Every now and again the noise could be punctuated by outbursts of the Grey Terror: things like—"How about another boilermaker" or "Hey Stosh!" Everywhere there would be these cobweb-like cardboard posters with putrid looking things hanging from them, identified only as "dried peanuts" or "pork-rinds." Toward the end of the long room there would be this huge kiln where sacrifices to the human appetite were made, where the bartender would take out what looked suspiciously like a cellophane-wrapped penis and put it in this delirious infrared machine, while one of the ghoulish safety—helmeted faces at the bar drooled anxiously, munching potato chips.

Perhaps our Flower Power hero would even sit down for a moment on one of the fetid toadstools and order a glass of that urine like soporific, just for old time's sake. Would he be able to tolerate the onslaught of the Shifty Change? Could he outwit the two headed monster of Infinite Baseball Information? My God, what a great legend this could become!

Now I will pause here, reader, and ask my original question. Is it the climate that breeds all this, or is the Grey a pliable and reversible attitude? My head spins. Like you, I will go out' for a breath of fresh air to ponder the matter, a breath of refinery fumes and acrid chemicals.

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