

Observations on Sunset Pier,  
Key West  
by Philips P. © 2005

Introductory

Sunset Pier is quite a scene, a mixture of medieval showmanship market economy, and depravity lurking in the hollows of tropical sunset eyes. All the buskers really have no shame. They'll make their droopy-eyed old hound dog jump through tiny hoops, and you can't help but go "aww." They make really bad jokes and you can't help but laugh. "This is Joan Rivers before surgery—" they say, pulling down on the dogs' jowls. "And Here's Joan Rivers after surgery—" and they pull way back on the dog's poor tight face, revealing white, wide eyes.

Still, I was fascinated by this world, how friendly all the buskers and panhandling kids were, open in telling me their stories, inviting and totally *chill* in terms of just hanging out. Some of the shows were actually quite good productions, so I found myself coming back down each night, for the sunset, for the people-watching, and for the craziness. On Key West, it was where to be.

The Blue Man:

He was one of those "funny assholes." He proudly wore a t-shirt that said, "Please tell your BOOBS to stop staring at my EYES." He'd been in town for a few weeks and had gotten himself set-up with a girl. Now he needed some money.

I met him one morning on the beach on the south side of the island. He told me his latest brilliant idea, which was to paint himself entirely blue and stand motionless until someone dropped a bill into his hat – then he would juggle his "blue balls." "It's artsy, you know?" he said. "Like that thing in New York."

It's true, it seemed like anyone could make easy money at Sunset Pier for an hour or two's work. When the cruise ships were docked, ten thousand people flooded into town, eager to be parted from their spare bills.

This plan was all well and good, except that (as I observed from a distance, that evening), the paint job didn't turn out all that good. It was kind of smeary and crude in places, and set him back ten bucks right there. He finally arrived down at the pier, a little bit late, but the Silver Guy was already there. That Silver Guy! He was really professional! His paint job was immaculate; I mean he really looked like a mannequin. When he was frozen it was hard to believe he was alive. Even his clothes were painted silver. He bicycled down each evening on a silver cruiser. He was an older guy, with a wry grin frozen on his face, behind those sunglasses, and the ladies loved him. He was also really funny – I mean, when the girls slipped money down his shorts, he became animated like a robot, and did all these schticky, flirty routines. He was smooth, and would pull lollipops out of nowhere and present them to the ladies.

How the Blue Man hated the Silver Guy. What a pompous prick! I mean, that phony European accent! And *what* did he have stuffed down those little silver shorts? It was obscene.

The whole gig wasn't going so good for the Blue Man. He kept fidgeting, moving his hat around, etc. The problem was that the spot he'd chosen was way in the center of the plaza. It was too easy for the tourists to avoid him. He needed to be near a corner, so that those motherfuckers would walk right past him. Then they'd *have* to tip him. But all the good spots had been taken, goddamit.

When after five minutes he hadn't made any money, he decided to take a cigarette break. After that, the sun set. It all seemed somewhat futile in the dark. No one could even tell he was blue. The Silver Guy was raking in the bucks over there, saturating the market.

Watching the Blue Boy, I realized that the reason he was an asshole was that he was short. He had probably felt insecure about himself his whole life.

Finally one young foreign couple came up and stood there looking at him, but didn't put any money in the hat. There they stood, looking at him. What was their problem? Couldn't they see the hat? Finally the Blue Man decided to start juggling anyway. Maybe they thought you paid *after* the trick.

Unfortunately he kept dropping the balls, and they didn't tip him at all! Then it was really dark and the Blue Man began to fall into despair. Right when he was going to give up, a bald guy walked up and put one buck in the hat. The Blue Man started to juggle, and actually did a few rounds before dropping any. But when he glanced up the bald guy was nowhere to be seen. He hadn't even watched. That really pissed him off. He didn't need no sympathy dollar bill!

The Blue Man was in a really foul mood by the time he got home – the apartment of his latest girlfriend, that bitch. Luckily she'd left it a big mess and it wasn't too hard to find an excuse to slap her up – and she liked it anyhow, that cow. As he hit her, and she screamed, he kept yelling out, over and over, "What's a pirate's favorite restaurant? Arrr-by's. Arrr-by's. Ha ha ha!"

The Blue Man was eventually imprisoned, at the jail on the far east side of the island. He was too poor to consult with a lawyer, but after a few days, they inexplicably let him out. He had to walk all the home, until he realized he didn't have a home anymore.