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PLEASE ALLOW ME to make an assumption. You didn't purchase this manuscript because you're all that interested in having a deeply profound reading experience. That's okay. Really! More likely, you plopped down your hard-earned cash—even *more* likely, scorched your plastic—because of the notoriety of its author. Maybe you're a genuine King Pest fan, and have several of our multi-platinum albums in your collection. (If that's the case, btw, please accept a sincere, personal, Keefe Taylor thank you for your support.) Perhaps I owe you even a bigger “boy, howdy!” for loyally casting your vote(s) to help us win those 18 People's Choice Awards, and/or for camping out on some cold, unforgiving sidewalk all weekend, just to grab up a precious ticket to our traveling circus. After all, we were #1 in U.S. concert grosses for three years running: 1987 through 1989. Maybe you knew that already, or it doesn't matter much—it probably sounds like I'm bragging. No need for that. Besides, trying to impress you—or anyone else—is so not what this story is about.

What I'm trying to get at is this: If you're all atwitter about digging into the most intimate, gut-wrenching, secret confessions of a wealthy, infamous, sex-crazed, aging-not-so-gracefully-anymore (and obviously still unfulfilled) superstar lead singer; if you're anticipating chapter after chapter saturated with sordid details of dimly lit, debauched, multi-partner orgies, psychedelic, drug-den hallucinations, real-life excess, and ludicrous, hedonistic waste—well, here's my apology in advance. If that's what you're here for, you've come to the wrong book. I mean, what good would it do anybody for me to spill those

beans. (Mind you, there are plenty of beans to spill, and I guess I'll have to drop a legume or two along the way. But, for the most part, I think I'll leave that kind of confessional, musical-fruit flatulence to the guys from Motley Crüe or Aerosmith.) I'm a changed man now, a better man. I want you to know why and how that change happened, so it will be necessary to reveal some pretty embarrassing warts. Meanwhile, to assure you that I'm absolutely sincere, I'm going to share this review (unabridged). This exemplary critical piece was published in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, under the subheading, "Pest Off."

Philips Arena was invaded last night by King Pest and their annual demonstration of vacuous, rock self-indulgence. The cavernous venue was throbbing with overkill sensory bombardment, kick, snare, and tom-toms pounding like a herd of elephants on steroids, through speaker columns two stories tall. Blinding lights flashed and swept across the stage, then out and over an adoring throng of devotees, whose age (I kid you not!) ranged from all of eight, to every bit of sixty-eight.

Lead singer Keefe Taylor prowled the edge of the smoke-filled platform, dressed in a sunken-chest-revealing, bellbottomed, silver jumpsuit, twirling his multi-colored, ribbon-draped mic stand, as if it was a chrome-plated phallus. It was only necessary for the anointed one to sing about a third of the lyrics from the Pest songbook, as more than 16,000 fans joined in en masse every time they recognized a refrain. Thus, Mr. Taylor spent most of the evening skipping from stage left to stage right and back again, extending his extra appendage toward and over the chanting horde. His every move—every smile, every grimace, every hip swing, every toss of his dyed-auburn, still-shagged hair—was clearly calculated to provoke the most enthusiastic response.

The capacity crowd, it seemed, either lacked the discretion to realize they were being manipulated or, like mindless, hypnotized cultists, were simply willing to guzzle the Kool-Aid and surrender their free will to the foppish, acrobatic guru in the spotlight.

The music? Well, it was a medley of derivative, blues/rock dreck—from guitarist Greggo Geiger's Clapton-cum-Duane-Allman plagiarisms to the worn out, double-kick, Ginger Baker flams of drummer, Spencer "Brick" Wall. The songs were still just as forgettable and insipid as ever—with the single, possible exception of their signature set-piece, *Daylayshus*, which took on a particularly offensive and perverse subtext, as Taylor, clearly pushing into his

late forties, shamelessly demonstrated the dexterity of his prodigious tongue to no less than four generations of ticket buyers.

The best part of the show for this reviewer was the curtain call, as the five aging Pests held hands and took their bows. Geiger flicked guitar picks, Wall chucked sticks, Taylor blew kisses, and the audience reached a fever pitch, begging for more, while the Jumbotron displayed close-ups of the band's smirking, middle-aged faces. Every crow's foot and graying root was on display, a hundred times life size and in high-def, living color. Taylor's blue-and-metallic-green eye shadow and his melting, black eyeliner looked particularly comical blown up to such ridiculous proportions. Thanks for the memories, guys. Now, do the world a favor and retire. Please!



Hey, don't worry about me. I'm used to this kind of puny-minded, quasi-hip excuse for journalistic criticism. In fact, I've learned to expect it. The poor goober who wrote that review is probably some pathetic, obese, past-30 spaz, still living in his parents' moldy basement (which is itself stacked to the ceiling with orange crates filled with thousands of vinyl albums, all alphabetically arranged, and recorded by every pimply faced wannabe who's ever been shafted by a greedy record company over the last 40 years). Commercial success can only mean one thing to his type: *THE MUSIC MUST SUCK*. My crew and I have enjoyed a long-enough linger in the embrace of public acceptance that, in his jealous eyes, King Pest's level of sucking must be epic in the annals of pop-music history.

The little bastard was right on about one thing, however. My every move *was* calculated. A couple of decades ago, I would've felt a bubbling in my bowels as I swung that mic stand over my head to make the whole arena go berserk. An involuntary smile of genuine delight would've stretched my mouth as wide as it could go, creasing semi-permanent dimples into my youthful cheeks. I would've had to collect myself, close my eyes and re-open them, shaking my head to make sure I wasn't dreaming. But, on this night—like the last, and the one before that—I *was* just going through the motions. Oh, I still love the adoration. I'd probably die without it. But,

it's nothing like those first few electric charges of wowness, when your whole life stretches out in front of you like a buffet of rich, sinfully delectable desserts. Now, though, it's more like that kind of love your dad must feel when he sees your stretch-marked, varicose-veined, saggy-armed mother snoring there on the same side of that same bed they've been sharing for 55 years: He knows he's a lucky man, but he still can't help but wonder if he could have done better.



I have a routine after every show: a half-hour of quiet meditation in my private chamber, some hot-rock massage, then hydration with vitamin-enhanced fluids. I travel with a portable tent, tapestries, oriental rugs, brocade pillows, and incense burners—all packed tidily into their own anvil case. My personal nutritionist/masseur, Milo, has set up my spiritual space at every venue, precisely the way I've specified, for the last eight years. You see, I learned decades ago that it's virtually impossible to step off of a stage, fully adrenalized after being showered with two hours of fan worship, and expect to suddenly be (in any way, shape, or form) human. Of course, for a good part of my adult life, I lived a subhuman existence, staying as stoned as I constantly was; back then, I didn't worry my pretty little head over the challenge of re-humanization. It was get high, rock 'n' roll, get high, get laid—and then get high, etc. Adored on stage. Adored in the hotel room; or in the stairway to the hotel room; or in the back of the limo; or...never mind, you get the picture. It was all the same dif.

On this particular night, however, I decided to pass up my customary wind-down, giving Milo a well-appreciated night off to cruise the gay bars of Candler Park. This I did mainly because my daughter, Tonya, and her squarer-than-a-checkerboard, commercial-pilot hubby, Rick, had made the trek all the way from their model home in the hinterlands of suburbia to attend the concert. I would've felt less than accommodating (i.e., subhuman) making the young couple (being family and all) wait while



“Hey, next time, dude!” I interrupted, saying a silent prayer that there would never be one. “You gotta do whatcha gotta do.” I took a not-so-subtle step toward the tent exit, grimacing from the inflammation in my lower joints.

“Are you all right, Dad?”

“Just a little wear and tear. You get used to it.”

“Oh.” Tonya said, daughterly concern still creasing her brow. “Listen, if it’s all the same to you, I’d love to just have you over to the house. I’ll cook. Or we’ll order something. I mean it’s such a zoo to go out. And with traffic....”

“Really? Honey, I’d be happy to send a car....” Just then, haloed in candlelight by the archway entrance to my private sanctum, my attention was stolen by a stunning silhouette. I cleared my throat and chose my words carefully. “Hey! I’d like you kids to meet somebody, uh...very important to me. Come on over here, Natalie.” The gorgeous waif/woman slinked like a jungle cat across the Persian carpet, wearing a smile as big as Lake Superior, then cozied up possessively next to me. “Natalie, I’d like you to meet my...” I swallowed deeply before I said it, “my daughter, Tonya, and her...her very nice husband, Rick. They live here in Atlanta.”

“Dallas.” Tonya corrected me.

“You drove from Dallas?” Natalie queried in amazement.

“No, baby.” I explained. “Dallas is a bedroom community, north of the city. You know, the ’burbs.”

“Oh, of course. Sorry.” Natalie seemed relieved, as she graciously extended her perfectly manicured hand. “Such a pleasure to meet you both.”

“Likewise.” Rick sniggered, agog with not-so-subtle innuendo as he grabbed her slender, outstretched digits. “Seems like I’ve seen that smile before.” Rick continued, unable to stop leering into her million-dollar eyes. “The *Victoria’s Secret* catalogue, I’m pretty sure.” Natalie graciously nodded at the recognition. (Oops. I may have neglected to mention a rather important detail that tends to put this little narrative in a somewhat clearer context. At this particular juncture, I was nearing the end of my fifth decade of life. That’s right. I was on the cusp

