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## **Madame Pipe and the Curious Crayon: A Fantastical Incident in a Pencil's Life**

*Phil Sawdon*

There was once a mummified and impotent pencil.

It was revealed by René Hector searching a clearly marked Lost and Found box in the main entrance to The Devil's Arse (Peak Cavern), Castleton and subsequently implicated in the murderous and heinous drawings at Winnats Pass and the Rue Morgue. Belief in the efficacy of Le Crayon du Singe persists: for some this truly is The Devil's Crayon.

Hector immediately identified it from various folk tales of such objects as a "Monkey's Pencil". It was donated to The Fictional Museum of Drawing and is the only alleged preserved Pencil known to survive.

Research has further demonstrated that this artificial and impotent pencil is right handed and that there are traces of a suggestion that one was ripped from the pocket of a monkey while the carcass was still hanging from the gibbet during an eclipse of the moon.

It appears that the Pencil was wrapped in Michallet paper, squeezed of graphite and pickled in an earthenware jar with honey, fiction and phrases. Then it was either dried in an oven with sage or laid out to dry in the sun during The Dog Days of August. When the Pencil was ready, punctuation, mischief and hair were added before it was dipped in wax and rendered fat so that it could be employed, as by happenstance it had become common knowledge that the sight of a burning Pencil or any works executed through the flaming tool renders any viewer dumbstruck and ineffective; impotent through self-regard. Furthermore records show that artists constantly attempted to light their Pencil before commencing since if it will not light then any art generated may not be significant however once the Pencil is alight no amount of stumping or erasing will extinguish it, only black ink and a bodily humour.

Confirmation of the use of such pencils is extremely scarce however an entry found in the journal of Emily Blaireau, erstwhile curator of The Fictional Museum of Drawing provides us with an account:

‘One obscure dusk, when all was fastened down and carefully arranged, there was a knock at the entrance of a studio collective, a situation on the edge of time and a successor to a medieval asylum. The door was opened cautiously to release the miasma, and standing without, breathless and sheepish, an artist, his women's clothes soaked with the human condition, and hands clutching a whimsical pencil drawing a ladder and a dead monkey. The artist enquired selflessly as to the possibility of sharing a space, he had little luck making conversation and his request was grudgingly granted; in truth there was no space, nevertheless the artist could lie on the mat before the great log fire in the cellar and was of course, unwelcome.

As soon as the artist was finally alone he drew himself up from the paper on which he was curled, sat himself on the donkey (that ate the Pencil), erased from a pocket a withered and desiccated Pencil and set it to work on that same paper support whilst all the while being observed through a panelled glass door by Madame Pipe. The drawer sharpened the Pencil, anointed the point, applied a match and it began to flicker with flame. Madame Pipe aware of the imminent albeit temporary speechlessness and futility that would come over the

collective if the Pencil were to fully ignite, rushed up the numerous stairways to the attic where her mind was usually clearer and endeavoured to stimulate her contemporaries with reflection, mirror images and erratic possibilities. But all was fruitless – they were yet further absorbed in self-interest; so in hopelessness she hastened down again to the cellar, and took up a post of careful observation and latent voyeuristic pleasure.

She saw the ember at the point of the Pencil, but as yet the flame was not fully afire because one member of the collective was deemed worthwhile. The artist was busy scribbling with increasing fervour whilst murmuring “Let thise who scrubble, spong on, and thanse who orne fliminity stay awake”. He started another drawing in frustration at the lack of consequence of his first attempt and on this Madame Pipe loped into view. She wrenched away the Pencil leaving a deep scarring bloodied mark on the paper surface and struggled to douse the glowing ember with ineffectual critique. However the Pencil seemed to respond and glowed even brighter. As a last resource, she took out a bottle of black ink and laced it with phlegm, and dashed it over the lambent point, immediately extinguishing the Pencil. Uttering a strident exclamation, she locked the artist in the cellar. The whole collective was provoked, and the artist easily secured and drawn and quartered with each part gibbeted in a different space: the attic, the cellar, in a drawer and a wardrobe. The next day the dead monkey was found to be missing a pencil’.