Movie Dog
and Other Stories

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy Money</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Life As A Grasshopper</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat Tire In Iowa</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roof Rat</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hey Grampa -- Tell Us A Story!</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie Dog</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
He thought he had it made. $10,000 worth of powder in his back pocket. At least, that's what it would make him when he made it out of this rat-hole country. He'd stuff it in baggies in the frame of his back-pack. And he still had $500 left in his wallet, hanging in the pouch around his neck. He'd been able to bargain easier than he'd thought. Piece of cake.

Jimmy walked down the dirt street that led to the center of the city. He'd go back to his hotel, check out, then hop a cab to the airport, then the flight to Miami. Then back home, a quick deal, then another flight south of the border, to Mexico this time and a long stretch on a hot beach. No problema.
Jimmy liked Latin countries better than this one. A bunch of black pirates! But, his home-town buddy Alec had turned him on to a connection here, and the type of pack to get that would slip by customs easiest. Quick in, quick out. Only a tourist here for the reef. A snorkle and fins he'd never used. Easy as pie.

As Jimmy approached his hotel and the market that were at the center of town, he noticed more people on the street. Skinny, hostile, dread-locked blacks in T-shirts that said Nebraska and Hard Rock Cafe. Ripped off, no doubt, from tourists, Jimmy thought. He'd heard everybody in this country was a rip off artist, but so far he'd been spared. His connection had turned out to be mellow and professional, the deal smooth with no hassles. Just like Alec had told him. But, the nearer Jimmy got to his hotel, the hotter the sun seemed, the closer the crowd in the street. And, the open sewer that flowed beside all the streets in the city became ranker still. And Jimmy began to feel uneasy. Everybody seemed to be staring, like they knew what was in his pocket. Take it easy, he thought. Almost home. Act normal. Jimmy knew he'd been walking these streets for a week, with the same people, the same heat, the same stares, and no bad action. Nothing had changed but a slight lump in his back pocket.

Jimmy saw a couple of well groomed black men in the
plain khaki shirts the police wore, walking through the market on the other side of the street and he felt a little better. Protectors of the tourist! He saw his hotel at the end of the block. Home free.

One of the men in khaki noticed Jimmy, nudged the other one. They both started walking toward him. Jimmy felt a chill, his back pocket suddenly heavy and full, his mouth dry. The men stopped in front of him, blocking Jimmy's view of his hotel. One of the men, the one who'd first noticed him, drew a billfold out of his shirt pocket and flipped it open, revealing a badge. He flipped it back closed and returned it to his pocket.

"Excuse me, sir, may I see your passport." The accent was the Carribean lilt Jimmy'd grown used to hearing in the last week.

"Uh - yeah - sure. Is there a problem?" Jimmy felt a drop of perspiration trickle down the side of his nose, onto his moustache.

The man didn't answer. He looked at the passport, then at Jimmy. He handed the passport to the other man, who looked at it, at Jimmy, then handed it back to the first man.

"Come with us, please."

The first man led the way through the crowd, walking next to the sewer, away from most of the crowd. The other
man walked by Jimmy's side. Jimmy felt the lump push against his ass, and knew he was dead unless he could get rid of the powder. Stay calm, he told himself. Take it easy. Think. He looked at both men. They were looking coolly ahead. Jimmy felt his rear pocket casually with the hand away from the man who walked beside him. The man's expression didn't change. Jimmy slipped his hand into his pocket and out again, the baggy surrounded. He gave the baggy a backward flip and heard a small splash as it hit the sewer. The men hadn't seemed to notice.

They walked a little more, then stopped in front of a dilapidated clapboard building that was like every other one in this city. In this country. A sign saying Police Station hung on a nail next to the front door. One man walked in with Jimmy, the one who'd flashed his badge. The other man stayed outside, closing the door behind them.

Jimmy stepped into a small room with one dusty wooden chair in it. There was a door leading into another room that had an old desk and a beat-up looking file cabinet.

"Do you have any other identification?" the first man asked, as he looked at Jimmy's passport again.

Jimmy pulled his wallet out of the pouch hanging from his neck, opened it to his driver's license, and handed it to the man.
"Please have a seat," the man said. He walked into the next room, closing the door behind him. Jimmy sat down as he heard what sounded like the file cabinet opening and closing in the next room. He knew he was safe. He had to be. He was clean. They couldn't have anything in the files. A tip-off? They hadn't even searched him for drugs. Look up my name, find nothing and let me go, he thought. He wondered, if they let him go in a couple of minutes, if he could race along the sewer, find the powder, and still make it to his hotel room, stuff his pack, make his flight. Maybe.

Time passed and Jimmy started to worry that he'd miss his flight. To hell with the powder, he thought. To hell with the $10,000. To hell with this damn country.

Jimmy stood up and went to the door to the other room. He couldn't hear a thing. Jimmy hesitated, opened the door. He'd hurry the guy along. They couldn't have a thing on him.

The room was empty, the window open. Jimmy ran out of the room, through the other room, out of the building. The other man was gone. Jim looked back at the building. The sign that said Police Station was gone, too.
I've always been a grasshopper. Even when I didn't really know it. Back then, I thought that each time I split my skin and stepped out I'd be a new creature, full of fresh possibilities. The truth was that I would just be a bigger version of my old self, ready to hop a little higher, maybe, but exhibiting the same lack of aim I'd always had. Maybe I'm not quite telling the truth, though, when I say I wanted to change. All I really wanted to do was get out. And why not? I had nothing better going on. California had gotten old fast. I never felt right there. Food stamps and give-away tins of chicken and peanut butter got hard to trade for anything but quaaludes. The street was dying. Needles were sticking out of everything. Dogs were killed and eaten at
barbeques on the beach. Airplanes crashed and we all laughed. The old men who yesterday were saints and prophets were now shrunken bums living on Mad Dog and Wild Irish Rose. I was ready to leave.

I was in Oakland then. I don't remember the exact year. Early 70's. The University back East had made me an educated idiot. Howard had told me I was one credit shy of being a Compleat Idiot, and I now see he was right. I lived in a rented room in an apartment two blocks from some projects, but I made sure I never walked over that way. Mort, one of my roommates, was an orphan who'd been adopted at the age of 8, along with his twin brother Mart, by a prominent Washington D.C. couple. His Dad, who was a hot-shot with the Department of Energy, had at one time been one of the Oak Ridge Boys - you know, the guys who rocked Hiroshima and Nagasaki - while his Mom was the semi-official handwriting analyst for J. Edgar Hoover. "This is the handwriting of a very dishonest boy," she'd tell little Mort when he'd give her a birthday card he'd made himself.

His brother had achieved brief fame the year before I'd met Mort by being caught in bed with a Republican congressman from Oklahoma. So the parents disowned Mart and thought hey, what the hell, let's get rid of both the inconsiderate little fuckheads, so they stopped paying for
Mort's schooling at the same time, and they changed the locks on their house so Mort couldn't get in to retrieve any of his belongings. Or at least this is what Mort told me, but he was probably lying.

Everybody had a story then. Make it long and fanciful, see who bites. Fantasies of a glorious past in the athletic limelight were especially popular. I snorted speed in Berkeley at a party with a guy who said he was second string behind Joe Namath at Alabama. And another guy told me about dropping acid before every game as an offensive lineman on a very shitty University of Pittsburg football team. It made the helmets shine during rainstorms, he said. Lying face down in mud was what he was made for, he said. He ate Lydell Mitchell's cleats for a main course, with the blood from his own broken nose as an after-dinner drink. He said.

I'd met Mort at People's Park in Berkeley, and after a brief chat in which I somehow let slip that I needed a place to crash - that I could even pay a little (though just how little was "little", Mort didn't then know), I found myself enrolled as a new roommate. What the hell, it would get me out of a bad situation - my pal Rene's wife Carol had gotten tired of seeing me lie on their couch 23 hours a day (the other hour was for my shower, during which I always made sure to empty the water heater
of every drop of hot).

Looking back, I can see what a silly wreck I was, how a month of frenetic activity, socializing with low-life holy men, addicts, unsuccessful musicians, poets without a clue, glow in the dark misfits and the like, or chasing women with a true drive and need for ART and MEANING would be followed by day after day inside, eating the glow of somebody else's TV, or planted hours on end dead in the middle of two 5ft. high speakers cranked all the way up with music from people who are now all dead - Jimi, Janis, or either of the two heroine addict Tims, Hardin or Buckley.

And money? Well, of course, despite what I told Mort, I didn't have much. I'd hoped to get by free, or next to it, on the west coast couch circuit, but instead had had to dip into, and gradually deplete, the stack of bills I'd piled up from my last job, which was picking apples, believe it or not, back East.

I was in an all-hippie picking crew. We did not know how to bruise fruit, so the farmers loved us. And there was always something I liked about standing on a ladder in the top of an old tree, looking out over the other rounded tops, seeing green leaves turning to yellow, seeing the crisp red circles of the apples, heavy on the branches, hearing and smelling the tractor that was moving the big
bins of the already-picked, and hearing the chatter of men and women, sure in the cool of the fall, happy with dreams of coupling in the close walls of their yurts and country homes, their tipis and sheds, their old trucks, certain that the communal answer, the fuzz and joy of eternal youth, the family and closeness of this perfect moment was as easy to grasp as each apple that they cradled lovingly into the buckets they carried in front of them.

No doubt you know I was in it for the money. It doesn't seem like much now. It even seems absurd that I'd considered what I cashed my check in for as "money". It was closer to nothing than to something. But to a twenty-five year old hippy scum-bag, it was something. Especially since I was a champion apple-picker. I was fast. Astonishingly fast. While the others would carefully pluck and examine each Ida Red, each Tompkins County King, each Red and Golden Delicious, I would be at top speed all day, emptying everything from every branch, wearing track shoes to run up and down the ladders, instantly planning each quick move before I would make it, filling the bins efficiently, red apples becoming green dollars that I thought would be ample to bankroll a trip to the golden other coast.

And, though the money may not have been much, it was enough for me, because I refused to spend any of it. Long
haired mizer, a cheap-skate son-of-a-bitch, that was me. If you were my friend back then, you could count on me for hitting you up for meals, booze and smoke. I smoked dope for ten years and spent only fifteen dollars for a single lid. I'd just slide into any circle with a haze around it, or I'd roll with a friend's weed, being sure to drop enough of the dried bits of leaf into my pocket for a second joint to be rolled later in the privacy of my own living room or, since I normally didn't enjoy the luxury of a living room, or, as often as not, a room of any kind, then in the privacy of my parents' own bathroom, with the doors locked and the fan on at full blast.

Yes, I lived nowhere. I slept in the back of my truck when it was warm (of course I kept the truck parked as much as possible, preferring to hitch and save gas money), or with friends or, in a pinch, with Mom and Dad - even though they were decidedly over thirty, and never stopped shaking their heads when they saw me. Now I can hardly blame them. Their Eagle Scout had become pigeon shit. Actually, they probably would have preferred it if I'd been deposited on the statue of the Civil War soldier at the center of town rather than on their floor.

The couch remained off limits - that's where Senor Fido, my Mom's prize winning chihuahua, slept. Best-of-Show, Tri-Cities Dog Show, 1964. Since that golden year
of his triumph, though, the old Senor had turned into a crotchety bastard. He'd loved me when I was a young short haired prize winner like him, but hated the stinking swamp creature I'd become. My bright red eyes, mangy beard and three foot long straight black hair, parted only enough to let my beak of a nose poke through into the perfumed inner sanctum of my parents' split level, drove Senor Fido into apoplectic fits of outrage.

Banished to the floor, I'd turn on the tube loud enough to drown out the wild-eyed shrieks of the couch-cur, and I'd chuckle into the night with Johnny, Ed, and Doc. The sleeps at home were sometimes fitful, awakened as I often was by the Senor's impotent gummy bites on my throat, but they were always free. And, I usually got the bonus of 3 meals: dinner, 2A.M. snack and breakfast.

So, I was able to pocket all my apple-crop cash, hit up a buddy of mine whose Dad ran one of the local junkyards for a few spare parts to get my old Chevy Panel Truck operational, then check out the ride board at the U. for some folks in need of a ride to Berkely and willing to share (among themselves!) the cost of the trip.

I left the East right after Christmas (I had to stick around for the biggest give-away of the year, didn't I?), with three 18 year old girls who were taking advantage of the break the U. always gave in December and January to
travel to California to visit friends and get their brains fucked to jello (this last assertion was mere conjecture on my part). These were the last of a generation of girls named Susan and Mary and Jane - not a Kimberly or Tiffany among them!- and were actually quite earnest in outlook and chaste in habits. The one whose name was probably Mary I found especially likeable. Sitting next to me, her left leg just barely rubbing against mine, she babbled endlessly about "poetry" and "meaning" and "relating", while she watched out the windshield as my truck ate up the miles in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado -. I did all the driving. She and her friends were amazed at my ability to stay awake, especially considering the headache I must not be able to shake - what other reason would I have for taking those little white pills I told them were "aspirin"?

In Utah, "Mary" got restless. She started idly rubbing the end of my emergency brake nob, which was, oh, about five inches long, a cylinder rounded at both ends, rigid and quivering with the life of the frame of the truck as it bumped rhythmically over the cracks in the highway. Mary ran her fingers lightly along the knob, then the palm of her hand, then she cupped her fingers over it and moved her hand back and forth, sort of like she was petting a cat.
"Um - why are you doing that with your hand - " I asked.

"Mary" looked at me with an expression absent of guile or tease. "I don't know - there's just something about this shape that I really like."

I considered stopping then. As miserly as I then was with money, women had at one time been even stingier when it came time to granting me carnal acceptance. I'd been unfailingly patient and understanding, gentle, kind and sympathetic throughout my early college years - just what women had always protested that they'd wanted - with the result that I'd stayed a virgin until I was 20. They'd tell me that, yeah, gee, you're a nice guy, but - well, there's this other fellow my heart belongs to, and then they'd spin the tale of some Neanderthal who'd talk to her with his fists and had a swastika tattooed on his 10 inch dick.

So, I took the hint, became abusive and obscene. Then, the women resisted, telling me that I was repulsive, not at all like their true love, who they were temporarily having a hard time with, this time some poetic Preppy wimp with wild hair, tweedy coats and an ailing Aston Martin. So, I figured what the hell, carried notebooks with incoherent unconnected thoughts written sparingly in a narrow column, free of punctuation, absent of forethought,
arrogant but effete in diction and in whatever meaning may have, by accident, been contained in them. I stopped combing my hair, which had yet to gain its eventual Samsonic proportion, wore tattered cordoroy sports coats and loafers with no socks. The women told me poetry was passe', that any writing absent of polical content was absent of erotic power. That their true love was only absent now because he'd been imprisoned by the pig-state for non-payment of tickets picked up while consistently double-parking for peace. So, I became a politico, attending marches, denouncing wrongs, holding meetings, educating the masses. Strident and outspoken, I'd try to petition women into submission. They'd sadly shake their heads, say their true-love would have to be someone patient and understanding, gentle, kind and sympathetic.

Finally, I decided to hell with sex, and dedicated myself to celibate sloth - a life of drugs, TV sports, loud obvious rock music, dirty clothes and pizza. And, of course, enough hitting of the books to stay out of Uncle Sam's rotating shooting-gallery. Inevitably, I then became the object of curiosity and even some desire by a certain portion of the co-ed community. Innocence lost through indifference! Dressed in jeans and flannel, slouching on a pinball machine in a bar, a beer clutched non-chalantly in one hand, an ironic eyebrow forever
poised somewhere between disdain and amazement, I was seldom without the company of a similarly dressed female slouch. The world was shit, we knew. The U.S. was shit. Our college was shit. The bar we were drinking in was also shit, and full of shitheads. The beer we were drinking was piss.

An evening spent engaged in this or similar light banter was usually followed by a night of half drunk, sweaty, desperate sex. The women were always fading back and forth between sighs and snores as I banged away fitfully, my teeth clenched in anger over the pitiful grim state of Mankind. My orgasms were always existential. "Existence preceeds essence!" I'd blurt with my final ram before I, too, would pass out.

Though I had finally found sex, I hadn't found love. In my innermost heart, I still couldn't decide between Darlene and Annette. When I was 10, Gerry Marks and I had spent hours describing who was the most loveable mouseketeer. His "Darleen" was always countered by my "Annette." His "long hair, cute face" by my "big tits." This debate, never resolved, was soon replaced by arguments over who was the perfect mate for Superman. His "Lois Lane", my "Lana Lang." And then, eventually, Playmates. His "July", my "October". No woman I'd met seemed equal to the fantasies that I'd built up over the
years. Three dimensional women didn't fit in my two
dimensional imagination.

How about it, I thought as "Mary" resumed her emergency
brake routine, can "Mary" fill the bill? Maybe chance has
placed her at my elbow for a reason! She's clean and as
close to a comic book character as I'm likely to find.
Hair and teeth - perfect. Clothes unwrinkled even after
two days in a truck. Conversation that deserves to be
preserved forever in little white balloons. Exclamations
of good cheer worthy of a crown of ebony mouse ears.
Breasts that defied gravity and, I was sure, would need no
airbrush of the imagination. Oh "Mary", "Mary". Now,
knowing what's come and gone since then, now I'd pull the
truck over. I would advise your friends on the delights
of a night spent sleeping on the cold permanent cracks of
the ancient sea bed that stretched for miles in every
direction from where the truck rolled. Then, after their
departure, I'd be honest, forthright, curious and gentle
as the deranged bull elk in heat that my imagination
insists I was back then. The squeals of frenzied delight
that this same imagination gives to you ring truer to the
way it must have been than the fitful snores that, in
fact, you were shortly to fall into as I decided, oh well,
love can wait until California, and I placed another
little white pill on the tongue that, I'm now sure, could
have tasted a far different and warmer pill, a pill that
would still be keeping me awake late at night, thoughts in a scramble of memory, desire, regret and oh, the love of a possibility within my reach, a pill then, and forever, excluded from my pharmacopia of self-knowledge.

In other words, for any who may still remain with me, my ashes remained unhauled, my love, both physical and ethereal, remained unrequited, "Mary's" gentle hand remained on cold steel only, and her two friends remained anonymous bodies asleep in the back. Soon "Mary" herself joined them for a giggle and a snore as the lines of the highway blipped flat and steady under the hum and hardly real movement of my old truck. The night, I remember, had a steady wind from the north that made the wheel something to fight instead of ignore. And I turned on the radio to hear a voice curl words around the sleeping breath of "Mary" and the other two, breaths that hung suspended in the cold inside of the Chevy like milkweed, floating lazy and sure of a fertile and growing future.

The voice spoke of love and pain, money, cows and the cosmos. Of life on the plains, about farming, about profits and losses, about swarms of grasshoppers, eating everything, stripping the earth bare of its bounty. The voice cried out to the Maker to let those who can produce, produce, and make those creatures who consume only die and
blow away. Why was this plague here? Was there some sin, something dark at the center of our life, asked the voice, that this swarm will purge? I thought about what the voice was saying, and turned the dial until the sound of a different insect caught my ear. Iron Butterfly. "In-a-gadda-da-vida, baby, you know that ah luv you-" I chirped along happily. Foolish boy, singing to a voice in the night instead of answering the unclear urges of the actual. The call of my own need for love, for my love, for my love forgotten and looked forward to, my love imagined and pink hot and solid, my love earnest and obscene, my love impossible, invisible, instant and forever.

"Mary" and friends: deposited in the arms of three identical guys with Greek letters over their hearts. Me: to a couple months of descent from hipness to hopeless. My good buddy Rene' was originally happy to see a piece of the East floating in and out of his door, but when the "out" potion of my life got minuscule and the "in" immense, his warm smile turned to wary grimace. Not that I really noticed. My brain had, in a very short time, been turned to tapioca by drugs of all shapes but only one price (free). I took barrels and blotters, caps and bottles, half-moons that sparkled in the dark and
teaspoons full of dirt. Uppers, downers, inners, and outerspacers, drugs that made my nose stop up and my toenails bleed, drugs that made me fall into ecstatic worship of the dead flies on Rene's windowsill. Rene's wife Carol would find me planted on their couch in hysterics over the unpredictable antics of their thermostat. "Ha ha! 72! 72! 72! Oh no! Oh no! Ha ha! 72! 72! 71! Oh, too much, 71! Ow! 72! 72!..." and so on.

My meeting with Mort happened after I'd finally woken up to the realization that I was slowly descending the ladder of evolution, and that humanity was worth another try. My realization came much too late for Carol and Rene', who viewed me much like my mother viewed the pet kitten that my brother Elmo and I brought home one day. Mom thought Kitty was the cutest thing ever and loved to dangle a string just out of Kitty's reach and watch her bat at it futilely, and then spin around in circles. "How CUTE!" she'd say. Until Kitty started pissing at random all over the house. Until Kitty clawed couch, chair, rug, dress and stocking to ribbons. Until every bite of food the family ate had at least one and as many as fourteen cat hairs in it. Mom's warm heart filled to the top with the blackest of bile, and the cat was out, replaced by a clawless, hairless puppy, yes, the heartwarming houndlet who would later viscerously apply impotent lips to any
flesh I'd leave exposed while attempting sleep on Mom's clean and soft TV room rug, the previously described Senor Fido, though the name the petite pooch then went by was "Chico Fidito".

My memory of the poor kitten of my youth wasn't only called to mind by the look on Rene's face when he informed me that my days as his houseguest were numbered and that the number was zero, but also by the smell that greeted me on first entering the room for which Mort had coaxed a 50 dollar bill from my precious, greedily protected stash. Smell, it's been said, is the strongest evoker of locked up memories, and the smell in that room instantly reminded me of the smell that filled my nose when Kitty was busy running quickly from her water bowl to every corner in Mom's house, squating and spraying or depositing little, fragrant turdlets that Elmo and I never were able to find all of, or miss stepping in and then spreading throughout those few parts of the house that Kitty, through carelessness or want of a superfeline bladder or solid waste system, had failed to hit.

Yes, the previous occupant of my room had owned a cat and had not owned a litter box. What he had owned was a collection of over 150 doll heads, which he kept glued on one wall. The doll heads were of many shapes, sizes, materials, and colors, but shared one common attribute -
they were all disfigured, maimed, soiled, or otherwise violated, with little knives, nails, hooks, and frog gigs stuck through the eye, ear or mouth holes of at least 80 of them. The rest were either garishly made up, with lipstick on lips, nose and chin, and mascara and shadow spreading across their foreheads, or else they were shaved bald. Scattered at random through this collection were scraps of blood stained women's underwear of a variety of styles, functions, and patterns. The whole experience was heightened further by the dead insects and rodents that the previous occupant had cleverly attached to, around, under and in both doll heads and underwear.

"Ah, home sweet home," I remember thinking as I started to place both dried cat turds and inspired collection into bags for the purpose of immediate re-location elsewhere.

Life with Mort turned out not to be the picnic I'd imagined. He actually made me pay for my part of the food and made me wash my share of the dishes, and even told me I had to help clean up the bathroom! How anyone as anal as him (though Mort was not, he claimed, as anal as his brother Mart) ever co-existed with the former resident of my room was quite beyond me. Mort told me that he had lived in mortal fear (though, what other kind of fear could Mort experience) of his ex-roommate, a huge bearded man in his early 30's, who had L-O-V-E tattooed on the
knuckles of one hand, H-A-T-E on the knuckles of the other, and who wore happy face T-shirts and went by the name of Charles Manson Schickelgruber. "Have a nice day," he'd tell Mort before he'd mount the Harley he kept parked in the living room, start it, and then crash through the front door and down the steps. Mort told me that Chuck was an artist who'd left when $100,000 in government grant money had rolled his way. Mort further told me that Chuck's cat, Mouserlini, was his co-artist, who didn't shit but instead made statements. If Mort was too thick to fathom the Implications of random feces well then he, Chuck, couldn't begin to explain them.

So all the pent-up feelings of clean living that Mort's secretly suburban soul cherished and protected were sprung on me. For the first time in my life, I was actually asked to pull my own weight. What a frightening notion. 18 years of living in the luxury my parents' labors had bought me had been followed by four more years of milking them for enough money to fill my head with vapid nonsense while at the same time managing to avoid any involvement in "the War". It's true that graduation had brought me face to face with the dread possibility of laboring to earn a living, but I was fortunate enough to come of age during a period in history when it was possible, even noble, to live in hovels while dressed in rags. Dignity
could be maintained while laboring only occasionally in the company of others of the same class, the "Hip", whose superiority to those around them was confirmed, not contradicted, by their desolate state. I knew, also, that I was destined for this class from birth, with my early childhood always re-affirming the supremacy of sloth as a way of life.

"Oh, the world owes me a livin', deedle-diedle-doedle-deedle-dum," I would sing along with my favorite cartoon character, the Grasshopper, in Walt Disney's "The Grasshopper and the Ant". What I remember from that story is that the Grasshopper, in the summertime, gets to play his fiddle and generally have a grand time while the ants, and this was especially shocking and incomprehensible to my ten year old brain, were constantly working. Then, when winter arrives, the ants are warm in their hill, eating away at the results of their labor while, outside, the Grasshopper freezes. However, in the Disney version, the ants decide to share with the poor Grasshopper, and he's soon fiddling at ant hoe-downs. The message was obvious. Being an ant meant working constantly for 6 months so you could be warm in a crowded hill with millions of other ants. Being a Grasshopper meant screwing off in the summer, and then, okay, freezing for a couple of minutes before you can screw off for the winter, living off the
fruits of someone else's labor. "Ah," my little kid mind thought, "someone will always come to the aid of the fuck-off! - In that case, 'The world owes me a livin', deedle-diedle-doedle-deedle-dum.'"
Jed's Pontiac was out on the side of the road with a flat. There was a spare but no jack. Roxy had gone back to sleep in the front seat and Jed wondered if there might be some cars passing soon. 3 A.M. in Iowa. A back highway. No moon. Warmth of a summer night. A breeze. The corn fields not still. The hunters passing quietly through the trees at the edge of the lake. The geese all together several hundred turning their heads in unison. No. Stop.

Jed stood for several minutes by the side of his car. There was no sound of approaching cars, no mechanical noises at all. The corn fields that stretched for miles in all directions swayed slowly in the breeze, made a sound like hovering insects. Jed turned his head slowly,
like a panning camera, taking in all 360 degrees. There were no points of difference except for one small black strip, the road, straight in two directions, disappearing in the black distance at both ends. Jed shook Roxy awake.

"There's no traffic. No cars this late. Let's go for a walk, it's beautiful out here."

Roxy was not ready for talk. She shook her head, the almost frizzy blondish hair spinning out at crazy angles. "We've been driving for a long time..." she tried to keep her eyes open. "And Ben-

"Ben's in Monroe, remember? Several hours ago. I guess you were asleep."

"No, not asleep. I just don't remember."

Jed took Roxy's head with both his hands. "Please get up. We'll take a walk. You'll come out of it."

She was able to move herself to upright, still shaking her head, her eyes closed. "Walk. I will take a walk. We will take a walk."

Jed lit a cigarette and let the match burn down toward his fingers. He stared at the flame close up and then changed the focus of his eyes to follow in a direct line down the road beyond the corn to the end of the horizon where the car could be seen minutes before, coming this way and then the bang and stopping here with Roxy asleep, awake, "What's that" and out into the road looking back
lighting a match. Jed shook it out and tossed it to the ground.

"Let's go, Roxy."

She had turned off the overhead light in the Pontiac and was trying to brush some of the snarls out of her hair. She was only half groggy. She looked up at Jed, then got out of the car.

"Which way should we go?" Roxy didn't seem interested in the answer, only in asking the question.

Jed thought of the Mormon they had met three weeks ago who had pointed over the cactus to the next cliff and mentioned the Indians and Jed had closed his eyes and seen the lake and the bats circling over his boat as his father had pointed to the lantern in the distance and the low engine sound over the fish as the lillies bobbed in and out of the water, the loons would not get close enough, over the distance, damn it, I swam out to the boathouse-

Jed took Roxy's hand for a second and started walking down the road, away from the way they'd come. He dropped her hand, listened to the wind through the corn, kept walking.

"Maybe we'll find a place we can go swimming" said Roxy. "Maybe we'll find another car, just like ours, with a flat, pointed in the other direction, and two people just like us, standing beside it, pointing at us as we
walk by. Maybe we'll find an old gas station, abandoned twenty years ago, or a graveyard..." her voice trailed off, her mind kept going. Jed stayed a step or two behind her, watching the first row of corn like a picket fence, watching Roxy's body rock like a buoy as the wind picked up and the corn nodded back at Jed as Roxy kept walking in front of him and the road stayed straight like an old canal and there seemed no use in looking too far.

Jed saw the Roxy of four days ago, climbing out of the lake, naked, shaking off the water and looking over at him as she picked the towel up off the rocks and rolled the moisture away from her body.

Now Roxy stopped walking, turned to face Jed.

"Listen" she said. "I can hear them. I can hear the squirrels." Jed heard nothing but the rustle of the corn, back and forth, the leaves and the silk rubbing against each other, moving in several directions with the wind, and the whole plant, against it's neighbor, as they know all about growing and watching, at night, here, in Iowa, in the flatlands, thinking about where the next fall of the land would be. The black road. The black night. Stars like distant spots of ice. The warmth Jed felt not coming from above but seeming to seep out from under the corn. Jed saw the wind pull Roxy's hair in front of her face. She shook her head in his direction, the hair
flying gently back with the wind. Roxy looked at Jed for only a second, then ahead, up the road, the stars overhead, the Pontiac with a flat tire, with a spare but no jack, now behind them, further behind with each step, but they don't look back.

"I can hear the squirrels, Jed, I can hear the frogs."

Jed walked up to her, touched her shoulder. They started walking, Roxy reaching over and closing Jed's eyes with her fingers. Jed saw the frogs, with huge eyes and tiny bodies, on the stalks of the corn, down in the crotch of the leaves, their throats swollen with air, their song swallowed by the space between the leaves. He only heard the corn, the wind, but he saw the frogs, their eyes watching for the birds that silently flew around the leaves, then suddenly overhead and jerking crazily after a flying insect, a large green moth, antennae open and swaying to the pulse of the night.

Jed opened his eyes, looked straight ahead, along the road. The flatness became a slight roll, the plane's beveled edge. The road, the fields, took a dip, not everything in front of him was obvious, but something, over this roll, something else - The squirrels. The frogs. The birds. The lake, ducks in a circle, around and around, we rise from the blind -

"Stop, Roxy." Jed put his arms around Roxy's waist.
She leaned back toward him, slightly. He tasted her hair blowing into his mouth, the air of the warm Iowa night going around the squirrels, the moths in the mouths of the birds, the Pontiac, and the corn, rubbing and swaying, for miles and miles and miles.

Roxy gently broke Jed's grip and turned to face him. "Let's just keep walking. Forever. Let's not go back to the car. No more Ben. Nothing we've ever done before. Let's be explorers! Let's be farmers! Let's be cow's! Let's be corn!" She trotted ahead of Jed, smiling back at him and disappearing over the dip in the road, waving at him to come on.

"There's no hurry, Roxy." Jed thought to himself. "It's hours till dawn and miles from nowhere. Wherever you are will look the same if you're running or if you're walking." Jed walked slowly, the wind, the warmth, in his hair. He looked back toward the Pontiac, its one side away from the road sinking forward and down, its motion lost, sitting like a white metal rock in the black stream as the reflection overhead was lost in the distant cold white points as the frogs' songs reflect within the leaves and the squirrels look out at us, through the trees, there are no trees, no lake, as Jed walks over the roll, now, and the Pontiac disappears behind.

"Roxy" where is Roxy? Here, over the roll, the road has
taken a right angle curve. Maybe she's behind that, down, among the corn. Jed thinks of Roxy, in the front seat, brushing out her hair, shaking her head and looking at him. He can hear the squirrels, the frogs, the wind, the waving corn. "Roxy!" There is no answer. Jed trots the 25 feet ahead to where the road takes its turn, into the rows or corn, the dirt as black as the road, as black as the sky, the squirrels scattering, the frogs still, their eyes open, the rock of the boat, the weight of the quill - "Roxy -" there she is, stretched out between the rows, on her back, her arms over her head, rocking slightly from side to side.

"Jed - we're in a closed spot." She is saying this softly. She said this softly. "It's in our house in Oregon. The sun shines in through the window on you. You are asleep. My dogs are asleep, too. The cylinders of the car are still. The deer outside don't move. Nothing moves but my lips, which move together, they touch one another - what fun!"

Jed leans over her, reaches his open hand out to just over her mouth, feels the hot air wrap around his palm, wrap around his fingers as she breathes out again and Jed pulls away his hand and says "No. I hear a car -"

Through the sound of the wind around the corn, like a needle in the arm, Jed hears it, barely there, but coming
closer, the sound of a car. He closes his eyes and sees two headlights, from miles above the only lights below for hundreds of miles, creeping like glowworms through the corn but from above no sound as everything is drowned by the light of the stars spreading like seeds in the wind, but I don't know why it's dark in my dream as the gnats land on my arm and bite into my skin all at once but I only feel them, one at a time, hours later as I wake up shaking my head and looking out at you.

Jed reaches down and helps Roxy stand up. The car comes closer and closer. "Maybe they've got a jack. Let's go back to the car."

"Maybe they aren't coming our way" says Roxy. But the sound gets closer. The sound gets closer, louder, more separated from the corn, the wind, the frogs and the sound of their feet hitting the dirt between the rows, then the pavement, a muffled stacatto. They walk faster, the two of them, together, up the slight rise, looking to see their car, the other car, the unchanged, the changing, the stars the same, the wind from a distance to close-up, against her skin, against his skin, against their car, against the other car, wherever it is, in whatever section of field, its driver invisible behind those big headlights and all that metal, awake and decisive, and Jed and Roxy, from whatever other state, are awake too and watching
everything melt together like ice out of the sawdust placed on top of the salt lick, the deer trying to decide which to taste while both disappear at their feet.

"Maybe they won't want to stop" says Roxy.

"Maybe not" says Jed, still hearing the other car, now seeing his car as they walk over the roll, yes, there it is, white, waiting, the same but getting closer, the flat land, the sound of the other car. Jed starts to trot, then run to be next to his car when the other car comes through. He can hear Roxy behind him, see the lights of the car, yes, a minuscule glow over the corn, brighter as the sound gets louder, more open, and Jed looks back at Roxy as the light increases, comes down the corn, Roxy's face beginning to glow like a mushroom in the dark as the sound kills the squirrels, the hunters are coming out of their boat as I raise my bow -. No, the sound, from the car, here it comes, a great rush of crazy whiteness, as Jed steps in front of its oncoming headlights, waving his arms, thinking of the flat, the jack, the flat, the jack -

"My God, he's not stopping! The bastard's speeding up!"

The car's horn blares out as its speed increases. Jed leaps to one side, behind the Pontiac, as the car swerves at him, then sees the Pontiac and turns its wheels the other way, losing, for a second, control, starting to
spin, as Roxy screams into the corn, the car still spinning, and now turning over, the engine roaring, the horn screaming as the car hits that slight roll that the land takes and flips over, on its top, the engine now dead, the wheels shaking, the echoes of the horn, too, dying as the sound of the night, the sway or the corn, the warmth from between the rows, comes back and swirls around and around Jed, lying in back of the Pontiac, and Roxy, standing several yards down the road, shaking, looking at Jed as he looks over at the other car and all movement stops except what the wind dictates to the corn, back and forth, dependent, and the frogs, watching, the birds flying at the green moths, the stars overhead frozen, the earth, the blacktop, the trees over the back of my head as the arrows shoot out in all directions and fall into the water, settle down among the lillies. The arrows, the arrows, the bullets.

Jed didn't move for several minutes, then slowly stood, looking over to where the other car rested, on its top, quiet, now part of the landscape, the corn broken in a path leading up to it. Jed walked toward the car. Roxy followed slowly. They walked down a different road, the corn broken and flat, green to black beneath their feet, the earth scooped out over some, and the worms and slugs open to the air of the night, disturbed, scattered,
crawling back to the warmth of the earth, the birds alert to what's below, dropping down silently, all around -

Jed walked up to the car and looked inside. Two indefinite lumps of cloth were tangled together, with some wet stains shining through the night. Jed could make out a hand, half closed, in one spot, frozen, and boots, hair. A red and black checked hat. There were several rifles in a haphazard pile in the back. Bullets were scattered like seeds all around the car, churned into the soil. Jed reached into the driver's side of the car, through the shattered glass, and pulled the dangling keys from the ignition.

"What are you doing?" Roxy's voice, from ten yards away, asking through the wind that increased to a rush between them, around the broken car, the flattened corn, the slugs -

Jed walked to the back of the car and inserted the key into the trunk lock. The trunk fell open. Jed reached up and pulled out a jack from the furthest back part of the trunk. He picked up a lug wrench from off the ground, where it had fallen when the trunk opened. He turned and walked past Roxy, to the Pontiac. Roxy went with him. Jed opened his own trunk, pulled out the spare. He jacked up his car, changed the tire, let the car back down, put the flat in his trunk, took the jack in his hand and walked
again over to the other car, the birds scattering before him, the wind whipping his hair against his face. Jed put the jack and lug wrench on the ground underneath the trunk and returned to the Pontiac.

Roxy had the overhead light on. She was combing the snarls out of her hair, in the front seat. Jed got in. The light went off. Jed started the engine and, slowly, rolled away, down the road. He did not turn on his headlights as he went over the roll, around the curve, the birds landing again, grabbing the slugs, the squirrels opening the cobs, the frogs, watching, in the roar of the wind, the felled corn rising into the air, floating off in a thousand directions, the whole earth bending and shaking, whitecaps against the side of our skiff, the matches puffing out behind cupped hands, the waves rising, the night turned from warm to deadening cold, and the dock a hundred miles away in the wrong direction — Will we ever get there?
The smell of lobster pies from the open window of the shack on my left enters one nostril. The odor of raw sewage from the ditch on my right enters the other. My ankles itch from a ring of bites inflicted by the sand fleas that leap off the dirt road and sink their microscopic fangs into my already scratch scarred skin. The slight taste of salt from the ocean that's just a coconut's throw away and the lilted greetings of the locals sitting in the doorways lining the street complete the picture. "Ari, mahn." Yes, the sun is out in Turtle Town and I'm ready for a beer. It's another scorcher, but who cares. The sun means my tan gets deeper, my thirst stays active, and most clothes stay off the ladies. I try to hustle them, with no success, when I'm not tipping a
few at Desmond's Cool Club or body surfing with a couple of union electricians from Alberta I met here. Down for the winter from the Province of the K-Mart People. Yes, there it is, all of Edmonton perking up for a Blue Light Special! My friends' names are Dirk and Brent. Dork and Burnt is closer to the truth. They're to meet me at the Club for a couple of guarros and to introduce me to a lady who they claim wants to meet me. Well, I hope she likes horizontal conversation, because that's the means of communication that I favor most but, down here anyway, practice the least.

I flew into this country a month and a half ago. Friends had told me the prettiest girls in Central America were here. And the cheapest. It's true. Before I came down here to Turtle Town, I spent some time in the capital, up in the mountains. The girls I saw were real short and real pretty. I was told if they seem friendly and are dressed just a little nice, they're whores. I don't know, most Yanks seem into that sort of thing, but not me. I want true love like back home, where you meet a girl, buy her a meal, tell her she's pretty and the only one, screw her and take off. I call it the four L's of love: lunch, lie, lay, leave. Simple and cheap. I got to admit, I did go to one whore house, though, just for grins. It was full of middle aged Americans and fifteen
year old senoritas. The drunkest guy there, a 70 year old Californian with laquered black hair, who claimed to be the owner of the place, explained to me the relative merits of each girl's blow job. I mean, give me a break. I may be a jerk, but I'm a cool jerk. So, I resisted the alluring eyes and the outstretched hands of the night shift, drank a little, and left.

The capital was OK, I guess. I liked the weather in the mountains, and I liked the smiles of the ladies. But I got tired of the Spanish language. Hey, pal, I'm American, don't give me none of that latin lingo, you know what I mean? And, I got tired of the politics. Contras, Sandinistas, death squads. It wasn't happening in this country - hell, that's why I came here - and, even if it were, I didn't do it, so why did these people bug me with it? Hey, all I want is hot weather and cool ladies, OK? I figured maybe I'd let the Latins confront each other without me, so I took a slow train to the Caribbean coast. Hot sun, sand, reggae, rum drinks. That scene. And, for the last three weeks, here I've been. I've got a room in a cheap, but not the cheapest, hotel. I tried the cheapest, but the first night a giant rat ran out on the rafters over my head. I bitched to the manager, who told me to wait a minute, went back into his room and came out with a giant boa constrictor named Paco. He told me I
could let Paco stay in my room and keep the rats out. I briefly considered the offer, but then figured that that would doom me with any females I might bring back. Either they'd immediately run screaming from the room, or they'd make unflattering comparisons between the giant boa in the corner and the pygmy rattler in my pants: the one Paco, the other pico. So I declined the offer and transferred to the place I'm in now - Winton's Travel Hotel. I got a room with a fan, mosquitoes but no rats, a warm shower if you use it when the sun's been shining on the tank for a while, and a relaxed staff of maids. I told Winton I'd leave a trail of string from my door to the desk so maybe his girl Betty could find her way up the stairs to my room every now and then. He laughed like he thought I was kidding.

There're a fair amount of tourists who wander through Turtle Town. They don't get the blue-hair cruise trips here, or the Club Med organized group gropes or the Yuppies seeking quaint hide-a-ways that only the select few know about. Instead they get the type of tourist who wants a long stay at a beach while sleeping on a sagging bed with burlap sheets, like Germans who tour the world on twenty five cents a day, sounding like migrating warblers - make that varblers - when they talk to other tourists "It's cheap! It's cheap! It's cheap!" Swedes who piss me
off because they speak perfect English and Spanish, and who are here for reasonable access to the offshore reef and onshore reefer; occasional North American bird watchers who've already seen enough of the quetzals of the highlands and are now keen on seeing giant flights of parrots and colorful shore birds. And they think dodos are extinct! Then there's young women from various Western countries who seem amazingly curious about the latin-black mix down here and even more amazingly uncurious about my brand of underwear. And, of course, there's the Frenchies who find Turtle Town a convenient place to feel culturally superior while enjoying easy access to every drug they desire. I particularly hated this one Frog scumbag who'd managed to snake away the only woman who I'd started to slide close to, a beautiful Jewish American Princess from Jersey named Sarah who thought maybe a couple of days with me, if properly documented by the $3,000 worth of camera equipment that her old man bought her for the trip, might be parlayed into an even bigger bribe on her return home, like maybe an Audi of something. But I was just starting to explore Sarah's possibilities when Pierre came along, with his disdainful sneer and his bikini brief swimsuit, which he wore tight enough to clearly outline his permanently semi-erect dick, or his Richard, I guess it is in the big frog-pond. I could see how Pierre's skinny
white body, with just the right pattern of tastefully plucked chest hair, and those pursed, continental, Jew-hating lips would raise the ante up to a Porsche. Well, too bad for Sarah, her dreams were shortly thereafter crushed when the locals finally got tired of Pierre sashaying through town with his briefed groin thrust proudly forward and threw him into the slammer for a few days. Just long enough for his visa to expire, so he'd be booted back to the motherland. Ah, Pierre, it seems that wearing swimsuits off the beach here is a crime, indecent exposure. Real sorry I forgot to tell you.

Mostly here it's been uneventful. Drink guarros, eat rice and beans, lounge on the beach hoping a wave will swirl a seniorita my way, and dodge the drug peddlers. This latter skill took me a while to figure out. The boys had zeroed in on me as a definite pot-head, despite denials on my part. Every other dread-locked yahoo would try to put the hit on me. They'd walk up in baggy trousers and torn T-shirts, a grin on their pussies and a distant stare in their eyes. "You want some grahss, mahn," they'd ask.

"No, thanks, my man, not today. I don't smoke," I'd answer, which, of course, was a lie.

"No, mahn. I see it in your eyes. Dey bloodshot. You fockin' wit' me, mahn."
So, we'd go through it all. I'd have to assure him that I wasn't fucking with him, that I couldn't afford dope, didn't want any, that I loved his glorious country, that, hey, I liked reggae music, that Marcus Garvey was married to my gramma and Haille Sallassee sold me my TV.

Eventually, he'd give up, but time standing up talking to him was time I could have spent lying down conversing with Mr. Sun, so I knew I needed a way out.

That's when I bumped into Eduardo.

Eduardo was a guy I'd seen in Desmond's from time to time, slapping Frogs or Krauts on the back after they'd bought him a drink or chattering with Rasta bar-flies. I asked Desmond what the guy's story was, and Desmond said his name was Eduardo and motioned him to come talk to me. Eduardo got up and staggered toward me. He was a Latino, maybe in his mid-thirties, handsome and flashily dressed in a guayaberra covered with a loose vest. He had a grin on his face that said he'd been fucked-up drunk since the age of twelve. Eduardo started hugging me and shouting "Amigo! Amigo! Amigo!" So I grinned back at him and repeated "Amigo! Amigo! Amigo!" His eyes lit up. "Norteamericano! Ah!" He lowered his voice, looked conspiratorially from side to side, and motioned me closer with his wiggling index finger. "Amigo! I get ju good marijuana." My sinking heart, I'm sure, was reflected in my face, as
Eduardo waggled his head in drunken surprize. "Amigo!" I said. "No! I can't! I don't!" Eduardo gave me a look that contained no hint of understanking. Then I hit on an idea. "Look. My dad - mi padre - CIA! If I"-I pointed to my self, then pantomimed taking a drag on a joint - "then my dad" - I then drew my index finger across my throat. "It's not possible!"

Eduardo's face lit up. "Me too!" he said, and opened up his vest to reveal a holstered pistol. He then took out his wallet and flipped it open, revealing an official looking badge. "Policia! Amigo!" He happily hugged me, and I hit on another idea. Through my sign language and his pathetically machete-hacked English, we told our mutual stories. Mine was a fanciful one, full of a nicely imagined life as the sad black sheep in a fine American spy family (CIA father, FBI mother) here for a little R and R, and maybe to find an item of two of intelligence on political activity in the region that might return me to the good graces of my wealthy but disappointed family. His was of a poor but honest police man, forced by the sad economy of the region to be a go-between and protector of the small local drug merchants against outside foreign interests. I informed Eduardo, whom I'd re-named Edwierdo-

"No, Amigo, es Ed-war-do."
"Uh, lemme try. Ed-wierd-do."

"No, no, amigo..."

-of my problems with the local drug boys, their being nice fellows and all, but definitely cramping my beach enjoyment. If he, Edwierdo, would be so kind as to waylay the lads a bit, keep them from hassling me, why, I'd make sure my Dad's agency would leave them alone and would, moreover, reward Edwierdo with some nice Gringo dollars for any useful political intelligence - no Commies on the Coast was the agencies motto!- and, as for myself, I'd be only too glad to reward Edwierdo with a daily dose of Flor-de-cana for his troubles. And I impressed on the man my need for an improved love life. So, if he sees any nice gringas who look like they need protection and guidance, to please send them my way and, if I'm ever in the company of one, to please make doubly sure that no unaware local hustler can invade my needed privacy.

I sealed our relationship with a first bottle of rum, which didn't seem to have much effect on Edwierdo, but which deepened my own appreciation for the aptness of the bar's stiped pink and purple day-glow decor. We, I think, became friends for life, as Edwierdo assured me he would continue to strive to live according to the highest ideals embodied by that great man, George Washington, and his exemplary, recently elected, symbolic descendant, Ronald
Reagan. And his love of freedom would manifest itself by allowing me the freedom of an unhasselled tan.

And so it turned out. My days at the beach became quieter without capitalism's minions insistent sales-spiels, and my colleagues from Canada, the no-necks of the north, Dork and Burnt, couldn't help but notice and approve of the increased quiet our corner of the beach enjoyed. They, unlike myself, started attaining a few successes with the fair sex, in their case a couple of Polish stewardesses who seemed amused by the faint sound of a sliding hockey puck they'd hear when the boys would wiggle their heads. Or maybe they'd seen dubbed re-runs of Sgt. Preston of the Yukon, and were hoping to be Canadian Mounties' mountees. In any case, I hoped that my own search for foreign soil in which to plant my flagpole would be assisted by the guys today in Desmonds. They claimed their girlfriends had a lovely friend from New Zealand who maybe would like to meet me. Sounded all right to me! I'd always longed to stick my pee-wee in a Kiwi.

So, anyway, I continue my stroll down the dusty main drag, until I arrive at Desmond's. I walk around the rusty ruin of a Renault that some sucker from the states had years ago abandoned at the front of the bar and which had remained a kind of local landmark. I greet all the old
black men who perpetually play dominoes on Desmond's front porch, and enter the bar. I look around, and see Edwierdo on his accustomed perch. I buy him his daily allotment of rum, and have Desmond deliver it. Edwierdo nods happily in my direction. I look around some more and notice that Dork and Burnt haven't arrived, but that there's a lovely young woman who I haven't seen before seated at one of the tables. She's looking at me as though she's expecting me, so I sit down.

"Are you Sam?" she asks.

"Why, yes I am. Well, you must be the woman Dork - excuse me - Dirk and Brent told me about."

"Yes. My name's Catherine King. I've been most anxious to meet you. Dirk and Brent informed me that you've been here for several weeks and, as you are an American, I was wondering what it is about this place that interests you so. You see, I'm a correspondent for the New Zealand Peace Journal, and I'm interested in doing a story on how the new U.S. created war against the Sandinistas is affecting life throughout the Central American Caribbean coast. What sort of attitude would you say the locals have exhibited toward you, as an American, and have these attitudes changed as the locals have come to see you as an individual rather than as a representative of a less-than-loved neo-colonialist government."
Oh, fuck. My heart is sinking. A politico! But, one whose earnest gaze sure does tug on my heart strings. Surely, I think, there must be some way to manipulate this situation to my advantage. I put on the smarmiest smile I can muster.

"Well, in truth, I've been concerned about the same thing. I know the war is heating up on Nicaragua's northern border, but down here it's still quiet. The people have always dealt with me openly and honestly, as I have with them. I wouldn't blame them for being suspicious of Americans, but I've found them very eager to engage in open, free discussion of issues of importance to them, though, I have to admit, they seem more interested in discussing economic issues than political ones. I, however, am happy to find someone who, I think, shares some of my concerns and interests about the effects of global super-power interference on the specific, local level. Just a minute, let me get you a drink." I motion to Desmond. "A couple of guarros here. Have you had guarro?" I ask her. She smiles and shakes her head. "A great local drink," I continue. And, I think, one that will maybe get you shit-faced and off this silly political topic. If I can milk this a little longer.

"In any event," I say, "how have you found things in this country so far?" I look at her and smile as our
drinks are delivered. She hesitates for a minute before picking hers up, then does, and returns my smile. She shakes her head.

"You know, you, initially, don't seem to be anything like your Canadian friends, or your appearance, make you out to be. I suppose I should be suspicious of a fellow who wears expensive sunglasses inside a dark bar" - well, okay. I reach up and take them off, grinning sheepishly - "but there's something in your tone of voice that makes me think maybe you're not such a representative asshole after all. We'll see." She takes a sip of her guarro, then another, then taps her glass softly on the table while she continues to size me up.

But, before she can speak again, a loud crashing sound comes through the open door of the bar. I look outside and see an obviously drunk man roll off the top of the dilapidated old Renault onto the wood deck in front of the bar. The man has apparently fallen on top of the car from off his burro, which he's ridden up onto the deck and tied to the domino table, though the players continue their game as though this happens every day. The drunk doesn't look at all injured by his fall, and lurches into the bar.

He's a poor Latino peasant, judging by his clothes: sandals, dirty straw cowboy hat, old and tattered baggy slacks, and a T-shirt that says "World Champion N.Y.
Knicks”. He staggers half way to the bar, then looks over at our two white faces and changes the general direction of his weaving from the bar to us.

I look at Catherine, who has a bemused smile on her face. "Well, this should prove interesting," she says.

Before I can say anything, the man sits down next to me and looks me in the eye.

"Me gusta Jimmy Carter," he slurs quietly.

"What?" I ask.

"He says he likes Jimmy Carter," says Catherine.

I look at the man, dumbfoundedly. He looks back at me, raises his hands and, this time, bellows.

"Me gusta Jimmy Carter!"

"Well, amigo, that's nice, but, if you'll excuse us, I was having a chat with this young lady."

The guy apparently has no idea what I'm saying. He glances at Catherine, then back at me. He leans closer to my face, then hisses.

"Ronald Reagan, no me gusta."

"Oh, he doesn't like Ronald Reagan. Great. Fascinating political discussion, wouldn't you say, Catherine?" I look at Catherine, who seems a little put off by my new contribution to the conversation. "Of course" I ad lib, "the poor man must be reacting to the heel of the oppressor's boot, so to speak." I quietly hope to soon give him the
toe of the oppressor's sandal.

At this point, the man stands and sways back and forth, this time howling to the ceiling. "Me gusta Jimmy Carter!" He slowly shakes his head, then his index finger. "Ronald Reagan, no me gusta."

This last outburst brings Edwierdo over to our table. "Amigo, es theese man, he bother ju?" Without waiting for an answer, Edwierdo starts talking rapidly to the man in Spanish. I have no idea what Edwierdo's saying, but every once in a while, he points his finger at me, jabbers some sentences with "CIA" and "FBI" repeated a few times, and then swings his pointing finger from the drunk to the door. Edwierdo finishes, and the other fellow looks at me, smiles, tips his hat, and steps toward the door.

"Me gusta Jimmy Carter!" he says as he slides onto his burro, and off the porch into the dusty street beyond.

Edwierdo bows toward me slightly, and taps his heels together. "Amigo." He then repeats the performance toward Catherine. "Senorita." And then he walks back toward his accustomed seat in the corner.

I look at Catherine and attempt to continue our talk. "Well, where were we..."

Catherine remains silent for a minute, then picks up her drink, reaches over and pours it in my lap. She then picks up my drink and repeats the action. I'm glad I
didn't order the drinks on the rocks. Though, come to think of it, that's where they've ended up.

Catherine shakes her head slowly, rises, then smiles sadly as she walks toward the door.

I call after her. "Wait! What did he say! Wait a minute!"

Catherine looks back at me and says "C-I-A? F-B-I?"

"M-O-U-S-E!" I sing in response.

Catherine leaves.

"Amigo!" shouts Edwierdo from his table. "What es problema with seniorita?"

"Politics, amigo. Just politics."
Bud held the pill between his index finger and thumb.
"Hey! Speedy. Speedy Gon-zal-ezi!"

Bud smiled, dropped it into my hand. He pulled another pill out of a vial in his pocket, put it in his mouth and swallowed. But I wasn't going to take mine. I popped the pill in my mouth, stuck it with my tongue between my gum and lip. I faked a swallow so Bud could see. He nodded his approval at me.

"Let's go. Let's go. Let's go."

Bud opened another bundle of shakes and spread it out over the roof we were working on. He laid some of the shakes in a row and reached into the stripper hanging from his neck. His hatchet started coming down, tapping, the nails set, then sunk. The row growing.
I was on the ridge, just a couple of feet from him. I cut a few shakes to length, laid them in, nailed them high, so the next row of shakes would cover the nails. I looked over the edge, at the masons hacking at their bricks. The mixer turning slowly, the chug as one of the boys swung a shovel at its mouth, then aimed the hose as he looked inside. I pretended to scratch at the sore in the corner of my lip, moved my tongue to get the pill and stick it onto my finger. I looked at Bud, who was reaching for another shake and looking at me.

"We're gonna go like Hell, amigo. There's fast, there's faster, then there's us."

I quickly dropped my hand to under the eave and placed the pill on the clean wood. Not today, Bud. Not today.

This morning I'd driven from my place in the center of the city out to Bud's double-wide set in the sagebrush hills to the east of town. It'd taken ten minutes of ringing to get him to answer the door. Bud opened it slow and quiet, waving at me to come in. He moved groggily to the kitchen table.

"Did the needle again last night. Had to, didn't I? Don't worry, we'll make it up. You know how. Here's coffee. Marva!"
She was just a kid, really. Pretty, quiet. Hair mussed, that soft red that seems made to float at every slow move. I could see Bud had hit her again. Lips puffy, one cheek a slight purple, one eye shut just a little more that the other. Bud thought he could do it so no-one could see. Bud thought.

Marva looked at me, then away. Bud drank his coffee, his big head nodding down, jerking up.

"Eggs. Eggs and toast. Marva!"

She got out the pan, put the bread in the toaster. White bread. The eggs sizzled and popped.

"Some of this to ease in the day." Bud was rolling a joint, the paper carefully wet, the grass spread evenly in the crease. "Then we'll go." The final twist finished the job. He sucked in. "This will save our asses, grease-ball. You wait and see. But first, you smoke." He handed me the joint. Marva put the eggs in front of Bud. When Bud bent down to take a bite, she looked at me and I knew. Today's it. I sucked air in deeply through my nose while I tried to keep the smoke of the joint in just my mouth. The joint glowed. I held my breath, then slowly let the air escape, pushing the smoke out of my mouth. Bud nodded happily.

"Yes, that's it. Mellow. Then go like hell-o. Ha!" Bud combed his huge hand through his beard as he took
another long drag, followed by a series of shorter puffs. He handed the joint back to me. "You finish it, then eat it, amigo. Muy pronto!" I didn't know if Bud knew Spanish or just a couple of phrases. I never answered except in English. Bud finished his eggs as I worked on the rest of the joint. I didn't want that smoke in my lungs. Not today. I made it look as good as I could, then stuck the roach in my mouth. That's the first time that day I faked a swallow. I slid the roach out of my mouth and stuck it in my pocket. Bud didn't seem to notice.

"Better'n a jalapeno, if you don't put it out first, eh, amigo?"

Marva picked up Bud's dish and put it in the sink. She ran some water, testing it with her finger until it was hot enough, then added soap. As the suds formed, she picked some up with two fingers of her right hand, then touched them to her swollen cheek, where the bubbles clung for a few seconds after she moved her hand away.

"To the roof, bean-boy!" Bud stood up. I looked at Marva again. She took more suds, touched them to her shut eye, touched them to her lips. Looked at me as the suds disappeared. I followed Bud. Out the door. Into my truck. We drove the 15 miles of dry, blank countryside out to the development where the job was. I tried to figure how I'd change things while Bud talked out the
It was 11 o'clock when we got to work. Start late, work late, on into the night. That's how it always went when Bud was like this. But not tonight. Tonight was Friday night, date night, and I had two dates. One with Bud. One with Marva.

I opened another bundle near the bottom of the roof. We'd already laid the first row of shingles. The split rolls of felt were started, the first triangle of shakes on, up to the ridge. Bud always worked slightly behind me, to push me, make sure I stayed grooved and my hatchet always splitting, or sinking the spikes I rolled and nailed high. Double coverage. The split felts rolled slightly ahead, each stuck with a nail as they covered the tops of the shakes. Felt, shingle, shake, then all shakes to the ridge, where the tops stuck uneven into the sky. Then the saw and then the ridge-cap.

I finished my section of the bottom and grabbed the shakes I'd need for the next row. And the next. Bud came down from the ridge. He leaned into the roof, his leather apron around his left leg and hip, so he could push and drag smoothly across the cedar.

I could tell when the pill started to hit Bud.
"Amigo. Little compadre. Bam bam BAM. Hit. Hit. Split. Grab that sucker a little faster, pal, or it's off to the big burrito in the sky. What's with you? Mas rapido, if you please. Bam bam BAM." And then mumbling. His sets more rapid.


The sun was hot. I took off my shirt, my skin even darker now, in the early summer.

Bud's hatchet was getting closer to my feet.

"Ooh - better go faster! Look how close I'm getting, grease-ball. Mas rapido!"

I tried to set faster. I dumped more nails in my stripper, shook it to let a few drop down. Pinched with my index and middle finger. Rolled them with my thumb, a tap, then a drive. Bud's hammer closer. Again.

"Andale, amigo. Here I come."
Bud snatched up my shoe-lace and gave a quick jerk from below. He grabbed my boot and shoved it sole-down onto the roof.

"Well, there, boy. You want to pretend like you're nailed to the roof. Why pretend?"

He took a spike from his apron. A sharpened one. He rolled his fist around it and raised it over his head. I tried to pull away my foot as Bud plunged down with his fist.

"Wham! Ooh-ee! Well, little amigo, you're lucky again. Missed by a Mexican cunt hair."

Bud's fist had come down an inch to the right of my foot, which was stationary in the grip of his left hand. He brought his fist away. The nail was sunk half-way to its head.

"Sink that the rest of the way for me, will you, boy? And, get a move on. Por favor."

I drove the nail in with my hatchet, then pushed myself a little higher up the roof. My ankle was sore from where Bud had grabbed it. I could see Bud was laughing.

"You gotta rub yourself with some more grease from your momma's tacos, if you want to get away better. One of these days, I'm gonna forget that I'm a joker and sink one of those spikes in the center of your big toe." Bud took a cigarette out of the pack he'd rolled up in his
sleeve. "Go on. I'll take a smoke break and watch you work." Bud stuck the cigarette in his mouth and sucked rapidly, his eyes twitching, his fingers in his beard. "WHAM! Hit that sucker. Ooh, you're nervous? Nervous but slow? Didn't Dr. Bud's pill help what ailed you? Well, Dr. Bud's got more. And he brought his needle today. He saw it did so much good in helping him swift-stroke little Marva. Maybe it would help his little rat scurry up the roof before the cat gets him again. How about a set in the arm, rat-boy? Ha!" Bud laughed, the cigarette wiggling in the corner of his mouth as the laugh went quiet.

I grabbed more shakes, split and laid them out. Nailed, rolled the next split felt, again held it with a nail. More shakes. Nails. Split felt. Double coverage. Trying to look fast, focused, and nervous.

But I wasn't nervous. I just had to wait and stay ahead. If he got me or not, I'd get him. I wasn't nervous. Swift-stroke Marva. Red hair, the suds on her cheek. More shakes. Bud, smoking, enjoying me swinging faster. BUD! Each nail. The cross hatches on the square end of the hatchet. Swinging again. BUD! Swift stroke rat. Toward the ridge.

"Ooh, look at him go! Spike in your boot! Spike in your butt! Here I come, better keep those little claws
climbing."

I stayed ahead of him. I got out the saw to cut a few shakes before laying and nailing them, and then set and cut the top row. When I finished with the saw, it was noon. The cement mixer off, other hammering stopped. We kept on. I went down to the bottom again, below Bud, who hadn't gained any on me. Shake. Felt. Nail. Leather slide against cedar. And Bud was singing and muttering.

"Bud. You're a parrot in a microwave," I said.

Bud stopped muttering. Stopped nailing.

"What's that, Amigo? What did you say? Did Speedy Ratzalez squeek? Or was that the wheel he's running on? Maybe if the wheel spins faster, the squeek will disappear."

I didn't say anything else. I wasn't supposed to talk.

"OK, partner. OK. Here's my hatchet. Don't get too close, it's splitting or nailing anything close. Wham, bam. Thank you ma'am! Ooh, little Marva, look out tonight! I'll be splitting and nailing at 4 in the morning. And, look out, amigo - I'm climbing now. I'll be on your tail in a minute. Go, brown clown, or I'll shut you down. Ha!" His hatchet, fist, spikes, faster than ever.

OK, Bud. OK, I thought. Perch and squawk. I'll flip the switch and you will fry.
Bud picked up his speed, got closer. The sun was starting to get serious, my skin hot, lips dry. Bud getting closer as I tried to grab more shingles, nail faster. I looked up to the ridge, down to Bud. His hatchet splitting shakes, then setting, muttering, looking at me. A wink.

"Yes, little hombre. I'm getting closer. You're getting hotter."

I reached above for some shakes, put them against the hot black felt. I tried to spit. My mouth was sawdust.

"Ooh! I can see the well is dry. It needs priming, maybe." Bud stopped nailing, inches below me. "I guess we can take a break. Go down and bring up the water jug. And our lunch buckets. Pronto, Senor Speedy Gonzalez."

I went down to the truck. There was a water jug in the back, and our two black lunch boxes. I put them under one arm and climbed back up the ladder, to where Bud was sitting in the center of the roof.

"Lunch at lunchtime, amigo. The whole project's quiet." Bud looked at his watch. "We work an hour and a half, then we quit for lunch. You like this schedule, don't you, boy. Not too ambitious today. The rat wants a cheese break before he hits the wheel again."

I drank the water, opened my lunch pail. An apple. Carrots. Whole grain bread, chicken salad, lettuce.
"Oh, look, amigo. I got something here for you."

Bud had his lunch pail open. He put his hand in and held it out to me. It was empty. I looked at Bud, who winked. Then, my head was smashed against the roof, Bud's hand twisting my nose. It felt broken. I could feel blood flowing from inside my nose to the back of my throat. I spit out blood on the roof. Bud gave my nose another twist.

"Now, now. I thought you wanted a drink, and so I gave you a drink. But then you spit it out! Is this gratitude? And on the nice clean roof! Can I tell the owner it's taco sauce? No, I can't. I'll have to pull that shake out. But I can't, because your head's on it."

I swallowed some blood, then tried to get a breath out between wet teeth. Bud pushed my head harder against the roof with another twist on my nose. "Oh, so you want that shake to stay? I don't think so. I think I'll take it out anyway."

Bud held onto the shake with his other hand, lifted it slightly, gave a tug and pulled it out from under my cheek. I could feel hundreds of splinters sinking into my skin. Bud pulled my head up again. I swallowed more blood. Bud turned my head and looked at my cheek, full of splinters.

"Too much greasy food. You got acne bad, amigo. But
don't worry. Dr. Bud's got something that will fix you up just fine."

Bud pushed my head back onto the roof, then put his knee on my neck and let go of my nose. My chest was facing the roof, my arms unresisting at my side. Bud reached into his lunch box, and brought out a needle and two vials full of liquid, one clear, one with a pinkish tinge. He put them in a line in front of me. He pointed to the pinkish vial.

"This one is good for siesta time, amigo. A slow afternoon, just you and your senorita? Good clean fun under the serape, then slap on the sombrero, sleep in the sun till you gather 30 buzzards, then wake up just before they peck out your eyeballs. Also highly recommended for evening wear. Oh, but you wanted to go out in the daytime without the embarrassment of ugly facial blemishes, didn't you, bean-boy. In that case, Dr. Bud suggests this." Bud picked up the other vial. "It gets you moving so fast, your face is a blur, so nobody sees the scars. And as the blur of the little rat-boy Speedy Gonzalez scurries across roof, Dr. Bud is happy, because he knows that he'll be able to get more medicine to keep his practice profitable."

Bud pulled out my closest arm. I didn't resist. He tied the rubber around my bicep, till the veins bulged.
He filled the syringe, stuck it in my arm, pushed the liquid into my blood. Bud lifted his knee. I sat up, rubbed my neck. Blood had been flowing out of my nose, had hardened around my mouth, chin, neck. Bud took a napkin out of his lunch box, wet it, and washed the blood off my face. My cheeks stung as he rubbed against the splinters.

"A messy operation! I hope they don't take away Dr. Bud's license. He might have to go back to being a roofer. Ha! Well — back on the wheel, little rat. Roof rat. Rat-a tat."

I started nailing again. The cement mixer had just started up. I could hear sawing and hammering, from all sides. My arms felt lighter, stronger. The sting of my cheeks turned into resolve. More shakes, more nails. Hammering, sawing, the mixer turning. The voices of men calling out measurements. Precision. I looked out over the project. Symmetry. Straight lines. Five designs. Seven colors. My hatchet independent of my body, floating on my right, the nail always set, waiting for the hatchet to come down. The hatchet to come down. I moved up the roof without movement. I could see Bud's mouth open and close, but I could only hear the voices of men miles away. Calling out measurements. Numbers floating next to me. As the puzzle of the roof solved itself. Bud's mouth
moving. The snap of the bubbles as they disappear, leaving the glow of the wounds on Marva's face. Marva's face. To the bottom of the roof. To the top of the roof. And over the edge.

Bud cut the tops of the shingles off while I moved the ladder to the other side of the roof. I estimated the squares it would take, and loaded all but two on the roof. Those two I left on the ground. Bud climbed over the ridge, and we started on the other side, working steadily through the afternoon, my mind crystal, my thoughts as focused as the sun on my back. I stayed well ahead of Bud, a blur on the outside, a blade on the inside. Lots of water. Lots of sweat. Invulnerable to Bud's talk. I could feel my finger on the switch, smell the burnt feathers.

We kept working as 5 o'clock came and the other workers left, driving back to the city. Only us, in the middle of the rows. We kept on working, hatchets setting, as my mind constricted to a point.

"Shit, amigo, we're two bundles short. You get one, I'll get the other. Rapido! Let's get done and get gone. I've got plans for Marva this weekend. Bud brings home the bacon in his lunch bucket."
I climbed down the ladder, swung a bundle onto my shoulder, climbed back up the ladder, popping the bundle off my shoulder, onto the corner of the roof. Bud climbed down the ladder, lifted the last bundle onto his shoulder, started up the ladder. I braced myself at the top of the roof. As Bud reached the top of the ladder, I sprung. Three quick steps, then a powerful push off the roof as I reached through the rungs of the ladder and grabbed Bud's throat. Bud dropped his bundle, let go of the ladder as it toppled over backwards. He grabbed my arms as his back struck the gravel yard, my weight collapsing on top of him and the ladder. I rolled onto the ground and looked at Bud. He was out.

I pushed the ladder out of the way and swung Bud onto my shoulder. He weighed as much as two waterlogged bundles. I walked into the house, into the bathroom. I put Bud in the bathtub, propping his head in an upright position.

I went back outside. The masons had locked their wheelbarrow in the garage and taken their hoses. But they'd left their cement under a plastic tarp and there were several 5 gallon buckets scattered around the sight. The cement mixer was chained to a hydrant. I started it up, took out some bags of cement. I went to my truck and got a shovel out of the back. I filled some buckets with water, and then alternated - cement, gravel, water,
cement, gravel, water. A yard and a half, I thought. I didn't want it too wet. I wanted it to set up quick.

I started filling the buckets from the mixer, then take two at a time into the bathroom. I slowly filled the tub. Covered Bud's feet. His belly. His chest as it was slowly rising and falling. I went back up on the roof, got Bud's lunch bucket, brought it into the bathroom. I took out the needle and the pinkish liquid. I filled the syringe. I pulled one arm out of the tub, unfolded it, exposing the inside of his elbow. I could see track marks.

"This last is a rat track, Bud."

I tied off his arm, found a good vein and filled it with the drug.

"Click." I said.

I put Bud's arm under the concrete, went back outside and got more buckets. I filled the tub until all that showed above the concrete was Bud's eyes, nose, mouth, and knees. I ran a piece of 2x4 over the surface of the concrete, to give it a clean finish.

I picked up Bud's lunch bucket and brought it out to the truck. I put the ladder back up against the roof, climbed up, got Bud's hatchet, my hatchet, my lunch box and water bottle. The saw. The extension cords. My shovel. I took down the ladder and put it on the rack on
my truck. I fastened it down with some bunji cords. The roof was two bundles short of being finished. Plus the ridge cap. But the area was clean for the weekend. And tonight was date night.

I drove to Bud's trailer, got out of the truck, walked up to the door. Then I remembered, went back to the truck and got Bud's lunch box. I walked back up to the door and rang the doorbell. I could see inside through the glass door. Marva was washing dishes. She stopped, took a towel to her hands and face. She walked up to the door and looked out at me. There were still a few bubbles on the inside of one arm. They popped and sparkled in the light of the setting sun. I lifted up the lunch box, slowly swinging it back and forth. I could hear the rattle of the needle as it bounced off the sides of the lunch box and off the vials. Marva opened the door so that she could hear it too.
Hey, Grampa-- Tell Us a Story!

Wendy reached under the water and grabbed my dick. That's right. No, not your grandmother, the fucking bitch. Oh, so you don't mind my use of profanity? Well, damn. Shit. And, fuck you. Saying that, I should get out my knife and stab you all, and then myself. Like they used to do in my day. Man goes berserk, kills family, eats goldfish, kills self. Giants lose again. Drought continues. Who cares. What? Oh, Wendy. That's right, she was built like a brick shithouse, whatever the fuck that means. Now they just zap it, but then, it was a hole in the ground in a few places, certainly in the popular memory on TV. The little moon on the big door. The big moon on the little shitter hole. All of it out back of my granny's house, so she claimed, bless her
rotted body and soul that never was. Maybe I'm crazy, but you be the judge, you little fuckheads. Wendy grabbed my dick and climbed on board while everybody else paid no attention and my ride was leaving. Let 'em go, I'm riding OK right where I was. Nobody paid any attention because they were fucked up on beer and 'ludes, back when those words made sense. Now what you got is that damned room where you all look at those endless parades. There's the mayor's smiling face, bless his perfect teeth. That's right, I lost some, back when they didn't grow back if you wished hard enough. You're all nodding, as though I've made sense or as though I've put you to sleep. Fuck you. Ha! There used to be millions like me, marching in unison but out of step, together but in different directions. Then came the universal death of white bread. I was as sanpaku as the rest of the ignorant masses until I got my oatmeal and my Utica Club beer. Oh, you miserable swine in your cheerful youth. Now it doesn't end. Now your plumbing always works. The lights come on when you look at them and blink twice. But I was in a dark place, in the hot pool, just off the road, if you can believe that, and the damn snow came down, Wendy grabbed my dick and I thought I would live forever. So far, I have. Wendy? She found another dick another night, as women used to do back then. Thank you for that! You'll never know. Are
things better now? Fuck you. I used to find 'em in my room, no, just in my bedroom. We'd watch TV. We'd read the funnies, back when we had something to laugh at besides old fools like me. You are wrong and I am right and fuck you. No, that was our political statement. This was after the pot took hold but before the revolution. Not the one you think! Don't be so smart, or so stupid. Listen to me and be both. You asked me what was the height, and I told you. That night, the snow falling, the wind and the unreal light of our eyes. Wendy just grabbed hold and sucked me into her vortex. Our underwear on the bank, our boots near the trail, the snow falling and wild animals giving us the once-over. What's that? Before the complete loss of chaos, before the death of Hell, I loved her. At least for five minutes, I loved her. What's love to you dung brains? You think you understand it because you have a print-out of it pasted to your foreheads. Horse-shit! Love was something as tender as Jello pudding when people used to eat it instead of watch it. Love was something possible with anybody, briefly, to be practiced at until every little cunt with a mouth would belch out your name, at least one night per each. That was love, and that was farming, casting our seed, practicing crop-rotation. Wendy was maybe special, maybe not, but she looked to me like that news-woman on TV.
They used to tell us what was wrong, before there was nothing wrong. You won't understand, you little gray lumps, ask me another question, I'll give you another answer that sounds the same. Your Grandmother? Also named Wendy, but not in the hot pool. I met her on an island, or was it on board a ship, back when the ocean was water and the waves would knock you over, instead of the other way around. Don't get off the subject! Grand standing? We used to do it! Dance all night at the OJ stand, do flips for the golfers, you name it, we did it. Granny wasn't my sister then, though she could have been made to be later, as it turned out. It wasn't love right away with us. First, I had to get a job—oh, you remember what I told you about that, small and insignificant except that you're my blood. Try to accept this as true— all work sucks sharp rocks, but so does all leisure. Mealtimes and bedtimes, especially in mixed groups, are what I remember. Your Granny, too! If she can hear me, she's quieter than she used to be. Always pointing out the Error of My Ways. And always right. She didn't shut up until the third shovel of dirt hit her mouth. And then it was sign language until her hands were covered up. And then she pushed up flowers that would eat bees. What's the point of all this! You don't listen. Times have changed and left me with no sideburns, it doesn't matter
if all I have to do is clean my nails next to my ears and they'll grow back. Listen to me, I haven't said fuck you in five minutes! Fuck you. Damn me and my head, but let my body still be able to slam dunk. I would soar above them all and cram the cow-hide home. That's the only thing that would shut your granny up! Oh, help. Oh, help. A tear of regret and sadness that there are no more hardwoods. Why learn how to dribble when the ball will do it for you? No peach fuzz! Clean complexions and no weight gains! No diets! Try to remember, even though there's no need. I can't tell you a story, you can't see any directions. How's this sound? Wendy reached under the water and grabbed my dick. You heard that one? But can you repeat it by heart, young and foolish, out there in the dark somewhere, taunting me by now staying still. Squirm when I spit on you! There used to be a way we had of knowing who was somebody. First, it was the tattoo of a horse-cock on your nose. Hairy balls dangling from your nostrils. You believe that? That's right, I'm lying. We'd grow our hair to our shoulders, though, that's for sure. Until the cops did it, then it was three-piece suits and the ironic eyebrow. Then we saw all the Japs with eyebrow implants and we shaved a question mark in our chest-hair and knew that we had to roll some heads. We didn't know it would come to this. When Wendy was purring
and pulling—either or all Wendies!—we didn't know. Look at you, statues, slimy young morons, egg me on and then fall asleep or, worse, stay awake and don't respond to my duck calls. Tell the flocks to land! It's too late, though. I close my eyes and see how things used to be, and it's too late. You've all gone ways that aren't worth diddly shit. Tolerance—Fuck you! Perfect, perfect. Am I the last asshole, or are you the first? Eat sperm! You don't need a straw, you can use mine. Too late, too late. Do memories mean shit if they don't make you sick? Me, I'm all right. I'll get by. I can't garden in these rocks, but I'll get by. Now, fertilize the flowers means paint the plastic. In the old days growth meant something, especially if it was a noun and it was on your proud prick. But there's nobody sick now, nobody diseased but one old fuck-head who doesn't believe the diagnosis, even if he made the diagnosis himself. Maybe I should turn the hot-plate in my heart to high and pound out a beat we can all dance to. Do you dance? Do you rock when somebody grabs hold, when everybody's foot hits the ground at once? Or do you sit and smell. Pardon me, stink, though to be sure the only fragrance left on earth comes from my socks. Well, leave me alone. Get out of here you young fecal-fucks. Story time is over. Wendy reached under the water and grabbed my dick. You asked me, I told
you, and now you don't give either a fuck or a damn.
Fine. Find out your way. You can drag Wendy out of the
nursing home and have her grab your dicks in a bath-tub.
Or just pour glasses of hot water over them. That'll do,
won't it? What? No bath-tubs? No glasses? No hot
water? No nursing home? No Wendy? In that case, no
story. It was a dark and stormy night? No story. Call,
me Ishmael? No story. In the beginning God created the
heavens and the earth? No story. Look at this studio,
full of prizes? No story. Wendy reached under the water
and grabbed my dick. No story, no story, no story.
No story.
There it was. A 100 dollar bill. I saw it in her purse, surrounded by credit cards, a bank book, stock reports, dog biscuits. She leaned over the candy counter, pointing at a box of Good and Plenty. Her purse was at her side, open, the 100 dollar bill within easy reach. She knew how I felt about her having a lot of money, me having little. So she let me get a peek at her bill, while she treated me to a movie and now would buy me candy. As though I were her boy instead of her man. So I leaned closer to her, rubbing shoulders, looked with her at the candy while I reached in her purse, pulled out the hundred, and stuffed it in my shirt pocket. The bill was hot, singeing the tips of the two fingers I'd lifted it with, burning the skin under my shirt pocket. I tried to cool my fingers by
paying for the candy myself, rubbing the last dollar bill from my wallet on the counter until the counter man took it. But my fingers got hotter, as did the bill in my pocket. She took my hand in hers, feeling the heat of my fingers as we walked into the theater and sat down. She took the fingers in her hand and pulled them to her belly. She rubbed them slowly on the outside of her dress, drawing the shape of a dollar sign. My fingers started to glow as the house lights dimmed, leaving a trail of light on her dress. One dollar sign would fade and another would start as she drew the same shape over and over again. On the screen, the Movie Dog looked through the dark and howled. Under my fingers, her skin shivered like a night field with the wind from the mountains. The Movie Dog howled again and I had to go. My fingers were too hot. The bill in my shirt was melting the pocket onto the skin of my chest. "I have to see a man about a dog" I said, fingers and pocket smoking and burning, red as campfire coals. The Movie Dog howled again as I walked out of the theater and up to the candy counter. "I need the Movie Dog" I said, my pocket in sputtering flame, my fingers two sticks of fire. "I need the Movie Dog. Here is 100 dollars." I reached into my pocket and pulled out the hundred, red with heat. I could hear, from the theater, the Movie Dog howl again and again. And she
howled from her seat, her howl high and wispy, floating like an ash out into the lobby. The counter man took out his kitchen mitt, picked up the hundred and put it in a cup full of ice, where it sizzled and hissed until it was green and cool. The counter man said "I'll see if the Movie Dog will accept this" and bent under the counter. I walked over to the theater door and looked inside. On the screen, the Movie Dog was chewing on something, wagging his tail. The Movie Dog howled again. I walked back to the candy counter, where the counter man was petting the Movie Dog. I took the dog in my arms. "I'll name him 100 Spot" I said, and placed my two burning fingers on his back 50 times, each time making a black brand. I put the Movie Dog on the floor. Roll over, I thought, and the Movie Dog rolled over. Sit up, I thought, and the Movie Dog sat up. I need clarity in a world without honor, I thought, and the Movie Dog licked my hot fingers, each lick curing and soothing, each lick shaping meaning and shame, each lick finding the edges, focusing the light, feeding the hunger, removing the doubt. Each lick. Each lick. I picked up the Movie Dog and walked back to my seat in the theater. She was still there. "Oh, you're back," she said. "And you brought the Movie Dog." "His name is 100 Spot and I stole him from you," I said. She pulled a dog biscuit out of her purse and gave it to the
Movie Dog. He ate it slowly, grinding his jaw while looking at her. The Movie Dog then stuck his head in her purse. He pulled out her bank book and ate it. The Movie Dog stuck his head in her purse again. He ate her credit cards, her stock reports. He ate small bills and coins. He ate her purse. She pulled up her dress to just under her breasts. The Movie Dog licked dollar signs on her belly while she slowly rubbed his head. I looked at the screen, and there we were, the Movie Dog, she, I, the counter man, the candy, the hundred, the bank book, the stock reports, my poverty, my jealousy, my theft. The Movie Dog howled, ate, licked, cured. The Movie Dog howled, she howled, I howled, the howling ice water on my burn, the howling a soft tongue on my mistake. Oh! I thought, reaching out from my seat, touching her hand, touching the Movie Dog's back, feeling his spots, hearing his licks, feeling her shivers and her calm, Oh! If only this thought, this moment, this feeling, this movie, this life, would never end!