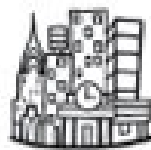


TALES OF THE OUT & THE GONE

BY AMIRI BARAKA



This is a work of fiction. All names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to real events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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To my wife Amina

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INTRODUCTION

What should be obvious in these tales are the years, the time passing and eclipsed, the run of face events, unities and struggles, epochs, places, conditions, all gunning through and fueling them. Tales are stories—I like the old sound to it, *tale*. A story (where we have stored something) can be from anywhere and talk of anything. Like Williams said, sometimes memory explains itself as a newness, future revelation.

But tales, as my mother called my frequent absences from the literal, are not only straight out my own orally recorded perpetrations, but have a literary stature from Pushkin, de Maupassant, Poe, Dumas, Kafka, Sembène, Bradbury, &c., a parade of awesome presences, themselves *tails*, of eras and assemblages of great thoughts and feelings. What is left of what has left. What my grandfather used call “the last part of the chicken to go over the fence.”

Does this have anything to do with Pin the Tail on the Donkey? It depends on who that ass be. We aims to be democratic, even in our registrations of where we been, is, and going. So there is diabol’ rats and real public coons featured throughout.

Mao sd that “works of literature and art, as ideological forms, are products of the reflection in the human brain of the life of a given society.” These tales confirm that. Ideological but also material, whatever extent the time, place, and condition of our own lives are rendered by our understanding, our perception, rationale, and use of everything we are or that surrounds the inside and the outside of us.

So many of these tales would be juiced-up journalism if I did not think they needed to be something else to be fully grasped. The earliest tales in this book fit that, with their takes on (almost at the time of) the interior of a social movement.

The slightly gnarled pinpoints of great human struggles raging everywhere across the planet! Trials and errors, attempts, failures, and successes of that period. Told, or halftold, or enhanced, by each succeeding level of knowledge that I was able to fully navigate. So there are sounds and colors and surfaces, as well as images and hard edges and impressionistic recallings. Some emerging philosophical constructs. There is also, at the optimal curtain calls, some real information, some actual use provided.

In specific contexts, anything can be *Out!* Out of the ordinary. So that even the most advanced of us who struggled against racism and imperialism could be called, and sometimes were called, *Out!* Just as we might call some artist, like Thelonius Monk or Vincent Smith or John Coltrane, *Out!* Because they were just not where most other people were. So that is aesthetic and social, often both at the same time.

There are “real” events and events taken from reality and enhanced with the spirit of the thing itself. That’s why in the “south” of the world, the bird sits on top of the wise man’s head—the soul of the spirit—whether Bantu or Cherokee. When we were told that Osiris, the Djali, raises the sun each day with song and verse, we learned that this is the function of art—to give us light, to let us fly, to let us imagine and dream, but also to create, in the real world.

The stories become tales when they can give us a sense of a less fully experienced dimension of what is.

The “War Stories” in this book’s first section are, for the most part, taken from a life lived and experienced, from one kind of war or another. It could be the USAF in Puerto Rico, it could be the

later Greenwich Village skirmishes, the Black Liberation Movement, or the Anti-Revisionist Communist Movement (we used to call it). Or what became post- all that. Or it could even be transmogrification of what happens when people cannot stand reality, perhaps because it is too *accusing*, and so try to duck out on it, but wherever they try to hide, it is right there waiting for them.

What happens to us literally is never obvious altogether. The smashing of the Black Nationalist paradigm of the '60s happened in a number of ways, obvious and un-. There are parables here, just like they told us in church. War stories can be tales of what happened "back in the day!" But there are concrete results of real life that have or have not happened, or might have happened or might yet happen, or even metaphorical descriptions of different kinds of life conflicts that move us, whether we can speak of them or not.

The "Out" is out, even if in plain sight. Though it would not have to be. The "Gone" could be seen or unseen or obscene. But even farther "Out," crazier, wilder, deeper, a "heavier" metaphor, deeper parable. We'd say that's "way out."

(At Howard we were so hip we wd say, "That's way," meaning, "That's way too much," exceedingly hip, super wise. Like a cat we called "Smitty from the City" who when he entered the room addressed us all as "CATS, CATS, CATS," and we sd among us that Smitty from the City was indeed, way too much.)

The act of imagining is the root of creation. I brought that with me as I grew. I cd imagine my a off. Sometimes my parents wd try to whip it literally off for such imagining. I told my teacher once that I was late for school because I had to feed the snakes my parents kept in the basement. Little knowing the wench wd come and investigate.

So to tell the whole story of this place, there has to be room to imagine what it means as well as what it seems to be, since all of that is what it is. And this is the shining antique surface that makes the tale. I was a lover of these tales, short stories. Richard Wright (*Uncle Tom's Children*), Langston Hughes (*The Ways of White Folks*), Ousmane Sembène (*Tribal Scars*), Isaac Babel (*Red Cavalry*). A of Kafka's *Outness*.

Earlier, I was a teenage science fiction reader. An *avid*, like they say, reader. The first story ever published, called "The Cat," as a senior at Barringer High School in Newark, had merely the humming of metaphor made mystical. But from Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, and science fiction from writers like Heinlein, van Vogt, Asimov, Clarke, and the annual sci-fi anthology. Plus the mysterious stories that the radio was hip enough then to offer; remember *ESCAPE* (with Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* as its theme song), which did the wilder stories by Cheever, H.G. Wells, and many more? All these sources molded my taste for the Out & the Gone. The merely humdrum quickly bored me, the tale had to have some *weirdness*.

The stranger and more science fiction-like that the tales might seem, I hope they still carry a sense of what needs to be addressed and even repaired in the "real world." Octavia Butler and Henry Dumas, though more my contemporaries, yet gone (really) already, carry this kind of social presence like a hymn of clear morality, in their works. We see what they love and what they hate, what they think ugly and what they think beautiful, as if addressing themselves directly to Mao's dicta in the *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Art & Literature* (1942).

That is not simply my analogy, but a historic litmus analysis for any art.

Sartre sd if you say something's wrong in the world and you don't know what it is, that's art. On the other hand, if you say something's wrong in the world and you do know what it is, that's social protest. At least that's what our enemies say. Fuck them!

Amiri Baraka

The Last Poet Laureate of New Jersey

Newark, NJ, 5/11/06

WAR STORIES

The debate was short and sour. Acrid. Unsunny. Though a vein of humor eased through it. It began after three years away from the organization. Conrad faced Pander with the proposition that he was an opportunist. That he would come up and criticize operations to others, but say nothing to people's faces.

Pander huffed and puffed through his opened nostrils. A flush of red thru his brown face, fattened by studentdom come late in life.

As revolutionaries, black nationalists, he and Conrad had been together as part of a larger being World Insurrectionists. W.I. But a silent and tightly focused split sent Conrad, as one suborganization head, off with his folks in another direction. There had almost been a shoot-out on a southern campus between W.I. people and the breaking-away Liberation Afrikan Front. L.A.F. people.

Pander had been where in that? Had he already left W.I., or what? During that period or a little earlier, Simba, the leader- teacher, apparently had Pander cracked across the skull and driven out with his running partner, Big Yellow Jerome, who's now a City Hall dope dealer. Cleaner. Wabenzi (the tribe that drives in the Mercedes Benzes). The whole story on that. The head whipping. The flight. Accusations that Pander was "an agent who pushes pills" inside the organization. All that remained unclear. Or too clear.

Except Simba got worse, from the strain of revolutionary struggle. Began to swallow too many stay-awake and stay-asleep pills. Became a drowsy ordering vegetable. Amidst the cries for blood, the secret and public capitalist hit men also cried. Amidst internal and external machination and opportunism—a more exotic withdrawal from the real world. Madness in the smoke of sweet incense. A machine gun set up on a tripod just inside the door of the house. Servants padded in stockinged feet. People pulled in and questioned. Through the fog, conspiracies hatched conspiracies—all fake. Except the real one, that worked.

Conrad gave money to Simba's brother to rescue him, take him to a hospital. The brother didn't even bother to report. Except months later, he explained the obvious: He had failed.

But all this, simply to set the proper pincer of memory and light. Truth moves the faces back and forth. Pander began talking in a rush. "Phrase mongering," he said. Being criticized for behind-the-back criticizing to the R.C. The Right Commies, a group of young, mostly white students calling themselves "multinational workers." About how it shudda been. With thousands of Puerto Ricans ready to rip, boiling outside on the pavement in front of City Hall. Safely indoors, the Nigger May losing weight, oinking like a panicked porker with his little tail curling up under his coat, nailed in place by the way his neck sat, holding up his doofus face. Conrad, the Puerto Rican leaders, and another organization—the Leopards—ran back and forth between City Hall negotiations and the pavement. The crowd had converged from the Puerto Rican ghettos of the city, El Barrio, to scream at this ugly life. One of their children had been trampled to death by a mounted policeman, trying to stop two Puerto Ricans from shooting crap in the middle of a folklore festival. Two more, both Puerto Rican, died. Shot in the back and the back of the head. The last one pistol-whipped in the face, for good measure.

The negotiators, of course, read and shouted demands, impossible even under the crumbling illusion of bourgeois democracy. And now it was the nigger—a grim fatso who stuffed himself dai-

with five or six meals, combined into two for austerity. He rode in a Checker cab instead of a Cadillac to give the illusion that he wasn't spending money. He changed mistresses so people who knew the old fat one would be confused because they wouldn't know the new fat one. But they knew both and laughed casually or derisively, depending on whether or not they had a city job.

Police review boards—Amnesty for all the prisoners—A people's investigation team—Expose the causes of the police riot—Free medical care! These were the demands. And the Nigger Mayor acted like the Cracker Mayor, co-collaborators with the dying order. Skin freaks still didn't understand this. "Give him a chance," they said. Though now they couldn't say it to the Puerto Ricans. Or maybe the fools could. Like big outtashape loudmouth Ms. Birdie, in charge of the anti-poverty special education fund. "These Podaricans is takin' everythin'," she said. A working-class recruit to the petit bourgeoisie, with aspirations from early times. Conrad told how she sang opera. She was Cio-Cio-San in *Madame Butterfly*, with pink makeup on her dark skin, even on the lips, with white sequined gown and hair tossed in high piles like frozen custard, Vaseline flavor. She was in training then to play the sorry role, big outtashape loudmouth hard bureaucrat of nigger-shuffle garbage can—eating para(meta)dise. "These Podaricans is takin' everythin'." Yeh. Poverty, exploitation, oppression, white feet—now Bignigger feet. They got, truly, everything!

"Whatta I supposed to do about these?" In the middle of Nigger Mayor scowling at being confronted with reality, a rock through his window made his eyes spin like Laurel & Hardy. When he got to the street, the rocks showered City Hall like Robin Hood's arrows. The fat middle-class fool nigger called to his hoodlums—mostly Italian, but with some young niggers fronting. One, the chief with a huge 'fro and crimson-and-gold dashiki, had gone to Harvard—N.Y. clean, really. But then the lower-echelon state hit men came on horseback and in squad cars. On foot, the crowd had been walking. Now they rolled, and young dudes waiting for this shit whipped out crowbars and bashed store windows down Main Street, punctuating the sirens. Crisscross, the police cars wheeling and knocking people over. A new technique: high speed, then last minute, wheel around in a sharp turn bashing the rebels into the sidewalk or up against the building. Conrad and the others, in the middle of the people, jumped to the sidewalk just in time. The cop car smashed one of the Leopards, sideswiping him twenty feet across the ground, but undead. The pigs scrambled out and leaped at his chest, wailing with sticks. Conrad said, "Walk, walk. Slow down. Don't run, just check 'em out."

The beatings went on. The whole of Main Street filled up with new storm troopers. Whites scowling. Blacks peeping. But all almost on the line to kill for the twelve thousand, if they had to.

A roll of poor people running against the shoetops of the mighty, whose blue louses came on from between the toes to beat and maim and murder. Demonstrations would go on, more protests. Jose Liga, head of the Revolutionary Puerto Rican Communist Organization, Conrad Barker of the L.A.I. Leopard leaders, and community and student groups, held a press conference announcing they would march in the streets—no matter that the nigger weasel downtown had banned it. "Fuck you, weasel" was their simple rejoinder. And march they did, filling the streets, the downtown, and the park with denunciations of the neocolonial niggers and collaborating Puerto Ricans, the state's pitiful hit men and the state itself—the instrument of the du Ponts, Mellons, Rockefellers, Fords, &c. It went well. And Pander and his student people were there too, marching with the rest. Standing in the crowd trying to grin. This was after the meeting, the criticism, the slender memory. The knowledge that even fleeing, reality remains in reality. Were these their class origins? The petit bourgeois thrust of socialist rap. The years of narrow nationalism and polygamous opportunism? Suburban privilege? Or what?

The day Pander arrived with his head split open, red pants, saying he was digging Sly and the F.

The white boy with him rapped about left opportunism and narrow nationalism. He had thick glasses and Lucky strained to like him because he wanted to be a socialist and abandon his black chauvinism. His hatred of whites. So he described it to Conrad, what the sectarian shoot-out had been, in tones that showed he wanted to deal with these socialists. But Conrad, looking from the back of the truck where he stood waiting to speak, was wondering what Pander and the young white revolutionary Gruen had explained to their people. At the point of the police attack, they shouted to nobody and everybody, "Let's get outta here, we ain't gonna get killed!" and sped away in their three- and four-year-old cars.

Who were these people? And what had their criticism outside City Hall consisted of? Would they help smash the capitalist system? How? Conrad swallowed and got ready to speak "people."

He began, "People, people. We gonna win anyway!"

The crowd agreed and hollered.

February 197

Goodson readied himself for his big day. Up a little early, shower, read the *Measure* (local paper) and take a quick glance at the *Times*. Checked specifically the word on the goings-on. Namely, the President of the United States coming to town. And he had the biggest front on it, since he was mayor. The Mayor. (A quick look in the mirror confirmed that it was him thinking about him, and check, any photos handy? Luckily—or as usual—they was right there.)

Touch down: 6 p.m. Streets clear all the way to the hotel. Motorcade convoy. Five hundred overtime cops. Quick call to Chambers. “Roger? Yeh, how’s it look? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. OK. Yeh. What about the Ray thing, is that set up? The ACLU? Oh yeh? Fuck ’em. I don’t give a shit about the rights, nor those people they got frontin’ for them. Yeh ... Ha ha ha ... Yeh. OK, check you at noon. Uh-huh? OK.”

Yesterday, ate, worked a usual day. No, that was his day off. He slept most of the day. Called the office, called Roger. Checked all the preparations. Rode by the hotel where the president would speak. A banquet. Goddamn, a Republican banquet. Thousand dollars a plate. Goddamn Republicans raising a quick million in Finland Station. Be here four hours, tops. He’d talked to the president a couple times. He had called him Tim. “How are ya, Tim? How’s everything in Finland Station? You’re doing quite a job, Tim. Quite a job. Ever think about getting on the team all the way? I mean, leave the jackasses and join the big elephants?”

“I’m on the team now, Mr. President.” (Couldn’t call him Jer ...) “Just a different wing of the old bird.”

“Wrong wing.” They laughed. Plastic cover somewhere, at a press conference just before a press conference. A group of black leaders. A group of mayors from all over. A lunch. Different salads. White wine. Tim burped, caught it in his hands. Fuckin Ray wrote a story about Tim, “Burping for the People.” Fuck him. I’m the ...

Yesterday. No, the day before. Up early, ran around the lake the right way. Seeing these people going uphill the other way, struggling up them hills. Tim went the right way where it was mostly downgrades. This goddamn Sloane there, coming down the wrong way. The goddamn Checker cab made them get the hell off the road. Tim was running around the lake with two policemen riding in front of him in a big Checker cab, rather than the Cadillac that came with the office. The Cadillac would’ve drawn a little too much fire. This way, a Checker, that’s offbeat and looks a little humble. Dig?

At City Hall, a lot of Muslims got jobs now too. We give them jobs to be cool with everybody. A little here, a little there. “Just fire Sloane’s people wherever you see ’em. Anybody you think hooked up at all with that Revolutionary Congress, burn ’em! Nowhere, no way!” Tim was screaming at Ethan Montgomery one morning. “These R.C. people are never on time, never there.” Some of the people were demonstrating against Tim the same morning in front of City Hall. “Then they want to come here and get paid. I ain’t going for that. Burn them niggers.”

S.O. Hares, the first black President of the City Council, meets Tim. Gray sideburns tinted red slightly. (Could dig it if you checked close.) Burned russet wire sunglasses. Light-brown and dark brown big checked jacket and pebble texture rust pants. “Hey, your boy is burning the hell outta you, Mr. Mayor.” He laughs. “Half a one of them goddamn poverty programs is out there too. Ha ha ha”

Hares would run next year, the bastard. Next year. He had the Dons to put up the money for him. See it's a fight between the different groups. But Tim knew he had it made, 'cause he had the biggest group. Gratitude Insurance controlled the whole state. Every major institution and corporation in the state had to check off with or was controlled or heavily influenced by Gratitude. And they had invested early in Tim.

"Me and the people at Grat., Laird Conroy and the rest of the folks, we very tight. But you understand, they're the real controls. What power do I have?" (The rap would change according to who it was.) "The real power is with the economic boys. Laird Conroy is the man." Up in the white marble tower, with Gratitude spelled out in blue steady lights—the first thing the airplanes see.

"The Negro that runs with the Republicans can't get up too tough a head of steam, because Rockefeller and them know these mostly nigger voters ain't going for no Republican—black or not. But then you got the Cosa Nostra, with S.O. trying to push their luck. If S.O. looks too good, he'll get busted straight out for sticky fingers or a morals charge."

Tim saw Maureen that early evening and they went to New York right after she got off work, for two Gibsons apiece and some pretzels. He was "working late" again. She was a librarian and a real positive step up from Ruthie. Ruthie cried and swelled up in her yellow bulk. But his wife Madeline was hip to Ruthie, and had been for a few years. Ruthie was on the board of everything and was his assistant campaign manager. She was a good campaigner, and pushed the campaign heavy all the time. Talked to a lot of people, sold a lot of tickets, set up a lot of coffee klatches at people's houses. Ruthie knew a lot of people. Plus she was especially in charge of "prone candidate orientation," but had not swelled up to damn near 300 pounds. Big and yellow with flat sticky red lips. She had her boards and titles and a couple of good salaries. What would she need now with Tim? So Tim reasoned, and no slid with Maureen. She woke him up to the *Times Book Review's* List of Best Sellers. *Jaws*. *Ragtime*. *CIA: Coup in America*, the true story of John Kennedy's murder. He got a chance to deal with a couple of pages now and then. *Jaws* was a better movie than book. So would the rest be. Be better as Tim programs.

He never missed Roger K. Smith or the Channel 13 weekly news review. It's a heck of a lot of work running a big city. Especially one like Finland Station, with a half-million people—almost 400,000 of them black or Puerto Rican. With a bunch of big mouths floating around on the edge of that, playing like leaders, always stirring some bullshit up.

Like this president thing. The man's just coming here to speak, raise some funds for the Republican Party. So we gotta have a whole lot of demonstrations and bullshit like that, just to build one of these people's names. Tim marched in picket lines. He knew when stuff was on the up and up and when it was BS. *This was BS*. Why? Because the president wasn't going to do anything. There was nothing that could be accomplished by demonstrating in front of the hotel where the president was. What's that gonna do? It ain't gonna get nobody no jobs. *I'll fix these simple niggers tho, they won't even see the president. And he won't see them either—I'll fix them.*

Tim made this statement in the newspaper, and immediately the ACLU and some other bleeding hearts called him up to protest, saying that they would sue if he violated the democratic rights of the R.C. *By the time that stuff even gets to where somebody will look at it, everything will be got up and gone. Ha.*

By 12:00, the staff meeting began. Reports. The police ready. Five hundred overtime. Cost of \$30,000 to the city. "Do the newspapers have that?"

"They got it, alright, and are blowing it all over. And our friends are at it on the radio. The R.C. your friend Sloane, and the others. Putting down the whole business."

“Yeh, but what the hell we gonna do? The president comes—he gotta get security. And the city gotta pay for it. It’s a hell of a thing, him a Republican and this city full of black Democrats.”

“Most of them not no Democrats, neither,” shot in Augie Bond, the drunk PR man.

“But what you gonna do?”

“I ain’t no goddamn Democrat either, Boss. You know that.” (The staff called Tim Boss. He cherished that.) “The bastards at least oughta contribute to the city for the security at a Republican fundraiser. What the hell?”

“Yeh, they oughta, but what will an *oughta* buy?” Rachel Mooney now sat in such a way that the talcum she put on her drawers was visible on the hairs of her upper thigh. Tim smiled and caught another burp, stifling this one completely. They finished the meeting. The usual.

Goodson’s collection: old Italians from the former administration, young whites from the Ivy League who wanted to “help” (at 25 Gs a shot), Tim’s friends in his “Association” serving as the enforcers of what passed for “policy.” These were the only loyalists. Some blacks with high side degrees, mostly from out of town. The young whites and the out-of-town blacks had a quick and consistent turnover. As soon as they got their resumes filled with a year in the jungle counterinsurgency funk, they took off for slicker pastures, wherefrom to sideburn their way into whatever they thought was hip. In the real world, outside the discotheque-like interiors of the new City Hall. (It wasn’t new, it just means that now there was Bloods inside; a black bureaucratic elite, complete with Pierre Cardin suits, humpback high heels, beards, sideburns, Mercedes Benzes, Porsches, and Lincoln Continentals—it bugged the boss that he couldn’t get one, but he had to give off an image like he wasn’t just high in a hog.)

The administration functioned by having people come to work in the city. Most of the good city jobs (most of the real jobs in Finland Station) were held by whites from the opulent suburbs—Livingston, Short Hills, Forest Hills, Essex Fells, Madison. In fact, New Jersey had the second highest per capita income in the United States. But in cities like Finland Station, Newark, Jersey City, Camden, and Trenton, where the niggers lived, the people who came in made the dust and ran back to the suburbs, while the urbs went to the outskirts of town and worked in shoestring factories or auto factories, iron works, paintbrush factories, breweries, and toy factories—when they could get gigs. That’s why Tim had to come on not too sparkly. It was bad enough already. Old folks still smiled at him, but some of these loudmouths were beginning to blow their bad breath heavy his way. “Look, do what I can. What can I do? We just don’t have the money. The federal government sends no more money. We do what we can.”

But mostly it seemed, especially to the loudmouths including Tim’s ex-friend Ray Sloane, like Stevie Wonder’s tune, “You Haven’t Done Nothin’.” And they kept saying that every time Tim surfaced.

“Like when those bitches from Redspair Health Insurance were demonstrating, Sloane bring these goddamn women down through the streets to City Hall. Then, when I went out to dedicate the park across the street, he gets on a bullhorn and starts to shout me down, and sics these freakin’ women on me. I had to get back inside.”

Somebody was passing around red cigarettes with gold filters. “Boss, you want one?”

But sometimes it brushed him further than he wanted to go. He was there, on top. He knew presidents, kings, and had been halfway around the world. The State Department sent him to Poland to tell those people how black people are really living, so they wouldn’t believe the propaganda.

“According to those guys, the Klan’s still taking people out they house! But Jesus, I’ve done something, something any one of these guys would give their left and right nut to do. Me. The Mayor

[Caught it.] And still, you got these jealousass niggers wanting to try to show me up. But it won't work. They can't beat me."

The time Jerry Lloyd, the preacher and radical councilman, led students down to City Hall to dump garbage that wasn't picked up in the 3rd Ward, Tim had them busted. He knew them—they initially campaigned together in the big push in '70 that sent old Mayor Bucarillo to prison. But "Lloyd was wrong." A couple of black cops got busted that day too, trying to protect the women. Cops arresting cops, white and black cops fighting in the street.

"He was in with that Sloane. That's why he got beat in the elections too. Trying to tear my ass and got his own ass torn."

Also, the AFL-CIO, Teamsters, Democrats, and Republicans backed Lloyd's opponent, "Rip-Off Dalton. Sloane said he was one of the original Daltons, and came to the council meetings with a bandana around his face so people would be hip to him. S.O. should wear a mask and an all-black suit and big ten-gallon hat. At least then you'd be clearly hip to who and the others there: two liberal blacks—one a college professor on the slightly trembly side, the other an overweight used-to-be-goober guy back in the Civil Rights days, who passionately wanted to be a councilman, and then one day he was, but he'd by then promised his whole 700- pound behind to Tim for backing him. A blushing prostitute, therefore. And five white folks—three ex-cops, a storekeeper, and the wife of a dead man who got in on his rep and mostly his name.

All the contradictory motions of the place, cross-currents in this here "democracy," where whatever wants to bite you can bite. Its teeth could look like anything; you might even vote for the one to bite you. Sloane running it down outside City Hall to the pickets: "Whatever mob wants to bite you, Gratitude owns Tim Fatson. That's Manufacturers Trust and them. Rockefeller owns Jisholm & Bangel and them. Morgan owns them Kennedy-chasing Bloods. The mafia own people like S.O. Harlow and Rip-Off Dalton. One mob or another. These politicians are lieutenants, the big ones and the lackies—the small rip-offs peeing on us around here."

Tim listened through the windows. Made himself a cup of tea in front of the big picture window. The sound boomed in. "That bastard."

Ethan squinted down and Augie made a straight face, trying to joke with Tim about it. "That bastard is gonna bite off more than he can chew one day. Somebody's gonna come runnin' down here to cry how some of them cops blasted him."

Outside: "And what we got here in this town? Niggers in high places, black faces in high places but the same rats and roaches, the same slums and garbage, the same police whip-pin' your heads, the same unemployment and junkies in the hallways muggin' your old lady. What is it? What is it? We strained to elect this nigger mayor, and what we got to show for it? Nothing but a burpin' black bastard slippin' his way around the city, sleepin' with fat ladies."

Sloane raved on. Loza laughed, hearing him in the crowd, and noted that the last statement wasn't politically educational. He thought it seemed unprincipled. Too abrasive, he decided. It was not analytical enough.

But Sloane raved on: "It is this system of monopoly capitalism that must be destroyed. The private ownership of the means of producing wealth, the land, the factories, the minerals, the mines. These must be controlled publicly and collectively by the masses of people, under the dictatorship of the working class. These black faces ain't enough. It is a system that oppresses us."

"Now the creep is talking like a goddamn commie," Ethan was saying. "Boy, they gonna carry his ass away from here."

There was a line of fifteen policemen on the stairs of City Hall that day as the women from the

Redspear sang, with the R.C. people among them urging the singers forward.

~~After the staff meeting, Tim inspected the hotel setup again, checked out the marked streets of the president's route to the hotel. Talked to the newspapers at a press conference. He thought about Maureen and decided to stop by the library. Call from a phone booth—get her to come to a side entrance. But nobody answered. He pulled off, the car being driven by one of the cops, his bodyguard. And turning the corner, he saw Maureen and his wife, Madeline, standing in front of the library talking. Madeline still worked for a real estate firm in the area, but it wasn't that close. She wouldn't give up her job—she said they needed to save all they could to get a house in the North Ward of Orange.~~

He was going to ride on by, but Maureen spotted him and looked, and Madeline turned right away. They both looked. It seemed that the contradiction was going to soon become antagonistic. He waved out the car. Slowed. "Hey, what you all into? I'm on my way to the hotel. You want a lift?" Maureen and Madeline had cars.

"How you doing?" Maureen tried smiling.

Madeline stared. "The hotel?"

"No, thank you," they both said together.

"See you back at the house then. We ain't got a lot of time. It's 3 now—he gets in at 6."

The car ran on, down through traffic. Stopping now at the police station, and checking with Chambers again. There was already a loose cordon being thrown around the general area of the hotel. A snow fence had been erected as well. There was to be an area in which no one was allowed but the police and the eaters at the thousand-dollar-a-plate dinner.

"They say they're gonna sue, Tim, if we don't let them demonstrate. We figure we'll let them demonstrate, but put them in the middle of the park or somewhere, OK?"

"Yeh, what the hell. As long as they can't make no trouble." Really, he meant as long as they can't get in the way of his future motion up the ladder to Colored Retainer Heaven. If that goddamn McGovern had won, he'd have already made it. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. cabinet member. That was the spot. Get cut in on some nice deals that way too, rather than the greasy stuff you had to pick up on the lower level. And that was even a little dangerous now, in these recent post-Watergate years. The take is allowed—everybody there does it. Tim let it roll through his mind. Everybody did that. Nixon did it. But the stuff upstairs is worth the risk. Not this greasy stuff where you got to be connected up with people like Wurlitzer Willie and the rest of the crew. So don't get in the way of the big trip. The big rip.

Sirens turned his head. They were normal for Finland Station every other minute. Sirens howling. It brought to mind the motorcade they would bring the president in with. There was talk all through the halls. And at every stop, people wanted to know and tell and speculate and myth-make.

He spotted Foster Tarasso, the congressman from the Dent District, coming out of the Eldridge Club with his entourage. The club was near his district office. Tarasso was in town for the dinner—on his trips to his district were strictly and only political. Washington was Tarasso's real home. He was the silver-haired orator symbolizing the Italians' rise to semi-respectability in America, when they could keep the frig-gin' Mafia headlines out of the newspapers and squash those reruns of *The Untouchables*. They exchanged oblique compliments. Tarasso thought Tim wanted his spot. Tim thought Tarasso wanted the HUD spot. Now that Tim had become an official Democrat, the elections in the Finland Station municipal government were nonpartisan. Tarasso felt a little safer, but still had to watch his back. Tim had to watch his front. They discussed the dinner and the demonstration. The fact of the assassination attempts. The tight security. The newspapers bombing Tim on the \$30,000

being spent to protect the president. Tarasso had a young girl, his legislative assistant, in the car. She waved and kept talking to the other couple sitting in there. Tarasso's law partner or his companion, another legislative assistant, or secretary, or reporter, or what have you. Tim wondered what the other couple looked like naked.

They made the last stop and went back to the house. Madeline was already there. He picked up his brown tuxedo with the tossed ruffle shirt and neat velvet tie. The schedule indicated to pick up the presidential convoy and arrive at the airport by 5:15. Air Force One would land at exactly 18:00 hours and the presidential motorcade would proceed—after a briefing with the Secret Service men—directly to the hotel. Fifteen miles an hour all the way.

Madeline was dressing. She spoke when he came in and said nothing afterwards.

He began to take off his clothes. "You about ready?"

"Yeh."

"How long you been home?"

"Long enough to be almost ready."

A slight edge, barely rising. He was quiet, pulling his socks and suspenders out of the drawer. Emptying his pockets on the table. Making sure his cologne was out. And that he had some money on his keychain, the clip. And all his ID cards. He turned to go into the bathroom and Madeline was standing there with her long skirt on, but her top in her hands, wearing her brassiere.

She said, simply, "If I catch you with that woman, I'm gonna kill both yo asses."

"What?" The radio was playing. WDNL, Soul Radio. Millie Jackson had come on, talking about another woman. That's what had set her off, the dumb-ass song. "What you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. My girlfriend saw your car down there at that library two or three times. I didn't know that fat yellow bitch was in there. You just got rid of one fat yellow bitch. You shoulda known why. To pick up another one. But I'm telling you, Tim, I'll waste both yo asses." She turned and went out the door.

"What?" He started saying some other things, but convinced nobody in the apartment since only the two of them were there. They had no children. He'd had some by another marriage, but they were grown. He kept talking.

Madeline shouted back, "Yellow fat-ass bitch! You like them yellow-ass fat women, why you not marry me then?"

Madeline was a brown-ass fat woman, chocolate-sweet when grooving, burning fire when she was crossed. It passed through Tim's mind. *Yeh, why?* The yellow streak was on him—in him. He was not himself a fat yellow person. It was 4:30. He had to rush into the bathroom. They said nothing else until it was time to go out together. He said, "You always hooking me up with somebody. Why pick her?"

"You picked her, not me." Madeline went down the front stairs. It was a small white wooden house. A two-family house, the top floor occupied by Madeline's sister and her husband, again kept up from the old days to maintain the image, though arrangements were already being made for a house in the country. You couldn't be moving around all these people—the world's petit bourgeois and the big boys too—without that life producing its own projections. Its notions that had to be fulfilled, its wobbly ideas and grand designs.

The turbulence of the Civil Rights black power decade was what brought Tim Goodson to this spot, yet the spot was ultimately something which was that decade's opposite. Goodson had marched in front of Barton High to demand jobs for black contractors, and was in the picket lines around the proposed 200-acre medical school, which was a cold-blooded attempted rip-off of black people from the area to stave off the realities of what black power meant at that point. It was a gag to get r

of black voters.

~~He was a part of the Civil Rights movement, the thrust that hooked up with Martin Luther King~~ pressing for the black vote all over the South, and the young SNCCers who followed that path, the struggle for democratic rights which boiled most fiercely in the land-base of the Black Nation, the black belt South. The fire of Malcolm had emerged then to raise the struggle to still higher levels with the true voice of the working people—aside from the motion that the black bourgeoisie could direct the good preachers of SCLC representing the other preachers and teachers and doctors and lawyers. It's why the student hook-up was exactly cool, the middles and upper-middles of the Black Nation. Yet the motion was a mass motion. The millions with their might opposed the segregation and discrimination, the white-only apartheid that finally even the big boys themselves saw was passé, that if they wanted to get on top of the world market as almighty U.S.A., the Camelot of the world, that they also had to cool out them old relationships. Stuff had to be modernized, Jimmy. Dig? Old Bu Connor's just out of whack with the times, JFK could have remarked coolly to himself in the oval room, posing for a picture with the big six leaders and Rabbi Prinz and Walter Reuther.

The motion then—the democratic rights, the voting, equal access—finally to where, when we stood up on the cars in the middle of the street screaming we had won, we had won, and hoisted fat-a-Tim in the air, we had won. Yeh, as if the lost democratic revolution that the KKK counterrevolution squashed after reconstruction had been completed, and we were equal in America, 'cause now we had "power." It is only the middle class that could think of that, Sloane would yell at the crowd. The people need control of the economy of this country. The land, the factories, the mineral wealth, all the people, together ...

Until it became clear that Tim was *them*, the owners—a "new way into things." That nothing had changed but the cover it wore. The new was niggers, or whoever is demanding what. A little special elite of them set up to run the ex-colonies. Yet ... blood in the streets, squashed faces under tank treads. A woman thrown against the wall, shot in the throat, her baby slips from her arms. We watch gagging in the jail through bars, while the carbine rings like a sweet bell. Lead fists against the National Guard trucks. They hide like the coward faggots they are.

Nothing had changed.

Tim was in the car with Madeline hunched over to one side. There were two police in the car now. Black police members of the Quixotes—a black cop fraternity sworn to protect the mayor especially from white police. They moved toward the airport. It was just after 5:00. And as they turned to go across the downtown bridge, two other police cars picked them up. In one was Roger Chamberlain, the Harvard grad who was Tim's political appointee as Police Director. Roger wore dashikis on Saturdays and was one of the only police directors with a beard. He liked to throw out a Swahili greeting at the militants when they came to bug him. He'd also turn on Herbie Hancock in the background to cool them out. The Cosmic Echoes if they got *too* far out.

In another car was the black Superintendent of Schools, with his special wine-aged briar pipe (\$750) and black Algerian tobacco. The Chief Judge of the Municipal Court, also black. With black watch, tartan dinner jacket, and long Dunhill cigarettes, looking frantically at his watch because he still had to call his woman Ida to see that she met him at the door exactly at 7:00. His wife would watch the proceedings on television, read her Bible, and go to bed.

In various cars, they arrived at the airport, and finally coming to the set that night would be the entire crew of Wa-Benzi (Swahili: the tribe that drives the Mercedes Benzes), the Blood Elite. Grown over from the black muscle of the '60s. The sister who was Executive Director of the City Hospital, the butcher shop, the head of the anti-poverty program (another sister). The business administrator

another Yale Law School graduate in a B.B. suit, natch. S.O. and his orange sideburns running with the Welfare Chief (she was an old head that had survived from the days when whites ran City Hall, and now she gloried in the coming together of survivors of the last epoch and the rulers of this). President of the Board of Education, a dude who wore cultural nationalist talismans over his blue Barney's suit. He had a red, black, and green pick he did his 'fro with too.

Along with the whites in the administration, country politicians, big-wigs from the Republican Party, and their niggerfigures as well, including their candidate for mayor: a "black" slumlord who was attacked by Sloane and the R.C. the year before because two black children died of lead poisoning in one of his \$175/month dungeons from eating the old paint off the peeling walls.

The dribble of banter rode around bubbly. Wax words oozed. Lies, conjectures, postures, puns, puns. Many had a last drinky-boo at the bar inside the airport before striding out, a comfortable triumphant little group, the in-it politicians of the state, and the po-lice, troopers, FBI, secret police, and more porters than the airport ever had. They all waited. On television, the head of the NAACP could smile—there were blacks "ever-where," including Tim, there, in the front line, with Governor Rockefeller, the President of Gratitude (an old-school friend of the vice president's), the Chairman of the N.Y.–N.J. Port Authority (a public corporation), the Republican State Chairman, the Republican Senator, and several county leaders.

They stood expectant as the door opened and the bigheaded, empty-faced moron who fronted out for the corporate dictatorship that ran America slid down the stairs, out of the plane.

Roger Chambers and his chief were briefing the Secret Service men as the motorcade began to shape up. The president was reaching the end of the line of people waiting for their hands to be shaken. The television was recording it all for posterity. There were about six or seven college-age whites on the street outside the airport, but cordoned away from where the president's motorcade would run, carrying signs, accusing him of being *The Chief of Imperialism*. They screamed at the cars as they pulled out and drove up the ramp they couldn't get close to. Some other people waved at the line of vehicles and talked excitedly.

As planned, the motorcade hit the bridge at fifty miles an hour, and the systematically timed lights blinked green straight ahead. The police sirens raised their customary wail and would have raised heads other places, but just made a slight dent in the consciousness of the black, Puerto Rican, and blue-collar white "Finns," who assumed it was merely the usual crime-busters action that went on in that town twenty-five hours a day. Though some had read the papers, listened to the radio, and stood at the curb looking at the motorcade. They waved. They called. Some gave it the finger. A few Puerto Rican teenagers at Britton Street said, "Fuck yooooo," as the motorcade passed.

The R.C. had reached the downtown area where the demonstration was scheduled about twenty minutes before the president touched down. They were met by the tactical squad, who said they would not be allowed in the area specified in the demonstration permit application. Just as Goodson had said in the newspapers, the police were going to keep them from getting too close to the president. "They won't see them, and they won't see him," is the way he put it.

Sloane cursed the police, said they were gonna get their asses sued for this violation of the people's democratic rights. The police said OK, and turned away. The long line of demonstrators, each with a different sign unfurled, walked around the outside of the cordoned-off area, chanting "President and Rocky eat thousand-dollar dinners/while the people are exploited by the capitalist system." Over and over again, waving the signs. They also had a big banner they carried with four main slogans: *Capitalist Lieutenant Ford Vetoes the People's Needs! Jobs, Not Imperialist War! Victory for the National Liberation Struggle Is a Victory for the Working Class! Support the People!*

of the World Struggle against the Super Powers! Young people got on their line of about 200. They talked about Ford and Rocky, about the Vietnam and Cambodian Wars, about unemployment, lay-off budget cuts. Police were heavy in and around the park. Disguised as vendors, drunks, passersby, along with the Secret Service. Unobtrusive, like an alligator in a dinner jacket. There was a new ring of people forming around the cordoned-off area to watch. A couple of smaller groups of demonstrators, some carrying signs saying *Rollback the prices!* Obviously suburbanites who wanted to buy more stuff with their loot.

America in the 1970s, in the pit of depression called recession. One out of every four black unemployed, Finland Station the gut end of that. Thirteen percent of the whole nation unemployed and in Finland Station it soared to thirty percent, fifty percent of the youth. And at nights there were more muggers on the streets than regulation folks. Sometimes the muggers mugged each other. Other times, they would mug police decoys, which they scattered all over the bleak slum, disguised as disguised cops.

The cries about the thousand-dollar-a-plate dinner hit home with a lot of the working people walking near the park, just coming from shopping, and even some of the people who were crowded around the outside perimeter hoping to see a glimpse of power. The line went from one chant to another, and circled back and forth on the perimeter where they were permitted to march. It was very late Saturday afternoon, turning to early evening. The shoppers were spreading after coming out of the bargain basements. They stopped to look at the signs and listen to the words being shouted at them.

Who's that? What's that for? That's Sloane and them. Uh-huh. What they talking about now? President—you know he's supposed to come in to some kind of reception tonight. A thousand dollars a plate? Is that what it cost? My land, child ... A thousand dollars! Sloane and them always on something or another. Need to spend that on some of these vacant lots we got around here. Ain't it the truth.

There were policemen and undercover-types literally everywhere. A couple of the officers would nod at Sloane or say something. Some of the others that had actually grown up in Finland Station nodded at some of the people in the demonstration line. A couple of Sloane's high school running partners grinned and nodded as they passed, now enrolled in the protection of the pretender. Some would beneath brown skin blush, and beneath the white skin, redder, they too would blush.

"Hey, Ray! What's happening?" said one dude who had become a militant cop for a minute, until Tim had him locked up for dumping garbage along with the Lloyd group. He was parked directly in front of the hotel. They'd placed him there to let the R.C. bunch see that there were defections from the revolutionary motive everywhere. Tim's aides, for instance, and many of the City Hall functionaries, were some of the biggest mouths calling for the destruction of America a few years ago. Ten thousand and up cooled them out a.s.a.p., and now some of them began to flit into the hotel. As the guests began to arrive in their finery, some of which wasn't fine at all. How come it could be that some sister making \$57.50 a week, in blue jeans or cheap skirt, could be more elegant than the shadowy presences strutting their stuff with capes and jeweled bags and the rest of the garbage? A couple of these couples made the actual mistake of thinking they could walk through the park toward the set, not knowing that democracy called for it to be shut off. Some of the demonstrators lit them up at once, asking about the money and the doofus clothes that purported to be expensive.

More and more people joined the line, and it was well over three hundred when the sirens could be heard, the red eyes swooping around on top of the leading police cars. A cheer began to go up from some of the people braced around the snow fence used to cordon off the park. But this cheer was drowned out instantly by the demonstrators, who blanketed the area with heavy boos. The cheerers

turned and gave the evil eye to the boos, but there weren't enough of them to matter. On the other hand, the provocateur walked back and forth in front of the line of demonstrators, a sick looking young Negro in a blue three-piece suit with a camera, saying, "Y'all gonna get locked up," but people blanked on him and he trailed off.

In the car directly behind the president's was Tim Goodson's, and directly behind that was Laird Conroy, President of Gratitude. Its white marble tower stood directly across the park from the hotel and the blue neon had just turned on and beamed its steady announcement of wealth and power. Actually, Conroy almost resented the fact that Tim's car was in front of his. The governor was riding with the president, and Senator Cod rode with Tim. It was the correct protocol, but not really, if you were being for real. Actually, Conroy should have been in the first car, Jimmy.

The demonstrators could see the cars as they pulled up the street toward the hotel. The comrades with the banners had hoisted them as high as they could, in hopes that the president would see them. Some folks thought he was jive. But it was mostly as Goodson had said: They didn't see the president and he didn't see them.

The party got out and swept up the stairs bathed in police. If you wasn't the president, you got mashed a little bit by the zealous Secret Service and the police. It was obvious that Tim and Roger had done a good job. There was no way nothing untoward could happen.

Laird Conroy was still a trifle starchy because he trailed the president by so much while Tim and the other blacks were closer, though none of them were anywhere near because of the police ring. With Conroy were his wife, Lydia, and their children, Morgan and Melissa. Melissa was a junior at Vassar, majoring, actually, in walking just slower than a medium gait, with head thrown slightly back and little nose reddening. Her brother was a peacenik potnik, gone straight. He and the governor's son had gotten busted a year ago for smoking bush, and that was when the governor came out with his humanitarian plea that the marijuana laws were too hard and should be reviewed. They were reviewed and the two boys got off with a stern talking-to by a judge, with Morgan being reenrolled at Princeton where he'd just about dropped out. He had started to go underground to classes given by the disciples of the Perfect Master Guru Rij, one of whom was a former revolutionary homosexual. The other revolutionaries kept being unsympathetic to homosexuality, and that moved him more toward the Perfect Master, who understood homosexuality perfectly, like he understood everything else. But at the same time, Morgan got excited when he read about Patty Hearst. Peace was everywhere, but he understood. But Patty Hearst, that excited him. They had the same experience. Trapped in the avalanche of privilege.

Tim was fine now. He shook the president's hand again. They were eating the thousand-dollar plate, and he looked over at Madeline, thinking she ought to feel better than this, sitting on the dais with the President of the United States. How many niggers can say that? Why she begrudge me a little loose booty, and I got her sitting up here with these million-dollar folks? A couple of years and a cabinet post, Jim.

"The security was fabulous, Tim, fabulous. I've heard so much about your city. The media, you know how they like to distort things. I didn't know what to expect. But you're handling things wonderfully." The president leaned over and said these things to Tim during the dinner, and he was glad that Madeline was listening and could check out how dynamite the President of the United States thought he was—the most powerful man in the world (Tim believed), what he had to say about Tim Goodson. *Shh ... I'm the only one that could tame a tough town like this, baby.*

"Thank you, Mr. President. But we both know how the media lie, trying to sell papers." They laughed, pretending intimacy.

The dinner was being eaten up. The dessert. Politicians had risen and told jokes. A few re-intimates had been upstairs at a smallish cocktail reception before the very big spenders. And the talked about the real problems. Markets. Russian contention with their business everywhere. Wh companies were in trouble. What Rockefeller's new house on the Pocantico, the Japanese model, w really like.

Now the president was being introduced by Governor Rose. Rose, a Democrat, nevertheless tri to sound like a member of the same team, though mentioning they were two different wings of th same American eagle. By talking about the president's personal qualities—his football years, h hardiness in the face of assassination threats, his willingness to get out and meet the American peopl He was finally saying, "the President of the United States." The band went into "Hail to the Chief."

The people rose, and as they did, Morgan Conroy drew a gun out of his belt and pointed it at th president and began firing. Tim Goodson instinctively rose up as the gun was pulled. He didn understand, but anyway, he was rising. He thought, *Why?* It was a split-second. *Why? This isn't th cabinet post!* He threw himself forward. *The cabinet post.* "What the fuck?" he was saying out lou and he got hit by all three of the bullets that were fired. They hit him in the head—face and neck. Ar before young Conroy could fire again, he was inundated by waiters with .45 automatics. By that tim Goodson was dead.

* * *

The president was whizzed back to Washington. He issued a grave press release praising Goodson t the skies. An investigation was held, but it merely revealed that Morgan was spaced out and thoug that this was what Patty would want. His father had to resign as President of Gratitude, but with half million a year and stock options as his retirement. Morgan was placed in a private hospital aft staying in jail for six years. Five years later, he wrote a book and began traveling around the worl snorting about \$500 a week in cocaine.

Tim Goodson was buried at the largest funeral ever held in Finland Station. Black politician came from all over the country. The vice president came, but not the president, as Finland Station w too much of a security risk. Madeline sat for hours in the house alone, thinking about what she wou do. And Ray Sloane and the R.C. discussed what had happened, talking about the irony, the sick iron of it all, and went back to their job of trying to make a revolution.

NORMAN'S DATE

Norman comes into the bar and tells me this one night. Norman always had great stuff to say, about painting and people he knew and Europe. Personalities and marvelous accomplishments. Fashionable stuff, in a way. But one night he comes up with this—it knocked me out.

He's drinking. He's got one hand holding up his very expensive trench coat. He's got a Gauloise dangling outta his mouth. (That's his usual stance.) He says: I met a woman, huh, the other night. Boy. He's talking and puffing the Gauloise, his coat pushed back, a couple of guys and me listening. We get drinks. It's not even late. Nobody's drunk.

Yeh, I'd been at the Five Spot, he says. He's talking like it's real. He's earnest, ya know? I was listening to Monk. And I see this babe standing by the bar digging the music. She's listening, she smiles. She's weaving, she's got a glass. Ya know. I start watchin her.

She's great, man. Great looking. Long and slender and blond. And all dolled up, but with good taste. Even some goddamn jewelry—and I hate jewelry. But on her it looks great, really great. And she spots me after a while. I was playin' it cool, ya know? I thought maybe her ol' man was in the job and coming right back. Shit, I didn't want no trouble. The music's great, too. That crazy Monk. And Wilbur. And that goddamn Trane is learning to play Monk's tunes, ya know?

Norman holds up his glass and gestures at us; there were maybe two others and me in our knowledge. He gestures for drinks all around. He's lighting another Gauloise with the stump he's got in his mouth. He shrugs acknowledgment as we hold up our glasses, saluting him. Norman was a kind of generous guy in a way, but he comes on tough. An ex-captain in the goddamn bombers during the Second World War. He's always got a scowl on his puss. People who don't know him think he's an asshole. A couple of friends of mine, even. They say Norman never invites them to his goddamn parties—the stuck-up elitist bastard. Ya know, Norman was making a little money then. Flying back and forth to Paris. Had regular shows there and a good gallery in New York. Big abstract expressionist canvasses. Big as hell with the paint soaked in. And you could tell his Rorschach—he had his own style. You could tell Norman *anywhere* once you'd seem them.

I got to know him through Frank. He was always jammed up with painters, especially the abstract expressionists—De Kooning, Kline, Guston, Hartigan, and even Rivers. He wasn't abstract, not on canvas anyway. I think Rivers took out his abstraction in the real world. But he would leave half a person out of his paintings. I guess as a kind of tribute to all the money the A.E.'s was making.

Cedar Bar. The early '60s, before Malcolm and hot street shit sent people flying every which way. (A buncha us to Harlem!) But we hung tough then. And bullshit—massive amounts of it got laid down in that joint.

So she looks at me, Norman's saying, right in the eye. Hey, what a look! It went right through me. My pecker started to turn over just a little bit, ya know? This babe was really good looking, no shit!

We're sipping and Norman's a good storyteller. He brings in the whole nuance of the thing. The environmental vibes, so to speak. He describes the woman. He really describes her. She sounds good like a cross between Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe. (I think these were his references.) But not "whorish," he says, not at all whorish. Real nice!

Norman's a big square-jawed Jewish guy with a permanently sneering lower lip. It gives him

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