

The First of Many Snarling Dogs

There is nothing that I would like to do more than go to bed, but I better write this now before it leaves me... I had just published my first book, nothing big, just a 78 page book of poetry and one short story, but I felt accomplished, not nearly satisfied, but accomplished. I had finally done it, and I lingered in its glory. After so many rejections, and after so many of your friends looking at you like your mad, you begin to doubt yourself, but when I opened the mail that told me of my publication I just put my head in my hands and felt like burning every rejection slip I had ever received. I felt like dancing 1000 dances, and listening to 1000 songs. I felt like the new member in a long line of greats, Salinger, Hemingway, Faulkner, Pound, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Saroyan, Celine... Chatterton. 2 suicides, 1 still living, the 6 dead, Céline and Hemingway on the same day, most of them drinkers. It makes me think... which will I be?

The sales were good the first week. I hadn't received any check in the mail, so I was still hungry, but I saw it fit to celebrate. Santhymum called me up and asked if I wanted to go have drinks with a buddy of his, Shelby. I told him yes and they picked me up in Shelby's burgundy Cadillac. We drove in the afternoon sliding into evening, so everywhere you looked the sun shown into your eyes. The heat felt like a giant blow-dryer with the windows down. Once we got to Shelby's I phoned Sam.

"Sam, are you around here?"

"Yeah, I'm with Jo."

"Come down tonight."

"Where?"

I gave directions. I hung up the phone and opened a beer. The house was strange. Shelby was Mormon, but not practicing, so there was paintings of their grand temple, that was actually in the city and that I had driven past many times. The paintings hung crooked next to a cardboard cutout of Marilyn Monroe pasted to the wall. Marilyn looked good even flat. She curved like no other woman. Down the hall was another painting called *Chagall the Dead Man* depicting one of the deceased lying on the ground surrounded by candles, a man sweeping the street, a woman wailing, and another man playing violin on a rooftop. The colors were sad and slow; I enjoyed looking at the painting very much, but then I was called into the other room by Santhymum and Shelby.

Soon after that Sam and Jo arrived. I went outside to greet them. Sam was in a extraordinarily goofy mood. Jo stood smoking a cigarette. And as we joked, they congratulated me on the book, and we spoke of what Jo's name would be in my stories, if I were ever to write any about her, although she knew Sam had the monopoly on that. She told me she wanted to be Penny because of the Beatles. We moved toward the house and past the onion plant in the front yard. Inside everyone became acquainted with one another, Shelby, Santhymum, myself, Sam, and Jo, and another man joined us with his girlfriend, Margot. We decided to go outside, I took my drink and sat on a lawn chair. Margot took out a cigarette and some pills. She offered me some.

"No thanks."

"You just do pot then?"

"No."

Then Sam interrupted, "He just drinks... a lot."

"I'm an alcoholic." I said.

"Oh..." Margot seemed unimpressed.

People like that were a waste of time for me. Margot popped the pills, and without warning or much drink at all Jo vomited on my pant leg and shoe; the faint sounds of Dylan's *Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again* playing in the background. It took Sam a moment to recognize what had happened, and then she began to laugh. I did nothing, just looked at Jo and said, "It's alright, I'll be able to write about you now."

I was feeling completely twisted inside. Sam was still laughter stricken. We sat together for a while. It was a moment alone, and I could feel the cool sprinkler water pelting me.

"How's it feel to have a book about you?" I asked her.

"Very Nice."

"Do you realize, I can kill myself now and my words will live on?"

"Yes. But you better not, because if you killed yourself, I'd kill you."

She climbed on top of an old trampoline. She took hold of my arms and saw that red zits all over them. "What are these." She asked me. "Ingrown hairs."

"Why don't you take care of them?"

"There are too many of them. They are all over my body." I said.

"They look painful."

"Only when I pick at them."

And then Santhymum came over and got onto the trampoline with her. We stood talking about many different things, few of them interesting. Jo was sitting in the corner, looking sick.

"What are your writings about?" She asked me.

"They are mostly about Sam."

"I know, I read your script. It was pretty good."

"Thank you."

"All of it true?"

"Most of it." I said.

Sam had to work the next morning, so she left, although I didn't want her to.

As we said our goodbyes, she told me that no one would believe the life we lead. That it is was just too insane, but I have the vomit covered sock to prove it.

When she left it was still early, 1 or 2am. I made myself a Rum and Coke and sat down on one of the chairs. The floor was covered with junk; half eaten blueberry muffins, Christmas stockings still hung in June, etc. Santhymum, a usually quiet man had been drinking steadily through the night, and when drunk he became very outspoken. As we sat together, drinking, speaking, and laughing, I got the urge to use the bathroom. I found the toilet, dropped my pants and so on. When I walked out Santhymum asked me, "Who do you think your biggest influence is?"

"I don't know." I answered. "Salinger."

"Really?"

"Yes. I consider myself a helpless case, and I wouldn't be surprised if I ended up living out in the woods, a recluse. Besides, Holden Caulfield *was* me as a young man."

"He was all of us."

"It's just a shame he didn't write more."

“Didn’t a news paper review compare you to him?”

“Yes. I’ve been compared to them all.”

“I saw you more as a Hemingway.”

“Really? I always saw myself as a Burroughs or a Raymond Chandler.” I said, half joking.

“But I’m none of them. I never wanted to *be* them. They are just the manure, and I’ve come from them.” I continued.

“Did you ever think about going up to see Salinger?”

“No. The man wants his privacy and I’ll give it too him. I can write about the son-of-a-bitch though. I wouldn’t want people coming to my door.”

“Well, you’re famous.”

“Hardly.”

“Don’t you get the nudes in the mail?”

“Yeah. Sometimes.”

“Shit!” said Shelby, “Poetry ain’t a bad business.”

“No, not if you can scratch the surface of fame. You either end up known or nothing. I’ve known poets who wrote their whole lives and they ended up toothless, jobless, loveless, and mad. But we’re all a little bit mad.”

I think it is safe to say that if you attempt this, writing that is, your mind has somehow been spoiled. The fine line between genius and insane is where writers/poets exist. I remember my parents reading my poetry and thinking I was maladjusted, cracking up, suicidal, depressed, and dark. I couldn’t have been happier, because as a realist my goal is write brutally, and parents never like talking about what’s real, so I must have been doing something right.

We then decided to watch a film. I had brought Jodorowsky’s *El Topo*. We got about half way through, when we turned it off and went back outside into the night. The sky was good looking. A handsome moon looked down and coated the ground with the faintest of light. We shared a peach cigar. By this time it was 4. I wanted more cigars, so we walked down to the corner store, for all of us were far too drunk to drive. The walk seemed a lot shorter than it actually was. While Santhymum and Shelby got what we came for, I looked at the candy. I picked up an Abba Zabba and contemplated buying it, but then decided against it. The store clerk was contemptuous, leering over the counter as us, obviously realizing we were drunk. On the walk home we took the long way and Shelby told us of his friend’s house that was torn down so the highway could be built. At one point there were no streetlights and I advantageously sprinted forward into the darkness, but then stopped, out of breath over my gut. I felt my heart thumping, unable to catch my breath. Finally back at Shelby’s place, we sat out back, smoking the cigars, watching the sun come up, speaking and laughing about authors, about our loves, me about Sam, etc. I told my stories of midgets with no legs, the orgies that ensued after all night parties, and of my first poetry reading where I beaten and almost killed in the alleyway, and it was very nice, one of the nicest times I’ve known.

We were sobering up and in need of a meal. I didn’t have any money so Santhymum offered to pay. Outside Santhymum vomited in the grass, then we got into Shelby’s Cadillac, and drove east into the sun, until we found a café. We took a seat inside. I remember looking at the clock and it reading 6:35. The waitress, a beat looking woman, with a face covered with make up and weatherbeaten skin, took our order. We all ordered the same thing: regular coffees and steak and eggs, with sides of grits and

toast with strawberry jam. The meal was good, and I felt a shit working inside of me. Between the liquor and the breakfast I knew it was going to be ugly. Our waitress only added to the pleasure. She brought me the paper, which I half read while sipping my coffee. She was kinder and more fragile than expected, and when we left we gave her the best tip we could.

On the way to my place Django Reinhardt came through the radio, and I felt as if the night couldn't of gotten any better. I had my book, I had Sam, I was full and fat, oblivious to all else. The eggs couldn't have tasted better, the coffee couldn't have been sweeter, and Sam couldn't have looked more beautiful. I went upstairs and sat on the toilet. I read my own book. The shit was so hot and violent that I began bleeding from the ass. "Motherfucker!" I shouted. I had bled out of almost all my orifices, and now I had bled from them all. I watered down some toilet paper and put it on my ass. Once the bleeding stopped I got into the tub; my knees and belly sticking up from the water. The water a hazy gray color from my filth. The ass felt better. The night had been something. Maybe I haven't captured the strangeness of this night. It was a singular moment in time for me, that makes up my entire life, and when you think of something like that it doesn't seem so insignificant. I had published a book. I had joined the gods in their game. I had beat the first of many snarling dogs. I had proven teachers and parents wrong. We all try for things, but most of us don't get them, but not out of choosing, out of bad luck, and the unwillingness to not except your failure. I then climbed into bed. Which is what I'm going to do right now.