Splattery (Part 1)

Special Edition for Twitter/X

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, names, incidents, organizations, and dialogue in this novel are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Acknowledgements

This particular round of mayhem is dedicated to JP, may you rest in peace. You left us too soon but you made one hell of a positive impact on the world. Thank you again for your selfless support.

Here I lay me down to sleep
To wait the coming morrow,
Perhaps success, perhaps defeat,
And everlasting sorrow

Let come what will I'll try it once
My condition can't be worse
And if there's money in that box
*'Tis money in my purse.**

*** Poetry attributed to California stagecoach robber Charles E. Boles, alias "Black Bart, the P-O-8" (b. 1829)**

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

acrobat	A talented criminal.
The Big Grift	White collar crime.
black hat	Homicidal.
blue hat	Physically violent.
blue plums	Bullets.
blue ruin	Gin.
(The) broad arrow	Prison uniform.
Buzz Town	A rival city.
The Card	Death.
The Cellar	City Hall.
crawlers	Predatory criminals.
crushers	The police.
The dixies	Police detectives.
float	To beat someone unconscious.
gouda	Cash; currency.
The hat factory	State penitentiary.
The Jeebies	The Feds.
The lottery	The criminal justice system.
Neptuned	Cremated.
outhouse	The morgue.
plungers	Syringes.
prancers	Horses.
rhino	Money.
rozzers	The police.
sacks	Homeless men; transients.
screws	Prison guards.
smashed	High on heroin.
Spill City	A polluted city on the coast.
spiritual	Dead.
spoil	Murder.
spoil rotten	Commit a brutal murder.
sponge bath	Electric chair.
Ten-over-six	Crazy.
thumper(s)	Gang member(s).
toad skins	Paper money.
The Trop	The big city featured in this story.
urchins	Runaways
white house	Hospital.
the wolves	Prison gangs.

Cast of Characters (In order of appearance)

Mawdy	A career criminal and the narrator of this story.
The Cheese	A morbidly obese crime boss with the most power.
The Doon	The heroin-addicted crime boss of The North.
The Cane	The flamboyant crime boss of The Seaside.
The Rake	The womanizing crime boss of The West.
Momma	Mawdy's mother. An emotionally troubled alcoholic.
Oinkle	Mawdy's violent, abusive uncle who replaces his father.
Yansey	Mawdy's best friend who has learning disabilities.
Souser	A friend of Mawdy's who is an alcoholic.

Chapter 1 **Splattery**

I found The Cheese. In a spiritual repose. *Vaya con Diosed.* Holy-Ghosted. A goner, gone west. The way, of all flesh. A sad fact. That will remain unbeknownst. A pact, with yours truly: Mawdy. That would be me. Narratively. Literally. Who just so happened, to happen upon. This most misfortunate. Substantially circumstantial mishappenstance.

The fat hatter. Ker-splat! Just like that. On the fractured floorboards, of his Feng-shui'd flat. On his brave face. At his place. Dead. As a doornail. His sail set. His maker met. The gargantuan warlordish warhorse. Never more. This leviathan, washed up on shore. Yet another chapter, in the tales of yore.

The Cheese. Pronounced. His ball bounced. DOA, at a white house. My main man. Who took away my pain. The Cheese. At peace. He made a hurricane, feel like a cool breeze.

The Cheese. The all-that. The baddest cat. Flat-lined. Headed, for the box of pine. Tomb temperature. His aperture shut. But I did my part. Cross my own heart. To try and jump start. His wild, yet departed heart. Hardcore CPR, right out of The Big Books—that I studied hard with Doler. In the hat factory.

The Cheese. His ticket ticked. His bucket kicked. The Cheese: The bees. The knees. He of three chins, under his goatee. The King of Splattery. This Francophilic pharaoh. Who fed off of us Philistines.

'Twas a heart attack, Jack. Like a sack o' potatoes. Keeled over, from all those extra kilos. But that's how it goes. When you can't see, your own ten toes. Over your growing boiler…that grows, and Grows, and GROWS.

Myocardial infarction—as I read it, in the Big Books. In The Pen. Handed to me. By the old guy, Doler…*merveilleux*, was he. Through the bars. That seemed to be everywhere. Surrounding me. Claustrophobically. At the hat factory.

When you tip the scales. A puppy dog's tail. Just over 400 pounds. Something's gotta give. Until it hurts. Or spurts. The Cheese. Painsteakingly mainlined his way. Via fine dining. To the afterlife. Skirting, with each steak. The issue of heart disease. And his crew. Including yours truly. You-know-who. *Sacré bleu*. The ol' Mawdy-roo. We always knew. That Father Cheese's time would come to an end. Much too early. For this burly, sometimes surly. Big stick, that spoke softly.

Sands. From his hourglass. Slid quick…Tick. Tick. Tick. Heartsick. With no one biting the hands. That kept feeding The Cheese. Round the clock. Piece-by-piece. Hickory. Dickory. Ignoring doc after doc. But still a shock. None. The. Less. A signal of distress. Our pants were down. Our heads, in the sand. Without warning. A complete surprise, to the eyes that have it.

Dammit. Dag-Nab-Bit. Whose bagman, gets my swag now? For heaven's sake. The Doon's? The Cane's? The Rake's? Your guess, is as good as mine. My darling Clementine. The Cheese: *Mort* Done-for Perhaps Perchance This was a formidable foreboding o' war.

The Grim Reaper. The Elysian-Fielder. The Big Sleeper. His scythe wielded. With a leap, and a bound. Has just turned this town. Upside down, inside out, and all around.

Now-now. Don't cry. Oh no, there you go with the flow. There'll be time to wallow. But there's more to come, and much more to follow. But first…we must go back…from whence we came…

…My fellow degenerate degenerates. Conspiring confederates. Indescribable indigents. Snarling harlots. Hellacious hellcats, sprats, brats, and charlatans. When life begins. The incorrigible origins. Which came first? The egg, or the chicken? Go ask the rooster, with the chicanerous grin.

Genesis. Chrysalis. Metamorphic metamorphosis. The sins—the cardinal, the venial, and the none too congenial. The beginning, of my sinning. In The Life, of constant strife. Fully profiled. All the woolly, and the wild. The dicey. The hot and spicy. Alongside the mild.

The Life. The semi-somewhat. Kinda. Sorta. Shortened short form. Short, for our sporting life…The Life, baby. Take it seriously. Fast and furiously. For real. The Life. You can't fake it. So make it, or leave it. Painfully. All the chains. All the whips lashing. And the chips cashing. Ashing-to-ashing. Moving through the clouds ever so cumulusly—Neptuned, in the penitentiary. Scary, some would say. And yes, be very, very, wary.

Now allow me, to introduce myself. Most cordially, and kindly. Ladieeeezzz and gentlemen. Guys and gals. *Mesdames et messieurs*. May I have your attention. Because it's time to exhume, *mon nom de plume.*

My name's Mawdy—yeah, Mawdy. Apparently, it's an Old World birdie…Cawdy-Mawdy. Referenced, in an old verse. It's an overseas bird, of rare occurrence.

Mawdy. Hard at work. Across the land. Pilfering. All the milk, and the honey. For The Cheese. I'm the busy bee, of B-and-E. I make it look easy. Because I'm sticky, and I speak the ease. The ease? Puh-leaze. It's the broken and spoken word. That I speak. Throughout this trick, of a treatise.

Here's to me. Descriptively. I've either too little, or too much self-esteem. I can be six-feet-one, or five-feet-thirteen. My long hair's dark, and my thirty teeth are clean. There's a busted-up beak, from a dust-up as a teen. I see you, with two peepers of green. I'm lean. Yet there's some pop up top. From The Joint's weight machines.

So everybody. Repeat after me: Mawdy. And I'm naughty. Kind of bawdy. Semi-somewhat tawdry. With a body, of dirty work. Right in front of me. Got a problem with that? Mawdy. *C'est moi*. My monikerous nickname. Alias…also known as my AKA. Sticking to me.

What's my repertoire? I thought you'd never ask. Please excuse me. Whilst I bask. In my glow. I'm sticky. I like free inventory. Which means I steal, burgle, and primarily pry fairly industriously. In commercial warehouses, and industrial facilities. Places of business, as well as manufacturing.

I'm a valuable commodity, to The Cheese—MAWD, should be my symbol, on the financial sheet. As I'm nifty. Nimble. And quick. Picking locks, disarming alarms, and all other forms of security. I can open doors, gates, and windows. *Sans* keys. I hide inside crates, ducts, and grates. Quietly. Adept, at every attempt. Whilst tempting fate. I can think on my feet *tout de suite*. And don't ever ask me, for a receipt.

Mawdy. The unknown employee, numbered infinity. Twenty-two-over-seven, my imaginary badge says to thee. I'm in heaven, on a shopping spree. With a flashlight

between my teeth. Burglary. Banditry. Thievery. And strike up the band, for grand larceny. A cottage industry. Covered by your company's insurance policy.

Perpetration. With no hesitations. Well, maybe a few reservations. But one has to accept one's unrightful place in the food chain. To stave off the starvation.

I have a gift. That keeps me living. It's the lift. The pick. The pocket. I'll pop your glass eye, right out of your socket—poof! And it's gone. Then I'll grin, over some blue ruin. Unbeknownst, to the mark…

…The mark. Stark raving sad—that's you, by the way. A revealed revelation. From this sarky marksman.

I'll snag any swag, that ain't bolted down. Unbeknownst. Because I'm the jay, who can peck his way. Out of a wet paper bag. Most of the time, anyway. But we'll get to that.

Swag. The mine-all-mines. This swagpie in flight, for anything that shines—brightly, and mightily fine. Swag. Merch. Free stuff. It's what dreams are made of. Love it. I'm mad for swag. Drooling for moveables, doohickeys, baubles, and doodads.

I'm thinking thoughts of thing-a-ma-jigs, trinkets and whirligigs—as it all spends, the same. Moreover, all the better, for this man of letters. I'm all in the game. An amorous, biliously valorous valedictorian. So take your complaints to a historian. Because I'm long gone. Va-Po-Rized. For your protection. Apparitional. *El bandito incognito*. I'm bye-bye by the time the crushers show.

I'm a klepto. Supposedly so. Klepto's short for kleptomaniac. Which means I steal with zeal. A zealot, for the hell, and pleasure of it. *Mon raison d'etre*…Reason, to be. Which is French, for look at me. This abecedarian, seizing his A-B-C's. That's how I read it, in The Big Books. On psychiatry. Or was it psychology? Handed to me, through the bars from Doler, the old-souler. In The Joint, ever so empathetically.

Did I say The Joint? You heard correctly. The Joint—AKA, the hat factory. The crushers pinched me twice. Those lucky ducks. Plucked. Downright abducted. This plucky young buck. Straight-up, and into the baddy wagon. Now this two-time loser knew the deal. Cooled his heels. And his jets. Paid his debts. In the cooler. *Bastille. Gaol.* But that's The Life. A life on the run Un-A-Void-Able Devoid of certainty—save for a guided tour, of the penitentiary.

The Life. Saints and sinners—no winners, in this game. Ward, of the state. Rep-Ro-Bate. Inside The slammer. There's only so much you can do. Under the watchful watch of the screws. In The Cage. Up the creek, without a paddle. This cowboy, knocked off his saddle. All taxpayer-funded. Thank you for that, as I tip my hat to you, John Q. Public.

Banged up, and counted. My countenance frowning. Locked down. Brought down. Beaten down. Bro-ken-down. Taken down—taking it, like a man. My beak sealed shut—this mutt, who listened to his master…The Cheese. Who would always say, that crime can pay. For those with patience. So let's giddy up, and divvy up the indivisible dividends. To no ends. When you eventually swim back, from the deep end.

The Joint. The Klink. In stir. Sleeping, with both eyes open. Nighty-night. Beddy-bye. Pleasant screams. This ambidextrous acrobat. Cat. Napping. In the Land of Nod. Keeping my hope in God, alive. In this hive, of killer bees—my shiv, and my shank, alongside. This loyalist, with clenched fist. His mitt on the Bible. Which is The Biggest Book, most reliable. I was hopelessly devoted, to The Cheese. Always and forever. Let it be said. To my last breath. On my dying day. On my death bed.

My game. My rules. It's all based, on a cruel story. The names, have been changed. To protect the deranged. In this silly syllabus of syllabic syllables. Rearranged. By this bull, with the big horns. A paradiabolical parable. A heart-burning heart-to-heart story. Using certain big words. Shorn and torn apart. For all to see.

Here's what's in store: Court jesterish lore. From yesteryore. A liturgical litany of homilies, litanies, and glorious stories. Chock full o' allegories. Symphonies of similes…Elliptical ellipses…Irony, arranged erroneously. Hymns of synonyms. Anthems of antonyms. Tons upon tons of acronyms—splashes o' em dashes—inserted, symbolically.

Gluttonously punishing punishment. Penned punaciously. Limericks. Scores of mixed metaphors. In this *tour de force majeure.* O' fanatical Anti-Gram-Matical Idiotic Idi-O-Matical Unapologetical experimental tendencies. All of it nimbly strung, tongue-in-cheekily.

I'm gonna hold sway. Bloviating. While avoiding the rot, and the decay. Coz the play's the thing—as I read it, in a Big Book. A burst, of the first and third person. Right out of the gate. Straight. To the point. Liked I learnt it, in The Joint. The bare necessities. In this sick, minimalistic Mo-No-Lithic Mystical work of Spartan art. Like a Scot unleashing, a tartan fart. A monomaniacal monologue. A prosaic mosaic. Of the tragic, yet true. From me, to you. Alongside. Siamese twins, joined at the lip. On a trip to the write fantastic.

Yin, with a touch of yang. If there's too many words, we'll all hang. Some cut, and some paste—haste, but no wasting of space. Or killing of trees. There will be some birds, some bees, splattery, and plenty about The Cheese. This one's bon mottishly *bona fide*. From all sides. A stocking stuffer. An off-the-cuffer. A buffer. Betwixt and between you. Yeah. You. And The Life, like no other.

It's a hybrid combo of combined and coxcombed combinations. Old Timey Sub-Lime Con-Temp-O-Rary Cor blimey Semi-somewhat Limey. Yet Americanically inclined. Thievishly ganglandish lingo. That goes bingo, Bango, BONGO! And knocks your socks, and your banjo. Right off your knee.

You name it, I'll flame it. Low and slow. Strung out, and slung out. Something. You might have heard before. A two-step or two. Of the same old same-old. Song and dance. Told. In a most unique *parlez* and parlance. A decadence recital. A dalliance. So please, just give it a chance. I promise. With all my heart. That you won't work too hard. So hand me, your dance card.

Splattery, is the new black. The star attraction. All the rage. On the stage, and on the silver screen. *Très chic*, never *passé*. Take in the triple-speak. The tongue-twippling cristers. Linguistically twisting the cappuccino, and espresso-sipping lips. Of wanna-be hipsters and impresarios.

It's the slang…the slime, of the times—the timeless, rhymable rhymes. Crushers is my favorite. Personally. For The Blue Meanies. AKA, the cops. Coppers. Rozzers. *Policia Polizei* The Five-Oh. Old Bill says please exit the vehicle. Nice and slow. So's I can see ya. All of it hard-boiled. Like The Card, spoiled rotten, and other terms long ago. Long For-Got-Ten.

Doler. Steady as he goes. Accomplished. Ready to die. Inside. He kept a bird's eye on ol' Mawdy. Whilst this fresh fish, was in the hat factory. Doler taught me, ever so eloquently. To dig the big words. Out from The Big Books most comprehensively.

It's not as hard, as it looks, Mawdy. You got me? You just start with your heart. And you tear them apart. Pho-Ne-Ti-Cally—indirectly, accidentally, and eruditiously. They're the same for everybody.

That's right, you heard me. It's all about having fun. With the fundamentals. Fun-Da-Men-Tally—words, the world over. Can be cooked rare, medium, well, and done. And don't you ever, Ever, EVER. Talk to your students. From the rostrum. Like they're dumb. Or they'll be truant and tardy. For your class. That's now a mind-numbing bummer of a slumber party.

We're all put here. For a reason. So said Doler. Quote Un Quotably. As he taught me to fly. On the fly. As we burned, churned, and turned the big words. When they first were swirling. Twirling. Unfurling. Running loose. Duck-duck-goosing, in musical pairs. In this bookish bookworm's cool new world.

Doler, in Stir. Sir yes sir. This raconteur. This agent of change. Doler. The mentoring minder. Alongside this amateur *provocateur*. Home-schooling, at chow time. And in The Yard. Con-Juring Con-Jecturing. Lecturing. Projecting *pro bono* perspective. About respective subjects. Far, and wide.

So get a load of me. I'm Mawdy. The man with the degree. In Kleptology. Alongside my alacritous and fantastical. Enthusiastically acrobatical. Fan-Tas-Ma-Gorical. Rhetorically allegorical. Nonsensical. Nonce-worded wordsmithing. As my hammer hits the anvil, ever so emphatically.

I'm Mawdy. I lead a life of vice. I've only got time to deal rightwise. With what's right in front of me. And I speak nice n' easy. From my heart. With big words spoken while broken apart. Served with verbs *ad hoc*. Alongside added adverbs *á* la c*arte.* All captivating, my captive audience. Oratorially O-Rating. Be-Rating. Liberating. Res-O-Nating. Punctuating. Conjunctivating. Paraphrasing. Ever so persuasively.

Doler. Over his chow tray. Would play with sayings, catchy catch phrases, clichés, and famous quotations—saved, for a brainy day. 'Twas his *forté*. Which made, his long days shorter, and sweeter. His stretch speedier. Some of the rain-rain going away. Sweetly dreaming, about sailing away. Along with the dog, that was having his day.

Doler. Croaked. Crossed over. Passed…before I could get the last of it. Naturally, *au naturel*. Spiritual. In his cell. Natural causes. A medical term, for old as hell.

Commodore Mawdy. Left at the helm. With just enough between me ears. To make it a career. Navigating the straits, and the shallows. Perhaps, the gallows. Mawdy the sailor-man. Who stays off dry land. Veering. Commandeering This mysterious period piece Free from seasickness Never mind the barnacles As we list starboard Via, *vis-à-vis* Port Man Teaus…and as you read this scribbly and scripted screed It occasionally will seem That the periods Magically, as if by magic Periodically Dis Ap Pear Now just where did they go?

Choo-choo! Chugga-chugga-chugga…the train, with your luggage—and your personal struggles—is about to leave the station. So wha-da-ya-gon-na-do? As we get caught up, in this Catch-22. It's a subversive vice-versive incursion. So don't get lost. In the translation.

Now pull the bar down. And hold on, to your partner's hand. If you must. As the afterburners will thrust. Soon, and anon. But no standing up. Keep your seat upright. Then please exit safely—to the right, after we come to a complete stop. After the pilot,

gives the green light. And says thank you, for flying Air Mawdy. And if you liked our service, please put it in writing.

It's a double-dog-dare. Are we square, *mon frère*? And to show you that I care. Please go back, and re-read. The first few paragraphs. *Du glossaire*. I won't mind. Coz you were blind-sided—blinded, by the blinding light. Of The Life. A life that always, takes on a life of its own. Our little secret…shhhhhhhh…unbeknownst. Know what I'm saying? Lots of those, in The Life.

I'm a jack-squatter
On a one-way teeter-totter
Between Hell
And the high water
Going down and getting hotter

The Cheese. Towed the line. With his eyes closed. His effervescent prose. Jux-Ta-Posed. To keep everybody, on their toes. While walking backwards. Stick that into your pipe. And smoke it. Inhale, to the thief. The Cheese: *Cheesus Maximus*—The Colossus, of all the bosses. God rest his weary soul. Cross my heart, and hope to die. Alongside.

Of course I should quit. Go legit. Straighten up. You don't say? But I have to live, to even give a damn. All the live long day. I'm possessed. Consumately consumed. With The Life. Hand-to-mouth. Slave, to the grind. A life of finders-keepers. While you weeping shopkeepers sleep. Like fearful deer, in the clear. Of hunting season.

No rest. For the wicked. So get out of my way. I'm gonna pick it, and pocket it. So stick a sock in it. And come on in—but please save, the last dance for me. After we conquer the world. One vice at a time. With our heads held high. While humming hummable lulla-byes. From bygone days gone by. With our fingers crossed. Behind our backs. While counting the stars, in the starry sky.

Five. Itsy-bitsy octopi. Can't hold 40 candles to me. I'm so ridiculously sticky. Open season. No limit. No reason. With my mitts. Through the wickets. Nicking bric-a-brac, knick-knacks, gadgets, curios, and keepsakes. Odds and ends. Whistles, and bells. It all depends. Yet I don't care. Because I'm doomed. Heirlooms, from Egyptian tombs. It's all up for grabs. Smack-dab. In the middle, of my hand.

Fencie. He's a friendly friend to me. He buys and sells stolen property. Moves it—or loses it. Before the crushers knock down his hothouse. The loot *tout de suite*. A drop zone. Downright fictitious. Area 51. Bermuda triangulation. Atlantastic. Unbeknownst, only to Fencie.

Down by The Docks. Cheese country. Reciprocity. Give him a taste. A turkey to baste. And all is well. That spends well. That's what I keep telling myself. Every night, before I lay me down to sleep.

Fencie rolls with The Crab. Thick as thieves. Coz they are thieves—literally, in case you might ask. But no questions asked. Clean as a whistle. No deposit. No return. Manhandling. All the handle-with-cares. Fragile? Not fragile? Cash on demand. Class, and carry. And it doesn't hurt, to have some panache. No shirt. No shoes. No service—or The Cheese, will do you a disservice. And stuff his hobnailed boot. Up your ass.

Fencie's the ace. Up my sleeve. The King o' pop, in all The Trop. A masterful master of poppery. Alongside. This sticky pauper. As he pops a potpourri. Of ownerless ownings. Pawnbrokishly. Believe you me. I know a good sling, when I seize one. So I always kick a chunk Fencie's way. And The Crab. Who also aids, and abets. All my nabs. Each and every way. To Sunday.

I'm what's called an acrobat
Either up to this
Or maybe up to that
All done unbeknownst
The way I learned as a sprat

But I won't take all of your gouda. Or your swag. Coz I ain't that greedy. Even if you left it out there. On a silver platter. For the taking. Candy, from a baby. Pies, on the windowsill. Greed. There's really no need. Not my cup of tea. Believe you me. Death wish. Bad luck. Black cats, crying on Friday, the thirteenth.

The Cheese. Second-to-none. Taught me this one. Son, always leave them something. To hold onto. Hope, springs eternal. Hate, burns infernal. Never give them a reason. To have a reason. And everybody rides away into the sunset. Kismetically. As you only get one chance. To leave a first depression.

Handing out The Big Books. Ain't in the game plan. Ix-nay, on the oint-jay. That's exactly that, in pig Latin. Put it in writing. Cut, and print it. Last will, and testament. Defiant. I ain't going back there. Not in a million years. I'm through, and thoroughly through with the hoosegow. This model citizen is done. With giving Old Roger his due.

The Joint. Not my kind of environs. Leg irons. The Hole. In-Sanity. In-Justice. Pent and sent up. Panting and raving. Slaving. Carcinogenically. Why must it be? Dying, in solitary. Incarserrated. My soul, mutilated. Beyond recognition. I have something to offer…to society. This roguish rogue scholar. Has read The Big Books. Backwards and forwards. Over and over. Hear me holler. This dog, chewing on his collar. Get me out of here. Coz I can't breathe anymore. I'll behave. I promise. Scout's dishonor.

The Big House
All dressed up, with nowhere to go
With nothing to win
Nothing to place
And nothing to show

Steer clear of The Life
So said with the tip of my knife
But you did not hear this from me
Coz my enemies might see
That I've gotten downright squishy

Chapter 2

Charles Darwin might have an opinion. In regards, to my predilections. But the chump's dead. Spiritual. Skeletal. Fossil fuel. Out of sight. Out, of mind. Archaic. Ar-Chae-Logical. Astrological. Into the void. Freud? I read about him, in The Big Books. On the by-and-by. Just another dead wise guy.

I pledged my allegiance. To the swag. Long before my molars popped. Perhaps. Even before I dropped…out of Momma. My Poppa? I never knew him. An absentee deadbeat. So that ain't it. He died inside. Spiritual. Poppa would shoot up. Oftentimes. With dirty syringes. Poppa…drugged and bugged out. Checked out. Neptuned. Scattered, to the wind.

Momma? She did her best. Given the mess, and the stress. Momma. Ten-over-six. The bipolar express. In 3-D. Fifty-one-fifty. A feel-bad movie. Sleeping unsoundly. A saint, with no restraint. Given the circumstances, and her own indiscretions.

Momma. Home wrecker. The biggest checker, of my blasted past. A train wreck, wrapped around a car crash. My mommy. A time bomb. A bouncing Betty. Ready to go off at any second.

Momma had predilections. Indiscretions. Blue confessions. Abusing substances—and everything else, under the sun. Bloody Marys. At the crack. Vodka-crans. At the track. Then back to Oinkle. To make the beast, with the two backs. Horizontal bopping. Family die-namics Yesiree Un Pro Ductivity with Oinkle.

Oinkle: Mister Wrong, working this long con. Who would run the frying pan. Or anything he could get his hands on. Upside. On my head. Sometimes he missed. Because he was so pissed. But I still felt, the welts dealt. Via the slaps, fists, and belt straps. Most nights. But you should have seen…the other guy.

Oinkle. Boy-oh-boy. On yet another notably deplorable occasion. This dozy bulldozer. Lost his composure. And gave me one mother of a noser. A demented memento. He rendered yours truly. Some What Semi Un Conscious. Dry gulched. KO'd…the blood flowed. A rhinoplastering. Unelective plastic surgery. He said see ya, wouldn't want to be ya. My beak was splattered. From cheek-to-cheek. Like the ancient continent of Pangea.

As such, my beak healed disastrously flat—flatter than a rat, right where an elephant sat. Oinkle. Wreaked havoc. Teaching this sprat, for no good reason. The ins and outs, of the blue hat. Inspiring me…to acquire…a baseball bat…

I don't see that smirk on your face anymore
As I open door after door after door
Mine eyes might not be dry
Coz I just might cry
Like I never have before

Please. Right this way. And waltz right into my squalor. *Caveat emptor*. Every time you stepped through our front door. Into this house of cards. And mind the shards. Of

crass. When you step lively. My childhood. Missed it. Oliver Twisted. It was all over, before I knew one existed.

Momma. A head case. A heroine, afflicted. Liquored up. Every now and then. On and off, the brown bag wagon. While my smashing Poppa. The spaced out. Waste case. Chased the dragon.

Momma, as I aforementioned. Shacked up with Oinkle—the dog, in our manger. This complete bastard, of a stranger. When my Poppa was sent away. And got the bug from doctor-playing. Then laid to rest. Inside. What can one say?

All of this permissively promiscuous perniciousness. Went unbeknownst, to my Poppa. But not to me. A front row seat. With no docent to explain to me. This hellish picture of Hell. That would make Hieronymous Bosch blush. Then choke on his brush.

This sorry state. Of an inmate, in an asylum. Im-Printed. This coin minted, with a bad impression. Of his phylum. Pavlov's dog, lost in the fog. Its paws stuck, in this muddy bog.

We were dirt poor—where "less" as well as "ness" is more often more, or less…Help Less Ness Hope Less Ness Lone Li Ness. It seemed endless. Pestilence. God help us. What a mess we're in…Empty bottles—here. Dirty dishes—there. Cigarette butts…everywherrrrre. Prayers vanishing, into thin air.

Mice teeming. Momma seeming. Not to care. But it's over now—in the past, at long last. So said my P-O and counselor. Little did they know. Those court-appointed. Self-anointed. Self-righteous pole cattish arseholes.

Im-Poverishly impoverished. Poverty-stricken. Roaches. Silverfish. Vermin. Cans of beans, for din-din. Sickened. Broken windows. Ripped screens. Fried everything. No heat. Spaghetti, for Thanksgiving. Home dentistry. Snow, in the TV. Old newspapers, for T-P.

Famished. Food stamps. Stomach cramps. From bad meat, that we had to eat. To stay on our feet. The oven, was our heater. I loved the rats. They were as big as cats. In the hallway. And that was on a good day. And Momma wondered why…they took my little brother away.

Things in The Trop. Happen for a reason. So said another counselor. Somebody get a mop. As her bleeding heart leaks all over the floor. A foolish do-gooder. Crusading crusader. Soft-spotted. Goody-two-shoes. Saving the world, from her guilty conscience.

She often talks to me. Whilst patting herself on her back. Always demanding the feedback. Tell me Mawdy. How did it make you feel? Watching that blood congeal? Did you know, it was wrong? Any matter of splattery. Which does not kill you. Only makes your life, that much longer.

So what's your sob story? All you boring, morning glories? Daddy bought you the wrong car? You have to study too Harvardly hard? Or was it Oxford? Mommy won't send you to Europe? Not just yet? Granny only gave you two twenties. For pet-sitting her pet? Try this one on, for size. You twits and gits. Strap it on. Tight. And see if it fits…

…Peas porridge hot. Peas porridge cold. My baby brother. Just two years old. Put up for adoption. No other options.

The time was nigh. For me, to drop that dime. There were no good-byes—just a few lies, from my Momma. Certifiably certified In-Dem-Ni-Fied So she could remain, on the outside.

Swearing is caring. Temper-temper. Things taste better with sugar, than with vinegar. Momma. Rage, before beauty. She flipped her wig, in a big way. Ripped me a new one. Quite the display.

If you got nothing nice to say. Say it, to the wall. Momma. The queen, of the vulgarity ball. Reached down deep into her vault. Broke. The. Bank. Mawdy, you blanking blankety-blank-blank. Both barrels. Bonkers. Miss *Bête Noire* Crocker, ticked off her rocker.

Momma. *Ma mère*. Every time I watched you. From the bottomless pit. Inside the abyss. That is my soul. I forgive, but I'll never forget. All that you had, and all that you offered. From your coffer, that was bare. I remember it…cue the harp music…as if it were yesterday—an oldie, but a doozie. It was that…long...ago.

My little brother. Forever and ever. In my dreams. Or so it seems. From time to time. Maybe he looks like just like me…or his daddy. Does he even remember me? What is he doing now, for a living? So give me a break. And somebody get me a doctor. Because I'm just about ready to drive a stake through somebody's heart. As mine is already rendered, and asunder.

Chapter 3

Never underestimate. Always appreciate. The value, of an education…Consider my precociously explosive verbosity. This loquacious, perspicacious, thug-naciously pugnacious *brag-ga-doccio*. Spoken, not too plain. This far-reaching arcane. Insanely insane repartee. May seem a little specious. But The Life. Is not all spacious skies. Apple pies. And amber waves of grain.

I know the style's a bit wildish. And if it seems a little childish. There's a reason for that as well. When this field mouse. Is sneaking about. After hours. After dark. Plenty of parking! Whether in a shop, or in a store. He keeps his eyes peeled. For where the child things are. The simpler books: Kindergartenry. Kiderature. Cursory-nursery. Required reading—that my coterie, will never see me reading. Feeding, my empty soul. Filling the hole. That Momma, Poppa, and Oinkle put into yours truly.

All these years later. When I'm on the job. I dip my mitts, into the children's book bin. And toss a few of them. Into my bag. Unbeknownst. I find room for just one or two. Maybe a movie to review. That's it. To feed the needy—which is me, yours truly. Never get greedy. Never leave a calling card. Making it all too easy. For the crushers, to slap the bracelets on me. Cuff stuff—the downside, of larceny.

The racing form, was the norm. In my house. Where nightmares thrived. Where dreams, went to die. These simpler books, now easing the pain. For this sticky guy. They get me through my year-round winter. To wit. Helping this no-good. Two-bit hood. To catch up, with his lost childhood.

Late at night. In my flop. When the city's asleep. There's no stopping the hopping on pop culture. The chittious chittery, while bang-banging. In a jalopy. A gigantic axe-man and his blue ox. Chopping up logs. Antics. From just over one hundred fun-loving spotted dogs. A determined pachyderm. Who hears little people. A maternal goose. Letting loose. There's that stuffed little bear, with no other cares. Except for honey. Whilst touring the forest. With a tiny swiner. And a bore, of a donkey.

It's a glorious An-Thro-Po-Mor-Phous affair. A humble and terrific pig. At the fair. With a rat, and an arachnid. *Avec savoir-faire*. A batter named Casey. A curious monkey. And his yellow-hatted master. A fabulous fox—and another one, who wears socks. Sherlock, and his doc. Slogging through the London fog. A white witch, pitching a wintry fit. In the melting snow, of a frozen globe. Knowing full well. She should have kept her icy mind. Out of the wardrobe.

Speaking of witch. There's a wickedly mean. Warted and green. Black-kettling Western hexer. With a dubious, red rubious score to settle. Getting thwarted. By a girl, a lion, a straw man, and a bloke made of metal.

A nanny, who flies over chimneys. Two grim siblings. Willy, acting quite silly, in his factory. Jimmy. And his monstrous peach. Rapunzel, and her hair out of reach. Solving the mysteries, of the seven seas—and please, call me Ishmael. As I set sail, for the great white whale. Alongside all the other old wives' tales.

Worlds. Where all the animals. Great and small. Talk. And no one dies. As the sky's the limit. Weather permitting. Except for the rain in Spain. No pain. No fear. Not like

here. A reindeer, with a beak that's bright. Flying, through the nighttime skies. With the Big Red Guy. Answering all the cries. Except mine. As I pine, most longingly. About this low life of mine. About what would I be, and at what level, of polite society. If I hadn't been so angry. At Momma, and Poppa. For not acting lovingly…Now I'm misty. Yours truly. Knocked for a loop. Aquaductally. Give me a minute. Talk amongst yourselves. Get some coffee. Use the lavatory. I beg of thee. Please…

Chapter 4

Enough about me. Myself. And I. For now. But don't furrow your brow. As this *avant-gardener*. Has just begun to plough. Plumb. And succumb. To the depths, of his soul. We'll get back, to that chit-chat. When I'm damn good and ready. In the meantime. Let's talk about where I reside. Sometimes hide. And lay about…The Trop: Home Base Somewherica Circa Nowadays.

The Trop. That's where I flop. Hang my hat. Chew the fat. Where I roost and boost. The city. That always creeps. Seldom sleeps. But never keeps me at bay. *Le Trop* is where I play. Rain, or shine. A city, most divine. For song, women, and wine.

Metropolis? What a major league. Meg-A-Lo-Maniacal mealy mouthful o' garbled marbles. To say the least. So let's keep it simple, because I'm stoopid. The Trop. Shortened and cropped for *metropolis*.

Yours truly. Born and crazed in The Trop. North Side. East Side. West Side. Downright gentrified. And the last, but not the least: The Seaside. Four parts shaken, but not stirred—the lines, sometimes blurred. That's the proverbial word, on the street. When all the cylinders are hitting just right.

Daddy Long-Legs. Had it all. The Taj, and the Mahal—all, to himself. Back in the heyday. This cat had eaten the canary. He would even get kickbacks. From the tooth fairy.

Then came the wrecking ball. Down came Daddy, cradle and all. The Trop was then all chopped up into four slices. For the four horsemen of vices: The Doon, The Cheese, The Rake, and The Cane. They maintain the balance. *Détente*. Equilibrium. Ho-Me-O-Stasis. As I read it in the cage.

I rolled up to The Cheese—alone, for reasons obvious, and unbeknownst. As you will find out later. He took me under his wing. A most regal illegal guardian. A father figure, *de rigueur*. Get the picture? The Cheese. Unleashed. In The East. He could have had The Trop in his back pocket. And the palm of his puffy hand. Just like Daddy Long-Legs.

Daddy Long-Legs? He was the Pontiff of the riff, and the raff. The wheat, and the chaff. But that's greedy. And it attracts The Jeebies. Makes you an endangered species. The Jeebies. Don't give them a reason. To have a reason. To take you down. The Cheese always knew that just reward. Whilst controlling The Boards.

The Boards? It's what we call Old Town. In the East. Headquarters. HQ. Our lair, *mon frère*. The Boards. All the precincts. All the wards. A place you head towards. For a good time. To be had by all. There's no last call in The Boards. Where all the action thrives. Where people go to add some spice. To their miserable lives. The Boards. Our house of lords. All made possible, by The Cheese.

The Cheese kept himself flush. With The Dump. A downright gouda pump. Remuneration via sanitation. Ash cans of cash money. A recycle of life. Paper, plastic, and glass—a fantastic morass, of unaccountability.

The Cheese. Coasting, ever so profitably with the proceeds. Cherries—straight across—with each pull, of this slop machine. The Cheese. Also controlled The Garbage Company. In a monopolized monopoly.

The Cheese then got alongside the greenies. Both parties, crawling into bed together. Consensually. In no uncertain terms. Cahoots. Brothers in druthers. A winning combination. Of ingratiation.

The greenies. Absolutely positively huggers of trees. Always looking to please Mother Nature. And their own self-serving idioms, axioms, and idiosyncrasies.

The greenies. Environ-*mental*. Organic, radical rebels. Caulifollowers. Never pausing for the cause, for those with four paws. Saving whales. Driving nails. Red paint, in pails. Chained, and linked. These vedge-hogs, clogging the cogs. Of the big oil machine.

Joyless joy-killing herbal tea-swilling pillocks. Wheat-germing berzerkenstalkers. Loyal, to all things furry and green. The Cheese, favoring their curry. Watering, their grass roots. Tofuriously. And everything else. Soy beanishly. Betwixt and between.

The Cellar…the echo chamber. Of purse-stringed commerce. For the right price. Passed an ordinance. A best-seller. No dumping—anywhere, except in The East. Written. In stone. The forbidden zone. Exclusivity—pity, The Mayor. Fit to be tied. Chapped his hide. Over this sad state of affairs. Caused by these longhairs.

The Mayor. Everybody, say hello, to *Sponge-a-nello*. This pushy, bushy-mustachioed. Pigeon-toed. Pigeon-Holed. No-souled. Pork-barreling porciniously-nosed poser. The Mayor: A feces-bleating. Bush-beating. Fleece-streeting. Piggy-backing. Tacky Machiavellian piece of trash.

Gee, Mawdy. Tell us how you really feel…The Mayor. He's a little despot, short and stout—this foul lout, with his snout. Sprouting. Out from his countenance. The not-so-stellar cellar dweller. A real fart smeller. The fox, in charge of the hunt—the runt, of the litter. A hot-air balloonist, *extraordinaire*.

The Mayor was a friend of The Doon. Compatriots. Damn near stapled to the man, who makes the grass grow straight, and narrow. In The North.

The Doon ran The North. The North? The right side, of the tracks. Scot-free, of sacks. Where the hoity, meet the toity. And the fancy, greet the schmancy. Where all the hanky-panky is swanky.

The North: All that glitters. The swells, atwitter. With their lavishly ravishing belles *et mademoiselles*. Successfully smelling the sweet smells of excess. Insincere chandeliering two-faced shameless name-droppers. Trop-hopping. On money Hell spent. On penthouse flats—and other acts, of fat-cattery. By the sophisticated aristocrats. In their spats, tails, and top hats.

The North. Where the hot water runs long and strong. The Doon: King Kong gone wrong. Standing atop, this Tropical paradise. Fancily dressed, to impress. But a little on the pale and frail side. Circles. Under his eyes. As he suppresses his appetite, with appetite suppressants. Narcotically. The Doon: An IV-Leaguer. Always wore long sleeves. Who will get ants, in his pants. Fiending. Jonesing. Without his morphine-dish *pièce de résistance*.

The Doon was the Trop's top-hatted top fop. A color-coordinated clotheshorse. Given to pleasant discourse—no cracks, in his armoire. This fashionable smashionista…with tracks, on his arms. He's sartorially snazzy, dapper, and snappy. This dressed-to-killer. In his palace. The North...much ado…To. Die. For. The Corona, as well as Aurora Borealis. Soaring. O'er The Trop.

The North: Hymns sung. Bells rung. Getting sacramental, in near empty cathedrals. Churches and chapels—former apples, of eyes gone by. Fire, all alone. Amongst the brimstone.

You snooze, you lose. An hour of sleep. If you kneel down, in those pews. After a night of floozing, boozing, swine-dining, and designer shoes. The preferred leap of faith, hope, and vulgarity. Cafeteria Christianity. Moral relevancy. In this consternation state. Piety, in the sky, of the high society. Gouda is the king. Of kings. The siren that sings. So says this angel, with broken wings.

Silicone busts. For the super-duperficial. And delusional. Of the upper crusts. Accessorized. Transgressorized. With jewel-encrusted accessories. *Narcissus* ain't got squat. On these cummerbunned blue-blooded lusters. Who lust with gusto. For relationships built on slush and trust funds.

Millions. Ga-Zillions. Mis-Ap-Pro-Priated. For appetites sated—on yachts, oceanfront lots, and clothes with polka dots. Cotillions. Debutantes. Regattas. I got. You want. The Haves. Having it their way. Not at all, like the Nots.

The North. Fabulous galas. Attended. Black tie affairs. Recommended. Your third face-lift. And consequences unintentionally unintended.

The North: Filthy. Stinking. Wealthy, and rich. The mink slinks. Around the cold, bony shoulders. Of half-in-the-bag swag-hags. With cigarette holders. Tiaras. Diamond rings. And other covetous covetings. Pro-Cured. By the manicured. From the grand scheme of things. The tenor sings *La Bohème*. For the *crème de la phlegm.* At the theatah…dahhhhhlinggggg!

Kudos, to the pseudo-intelligentsia. These artsy-fartsy matrons of the arts. For playing their part. Their fragrant farts—*excusez-moi*—smelling of caviar, and *foie gras*.

The sacks can't sit. Or spit. Anywhere near this part of town. They don't want no beat-down. By the crushers. Acting as ushers. Shining a light. On those, who just don't belong there. The Life: Reality, turned inside out. Put your right foot in. And shake it all about.

All of the appalling made possible. By The Big Grift. It's the gift horse, with the gift. That keeps on giving. To the easy-living. Footloose, and fancy-free. The goose pumped full of juice. Laying golden ostrich eggs. To these dregs, of impropriety.

The Big Grift. Debt-O-Nation. We, the repo'd. The refi'd. Funding the lifestyles. Feeding the wiles. Growing the piles. Of the rich, and the heinous. Usury. E Pluribus Unanimously.

The Big Grift: Coniferous, carnivorous, and swift. The big shirt lift. The sift. Panning for gold, by laying off the old. Alongside the too tired to fight. Taking it right between the eyes. Hung out to dry. Getting the average bloke to buy high. After they bought low. The world's biggest pigsty—slopped, with stocks and blondes. Big fish opening wide. Draining all the small ponds.

A smorgasbord, for all the chaired lords. Yesiree. Yes, indeedy. Mighty is the tree, which can be grown. From the seeds that are sown. Through The Big Grift—where even Jesus, would get the short shrift. As gouda is the root, of all the known evil that is known.

Upper echelon swill
Eating way past their fill
Each scam gets bolder

Coz you, the shareholder
Will always be paying their bill

Puts and calls. Stop losses. Shareholders crucified. On their crosses. Courtesy of the real bosses. Stepping over pennies. Slashing your bennies. To pick up dollars. White collar hustlers. Chattel rustlers. Hardcore corporate culprits. Pirating. Raiding—riding, the gravy train. Capital gain, with no pain. Lower than all the purse and chain snatchers. Combined. Looking to find. Any way. To outsource company pay.

Pump-and-dumps. Pension funds. Stock purchase plans. Grown men, on all fours. Dropping their drawers. Stealing the means to no end. No health care, to be found. Nowhere. With even more room to spare.

Cost-cutting. Then some head-butting, with their own reflections. Succumbing, to their predilections. And the bottom line. They make the excuse to abuse. Their top shelf booze and Italian shoes. Paid by outsourcing, and union dues. You just can't lose…in The Big Grift.

But not where I live. The Big Grift: It is the graveyard shift. For any one of us mutts. Or bosses. Who is lured. Who wanders wayward into this profit, without the loss. It's the law. Danger. *Peligro*. High Voltage. In regard to this Godless God-For-Bid-Den Crime Rid-Den sadventure. Far beneath any one of us mutts, with a shred of indignity.

Captain Long Gone Silver. Steering this ship. Into the doldrums. Bankruption. Leaving a wake, of crumbled crumbs. Privateering. Financiering. Feeding the GDP: Grossly Disproportionate Profiteering. Deliriously leering. At Lear jets and Lamborghinis. *Tête-à-têtes.* Hedged bets. Appetites whetted. Vettes vetted. Betties bedded. Expectations met...until the next quarter's numbers are set.

Mergers, and acquired acquisitions. Splurgers and dispositions. Outlandish inquistions. Periods, of transition. IPOs, re-orgs, and depositions. Leveraged-Bend-Overs. The usual positions, of all the workers. Left reeling from the raw dealing. Gone to the rolls. Soup bowls, cardboard abodes—and the queues, of the doles. Kneeling in submission. To the new religion. Of nothing to lose, and everything to gain. Amen.

Chapter 5

The Mayor, and The Doon. Cronies. These one-trick phony balonies—alongside, on their polo ponies. In The Park. Without a care. A malarkious farcical farce of an affair. That is most unfair. To the urchins. Who died. So these two zeros could ride. But this dark horse will decide about that…much…much…later.

But now, back to the weather. Possible showers. To water the flowers. Especially this special prose, in the heather.

The Mayor. A one-man three-ring circus. Of racketeering, electioneering, and interfering. It stands to reason, so decreed The Cheese. You will not be, the last man standing. Your Wreckcellency. So don't look the gift horse in the mouth. Greed, the apocalyptic steed. So cut it out. And keep your snout, in the feed.

The Cheese. Venerably venerated. Also generated serious change. From The Harbor. In the East. Location Location Location—that's how it rolls, in our great nation. The Harbor: Buckets o' ducats. All under the table. Cornucopious. Horn-O-Plenty. A veritable plethora, in this criminal utopia. The Harbor. They used to build ships there. Right before Daddy Long-Legs made The Trop his lair.

Daddy Long-Legs: Gangsteriffic. Dyed, in the wool. Nobody's fool. This old school zoot-suiter ruled. Brutally. With knuckles of brass. Always ready, to kick some ass. Wingtips and fat lips. Pinstripes, and lead pipes. His rivals...downright ankle-biters. To The Long-Legged King. With the Midas touch. Via, his tire iron.

Daddy got started by running hooch. From The Harbor. Crates and kegs. Courtesy of Long-Legs. The Trop's bigwigged swignitaries. Would dunk their beaks, in the speakeasies. Day and night. White Lightning. Moonshine. Sour mash. Alky-hol—water, sugar, yeast, and malt. Filling casks and flasks. Bagholders, holding bags of cash. The crushers, alongside, for this ride. Because of Daddy's glad tithings. Of toad skins, gouda, moolah, and rhino. On the side.

Then The Docks. Then The Casino. Like dominos. Down by The Seaside—Daddy's net, cast far and wide. But he got greedy. Full. Of. Him. Self. Arrogance. Conceit. The heel of Achilles. Attracted the touchies, and the feelies of The Jeebies. Uncle Sam, decided to slam the door shut. And throw away the key. Let this be a lesson. Of necessity.

What's this? A shiny ducat, for my thoughts? On Daddy Long-Legs? Well, since you asked. In a nutshell: Ambivalence. Indifference. Like spitting, with the wind. I'm not too distraught, that he was caught. He can rot. Because Long-Legs dropped the H-Bomb. On The Trop. Just so's ya know. An all-out heroinferno. My Poppa was one of the fallen. In the fallout. Does that, answer your question?

Long-Legs felt the strain
Of the ball and of the chain
Busting rocks and making plates
Behind the walls with no gates
Nothing to do, but take the pain

The Cheese, had The Harbor. So naturally—*au naturel*, he ran The Docks. It all makes for self-serving, self-centered self-defense. And it's the best offense…along with a little help from his friends—to the ends, of Mother Earth: The greenies.

The greenies. Yet again. Conveniently released, from their cruelty-free pen. No way, no how no Docks down by The Seaside. So the town crier cried. Only in the Eastern tide. Verified, by The Cheese. Wholly owned the whole hog. Sole proprietorship. A boy, and his docks. Cheese, myself, and I. Even The Rake. The big dirty dog. Who ran The West. Was also now, at his behest.

The West: The quieter part of town. Think of The North. But downsized. Semi-somewhat upper-yuppified. Upper-middle classified. Comfy and cozy. Cushy and rosy. Noses up, pumping their gas. Sorting their trash. While reporting sacks, and other sordid trespassers. Who are not keeping off their grass.

The West. Band Wagonistas. Confident consumers. G-D-P-ers. Feasting. Consumately consuming, with consumer confidence. Weekend warriors. Gym-Pho-Maniacal bottled-watering fitness freaks. Obsessively piqued, with their physiques. Lose their power suits. In glorious. Time-trialing. Hour-grinding. Tri-athletically frenetic Medic-Alert inducing pursuits.

The West. Brownstones, townhouses, Victorians, condos, and co-ops. Splendidly well-tended botitanical gardens. Museums, lyceums, amphitheaters, and arboretums. Pagodas and-or gazebos. Ducks, coots, swans, and geeses…but please don't feed 'em.

The Westerners. Trendy. Spendy. Thread-counting treadmilling trendsetters. Pretentious pleasure-seekers. Seeking pleasure, in peer pressure. Being led, by the easily led. Birth School Prep School Grad school Law school Work Death Madly dashing, while holding their breath.

The West. Well kept best kept secrets. Everything grows here. Perennials. Semi-annuals. Ferns, rose bushes, and lawns. Leaves blown and gone. Whilst the crushers yawn. Only parking tickets, in these western districts—The West, where the world, has not gone to Hell. White zinfandel, Pinot Grigio, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot. Fueling the sin, the indulgence, and the *flagrante delicto.*

The West: Beamers, Mercedes', and minivans. Veneers and salon tans. Super-duper supermarkets. Various Marts and farmers' markets. Dog parks. Your car—safe, wherever you park it. Scores, of department stores. Gorgeous public parks. And lovely post offices. Where it's OK to walk... after dark.

Am I envious? Oh, hell yes. Jealousy, I plead guilty. To the nth degree! Geez Louise, they even have palm trees. Would somebody, in The West. Please trade places with me?

Now The Rake owned the trucking company. So The Cheese let him off easy. The wheels nice, and greasy. Between these two easy geezers. Ebeneezing. Unscrupulously. Amongst their crews. Just enough gouda, to make it right. And out of sight. Down. Right. Unbeknownst. To The Jeebies.

The Rake, and The Cheese. The earth, and the quake. Tectonic plates. Sharing Richterous traits. The hads—whatting, alongside the takes. The hardened yard birds, of a feather. They once roamed the gloaming streets together. In the same gang. Navigating. The subterranean nether regions. Orchestrating the legions. Hell-for-leather. Back when Long-Legs, still controlled the weather.

The Cane ranged, reigned, and roved. Over The Seaside. The Supreme Being. All seeing, of all that is seen. And unseen. And a few other things—but that's between you, and me.

The Seaside: A semi-somewhat DMZ. Neutrality. Where the swells, and the rest of ourselves. Chum it up. Amongst the carousels, and the sea shells. In the summertime tide.

The Cane. Maintains. The coastal plain. And nobody complains. Rocking and rolling rollercoasters. Bumper cars. Bouncing around. The haunted house—pounding and surrounding us with sound. As we walk the boardwalk. Arms locked. Acting daffy. Laughing…with our gobs full of saltwater taffy.

Cotton candy. Candied and caramel apples. In-hand. Prom-E-Nading. Shades and sunglasses. Passing the arcades. In our sandy shoes. The scents of various brands of sunscreen. The terrifically odoriffic odors o' popcorn, kettle corn, caramel corn, funnel cakes, and corn dogs. Your. First. Kiss. Amidst the roar, and the hissing mist. Of the ocean.

Behind every great man. Sometimes, there's another man. The Cane: Man's best friend. Literally. A real randy Cockle Doodle Doing Dandy. A rooster, of no use in the henhouse. The champagne cocktailer. He preferred the male-to-female ratio. Be set at zero percent. The Cane. Given to sophistication. Penetrating conversation. And man-to-man resuscitation.

But never. Ever. Never you ever taunt, this flauntacious *bon vivant*. About his elegant life of extravagantly extroverted Ex Tra Va Gance—*bonne chance*, with that one. So don't fall, for that fallacy. Or you'll find out why. He's called The Cane. The acrobatic bringer, of metallic migraines. Taking great pains, to send any shit-stain. To a higher Valhallic plane.

The Casino: The biggest beast, of them all. Cash cow. Disposable income. A tidy sum. *Beaucoup* buckeroos. Courtesy, of the dumb.

The Cane. Blatant. Against, the grain. Urbane, with a mane of gray. A blue ruin drinking, pinky-ringing pocket-squared player. *Monsieur Gracieux*—with nary a hair, out of place. The Cane. This bow or stripey-tied. Bougainvillainous boulevardier. A florist with flourish. Who never walks out his front door. Without a derby, fedora, or a bowler.

The Cane. Owned a chain. Of floral shops. In the old days. Legit. At that time, in particular. Above reproach. Model citizen. Checks to The Eagle every April. I. R. Impressively. He used to give Long-Legs, a free boutonnière. To give him power. When Long-Legs was just a swag-snagging. Bag-nabbing bagman. On the sidewalk. Talking the walk. A modicum of gum. On the bottom, of a crusher's shoe.

And we have a winner. In a photo-finish. A new champ. Daddy Long-Legs. Rubbed the lamp. Hard enough. And got his wish. Daddy's ship came in. From all the sin. *The USS Racketeer*. And Long-Legs rose to the top. Of The Trop. A victory he did savor. But he also knew how to return a favor. He made The Cane his main and made man. In the shade. Getting paid. A failsafe move, most tailor-made.

The Cane. The major domo, of The Casino. *Bravo! Bravissimo!* The front man. Installed. His number called. A compatriot. Alongside Long-Legs. Swimming in the rising tide. With everything to hide.

Temptation. The hottest craze, sweeping the nation. The Casino. 52-to-48. Odds great enough to grate. All the gouda onto your plate. One-armed bandits. Buxom waitresses.

Hostesses, in low-cut dresses. Baccaratting Fat Cats in tuxedos. Dice-throwing bad-boys with their crews in tow—alongside the college schmoes, who think they're pros.

Nitwits. Spending all of it. In these tar pits. All of these marks distracted and disarmed. Euphoric, and charmed. Feeding the sharks. And never smart enough to call it quits.

Does three eight's beat a straight? Or was it the other way? Good luck sir, have a nice day—damn, I should have walked away. A spate of losses. The bosses, of the pits. With their knowing nods, on suspect hits. There's a sucker born. Every minute. The ATM spits ducats and ducats. Lady Luck, ready to suck. The life. Out of anyone, with anything left, in their pockets.

The Mayor? What? Are you kidding me? Lines o' credit. Lines o' toot. Room service. Limousines. Suites, for the sweet—escorts, that is…Dial-a-dates, who like to drink champagne. Like it's going out of style. All courtesy, of The Cane. On the arm. Written off. For this royal immoral mayoral pain.

Anger. Denial. Bargaining. It's a disease, you know. Just like Saint Vitus Dance, ants-in-the-pants, and brain cancer. The Cane. Riding the coattails, of the whales. Paper plays, and pays their daily bread. Let us prey. On the afflicted. The addicted. Those who live repulsively obsessive—as well as compulsive. Blowing Burning Blow Torching First their "4", then their "O", their "1", and finally their "K." As well as next month's pay.

Gambling. That's how I read it. Gamboling through The Big Books. In The Cage. Turning every page. Trying to find myself…so long ago…so far away.

Long-Legs got pinched. Sent up. And The Cane inherited The Seaside—clinched it, in a cinch. The whole *enchilada*. No *intifada* necessary. In its entirety. Pay. Dirt. Jack. Pot. All without firing one shot.

The Cane took his receipt. To the nearest window. Not without a few hiccups. Mind you. As a few lumps were taken. As well as a few bumps, in the road. As a toad, or two. Had to be squished along the way.

Come what may. Just another day. The Cheese. Empowered with staying power. Offered his assistance. For a pittance, of a remittance. But of course he assisted The Cane. In maintaining his inheritance. During those early hours.

When The Cheese was summoned. By a higher power. The Cane walked down memory lane. And provided all the flowers. Free of charge. In honor. In memoriam. Of the man most large. The big barge…The Cheese. My lord and savior. My loyalty never wavering. Forever and ever. And a day.

Chapter 6

The Mayor was our problem child. He always had a wild hair, up his *derrière*. The pig liked to squeal. Over every deal. Wanted all the slop. The tip, and the top. To the bottom, from The Trop. What a surprise, from Mister Pennywise, but pound-foolish. As every shoe does not need to fit. But one can drop…right on top, of your head. So get over it. And take a few pointers from The Rake.

The Rake. Snakishly charming. Disarming. The shake, and the bake. The gander, running amok. In Swan Lake. One mean libertine. Likes to hit the scene. Libidinously. This dirty dog. The best in show. Where the sun doesn't go. Possessed with zest, for the times spent undressed. Un-Re-Pen-Tant. Hedonistic. A bed-headonist. Every gal, is on his guest list. A hyper-blondriac. An auburntunist. A frenetic brunettist—easily led, by any red-headed temptress.

The Rake was the second best horse. On the track. A real mudder. Did I say The Track? The Rake had The Track, and The Stadium. The *ad*, alongside the *nauseum*. Which made him dumb, fat, and happy. *Un papillon*, fluttering in the Tropical breeze. Cha. Ching. Gotcha. A king's ransom. Cha! Cha! Cha! Dancing, to the sounds, of the prancers. The crowds clamoring and cluttering. The Mayor…buttered up…but still muttering.

The registers ring. The turnstiles swing. The Mayor—Hizzonor, the butt crack. Did get a piece of The Track. The Mayor. Uptight. As it's not rightwise. In his one-track mind. But he eventually simple-mindedly finds, something else to mind.

The Rake. Likes to give, to those who take. His breath away. A ladies man. A downright Casanova. A playboy in demand. From all the pretty maids, maidens, *und mädchens*. A patron, of the tarts. Even more reason, not to attract The Jeebies. This mutt did not want, to go to the pound. He would rather die. And so would I. Stick a needle, in my eye. Why? You do two stretches. Then get back to me. You'll see. So never let go, of the *flagrante delicto*. Oh no, No, NO. As it makes the world go 'round. And 'round. And around again.

The Mayor, and The Mayoress
A no-account, and a countess
They say she married up
And he married down
But truthfully
It's the other way around

We are gathered here today. Scoff. Law. Fully. In unholy acrimony. You may now, piss the bride off. The Mayor, and The Mayoress. The princess, and the pea-brain. A coarse-drawn marriage, of personal gain. The Mayoress. Me ladyship. She sometimes pulls, the marital rip cord. When she's bored. And under the tortuous strain. When her hay has remained…unwained.

Word has it. That The Rake. He of slicked black hair, and a chin that's square. Is taking The Mayoress to heights unknown—seeds, being sown. Unbeknownst. The Worst Lady, liked to get shady with the champ. Lowering the boom, on her rising damp.

Speak now. Or forever. Hold your tongue. The Mayor. The dung-heaper. Hung up, on the bottom rung. No time to pick up the slack. And make her explode. At his abode. The Rake was a creature of habit. Like a rabbit. Always the gigolo. In the moment. Sticking his iron. Into the fire. Of burning desire. Washing her dirty laundry—Cuckoldry—as I read it, in the dictionary.

The Rake. Unforgivably living. An unlimited. Off-limits. Life of limited engagements. A studly stallion. On the rutting edge. Trimming all the hedge. That The Life has to offer.

The Rake. The dirty doggish dog, also got hog wild. With The Mayoress's daughter. This bit of gossipy fodder—this slip, of the lip, a hot spot of bother. It could not, get any hotter than that. The booty call, that tops them all. If I dare say.

When the cat's away. The kitten likes to play. Their daughter…a tall drink of water. H-2-Oh my. Twenty-years-old, beautiful, and bold. Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. In this thickly veiled secret. Unbeknownst, to the royal couple.

Double Trouble Toil and bubble. For The Rake. If the wrong person played this the right way. Now, you did not hear any of this from me. Got it? Mum's the word. Silence. Is golden. And it's the rule. Only a fool. Would stick his hot foot, into this dead pool. The Life. It ain't for everybody. But somebody's gotta do it.

A few more bits. And pieces. Another reprise, for you mangy malingering miscreants. Don't let the panache, of The Cane. Fool you. Or you. And you—I see you, in the back. Jack. Looking away. Avoiding eye contact. As he's tried, but not true. The Cane had a long fuse, but a big explosion. This connoisseur of fine wine, art, and retribution.

The Cane: A ram, in sheep's clothing. Loathing. Those who trespass. This dandy. Will kick your ass. Maybe he'll show you The Card. The hall pass. To the wrong side of the grass. If you show careless disregard. For all that is right. Or wrong. Which is not so easy. But not so hard.

The Cane: A late-bloomer, to The Life. But a quick study, under his buddy, Daddy Long-Legs. He watched Long-Legs make his moves. The teacher's pet. Who took notes. On how to never forget—or let, your guard down. In this town. Regardless. Of the size or shape of the clown. Making you frown. Not for one damned second.

The Cane's rolled up his sleeves. I believes. On more than one occasion. When all manners of persuasion. In the confrontational Con-Fron-Tation. Have been exhausted. A couple of flim-flammers. Once ran a scam. At the craps table. The Cane. Tore the labels, right off of their cans. An example. Spoiled them rotten. Dealt The Card. Unbeknownst to anyone, who gave a damn. Quite gory that round of glory. You'll need a Ouji board. To get their side of the ghost story. The Card: The ninth yard. In your ninth life. The hardest part of The Life.

Dealing The Card
Down and dirty and hard

A backstage pass to the bone yard
And other parts
Unknown to God

Perhaps, maybe The Cane. With much to gain. Put The Jeebies. Onto Daddy Long-Legs. Blasphemy. Heresy. Treachery. A tale with legs—that begs, to be seen. But not heard. But that's the word. To be left unsaid. Un. Sub. Stantiated. So's we remain undead. I got it from a friend. Of a friend. Who knew some guy—a fly, on a wall of flowers. But just so's ya know. I think it was Hizzonor. Looking for horsepower.

Hear. Say. All the way. You can't resist. This irresistibly irresistible grist. For the rumor mill. A tough pill, to swallow. Words, which ring hollow. Absurd. To some in the herd. Nary a word. From that little bird. That seems to tell nobody. Just enough grease. To keep the skids turning. And a few ears. Burning. Unreliable sources. And wild horses. Can't keep me from spilling this bucket. That holds just enough water.

But that's the last time. You'll ever hear it from me. It stays right here. Amongst us fair weather friends. To the ends, of the flat earth.

To be. Or not to be. From sea to shining sea. I'm quieter than a church mouse. In The Vatican. In the presence of the Papacy.

I've been in The Cage. Where there's enough rage. To power the town. Lock. Down. Where nobody wants to go. Getting your ass beat. Crap to eat. Where the grass stops growing, under your feet. More than enough reason, to reasonably consider treason. And get out your whistle. And blow, Blow, BLOW.

The Joint. Where the screws knew. I kept a tight lip. Two goddamned stretches. Stretched out. On my bunk. With no ships sunk. I'm no punk. Many words unsaid. Respect, for the dead. While standing on my head. Coz I prefer. To pilfer, purloin, and heist. Feistily. My *zeitgeist*. Everyone knows, that's how I roll. That's me. My procliviously predisposed Pre Dis Position. So keep a lid on it. If you know what's good for you. No room for stoolish—nor foolish, Pidgin-slinging pigeons. Stealth. Equals health. So keep it zipped. If you know…what's good for you.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder
And as I grow older
I know that beauty's
Not spending my life
Looking over my shoulder

The Cheese was not well. He was still large. And in charge. Mind you. But a shadow, and a shell. Of his former self. Ill health. In his last year of his life. He went under the knife. Unbeknownst to all. Except The Rake, and yours truly. Quadruple bypass. At a white house. That's how I read it. In the hoosegow.

Calling Doctor Mawdy. Calling Doctor Mawdy. The Cheese. After that bit. Of tit for tat. Being split like that. The pharmacy. Was my daily routine. A veritable A-Pothecarial bean cuisine. In between each lavish spread. A death wish. Which continued, after his stretch. In a white house bed.

The Cheese. The tubby tubster. With the biggest feet. On the street. Still liked to eat. *Bon appetitely.* Bubble, and squeakily. Getting down to the bouilla, and the baissics.

Making the sutures leak. The Cheese. Public Epicurean Number One. This well-Fedwardian. A passionate pastafarian. A tater-tottering gourmanderous gourmet. Gor-Man-Dizing. His way. To his *götterdämmerung*.

The Cheese: A true Danish pastriot. A salad-dodger. Of whom a ballad should be sung. Hotly crossed, and bunned. Trumpeting. Flour power. Cream puffs, crumpets, croissants, and scones. Ice cream, with sugar cones. He was on a collision course. To 500 LB's. An air hose, under his beak. Breathing with difficulty. Always on a filling spree. In spite of the hardening, of his arteries. Getting downright kilo-grammatical. Feeding his morbid obesity. At the local *boulangerie*.

My concern for The Cheese. Was of upmost apostolic importance. For this diehard. Pie-A-Bolical Chocoholic. Dismissively. Dis-Mis-Sing his sys, and his diastolic. A diuretically dire E-Mergency—an APB—was then put out for both his "B," and his "P." By yours truly. 180 over 120. Revival signs, of inevitable Un-De-Niable Tribulations, trials, and defibrillations.

Á. La. Mode. One for the road. Alongside the toad, in the hole. His declaration of overindulgence. Amongst the palpitations—as I read it, in The Big Books. I once tried to mention his hypertension. Alongside his water retention. As I read it, in The Big Ones. Which was nobody's fault. But wine, women, and wrong.

The way, to The Cheese's heart. Was through beignets, baguettes, bagels, and bon-bons. Dollars, to doughnuts. Literally. A blintz-krieg of Berliners, bear claws, krullers, and bialys. By the bare minimum. Of a baker's dozen.

The Cheese. Falling prey. To his starch enemies. Diabetes. Types One, Two, and working on Three. Kidney disease. Hypo, or was he hyper-glycemic? Digitalis, and nitroglycerin. For his vasodilation. Circulatory Cir-Cu-Lation. A pacemaker, and a few stents. Angio. Plastic. Medicinal talismans. Were inside this corpulently truculent gent.

The Cheese. The bread-breaker. The best friend, to any baker. Now wired. Diced twice, and tired. His expiration date…soon-to-be…expired.

The Cheese got it while the getting was good
But this boss who could slay
An all-you-can-eat-buffet
Was really chewing away
At his own lost childhood

And if that weren't enough. There was a mouse, in that white house. Who slipped through a crack. While The Cheese was on his back. In recuperative recuperation. This said mouse. Tipped off the louse, The Mayor. That The Cheese. Was a bacon piece away, from the outhouse.

The Mayor. Upon hearing, with ears searing. About The Cheese's cracked chest. Left his nest. To go suck on the breast, of his double-breasted vested interest: The Doon. With the skinny. The dealie-o. The down-low. On the triple-chinned paladin. Maybe it was time, said the slime. To approach on bended knee. Cull the herd. Divide The Trop into three.

The Mayor and the Doon. Soon. There. After. Made The Cheese. An offer. He couldn't confuse. A downright ruse. And my fuse was lit. Once this bit. About a three-way split. Hit the fan. The Cheese. My man. For all reasons. Weak, in the knees.

And wheezy, from cardiac surgery. Puh-lease. Just give me one reason. To bring The Card into this plan.

The two uncultured vultures. Were circling. The Mayor. Decided to put out a feeler, via The Wheeler. The Wheeler was The Mayor's right-hand man. An authentic Sy-Co-Phan-Tic. Boot-licking. Brown-nosing posturing *poseur* of a toady.

The Wheeler. Said how-do-you-do. With two of The Doon's, most gruesome goons: The Mule, and The Lump. A hump, and a chump. Respectively.

The Wheeler. Brought these two slugging. Plug Fugly Mugs alongside. Just in case things got ugly. At The Cheese's place. When the suitcase of gouda. Was shown to his face. More about this usurping perpetration later. Coz you need to know more. About yours truly. This purposefully purpose-driven. Per. Pe. Trator. The sooner. The hater.

Chapter 7

Blood is not thicker than water
As we've been told
But it sure runs cold
For this little lamb, nearing slaughter

It could not have happened. To a nicer guy. I cannot tell a lie. I had wanted Oinkle. To either shove off or die, Die, DIE. Oinkle had managed to damage. Every hair, on my head. Out. Done. Him. Self. Then for good measure. He would start all over. From start-to-finish. Again and again and again. Momma, for whatever reason. Gave this flea-bitten beer-paunched raunchy cartoon character *carte blanche.* To get carried away, in my Poppa's bed. All's I remember. Is that I had wanted Oinkle dead, Dead, DEAD.

Oinkle. Out of his gourd. Once more. Wielding, a doubled-up extension cord. Coming toward me. To whip the bejesus, out of me. So let's get it all out, into the open. *Mea culpa*—as I once read it, for all to see. Cul-Pa-Bility. This sprat fought back. And spoiled his Oinkle. With a baseball bat.

This young, and talented acrobat. Put on his black hat. A downright bleak sequence of events. Self-defense. No near-death experience, my dear. Just the sentence. Sent him drifting. Spiritually. Accidentally. Dust-to-dusted. Skull busted. So much thrust, that I pulled a muscle.

I moida'd da bum. In a requiem, of aluminum. Manslaughter. For maximum effect. On the derelict. Thirty-four ounces of prevention—all the better, to spoil you with. There goes trouble. Burst his bubble—a catch-all—curing, all my ailments. Game. Set. Match. And the crowd goes wild. Thunderous. No doubt. Put his lights out. Sent him six feet under. I just wanted to float him, but too much anger, bending my olive branch—an *avalanche*, until it snapped. Oops. Don't you just hate it, when that happens. Oinkle…Dirt-napped Mouse Trapped. Tapped out and straight to the outhouse.

Momma. Covered my tracks. Rolled out, the whole ball o' wax. In regard to Oinkle. The soulless polecat.

We found him like that, officer. Cruel, and unusually. Momma littered the road with tacks. Getting the back, of this sprat. What a saint. Reaching down into the barrel. For this rotten, wormy apple. Of her last blackened eye. Produced my alibi. Regarding the biggest pig, in the sty.

Oinkle: A mean and callow bastard. Asking to be tossed, into a casket. Momma turned on the faucet. For the crushers and the dixies. Downright Croc-O-Dilian. Oinkle. A rancorous bore. An eyesore. Amongst the skank and vile. A true local zero. Owing money. Selling drugs. Loan sharks. Swimming around our building. After dark.

I kept my swollen cheek turned, ever so discreetly. First you live. Then you learn. I didn't show them. The cigarette burns. Or the bruises, on my back. Nor any other unlucky charms, that will sound the alarms—or the crushers, will most certainly come back.

Nobody will miss Oinkle. Every one had it out for him. A view, most dim. Get in line. Take a number. Mine was thirteen. Most unlucky, and already mean. So let this tale slumberrrrrrrrrzzzz…

Sweet bird of youth
Pushed out into the sky
Before even given a chance
To learn how to fly
Time to live
Or time
To die

Die young. And leave here pretty. Is pretty obscene. A downright obscenity, if you ask me. The Cheese rescued me. Mawdy. From the street. A child of God, at rock bottom. And that's putting it mildly.

The street: *La rue*, with no view, of the future. This wicked stepsister. Showing no mercy. Defeated, on my blistery feet. Cheesus Saves. This pageboy, amongst the knaves. He paved the road to salvation. From ruination. This friendless serf, in the turf. Of this endless bummer, of an unpaid vacation.

You heard it here first. I was now an urchin. With only the saints preserving me. Searching. Yearning. For anything. Except the secret worst kept. The one and only, that made Jesus Wept. The dirtiest, of the dirtiest. Everything I heard. My ears, were burning. As I began to learn. About the creepy crawlers…in The Woods.

The Woods. Where even Robin Hood, wouldn't want to earn. His livelihood. The copse, that the cops gave up for good. It's the furthest, farthest, darkest part. In The Park. The social club. Conjured up. By Beelzebub. The crawlers come from all walks. E-lusive E-licit Lascivious Lecherous Sinfully industrious captains of sindustry. Flocking demonically, under the canopy.

Crawlers from every city, and every town. To hide out. In this abhorrently horrid tourist trap. Creepy Hollow. The worst of the worst wallow. Amongst all the cheap graft. On tap. As The Mayor refuses to put his cloven hoof down.

The Mayor. The bad shepherd. His back turned. His idle hands, not working. On these purveyish perverted perps and pervs. Who traverse nightly. Determined and Un-De-Terred.

How did I become an urchin? Two words: Mom, and ma. The see and the saw. That tipped me over, and out on my ear. Momma, ever so dear. Had the unmitigated gall, to lose it all. The farm. In a three alarm fire.

Squanderlust. Gone. Bust. At The Track. She ponied it all up. To the prancers. Bangtailed. Drawn and quarterhorsed. Unceremoniously. Even the cab fare vanished. Into thin air.

Momma. Drunk. Under the influence. Sunk the ship. Betting slips. Tattered. Scattered to the wind. The four corners. Win, place, or blow. *Voilà*. Nothing to show. A powder keg, to the nest egg. The nut. The what. As well as the not. Gone to rot. The entire chicken, alongside the pot.

Momma. The dirty dish, ran off with a goon. A new old man: Step-Poppa. A tropical disease. A weasel. A snake, in the grass. With no love. What. So. Ever. For another

mouth to feed. This serpentiniously slithering sea serpent. A sharp-dressed card-sharpening card shark. Who reeked of cheap wine. Who did not take a shine, to yours truly—Mawdy—who got the bum's rush. From Mister Three-Card Monte. Who found the lady. Then told me promptly. To get lost, or I'd get a stomping.

Step-Poppa. With his paw, full of short straws. Told me. Quote Un Quotably. That if he had needed another friend. He would have gotten…a dog. Wha-da-ya-gon-na-do? This mercenary was much larger than me—and quite adept, at splattery. He could read my mind, while seeing right through me. So it was go-time. Time to go. Solo. All by my lonesome. This stowaway. Pitifully penniless. Thrown overboard. Only to be saved, by the *HMS Criminalis*.

Momma. My own mother. *Madame Guillotine*. Cut me off. Via, a clearly cut clean break. Forsaken. Couldn't even spare me. A dime. To call someone who did not care. Marooned. Sucker punched. A. Ban. Doned. Handed over to the street. No-Madically. With nary a doubloon. Where only industrial strength. Feats of strength. Could save me.

Please. Can't I at least sleep, with my soul to keep. In the back yard? You back-stabbing blaggard. The crushers won't let me crash anywhere proper.

I was left. To fend for myself. With no help from my empty hand. This little elf. Lifting swag. Off of the shelf. In The Boards.

Annus horribilus. Boy meets world. A starving-to-death starving artist. A young man supplanted. Who missed out on everything. The youth of Somewherica take for granted.

Up. Against. It. On the street. Graduation. Ma-Trick-U-Lation. Isolation. Separated, by a separation. Congratulations. You're an Urchin. With a capital "U." Boo Hoo. Too small to thump. Too green to jump alongside The Rake, or whoever else. *Et cetera. Et al* pallie-pal. What to do? A boy alone—prone, amongst the hoi. And the polloi.

Sink or swim, in the lake of fire. Dire straits. Use your cunning while running with ankle weights. Gates of Hell. The smell of fear. Always near. The training wheels are off. No life preserver. Mean and weaned. No flares. No spares. Nobody cares. Except those, who want to tear me apart.

SOS May Day. Two months away, from my fifteenth birthday. This cat's gotta spray—swag—each and every day. No room for lag. Keep filling your bag. That seems to have a hole in the bottom. This setting son, saying *danke schön*. To his *Momma-san.* For this beastly burden.

You. Are. Here→ X ←You have everything to fear. Along with fear itself. Somebody help me please. *Por favor*. Thanks Momma, for the menageries—nurture, giving me up to nature. My new mother, and she's quite the bitch. With every predilection. One hundred percent natural selection. My scent. For all the predators to smell. Welcome to Hell, swarmed over.

The Woods
Where the worst
Of the worst go
As all the urchins know

The Woods
The tenth ring
That only the urchins have seen
In Dante's infernal Inferno

The Woods. A disturbing legend. Was always. On this urchin's feeble mind. When he a little behind. On the rent, and the utilities. Of a place, that did not exist. Stomach churning and rumbling. Bumbling. Learning to earn. To shift into a higher gear. But the brakes are squeaking, the oil is leaking—and the clutch, is burning. Smoke. Plumes. Running on fumes…Doom...

…The Woods. An unnatural preserve. Crawling, with crawlers. Serving, as a full-serve shooting gallery. For the pushers, and the junkies. It's a sanctuary. For mad sacks, wackos, and axe-wielding maniacs. Demonic barbarians. Grave conditions. The crushers come in. Only with the ambulances. As they bring out...the unliving.

As if just being an urchin, wasn't bad enough. The Woods: No place to play blind man's bluff. Dirty plungers Grungy stoners Over Dosers All-aloners Moaning. Drunks convulsing. The pungent stench, of excrement. Brought-up rotgut. Roasted birds and squirrels for evening supper.

Food. Is good food—you scream, I scream. But only you, got the ice cream. Dreams were racing. At a snail's pace. Through my head. About cold green gruel in my tureen. Eating the mold, off of your hardened bread. That the supermarkets, won't let us eat. But they toss into the rubbish bin instead.

Waste not. Want not. I hope you all rot—alongside, all those uneaten groceries. Somebody please shoot me. Ever so mercifully. Hunger. As my belly falls and falls. In this low tide. *Merci beaucoup.* What in the bloody hell, did I ever do to you? Didn't Jesus rise from the dead. To make sure. This never happened again?

Rookie mistakes were made. By this gosling, amongst the drakes. I lost my touch. But that's what happens. When you don't eat much.

Soon, there were instructions: You, yeah you. Leave your jacket, and bag. At the checkout stand. Before you *entrez-vous*. Hey! Is that a candy bar, tucked into your shoe?

This cold and alone. Frost-bitten little kid. Looking, just for a pittance. In the forbidden zone. Only this one grocer, an old deli owner, and a bistro *maitre d'*. They were Angels, you see. Wouldn't give me a noser, or a nosebleed. As they chose to donate on a back alley plate. Their soon-to-be stale bread. Rotting veggies. Turning salami. Soggy macaroni. Curdling milk and dessert cakes. To me, yours truly. And a few of my emaciated mates.

Terrible, ain't it? And we ate, Ate, ATE. To get back a fractional/fraction, of our lost weight.

I was a marked mark. My dark days darkened. David. Pauper. Field. Sleeping in parked cars. Slumbering numb, in the subway. Or under the moon and stars. There was no going to the shelter. Where bugs swelter. Too many sacks. Their coughing attacks. Keeping you up all night. And that Bug of theirs, just might bite. I'm too small to fight. After lights-out. A crawler, or a mad sack. Singing rock-a-bye baby. To this teenaged midnight snack.

When life hands you lemons. Consider yourself lucky. For the Vitamin C. There's juice in the rinds, and you can chew on the seeds. You find that out, when one's truly hungry. So just maybe…the street…while casting its pall. Ain't so bad after all—like I had a choice, in the first place. Home. Street. Home. So about face. And march like a mad hare, Jack. In disgrace. The shelter will be there. Just in case. Of an emerging

E-mergency. Believe you me. I may not even be strong enough to break the glass. By the time I get there.

Dear Diary…TB…or not TB. Epidemiology. What is out there, waiting for me? Mumps. Measles. All sorts of diseasles. Occupational. Hazardous hazards. Disastrously repulsive. In-Con-Clu-Sive results. There's the usual, run of the mill starvation. Amongst the other infestational In-Fes-Stations. Plaguing. Per-Co-Lating. Germinating. In our great nation-state.

The Bug. Making its omnipresence known. The cholera of the wild. Caught on the bygone by-and-by. Dying to survive. In the shelter. Fighting the hots, and the trots. In your mite-filled moth-eaten cot. On the *USS Streptococcus*. Burning up. From the what-nots. Turning blue, from the flu. And whooping cough. Pertussis. Plague. Macrophage. A feverish rage. Perchance. Courtesy. Of a hacking sack. Who brought it back from the street. Or The Cage.

All of this nonsense. Because Hizzonor. Cut the funding, for free shots. Allotments. And glad-handed handouts. So The North could re-plot their gardens. Break ground, on more roundabouts. There's always gouda to be found. For the Northern vanity fair grounds. Such as the new country club. He had built. After the reformatory burned down.

Urchins. As good as dead. As The Mayor, feathers his bed. All of this hardens this broken heart. Of yours truly—Mawdy: The self-reliant sleeping giant. The sworn enemy, of this tyrant. Vengeance. Will be mine. As it was once told. Revenge is best served cold. I will speak. For all of those. Who will never get a chance, to grow old.

The Woods. The final frontier. For a scared little deer. With tears, in his eyes. But I'd rather die. Than earn dough. That way. A slow death. Buried up to my neck, with a mouthful of ants. Then to dance that dance. Never was enough. As once is enough. To last you a lifetime and a day.

So I'll just stay away. And take my chances. With my last shred of dignity. Intact. Until tomorrow. That always comes. Rain or shine. Or sometimes snow. Then back to the beg. And the borrow. So I'll just keep sweeping. The ocean back. With my broom. With no room for error.

Childhood's end. An epic epilogue. Written in this ghoulish gulag. *Sisyphus* would have had trouble. Pushing through this hard slog. A misfit boy, floating adrift. Searching for that island, run by that flying lion.

This time of terror—courtesy, of The Mayor. Cut all the youth programs. In favor of other scams. The Mayor. *El pendejo gigante.* As I read it, in *Los Libros Grande.* Leaving us *bambinos.* To push our own prams. Around the mouth, of a volcano.

Urchins can't vote. So why float that leaky boat. When the battleship, needs a new coat of paint. So advised, the much despised Wheeler, The Mayor's sidekick. The trickster. The Wheeler. The voice, in the squealer's ear. But an urchin never forgets—if he lives that long, to call in some of these bets. A subtle hint. Foreshadowing. Prediction. A downright premonition. In regards to spiritually spirituous. Ammunition-ridden rituals. And wars to come.

The Cane…Fucking Hates…The Woods. Dis-Dain-Fully. He can barely constrain, contain, and restrictively restrain. His contempt. Wants to make a painridden stain, of every crawler. And all of the intolerable. Bad-blooded. Undesirables. That crawl, in The Woods.

Same with The Rake, and The Cheese. Supposedly. All for one, and done for all. But The Cane? Wow. Fuh-get-a-bout-it. A-Po-Plec-Tic. Doesn't sit well. At all. A downright squall—a constant rip tide, for this man o' The Seaside.

Every once in a while. The Cane gets loaded. In Dandy Land. Puts on his best black-and-blue hat. And takes a walk. Into The Woods. No little basket, no little red hood needed. To clean up this no-good part of the neighborhood.

The Cane. Ten-over-six. Running on high octane. Off his chain. Feeling no pain. In Con Solably De Ranged. Strolling. Patrolling. Tem-Po-Rarily criminally insane. With the bell that tolls. Even the trolls, under their bridges. Are hiding from Cane sight. Time to put on a show. With the crowbar, or a two-by-four. Total war. To administer the what, as well as the for.

The Cane. Blasting. Casting. A long shadow. In the dead of night. Taking a bite out of crime—one crawler, at a time. Taking numbers. Breaking lumber. The Cane. Our unelected official. This impressive impresario. Making an everlasting impression. On these twisted predators, scavengers, skellums, and assorted lotharios.

The Cane. Never nervous. Ice water, in his veins. Collected. About this bit of community service. The perfect storm. This malevolent maelstrom. As no forms, will be filled out, by an injured dirtbag or crawler. Not looking to be counted. Unless of course The Cane. Really flips his lid. Overcome with spirituality. And decides to spin, a little extra cotton. And spoils one rotten.

As for me, *Monsieur Mawdy*. I slide the urchins rhino. On the side. I know the plight urchinity brings. Spending what's left of your budget. By eating, your old shoe strings. Some bubbles, for their troubles. Off of the incoming tide. I'm a klepto—I steal, lift, pilfer, and purloin. So I flip a coin, when I can. Which is early and often. Coz I'm just that kind of man.

…To the good people. Out there watching. Across this great nation of ours—and to those here, in the audience. I would like to close it out. By stating. Right here. Right now. If I am elected. If I'm given this honorable honor. To represent you, the electorate. I promise to address, in my inaugural address. As the key to success. To clean up this mess. Is to procure, for the urchins. A roof, over their heads.

Let's cheer. For this clear-headed approach. New shelters. Free clinics. Free of The Bug. Clean beds. Plenty o' meds. And no rats or roaches. What. So. Ever. We will celebrate the urchins' Re-In-State-Ment into the welfare state.

Wait…there's more. How's about a Park, with no crawlers. A complete overhaul. Courtesy, of a wrecking ball.

Our current Mayor. With all due resentment. Is an unreachable Un Teach Able Im Peach Able offensive impediment. And I would bet. Wager. In between now, and election day. Somebody's out there, lying in hate—waiting, to give him a taste of waste management.

I'm bad for business. As usual. Because I'm nobody's political tool. Thank you very much. And I will see you. And you. On the campaign trail. Whenever this whistlestop stops. And donations drop. Somewheres. Vote for me. Let me shake your hand, or kiss your baby. Vote for Mawdy.

Yeah, I've been in The Pen. As my ruthless opponent spins. So that's why I know it, as the hat factory. Alongside other truths, we hold self-evident. VOTE MAWDY. May God bless Somewherica. Wherever the hell…it went…

Chapter 8

I've heard about you kid. So said The Cheese. As he pulled me out of the rubble. You're trouble. Even double. An urchin with skill. Alongside potential. A whippetous Whip Poor Will. You're sticky and savvy. A real Rikki. Tikki. Tavi. You've got sticky digits. Snagging swag, is your acumenical bag. You're the Rembrandt, of artful dodgery. The word is loud, from the wrong crowd—I would be proud. To line, your silver cloud. Most cirrusly.

I'm The Cheese. Heard of me? Yeah, I've got a huge belly. And I wheeze. But don't be fooled, by my blubberish Cherubic chubbery. As I'm a mad dog. Black-and-blue hatter. The King o' Splattery. And battery. I'm bigger and badder. Resistant, to all matters of sorcery—or anything else, out of the ordinary. When I'm ten-over-six, it's time to scatter. Feast or famine. Eternal damnation. I'm the Eastern Go To Guy. The crushers gotta climb a ladder. To look me.

Mawdy. You've got what it takes. To make something of yourself. Come by The Pool Hall. With a modicum, of moderately modest sums. As everything counts, in small amounts. And we're in business. Monkey-style. All worth your while. I'll put it out. Amongst and alongside the devout. That you're now what it's all about. Clout. In The Boards. With rewards. Food and flop. In this old part. Of The Trop.

The crushers. Won't roust you no more. So let's go to war. You and I. So take off your kid gloves. And grab that slice of apple pie. In the sky. The SomeWherican Dream. That makes the masses teem. In a brave new world, of unconditional love. The little sunbeam. That dreams are made of.

Into the vault between my ears
Go the memories of the years
Spent dealing with the trauma
Enduring the drama
All starting and ending with Momma

Hey. Kid. Stick this, under your lid. Don't get greedy. Not even semi or somewhat, you see. So decreed The Cheese. Quote Un Quotably. Take what you need to keep things rolling—no trolling, or withholding, or I'll go bowling…with your head.

I'm not The Cheese, King of The East. Coz I let people walk all over me. I own a black hat. And that's that. I'm sharp as a tack. So don't make me take it off the rack. And it fits real tight. On my fat head. It's the size of a pumpkin. Picked off the vine. On Halloween night. So never get greedy—I may be fat, but I ain't stupid. Just ask The Mayor. Who needs to thank this boss. For The Life we share.

You'll thank me for it all later. Don't get greedy. And don't be a traitor. That's the first, and the last lesson. You'll ever need to know. In The Life. Long, after I'm gone. But look at you. *Sacré bleu*. Something the cat wouldn't drag. A ragged, as well as bedraggled. Rag-A-Muffin. Nothing. For the buzzards. Amongst those bones, in your bag.

La peau sur les os—that's French, for you look like a ghost. You are waning. Wasting. Ready to pull the chain. I feel faint, just looking at ya. I'll teach you the *en francais* some other day. Maybe when you weigh the same. As my dame's Pomeranian. So get some skin, on those bones, Little Lord Gaunt Leroy. *Maintenant*. Before you dry up, and blow away.

I was death. Warmed over. On my last breath. A one-leafed clover. Licking the stains, on my holy pullover. Getting thinner and thinner. Scurvier. On a plane crash diet. Of grim pickings. Rickets. My joints, clicking. You could just about see…my heart ticking.

You don't owe me this time. Kid. Not a goddamned dime. Said The Cheese. Here's a C-Note. Gouda Glorious Gouda. Toad skins. For food, and a warm coat. To get you out of your rude awakening. From your unbearable darkness of being.

The Cheese. Ol' Jolly Roger. Getting Faustian. Unbeknownst to me. Custodial custody. NQA, *sans* the formalities. If it so pleases the court. Case Dis Missed. That's how it goes. In The Trop's halls, of improbably improbable cause.

Burn. Mawdy. Burn. Feeling the temperature rise. As Daniel Webster. Did not answer my cries. So I could not read the fine print. With my bloody blurry and bloodshot eyes.

I was down on my luck, and on my knees. In despair. Wheezing my last prayers. From the abysmally abysmal. Abominably dismal abyss. Of being so piss-poor. I'd swipe the doughnut, and eat the hole. This soul. A sinewy weeping willow—the ebb, leaving the flow. Of this sickly foal. Who was getting ready to stroll. Through Death's door. Paranormal. Six feet closer, to the earth's core.

Jesus died for our sins so that we may live
Jesus ain't got squat on The Cheese
The only God that I have thanks to give
When I'm down and right on my crooked knees

Chapter 9

I'll take. What I get can get. *Carpe diem.* I call 'em as I see 'em. Believe you me'um. I came up, and got down. In The Cheese's Eden in the East. My proving ground. I grew up, before I was grown up. Alas…a past…*sans* summer camp. For this scamp. No cleats, on my Little League feets. Running up and down a field of dreams. Hearing the cheers from the seats. The Boards: A concrete jungle. Downright fungal. Going mental. In the monumentally unsentimental tenements.

Yet I never quit. Per-Ser-Ver-Ance. Coz quitters never win. And winners live in sin. Nobody was alongside for the ride. The Boards. The wrong side, of the tracks. Smoke. Stacks. Cracks in the walls. We have it all, in Mawdyville, USA. Semi Some What Blue Collar All the way.

The Boards. Where I made my bones. Paid my dues. Played the ball, where it lied. Learned, to ride. Over the cobblestones. The Boards…Time, for the nickel tour—keep your feet, beneath. And your headset, is under your seat. Free of charge, but donations, are gladly accepted.

The Boards: Skid row. Tomcats, chewing on fish bones. Sacks holding out their hats. Bus stops. Mom-and-pop shops. Flower, sweet, and sweat shops. Palm readers. Teasing marquees featuring girls, Girls, GIRLS. Cavernous taverns. Dark alleys. Garbage cans. Bar and grills. Pubs, saloons, and newsstands. The Pool Hall, The Blue Bustard, and other fine establishments.

Soup kitchens, pigeon coops, condemned buildings, and opium dens. *Emporia.* All sorts of playpens. For the players to do, what strikes them. Tattoo, beauty, pizza, and massage parlors. Slumlords. Squalor. Street vendors. Card-benders. Cheaters prospering. Bookies Hookers Dealers Barkers Black marketers. Hollering, at their marks. Buskers. Hustlers. Red-lighting, fist-fighting, dusk-til-dawners. All looking, for legal tender.

And it bears repeating: No motor car, for this star. No more, of this weapon o' war. With four on the floor. I can go out any time and get me one of those. But it's just not my type of swipe. That's how the chips fall. I don't hear the call, of the white walls. Nor chrome pipes. Just not enough. To entice. This man of vice. Who likes to stay outside, to chase—those, who are made of sugar and spice. And everything nice.

There's just no motive. No auto *modus operandi.* I just say no, to this M-O. No justification. It's complicated. But I'd call it associative association. Cause and effect. Pavlovian slobbering. Over my first stretch. In the hat factory. For interstate thievery. Pinched. Dead-to-rights. Red. Handed. In a lorry. Remanded. Into custody. Ex-traditionally.

But I can testify. With my feet in the fry. I used to get alongside. Grand auto-thefting felonious felons. Coz you can't beat a nice ragtop. Three-on-the-tree. Wheeee! With the breeze, hitting your melon—your foot, on the gas. As we pass the red line, in our taillight special.

Merchants of menace. Pirates of penchants. RPM's and predilections. Screaming. Free. Wheeling. Fuel. In. Jected. Through the intersection. That divides The Inside, from my insanity.

Objects in the mirror. Are closer than they appear. Now on the odd occasion. I picture me, and *ma maîtresse*. Sunday driving. Nonchalantly. On a jaunt. In a hot Jaguar. But you can't flaunt it like that—as curiosity, will kill the greedy cat.

Ma maîtresse? Good question. She's my ladylike lady-in-waiting. That I like. She's coming up…just ahead…right around the corner. I'll tell you when to slow down.

Why sunroof it? I'll just hoof it. Hot Pa Toot It. From haunt to haunt. I don't want to keep my eyes on the road—or my hands, on the wheel. Hear the squeal. Of my four wheels in the street. Spilling my coffee, in the front seat. Ten-to-two? I'll leave that crap to you.

I'm a proud pedestrian. Downright Pickwickian. No stopping and starting. In stop-and-go *trafico*. Nor parking tickets, oil changes, or towing fees. And I don't need a nosebleed. From the air bag. Or a toe tag. Courtesy of some under-the-influencing. Drunken dirt-sack. Who blew a two-point-three.

It's the SomeWherican Dream. Hearing that engine scream. Infernally combusting. Cruising and boozing. Making the scene. In The Trop. From block to block. With nothing in between us and the road. To perdition.

And after this accomplished mission. Perhaps. Take it out to The Sticks for a spin. To say yoo-hoo. Who the heck are you? As you cruise through Slumberbia.

General stores. One-horsed Podunk cow towns. Fruit stands. Marching bands. Blue ribbons. County fairs. Bountiful harvests. Orchards of peaches, cherries, apricots, and pears.

Fireflies. Silos. Scarecrows—where everything grows, far and wide. Pick it, and flick it. Into the bucket. Thickets. White pickets. Counting your chickens. Tractors pulling. The sound of the crickets—lulling, you to sleep.

Yer not from around here…are you? The crushers abound, in large amounts. A. Bun. Dant. In The Sticks. With nothing to do. Except take you down. Clown. So be alert. Don't get too comfortable. Nor stick around for dessert.

There's only one stop. After we desert. This little patch of dirt. It's back to the flag ship—The Trop. And the chop-shop. For a little gouda. For this hot. Money-making widow-maker. Or any other ride, that's a money-taker.

First, before they tear it up. Let us repair. To the boot, and its loot. Where rifles may sequester. Perhaps a mysterious Winchester. Or a Remington under the spare. Golf clubs. A valise, full of pay stubs. And receipts. Left for the deceitfully deft. To I-D your identity and theft it. In a mad dash. A rash of larceny. A cache of cash bonuses. Somebody—get on the phone, and call security. Coz I'm lost in this funhouse. Laughing, while crying. At the mirror images of me.

Drinks tonight. Are on Mawdy. Barkeep, add on a nice gratuity. Some onion rings. Chicken wings. As well as a souvenir t-shirt for me. Until the card. With the "M", and the "C" gets cancelled. E. Lec. Tronically. Fencie loves you, believe you me. He can't get enough hot stuff from Mister Hot Stuff. Stolen properly—no labels, no warranties. Guaranteed. This demon seed. Making it happen. Rampaging. Robbing the stage. Wanted dead, or sublime. Can't you go. Just one more time. To do, the crime. The hot hand. Can you smell it? I'm setting the world alight. Just my Luck, is a payday tonight.

We all have it coming
That you must understand

So take it while you awaits
The aces, as well as the eights
The dead man's hand.

My first stretch. In The Cage. Was for driving a rigged big rig—a truck, full of bad luck. That The Cheese instructed me to pick up. Orders. I was to transport. Re-Lo-Cate. And lay low. In a place, out of state. With whatever the hell it was, stored in those crates.

Fool me once. Shame on you. Fool me twice and it's back to the zoo. After I got pulled over. By the highway rozzers. It was quite the search. And discovery. The cardboard boxes in that lorry. Were full of cigarettes. Con-Tra-Band. Duty free.

It. Gets. Better…and the wooden ones were packed with automatic weapons. A beta test run. Con Ducted. Unbeknownst, to yours truly.

This bloke. Went up in smoke. My white line fever broke. First time offender. Ouch. And I sweat it all out. In my first bout. At The Joint. My *habeas corpus* christening. Prison. The D-O-C. The hat factory. Working in the auto shop was my daily routine. Irony. Paying my dues. For my wrongdoing. And quite lethargically. I was in this lair of car care. For the fresher air. Courtesy of *mon père*, The Cheese.

The Cheese. Had a few of the screws. Up his sleeve. Me and Doler. Got to read The Big Books in tranquility. Protective custody. Glory be, to The Cheese. *Gloria*, for believing in me. Whilst I was bleeding internally. In the hat factory. All for not giving anyone up to the authorities.

Cars attract the crushers. And carry strangers with candy. As I stride. Most prim and properly. So I'm just gonna put one foot. In front of the other. Mother. Truckers. Deal me out. Not my cup of Rosie Lee. I can garrulously guarantee. You'll never see me at the "D," the "M," or the "V."

I'm a man of the infantry. With my boots. On the ground. I like to get down. *Vis-à-vis*. Via the underground. When the rain's coming down. Cats and dogs. Along with a few frogs. It's the subterraneous subway. For this jaywalking jay. So stay outta my way!

That completes the tour, of my sock drawer. There's going to be more. Sordidly sordid. Candidly candid. Self-De-Struc-Tive degeneracy. So hell yeah, I agree. I'm one flawed outlaw. Acting out selfishly. Underneath the smoke screen of self-reliance—in defiance, of God's Decree.

But I don't have a gun drawn. On nobody's head. So don't blame me. As I build my street cred. Low profile, just my style—worth, my while. Under the radar. Off the Troppler screen. Amongst the rank and file.

I always live. Within my means. Don't give the crushers a reason. To have a reason. So says The Cheese. Leave the bling, and the bling. As it won't mean a thing. To those who'll sing. Trapped, by their trappings. And too many needs. Fools. Brimming. Swimming. In their wreck-cesspools. These yearlings, to The Life. With all the staying power of weeds. Six months after spring.

Chapter 10

This rooster, a seducer
Of hen after hen after hen
Just might take a beating
After the following reading
From those who are judgers of men

Eternal flame. Seeking same. I still have my teeth. And both my ears. I enjoy long walks, on very short piers. It gets lonely, at the bottom. So I like to stroke 'em. While I got 'em. Like any other mutt. On borrowed time. I'm gonna run. And play. Each and every way. Before Judgment Day. So before I say goodbye. And toodle-loo. To The Trop. I'm gonna hop, skip, and jump. On as many bones. As plausible to you.

Yeah. You. That's who. Who'd you think. I was talking to? Yoo-hoo. *Sacré bleu*. Hey you, the reader. The feeder, of my pagination. There's no fountain of youth. All of you *Monsieur Ponce de Leóns.* Just a mountain of truth. So youse gotta be smooth. While your skin's still smooth. And while you're short, in the tooth.

I'm quite the catch. An eligible bach. Getting a big whiff. Of the scratch, and the sniff. Amidst. The hot and heavy. Heavy-petting. Of what The Life. Has to offer.

So just give me a holler—even when I'm down, to my last dollar. I'm always up. For getting hot under the collar. It's all good. All the shoulda, coulda, and wouldas—in between now, and putting on the coat. Made of wood. When this sticky cur's spurs, horns, and antlers. Are hung up for good.

I'm a simple man. "B," is always my plan. I don't need a castle. It's too much hassle. No maids necessary. To make my Murphy bed. Or fluff my pillow. Low-down low overhead—into my mattress, goes my rhino instead. Just give this poor soul. A pigeonhole. To lay his noggin. A decent futon, for some snoggin'. And some grog. To dampen, his black dog.

Make yourself at home. For a roll in the hay. And a short stay. Chicks dig this angel's dirty place. Where all manners vanish, without a trace. My flop: Three hundred square feet of splendidly splendiferous splendor. Not including, the fire escape. That's the tale, of the tape measure. Of this pleasurous pleasure palace. Of guilt-ridden guilty pleasures.

Please excuse the mess. Work's been crazy lately. Everybody hates me—even my cleaning lady. Now, where were we? Ah yes…the full moon, your perfume. Swoonish, low-volume croonable tunes. What's mine, is yours. Literally. My icebox is filled with old take-out. And cold suds. A chest o' drawers, for my duds. And there's pud-covers. For this semi-somewhat stud.

That's not all I've got. And never bought. There's a stove, and a pot. A hot plate. For home cooking. With a hot date. A bottle of rotgut or two. Both for me. But I've got wine for you.

Three hooks on the wall. One for my jacket, one for my hat—and the extra one, for a dollish moll. Another pretty face. Or a passing fancy. Coming up for a look-see. Perhaps.

Perchance. For some coffee, tea, or some Mawdy. So let's get out of our kits. For some canoodlish, frivolous, kit and caboodlery. With a sticky mutt. Constantly, in constant heat.

If any hot Tropical natives. Want to get contemplative. Kill their brain cells. Cannabistically. Before, during, or after our *soirée*. It's sorta okay. As wacky-tobacky. Is in that area that's kinda gray. Mary Jane. A subject, for debate. I say it's a gateway. Be that as it may. I'll just patiently wait, as you tempt fate. And turn my head. The other way.

But no playing doctor. In my office. I'm sticky, but not like that. And neither should you. When it comes to the needle stick. This good old boy, is downright voyeuristic. No plungers. Fuh. Get. About it. Get it? Ix. Nay on the hard ugs-dray. Not like my heroinistic Hy-Po-Der-Mic Poppa. Who never knew when. To say when. To who, what, whenever, or wherever. Again and again and again.

I can stop. When I want to. Yours truly. Said yes, to the thugs—but no, to the drugs. Before he even knew, what they were. Poppa took a trance-contagious trip to Bugistan. Poppa. Remained predilectional, in the correctional facility. Played doctor, M-Deviously. Mocked Momma. Rocked her world. Off course. While horsing around, on his hobby horse. Poppa liked to train in vein. As he headed, with a full head of steam. Straight down the drain…

…Now back, to the hanky. And the manky-panky—earrings clank, on the floor. Stockings hung, on my door. Brassieres—slung, on the rabbit ears. Empty beers. All over my parlor. As we set sail. On our course. This pummeled horse. Ain't no tomato can. He can go three rounds. And can take, all the pounds. And still have one more pop. For the top O' the morning.

My tail wags. When you wear my shirt. And give me those dirty, and flirtish looks. When you peruse. My skin mags. I love the sound. Of your bare feet. After our lover's leap. As you creep. To eat my cold pizza. And drink my beer. When you think. This sleeping Tom. Is counting sheep.

I learned to doze, with one eye open—The Zen, of The Pen. Learned by this sin citizen. But don't turn on the stove. Stop! Whatever you do. It's the only rule. The Simpler Books. I hide them there. Handle with care. My dear. Coz nobody cooks. In my lair. My treasured treasure trove. When I want to rove. Faraway, in a faraway place. And expand the space. Betwixt my ears. And behind, my face.

The roses are dead
And the violets are hewn
Across the burning bed
Of true love
Amongst the ruined

Your attention. Please. I have a squeeze. And this lady. Is a vamp. Lights my lantern. Always ready for the Tour de Pants. She's quite athletic, in that department. No strings attached. The beast, with two backs. Getting scratched. And whilst I'm on that tack. I shall refer to her. Surreptitiously. On the QT. To protect her innocence…as *Beauté*.

Beauté. Bee-yooo-tay. A real beaut. Brutally beautiful. A cutie pie. A body that stops traffic. She works out, like a maniac. Rolls around on that giant ball. Eight days a week. Certifiable. A lovingly lovely. Hornily Por-No-Graphic Aromatically lavenderish lover. Born of fire. But we're too torn. Hopelessly forlorn. To make it really work.

Beauté was on the go. Looking for a good cup, of Average Joe. Not someone like me. Mister Instability. Living my life, right in front of me. And her parents. Whom I will never meet. And will never know. But that doesn't mean. She doesn't like to get down. And mess around. With this verboten no-no.

We knock the dust off each other. In this off-the-books, under-the-table labor of lust. Scrubbing off the rust. As we do what we must. We are mental, for each other. Momentarily. Finishing each other's non sequiturs. While we both pursue, our separate druthers—separately, in our separate lives. Casually casual. Asking ourselves, after we pleasure ourselves. What do you want to do. With the rest of your life?

Beauté's searching, for the perfect mutt. With the right pedigree. Who has all his shots. Alongside a college degree. And a substantial after-taxes salary. So her prudish parents. Don't get the trots. Fiduciarially. On their trust-funded daughter—AKA, the seducer, of this sticky seducee. In this contiguously ambiguous union. Between two friendly beneficiaries.

Beauté: My little dealio. A good little rich girl. A pretty face, gracing my pillow. She's right off the first page. Of the first chapter. Of the mutt manifesto. Sheet cred, in my bed. Presto! Side action. Satisfaction. Both getting what we want. Out of this nocturnal situation. So when she gets lonely. And I'm the only. She looks up, and hooks up. With her man of manliness. *Beauté* calls in the artillery—that's me, Sergeant Mawdy.

Beauté's last ex. Was under the hex, of The Big Grift. This namby, was a pamby. A real soup sandwich. Obsessed with *largesse*. Which caused a rift in their salaciousness. This near-sighted jerk was a workaholic. Going berserk. Over something he couldn't take with him. One of the rat race's miserable minions. In my most humble opinion. A pencil-pusher, with early gray hair. Rushing towards The Big Grift. Like a salmon spawning. Fawning. Into the yawning mouth, of a bear.

Nobody ever said. On their deathbed. Re-Gret-Fully. Forget my family. I should have worked even more diligently. The workforce can be a dangerous course. Towards the edge, of the earth. Definitely not for me. Servility. The real death penalty. A little pipsqueak. Earning. In a world designed cubically.

I just might have been. A clock-puncher. Joe Lunch Buddy. Condemned. To a life of fun prevention. Conference calls. Dis-Con-Nection. Conventions. Sitting at attention. The boss. Spitting out. The streams of unconsciousness. About the newly invented invention. That will make none of you healthy. Nor wealthy. Or wise. Just a few extra ducats into your pay. For slaving away—Hooray! You can finally barely pay the payment. That's paying off your laid-away payments.

The Convention: Wet handshakes, cigarette breaks, and medium-rare steaks. In. Sin. Cerity. Squirting flowers. Champagne towers. Cowering lackeys cower. Mid-tier middle managers glower—some razzle, some dazzle. Perhaps a raffle. For a big screen TV. But only if it was a good year.

Reeking of booze. Looking cool, in tailored suits. By some Euro-dandy. Whose last name ends in an *ana*, or an *ini.* All the top bananas—braying, like jackasses. Celebrating their excesses. Denigrating. Suck. Cesses. A full spectrum. Of deplorable decorum. This forum, of pond scum. I guess that impresses some folks. But not me.

Bad hunches. Declared at brunches. Liquid lunches. Bunches. Of folks. That will be gone. When the number crunches. Hope no one croaks. Like last year. That poor dear old bloke. What's-his-name. You know. He will be missed. Whoever it was. Hear the latest

buzz. Bad jokes. As the oxen, remove their yokes. The broken spokes, in the wheel. Out to get some. Rum and cokes. To fool the boss into thinking. That you're not drinking anymore.

Quarterly prophets. And losses. Tchotkes. Cookies to toss. Disorderly deposits. Into your sink. After much too much to drink. Then pay the escort. Bury that, in the expense report. Your late night consort. With the dangerous curves. To leave your comped room. Ever so discreetly.

A tisket. A tasket. You can all sit and spin. In your in-and-out baskets. If I seem a bit cynical. Overtly overzealous. In my contemptible contempt. At those of you, on your attempted quest. To be your best. Reaching the pinnacle, of corporate success. Did you ever think. Just once. That I just might be. Ever so slightly jealous?

My loving cup runneth over—enough, about The Convention. As I'm starting to get indigestion. With the attention. Of the deficit. Dis Or Der. That's how I read it. I'm on the border. Of being bored. Out of my skull. This matador, is tired of the gore.

The things people will do. Or say. For a company car or a bigger payday. The key to poop. In the executive wash room. If I need an office, with a window. I'll go steal a car. Vroom Vah-*roooooom*…GTA. Straight down the highways. And the by-ways. Without any insurance, or monthly payments.

The SomeWherican Way. Thrill, or be killed. Eat the captain, in the lifeboat drill. As the soil for all of us, will be tilled. Eventually. If not sooner. Death is the dominant common denominator. Now please hold the wheel, whilst I adjust the tuner. Then let's see…what this baby can do…

Chapter 11

I'm no alcoholic
A term most hyperbolic
My life is such
That I need this crutch
Or else I get melancholic

One's too few
And a thousand's my druthers
So please stay away
As I forget this day
Just like all the others

The eight-ball, must drop clean—and please don't shake, the cigarette machine. I'm always to be seen. Betwixt and between. The go, and the getting. As well as the bloodletting. Getting. After. It. At The Blue Bustard. A most fowl locale. For the rag, tag, and bobtail. Getting my fill. Good will spreading. E-Gregiously releasing. Speak-easing. Wetting my wolf whistle. Getting a load-on. At The Blue Bustard. Being of no use. Living a life o' blue ruin, and wishful drinking.

The Blue Bustard. Smack Dab Dead Center. In The East. So stop gathering moss and get rolling. Go under the overpass. Cross the burning bridge. Over the moat. Into The Bustard. As the crow pounds. Romping grounds. Stomping rounds. For the foxes and boozed-up booze hounds. Arsing around. Minding their pints, and their quarts. Rabbits and porks. Regaling while aling. Tall-taling about ports of squall.

One for my master. Two for The Cheese. None for you. And then three for The Cheese. Then four more. For the handling and shipping fees. Ex-Hor-Bi-Tant Extortion. Usury. That's how they count the score. At The Cheese, Sin-corporated.

The Cheese: The bishop, of the Eastern diocese. Keeping the piece. Limited, in his reliable liabilities. GMBh, and all other affiliates—love it, or leave it…spiritually. So says the director of operations. The VP of HR. And of all the other respectively executive checks, balances, and formalities.

Hang your hat. Raise yer tankard. Aargh! At The Blue Bustard. AKA, The Cheese's launderette. Alongside his cornering, of all the corner markets. I can still smell the wood chips, peanuts, cigar butts, and pistachio shells. Amidst the sounds of hot tips. Tales of hardship. Darts darting. Partners partnering. Calling cards falling. And the last call bell calling.

The Blue Bustard cuts The Cheese's mustard. Just another fixture in The Cheese's infrastructure. As he just can't lose. In this winning as well as winnable win-win situation. Taxation, with remuneration. As he's got his crew. Giving debit, where debit is due. Coming. And going. On this tour of duty. First we pay the tribute. On our booty. Then our dues. And the rest on juniper juice—AKA, the blue ruin. In his public house of swill repute.

And if any one of his mutts. Doesn't patronize The Bustard. Every now and then. It just might be hazardous—downright sanguineous, to their health. But it's a free country. So do what you please. But it might be a little hard walking to that other bar. On two fractured knees.

There's another Cheesy dive. That jumps and jives. Rotwang's. My kind of place. To erase the space. Between my ears. Amongst my peers. You can't see your hand, in front of your face. And that's during the day!

A long walk, but a big pour. From ship-to-shore. The right cadence of a shave, and a haircut. With their two bits. Gets you a seat at Rotwang's. So leave a tip. With no questions asked. Your gouda, is as green as the next guy's. Just keep to yourself. And buy the bartender a round. Off of the top shelf.

Make it a double. Pull the moolah, out of the rubble. Stacked up in front of you. And a bob or two for the bouncer—the trouncer, of poseurs and fools. Who yearn to rub shoulders with the old school.

Rotwang's. Straight-up, or neat. Where Daddy Long-legs cleaned his feet. Then got three-sheeted. Daddy Long-Legs: A legendary legend. Leaving a legacy of long-legged legwork. Never to be repeated. Here's to you. Cheers Daddy Two-L's. See you in Hell.

If my lady calls. Tell her, I'm still at it—work, that is. Cheers! Here's to the scrounge lizards. Laughing at the ground. The drunks. Blowing chunks. Speaking Welsh. These wizards of wretchedness. Alongside and amongst the deadly drunk. Fall-down. Bar room brawlers. Bilge rats. Who smell, like they fell. Onto the deck, of a garbage scow.

I have a rumbunctious chum: Souser. A rummy. A proud-to-be-ploughed loudmouthed sour mash test dummy. This bleary-eyed. Gin-milling. Soused Souskateer. Who likes to down it dumb. Numbing himself, from the humdrum tedium. Of the hub, as well as the bub.

Souser: A hum-a-few-barring jar-lifter bar none. Rumpty. Bumpty. Having a ball. Swallowing all 99 bottles. Of beer on the wall.

I'll have half—with a twist, and a splash. Of whatever he's having. Souser. A real oiler. A pished-posher. A sloshbuckler. A swizzled stickler. A downright down-the-hatcher. A catcher of the rye. Gone for a ride. On his pink elephant. Flanked by the white mice. Souser. Ginned up, and blossomed. Tossin' em down. Done up from sun up to sundown.

It's five o'clock somewhere. Souser. A most believable bourbon legend. A piss artist. A lush for life. Who totaled his tee. Souser. Our party-fouling perennial nominee. Of the publican party. A fervently fermental swivel servant. The Whirlingest Dervant. Apt to drivel. A wharf rat. Drowning. In a vat of Chianti. The life of the party. With always something to spray. The garnish tray was his idea, of a buffet—his liver, should be on display. For all to see. Even you Mister Ripley. Believe you me.

I have a real friend. Till the deadly end: Yansey. My crooked bookend. A compatible companion, who I highly recommend. As close as one can get one. In The Life. Side. By. Side. Not the brightest light. He's the guy. Who might bring his knife. To the gunfight.

Yansey. Was my cellie. From my first visit. To the hat factory. Why does he go by Yansey? It's either a simile, metaphor, or irony—or a little bit, of all three. Full-frontal stupidity. His brain rests vestigially. He always got stung, in a spelling bee.

Raggedy Yansey. The proud owner. Of an astoundingly pounded. And rounded countenance. Some Wheres Some What Semi-in-between. A scary, and scarred.

Black-haired scarecrow. And a snowman. With a cone of a nose. Alongside eyes, dark as charcoal.

Plus he's pale. As one could be. Which just has to be seen. To be believed. Believe. You. Me—but he's friendly, as a mutt can be...Once…You get to know him. Over a cup of tea. Or if you need a friend. To tend. To matters of splattery.

Yansey. The crown weighs heavy. On his empty head. Not the sharpest pencil. Not by a long shot. He once thought. I-kid-you-nots were flowers, you see. But he's loyal. To the nth degree. Yansey. The man. You want in the ring. In the fifteenth round. In the eleventh hour. The bottom of the ninth. On a goal-line stand. Storming the beach. At Normandy.

Yansey. Slow-moticons. Down. Loaded. On his soft drive. My future, partner-in-crime. Was my cellie. The first time, in the iron belly of the beast…the hat factory. Yansey. A champ in the cold. And the damnable damp. Never gave the authorities one letter. Off of one page. Under the lamp, in The Cage.

Yansey: A retardant-at-arms, on the *HMS Thoughtless.* Anchored aweigh in Simpleton Bay. Day-dreaming the day away. With a head made of *papier-mâché*.

Yansey. In Ex Or Able. A mentalistic dyslexistentialist. Words Backwrads Scrmabeld and scrabbled Affecting his power of babble. Yansey is a nowdright ignorantly blissed. Som-Nam-Bu-List. Yansey. Enough gaffes, to last a lifetime. Alingsode yuors turly. In our crife of lime.

My man Yanse is afraid of clowns. Circus clowns. Even rodeo clowns. Seriously. And specifically. Scares the bejesus. Gives him seizures, and the willies. Deep. Seated. Perchance, it's their exaggerated features. Or their horrible shrieks. Perhaps. Some of these horn-squeaking freaks. With their red beaks, and blemished cheeks…oh well, it's his journey.

Weird, this fear. Coul-Ro-Phobia. Taking hold of Yansey. One of The Cheese's fiercest creatures. But I can see it. Empathy. Clowns, are indeed kinda creepy. Yansey once told me. Confidentially. In a state of intoxicity. That as a sprat. One gnarly harlequin. Once made him piss his pants...something cruel, done to a balloon animal.

Yansey. His train of thought runs aground. In a good brain storm. Which is the norm. So you have to do an end around. To pound. Some intelligent sense. And sensibility. Into Yansey. Who once asked me. If one were to re-steal some stolen property. Would it be free?

But Yansey. My *aide-de-camp*. Is the heavy weight champ. Of The Trop. His brain might cramp. But that doesn't matter. He's still a *bona fide*. Maulified. Black-and-blue hatter. Not given to chitter or chatter. About any act of splattery.

Yansey. A dain-bread. Hell-educated probationary. Who graduated delinquently. Yansey had launched into the lottery. Long before me.

Yansey-pants—truancy, his first game of chance. He's been counted. His countenance photographed. And mounted systematically. Starting with the reformatory. Then Juvy, and The Ranch—lock-ups, for young pups with ticks, fleas, and rabies. The temp kept at ten-over-six degrees. Scarenheit. Yansey. Round-aboutly, bounding around. In, and out. Of the lottery.

Yansey. Will never be mistaken. For an *alumnus*, of any university. This same Yansey. Who I once caught watering, his artificial Christmas tree.

Yansey. A cent short, of a penny. Yet still has enough sense. To display reverence. For The Life. Ignorance. Is not pissing it all away. Yansey knows enough about the severance

pay—for hear, as well as for say. From one's gob. To some yob. Or a crusher, on the take. Making a play. Get's you downright nautical. An obsoleted obstacle. Saying hi to Poseidon. At the bottom, of the bay. The fishies pecking away. At your coral decay.

Let's get back to the tawdriness. The haughtiness. The male-pattern bawdiness. Souser. My cirrhotically pissed accomplice. The resident. In-E-Briated Poet booriate. Likes to excoriate. Ex Pec To Rate. Excruciating swales and gales. Of ribaldry. For any fomentous occasion.

Souser. Our obliterated deviant savant. Likes to sing wantonly. When he's not amounting to anything. Out of key. Mercilessly. Taunting and flaunting the Limerickery. Dis-Taste-Fully. But we could use a few laughs. As we cling to our rafts. In this rough draft. So let's drop a ducat, into the puke box. And listen to this pox upon us: *Sousus raucoustus.* The ignominious ignoramus. Gloriously singing glorious. With a mouthful of rocks.

Here's to the old brown booze
For those who've got nuthin' to lose
Whiskey's the winner
For this dirty old sinner
But a shot o' Scotch I'd never refuse!

So's I'm here to spread the news
About the miracle known as brown booze
Bourbon's a treat
And it tastes the best neat
While taking the shine off of your shoes

You want more? Souser. The badgering, bad-breathed barfer o' badinage. The out of hand bandoleer. Unavailable for weddings. Now The Old Brown Booze. Usually wows the crowd. Gets the party started. This gem, most rare. Unbeknownst until now. A ditty without care. The hair of the dog. Parted. Now here's a few more, of his most highly regarded:

Let's go to Mexico
Coz they got avocados
They come from a tree
As green as can be
Grown by our amigos

Into a bowl goes the pintos
Then tomatoes, queso, and chorizo
First peel the skin,
Lose the pit, then begin
To throw in the avocados

* * * *

Observe the herd of elephants

Thundering wondrously above
Atop the canopies
Of the trees
With the birds
And the monkeys
Such an absurdity
Is unheard of

* * * *

The best defense
Is an offense
So never pass out
Or get knocked about
In a bar full of ne'er do wells, misfits,
And malcontents

So come one, come all—not the guys, just the dolls. To The Blue Bustard. No glass sippers, or bad tippers. At this free-for-all. After hours. After endless hours. Of sad conversations. Bad ruminations. Fulminations. And boreplay. With some fancy Nancy-boy. Exploring his semi-somewhat Metro Sexuality. While choking down flamed Grade-A-Thai-Viet-Itali-Mexi-Tex-Mex-Stuffed-in-a-shell-on-a-stick *nouvelle*-whatever.

You poor girl. Enduring that banal prattle. From some chattering prat. As you bathe, your gray matter. With way too much chardonnay. On this grinding. And blinding. Unraveling, and unwinding. Blind date.

After the awkward hug. With that slug. It's time, to cut a rug. Chug. A. Lug! Behave like the lemon drop dropping. Tequila-popper popping Trop star. That you are. So throw on your low-cut jeans. Your tankini, and your broken dreams—and hop on the subway. To the last stop. And head on down to The Blue Bustard. And make a wish. Amongst this drooling school of fish.

Yo! This desperado. Is squished betwixt and between. An embalmed crock. And a dozy pillock. Souser, and Yansey. Respectively. So knock down a *kamikaze*. Slam down an Alabama Slammer. Jeepers. Peepers. You have piercingly beautiful deep blue lamps. And lovely gams. But show off that vampishly trampish ink stamp. A most welcome welcome mat. That no one in your office knows about—except, perchance, the copy machine repairman…Your covertly covert. Co-Con-Spirator. In your strangely fascinating machinations. Behind the supply room door.

Souser. He's either talking to a white mouse. Or filling a pail. Never without fail. So I just told him to bail. So, park it. Have a seat in this meat market. And get alongside. Love your whale tail by the way. I like to get Cornish, with the game hens. Blue's my favorite color. Downright chromatically. Is it hot in here? Or is it thee? Can you buy me a drink? Payday's tomorrow…I think.

Thee? Yeah, that's the word. That you heard. It's from Shakespeare my dear. America's greatest poet. And don't I know it—Shakespeare, if my university degree serves.

Now stop me, if you've heard this one: Shakespeare, after a few beers. Wrote the Declaration of Independence. Or was it The Articles of Confederation? Jefferson? No, he scribbled the Magna Carta. I'll ask Yansey. AKA, the professor. The man's a genius. But some other time. Which will be never and a day. As there's no need for rain delays.

Are you a model? Looks like you work out. In a furiously burning. De-Mo-Niacal. Pilatery. Love your hard body. Can I buy you a shot of voddy? And a beer? How do I stay so slim? I do it by staying away from The State Gym. And their offer of a knife-time membership. First thirty years, free of charge.

But I'm done wearing the broad arrow. So let's go so's I can show. My version of cardio *flagrante delicto*. An adult workout video. Burning carbs, *sans* our garbs. While reaching a crescendo.

One glance at my tatts. Subtle hints, of all the splats. And my flattened beak. The scars and the bars of my convicted legacy. A Cawdy-Mawdy bird—inked, on my shoulder. Then "Mawdy," cursively, for all to see. On my wrist. Whenever I hold up my tea. And all sorts of other bad-boy artistry. As I'm damn near sleeved. Some of them cover Oinkle's cigarette burns, you see.

Now's my chance. For some short-term romance. Dancing to the sheet music. At the party in our pants.

OK. All right already. I've been Inside. The Pokey. Okey-dokey? Which is why. This product, of society. Is sorta *loco,* but still low-key. Baby. Seriously. You want nothing to do with me. Trust me. I'm trouble with a capital "T." A complete stranger that spells danger with a capital "D." These are the top three hiccupped lines. Busted out. In all of Bustard history.

All of the mess was linked to charges dropped. And filed insufficiently. All made possible. By the *gratin*. Provided by The Cheestrict attorney. The Cheese cheats 'em, and how. *Gratis*faction. This sticky, off-the-level devil—with two more devils, on both shoulders. A patriotic poet. Who likes to throw it down. Schizo-Pho-Netically. The bats in my belfry are flapping deliriously.

A crook with a black book. That makes him cook. I flame on automatic Auto Pilot Downright Ultra Violet. The way I stick out, in the ol' slaughtering hole. Cruise control. This sold soul, on thin ice. It's not fair. But it's one of the perks of a life of vice. For this ex-*concierge*. Ready to disparage. The reputations. Of his Trop-dead gorgeous guests.

I'll leave the Romeo rodeo. Flowers, chow, and a picture show. To the Casanovas, and the lounge lizards. All the Toms, Dicks, and Dominics. Getting parried away. In this swordfight. Desperation is the mainstay, below the fray. The wizards of blizzards of blasé repartee. Slumming for brine. The swine. The asinine. The scum, chumming the waters. Distantly drumming, with all the wrong lines.

When the light hits it right
You can see my big scar
The one I got in The Yard
In a pitched and battlish fight

But it's not the one
That I'd most like to hide
It's the uglier, nastier, and deepest ones

That I keep, ever so deep, inside

Liar. Liar. Say all the right things. To light their pants on fire. Sing the song that she sings. To keep her skating, on the brink of desire…I'm here for an after-work party. I don't usually do this. My old miss, was worried about the bloom. Falling off of her rose. She didn't see me. Yours truly. In her Tarots. B-S. She tossed old Mawdy. Out on his arse. With both elbows. So I'm drowning my tomorrows. That's just the way it flows.

Let go. Let God. Blah Blah Blah. Voddy-vod vodka. Yadda Yadda Yadda. Yours is the Piña Colada. With the umbrella. Whatever I gotta say. To take a swing, at your *piñata.*

Paired up. An item. I'll get the tab. Grab your sugarcoat, sugar. And let's grab a cab. Can you pay the fare? With carelessly abandoned Dis-Re-Gard. And blow this popsicle stand. And head back to my flop. For some gland-to-gland combat—oh drat, can you drive? My ride's in the shop. Threw a rod. Hand. To. God. Dodging the rozzers.

They like to drive anyway. Reverse psychology. Basic biology. Em-Power-Mentally. This ex-jailbird. Is messing with the bees. Holding both the honey, and the flower. A power play. The old switcheroo. This squirrelly nut, turning the screw. In this kangaroo courtship. Makes their day. Like they are still holding sway.

I don't know about you. But I'm in the mood. For some drive-thru. To soak up the booze. I know a dude in full-blown fast-food servitude. He was an ex-urchin. Who got out. Before he got in. Who now runs the night crew.

Since I know the bloke. There's no need for pesos. When we get to the window. I'll order a burrito. Nachos. Tacos. Bell peppers. *Grande Supremo Muy bueno Fantastico*. Quesadillas. Fajitas. Carne asada, and corn tortillas. Please try the salsa my *bella belleza.* And try not, to get any on ya!

Did I mention. That I was in the hoosegow? The Pokey? Cap-Tivity. I was knee-deep. In the muck, and the mire. A downright my-oh-myer. It was a conspiracy. Them Against Me—innocent, on all counts. Believe you me. Two stretches. Enough to scare me straight. Back into The Life. With the hate of the world, on my shoulders. You have to be in it. To win it. Maybe this one time. Which is what I said the last time.

Darwinism: a schism, along with recidivism. That shapes. All the bad things that come. I'll tell you that pearl of misdemeanor. After I make your toes curl. And no, I don't have a girlfriend. Why would I lie to you? You're the first late-night date. For this worst-rate sleepskate. Since I walked out…in my new government-issue suit. Through the gate. And I must forewarn. As I do come with a warning. You just might like yourself in the morning…

Chapter 12

She loved me. She loved me not—I want, what you got. Full disclosure. Ex-Po-Sure. *Ex post facto.* Tactically tactfully. I once walked down the aisle. Stepped into a pile, and straight into oblivion. Dropped. Popped. The question. Tied the knot. Dipped, into the Big Dipper. A downright threshold tripper.

Married. Hammered. Hitched. Be-Witched. My ex-wife. The one time lust of my life. Who put a hex. Cast a spell. On yours truly.

Me and Exie sitting in a tree. H-u-m-p-i-n-g. First came Mawdy. Then came the carriage. Then came the shotgun marriage. Preggers—a bun, in the oven. Love squirts, and I've got two of 'em. Loved ones. My darling bugs. Sprats. Pitter-pattering rug rats.

The rabbit died. Then the stork flied. We were fruitful, and multiplied. Exacta. Actuarilly. My little sperms of endearment. My wigglers. Man grenades. The Sire Brigade. Made their way, past the goalie. And swam fast, into the hatchery.

I know the doghouse, the couch, as well as the porch—the last resort, when the torch really got lit. This half-wit tanked it. Shanked it, off the crossbar. Grounded out, into a triple play. With the bases loaded. There's worse things in this world. I blew it. But I did the best that I could. With what little I had, and what I barely knew.

Room for improvement? No argument here. Unquestionably. No question. No question at all. You can quote me. Quote Un Quotably. I laid not a finger on them. All of them. Never even yelled. Not even one shout. Down the hall. Not one flog, or a flurry. At the dog. Who now sleeps on the couch. Like a log. And eats better than me!

I can stand tall. On a stack, Jack. And Jill. I am separated, from the animals. This revolutionary chopped down his family tree. Atavistically. I am proud. About walking upright. Out of the surf. Evolution: The revolution, that overthrew me.

I'm a klepto. With my sticky fingers, off the back burner. Earning the bacon. A piece maker. Marking time, in The Life. Trying not to attract flies. Alongside the eyes. In the back of my head. Paying my dues. Amongst the do's, the donchas, and the don'ts. The weight o' the world. And my poor childhood. Quite a load. On my shoulders.

Whadaya want from me? Exie. I had you. On the need, to know. Baby. The NTK. *Intimité*, as The Cheese would say. And you did not need to know anything. About anything. Nothing—zip, zilch, zippo—*non, nyet, nada*. It's the smart strategy. Risking only the *USS Mawdy,* and not the whole damned armada.

I tried my best. To clamp my post-dramatic stressful unrest. Yansey, as well as Souser. Would get the brunt. Of my angry bully pulpitry. Their ears—filled, with my guts. That I spilled. About the nightmares. The disrepair. Un Bear Able. Tearing apart my seams. And the unfulfilled dreams, that a lot of us share.

I would remain, with my painful pain. At The Bustard. Until the fog lifted. When the seas were calm. So I could sail home. Without hitting any rocks. Or perchance dropping an atom bomb. And if it got real heavy…I went to The Cheese.

The Cheese knew about the quicksand. That could suck a mutt down. How the anger spanned. Across the generations. Of mutations. In the mean pool. The school, of hard knocks. That rocks your world of hurt. God. Damn. I miss that man.

Yours. Mine. And yours, Yours, YOURS. The settlement—the lock, and the stock. The whole lot. *Voilà.* The pot, the barrel, and the black kettle. Irreconcilable. Musical. Differences. Too much distance. In between the love, and the hate. That was on a double date. In our relationship. Splitsville—Gretel took Hansel, for every crumb. A tidy sum. The gum, right out of my gob. Anything. With or without my name on it.

The moolah came, and the moolah went. All to the settlement. She got it all—even the ball, at the end of my chain. Her gain, from my pain. She got all my swag. This bobtail nag. An internal revenue servicing. The shoe, on the other foot. She got the chimney, I got the soot. What. Ever. Fuh-get-about-it. Rhino comes, and rhino goes. Gotta earn. As The Life goes on forever.

As long, as you have your health. And a wealth, of new information. You brush yourself off. And keep moving. Forward. I'll get new, and improved. Reborn. I'll weather this tormential storm. Never regret. As it all happens, for a reason. And I'll own this one. Around my neck. Acceptance. Concession. Confession—then acceptance, all over again.

Is there a doctor in the house? Mawdy. Diagnostically. A subject, to be bounced around. For a round table discussion. Across, above, and below the board. To discuss my personal persona.

I ain't afraid of clowns. Like Yansey. But I've got my own list. All sorts, of disabling disabilities: Com-Punctional Dys-Functional—just two, to start the bidding. In this packed hall. Yeah I'm sick. But aren't we all?

Manic. As well as compulsively compulsive. Semi Some What Unbeknownst to me. Subconsciously self-destructive—stability, alien to me. Self-immolation, my daily routine. Impulse control, a scarcity. Self-respect, a rarity. Intimate intimacy…a lack there of…Love? I love it. But it's high above, and beyond the wait and see. Commitment to anything is a delicacy. An accident waiting to happen. Or did it happen already?

Where do we go from here? I still love her. Dearly. As close as I can get. I'm vexed and perpetually perplexed. Cerebrally cortexed. To the core. That funny feeling. Reeling from the deal. You get the picture. Do I need to paint it?

Love. Ain't it a stitch in time. She will forever. And a day. Beholdenly hold sway. Over my soul. We're still friends—unseen, yet albeit. The loose ends. Pulled tightly between us. There's no need, to be mean. She asks no questions. And I tell plenty of lies. Alongside the suggestions—the shake, as well as the fries. Look into my eyes. And please don't tell me what you see. Coz it's what you get. Oh, the humanity.

Our progeny. Will eternally, and gratefully. Never be sullied. By my larcenous. Ill-reputed. Fool Hardy Tom Foolery. I hope they will inherit my tenacity. And stamina. Alongside my elastic ability—to bend, and never break. Take things in stride. In the wake. Of this hurtful world of hurt. And learn, from each mistake.

It's only human, to burn a few leaves. So said Yansey. Quote Un Quotably. But never the trees. Coz they're full of beautiful birds, squirrels, and monkeys. God bless The Cheese. Re-Gret-Fully—or maybe, for the better. My offspring never bounced on his pudgy knees.

After the split, and the writ. That was it. She took the kids to The Sticks. Most lickety-splitually. What could I do? Every time I argued. My nose grew, Grew, and GREW. Our boy and our girl. Our tykes. Destined to be suburbanites. In a rendezvous with decency. Listening to the crickets every night. Running under the light, of red sunset

skies—ties, that go to the runner. All the games of innocence. In a nutshell. All the things. That I never experienced.

Barbecues. On the Fourth of July. 4-H, and apple pie. Corn on the cob. With globs of butter. Before shoveling ice cream. Into their gobs. Go-Karts. Sno-cones. Crazy-Eights, Hearts, and Go-Fish.

The ‘burbs. Where the rozzers have cobwebs. On their guns. My Exie. Originally a city gal. A blonde bombshell. Still withstanding. The time, that will tell. A soccer mom. Handling it all. With aplomb. Coming out of her shell.

My ex-family. Will never move back. To The Trop. Proper. Not many virtues. To extol. That I see, on my foot patrol. In this city. That’s the way it rolls. *Comme ci. Comme ça. Que sera sera.* You’re winsome, or you’re loathsome. But it’s all good. Hallelujah. Gloria. The Life taught me that bit of rah-rah. Sis. Boom. Bah.

I’m a klepto. And his sprats don’t need to know. Their points of origin. Now before I go. And let another bygone. Be a bygone. Can I have a photo or two. Of *mon deux*? Thank you.

You look great, by the way. Lost weight? Oh, you got a new dude. Terrific. I’m so happy. He bought you that minivan? What does he do? No tattoos…nor booze…but, but I was true to—gotcha—well, it’s getting late. Can you drive me to my hotel? With the kids? I’d like to see, hear, and talk to them. As long as I can. While I’m here, out in the clear. Our boy. Looks just like my dear baby brother. Lost to The Life, and foster parenting. A long story. A repressed memory. About something not meant to be.

Women. You can’t live with them. Or without them. Co-Nun-Drum. It’s either the pit, or the pendulum. Women. Amen brother. Let me tell ya, Jack. With my sticky hand. On a stack. You will never figure them out. One step backward, then ten steps back. Behind the line, that’s always moving—and grooving—as you’re improvising and improving. So why try dying. So keep lying. Complying. Satisfying. Whilst frying both hands, on the stove. So up and at’em. Go look for a lovely madam. A soul mate. Have faith, in fate. Coz you can’t always…go it alone.

Chapter 13

Love
Please load up your plate
And take off your shoes
As the more love you eat
The more hate you lose

If I fall in love. It will be whenever. That's all you're gonna get about my ex. Privacy please. *Privé, s'il vous plaît.* What do you want from me? But thank you. *Merci.* From the bottom of my heart. To thee. For listening. Enabling. Co-De-Pen-Dently. To my cathartically heart-aching. Self-absorbed sob story. A self-pitying pity party. Now here's a litany. About somebody special. I'd like you to meet. Be nice now, to *ma maîtresse.*

Ma maîtresse: it's French, for my mistress. Lover. *Mon Coeur. Mon Tresór*. My presently present. Preciously precious. Gal-pal. And carnal knowledger. My significant druther. *Lisette*—the name, at the tippy-top, of my black ledger.

Yum. Yum. *Ay, caramba*! Trumpets. Birds chirping. Hubba Hub Ba. Truly scrumptious. I must've done something worthless. On God's green earth. To deserve this God-sent goddess.

Ma maîtresse. My amorous source of *l'amour*. *J'adore*. For whom, I get the door for. My sweetie. The dealio, of the century. A portrait fit for The Louvre. A stunner. Jaw. Dropper. Whose hips move, while she's reading.

She's a real Betty. And I'm going steady. With this steady stream of *ingénue*. This sticky cat's moll. Who once resided. Just down the hall. *Ma maîtresse*. My idolatress. A wild flower. A randy dandelion. Voluptuous, while semi-virtuous. Her scent is rose petalous. My legs are gelatinous. *Ma maîtresse*. My mistress, who had me at hello.

Spills and thrills. I've seen the chill pills. Beans, for all her mentally-mental ills. Transcendental Medication. Do not operate heavy machinery. Meds. To get her means, to the end. Inside the medicine chest. Momma—coulda, shoulda, and woulda. Grabbed some of these tablets. To restore her faith. In insanity. As for *Lisette*. Even the best. Need a little nudge. Every now and then. So who the hell am I to judge?

I keep her, at arm's length. Which saves my strength for The Life. We get coffee. Every once in a while. At a café. A little coffee talk. Perchance, some public displays of affection...AKA, PDAs. Pet names. Smooching. Kissy-face. Footsie. Perhaps a matinee, amongst the fray. Seeing all the good movies lately. With this block-busting cineaste. In a picturesque variety. Of cinema *verité*.

Lisette was God-awfully Godly. By the way. She was a suburbanite. Wildly Bible-Belted. Her fragile heart, slightly melted. Evangelically.

Before *Lisette* met me. She had sallied off To The Trop—to dilly, as well as to dally. With her best friend. Besties. B-F-Effies. Best of friends. Forever. Dorm Mates Double dates. Post-grad travel. And now, flat-mates.

Let it be said. That Simon said. From his wrong side of the bed: Sexy. Single. Career girls. Don't mix too well in The Sticks. No siree. Verboten. Sorcery. A scarlet letter, for

all to see. As the klatches, of concerned citizens. Ratchet up, the hyperbole—anybody, gotta match? And a can of gas. To burn down, these glass houses. Ever so hypocritically.

They packed up their plants. Their pantsuits, hot pursuits, and their college degrees. And got busy. For Bohemian. Singletonian. SWF NS Must love pets Long walks on the beach. And me! New. Aged. Ecstasy. Fleeing the burbs. And its complacent complacency.

It seemed like it was yesterday. I remember. When my soon-to-be *petite amie*. First said hello to me. Visibly. Noticeably. Noticing me. Right down the hall. From my place. Serendipitous serendipity. As this pretty face, had this damage case dizzy.

First floor—Housewares! I acquired a blender. With no legal tender. For them. Zero down. Layaway at never, and a day. A blouse-warming prezzie. Most pleasant, and unaccounted for. My usual high wire act. In a midnight run to a department store. A nice little score. Through the back door.

I have sticky fingers. You know the drill—insert symbol—over the sill, and through your goods. For the pilfer and the purloin we go.

It can happen. To the best of them. You just have to keep trying. They began flying, on one engine. Winging it. On a wing, and a prayer. And a lack of commitment. This double-dare. Soon. There. After. The out-of-towners were overwhelmed, by The Trop. Their bucket filled, to the top—where's a copper, when ya need one? Trash strikes. Transit strikes. Tax hikes. Stolen bikes. Transients, mashers, and the like.

Crime rate. The daily slaughter. Of the police blotter. Bothering these two fish. Out of water. *Lisette* was working hard, at her odd job. Paying the rent on this house of cards. Whilst her friend, became a crazy slob. By putting the meth. Into the method to her madness. With that glass pipe in her gob.

I had thought. I had done the lot. Seen, just about every mean thing…Meth-Am-Pheta-Mine. Crystal meth—the absolute death, of just about any human being. A pistol, to your head. The gasoline. Fueling the death machine. The short good-bye. Frying your mind. Grinding your teeth. Sores, for all to see. Take two, and crawl home in the morning.

Meth. I've got no color. To go with this hat. The fast track. To becoming a mad sack. Flat, on your back. Smacking your gums, amongst the bums. In the street.

We're not in Kathmandu. Anymore. She ended it. My future *maîtresse*. In this stark passage. She stepped into the box. As the ump said splatter-up…

…Follow the bouncing brawl—and head, to the fall-out shelter. Nuclear. Winter. Spring, summer, and fall. Swallowing her whole. ICBMs. Alongside the thems, and the breaks. *Lisette.* My damsel, in distress. Ve-He-Mently. Hashing out inferences—hate, beyond recognition. Her friend was a ten-over-sixish vixen. This dame made Oinkle seem like a bantamweight. About as black, and as blue. As I've ever seen. Crossing the border, of civilization.

Calling all cars. Calling all cars. Restraining. The order of the day. I made my play. Vi-Cariously. I called the cops. Me, of all people. Dropped a dime. For the second time. Or was it a quarter now?

Roger that. Roger. Dodger. This complaint lodger. Over and out. Red rover, red rover, please send the crushers right over. That night of their nastiest fight. Un-Be-Lievable. Hell had frozen over. Old Roger, even needed a pullover.

For all other emergencies. Please press one. Yours truly. Called to duty. This tipster. Con-Scripted. The sticky tipster. Called from the pay phone. Around the corner. No bills. It was that serious. No records. No trail. No crushers.

Lisette. My fetchingly feted *femme fatale.* Still vibrant, and radiating. Amongst all the irate tirading. Her ex-bestie conducted quite the train wreck. Spitting her infinitives. With the expletives, as well as the deleteds. Words. That. Hurt. Directed at *Lisette*. Sitting anxiously. In her front row seat. Under the burning bus. Feeling the heat.

End of Part 1 of Splattery (Copyright © 2007, 2010, 2012, and 2024 by Stephen T. Savage)