

Not Lou

Lou had such a great vibe it was hard to believe he was a pig. Graphing our every movement, shuttering in to freeze our steaming gestures – his beneficent lens salving our drive for so much focus – our yearning to give away our skins – our bottomless appetite for fear – and the wonder is I can't remember him ever setting us up, just hanging out with his camera and press pass in case something heavy went down which of course it always did. The only shoot Lou ever styled was the pinup – the naked group grope chorus line *con* carbines tableau in the basement commune: clenched fists and blood orange oval *Crazie* buttons double-face taped to our nipples like we'd popped them through the living flesh and his shutter heard, if not round the world, then at least all the way from the hallowed halls of the Red Squad to the sixth precinct locker room – Lou shooting with the same affable cool he'd perfected in the heat of more demos than you could shake a fist at – not batting an eye as Sister C.'s tanktop came off and we, his negative stock, always gave up our light to him, why not? – for Lou was our own working-class uncle Riefenstahl, our Nikon echo confidante who even tried to warn us off the bust he'd set us up for – but here's the way it came down, here's the encounter: Sister C. draping her fine body across the hood of the Coupe de Ville that suddenly turned pink, the way objects comply to honor the logic of a higher pharmacology, and there is Lou materializing like we'd birthed him sweatlike from our collective brow, that hot town Sunday forenoon, just on his way to nowhere in particular and isn't it amazing how comfortable we all feel with him – him old enough to be our father, but no weird vibe – not like those Stalinist dinosaurs for whom the revolution was definitively not groovy, much less a cocktail party of Young Lords' alchemical reefer, its whip n' chill chaser vomited into the sink we all forgot was clogged, and as the morning's trip prematurely peaks then starts to nose dive we

recognize in an instant What Must Be Done which is to vector home on our errant acid man and prevail upon him to do the righteous thing – and though he might be floating any block from Astor to the estuary, Thirteenth to Houston – we few, we happy few, we band of brothers – and Sister C. too – are triumphs of the lysergic will, imbued with the imminence that suffuses Coup de Villes their chameleon hues, then offers up the folks you are looking for without a clue as to who they are, and sometimes absent even the notion that you were looking for them in the first place – and the spontaneous collective judgement of our expeditionary force encountering Lou is that he could not, simply could not be a pig, whereas *who knew* about comrade W., with his Madame Binh fixation, or the prodigal R. with his ruling-class pedigree and Kipling predilections, who a year later tripped all the way to Attica to stand at Sam’s side when the snipers took him out – and who could say for sure about all those privileged motherfuckers, with their strange rigid takes on the struggle, and for whom the struggle was a matter of discipline – of party and colon – why they might either be working for the Man or maybe they *were* the Man in some self-deluded incarnation? Then it’s bye Lou and head crosstown to the spot where a car just happens to be burning at the corner of Fifth and B to the cheers of multitudes dangling off radiators, did I say fire escapes? – and here, just where we knew we’d find him sits Mr. Palpably Inadequate Acid himself, scoping out the bonfire, innocent as a lamb, did I say bomb? – and shocked and dismayed by the tale of our abortive get-off and more than delighted to hook us up with another hit for he would never countenance us hanging midway between chemistries if he had anything to say about it – see I was too young to understand about typologies: that flaming cars are bushes with carburetors whose prefiguration heat is something to dangle from radiators about and salute the coming dawn, but having seen with my own eyes Sister C. azimuthing her fine arch over the loftbed edge and into the garden, I knew that death is no more to be feared than rhythm or electricity – that it’s something

that cues you, then moves you *around* to its own score and that if anyone's a pig, no it could never be Lou.

Everything Must Go

In daylight, it was easy for Steve and me to laugh at the bullet holes pocking the tin cornice. Even the pigeons laughed, but it wouldn't have been so hilarious if we'd caught one of them.

This was our first day up on the roof in a week. The last time we were there was under considerably different circumstances. One, two, three we had shouted and heaved the gallon zinfandel molotov jugs as hard as we could toward the intersection. Sixth and C was being held by two squad cars and a line of tactical pigs in their crowd control finery. Steve's jug went about twice as far as mine, a lovely arc, glimpsed by firelight and cherrytop, primarily on account of his maximally pumped upper body. This is what happens when you read comic books and realize there is an alternative to having sand kicked in your face. My solution had been to avoid the beach, but Steve – since he had genetically topped out at 5' 2" opted to expand laterally. This effort had certainly gained him *lebensraum*, though this came with a price. I noticed that despite being temperamentally much more easygoing than me, he got into a lot more fights – his knuckles were endlessly iodined. I ascribed this – particularly when zombified on his state-of-the-art marijuana to the blurred circularity of form and function.

Damn he must have put some english on that cocktail because the sounds that came off that streetcorner were cong-fucking-crete: A) the dead silence before the concussion; B) the fusillade immediately after impact, followed hard upon by C) the wounded sirens of retreat. But by the time they'd gotten off their volley we were

halfway back across the rooftops to our building, vaulting the interceding walls, trying not to fall down the airshafts.

That might have been the night I felt totally legitimate, like whipping out plastic and feeling alright, like everything could be gathered together – that successful resolutions were possible – that I was bound for glory and the neighborhood was coming with me. But it was also the night of the young – stoned – clinicians and if we had rained brimstone down to liberate our corner, the street did not shrink from favoring us in return with an unsought baptism. It was the first time I had seen arterial blood. We'd improvised an aid station in the ground floor apartment, patching the walking wounded – victims of the supermarket gate removal – this accomplished by a wondrously effective form of urban tractor pull employing chains and the vigorous locomotion of the Pontiac V-8. Other patients had encountered the flying byproducts of the shopwindow deglazing during the putative fire sale. Then they brought in a live, almost dead one. He – but it might have been a girl – was so thin, it was like cradling a bunch of sticks and even if he hadn't been pretty much exsanguinated, would have still been nodding out. The only other thing I noticed about the arm was how white it was, like furry alabaster, and thanks to Steve's undulating reefer, how absent of veins, how spiked out, how unrivered, how desertified. We managed to stop the blood with one of the suspenders I had gleaned on my first pass at the haberdashery – they were to go with the corduroys – which, in my haste turned out to be the reverse of my waist and inseam measurements – this before the cops even showed up, before they'd tried to advance – I swear – in a phalanx down Fifth Street to whirl in jumbled retreat under fire, but two whole convulsed days after they'd beaten some kid from Pitt Street into a coma – which was the flashpoint – and after years of the supermarket jacking up the prices thirty percent on check day. And now Steve is holding the door open for me –

and shit, there's Old Hickory, old trail of tears himself winking at me off a twenty dollar bill, just lying there on the bloody tiles and I tell myself I'll come back for you later but of course he's gone by the time I do and outside there are no pigs *anywhere* and only one car, driving north, its trailing muffler abrading fireworks left and right and now Steve is waving his pumped little arms, running in front of the Pontiac and it hits him, spreadeagles him on the hood, but the motherfucker stops and in that second I whip open the back door and lay my patient across the seat, my tourniqueted bundle of sticks shaped like a child and in my best dispatcher voice command: To the Beth Israel E.R. good coachman, and don't spare the horses! They zoom up Avenue C looking very much, from my perspective, like a miniature Chinatown dragon parade. Steve is in the passenger seat with his arm convivially round the driver's shoulder, making sure he kept the hammer down.

Amazingly enough, Al's store didn't get looted. Maybe he had forgotten how, or else never learned to treat poor people like shit. For some reason – though he had no window gates and *ropa para niños* always travel fast in times of civil unrest – no one touched the place. I'll never be sure why. But Al was no slumlord. His – ours – was the only building he owned. And he seemed to be under the delusion that this was still a Jewish neighborhood because his daughter – and though shy, she wasn't bad looking – was his most prominent display, perched in her pillbox hat on a cardboard carton pedestal amidst the markdown tables spilling onto the sidewalk. He tried to fix her up with Steve – a full-blooded Yid, but who, alas for Al, was into black girls and kohl-eyed, Sabra types. Rebuffed, Al got so desperate he turned to me – a stone polymorph. Even then he must have known that if it could be done, I'd be the one – though I'd never make it through med school – to perfect the painless operation that dissolves connective tissue, but leaves visible form in place.

Two Line Struggle

“No one saw nothing,” Fireplug imperatived at me and Finnie as we wheeled away from bungling the liberation of the last cash payroll in all of Christendom. Even though he had pulled the trigger, all of us were aware that we were now collectively gathered in an eternal statutory embrace. There is no unmurdering someone. Fireplug – whose real name has the sonic effect of a blackjack rapping you in the medulla – had a mug like the spitting reductive anagram of our late comrades Stalin and Trotsky. His signal characteristic being emphatic pronouncements of the obvious, FP was referred to, even by his friends, as the Original Blunt Instrument.

“You asshole!” shrieked Finnie, his coke bottle glasses fogging in anticipation of the collapse of our pathetic defense before an onslaught of unimpeachable forensics and his inevitable embuggerment at the hands of an obese recidivist biker patriarch. “You fucking psychopath!” now shaking Fireplug by his peajacket collar and filling the air with panicked backseat abandon. “I can’t believe you wasted him – and for nothing!”

I for one had no trouble believing that FP would waste him or anyone – us for that matter. The watchman had, after all, hit the alarm and most certainly could have identified Fireplug as a disgruntled former employee of the plumbing supply concern, attempting to disguise himself behind a mesh of distressed pantyhose and a crawful of marbles. What I couldn’t fathom was how such a simple inside job could go so wildly awry – and on top of that, our not even getting the money. I regretted giving Fireplug the widewale corduroys he was wearing that very moment – pants I had selectively looted from the local haberdashery during a riot that past midsummer.

Disappointingly, they turned out to be the reverse of my measurements – but FP had

lucked out since his waist was equal to my inseam and vice versa.

All up the turnpike, FP bore Finnie's hysteria with a beleaguered stoicism often attributed to the long-suffering husbands of borderline sitcom harpies – his only sign of agitation being a rhythmic stroking of his Joe Steel moustache with the teeth of his prognathous jaw. My own panic blew inwards. It was clear that my life was, after a fashion, as over as the watchman's – our fates linked by my imbecility at having allowed myself to be centrifuged into this doomed gambit – and the guard's by his compulsive dog faith in the sanctity of other people's money.

It was snowing on the parkway – hard to believe in anything but snow, easy now to consign Fireplug's resolute point blank gesture – that in one stroke had evacuated us all far beyond the pale – to the realm of transient delusion. I passed another car and my voice rang like the operator on a primitive trunk call: "Bro, you better lose the piece *and* the dope." FP shot me an accusatory glance – how could I possibly think he had forgotten? He was just waiting for the right moment and here I was getting on his case. Nevertheless he cracked the window and was preparing, with obvious reluctance, to render the cornerstones of his identity into the blizzard when a state police car came out of nowhere and pulled alongside in a gorgeous panoply of pulsating light.

The frozen air gusting through the open window awakened Finnie just in time for his panic to reignite in exponential measure. "Oh shit!" he screamed, clawing my shoulders, "It's the pigs!" Inadvertently I floored the accelerator and the car surged, pitching him backwards. In the rearview mirror I saw him scrunch into the corner of the seat, sullenly previsualizing the brutalities soon to be visited upon him. I hit the brakes. The Rambler executed a protracted slalom across both lanes of glistening powder before coming to rest on the shoulder, its nose dipping slightly into the ditch. Behind us the lights whirled in tawdry aurora splendor. I thought of Coppelia Street – a bar the size of a plane hangar where amidst neon fibrillations hundreds of women

danced bare-breasted – among them my sometime girlfriend who had once, eons before, flung a possessive leg over me in the black leather waterbed in our cadged crashpad with: *Leary Lives/Free the Chicago Seven* graffitied on the wall downstairs. Her gesture had imparted, among other things, the transient and chimerical sensation that I had finally arrived somewhere. In close succession, two doors slammed shut.

“Try not to shoot the pigs,” I said to FP, my whole frame rattling like a deranged castanet ensemble *sin guitarras*. FP, who I could tell was, at that instant, engaged in cost-benefit analysis of blowing his way out of pork city, hesitated momentarily before shoving the .38 and the freezer bag of dope under the seat. The windshield wipers persisted in their futility. Finnie began to wheeze with the onset of an asthma attack, but remained immobile. Normally he’d have whipped out his inhaler and gotten off a few short bursts by now, but I’m sure that he too saw projected on his internal TV screen a press conference wherein the state police commissioner disclaimed that in the stygian gloom the apprehending officers observed the subject reaching for a shiny object and had therefore collectively emptied their service revolvers in self-defense and according to established procedures.

A white glare blasted through my window. I rolled it down, but could see nothing beyond the corona of a monstrous industrial flashlight and whirling snow. The requisite, yet disembodied demand for documentation jogged a rudimentary survival instinct in me which leaped to the fore in all its cosmic perversity. “Yas?!” I enquired, squinting authentically. The demand was repeated with emphasis. “Yas! Yas!” I bobbed my head with subservient eagerness and scrambled over FP, clawing my way through the detritus of the glove compartment – protracting this project for an unconscionable length of time. Finally I proffered several pieces of paper, selected with great earnestness, yet at random, into the squall outside, proudly enumerating: “Yas leesense! Yas insooranse! Yas ra-ji-stray-shon! Yas teetle!”

I could feel FP's welling revulsion at my obsequious charade. I knew that any second he would explode in a savage denunciation of the violation of his rights by KKKapital and its porcine lackeys. Suffused with a desperate energy, a split second ahead of his diatribe, I leaped out into the night. A safety clicked and I grimaced into the flood of juridical illumination.

Rolling waves of sound emanated from the direction of twin gray monoliths.
"The registration on this car has expired."

"Yas! Yas! Expird! Can you say me way to Bore-ling-ton? We go Bore-ling-ton for inspakshun! We work!" I proclaimed enthusiastically, stumbling toward the rear of the car. I began untwisting the wire hanger that held the trunk shut. Another safety click. I whipped open the trunk lid, half expecting the gesture to be my last, and proudly displayed our collection of rollers, paint pans, sheetrock tape and tubs of joint compound. "We work!" I shouted again with brazen good fellowship, hugging myself with cold and rocking from side to side. "Bast place Amarika!" I thumped my chest with conviction and fixed my eyes on an imaginary beacon of Liberty rising beyond the silent, phantom silhouettes. I froze in tableau for what seemed like a lifetime, plashed from behind by cherry syrup and aqua velva and frontally bathed in bleached, unwavering radiance. A hand burst into visibility, thrusting my papers back at me. I clutched them and smiled, cocking my head. Suddenly, the white light vanished leaving only red-blue pulsations to illuminate the spiraling flakes. There was a crunching of snow on gravel followed by two door slams. "Pleece, Bore-ling-ton?!" I implored querulously, pushing my luck beyond all reasonable limits and squinting into the headlights that veered away and U-turned into the infinite snowscape.

I twisted the hanger back through the hole of the punched out trunk lock, then walked around and opened my door. In the darkness, I couldn't see FP, but felt his eyes burning with hostility and heard Finnie blasting away with his Primatine mist.

“Let me have the piece.” It was as heavy in my palm as a miniature anvil. I stumbled across the ditch and up the embankment, stopping only when I walked chest first into the snow fence. Holding the gun by its barrel, I flung it like a boomerang into the forest. I let FP keep his dope.