

**Some stories are pure cinema,
movies, screenplays of love's
unending desire.**

How Buddy Left Me

Loneliness grows like thistle in a heart cracked and drained of love. Yeah. Sure. Buddy would have laughed at my saying that for all my knowing him, because Buddy thought only simple thoughts. I was more complicated. Buddy played Puck to my Hamlet. I needed him to pare me down. I needed him to simplify my head. I needed him to show me that what was, simply, was. Buddy, that summer of '71, was so handsome and innocent he put me in mind of the teenaged Billy Budd standing on the deck of a sailing ship, waiting to be hanged, turning his angelic blond face eastwards toward the rose of early dawn.

In those days, Buddy was nobody's fool. He thought only simple animal thoughts of eating and sleeping and making love. He was the salt of the earth. He never analyzed a thing in his life. He smiled. He cried. He knew the difference between good and evil. That was enough. When he was cold, he shivered. When hot, he sweat sweet sweat. When he saw an asshole of the worst kind, he punched him out. When he saw an asshole of the best kind, his boner inched hard and honest down the leg of his jeans. Buddy was that natural. That whole. Come from dirt-poor folks, who spent everything they had on a new car that killed them, he was a drop-dead blond kid and his innocence, like his big cock, was his strong suit.

Before I mention exactly how Buddy came to live with me for the best year of my life, I must explain, explain, mind you, not apologize, that Buddy was so appealing as an eighteen-year-old that I was the first man of many to give him the shirt off my back. After two months together, I gave him the keys to Blue Boy, my 1950 Ford pickup. He cavorted like the calf he was and carried on like I'd given him the world on four wheels. In a sense, I had. With keys in his hand and cash he'd earned in his jeans, Buddy easily mapped his way the sixty miles south from my dairy farm in Sonoma County to the Golden Gate Bridge.

That summer of '71, if you were going to San Francisco, you still wore flowers in your hair. Buddy liked the Day-Glo psychedelia of the Haight-Ashbury well enough. Besides me, in those first two exclusive months, Buddy had never had sex with anyone. All he needed was opportunity. In San Francisco, he found it. And attention. For all his sunny good looks and fine body and country charm, he was noticed.

Grown men, cruising the delirious Haight for fresh meat, sensed Buddy was special. His innate shyness, they took for the tease of a hustler. The first time the first man sucked Buddy's uncut dick in a gas station toilet, he paid Buddy ten bucks.

Buddy came home to me and said, "Go figure. I was the one who got the blowjob."

I took his ten-dollar bill and framed it and hung it on the wall the way small businesses hang up the first dollar they make. Why not? I was older. It was fun.

He pointed at the framed ten-spot.

"Right," I said, and counted out ten ones into his hard palm.

"Just kidding," he said. He gave me back the money with a big kiss.

Buddy, the uncomplicated innocent, could never have thought up being paid as trade, but he liked the novel idea. What kid wouldn't?

Hustling was an easy habit to acquire.

Buddy, driving Blue Boy, branched out from the Haight to Polk Street which was an easy slide through the Tenderloin to the intersection of Golden Gate Avenue with Market Street. The sign over the point of the triangular corner store marked the hustlers' main station, Flagg Bros, which was pronounced "Fag Bros," and was no more than a hop, scotch, and a jump from the infamous Old Crow, one of the City's oldest hustler bars.

Parked in the pickup, curbside on Market Street, Buddy watched the foot traffic ebb and flow propelled by drugs and cash and sex and cash. The male hustlers, hardly older than he was, looked dirty, almost as thin as street people, especially with their trashier young peroxide bitches in tow. He didn't feel superior to them, he told me. He felt different from them. He retreated to more subtle ways in more casual places: movie theaters, adult bookstores with gloryholes, Golden Gate Park, the rocky woods at Land's End.

Sex was everywhere.

Always the scene was the same. Buddy never mentioned money. He merely smiled that killer smile of his, exposing the appealing gap between his two front teeth. Grown men melted. Here they had this kid, this guy,

this man who looked like he wouldn't go with anybody but God himself, and he was with them. They were very big on tipping Buddy generously. If lightning could strike once, maybe it could strike again. "See ya around, Buddy....OK?" Even Johns, who were so tight they squeaked, out shopping for cheap tricks, often and gladly doubled the going rate, at their own insistence, for the fifteen minutes or fifteen hours spent in the pleasure of Buddy's company.

Naturally, everyone thought Buddy was a hustler, because men paid him money for his body. But the truth was the men, themselves faithless husbands and closeted fathers and gay cologne queens, were the real hustlers. They hustled Buddy. His Sistine body was worth more than their U.S. Mint money.

The Johns flashed their cold cash. They asked him to give them attitude. They begged him to flex his hard biceps. They implored him to let them peel his foreskin back and chow down on his hard cock. They beseeched him to set the twin cupcakes of his butt down on glass coffee tables, while they lay underneath on their backs in a sprawl of magazines, beating their meat, raising their faces to tongue the hot glass pressed against his blond asshole.

The Johns knew what they wanted and they ordered ala carte. Forty bucks for generic openers. Ten bucks more for this specialty act. Twenty bucks more for that. Without even trying, Buddy, much obliged, thank you, could turn a basic forty-dollar trick into a hundred-buck affair without ever mentioning money. He was never a hustler in the gold-digger sense. What he was, was desire. And what men desire, they expect to come with a price tag. Women and divorce taught them that. In Buddy's case, the truth was he never had to do more than stand in the sun or hang out on a corner at midnight in the rain, and a crowd would gather.

During that golden year of his weekend adventures, Buddy always came home in old Blue Boy to me, and to the week's chores. I don't protest too much when I say I was never once jealous of the wild oats I knew he had to sow. How could I ever mind the crowds that gathered or the men who paid for his presence? Their affirmation served only to affirm mine that Edward Buddy Brooks was one of those young men on whom, when the gods smile, they positively grin.

With his muscular tattooed arms, Buddy looked like the tough kid brother of the boy next door. He was trade okay. It was too bad a rough world fighting a dirty little war in Vietnam turned him into rough trade.

Time moves fast the day of an execution.

For three years in the Marines, Buddy kept the company of other men. The day before his nineteenth birthday, he had in all sincerity stripped off his T-shirt for the flustered recruiting sergeant, who approved of his muscular arms and chest, but failed to find words to make any comment on the big rod Buddy was packing in his faded blue jeans. The sergeant knew a Marine when he saw one. Within seventy-two hours, Buddy was on his way to the San Diego Recruiting Depot. Finally, nearly two years after his Marine Corps hitch, he was twenty-four years old and sentenced to death.

The Supreme Court Ruled 5-4 that the Death Penalty as it is now used in the United States is unlawful. Only three of the justices in the majority seemed to hold, however, that it was unconstitutional because it was of its nature a cruel and unusual form of punishment. The other two found it to be cruel and unusual only because, in the words of one justice, it is now "so wantonly and freakishly imposed." The dissenting justices, for their part, felt generally that to retain or abolish capital punishment was a decision the people ought to make through their legislatures, not the courts. The ruling thus left the way open for states to continue to impose death as a penalty if they can write new laws.

The day Buddy left for the Corps was the saddest I'd seen. Till now. I can tell you that. I remember how I'd seen him first when he was no more than a whelp of a kid, snot-nosed and dusty-blond, sitting on the steps of his Aunt Mim Bailey's house. He rocked on those white-washed steps staring like he was seeing things others couldn't see. His Aunt Mim who'd taken him in when his parents were killed in a fiery car crash on the Golden Gate Bridge said she'd never seen a boy like him.

"He don't say two words a day," Aunt Mim said. "Seems like that young boy needs somethin' I ain't got. He won't let me touch him and he ain't gettin' any cleaner sittin' around lettin' the dust settle on him. An' me with a bad heart, not knowin' how much ruzzabuzza, ruzzabuzza, ruzzabuzza."

To make her long story short, it took me three years to get to know Buddy, and for him to trust me. I hired him to help once in awhile with small chores, so by July 4, 1971, when he turned eighteen, Buddy was celebrating Independence Day with me and had been working over at my small ranch so regularly I gave him a special birthday present and hired him on as a hand. He went nuts! By August, I had that kid, already fairly strong for his age, working like a man alongside me and skinny-dipping late afternoons in the irrigation ditch. Even then he showed promise of how he'd grow. He was, as I said, a fresh eighteen, looking like he was

sweet sixteen and never been kissed, and I was, that summer of '71, getting up there, turning thirty-two.

"Hey, Buddy! Jump on in!"

Buddy stood on the green bank, the dazzling California sun lighting his body. He was his full five-foot-eight, but slender yet, with only the sinewy promise of the muscle that would soon fill out his chest and shoulders, thighs and arms. The sun and wet glistened on his blond hair. He stood, poised for a moment, as if he knew I studied him. Even though his groin blossomed with golden hair, his pubescence was no embarrassment to him. In fact, his arms reached forward, left hand cupping his furry balls and his right hand tugging at his peter.

"Don't want to get 'em cold, huh?" I said.

"Don't want 'em to shrivel up." He smiled at me. "With my pa being dead, I gotta take care a the family jewels."

We both looked at his cock. It was thick. It was long. Its pink head peeked out roundly through the iris eye of its heavy foreskin. His equipment looked almost too big for his body. He had the full-blown tools of a man, but his body, though hard and well defined, still lacked bulk hefty enough to match the authority of his cock and balls. I knew looking at him that day, that his shyness would leave, his bulk would come, and a hard world would beat a path to his crotch.

"Jump!" I ordered.

He obeyed.

For a moment, the spot he occupied against the sky stood empty as if something simple and straight-forward had been subtracted from a perfectly balanced equation. For a still longer moment, he was gone in a splash. He disappeared under the water. Droplets of spray splashed in slow motion into a high arc which fell like a crown of rain on his golden head as he bobbed to the surface.

Time moves fast the day of an execution. To save the undertaker time, the prisoner is showered and the prison barber shaves the man and clips his hair.

Buddy jumped up, breaking the water with a splash, and swung his wet hair from his eyes, puckered his lips and spritzed water at me. Then, laughing, he dived again beneath the surface, his bare ass arching up, two white moons flashing tight from the transparent green water. Beneath the surface, I felt his hands pull my ankles apart, the way a kid'll do to his dad. Then his body sliced between my legs. He slowed, dawdling beneath me, tickling my feet.

Without surfacing for another breath, he turned underwater, and swam through my legs on his back, looking up, allowing the air filling his

lungs to raise his face slowly up my thighs. A mixture of bubbles and hair like blond seaweed, and what I was surprised to find, his tongue, grazed around my balls. All the bubbling float of it bobbed my hardening cock up against my belly to my navel. When he surfaced, spewing flume, he laughed at my surprised look.

"I had you figured," he said simply. "You're like me."

My cock stiffed its head up like a buoy on the water.

He reached for both mine and his.

"Let's go up to the house," I said.

"Let's stay here." He smiled, because he knew he was right. Instinctively. No one around. No need to hide away. I was the one getting complicated.

He put his arms around me and pressed his face in close. My arms folded him in. The cool water between us gushed out and warm flesh touched warm flesh. He wrapped his legs around mine. His cock, hard and stiff and big, throbbed against the hair of my belly.

I held him and held him and held him. Then gently I floated him on his back to the bank and laid him down in the grass. Half in the water, I lay between his legs, with his feet still in the stream. He looked straight toward the open sky. His arms lay taut at his sides. His cock bobbed up, throbbing, hard. He stretched back, waiting, expecting something from me that he had only half-imagined or half-heard about.

My fist closed around his man-sized cock. I squeezed it hard. It inched up even farther around my hand. Its color was that raw red-purple peculiar to fair, blue-veined dicks rooted in a curly nest of blond hair. A dragonfly executed delicate aerobatics over us. The parched summer air dried the big mushroom head of his dick. My squeezing pressure caused a drop of clear gleet to ease its way from the soft mouth of his prick as I stretched his foreskin down and back. His right hand raised to touch again his low-hanging balls. My tongue followed, rolling his balls loosely back and forth, feeling the new hair soft as fur on my tongue.

Gently I pulled his cock to my lips. I kissed it, happy I was the first, glad for him I would not be the last. My tongue caressed the head of it and traced the heavy veins down the length of his shaft. Even after his long swim, horsing around in the water, the soft down of his crotch smelled of the sweat he had worked up that day in the fields.

Stationed between his legs, I pulled his cock down and towards me, aiming the shaft of it straight though my mouth into the back of my open throat. My slide down on him was slow enough to make the memory of this first-time swallow last a lifetime: at least mine and probably his.

Buddy's virgin body went rigid with pleasure. Holding my breath, I swallowed his thick uncut cock. Deep inside, my throat muscles clutched and pulled the sensitive head while my lips held firm to the root of his shaft. My tongue gleaned out the clean clots of fresh young headcheese around the corona and under the still unretracted foreskin. My nose was buried in the soft blond down of his sweet crotch.

Three times I came up for air as he had come from beneath the water's surface. My second dive down on his prick, he let out a small moan that added to the arch of his young body. On the third, his hands grasped my swallowing, bobbing head, and held me firmly in place. Looking up, I watched his strong young pecs contract. The veins stood out on his forearms. His belly tightened to a washboard. His hips raised. The full rounds of his buttocks tightened. Backed by the loud moan of his first pleasure, he contracted totally. The spasm wrenched his shoulders from the ground like a wrestler bouncing off the mat. The whole of him turned inside out and shot out through his cock into my throat, foaming straight up, overflowing into my mouth, flooding even up into my nose, so the taste and smell and touch of him merged into a shock wave that itself quaked my own body, spilling my own seed into the slow current of the warm stream.

By supertime, the best kind of post-nasal drip, his cum, trickled down the back of my throat. Buddy found it both gross and funny. Later that evening, he telephoned his Aunt Mim that he would stay the night the better to help me with the early morning chores. She could not help but wonder that this boy who had kept so quietly to himself in the years since his parents fiery death was that night on the phone talking a blue streak.

What she didn't know was what had passed between us.

I thought it touching that to dial up his aunt he had slipped from his nakedness into his clothes, as if the woman were something to guard against.

The prisoner puts on his burial clothes: a clean khaki shirt, a short jacket, and khaki pants. There are no shoes. He will walk barefoot to his execution.

Buddy dropped the telephone into its cradle. He said nothing, but his face looked final, as if he had closed a coffin on all his past. I knew he would never live with his aunt again. As long as he wanted, he could live with me. He turned from the phone and slowly let his eyes wander up my naked body.

I remember being sprawled back on a cowhide in a low-slung canvas chair, feeling the soft hairs of the hide scratch into my backside. He looked at me so hard that his eyes reflected a picture of me I'd never seen: my legs

spread wide apart, feet laced up in scuffed workboots, thick wool socks rising tight on my calves. His eyes zeroed in on my cock. It lay flopped up and over on my left thigh. His look made it harden. As it slowly stiffened, I could feel it roll and push itself out across my leg until, like some time-lapse photography of a hearty seedling, my dick sprouted straight up for his approval. It was like Buddy was looking at me for the first time, really seeing me with those blue eyes of his. Really seeing right through the dark hair on my belly and up to the thicker hair on my chest. Sort of embarrassed, I fingered my moustache and pulled my hand across my unshaven chin.

“Shit!” I said.

Because I knew I loved him.

The night of the execution the state trooper who had made the final arrest of the prisoner showed up to watch the execution. “I know the punk. He’s a no good sonuvabitch and it’ll be a pleasure to watch him die.”

Buddy stripped off his jeans. Maybe to match my nakedness; maybe to relieve my slight embarrassment. He realized I loved him, and maybe, in his way, he loved me too. Anyway, I dragged the cowhide to the floor and dropped him down on top of it, flat on his belly. The muscles along his spine were firm arrows pointing down to the golden mounds of his butt. I put my hands, raw and strong, against his soft blond flesh. I smoothed the cheeks of his ass. Then with insistent pressure, I pulled his buns apart. I dipped and tongued his ass. He relaxed. His cleft widened to expose the tight rose-pucker of his unplumbed butt.

He was tense. His fists clenched. But he was game.

On my knees, between his legs, I leaned forward. Again, my two-days’ stubble of beard grated into his crack. I pushed the wet of my tongue against the heat of his asshole. Tweaked and twirled and twisted, his tight pucker began to yield, and more, to bud and bloom. Everything Buddy ever did came natural to him. Suddenly he was ready and my stiffened tongue slid easily through the gates of flesh into the warm hall of his ass. His heat met mine. The rough buds of my tongue slipped down his silken darkness. A sweet musk taste filled my mouth. Small hairs curled up from his cleft to scour my lips. He was clean and redolent as earth and grass after a mountain shower.

With my tongue deep inside him, I felt his muscle contract wanting more. I straightened up and pulled his belt from his jeans. I tightened it around his naked waist. He understood. He lifted his hips, and with the leather belt as a handle, I pulled him into position: his chest and elbows on the floor, his ass up and supported on his squat wrestler’s thighs.

Carefully, the head of my cock docked with the portal of his young ass. He strained to receive it. His young body shined with sweat. Slowly the slit at my cockhead slipped inside the tongue-wet darkness. His innocent asshole stretched slowly to please me. Evenly, I pushed. Evenly, he began to receive. Less suddenly than his ass had grasped my tongue, the lips of his ass began to nibble at more of my easy-going cock. A vein in my dick throbbed visibly as if his tight pressure would explode it like a pipe bomb.

The first inch of penetration.

My cock began to make his asshole blossom. The full rosy petals of it sucked another two inches of my hardness into his warmth.

In his throat little grunts of discomfort turned to moans of pleasure. One of his hands reached under for his own cock. His other hand reached back to my balls and pulled me the last five inches deep into his interior. His tight young hips began to revolve, if not begging for more, then offering more.

In answer, I grabbed with both hands the belt around his waist to hold him steady like reins on a young colt. My cock pulled nearly out and eased all the way back in; almost out and in, slowly, then faster. He bucked and reared up under me holding onto the belt. I rode him hard and deep, harder and deeper until my fuck surged up somewhere behind my eyes, shot down my spine, out my cock, and into his ass. The flood rushing deep into the moaning boy.

At almost the same instant, Buddy's cherry broke free. He quaked. An immense shiver through the length of his body vibrated my cock inside him, and the rain of his cum spilled out white and thick from his big prick. He moaned and wriggled impaled on my cock. Then he sagged slowly to the floor, my full weight on top of him, my dick sheathed inside him. We lay like that for a long embrace, until his quick short breaths and my deep long ones met somewhere in the middle and, breathing together, we dozed into the sweet sleep of new lovers.

At about 5 PM the prisoner eats his last meal, whatever he wants, and about 9:30 PM the assistant warden reads his death warrant to him—the court order to put him to death “before the hour of sunrise” the next day.

My days and nights with Buddy became months that lengthened almost to a year, before all the accumulation of later months became those years that came between us as the world went mad over that dirty little war in Vietnam. That apocalypse that made no sense caught Buddy up. Its athletic violence, its muscular patriotism, inspired him so much, no matter what I said, that one summer morning in 1972, his nineteenth birthday,

he kicked back our sheets, rolled his full-grown heft on top of me, cock to cock, and held my face between his hands, holding me as if for one last time, saying only that he just had to go do it. And he did. In fact, he had already enlisted in the Marines the day before.

He turned twenty in Nam. I sent him a package at Tonsonut Air Base. In return, I found in my mail a series of postcards. Several from Saigon. One from Sydney. He made mention of a USMC Captain who took him all the places worth seeing. Then he drew one of those goddam SMILE faces. The officer's name was Bill. He was twenty-three. Buddy said the Captain reminded him of me.

The lines I could read between.

To that man I was grateful. He was taking good care of Buddy. Of that man I was jealous. Neither emotion mattered. Life was complicated enough to suit my penchant for complications. Buddy and I were at long distance. So long and so far that for months, as the war built to a climax, I heard nothing.

"No news," his Aunt Mim Bailey told me one summer afternoon when I pulled up next to her Chevy station wagon at a gas station, "is good news. Especially when you've got a boy in the service. I don't suppose you'd quite understand that."

"Why not?" I asked.

"You're almost thirty-five..."

"I just turned thirty-two."

"...and you don't have any children to worry about."

"I'm not married," I decided to play her game and see what she was really trying to tell me.

"Of course, you're not married," Aunt Mim said. "You're a born bachelor." She winked. "I knew lots of wonderful bachelors in my day. I'd be a long-time married woman today if I could have had me one of those bachelors, but they all was lookin' for somethin' else. God knows what. Probably other bachelors. But I sure thought the world of 'em. I still do."

"I know you know what you're saying, Mizz Bailey," I said. "And I thank you."

"Don't you worry about Buddy," she said. "Remember, he's our boy. No news is good news."

"Yeah," I said. On the truck seat next to me lay a copy of *Life* magazine, one of the last regular weekly issues, the one where they filled five or six pages with 2x2 pictures of the boys killed that week in the war. It was like a graduation yearbook of dead seniors. I tore the issue up. No way was Buddy going to be killed. No way.

Near midnight, the prison chaplain visits the prisoner to pray with him or hear his last confession. These hours between midnight and pre-dawn are the longest and coldest hours for the prisoner finally separated from all others in a holding cell situated one long hallway from the execution chamber. Isolated, finally alone, he waits. Outside the prison gates, a hearse with an empty coffin is admitted and directed to park in the reserved space near the double doors that swing out from the room surrounding the execution chamber. No movement is wasted.

I started to hate USMC Captain Bill whatever his last name was. The hatred was subconscious, surfacing first like a shark in my dreams, causing me hot night sweats that woke me in a stupor trying to remember what the nightmare was. Worse than the bad dreams was the realization I was jealous. I wanted Buddy. I wanted him to want me alone. Fuck Captain Bill. He was probably a pencil-necked geek even if he was a Marine Captain. The Marines have geeks. Especially officers. Everybody's seen them; they just don't show up much in anybody's perfect fantasy world of dreams.

My stupid, unfounded, complicated jealousy gave me wet dreams and jungle sweats night after night. Always the dream was the same just like the television news covering the bloody war. They were in country, Buddy and his heroic Bill, catching what time they could together. Hitting the deserted sand dunes and abandoned bunkers, they found a slender stretch of beach to be a secret paradise away from the smell of napalm in the morning, and the light of flares and incoming mortar in the night. Captain Bill in my dream fairly proved to be what he was in fact. In a snapshot Buddy sent, Bill stood next to Buddy. He was about five-eleven and a powerfully built 190. Buddy looked small by comparison. He hadn't grown any taller. He was stalled at five-foot-eight, but his constant training had thickened his build.

"Lordy, lordy," Aunt Mim Bailey said, "Why that little runt! Even his muscles have muscles."

I could have handled all that. What bothered me, in and out of the dream, was Captain Bill's hair. It was red. Not one of those ugly carrot-tops where the person who has it is so covered with orange freckles it looks like a horse blew a fart in their face. No. His was chestnut red as a strawberry roan stallion. His short-cropped mane caught the sun like a fucking halo. His red moustache shimmered in the snapshot. The same beautiful chestnut hair matted across his pecs, then in a treasure-trail line ran down his flat belly, disappearing into his baggy swim trunks, reappearing thick on his full thighs, and growing all the way down to the tops of his feet. Of course, his forearms glowed like they were downed with copper fleece, so

I suspected his broad back and thick shoulders were upholstered the same. I could not think about Captain Bill's chestnut red crotch and furred balls from which sprouted his porcelain white dick hanging undoubtedly big, thick, and uncut, with heavy blue veins visible through the skin. That I could not think about.

But think about him I did.

In my dream, which was no dream, Buddy said, Captain Bill in the moonlit Vietnam night lay back on a blanket in the dunes. Naked but for dog tags. His left arm cocked behind his head. His nose sniffing the sweaty dark red hair exposed in his left armpit. His right hand fondling his big dick. His eyes focused and intense on Owsley acid.

Across from him, equally ripped, visible against the quiet night sky, Buddy stood, legs spread, his right hand stroking his cock, his left hand smoothing first one nipple then the other. Captain Bill had covered him from face to feet with camouflage grease paint: greens and browns and ochre and black.

Buddy was perfect. His aquarian body was totally aligned with Mars. He was the young warrior come to his captain's tent. He was a USMC recruiting poster: cropped blond hair, stungun good looks, muscles with posture and stamina, and under it all, his big, uncut blond dick standing straight up his tight belly at full attention.

Each man watched the other, both drinking in visions they themselves had only seen in dreams.

Captain Bill had recognized the quality of Buddy's self-possession the first day Buddy had stepped out of the air-conditioned commercial jet that served as troop transport. When the door opened to the blast furnace of the humid Vietnam afternoon, Buddy had been the first of three hundred young grunts to deplane; he was finally in country. He looked down at the steaming tarmac and drew in a deep breath that was like nothing he had ever smelled before. His face did not flinch. He had a job to do. The boner gunning down his leg stayed rock hard as he marched from the plane.

Buddy always stood out in a crowd.

Standing on the tarmac, Captain Bill made a note. That note probably saved Buddy's young life, for a time, and, for a longer time, delayed his fate. At first, Buddy was disappointed. He was sent on fewer and fewer patrols until finally he received orders promoting him, for no reason he could understand, and assigning him as corporal attache to Captain William Karg. Buddy could not have known that Captain Bill was leading

him into the heart of darkness. But, “No news,” as Aunt Mim would say, “is good news.”

In the bunker in my dream which was no dream, Captain Bill, laid back, stoned on acid, stroking his meat, stared intensely at the naked young soldier whose muscular buck-naked body he had hand-painted all the camouflage colors of the earth and jungle. Buddy too was mellow and cool riding his own hit of acid. He stared at his green and brown hand while he stroked his blond cock, the only part of him that was still white. Even his short blond hair was camouflaged with the grease paint that laid it slick to his skull.

Captain Bill rose up on one elbow in the faint light of a waning moon. Buddy took one shimmering step toward him. The Captain sat up fully. His acid broke Buddy’s movement into strobe-like bits. The Captain sighed with stoned lust. Buddy closed in another step. The Captain rose up to his haunches, kneeling in the sand, jerking his meat. In the red glow from a far-off flare, Buddy, his hard cock bobbing in front of him, took one last step, positioning his dick directly in front of the stoned Captain worshipping him, painted like a savage, with his twenty-year-old, dirty-blond hardon jutting uncut toward the Captain’s waiting mouth.

Buddy fingered the Captain’s red moustache and parted his lips. The Captain licked his camouflaged fingers and opened his mouth. Buddy retracted the foreskin from around his cockhead the way a shield opens over a missile silo. The Captain took a dive, impaling his mouth and throat, overcome with pure lust for his young corporal. He sucked hard holding Buddy by the butt, coaching Buddy’s favorite move, the hard line-drive of his cock slamming a home-run down a man’s throat.

The Captain was sucking Buddy.

Buddy was fucking the Captain’s face.

Buddy gripped the Captain’s head, one thumb in front of each ear, palms wrapping flat around the base of the head, fingers almost touching at the nape of the Captain’s neck where the barber had shaved the short red hairs to bristle.

Another flare, closer this time, lit the sky almost above the dunes. Buddy stood invisible, painted naked in his camouflage, face-fucking the young Captain whose sweaty red hair shimmered on his chest, shoulders, butt, forearms, and head. Again, sniper fire, sporadic and faraway, cut through the heat of the night. In the last throes of their mutual passion, the Captain beat his meat, revving up to time his cuming with Buddy’s hot load shooting down his throat.

Still holding the Captain's head tight in his hands, Buddy rammed his cumming cock deep down the Captain's throat. The Captain beat his own fuck, choking and swallowing Buddy's creamy white load, and as he rose slightly from his knees, starting to shoot, in the last glow of the rocket's red glare, he dropped slack in a dying fall.

Buddy felt the hit. A sniper's bullet had shot straight through the Captain's left ear and lodged in his head. Buddy had felt the impact hit in his cock. The bullet, slowed by the Captain's exploding bone and brain, had stopped bullet-tip to cock-tip against Buddy's still hard meat buried in the dead Captain's red head.

Buddy never got over that.

Because of the Captain's death, he volunteered for a squad in a company that had suffered severe casualties. A certain General who had once favored the Captain tried to take Buddy under his wing. But Buddy was stone cold. He re-upped for another twelve months and the General made it happen. Two tours back to back, even in the last years, was unusual, but it happened; and none of it was worse than what happened to the young boys who marched into the jungle, scared shitless, but gung ho, and who months later crawled out, alive, scared of nothing, with a string of VC ears, fingers, and pricks threaded on rawhide around their necks.

In prison, even in the hours after midnight, there is never any silence. Not really. Echoes of moans and sighs and crying. Ten seconds of dying some say is better than a cruel and unusual lifetime of imprisonment. But the condemned prisoner waits, smokes, talks one last time to the chaplain, and one last time to the doctor who examines him to certify he's healthy enough to die. What kind of doctor is that? The same doctor asks the prisoner if he needs anything to calm him for his execution. Pills? An injection? Anything to avoid a scene. Anything to make the prisoner cooperate peaceably with those who will shackle him and lead him down that last corridor that leads to the heavy metal bondage chair in the gas chamber.

When Buddy came back from Nam, he was a changed man. We had sex, but we didn't make love. He didn't at least. I turned thirty-four, two weeks before he turned twenty-two. When he told me his war stories, I believed him at first, because he'd always told the truth. But the surreality of what he said made me wonder. I could tell one of his lies was an old lie. A strategic one. He'd told the lie so often in Nam that he'd gotten it into his head that he had a girl back home. He made her up to impress the other guys. He copped a picture of some white-bread blond chick off a dead U.S. flyboy and passed her off as his old lady. From the inscription at

the bottom right corner of the color photo, he knew her name was Kathy. Naturally. Of course. Those country club blondes are all named Kathy.

The trouble was that back stateside, Buddy couldn't find any real Kathy, because a man can't find what he's not looking for. He didn't want what the other guys wanted. He wanted something different. Before Nam, I was different enough for him. After Nam, kind of to pay me back for letting him crash with me no questions asked, he just played around with my tits till I came, and he didn't even bother to stay awake while I tried to blow him. He was grown up and better looking than ever, but he didn't give a shit about anything. When his Aunt Mim died, I couldn't drag him to her funeral.

"Fuck her," he said. All he wanted was to smoke, drink, drive fast, and party hard. "Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll!"

That might have sounded good if Buddy hadn't been acting like his plane had crashed about a hundred yards short of the runway, and he'd never really arrived back home in the USA. Maybe it was post-Vietnam stress syndrome. Or maybe it was watching his mom and dad burning to death in that car crash that threw him clear on the Golden Gate Bridge. Maybe what he couldn't face was that, despite his look of the blond athletic All-American warrior, he was a queer, cock-sucking, fudge-packing homosexual faggot who, coming home to his closet, was even more forgotten when he returned stateside than were the straight soldiers who at least were visible kissing their women on the six o'clock news.

Or maybe it was nothing, everything, something. Forgive me. I once read Nietzsche the same week I read Hemingway. So do not ask for whom das Nicht nichts, the Nothing nothings for thee. Or so I thought standing at Aunt Mim Bailey's grave-side service without Buddy who was at home sprawled out with Jack Daniel's and cleaning his guns.

I wanted the innocent Buddy I had loved before to come home, but it was like he was dead or MIA and someone in Washington had sent me a facsimile replacement that was defective. Buddy hardly spoke a word; he was more silent than when first he came to work for me. At least then, sex, initiated by him, had loosened him up, but even that was gone. What a fucking waste of a beautiful face and body, still so young and unmarked, except for the first pair of the six tattoos. At night in bed I lay awake beside him watching him breathe, stroking his chest and nipples, running my hand down his powerfully ridged belly, rolling the soft length of his huge blond dick in my hand, holding his cock hardening in my easy grip, beating my own meat, staring at his sleeping face, sweeping my eyes down his beautiful body, wanting him to wake and want me, or want something,

anything, desperate with desire for him, loving him, in love with him, shooting my hot seed on his cool hip, me sweating and panting and him sleeping the cool sleep of angels.

Within two months, Buddy was gone.

"I'll never leave you but once," Buddy said.

That was cryptic. "You left once to go to Nam," I said. "Now you're leaving again without ever really having come back."

"I mean I'll always be with you." He pressed his forefinger on my chest over my heart. "That once that I'll leave you won't happen till I die."

"You can't die," I said.

"Wheeze all gonna die, Bro!" He said it and did not laugh.

Buddy left my ranch traveling alone on foot. Just one morning he came in with the chores half done and I knew, sure as a daddy on a dirt-poor farm, what my wild boy was going to say. "I'm leaving today." He would take no money. He refused a ride to the freeway. "I'm traveling light," he said.

You were always traveling light, my Buddy boy. You were brighter, blonder, more golden than the speed of light itself.

His first stop was San Francisco's Tenderloin, a war zone of small tenement hotels and expensive corner liquor stores. Mattresses burned in the gutters. Old Vietnamese women fought over the aluminum beer cans. Young hustlers, boys and girls, younger even than Buddy had been, worked the street. Idly killing time, they dodged vice cops, and flirted with the Johns cruising in expensive cars and beat-up wrecks. Some drivers waved a deuce of twenty-dollar bills between their fingers, flashing them in plain sight around their steering wheels.

In one of the Tenderloin shooting galleries, a young blond punk of a bitch tried to cut Buddy's face for no more reason than she didn't like his looks the way everybody else did. Buddy objected to her attack, took her knife away, and punched her lights out, dropping her face down to his fast-rising knee, rabbit-punching her to the floor. He didn't kill her, but she wished she was dead when she saw her new nose. It hadn't impressed Buddy one way or the other that the crowd in the shooting gallery, at least those conscious enough to respond, waved him goodbye, good luck, good riddance when the manager asked him to leave and not to come back till tomorrow.

Near the condemned prisoner's cell stands a telephone. Rarely does the governor call at the last minute to reprieve a prisoner from execution. The phone exists so that the prisoner may make one last phone call.

Hardly anyone does. What can anyone say making a call like that. What can the one listening say?

The Tenderloin was to Buddy what smack is to a junkie. He was living with drug dealers and prostitutes in an SRO flophouse hotel on Larkin Street in Little Saigon. He had hated the Tenderloin when he was eighteen and innocent. Now he felt comfortable living anonymously in an eight-by-ten rented room with the toilet down the hall. He arrived knowing how to curse in Vietnamese, and talk some Jive, and he picked up a smattering of street Spanglish like a mother tongue. Sporting a couple of new tattoos, he was as at home as he was ever going to be.

Two weeks after Buddy broke her nose, the blond bitch, whose street-name was Baby, knocked on his door, and, when he opened it, she tried to stab him with an icepick. He backhanded her, knocking her flat on the floor, kicking her with his big bare foot, sliding her across the greasy linoleum, and shoving the red gash of her mouth down on a Roach Motel.

"Fuck me," Baby said, not even looking up.

Sex with violence. Not a bad idea. Buddy unhitched his belt, stepped out of his jeans, hot to fuck. He had found his Kathy sitting on the dirty floor spitting dead and dying roaches off her tongue. "Kiss me," she said.

"Fuck you, bitch!"

He dropped down between her legs and pulled her jeans down to her ankles. Her red-nailed hands, in ridiculous modesty, covered her pussy.

"Come on, bitch!"

"Fuck me in the ass."

"I'll fuck you in the ass, in the face, in your fucking eye sockets."

He spread her legs and shoved his big uncut head into her ass, slam-fucking her. The harder he plowed the wilder she got. He spit in her face and slapped her, surprising her. Instinctively, protectively, Baby pulled both hands to her face. Buddy saw what she'd been hiding.

"You're a fucking guy," he yelled. He pulled his throbbing rod dripping from Baby's asshole.

"What's it to you, Studnuts?"

He tore open Baby's denim shirt. "You don't even have titties."

"Neither do you," Baby said. He looked hard at Buddy. "So are you gonna finish fucking me or what?"

"How old are you?" Buddy asked.

"I'm eighteen-plus."

"You look sixteen-minus."

"Fuck you."

"Fuck you."

“So fuck me,” Baby said, “You broke my nose. So fuck me till it bleeds.”

Baby was an angry young man trapped inside a man's body. Go figure. He was so punk bad, he'd come full circle back to the home-ground of motiveless malignancy. He was criminal beyond crime. Police inspectors strategically look for a motive, a possible motive, as clue to solve their cases. How droll for criminals like Baby! No motive. No clue. Baby could rob an old lady of her life savings, just to be mean, so mean that the money, the loot, thrown into a garbage dumpster meant nothing to Baby as long as the loss meant everything to the old woman. Meanness was a means to his own mean ends. Baby was a two-bit, post-nuclear Iago armed with a can of spray paint and a gun. Baby's favorite song was Johnny Cash singing: “I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die.”

Baby and Buddy were bad for each other.

Baby taught Buddy all kinds of new habits, easy addictions to acquire, easy ways to hustle money, easy new ways to be bad, because, as Buddy figured, if the world was going to do bad things to you, you might as well inflict some of the damage yourself.

Buddy was like a ruined Billy Budd, a sailor fallen from grace with the sea. His hustling took on a hard street edge. A meanness was oozing out of him, and exciting him. He hit up his Johns, demanding more money than agreed upon and often left without getting the John off. Baby coached him into shoplifting the food they needed. They crashed where they could till their welcome wore out. Baby hoarded all the money for the crystal amphetamine and cocaine speedballs they injected in their veins.

“This is all shit,” Baby said. “This is penny ante. It's time to move up in the world. You wanna have life everlasting or life in the fast lane?”

“Don't ask.”

“Don't answer.”

Ultimately, everything was in the police reports and became public record at Buddy's trial. In only two short months, with Baby leading the way, they had set up, hustled, and rolled more than thirty gay Johns, taking what cash they had and demanding more for blackmail. Most of the time they got what they wanted.

“The best thing I ever learned in the joint,” Baby said, “is that faggots are easy marks. For anything.”

Buddy made no objection. He was the brawn and Baby was the brains. Buddy hardly minded. As long as Baby kept him stoned, Buddy went along for the ride even the night things escalated.

Late, when the City grew quiet, about three AM, Baby took Buddy on a search-and-destroy mission. Their prey was easy to find. He was a young bum, a wino, no more than twenty himself, but unwashed in filthy rags of what once had been the jacket of a Brooks Brothers suit and a nondescript overcoat which had fallen open as he slept passed out in an alcohol stupor.

"He looks cold," Baby said. "Don't you think?"

"Leave him sleep," Buddy said.

"I'm gonna warm him up." Baby pulled a plastic quart bottle from his coat. He sloshed the gasoline carefully on the young drunk from feet to face. The man roused slightly at the wet burning his eyes and then as Baby threw a cigarette to his gas-soaked rags, he tried to stand as the small fire spread to a roaring inferno.

Buddy stood and watched the young wino burn. Nam had numbed him almost dead. The burning bum was no different than the burning corpses of strange women and children twitching and dying covered with napalm. They were all better off.

"Jeez," he said. "Let's get out of here!"

No one was around. No one even called the fire department.

Baby performed like some evil fairy godmother granting wishes Buddy had never wished. Somehow, a gun came easily, and they used it, driving a stolen beat-up van with out-of-state plates. They went on a rampage. They stabbed a 32-year-old married John in his garage while his wife was away visiting her parents for the weekend. They picked up a young Italian-American sailor from Alameda Naval Station, raped him and shot him, and dumped his bullet-ridden body, with cum draining out of his virgin ass, under the freeway near the entrance to the Alameda Tube. As the van sped away, Baby said to Buddy, "You know why they have a tube going to Alameda?...Cuz nobody wants to be seen going over there."

"I don't think you're funny," Buddy said.

"I think you're hilarious," Baby said.

Next came a series of murders committed, so the headlines read, by "The Dumpster Killer." The mode of operations by the sixth murder followed a strict pattern. The victims were all gay men, particularly masculine gay men, picked up from one of the raunchiest Folsom bars, the "No Name," which was the last place most of them had been seen alive. A day or two after the man was reported missing, the victim's tortured and dead body was found, killed execution-style with a single bullet to the back of the head, always nude, bound hand and foot, in one of the hundreds of dumpsters sitting in the back streets and alleys of the light manufacturing and warehouse district South of Market.

Naturally, I saw the lead story repeatedly on the six-o'clock news, but never once did I connect my Buddy with the Dumpster Killer. Not, that is, until one night, the day after the sixth victim was found, and the TV showed a police composite sketch of a hustler who had been seen in the bars. He was a suspect, because he always left alone, having made plans, it was revealed at the trial, to meet his victim fifteen minutes later "for a trip you'll never forget, man!"

"They've made your face," Baby said, staring at the TV. "I'm leaving. You can leave with me if you want."

"I'm not leaving," Buddy said. "And neither are you."

"Shit you say."

"I captured them, but you tortured them," Buddy said.

"You fucked them."

"That didn't kill any of 'em."

"You can't blame me. I didn't kill them all," Baby said.

"My ass," Buddy said. "You did. Just to watch them die."

"You're an accomplice. An accessory."

"No I'm not," Buddy said, "I'm just a sick motherfucker."

"Poor you."

"Poor Baby."

By this time, I did what I had to do. I called the police and gave them a name to go along with the sketch. Within an hour, a detective arrived at my ranch to pick up a photo of Buddy. I pulled open a drawer, skipped over the snapshot of Buddy with Captain Bill, and gave him a picture of Buddy as a proud new Marine.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" the detective said.

"The answer is I'm gay."

"That's cool."

"You think so?"

"Is Buddy gay?"

"No. Buddy's a homosexual."

"What's the difference?"

"If you have to ask, you'll never understand."

With Buddy's picture, the cops, by asking around the streets and alleys in the Tenderloin, made a description of the van, down to its current 1977 Kentucky plates and three of its digits. About eight o'clock, on a dreary winter's night, they located the van parked under the huge cement battlements and industrial-strength arches of the San Francisco end of the Bay Bridge. The SWAT team circled the area of empty parking lots, abandoned buildings, and unused railroad tracks. The live-action TV reporters

from three competing stations were talking earnest shit, with all sorts of phoney-baloney factoids, into their cameras with the van spotlighted in the background. The set piece was as perfect a Hollywood action film as was the Symbionese Liberation Front shootout in LA a couple years before. The police called through a loudspeaker to try to flush the mad dog Dumpster Killer into the open.

Inside the van, Baby took the handgun and pointed it at his right temple, Saigon-style.

"Don't do it," Buddy said. He was stripped to the waist.

"Fuck you, asshole. They're gonna pin all those murders on you. That's better than I could have planned."

"Why?"

"Why not, asshole."

"Talk to me!"

"Always save the last bullet for yourself, Buddy!" Baby's finger squeezed down slow on the trigger blowing his face and the half-brain he had across Buddy's face and bare chest.

The rest happened on TV: Buddy climbing half-naked, covered with blood, hands held high, thrown to the ground, hands cuffed behind his back while a shotgun barrel against the back of his head pinned his face to the gravel. By the time the media and the police had finished with him, Buddy had committed not only all the murders Baby had committed, he had also killed Baby, who, as the TV anchor said, "was likely the innocent dupe of Edward Buddy Brooks, the reputed Dumpster Killer, who served with honor during two tours of Vietnam, and apparently had more than his share of trouble returning and adjusting to civilian life."

Towards dawn on the night of the execution, the chaplain returns one last time. Then follow the guards who chain the prisoner's hands to a leather belt from which drops a second length of chain to shackle his bare feet. The warden expresses his condolences and asks if there are any last letters to be mailed. Then begins the short walk to the gas chamber. The walls are painted green, not just any green, but that pale seafoam green the Government provides to all its institutions.

I don't even want to remember now exactly how it went with Buddy. I saw enough. I can't forget. Guards marched him into the gas chamber. The Chaplain said he was not drugged. Society wants the condemned to suffer fully aware. But who knows? They strapped him into the left of the two chairs in the round room surrounded with thick windows of one-way mirrors, so witnesses may see without being seen, as if his hard stare at them could suck their souls out of their bodies and he would perforce take

them with him to hell. Padded, brown-leather, standard-hospital-issue restraints were fastened tight around his wrists and around the ankles of my barefoot boy.

Another leather belt cinched across his chest. He sat stock still, not fighting the way some do, straining so fiercely they break loose of their restraints and run at the door, which is heavy as a bank vault, and then throw themselves against the thick glass of the windows, clawing, until finally, winded, they can hold their breath no longer, and the cyanide gas kills them.

Buddy did not struggle. He knew exactly where he was. He was sitting in a room in San Quentin, no more than ten miles from the Golden Gate Bridge where at the age of eight he had not been able to rescue his mom and his dad trapped and burning to death in the wreckage of their new 1961 Chevrolet.

Buddy stared straight ahead, restrained helpless beyond help, in the pale green circle of the gas chamber. At the last moment, when the warden's hand rested on the telephone waiting for the impossible chance of a stay of execution from the governor, no call came. When the clock hands ticked the last minute of the hour, the warden crossed himself and nodded his head. Everything in me died. The anonymous executioner hidden in a chamber behind a window with a drawn curtain triggered the mechanism that dropped the cyanide pellets hanging under the seat of Buddy's chair.

At first, nothing perceptible happened as the air changed to cyanide gas. Then coughing slightly, Buddy very deliberately inhaled one deep breath. His body jacked up against the restraints, then collapsed down, his chest heaving two or three times, his eyes closed, and his body slumped dead in the chair.

The officials waited twenty minutes, then pumped fresh air into the gas chamber. The door was opened and Buddy was pronounced dead.

For all that he had done.

For all that had been done to him.

When the execution is complete and the medical coroner officiating has pronounced the condemned man dead, the double doors to the anteroom outside the gas chamber open and the uniformed attendants wheel in a gurney. They push it to the door of the death chamber. They know their work. The body is already unstrapped, except for the chest, to hold it in place. The attendants take hold of the warm corpse. The chest strap is released and they carry the deceased to the gurney, place him in a plastic bodybag, zip him in, secure him, and wheel him out to the waiting hearse.

When I heard those double doors bang open, when I saw the terrible baggage the attendants pushed, my heart cracked open, dry and parched, and loneliness grew thick as thistle in my heart.

