

ON THE LAM
THE WRITERBIOGRAPHY OF FLOYD SALAS

1

My autobiography is my writerbiography. I am only my writing. There is no life without my writing. There is no reason for living without my writing. I am my writing, all of me.

I'm a writer because I grew up in a house full of books. My father had a library of history and geography books, as well as *Dante's Inferno* and the *Police Gazette* and pulp fiction detective novels. My older sister, Dorothy, read volumes of Book of the Month Club bestsellers and *True Confession* magazines. And my brother Eddy had a Renaissance man's library which included everything from Baudelaire to Marcus Aurelius to Plato to Dostoyevsky to Bennet Cerf to books of literary criticism and biographies to American history. All of which I read. I read from the libraries of all three all my life. That's why I'm a writer.

My family on both sides came to this country from Spain with Coronado and Ponce de Leon. I am supposedly descended from Coronado himself, according to a female scholar cousin of my mother's, Eileen Sanchez de Bankson, who is a curator of a small Colorado museum in the Spanish Peaks mountain town of La Veta and who is writing a book on the family. She says it's possible that Ponce de Leon, too, is an ancestor. I told her she had better document those claims exactly since it's not politically correct in Hispanic circles to claim to be descended from the imperialistic Spanish conquerors. I can claim my Navajo Indian blood from five generations back, but I better keep quiet about my aristocratic Spanish lineage and my Irish and Belgium blood and the bastard line which comes from a redheaded Catholic priest, who bribed a bureaucrat with \$500.00 -- a grand sum then -- to be allowed to stay in this country when all the Spanish Catholic priests were being deported after the Mexican republic drove out

the Spanish monarchy around 1823. In a family genealogy, his daughters and granddaughters said he was French, though his name was Castro. I have read of Frenchmen in boxing circles called Rodriguez and Fernandez. So, it's all true, sort of.

I was given the last rites when I was born and immediately caught the whooping cough during a national epidemic in 1931. I was given goat's milk instead of my mother's milk because she was too ill herself to breast-feed me. My diet was closely watched because I was so scrawny, and I never caught any childhood diseases except for a three day bout with the measles at six and I didn't catch colds either. I was deceptively strong and healthy all my life, in spite of that debilitating first illness.

My father taught me to read from the comic strips when I was five. I went to Ebert Elementary School in Denver, Colorado, starting the kindergarden in the Fall of 1936. Denver schools always produce students who are among those who get the highest scores in the SAT college tests. When I was in the second grade, my teachers realized I had a very superior intelligence and could already read far beyond my grade level and gave me my own individual curriculum: academic subjects with higher grades, an hour alone in the library by myself every day, and gym and art classes with the kids my own age. I was receiving a rich boy's education in a public school. Then they skipped me a grade in June, 1939, but my family moved to California in the summer and I went to a mountain school in the Fall of the year by the Shasta Dam where my father had found work at the end of the depression. Though I was now in the fourth grade when I was only eight years old, I was no longer the star student and had to shift for myself. I did okay, though, small for my age anyway, I didn't know how to play games like softball and basketball and was so tiny the teachers put me with fat kids and skinny kids and other outcasts and, except for one female teacher who once picked me for the class team in a softball game against the fifth grade boys, never gave me a chance

to get picked by the bigger guys for their teams. That only reinforced a tendency to solitude that all book worms have.

Yet, I come from a family of boxers as well as scholars -- one brother, Eddy, eleven years older, born in 1920, was an intellectual prodigy and the other, Al, nine years older, an outstanding athlete and Golden Gloves boxer -- and I won every schoolyard fight I ever had all through the nine public schools I went to in twelve years, and on the very first day of school in the mountain community of Boom Town, I won three fights and the respect of every kid in the school. I also would chase kids home from school, even if they were on the school athletic teams, if it came to that.

Boys asked me to be in their clubs and I always said yes. But I was still a bookworm. So, all my school life, I always had two entirely different types of friends: scholars, artists, poets, musicians and other cerebral outcast eggheads and jock athletes. I've spent my writing life telling stories about tough guys and brainy guys. Every one of my books is about a brain who is a boxer, no matter what the locale or the subject matter, and every book is different. But Al, the brother who was the boxer, became a criminal dopefiend and led me onto the fringes of crime through smoking pot and unwittingly gave me the subject matter of violence and tragedy.

We had a very happy life and a lovely home in Oakland until my mother died when I was twelve in 1943 and my brothers went to fight in World War Two. We had a lot of money for anything I wanted. Christmas was a wonderland of presents piled under a magnificent, spider-webbed tree in a huge front room. I wrote a poem to capture it when I first started writing after the early suicide of my oldest brother, Eddy, the intellectual, who had a brilliant life and success everywhere he turned.

Kids born in 'thirty-one
wore shoes had lunch on relief

Adolescent years
shipyards
fears
Ma worked
bright coin
and grief

But Mom died and death caught me and held me all my life. Then when my brilliant brother Eddy killed himself in the early years of his incredibly successful life when I was only nineteen, I knew for sure there was no benevolent God. Though I loved Jesus and wanted to be like him, I saw how he died and heard his last words, "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?" and knew that a caring God was all a sentimental lie. God always was, still is, and always will be, an empty circle of infinity, the only universal symbol in all life, in the whole universe, from a spinning galaxy to the sun and the circling earth and the moon to my eye to my lady's vagina. The essence of being is an incomprehensible and unrelenting circling force of life and death. There is no eternal paradise or Hell and only mortal fear and self-centered narcissism project the human lie that God looks like us or cares for us. The only sure future we truly face is death and absolute nothingness. God loves us, but not the animals we eat? What a sentimental fallacy! When most dogs have a greater capacity for selfless love than we humans do. Incomprehensible force there is. Understanding of it there isn't. True benevolence is a lie. We live by murder. We kill other beings, animal and vegetable, to stay alive for a short time. Then we die and there's nothing. This is existential reality and I am an existentialist. Whatever force created this unhappy mess has no pity or concern for any of the individual objects, human or otherwise, that exist within it.

So, if there is no heaven and no benevolent divinity and no future happiness after death and only nothing after this brief light of suffering and, yes, love and joy, too, according to what I can

perceive, then I must make the most of it. There are only two priceless things in existence and these are love and time and so I must spend my time doing what I love, appreciating and making beauty with words out of suffering and joy so that my perceptions might live on, however fleetingly, past this so brief respite of consciousness called living. This is why I write. Because there's nothing better to do. Here's a poem I wrote when my first wife called me up on the phone from her job as a bookkeeper one day and asked me what I was doing, that her boss, who had been a high school acquaintance of mine, wanted to know just what I did when I was home writing and she was working all day.

To My Wife To Tell Her Boss What I Do All Day

Tell him
I sit still in the sun
warming my sole
S-O-L-E

Tell him
I don't do anything
but sit down and read all day
stare at the page of your life
trace the chicken tracks
over the white void
deep as snow
footprints of darkness
black as this print
footsteps
into the nowhere ahead
down
into the final hole

Tell him
I think of this

all day!

Tell him
I do this

Tell him
that's how I earn my keep!

Tell him
that I think of him too
for him!

Tell him
that's something to do too!

More than one way to skin a cat!

One time
I would have been a priest
or better
a shaman
making the sun come up
every morning
giving it a reason to
chanting at it
to stay up
and help the kill
sucking in His will
spreading His vibes
to the whole tribe
especially the hunters
Spears for their arms!
Arrows for their eyes!
who might die today!
against the wooly mammoth

and the saber tooth

I would have been him one time
Shaman
with knives in my hair
and tiger claws at my neck
red mud and fire ash
painted on my face
dancing around a drum
stomping and shouting
curing the sick
with one touch
of my finger
wand of electrical energy
a halo at its tip
saving the children
and the warriors
and suck the fever
out of the old

I would have been him one time
part of the tribe
helping them stay alive

In the Middle Ages maybe
I might have been a friar
like Saint Francis
or in France
like Villon
wandering around like a beggar
panhandling my poems
for a crown or two
half-out
of respectable society
and half-in

the big walls of the Church
too high for me
and sucking ass at a count's court
much too much to bear
Maybe I might have been that
in the Middle Ages

But not in our society
There's no place for me
Poetry doesn't sell
and I don't like to work
Can't see wasting all that time
for just money

I wanna stay free!
I wanna touch my soul every day!
I wanna spend my time
loving
what I do!

I don't wanna spend my time
working
for a living
I wanna spend my time
living
my work
I don't shirk
I spend all day at it
all the time
in the sunlight
and in the dark
I can't think of anything
better to do
Can you?

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In spite of the good fortune of growing up in a house full of books and getting a really sound beginning to my education, the death of my mother, Anita Sanchez Salas, from heart disease plunged my family into sadness and tragedy that in spite of the heroic efforts of my sister Dorothy to keep the family together, nearly ruined all our lives. It was the middle of the war and my father owned rental property and we had lots of money and a big house and no home any longer. Everybody in the family was unwittingly broken by my mother's death. Dorothy eventually got divorced after four kids and had four husbands, finally marrying the first one, Frank Golubin, over again when he was dying from heart disease. He committed suicide, though she had learned how to take care of herself quite well, thank you, and has a handsome retirement income and is now starting to write her first fictional stories built upon her love of family. She's a natural mother and loves everybody. She triumphed in the end but spent most of her life struggling for individual expression and happiness after our mother died. I always told her that her life is a Book of the Month Club best seller like all the stories she's already read, and she's starting to write it now, if slowly.

Eddy got a four year scholarship to any university in the state of Colorado when he graduated from high school in 1938, was a pre-med Cal graduate, who passed the California state board in pharmacology in 1943 so he'd have a profession when he came back from the war, studied post-graduate history at Harvard, and was a naval officer in the war. He taught at a naval academy, but after Mom died, he volunteered for active duty and fought in the Pacific and was in the invasion of Japan. After the war he was in naval intelligence and was stationed as a cultural attache at the U.S. Embassy in Paris. Then he was seduced by a rich Catholic monsignor in New York and became a practising bisexual. He

started his own successful professional pharmacy in downtown San Francisco at the age of 29 and committed suicide in it at the age of 30. I found him dead in it when I came to work in the morning in 1950 when I was 19 and then began to write some of my early poems. This is why I began to be a writer, though I'd written stories, poems and a play that was produced in summer school when I was 15.

Al, two years younger than Eddy and nine years older than I, became a dopefiend after Eddy killed himself, and went on a 25 year heroin run that put him in two prisons, half a dozen jails, and welfare. All of his nine children but the very oldest and very youngest of his daughters have had an addiction to drugs. Four of his children that he helped get hooked committed suicide as very young adults. Two of their mates also killed themselves. All of his sons, including the two still alive and three that are dead, have been hooked and in jail for it. One has been in prison for stabbing a security guard. None of his children -- and there are two sons and three daughters still living -- is at this time hooked and he was clean the last fifteen years of his life, I'm happy to say. Half of his remaining children, a son and daughter, hate me for what I write about, like what I'm relating now, and half of them, a son and a daughter, don't. The oldest daughter does both, loves and hates me.

My youngest sister, Annabelle, has married a plumbers union board officer who is as corrupt and vain as a Mafia don, whom he resembles. We do not speak because I feel that I saved the life of their youngest son, by weening him off drugs and tutoring him and letting him live with me while he went to college for a year until he was able to do it himself and was able to graduate and get a bachelor's degree. And yet her husband has never thanked me, though before I helped the son, Floyd, who is named after me, the father, Fred Castro, would not even allow his son's name to be mentioned in his upper middleclass house, because he had burglarized it when he was on crack. Now the son is the apple of

his eye. The husband is also an FBI informer who has played it both ways all his life, which I also don't like. He took me to a plumber's house one New Year's Eve, 1960 or 61. The plumber looked just like Hubert Humphrey and was really an FBI agent who shot off his .45 automatic at midnight and later appeared in the papers for busting Ken Kesey.

Such is the price paid by my whole family for losing the moral core of the family, my mother, and the price paid by myself for daring to write about it all. So much for my family. Now for my writer self.

From being the class counselor and one of the two boys that my junior high school homeroom teacher predicted -- when I was eleven years old in the seventh grade -- would be school president in the ninth grade, I came back from summer vacation and the death of my mother into the eighth grade and got suspended three times and finally kicked out of the school in the ninth grade and sent to a high school with the reputation as one of the roughest around, though even it would be considered wimpy by today's standards. It was a melting pot of a school and had only one stabbing in all the years I've known about it, before, during, and after I left it, when there are shootings all the time in urban high schools now.

I went blind when my mother died. Instead of getting ulcers in my stomach, I got ulcers in my eyes from the sight of my dead mother in the coffin with a sore on her lip. I became hysterical and threw myself into the coffin and they had to drag me out of it and send me off to an aunt's house for a few days to recover. But I still went blind in one eye at a time right after her funeral. This was the second time I'd felt grief over death. My Irish grandmother had died only a year before and though I cried, I never suffered the great despair that the death of my mother plunged me into. I'd go to school and could only see my sad father

sitting by the big front room window, in the dark, grieving. I grieved all day. I couldn't concentrate very long before I'd get sad again and couldn't read intensely like I could before. It seemed that I'd try to do the homework, but a dark cloud hung over me, and even if I did the homework, I'd lose it by the next day. There didn't seem to be any reason to do anything, except try to escape the sadness inside me by having some kind of excitement and fun.

I was arrested five times in 15 months for cutting school, staying out late at night, fighting in the streets, and, finally, joy riding in a car stolen by an acquaintance. I remember I couldn't figure out why things were so different, why I was so different than I used to be only a few months before, from the class star -- an angel, as one old friend said -- to a bad, naughty boy. I still went to church every week, saved all my money, bought defense stamps, was polite to everyone, joined the boy scouts and became a patrol leader and passed more tests, (14) than anyone else in the city in the week at Boy Scout camp when I was thirteen. But I got in a fight at camp and won the fight and so didn't win the outstanding medal. And that's been the story of my life ever since, if a medal can be construed as gaining the spoils of victory, of superior achievement. When my play was put on in summer school when I was fifteen, the drama teacher never announced to the audience that a student had written it, though he produced it along with a professionally written play.

But I had the good fortune, because I had intellectual friends, to get my third job after high school at age 17 as a page in the Oakland Public Library. It was a grand old Victorian slate gray granite building, with huge walls and high ceilings and windows that could have been in a cathedral and Roman columns and glass floors that you could see through in the stacks. Like looking up through the bottom of a coke bottle. Thick and beautiful as frozen ice. Beautiful the upper stacks where only the employees went, pages like myself called to get reference material by a buzzer.

Beautiful the sense in my teenager's head of the quiet and seriousness that hung like a light mist over the readers' bent brows, as if they were bending to prayer. Beautiful to sit down on a stool when I stacked the books on the public shelves and read passages out of book after book after book, for a year. Beautiful to take book after book after book home when I really got interested. I'd work real hard and get my eight hours of work done in four hours, then make myself scarce in the public stacks and read by the hour, everything from Black Boy and Native Son to This Is My Beloved by Walter Benton to The La Guardia Reports on Marijuana, 1937, to Mother India to books on black magic and the psychology of dreams and the life of Soapy Smith, conman extraordinaire in Alaska, and Joaquin Murieta, the California bandit. Life was rich. My head was full of words and stories and great ideas on how my mind worked and made visions at night. I'd dream of the bookshelves at night. Wandering among them. Lost and happy and a little bewildered by the magnitude of the journey of the mind that stretched ahead of me, if I wanted to learn all that there was possible to learn in a lifetime, soon as possible. The idea even came into my mind then that I could maybe do a little writing myself.

I first heard of a modern long narrative poem when a fellow page wanted to show me something sexy in the book room, where we loaded our trucks up to go out and shelve. "Why should I say your thighs are like lillies./ Lillies are neither quick nor scented/ They can neither fire love nor quench it." I fell in love with This Is My Beloved and stole the book for months at a time. There were other copies so I wasn't a total thief. But I returned it like I returned all the books that I borrowed for periods at a time. If I'd been in college, doing graduate work, they would have granted me the same privilege. I took it. I returned the books and I became a writer and won a few awards and got good critical reception and thanked God I got to work in a public library where education was free.

It saved my life. For that reason a public library is the first bastion against tyranny. The first thing the reactionaires do is cut off education so people won't be smart enough to see through them. The battle over the NEA, which publishes the works of protest by writers like me, when the corporate publishers won't touch us, came out of right-wing Republican think tanks like the Hoover Institute, whose members know that the control of consciousness is the key to control of the country and command of profit. The library is the most socially important structure that can be built. Without libraries we will become ignorant and enslaved. President Kennedy quoting Lincoln said, "Whoever wants an uneducated society to be free, wants something that never was and never will be".

I'll go on. But first I must say something. I became a writer against all odds, oppression, suppression and social ostracism, ranging from the police to the universities I attended, to my next door neighbors, close friends and my family. And here is that story, book by book.

I was a brilliant student at Cal, the University of California at Berkeley, with an A minus grade point average. Josephine Miles, the reigning poet laureate of the campus, and the only truly famous poet there, read my poems as a sophomore student and said that I was a natural poet. But on Saturday nights, I would smoke a joint with my artist buddies and make sculpture for my sculpture class, though I was an English major. Two of those painter buddies, one, Norman Fontaine, an African American, crippled from polio, and the other, Peter Gambarini, Italian American, a brilliant non-conformist, got involved with dealing pot and got busted and everyone who hung around with them in the artistic community of Berkeley was guilty by association when, in 1955 and 1956, smoking pot was a felony punishable by prison time. Peter had once been sent away as a teenager for dealing pot by a state narcotics agent named Braumeller, who was himself later sent to

federal prison for trading heroin to junkies for stolen goods. And he had sworn to send Peter to prison if he ever got involved in dealing again.

I had the misfortune to be outside Peter Gambarini's liquor store job when he was closing up. I didn't know that he had been set up by a mutual friend, Walter Soots, a jazz musician. When I saw a strange car keep circling around as if the guy was either a crook or cop, I jumped out of the car where I was sitting and raced the guy to the door of the liquor store and slammed it shut and locked it in his face. In two seconds, two great big narcs in blue suits hit the door and tried to knock it open. I ran in back and flushed Peter's pound of pot down the toilet. Then when Walter got Peter to open the door for him and stood in the door so it would stay open, I guessed what he'd done, called him a fink and blasted him and knocked him down, then pounded him on the back. This was strike one against me.

Then, studying late for a U. S. History final one night, another African American buddy, Fred, and I decided to go get a couple of joints to relax with after beating our brains out for six hours or so. We went down into West Oakland to buy it. He took so long, I went down Seventh Street looking for him, found him, but when we jumped in my car and got to the intersection, a plain-clothes narc car swerved in front of us. I spun by it and up the wrong side of Adeline Street and got far enough ahead of them for my buddy to throw the pot away. Then I slowed down. They cruised by us a couple of blocks further away. A narc named Ernie Ingram stared at me, but they didn't try to stop us.

After that, I gradually noticed that I was being tailed around the campus and did a little research at the law library and saw that there was no charge that they could stick me with. But they did take away my boxing scholarship, one of the first two boxing scholarships Cal ever gave, and also took away my will to continue pursuing my education there, but not my will to become a great writer, which I was sure I could become. It was an incomprehensible feeling based upon the profound spiritual

feelings of love which would overcome me and transfix me when I wrote. Some grand illumination would grip me and hold me until I wrote the feeling away. It was beginning poetry and often clumsy, but not always, like the poem I wrote as a freshman at Oakland Junior College, when I was 24 years old, my third college already after changing my major from fine art to education to English, and after dropping out of the commercial world executive career track I was on so I could find something worth living for besides just making money and gaining power.

On the way to the library one day, I saw a tree stripped of its leaves and wrote:

FALL

A dog's muddy footprints
among the star-specking leaves
Evanescent factors
Summer is done
The trees stand shred-dry
with the breeze

One other day I saw a beautiful Persian girl in a class room at Cal that students used to study in. She was gorgeous, a tawny blond, and I wrote:

FOR BEAUTY

Oh see how the green wind blows
the banjo strings of humming grass
and the bumblebee wipes his sword
on a copper leaf

Then I stood up, walked by the small desk chair she was sitting at near the window, dropped the poem in front of her and rushed out of the classroom without looking back. I never saw her again.

I loved those two poems. I wrote a dozen more like that, with varying degrees of skill. I had the gift of language, but most were a little romantic in the 19th century sense, and Josephine Miles said that I should keep writing, but I needed to read more. She didn't say why, but I know now that she felt it would take me out of an archaic romantic sort of 19th Century style of using language I had, like the classics that I'd read. There were no Beat poets then. I gushed with corny feeling, like all young poets.

Oh, I am a winter rose lover
dancing to the worried winds

This was me, the poet, at Cal. I believed in love everlasting and the songs that sang in me. I smashed IQ tests. I was a bonafide genius in the brain power department. But it was the feeling that prodded me to write, the desire to assuage the need in me to express my emotions. I had never gotten over my brother's suicide and still haven't. This was on top of my mother's death. My brother Al was a dopefiend, who stole and cheated everybody and was always in jail. My father had married a woman who disliked his children. I was trying to make something out of myself. I worked at the library 15 hours a week, trained with the boxing team for two hours every day but weekends, had a wife and wonderful son in the first grade, took care of my brother Al's kids, too, since he didn't, and managed the apartment house my father had bought my brother and I, as well as carrying a full load of units. I caught colds all the time. In the Fall of '56, I had about 10 doctor appointments for anticold medicines and sniffles, and complained that the pills would get me a little woozy at times. I still got great grades, but I was driven to the edge of my endurance by my schedule and it was only the poems erupting that saved me from a breakdown. But they kept me joyous. Life was beautiful. I had a beautiful wife and a very handsome son. I was handsome. Girls swirled around me all the time. I loved the girls, too.

I had interrupted Josephine Miles appointments with graduate students and she would let me walk right in when I showed up, to the annoyance of a female grad student who told me that she and other grad students were working on big papers and had made appointments. I heard her. It made sense. But I was a sophomore in English and two professors, one a poet, both female, had said my work was beyond their help and that I should go see Josephine Miles, that only she could help me. The Spanish teacher, Myrtha Chabran, a sexy 22-year old, who later got a reputation in poetic circles as a teacher and critic, said, "Now, don't expect her to tell you that you're a poet!" "Okay," I said and walked up to Josephine Miles' office and knocked on the door and went in and handed her a poem. She told me what day to come back, and when I did, she asked if I'd written any more poems in the couple of days since I'd seen her and then said that I was a natural poet. All the time she talked to me, she smiled. She told me that she was taking a year off but gave me her home address so I could send her my poems. What a gift!

But in the meantime, the surveillance was hot and heavy. A guy who resembled Jack Dempsey, tough like a crook or a cop, and who in no way looked like either a professor or a student, used to follow me around the library. And I decided to leave. The night before my last exam in Spanish, I made love to my young Spanish teacher, told her I was not looking for a sweetheart, and said that I was taking off for LA and was going to write, whether I succeeded or not, and she said, "You'll succeed. Because you're whole."

And I did, in my way.

I hitchhiked a ride with my brother-in-law Frank in a truck, leaving about five o'clock in the morning -- I'd already slipped out of my apartment house the day before -- and left for LA from my sister and brother-in-law's house. My wife took circuitous routes

by car from our place and kissed me goodbye, saying she was sure nobody had followed her.

The first day in downtown Los Angeles, I went to Pershing Square to watch all the sky pilots try to preach all the people into heaven, and later wrote my first short story about them in modern prose on this journey to become a writer and sent it to Josephine Miles. She said, first of all, that it was very powerful and she might be wrong, but she thought it might be a dramatic poem. That first short story written within a couple of weeks after arriving in LA became one of a group of them which won me a Rockefeller writing scholarship to El Centro Mexicano de Escritores in Mexico City in a year and a half, by July, 1958. Later, I used it as one of the central chapters, "Visiting Day", in my first prize-winning novel about a boy in a reform school, *Tattoo The Wicked Cross*.

But I saw a man that day who was in one of the many groups that congregated and debated the problems of society and existence in the park, in the very middle of the city skyscrapers. He was a middleaged, gray-haired man, with light eyes behind wire-rimmed glasses, who looked like an intellectual and sat on a garden ledge and swung his feet back and forth, and never once raised his voice. He said on this sunny winter day in January 1957 that the youth of the country would rise up in revolt against the militaristic, authoritarian society of the McCarthy-Eisenhour years. I was a student on the lam, just driven away from the campus by the police for illegal, anti-social behaviour, and I said, "I come from the campus and it's a rigid conventional society without any kind of revolutionary mood. The students are conformist." And he said, "But they will revolt." And they did. I was one of them. In 1961, just four years later, I started the Student Peace Union at San Francisco State University to oppose the very military-industrial complex he was talking about. This was the year that Kennedy

became president and the school put up a speaking forum on the campus for the first time.

I went to Long Beach from Los Angeles the next day and stayed with my wife's aunt and uncle for three days until I got a job and moved into a rooming house near the Douglas Aircraft company. I scored a perfect 100 in the IQ test and was hired as a time-keeper immediately.

I spent my days in poetic solitude. I lived a quarter mile or so from the aircraft plant entrance in a room I was to share with another worker in another aircraft plant. He was a southern boy, mid-thirtyish, heavy, but not really fat. Uneducated but a nice guy who took me to an Okie nightclub where I met a beautiful brunette, who looked like a movie star and came over to sit by me at the bar and asked me why I didn't come over to her table when she stared at me. I didn't tell her I was shy. She went out in the car to kiss me, but I never saw her again. He moved out because I'd come in from the swingshift at 1 a.m., switch on my lamplight, turn on the radio low to classical music, drop down on my bed, and start writing that first story about Pershing Square. He had to get up in the morning for the day shift and he moved out. He never complained to me, just moved out in a few days. I was sorry, but I had to write at night when I got off work and I had the time for it. I had been training for the intercollegiate boxing season at Cal and was in good shape and full of energy. After I finished the story, I'd write poems after midnight until I fell asleep around three or four or five, sometimes six in the morning. When I woke up, I'd eat a breakfast of two raw eggs stirred up in ovaltine or orange juice, then shower and shave. Then I'd go to the library, which was a half a block away from the rooming house, and read books of criticism on Dylan Thomas and any other other poets I found to be interesting. He was my favorite at the time. I'd study and sometimes memorize one of his poems that day. Then I'd go back to my place and sometimes, though not always, smoke a joint, then

go to work as a timekeeper at the airplane factory. I could do all the work in two and a half hours if I pushed it, which I did when I wanted to write a poem that night at work, or, if not, still go to work with Dylan Thomas's poetry ringing in my head.

I'd be checking time cards on a rack in this factory aircraft plant -- suprisingly quiet -- and through my head would be raging: "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower/ drives my green age/ that blasts the roots of trees is my destroyer./ And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose/ my youth is bent by the same wintry fever." Or "As I was young and easy under the apple boughs,/ about the lilting house and happy as the grass was green/ In the sun that was young once only/ Time let me play and be/happy in the mercy of his means."

It was a beautiful existence. I missed my wife. I was lonely, but I was also rich in creative mental energy. I reveled in my loneliness like a solitary poet drunk on his own feeling. I'd get off work after midnight and buy a hamburger for dinner at a fast stop joint, then eat my burger and walk the dark streets of residential Long Beach reciting my poems aloud to myself, exulting in the beautiful feeling of love that gripped me. I'd walk for hours in poetic happiness, in love with my solitude, exulting in the huge feelings of ecstasy that wanted to burst from my chest. I made joy out of my sadness. I felt like a cross between Dylan Thomas and Poe, Baudelaire and De Quincy. I felt like the great feeling that transfixed me was the stuff of the immortal spirit, that my words held my uplifted soul and rang with the universal song.

That was the young poet I was. But having read the lives of conmen and great bankrobbers from the *Police Gazette* in my father's library and the Oakland Public Library where I had my first real, steady job at 17, I had learned that the great masters of crime knew how to live in solitude and escape detection. So I did, too, and never got busted, ever again, once I made up my mind that I was going to make the police persecution pay for me, that I was

going to use the enforced solitude to become a poet, a humanitarian writer, an asset to his society, not a criminal in any sense of the word. And I'd keep smoking pot, too, a victimless crime, and much less a vice than booze, the most harmful drug on earth, the one sanctioned by my hypocritical society.

I stayed at Douglas Aircraft for about three months, then went back and got my wife and child and left again for Long Beach. This time, I took bus boy and bar boy and kitchen helper jobs until I found myself a good job. I took a test for a Remington Rand salesman on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. I got the highest grade in the I.Q. test that they'd ever had. It was a naval officers' test of 75 questions, with a time of 20 minutes. Nobody had ever finished it. I finished it in 16 minutes and got two answers wrong. I was hired immediately, and picked, with two other high scorers, to be sent back east for three months and special training.

I was to spend one month studying before being sent back east to the main factory. But in two weeks, my boss called me into the office and showed me a telegram that said simply: "Fire Floyd Salas immediately." And so I was out of a job. Two days later, I got a job as a bar boy at the Wilton Hotel in Long Beach and was asked to fill in as a bartender when the night bartender at the basement beach bar had to skip town for locking the cops out when they tried to bust one of his whores for solicitation. I did well. They wanted to keep me. But I dropped one of my joints on the floor of my wife's uncle's apartment and her mother, who had come to Long Beach with us, called the Long Beach police and they set a trap for me. I found this out from the manager of the hotel, who told me about it when I told him that I didn't want to get anybody in trouble but the cash that I was given by the office to open the bar with every morning was off every day and that this day there was too much money. He nodded his head, then told me a few minutes later that I was a good boy and that I'd better watch

out because the Long Beach police had me under surveillance and were setting a trap for me.

I quit the next day and spent the next several months bouncing around from bus boy job to apprentice waiter to bar boy in town after southern California town, always moving when I felt the heat getting too close again, but writing, always writing short stories and poem after poem after poem. Finally, when a customer in the bar of a resort called the Antelope Valley Inn in the town of Lancaster in the Mojave Desert made friends with me and asked me to help him with some cement work he wanted to do at his home, I knew it was another trap and quit the next day again.

I went back to Oakland with my wife and child, moved into another of my father's houses to house-sit while he was in Southern California for a few months. I collected an unemployment check of \$22.00 a week, and wrote all day, every day while my wife worked as the assistant manager of the credit office in a downtown women's store.

The narcs were still there waiting for me. They had chased me out of Cal, so I drew unemployment and wrote. I lived, though I didn't know it at the time, one block from where Jack London had written his early stories. He was one of my idols since boyhood. I'd read his books and his biography, and I thought of him as my spiritual progenitor. I would try to live up to his example.

I sent my stories to Lowney Handy, who had helped James Jones, the author of *From Here to Eternity*, and she wrote back that I was a very promising writer and she would continue to help me by mail because she had heart trouble and had no more room at her writers' colony in Ohio. She gave me instructions on how to develop as a writer. So every day, I'd get up in the morning, eat two raw eggs in a glass of ovaltine, shower and shave and then sit down and copy great works of literature, word for word, letter for letter, period for period just as she had told me to do. I must have copied fifty short stories ranging from Steinbeck to James Purdy and John Updike, Faulkner, Hemingway, and novels, too. I copied all of the *Great Gatsby*, *As I Lay Dying*, huge sections of *Ulysses*

and *The Sun Also Rises*, the beginnings and ends of every chapter in *From Here to Eternity*, large portions of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and, a couple of years later, two-thirds of *Rabbit Run*. I quit at what I considered the true end of the book, though Updike kept going for another hundred pages or so. After I'd copy for two or three hours or until lunch, I'd then start writing one of my stories, either reworking, continuing, or starting a new one. I'd write all afternoon until dinner time. Then, I'd eat and go back into the back sun porch where my writing room was, lined with my brother Eddy's and my own books, and study poetry. I'd read and translate Lorca and Vallejo. There was no Neruda, the commy, around to read in the U.S. then. Then finally around ten or eleven, I'd quit and get ready for bed.

This was my normal pattern. All the time that I spent in the back porch office, a small foreign car, with a big antennae sticking up from the back bumper to attract my attention, would circle the block, riding through the alley behind me, letting me know that I was being watched, trying to distract me. This is called hostile surveillance. Plainclothes cops would come up behind me in the unemployment line and stare at me and try to un-nerve me or knock on the front door and suddenly flash a badge in my face to scare me and disrupt my writing. But I kept writing. All of this for supposedly smoking a joint on Saturday nights, but really for daring to outwit the cops for a friend's sake. But I was determined that if they were going to try to capture me, I was going to make it pay off for me. If I had to withdraw from all society in order to save myself, then I would make it a creative solitude, and I did.

A maitre d' immigrant from Mexico, a handsome white man and his mate, an anglo real estate woman who sometimes did business with my father, had become friends to my father and his wife, and he wanted to read my palm one day. He said that I had the hand of a person who could forge their own destiny, that I could shape my own fate. This happened to me the Spring of 1958, after my father returned from Southern California. This was what I was sure I could do, but his words strengthened me. I

remember my younger sister Annabelle at the kitchen table in my father's house being resentful. She never did like my bohemian lifestyle and thought I should go to work and support my wife and kid just like any other married man. Why should I be so superior? Who did I think I was, anyway?

Finally, I won the Rockefeller Foundation scholarship to the El Centro Mexicano de Escritores in Mexico City in July, 1958, with the short stories that I had written and worked on during the months since I had been driven out of Cal in January, 1957. I won my escape from the local narcs with the talent that they had driven me to develop by driving me out of the university and what would have been an academic future for me as some professor somewhere. I'm leaving out at least a hundred more entrapment tries that would take more than a book-length volume to relate.

One buddy, Jerry O'Gara, now dead, who tried to set me up a couple times, in 1958 said, "You're so driven to be a writer, Floyd, because there's no other way you can make it in society." And he was right. I worked in an Oakland cannery for 90 twelve-hour days in a row the summer of 1958, with only one day off after 45 of those days, and saved a thousand dollars to keep me alive when I was gone for the promised year on the Rockefeller. I was exhausted, but determined. I left in October just before Halloween by myself since my wife had been promised a job in Mexico City, if she stayed with her women's department store job through Christmas, which she did and they got her a job as a private part time secretary for Mr. Shirley, the millionaire owner of the only American style motel -- at that time -- in Mexico City when she joined me in January, 1959.

I paid some dues though. And though I got away from the local narcs, the same kind of game started in Mexico City a couple of days after I got there. And I retired to creative solitude again. I moved in with another African American, writer to a pensione and the first night I was there, he and another writer on a Rockefeller, Archer McBride, brought in a whore and a sack of pot. After we

got high, we all took turns screwing her. But when Archer jumped into the bed while I was with her and tried to make a three-some out of it, I jumped out of bed. Then when another American who just happened to come in mentioned the FBI, I seemed to be so paranoid, I put on my clothes, picked up my bags and moved out. I called my wife in Oakland from a hotel, told her exactly what had happened and said I was going to fly back to my own country, where at least I had some rights and support. But she talked me out of it and I stuck it out until I could go back and get her and bring her with me after Christmas.

I had only gotten a scholarship. Two other guys from the U. S. who have never been heard from since (one of them, Archer, is the one who took me to that pensione that night) and who never reached a professional level in their writing, let alone achieved any fame, got fellowships in 1958, the year I applied. They received a couple of thousand dollars for the year. I had to pay my own living expenses. I was suspect, not respectable. I had a bad rep, somehow. There was something not good about me, evidently. I also wrote about criminals as if they were human beings. But I made the year pay and completely wrote and rewrote seventeen new and old stories, and came back from Mexico City never having been helped with a cent from the center, except for a part time job they gave me for a couple of weeks. Other writers from Mexico who had received fellowships asked me if I got any money and I said no, but I'd like to. Then I gave the director, Margaret Shedd, who was a well-known successful writer, my stories to read when she came back from the States for a while. She skimmed them, wrote, "These look all right to me," and sent me on my way. So I went, unhappy, but not bitter nor defeated. Five years later in 1964, I'd win what was, I think, the second or third Joseph Henry Jackson Award ever for an unfinished work of fiction, and she'd invite me to a party with other writers to impress them with the quality of the writers she'd taught, and I'd go. But I never forgot that not one person in that center ever asked me or my wife and

child to any social function of any kind except for one single time when my wife came back with me to Mexico City in January 1959, and Margaret Shedd took us to a play put on by a group of drama fellowship winners, actors and playwrights. She did not smile once the whole night.

As soon as I moved out of the pensione with the pot and the whore, after I first got to Mexico City alone in October, '58, a tall dark man in a brown suit used to stand outside my door in the small hotel I was staying in, and I'd see him every time I left or entered my room. Finally, I asked, "What are you watching me for?" And he smiled and, very slowly, said, "Com- u - nista!" I could tell you more, but that's enough. My wife was a blond of Mormon, now agnostic, stock, who had the face of Elizabeth Taylor, very beautiful. When she joined me in Mexico City, we sent my son to a private school in the ritziest section of town, Chapultepec, like all the other Americans who had children. Miss Bell, the principal, was so impressed with my wife, she hired her to teach my son's fourth grade in both Spanish and English, and when Teacher's Day came around, she got more presents from her students than any other teacher in the school. My wife is the only person I ever knew who learned how to speak Spanish by taking it in high school. Still, my son didn't have one friend there. He only received one invitation from another student and it was withdrawn without explanation. I'm sorry my wife and child had to pay my dues for me. The sins of the fathers shall fall upon the sons, if smoking pot can be considered a sin. Such is the price of non-conformity and artistic rebellion in any society.

When I came back to the United States in July 1959, I found I needed help, a true editorial perspective upon my work I didn't get from Margaret Shedd or anyone else at the writing center. Josephine Miles couldn't criticize fiction and I had stopped sending my poems to her. But first I had to earn some money. I worked in the cannery for three months again to save money and get back in

the black, which I did, though I got fired for breaking a guy's jaw who threatened me. The narcs were at the cannery, too, and my brother had blabbed that I brought a pound of pot back from Mexico with me, so when a guy named Al Rogers told me that I had sold an ounce to Al's cousin-in-law, which was a lie, I blasted him in the stomach with a left hook, hard, folded him up like a jackknife and told him not to fight or he'd lose. And he groaned, "I'm hip!" and never talked pot to me again. A few years later, he was found in an orchard outside San Jose with a bullet in his head. He had become a well-known fink. But then another guy, a tough Puerto Rican named Valiente didn't like me being his straw-boss, the assistant to the foreman, and wouldn't turn off the machines at lunch time because the year before he made 15 minutes overtime washing them off after everybody went to lunch for a half hour. This went on for two months or so. Finally, we fought and I broke his jaw with two quick left hooks and got fired, which forced me to look for another job. So I got a job as a busboy in a first class restaurant, but didn't like it, though the maitre d' told me if I stuck in that racket I'd be as good a waiter as Lou, the best waiter there. I then applied for a job as a shoe salesman when I didn't even know how to measure a foot size. I fibbed about my experience, got hired, and then told the manager, who was an excellent shoe dog, that I'd rather watch him as he sold a pair first. I watched carefully as he used the foot scale to measure width and length size, then took over on the next one and became his top salesman the six months I was there.

Then I called up Walter Van Tilburg Clark, the author of "The Oxbow Incident", in January, 1960, at his office at San Francisco State University, where he was head of the Creative Writing Department, got him on the phone, said I wanted to work personally with him, told him I didn't want to enter the Creative Writing Department, that I already was a writer, and he said, "There will be a card waiting for you at registration." And it was the most important thing that had happened to me in my writing

life since Josephine Miles took me under her wing, somewhat, three and a half years before.

I had wanted a shoe salesman's job so I could work nights and weekends and use all the days of the work-week to write. So I quit my full time job to take the directed writing course with Walter Van Tilburg Clark, who had written a truly great book, and planned to find another part time one. But I was such a good salesman, the company hired me back to work in another location, a warehouse type store on weekends and two nights, 24 hours a week, which gave me the time to write during the day. I had brought a pound of pot back from Mexico with me, so I wouldn't have to go out on the street to buy it and take my chances on getting busted. I used the pot to write. It lasted me two years and was a creative tool that allowed me to use both my day mind simultaneously with my dreaming mind, letting the day mind follow and support the dreaming mind into the world of imagination and metaphor. I didn't use pot to play. I used it to work. But it was work I loved.

Anyway, I now wrote in the day time and worked nights and weekends and began to rewrite all the stories I had written in Mexico City. Walter Van Tilburg Clark said I had some talent when he first talked to me about a couple of my stories and then told me how to rewrite, what to aim for that is, what was wrong with these drafts, mainly that there was no deeper meaning to the action of the stories. I asked him for his note pad and insisted on taking notes when he didn't want me to because he felt it was stifling, but I convinced him to allow me to do it and to also give me his notepad with his criticisms on it, which he reluctantly did. Then I went and studied in the library, reading books on symbol, theme and metaphor, as well as everything I could get my hands on on Rimbaud. I always studied poetry after I studied fiction, because one was harder than the other, and I wanted both. Then I rewrote the Pershing Square story and sent it to him when I was

running a trampoline center in Russian River, up the coast a 100 miles, for which I quit the shoe salesman's job. When I went to see him in late Spring, he was very excited about the story and sent me away with a thousand word new beginning to my story written by him in his tiny handwriting. It was great. I both loved and resented it. I feared that he was taking over my story, yet, I recognized the great act of giving it entailed as well as the map laid out right there in front of me of how to make my tale of a red-headed devil berating a tiny black woman preacher in the park, with skyscrapers and the pigeons flying all around, succeed. I broke the whole section he'd written down into parts so I could understand exactly what he did. He told me the story was quite well-written and urged me to keep writing and to enter the creative writing program he had founded at State because he was retiring to go into Nevada and write himself. It was wonderful. One of the best experiences of my life. I'd seen him twice and he had illuminated metaphor for me. And he'd loved my story so much he'd written his own beginning to it. He helped shape my life. And that Fall, I entered the Creative Writing Department at SF State. It was one of the most important forces in my writing life, as important as Cal and Josephine Miles. I was forging my way.

San Francisco State was a conservative commuter's school with a blond, pink-complexioned Homecoming Queen and sororities and fraternities. Fraternity bullies who would come and harrass us when we demonstrated for Peace and Hands Off Cuba. I didn't care about them. I was there to talk, read, write and breathe writing, both poetry and fiction, and knew with the heat that was on me that I could never ever even think about being a teacher. I was an outcast, a pariah, like Jerry O'Gara said. There was only one way I could make it in America and that was by becoming an important writer. So I had no intention of using a degree to get success, which included teaching. In fact, the worst grade I ever got was a D in Mental Health in 1963, a required course for public school teaching, which I could substitute for a

science class. I got the D because I challenged the professor -- who was always using me as a guinea pig in the class -- to quit talking about being creative and let me go home and create my sculpture and I'd bring it back to him at the end of the summer session to prove what I'd done. For some reason, though I never told anyone, he knew I got up every morning and wrote before I came to school. He gave me a D because I wouldn't give him the sculpture I'd carved out of sandstone, therefore proving I hadn't learned how to play the game. The one thing the authorities wanted to teach me was to learn how to play the game and prove that I was rehabilitated and thereby break my stubborn idealistic attitude. This was the last science class I needed in order to get my bachelor's degree in 1963, which I did after I got out of the nuthouse. I'd been in school for 12 years already and still didn't have a degree. But I get ahead of myself here.

I did great at State. Herb Wilner, the new head of the department wrote in his note on my brilliant term paper in The Craft of Fiction class, studying the construction of the novel, that he paid me tribute for my ideas and my writing.

I got As in everything but fiction writing because I was too clumsy and didn't polish the manuscripts. My poems were published in *Transfer*, the best college literary magazine in the country. I was on the editorial staff. It wasn't until I won the Joseph Henry Jackson Award in 1964, for an unfinished work of fiction, worth a thousand dollars and contact by agents and publishers, Harpers, that is, that I began to get As in fiction, when I was already a graduate student. Creative writing departments grade on neat clean styles. I was struggling to gain control of a tragic subject matter, crime and murder, that was huge, novel size, not neat little short stories about minor personal hassles, and I didn't sweat style. Everybody who read them would say, "Great. Powerful. But they're not short stories. They could never be published as short stories. They'd have to be published in hard cover, if at all." Finally in the fall of 1961, after one year at State,

I said to myself: If these stories aren't short stories, I'll make them into long stories, novels. And I did. My first three novels were originally three of the very first short stories I wrote when I applied for the Rockefeller.

But in the meantime, since I wasn't going to be able to teach anywhere, I figured I had to be able to earn a living doing something, so I took a journalism course writing for the daily paper, the *Golden Gater* in the Fall of 1961, but told the instructor, Jerry Wortheimer, that I was working on a novel in the mornings and wouldn't be able to come to class, though I'd write for the paper. Well, he didn't like that very much, but I then wrote an article on SF State students picketing the AEC building in Berkeley, a block from Cal, and took pictures of them, too. The editors put it on the front page with my byline, and nobody ever bothered me about attending class again. Also, the media picked it up and whammo! Now, The Movement got some press and TV, and the authorities decided to bust them. Then when they got busted, a troop of reporters showed up at the court hearing and they got more publicity. I didn't realize what I'd done until a Quaker named Cecil, a big middleaging preacher, who worked with the small band of pacifists at school, told me I was doing a wonderful job publicizing the movement like that. I also was the primary organizer of a demonstration in Union Square in downtown San Francisco in which I tried to get all the dissenting groups in the bay area to object to the atomic bomb military industrial complex in order to save the world. And I also organized an all-night vigil that hit the front pages when the Russians set off the hydrogen bomb. But it wasn't until the Vietnam war had started and the whole country started demonstrating that I realized what I'd done, that I'd actually been in the vanguard of the student movement, just as that intellectual in Pershing Square that January day in 1957 had predicted.

But I learned all about radical politics when I went from school to school, SF State to Cal to socialist and communist and anarchist and pacifist groups in San Francisco and Berkeley, trying to rally everyone together for the cause. I didn't know that you weren't supposed to tell the truth, that repeating publicly what people said wasn't good politics. Once, I spoke out at a socialist club dinner party meeting that I got to address for the proposed rally in Union Square in San Francisco. The chairman of the party told everybody to go to the rally because it would be good for them, for their political group, and for that reason, only, to do it. I got up and spoke in this anarchist restaurant -- Anarchists were the only ones beside the students who cared or did anything about the war machine then -- and told the socialist club that that was exactly the wrong reason to do it. I wanted them to join the rally because they loved us and the country and the world, not because it would pay off for them. When I finished only one woman clapped, but hard, and in the rest of the big restaurant, where a group of anarchists were sitting, one young man said, "Good speaker!" as I walked out.

Then when another student, Don Auclair, and I organized the Student Peace Union in the early Spring semester of 1962, everybody started jockeying for political power, since I seemed to get all the publicity. I was already writing the second draft of my novel *Tattoo The Wicked Cross* and was only carrying 11 units in school so I could devote most of my day to it. When I showed up at school one afternoon and saw the table set up on the commons by the student activists and people acted cool to me in an attempt to keep me from being president of the peace union, I shook my head, said, "I pass. You can keep this presidency," and went home and wrote on my novel. In two years it would win the Joseph Henry Jackson Award and bring me attention and fame. And the Student Peace Union would not commit another act without my leadership that attracted any attention from either the school or the public media.

But it wasn't over for me. An undercover CIA agent by the name of Bob, posing as a student on the campus, asked me to work with the Company in order to keep the student peace movement democratic -- though he wouldn't positively identify the agency until I met with his supervisor. He told me that smoking pot would get me in trouble if I didn't cooperate. I said it sounded like a blackmail threat. When I then backed off from the Student Peace Union, he put my name up for the presidency in my absence, but it wasn't accepted since I wouldn't attend the election meeting. Then when I still wouldn't attend any of the meetings and stayed away from school to write my novel, the heat now infiltrated my family through my new brother-in-law Fred Castro. I already spoke about the FBI agent masquerading as a plumber.

But even though I stayed home to work on my novel, *Tattoo The Wicked Cross*, I still got embroiled in politics at school. I'd written a poem called "The Professor and the Lumberjack" and submitted it to *Transfer* magazine. It was accepted, but because I was then being ostracized for some unknown reason, it was stuck on the last page of a play by one of the editors and overlooked when the magazine was attacked and held up from distribution and sales by the right wing student body president for the word "arty-farty" used in a short story about a musician who breaks up with his girl. The story was written by Clancy Carlisle, who would later write the novel, *Honky Tonk Man*, which would be made into a movie produced by and acted in by Clint Eastwood. A student judge ordered the magazine released, but when it was, everybody read the magazine and discovered my poem about a homosexual orgy which ends in murder and I became famous on the campus, though the student newspaper, which had followed my political organizing, reported the furor which followed by hardly mentioning my name, even though right wing forces on the campus, including a couple of professors, tried to have the magazine banned for good and took the issue to the college council

meeting of professors and student body officers, where both mine and Clancy's school records were examined. One history professor then complained because students like Clancy and I were almost straight A students, which meant that writers of obscene material were being rewarded by the Creative Writing Department. All they did was fan the flames and sell the magazine out and make me famous on campus now for my outrageous poem as well as my political acts of dissent. Here's the poem:

THE PROFESSOR AND THE LUMBERJACK

The Professor of English
and the lumberjack
met in a bar
orange tea and bourbon
gin grin
and the knuckle crunch
of eye teeth
spectacles
and nuts

Two fifths later
the Professor
took the lumberjack home
and took off his clothes
and hurt the lumberjack's feelings

But the lumberjack stayed
and took his clothes off
flexed his muscle
tied the Professor to the bed
whipped him with his own belt
beat him
into an orgasm
of sperm and blood

swoon and scream
coming
and dying
and then
pissed on him

That spring of 1962, on May Day, the first black nationalist appeared on campus and created a scandal with his attacks on the white power structure and his demand for a separate black country within the United States. He preached hate and I took him on. One African American poet, Welton Smith, whom I knew and befriended, put his arm around my shoulder and said, "I claim Floyd as a friend."

But I was so disturbed by the demand for separation when I and all my friends worked hard for integration of all peoples in the United States, especially the African American element, I went home and wrote a poem and called it into the student newspaper office where the main editor, John Burkes, who later wrote for *Newsweek*, took my call and typed up the poem and put it into the next newspaper that week. That, too, raised a stink, but I found that a couple of the right wing professors now even said hello to me. Here's that poem, too.

MAY DAY 1962

A speaker on the campus:
black nationalist
brilliant seer of black currents
in the muddy globe
folk orator
brown

He harangued the crowd in pulpit tones
but denied The Christ
the white man's God

He would keep his cheek to himself
reign like an African
a prince of dignity

I would not exist
He would be free
perhaps Muslim

Integration?
The vote?
Slums of the North?
Rape and lynch?

I can keep my share

He would be free

I would not exist

But time would solve my identity

And indeed
he might be the sculptor of my fist
the blacksmith of my shield

And we would drink the blood of black sheep

and white kid

and toast the horn of Lucifer

It was a prophetic poem. Because that was what indeed did happen. The black power movement became violent and created a backlash and all the blacks and liberals and student activists suffered. But I got such a reaction from black poets and the few

black people that were then in The Movement, who wanted me to sympathize with and understand them, I wrote another poem the next week and it was even more prophetic.

TO A BLACK MESSIAH

You seek a promised land?
with the fence posts planted by your own hand?
You wish to sow black seed with black topsoil?
pocket the bright fruit
that glitters on the branch
like coins?

bend your knee to a black God in a burnoose?
with a broadsword?

show the small of your back to that apostle
with the bleeding rib
and the pale brow?

Then there must a messiah!
A black man
crowned in the kink of his own thorns
while seeking the timber of black truth
for that silver nail
that blood clot
in his pink palm

There must be a messiah!
if anti-Christ and the white man's lie:
the fang in the lamb's bleat
the rape in Georgia cotton
that is veiled
in the lace of scripture

There must be a Messiah!
willing to paint the blackened ulcer
of his race
with the iodine of his own veins
willing to stitch the bruises of his own skin
on the patches of discolor
in the white pigment
of a pale skinned pride

If you deny the Christ
there must be a Messiah!
to shoulder the lynch tree
and hang from its branch

like a flag

I unwittingly prophecied the deaths of Malcom X and Martin Luther King six years later. But now, though the black poets were pleased, the professors who spoke to me the week before ignored me again. But I called it as I saw it and it came true.

All the time that I had called in both the poems on the phone, because I had written them at home, the phone kept clicking as if someone was trying to distract and interrupt the phone calls that would then give me more publicity for my outrageous acts of dissent. That was in the Spring. I used to see guys following me around campus all the time, even when I played around with a couple of girls. I felt I had to get published in some way, so I decided to go see Lawrence Ferlighetti, who had not spoken at the demonstration I organized at Union Square, but did attend it. He was the publisher of *Howl*, after all, and seemed the logical choice for my biblical poems, which I called *Prayers of Heresy*. He remembered me and read a couple of the poems, then called them psychopathic and sent me on my way. And this is the guy who published *Howl*? Who had to fight a criminal charge for

publishing sexually psychopathic poetry? Here are two of the poems.

SCARECROW

Out of a tent of wind
came a tuxedoed scarecrow
dancing for me
with hinged limbs of broom
whistling a dirge
through the bearded straw of his chin

His tongue was laughing black
His eye the shadow of crow
The silken knot at his throat
the strangled heart of a bow

Still he danced
His cane steps tapped their song
until I cried that I could not dance
with the murmur and shiver of silk
'till my toes had nails of bone
my eyes
the curdle
of milk

BLACKLIPPED BIRD

A black-lipped bird
hunting from a wind
snatched the yellow stalk of my tongue
from the belly of a rain cloud
and spit it on the peak
of a climbing mountain

No odor of mint pine there

only dogwood
and bat screech
poison leaf
and goat pellet
and the numbed pond
of a rock spring
stiff
with the peelings
of August snow

I was still desperate and went to the left-wing radio station KPFA and left some poems there, asking if I could read them on the radio. A couple of days later I got a call from a guy named John Leonard, who asked me to come in and read them. He was a personable blond guy, who would later become the editor of the *New York Times Book Review* section. I was so excited that when he put me in a room by myself with a mike and closed the door, I started reading right away in a rushed, excited voice, mumbling and slurring my words. I'd gotten through about three long poems when he came to the door and said to get ready and watch the red light above the door. When it went off I was supposed to begin reading. I'd been reading to myself all this time but had unwittingly warmed up for the reading and now could read calmly and strongly for a good half hour, poem after poem. Then when the KPFA folio came out with the programs listed for the next month or two, I wrote to my hero, Norman Mailer, who had been clipped hard by a *Time* magazine reviewer for his first book of poems, written in a poetic form and style of his book. I told him I sympathized with him and liked the poem he had written to the editor and printed in the letter section and told him that my reading would be broadcast over WBAI in New York City, since it and KPFA in Los Angeles and KPFA in Berkeley were all three members of Pacifica Radio. He wrote back saying that he was too busy writing to listen to my poems and that I was trying to cash in on his fame. Well, I lost that one, but I still didn't quit. I then

wrote to Lowney Handy again, sent her some stories, and asked for her help with my writing. She wrote back and said she had a bad heart condition and couldn't help me but that she didn't know how or when, but she was sure that some day I would be a well-known, well thought of writer. Well, that was two strikes, though the last one might have been called a foul ball. She died a year or two after that letter. I then saw a poster announcing that Nelson Algren was going to appear at San Francisco State and I showed up. After his speech, I went to the back stage door of the auditorium and introduced myself and said that I wrote the same kind of material he wrote and asked him if he could help me. We were walking away from the auditorium and he suddenly asked me if I was a boxer. When I asked him how he could tell, he said by my walk, my movements. Then he gave me the address of his agent Candida Donadio and told me to write to her. I was writing the third draft of my novel *Tattoo* then in the fall of 1962 and it wasn't quite ready to send yet, and I didn't want to strike out with a few short stories, so I held off writing right away. But I'd gotten a single anyway and didn't strike out.

Then the next thing that happened was my wife began to act strangely and make strange comments. One time --after I had gone to review a Becket play at the Actors Workshop at the Marines Theater in San Francisco for the school newspaper -- when we were leaving a crowded bar in Jack London Square in Oakland, she called out, "Floyd! These guys are bothering me!" When I stepped up to protect her, one of them leaped at me and when I threw a punch at him, she stepped in front of me and blocked my punch with her hip so I couldn't get him good. We wrestled out the front door and I got him down, but I still didn't hit him, just pocketed my review notes as I sat on him while a pickup truck pulled up to us and kept his headlights on us so everyone could see what was happening. He did the strangest thing I ever saw in my life. He threw his arm across his face and when he pulled it away,

there were cuts on his eyes. Still, I didn't hit him and the fight ended.

Then a couple of weeks later, when some woman who drove a Cadillac and belonged to the business crowd my wife belonged to leaned all over me in a bar and tried to kiss me and I held her off, my wife surprised me by saying it was okay I should have kissed her. I finally pinned her down about both acts among others and when she admitted she was put up to it by the police, I said call the DA right now and tell them they can bust me walking down the street with a joint and put me in prison. If they can get to you, I quit. She said she'd go talk to the police the next day and I should hold off. That next evening she said I only had to do 90 to 120 days and I was pleased that it wasn't San Quentin. The following morning a police wagon came, but instead of taking me to jail took me to the psychiatric ward at Highland Hospital. The jolly redfaced cop driving the wagon said that a colleague of mine had died that day, Robert Frost. Then he showed me the arrest warrant at the hospital which said, "... is writing a social protest novel and believes the police are after him." When I told a doctor the narcs were after me and I, like Raskolnikov, who thought he was above the law, in *Crime and Punishment*, had brought suffering to my family, another doctor came in and acted as if I was crazy. So, I stayed up all night the night before court, lying in my bed, figuring out what to do, and the next day in court, after my wife testified against me, saying I was acting crazy, never mentioning all the wierd phone calls and the cars that followed us everywhere we went or her admitted to me cooperation with the police, which she had admitted to me. I told the judge that I had been smoking pot and was just imagining the police were after me, which meant I wasn't crazy. I saw the head doctor spin around and stare at me. But now I had out-finessed him, and the judge said, "You seem tense. Go spend a couple of weeks on the funny farm, anyway, so you can rest." And I did, and took no medication the whole time I was there, at Napa Hospital, telling the doctor, Dr. Jones, I didn't want to become an emotional cripple. I was probably the only

person in the nuthouse, including the doctors and nurses, who didn't take tranquilizers. When he asked me what my IQ was and I said 150 plus, he guffawed and proceeded to give me an IQ test right then. By the time he was finished, his eyes were wide with surprise, but the love of my wife and I was ruined.

I got out of the nuthouse three weeks later but they wouldn't release me completely because I hesitated when I was asked if I'd stop smoking pot completely. I had to spend seven more half weeks there before I was finally allowed to leave for good. When I first got to Napa, an Oakland narc was in the receiving room. He said hello to me and put his arm around my shoulder because I had been willing to give up. Then when I was received, the head of the State bureau of Mental Health, who looked like Alfred Hitchcock, came in, took my statement and immediately left. A group of psychiatrists had an interview meeting with me, the only person that whole day of maybe fifty people who had arrived at Napa Hospital to be interviewed by them. One of them asked me why I smoked pot and I answered, "Because it makes me love everybody."

When I was finally released under the conservatorship of my wife after 10 weeks, on the grounds that I would now get a job as a reporter at the Oakland Tribune, where a cousin's husband was copy editor, I put a rifle in my mouth to see if I could kill myself, then stood up and started writing the fourth draft of *Tattoo*. I wouldn't ask my cousin for the reporter job. I was too idealistic and wanted to get it myself, so I was hired as a copy boy. I quit after a couple of months to take a reporter's job with a suburban newspaper, then went back to school to get my MA and finish my novel.

I finished the fourth draft and sent it to Candida Donadio who read it and then sent me a rejection letter. I wrote to Nelson Algren again and told him that she'd rejected it, but that it was a powerful story and I still wanted to get it published even though I was now working as a reporter for a suburban newspaper. He wrote back to me that if it was only my own hope talking about it being powerful

because Candida would have taken it if it were. Nevertheless, he told me to send it to him and be prepared to have red marks all over it and don't think about jumping off the bridge either. I felt he had misjudged me and didn't send him the book, which I regret to this day.

But I then read that Allen Ginsberg was in town after a year in India and I called up at Ferlinghetti's City Lights bookstore. I got him on the phone, told him I'd like to show him my poetry that I was an outcast writer and made him say, "Hey! Don't scare me!" though he agreed to meet me there. I told him I'd drive right over. I lived at that time in the Montclair upper middle class district of Oakland with my wife. She was making a lot of money as the head bookkeeper for the junk company she worked for.

There he was still dressed in the flowing robes of an Indian fakir waiting in the book store for me. We went across the street to a cafe that would later be the famous restaurant Tosca, and I showed him some of my *Prayers of Heresy*. A blond man sat the table right next to us by himself and listened to everything we said. Ginsberg turned the poems down, too. I was right where I started, only worse. I decided then to send my book *Tattoo* to the Joseph Henry Jackson Award competition, which had been won the year before by Leonard Gardner for *Fat City*. The prize was only a couple of years old at that time. If I didn't win it, I was going to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge. It was my last hope. But in June, 1964, a telegram was delivered to me by a guy in a sport coat who looked like a plainclothes cop. When I called the number, I was told I had won the award, but couldn't tell anybody about it. I had to keep it a secret. I couldn't understand that. Herb Gold, Tom Parkinson and some other man were the judges. I was so excited, I went to see my father in his restaurant and told him and talked excitedly about it. When I called the person I had talked to at the San Francisco Foundation which administered the award about what to do next, the man said, "Don't bother," in a real cold voice. It turned out that I was the only person who won the award who

was never given an award luncheon for it, to this day, over thirty years later, though I myself was one of the judges two years in a row, for 1978 and '79 and attended the luncheons. Still, I didn't have to kill myself and my life did change for the better.

The award brought me fame and the novel earned me much more fame when it was published in 1967. It was called a work of genius, a classical first novel and the best first novel in ten years in the Saturday Review of Literature, among other rave reviews, including the New York Times. It was also picked for the Evergreen Book Club as a dual selection with Norman Mailer's *Why Are We In Vietnam?*

I was no longer considered crazy by my friends and family, but eccentric. Such is the benefit of being accepted by society. I then wrote to Nelson Algren and sent him a copy of the article about the award and said, "I'm not gloating, Nelson. I've got a long way to go. I just wanted you to know that it was a powerful book like I said it was, no matter what Candida Donadio's opinion was."

But I'd lost the love of my wife and within two years, in 1966, a year before the book was published, my wife and I broke up for good. I'd played around with a couple of girls at San Francisco State in 1961 and '62, and that was how the FBI got to my wife, with the help of my brother-in-law and sister Annabelle, of course. But I'd been true to my wife since, though she didn't love me anymore after the humiliation and subjugation of the nuthouse. I had started going to church again and was going to get remarried in it so I could go to confession, but when I asked her if she still loved me, she said she didn't know and I called the marriage off and quit going to church. I completely broke with my family after that and didn't talk to any of them again until they started showing up after I won the Jackson Award and I got all the publicity after *Tattoo* was published. But it was over. I no longer had a marriage nor a family of any kind. I was totally alienated from all close human contact. The only good thing, to me, that came out of the nuthouse was the state department of vocational

rehabilitation gave me a monthly stipend to get my two degrees, a BA and an MA from San Francisco State.

I applied as a teaching assistant to a creative writing instructor, George Price, at State and did so well they gave me a job. I started teaching creative writing at San Francisco State the summer of 1966 and moved out of an upper middle class neighborhood of Oakland, Montclair, and into the Castro district of San Francisco with a young writing student, Juliet Calabi, before that district was a gay enclave. It was a sad, yet beautiful life. I was free now and could flirt with any woman I wanted to and there was no guilt. Still, I loved my wife and yet knew that it was over between us forever. She wanted me to come back a few months after I left, but it was too late. I did go back once, but as soon as I was there, I felt the pressure of the police again and told my son, when I drove him to Skyline High School, where he was now going, that it was being watched by cops. Within two weeks after I moved out of the house because I felt I was being set up, one hundred students were busted at the school for pot and many of them were asked if I had furnished pot to them. One particular incident, in which I took my son and a couple of his buddies over to the Haight Ashbury and stopped to buy a six pack of beer, was used as an example of my supplying he and his buddies with pot. But it wasn't true and there were no charges made against me. But my life as a family man was over forever.

But I had spent four and a half years writing *Tattoo* and had lost my wife and my life and I didn't want to go through that again. So I wrote a novella, *What Now My Love*, in twenty-three days in February, 1968, when I had the flu and rewrote it four more times in five months and sold it to Grove Press. I'd been working on my second novel, *Gin for Xmas*, during the fall of 1966 and up to the fall of 1967. I sent it to Grove and when they didn't answer right away, I wrote and told them that the book was as great as *Tattoo* and whoever didn't think so didn't know nothin' and I didn't care

who he was. They sent me a contract for \$2,000.00 and the book back to rewrite. When I reread it, I felt it was too sentimental and wrote the other book, *What Now My Love*, and sent that to them instead and they snatched it up. I would try to rewrite *Gin For Xmas*, an autobiographical novel about my brother Al and I four more times over a total of 35 years, counting the time I wrote it as a short story in 1957, before I'd make it a pure memoir and write it three times in two and half months on a computer in 1991 and sell it immediately. But that was my fourth published book and I get a little ahead of myself again.

I was living in Capitola below Long Beach at the southern tip of the San Francisco peninsula when Martin Luther King got killed the Spring of 1968 and I went back to Berkeley to fight for freedom again. I'd signed a separate peace with myself about fighting the establishment after my disillusionment with the Student Peace Union so I could write and do my thing and not get mixed up in any more political power stuff. But now I felt I had to do something. Malcolm X and the Black Panthers were getting shot down, too. It was a crisis. So I went back to Berkeley, wrote an article on the killing of a teenage Panther, Bobby Hutton, by the Oakland cops that was printed in the *Berkeley Barb*, then moved to San Francisco and joined the sit-in occupation of the San Francisco State administration building. It lasted one week and we won 14 out of 15 of the points we sat-in for including a new black studies department, a La Raza department, and the lowering of admission standards to allow 1,000 minority students into the college. The only thing we didn't get was ROTC, pronounced rot-sy, off campus. We beat everybody but the Pentagon. Undercover cops were everywhere. I challenged one when he walked upon the banner we were making in the basement of the Ad building, pretending he was drunk, and jerked him outside where no one could see us and told him that if he kept molesting us, I was going to blast him and he split. But that didn't help me with the FBI, the CIA and the SF police department. The phone in the house we

were staying in --my new lady and I, Ginny Staley, with another couple, Steve Wiesinger and Barbara Schatan -- got tapped. The ignition of my MG got jammed when I tried to drive home that night. But the greatest irony of all is when I got accused of being an undercover cop. I believe it was because I took on the central committee when they tried to run things without consulting the mass of students sitting in. When I tried to get the mike to speak about it, one of the ruling members of the committee running the sit-in took over the mike and kept it away from me. I was really hurt and didn't come back. And in a couple of days, I got letters from students, all girls, in the sit-in, telling me to come back and join them and I did. Then everybody knew that I was a wild novelist former teacher there who had helped start all this seven years before, and the students all welcomed me back and kept referring to me over the mike. It made the whole battle worth it.

Also, in 1968, I also took on Saul Bellow when he appeared about two or three weeks before we staged the sit-in of the administration building at San Francisco State, and said the university should be a haven from vulgarity for the writer. I asked him to confirm that he'd said that since I'd come into the auditorium late. He said he was sorry I had to sit in the aisle so far back because it was so crowded but he wasn't going to answer that question. Then a young woman near the front asked how much of his work was autobiographical and he said it was none of her business. The English and Creative Writing faculty members who were sitting on the stage behind him smugly clapped with each of his answers. Then another young writer, Frank Olson, sitting near me in the aisle, asked him why he called his last book *Herzog* instead of Bellow, and there was an uproar at the impudence of these young people. I jumped up and said, "Do you realize what you're doing worshipping that effete man down there in that expensive suit. I bet he can't even come!" An even greater uproar followed. All the faculty people on the stage had a shit-fit and people stood up and some clapped and others cheered, and I

hurried out. When I got outside, I saw a beautiful student I knew standing with some other students. I thought I was going to be attacked when one woman standing a few feet away from her said, "You should be ashamed of yourself. He's a great man." But a student with a motorcycle helmet in his hand, standing next to the beautiful girl I knew, said, "Bellow asked for that. You stood up for all of us." And a couple of weeks or so later, I joined the sit-in at the Ad building.

After the successful sit-in, we three couples, Ginny and I, Steve and Barbara, and Vic and Mary Roerich, spent three months in the Siskiyou mountains of Northern California on an old homestead still owned by the original family, Vic's wife Mary. He was an artist buddy who lived next door to us in San Francisco on the hill with a view of the Golden Gate. Then in September we left for Europe, my lady and I, Steve and Barbara. On the plane, my seats were sold twice. So they had to unsnarl the mess first. It turned out the guy who was given my seat was a dope dealer who was retiring on the proceeds of his business and going off to Europe for a while, where he bought a fairly new Mercedes and took me for a ride in it in Mallorca. But there was also a couple who sat behind Barbara and Steve, and the guy was the only man on the plane in a suit with a white shirt and tie. The plump woman in a blue-skirted uniform with him looked like she went to a catholic college. She took my picture as soon as I stepped off the plane. I wrote all about this in *State of Emergency*. But in Europe, I planned to write a novel about the siezure of the Ad building and my days as a student radical. It turned out that though I managed to write it, called *Lay My Body On The Line*, in four years from 1968 to 1972, I didn't get it published until 1978 by Ishmael Reed and Al Young, two great African American writers, as a Y'Bird Press project, funded by the NEA. That year I also got an NEA grant of \$7,500.00, which I put down on a four-unit apartment complex, in which I still live very cheaply now.

But all my time in Europe was ruined by the machinations of the CIA and Interpol. I was tailed everywhere. Every contact I had with every publisher in England and France was controlled by the same two agencies working together and every police department in every city or village I lived in whether in England, Spain, Morocco or France. It made life a constant trial. In Spain we were harrassed so much that I finally fought a six-four, red-haired Spaniard who stuck his camera in my face and snapped my picture for the tenth time that morning. Then when I finally knocked him out after being down three times myself, and went to a doctor to set my misplaced knuckle, the doctors broke my thumb and mis-set my knuckle, bent my finger over, so that if I hadn't torn the cast off after three weeks, I would have had a permanently crippled claw for a hand. I had to have the hand operated on after I got back to America, thanks to the Writers Guild, who paid for it on the grounds that I was an impoverished writer. The CIA made life itself a living death in Hell. I moved from country to country trying to get away, but only moved myself into another police jurisdiction. I was treated like a political pariah, and had to come back to the U.S., New York City, to get *What Now My Love* published. I wrote all about this in *State of Emergency*, which wasn't published until twenty years after I finished it by Arte Publico Press on April Fool's Day, 1996. Every day while I was in Europe, I was worked on in an attempt to control my writing and my activities. It was 1984 on an international level. What should have been a great happy creative trip became a sinister unhappy nightmare.

Tony Brown, Mailer's publisher of *Armies of the Night*, wouldn't publish either of my novels, *Tattoo* or *Love*, in England, though I got to meet Mailer for the first time and we had a great conversation in which he told me I was going to have to become a performer if I wanted to make it in America, then told me to call him when I got to New York. Spain broke my bones. Morocco threatened me with the hospital, if I persisted in my writing about my radical life and harrassed me and my girl all the time. When I

went back through Spain to Paris, five men in black rain coats tried to bust me on the ferry from Tangier to Algeciras and a CIA agent tried to ride in the van I was riding in to Paris, though I refused to allow him to do it. In the cafe next to the Algeciras dock, he talked about smuggling dope and making big money. All these dope dealers were making big bucks, people kept telling me. It just so happened that the owner of the van I was riding in had thirty pounds of kif hidden in his van and my lady was carrying about a half a pound hidden on her body. The nephew of a Grove Press sales manager came over with us carrying hash cookies and loose kif in his pockets. I was the only one who came in clean, yet I was the only one that was surrounded on the ferry by four men in black raincoats. But I was clean and they couldn't bust me. France had published my first novel *Tattoo*, but wouldn't publicize it or me or allow me to attend any book functions nor would they attend my reading at the Shakespeare Book Store by the Notre Dame in Paris because I didn't play the game and didn't call up James Jones again when he didn't call me back after they'd given me his private number. One night, when I was being followed down the street by some big American agents in trenchcoats, I stopped and wrote this down, but was interrupted before I could finish it by a woman walking with my lady, Ginny and I.

DOWN WET PARIS STREETS

I'm with you baby!
Yeah Eldridge
You and me and Leroy
and every other crazy motherfucker me!
Kiss my ass!
Those fucking bulls tail me in trench coats
down wet Paris streets

Shiver
and write these words down
on a damp car top

Raindrops
on my palm
follow this heat in my hand
till I get this down
and leave some blood
on their hands
All these paddy poets
And I mean Ginsberg too
Cop-outs all of them

After three months or so in Paris, I gave up and headed back for the U.S. on July 3rd, 1969 and arrived in New York on the Fourth of July, Independence Day. When I went into Washington Square in Greenwich Village to play my drums, only I received a citation to appear in court for creating a public disturbance though there were ten other drummers. In New York, I did get my book *Love* edited and a publication date set for January '70, but I was not invited to a single social function by any of the Grove Press staff, except for one business luncheon, in which my food was burned in a posh restaurant, exactly as it had been burned in a fine restaurant in Marakesh. I participated in every protest demonstration I could that hot summer, including picketing Rockefeller's apartment next to Central Park. It was a great but bitter experience and merely capped the whole year of turmoil and the fight to keep writing my novel of political dissent. In the Canary Islands, with my crippled hand, I wrote this poem:

BE MY VALENTINE

A strange thing
an image of myself
keeps coming back to me
a self-pitying one
bringing with it a flush of tears
seeing myself

as some persecuted
trapped creature
in some room
with the walls listening in

Picture of secret police
with their heads bent
to my baby talk with my chick
and my sobs when I cried
maybe hurting them too
anonymous frowns on their faces
white shirts and ties
tracking my lifeline across the globe
spiking it dry

There's a danger there for me
Mist over my eyeballs for myself
could drain me for good
have no spine left
to stand up with
and shout
Fuck
you!

I didn't finish the book, *Lay My Body On The Line* until election day, 1972, three years later. I was then told by Luther Nichols, the west coast editor of Doubleday, that it was the book they were all looking for about student radicals, but it was too late. He then invited me to lunch, which I refused since the protest movement was still very strong at that time, and it was hardly too late. It took me six more years and a Democratic president, Carter, to get the published in 1978 with NEA money. The NEA, National Endowment for the Arts, has supplied the funding for the publishing of all my work since 1970. This includes the book published by Arte Publico Press in 1992, my memoir,

Buffalo Nickel, the republication of *What Now My Love*, 1995, *State of Emergency*, 1996, and my first book of poems, *Color of My Living Heart*, 1996. With the new restrictions Congress has passed, I cannot ever again apply for an NEA fellowship. I have never received a Guggenheim.

After I came back to Berkeley in September, 1969, I had been nominated for a Guggenheim by Harry T. Moore, the renowned biographer and critic of D.H. Lawrence and his work. I was invited by the writer Kay Boyle to a reception for him at her home in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. With the publication of *Tattoo*, he had compared me to Susan Sontag and Robert Stone in an important review in 1967. Half the Creative Writing Department at State was there, also Lew Welch the Beat poet. I gave Kay Boyle a copy of *Love*. Everybody was supposed to go to dinner together, but I didn't have any money. So Harry took my lady and I to the St. Francis Hotel for a drink. We had a great talk and he mentioned that the giver of the Guggenheims was going to be in San Francisco the next week, but I didn't have the social, opportunistic bent to seize upon the chance to meet him, though I knew I had been nominated. I was so used to not being included in social functions, I assumed I was not invited, and though Harry called from the St. Francis and said that my lady, Ginny Staley, had left her purse there, I still didn't get the hint. And I didn't get a Guggenheim. I remember the night I found out. I laid in bed in the dark and cried quietly to myself. It wasn't how good I wrote. It was how well I played the game. I didn't even know when there was a game! As soon as I saw subterfuge, I backed away and so never learned to play. Subterfuge always meant trouble. It always meant cops. It always was cops in one form or another. I didn't do back away when I sensed them primarily out of principle but to keep from being manipulated and all that entailed, meaning finally being corrupted and coerced into a willingness to play so bad you had no values left to write with (like screwing the right person, letting your lady get screwed by

the right person) which is why nearly all American novelists never again reach the promise of their first books. They learn how to make it and forget how to create. They become power driven and ambitious, rather than loving and creative. I did not trust the cops. The cops don't trust each other. Each runs on a power principle that is total. They get paid to look for trouble, so they can stop it any way they can. They enjoy wielding the power. That's why they're cops. So they create trouble through entrapment so they can bust somebody and earn their bucks. So I back away. Instinct rules me. Thought follows.

But thought, thinking the problem of entrapment, through, works. Thought crystalizes. Thought reveals the pattern of the subterfuge. The pattern is in the action. The pattern reveals itself, if I look at it. Maybe the whole world runs on this subterfuge, but it still smacks of deceit. And deceit is harmful to the deceived, even if they don't realize it, or if they do, it hurts, too, to see the deceiver hide himself from you. No friendship exists at that moment, nor can it ever if the attitude remains the same. Maybe everybody lies like this, but the cops do it, too, and the cops hunt people who break marijuana laws. So that makes me always an object of attention, which coupled with the weapon of my words, my talent, a threat, if I write about the patterns, meaning write about the cops. Also, in spite of a humanitarian impulse, when someone manipulates you, I, me, we, you struggle to escape their power and you don't like being subjected to unpleasantness. Because it is unpleasant. So you, I, me, we don't like the unpleasant. Not for personality reasons, but for self-protective reasons. I stay away from the subterfuge and unpleasantness, stay away from people who employ it, which keeps me out of the literary business because this business is based on the power principle, get the advantage, do the other dude in, which makes me, because I shy away, a monk. Which makes me think and write because I am in an intuitive, subconscious state of emotion, which is creative solitude. The supreme irony of being eternally hunted is

that it forces me into a personal privacy which is so intense that I have to write to relieve it. Fun, huh?

Then, after I cried over not getting a Guggenheim, I hung around the Cal campus in Sproul Plaza in 1972 for a few months. I'd get up in the morning and read for about four to six hours, then walk or bike down to the campus. I'd been coming down like that through the two and half years I'd been back in Berkeley. But now I did it every day and became one of the Telegraph Avenue regulars. I'd come home for dinner, then write in my journal, then go back to the campus. Soon, I belonged to the ever changing crowd. It was a great summer. We'd decide to have a party in the early evening and then send black guys and girls down the street to beg change because people would give to them. The streets weren't filled with beggars in those days. One young girl used to work a corner on Haste and Telly, but that's all. So, the crew of guys and girls would come back with handfuls of change and I'd drive down to a liquor store buy some gallons of cheap wine and we'd go to somebody's house and have a party. We did it several times a week. It was great fun. One day, crossing the campus with my long-haired shepherd Sergie, a cop car pulled up next to me and the cop in the passenger seat asked me for my ID. When he looked at it, he was so surprised because I looked so young he said, "Oh! A forty year old hippy!"

"Novelist," I said, and he said, "You're the guy who's been putting on all these parties."

I said, "Yeah! And if I had more money, I'd get my picture in the papers for it."

He looked away, thought a moment, then nodded his head, and gave me back my ID.

I didn't have a hot thing going with my lady, Ginny, anymore. Too much suffering had cooled our romance. She flirted with guys and I had a couple of girls I liked to look at and be around, but that's all. A 17 year old little blond beauty and I

fell for each other though. Her father was a teacher and she was just hanging out at the campus with her Catholic school girlfriend during the summer before college. It never got further than a couple of kisses because I did still have a girl and didn't want to get entangled. There was a certain loyalty between us after the horror of Europe, and we got along well together, Ginny and I. I used our adventures in San Francisco and Europe for my two political novels, *Lay My Body On The Line*, and *State of Emergency*.

My lady, Ginny Staley, helped organize with another girlfriend at the California Public Health Agency the first political demonstration by state employees ever to protest the bombing of Cambodia and/or the Vietnam War. For that reason, she was chosen by Emerson Dagget, the liberal head of the public health magazine, as a journalism intern for the magazine and her future was secured. She ended up being the only original person of that staff left after Reagan closed it down at the end of 1972 because it was so liberal and made one small office out of it in Sacramento. So I moved to Sacramento with her in January, 1973, with my son so he could go to Sacramento JC.

I was now trying to sell *Lay My Body On The Line*, still and sent it off to Scribners to, I think, Jason Epstein. In the meantime, in that Sacramento house on the edge of the Oak Parks, mainly African American, neighborhood, I read 71 books on revolution from a list compiled by Professor Solomon at San Francisco State. It had everything from Camus' *The Rebel* to Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, a haunting tale of idealistic students, which is never read in American campus literature classes. I discovered *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, and many I had already read, like *The Possessed*. It was like a grand survey literature class or two in graduate study. I was demoralized though. I had never received payment for *Tattoo* being published in France or Spain or *What Now My Love* being published in Japan. The publisher in England

gave me \$75 only for *Love's* publication there. I went to a lawyer in Sacramento named Brown. He and his partner turned the case down because there wouldn't be enough money in it for them. To this day, I have never been paid. Though I've had other lawyers write letters about it to agents like Robert Lescher, and all the publishers, all of which say they already paid an agent, including Lescher. One lawyer Moore, the famous African American lawyer who had defended Eldrige Cleaver at one time, sent for my FBI files under the Freedom of Information Act. There I found about half of it blacked out, but enough to confirm my suspicions about a teacher in San Francisco since I had written in my journal when he called me and tried to get me to shut up. These pages disappeared from the file when I checked for them before putting the file in my safe deposit box, along with the pirated copy of *Tattoo* put out by Studio Books, the pornographic subsidiary of Grove Press.

I had a friend then, Stan Rice, assistant director of the poetry center, who told me to appear for an interview for a new state coordinator of Poetry in the Schools, an NEA sponsored organization, with he and the director, Kathleen Frazier. She didn't want me. He did. He'd taught with me on a week long gig in Point Arena, up on the California coast. He thought I was great. And I thought he was. He held out and I got hired as one of the two state coordinators of PITS. I was there three years and my poetry bloomed.

I had to develop the program in the whole state and Nina Serrano, the other coordinator, had San Francisco. It was the best thing that could have happened to me and my poetry. It brought me out of my now habitually paranoid personality by making me use my naturally extroverted social personality. I love people. They're fun to me. Fun to be around. Fun to love. Fun to dance with and have fun with. Fun to teach. The job made me leave my solitary room and go out and deal with teachers, superintendents, professors, students of all ages, and pretty girls. After I'd gone up

and down the state in the Fall of '73, I wrote 40 long poems in about six weeks. I suddenly burst out into long declamatory poems like "The Politics of Poetry", "Steve Nash," and "Hail to the Poet Laureate."

I'd written long poems before, "The Prophecy of Jonas," "Kaledoscope of an Assassination in Black and White," and "Trip to the County Fair," "Elegy to a Betrayer by an Outlaw Prophet." But now I wrote as if writing for a huge audience of 2,000 people like the readings that I'd been going to. I also wrote a poem called, "Pussy Pussy Everywhere," a comic poem on the secret police. "The Politics of Poetry" was a tragic poem on the secret police. I wrote long love poems and the poems poured out like a gush of hot feelings. Day after day, even though I had to travel, when I came back home, they'd pour out again. It was a sad, but rich poetic life again. I thank Stan Rice for that opportunity. I built that program up across the whole state. And it brought me out of my paranoid, monk's cell. It was another of those important stages in my writing life.

But when 1976 began I was still trying to sell my political novel *Lay My Body on the Line* and finish my other political novel *State of Emergency*. I got a flyer in the mail from the Scott Meredith Agency and read an article on Norman Mailer founding The Fifth Estate and decided to write to him, since I'd met him and he'd been my hero since I first started to write. In fact, it was after I read *The Naked and The Dead* that I tried to write my first short story when I was 21 years old. Here's the letter I wrote:

"Dear Norman,

"I read in the paper that you founded The Fifth Estate on your fiftieth birthday as a muckraking operation on the intelligence community and that it had published the names of CIA agents in its paper or had passed the info on to the Greek papers who published them and the head of the CIA in Athens was offed. I am sorry for

him, Welch, as I am for any man who dies to perpetuate the military-industrial system that now oppresses us. But I then remembered that the topic of your lecture here in Berkeley last year was "Poetry and Espionage" and that you had asked me in a private conversation later if I had an agent. I then received a flyer from the Scott Meredith Literary Agency requesting submissions of my work on the terms of \$150 apiece per novel, of which I have two, per reading by them. Since I haven't sold anything to a major publisher within the last year, I decided to write to you and ask your help in getting a sympathetic reader for one finished novel I have called *Lay My Body On The Line* and a second unfinished one called *State of Emergency* which are both about poetry and espionage.

"I have been trying to get *Lay My Body On The Line* published for three long years. I started it on Election Day, 1968 and finished it on Election Day, 1972. It is about the corruption of the radical movement by the FBI and the CIA, plus local police. It is about the collusion between the Movement and the secret police, how They get to the very leaders of our most radical groups and get them to cooperate against other radicals, which they would call -- if they dared speak of it at all -- as realpolitik. The basic plot movement is the seizure of an administration building by campus revolutionaries which the protagonist joins because he believes that both Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated in a coup d' etat pulled off by the Military-Industrial Complex secret police. The time span is roughly encompassed by the deaths of King and Kennedy.

"The novel is not some James Bond bullshit thriller but about real espionage on the streets and universities of Berkeley and San Francisco. Agents and editors have read the book. Some have called it great, the best book on student revolution yet, the book we were all waiting for, then have rejected it for subjective reasons or -- if I have been able to corner them in person -- because it is too

late for books on student revolution and too early for material on the CIA. All have said the level of the writing is of the highest calibre. I myself believe it is the best book I have ever written and that there are no political novelists writing today because the Establishment, that is the Republican Administration, pressures the big houses to perpetuate the lie that nobody is interested in student revolution, period, while the revolution continues unabated -- witness the SLA, the New World Liberation Front, and the constant bombings all over the country, in spite of the fact that they have assassinated our leaders: Malcom, King, and the two Kennedys.

"I have revised and tightened "Body" these last three years. It moves quickly and dramatically, graphically, yet the viewpoint is third person subjective. It is original in concept, form and style, not to say content. I am a political novelist who writes from a revolutionary viewpoint. My hero begins as a peace demonstrator and ends as a violent revolutionary. That is what the establishment readers object to. It could be all about student revolutionaries as long as the formula that supports the system was inherent in the attitude of the writer. This writer wants to change society by producing socially relevant art on the level of *The Naked and the Dead*, *Barbary Shore* and *Deer Park*.

"All of my novels are about the individual fighting the police. In the first book, *Tattoo The Wicked Cross*, Grove Press, 1967, which was offered as a dual choice with *Why Are We In Vietnam?* by the Evergreen Book Club, a boy fights the authorities as represented by the superintendent of the reform school (I have never been in a reform school) and an inmate cadet captain. In my second novel, *Gin For Xmas*, which I still have to finish, two boxer brothers turn bunco men and end in jail. My third novel, *What Now My Love*, is about three young people hunted down by the American and Mexican police for smoking grass and dropping acid (Grove Press, 1970). My fourth novel is *Lay My Body On The*

Line. My fifth novel, of which I just finished the third draft, is about a radical writer who is pursued and harrassed from America to London, to Spain, to Morrocco, to Paris and finally to New York City by the secret police. It is called *State of Emergency*. It moves on the themes of loyalty and treason and what contistutes a true patriot: the policeman as witless soldier doing his military duty or the idealistic rebel who fights to make his country as great as its constitution.

"I doubt if you are familiar with my reputation but *Tattoo* is considered a reform school classic. I won the Joseph Henry Jackson Award in 1964 for it and a Eugene F. Saxton Fellowship in 1965. It is included in a bibliography of great novels called *Good Reading, 1969*, which also includes *The Naked and the Dead*, just above JD Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. But I have starved since Nixon took office. I am a serious writer who is being pirated by a pornographic subsidiary of Grove Press called Studio Books, which publishes *Tattoo* without a copyright page. My books are sold in France, England, Spain and Japan but I do not receive a penny in royalties and though I have tried to sue, the lawyers stalled me for six months, then dropped out of the case. Officially, my books are out of print in the U.S. I am a political prisoner in my own country who is not in jail. I cannot publish. I am blackballed just like the Hollywood Ten of the Fifties but without the fanfare, without the publicity, which gives power.

"When you gave your lecture here in Berkeley last year, I asked you on the open mike when you were on stage if it wasn't true that the Establishment Critics had broken you as a revolutionary political novelist of great social import in the Fifties by putting you down as a craftsman and thereby forced you into journalism by taking your confidence from you. You have agreed with that. In fact, I was talking about McCarthyism or, in truth, Republicanism, getting to you, too, and diverting you from your artistic path to a documentary one and thereby lessening your

impact on the society. The great social protest works of *The Naked and the Dead*, *Deer Park* and *Barbary Shore* which fought fascism as it oppressed us were no more. The revolutionary soldier had been beaten by the hostility of a conservative administration. The pigs won another battle. You did not write the great political documents *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* and *The Armies of the Night* until deep into a Democratic administration, books which I love and which have influenced me as a writer and I am talking about *The Novel as History*.

"I continue to be influenced by you. I try to use the novel to capture the most significant struggle of our time, the political one between the people and the police state. But I need some help, man. A long time ago, in 1963, when I was being hunted down by the narcs for smoking grass and run out of school for radical activities and finally put in the nuthouse for three weeks full time, seven weeks part time, I wrote to you and asked you to listen to my antiwar poems on WBAI. You wrote back and said that you were too busy and that I was trying to cash in on your fame. That hurt. You were my idol. I did need support but you must have been -- and probably still are -- swamped with requests for help and were probably justified in your answer. I'm a published novelist now but I'm in the same fix as I was in then. But now, you yourself have a stake in my struggle: poetry and espionage. I appeal to you to help me and I know that you are impossibly busy. Yet, I am a practising agent of all the things you taught about the artist and the rebel, both political and social, and I am paying big, big dues for it. Give me a hand, man, please.

"Yours hopefully, Floyd Salas."

Mailer never answered. I sent it registered mail, Feb. 9, 1976, to the Scott Meredith Literary Agency and got it signed by a woman named Ellyn Reeymen on Feb. 11, 1976. I keep it in my safe deposit box, since the single copy I had of the pornographic copy of *Tattoo* that was being sold without a copyright page by

Grove Press was stolen out of my basement, but not until I had photocopied the cover and put that in my safe deposit box. The lawyer, Ellen Levine, who wrote to me from New York about it has since died. I never wrote to Mailer to ask him about my letter nor asked Mailer for a thing again, until *State of Emergency* finally got published in 1996, twenty years after I wrote it when he came to San Francisco on a tour for his book *Picasso, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. He treated me like an old buddy, insisted I sit at the table with him for the whole night and offered to look at it when I told him that he was a character in it. He wrote back to me: "Dear, Floyd, You're not going to be happy with my reaction but I like you enough to know that our relations have to be honest. I just didn't take to the new book. I only read about fifty pages but it didn't turn me on enough to continue. (He quit after the section about him.) Understand that my eyes are not too good anymore and so I can't read a great deal and I get irritable easily. Not liking your new novel could easily be my fault, but there it is. I just couldn't get interested in the main character. It may be that I've known too many guys like that. None of this takes away from what we talked about at Tosca's. I enjoyed drinking and rapping with you, and will look forward to going with you and Chequi Torres (former light heavyweight champion of the world and an author, too) whenever you get to New York. Let me know in advance, however. I spend most of my time these years up on Cape Cod in Massachusetts trying to get work done.

Yours and best, Norman."

Nevertheless, I really liked his Picasso book and nominated it for a Pen Oakland literary award for 1995, which it won, and he wrote me a thank you letter, calling me a great guy. But though he called me at home in Berkeley afterwards to tell he he'd called me at my hotel, he never did show up in New York.

In 1976, I read my poem "Pussy, Pussy Everywhere" at Ken Kesey's Hoo Hah in Eugene, Oregon and almost caused a riot. The

poem is a comic satire on the secret police, and when one thousand women wanted to kill me, one thousand people, both men and women, clapped for me. I thought it was just a comic poem meant for a sophisticated audience. I'd read it in Berkeley and didn't have a problem, only caused lots of laughter. But it caused a huge uproar, my usual thing, in my naivete. Two women poet editors, Laura Beausolei and Susan Hopkins wanted to put it in the Haight Ashbury Journal, but a lesbian Noni Howard, who holds paid sex orgies with rich male customers and female poets, and John Bryant, a sometime publisher of a counter culture newspaper, who faked a ransom note from the Symbionese Liberation Army and Patricia Hearst, convinced them not to print it, so Ishmael Reed published it in Quilts IV with an essay by me about it.

When the local Eugene, Oregon newspaper wrote about the Hoo Hah, Ginsberg and Kesey were the big names, of course, but they gave the lead to my poem and the reaction to it, saying that poetry often disturbs (as did *Howl* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). I'd say that all my work falls into that category of disturbance. I'm still there; nothing has changed since I began writing.

I must say that I think Kesey, Ginsberg, and Mailer have all written great works. Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*; Ginsberg's *Howl* and *Kaddish*, Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Executioner's Song* are terrific. This is not to mention the other memorable books that Mailer has produced, including his great political works like *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* and *Armies of the Night*. Mailer's genius in particular is his theoretical conception of the novel, which sets him head and shoulders above most writers even when the works themselves don't reach the level of the greatest work.

My only hope, it seems, is to live long enough for the work not to be controversial anymore. In 1977, I won the Joseph P.

Lynch Memorial Fellowship for Outstanding Teachers and got hired to teach at Cal. It was ironic since they'd taken away my boxing scholarship in an attempt to stop my education, but had only succeeded in postponing it. It took a Democratic administration to loosen up the media and the populace again. I'd already come back to the campus and had been helping with the boxing team for two years already. The first year I was given a free hand, 1976, I turned out three intercollegiate national boxing champions, at 112, 126 and 132 weight classes. In 1984, I turned out two more national champions in the heavyweight and featherweight divisions. In 1977, I won an NEA creative writing fellowship, too. I used the money for a down payment on a four-unit apartment complex and have been living in it ever since. I bought out two of my original partners and now own the property with my son, Greg. Without that NEA, I wouldn't be able to afford to even live in Berkeley, let alone in a private cottage behind the tri-plex, in which I have written six books already.

I am now president of Pen Oakland, the only multi-cultural chapter in the world of the international PEN writers organization, founded in 1922 by John Kenneth Galbraith, whose main purpose is to help downtrodden American writers. Ishmael Reed who is chairman of the board, Reggie Locket, Claire Ortalda, Jack Foley, John Curl, and I were the founding members.

I work at part time college teaching jobs to stay alive , and have four polished, unpublished novels. Two of them are historical novels about early Spanish California, *La Favorita*, about the romance between Count Rezanov, the high chamberlain of Russia, *Day of the Dead*, about an aristocratic Spanish woman who was the richest woman in California during the Yankee Conquest and Gold Rush, who had seventeen men die fighting over her fortune, *Heat of the Hunt*, about a poet rapist who preys on the literary community of Berkeley and is never caught, and *The Dirty Boogie*, a Romeo and Juliet, West Side Story about a

young Hispanic who falls in love with a girl from a Mexican ghetto and fights for and finally loses her. The historical novels are about Spanish aristocrats and so are politically incorrect and my rapist in *Heat of the Hunt* is half Spanish and half Irish and is also politically incorrect so my Hispanic publisher Arte Publico won't touch them.

I have won five literary awards for outstanding fiction: the Rockefeller in 1958, the Jackson Award in 1964, the Saxton Fellowship in 1965, an NEA in 1977, and a California Arts Council Literary Fellowship, 1993, and two outstanding teaching fellowships from the University of California Education Department, 1977 and 1984.

At the time of this writing, October, 1996, my last novel *State of Emergency*, which is about the hunting down and suppression of a radical writer by the CIA, and published on April Fool's Day, 1996, has not been sent out for reviews, neither prepublication nor otherwise, by my publisher, Arte Publico. I have also been informed by the managing editor that they do not plan to publicize my first book of poems, *Color of My Living Heart*, October, 1996, nor set up any readings because poetry doesn't sell, either. Furthermore, they will only have an autographing session in the Arte Publico booth for my poetry book of my two books published in one year, 1996, at the 1996 San Francisco Book Festival, though I am on the advisory board of the festival.

At this moment, I have sent out *The Dirty Boogie* and *La Favorita* to yet another agent who might like them, I hope, and find a publisher for me, who would pay me a decent advance and advertise my books, maybe even publish the other two polished novels. I am as blackballed now as any screenwriter or director ever was in the McCarthy years. My only hope is to live long enough to outlive the problems I write about.

But every day, the writing pours out of me. Fiction, novels and short stories, and poems. The creative act at the age of 65 is undiminished. But a work of literature is not finished until it is read. So the work remains undone.

Such is the price of artistic rebellion against the literary establishment and the power structure in any modern society.

THE POLITICS OF POETRY

After a while
they disconnected the wire from my finger
and connected it to my ear.
They immediately gave a high dose of electricity
My whole body shook in a terrible way
My front teeth started breaking
At the same time
my torturers would hold a mirror to my face
and say:
'Look what is happening to your lovely green eyes
Soon
you will not be able to see at all
You will lose your mind
You see
you have already started bleeding in your mouth

Torture tactics in Turkey
an urgent appeal
on behalf of hundreds of thousands of innocent victims
now suffering the tortures of the damned
Amnesty International
USA

But there is more to torture than the cell
There is a different kind of Hell

Secret hush of the police sighing

over the snail trails of bookworms
sticking
to the leaves of the library
Those fakes in pipe and tweeds
just as hard as the street dudes
only wearing a sheepskin over the weeds

or the lines of your smiling face
the sense of the lie
behind your grinning teeth

Take them out and dip them in a glass
swimming with solvent
murky clouds of lime
that will dissolve them in time
Dark sores on the calcium
Can't you see it?

Think
of never being able to say a word
for fear it will be heard
and transmuted and computed
and filed in the appropriate place
deep underground
with leaden walls to shrink your balls
catch even your cocktail chatter
or the privacy of your bedroom
where you grimace at the mirror
and cry in your secret heart

Caught in the web
gossamer traces of it brush your face
when you enter a doorway
whispers
that still hang in the air
faint fluttering of skirts
and hum of static
the pretty girls with robes on
beckoning
beckoning

You
like the animal come home from the hunt in a heat
the battle fought
needing love
and the musky smell of sex
carrying your offering
wrapped in puffs of cotton
with a red silk ribbon and a bow
the selfish beast
caged down inside
and the angel
let loose with beating wings so hard
it makes you thirst.

Cushion the force of my lust with your lips
the surge up the middle
the love like bone
holding my head up
and my dick

But she doesn't love you
Secret Agent of the Police State
set out to warm your heart

Listen
There is more to torture than the coffin of the cell
of that Hell
There is more to torture than the blow
the kick in the nuts
the knee in the groin
the smash in the face
the broken nose
the blood in the pee
the stiff bones and the puffing muscles
the cattle prod and the bottle up the snatch

Dear poet
how would you like to wake up in your own windowless room
with your heart's blood wetting the bed around you?

the mattress seeping through to the springs
with your guts?
blank wall above you?
stone brick around you?
sunk in a concrete hole to keep the worms out?
with only the dampness to decompose you?
skin a dull yellow in the cold air?

Waxy odor
The Ghoul has a painted face
With powder and rouge like an actor
he lays in the bed without flowers
without sniffing mothers
and suffering fathers with hands on their hearts

Without family the poet lies
The Holy Days click by
Soon his time will be up
Fold him into a drawer
some marks of his name and number
the day he died
just his scratch on the wall
and the unread poem under the bed

There is more to torture than a cell
There is a worse kind of Hell

Still
a brown horse shivers his glossy sides!
twitches his mane!
swishes his tail!

Look!
I can see my shadow!
It gathers at my feet!
moves when I do!
jumps! steps! stops!
trots a little!
turns with me!

as if my toe were the axis of the sun!
and all things good!
and all things fun!
turned with it!