

The Blood Of A Wig

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MY MOST OUTLANDISH DRUG experience, now that I think about it, didn't occur with beat Village or Harlem weirdos, but during a brief run with the ten-to-four Mad Ave crowd.

How it happened, this friend of mine who was working at *Lance* ("The Mag for Men") phoned me one morning—he knew I was strapped.

"One of the fiction editors is out with syph or something," he said. "You want to take his place for a while?"

I was still mostly asleep, so I tried to cool it by shooting a few incisive queries as to the nature of the gig—which he couldn't seem to follow.

"Well," he said finally, "you won't have to *do* anything, if that's what you mean." He had a sort of blunt and sullen way about him—John Fox his name was, an ex-Yalie and would-be writer who was constantly having to "put it back on the shelf," as he expressed it (blunt, sullen), and take one of these hot-shot Mad Ave jobs, and always for some odd reason—like at present, paying for his mom's analysis.

Anyway, I accepted the post, and now I had been working there about three weeks. It wasn't true, of course, what he'd said about not having to do anything—I mean the way he had talked I wouldn't even have to get out of bed—but after three weeks my routine was fairly smooth: up at ten, wash face, brush teeth, fresh shirt, dex, and make it. I had this transistor-shaver I'd copped for five off a junky-booster, so I would shave with it in the cab, and walk into the office at ten-thirty or so, dapper as Dan and hip as Harry. Then into my own small office, lock the door, and start stashing the return postage from the unsolicited mss. We would get an incredible amount of mss.—about two hundred a day—and these were divided into two categories: (1) those from agents, and (2) those that came in cold, straight from the author. The ratio was about 30 to 1, in favor of the latter—which formed a gigantic heap called "the shit pile," or (by the girl-readers) "the garbage dump." These always contained a lot of return postage—so right away I was able to supplement my weekly wage by seven or eight dollars a day in postage stamps.

Everyone else considered the “shit pile” as something heinously repugnant, especially the sensitive girl (“garbage”) readers, so it was a source of irritation and chagrin to my secretary when I first told her I wished to read “*all* unsolicited manuscripts and *no* manuscripts from agents.”

John Fox found it quite incomprehensible.

“You must be out of your nut!” he said. “Ha! Wait until you try to read some of that crap in the shit pile!”

I explained however (and it was actually true in the beginning) that I had this theory about the existence of a *pure, primitive, folk-like* literature—which, if it did exist, could only turn up among the unsolicited mss. Or *weird*, something really *weird*, even insane, might turn up there—whereas I knew the stuff from the agents would be the same old predictably competent tripe. So, aside from stashing the stamps, I would read each of these shit-pile ms. very carefully—reading subtleties, insinuations, multilevel *entendre* into what was actually just a sort of flat, straightforward simplemindedness. I would think each was a put-on—a fresh and curious parody of some kind, and I would read on, and on, all the way to the end, waiting for the payoff . . . but, of course, that never happened, and I gradually began to revise my theory and to refine my method. By the second week, I was able to reject a ms. after reading the opening sentence, and by the third I could often reject on the basis of *title* alone—the principle being if an author would allow a blatantly dumbbell title, he was incapable of writing a story worth reading. (This was thoroughly tested and proved before adopting.) Then instead of actually *reading* mss., I would spend hours, days really, just thinking, trying to refine and extend my method of blitz-rejection. I was able to take it a little farther, but not much. For example, any woman author who used “Mrs.” in her name could be rejected out of hand—*unless* it was used with only one name, like “by Mrs. Carter,” then it might be a weirdie. And again, any author using a middle initial or a “Jr.” in his name, shoot it right back to him! I knew I was taking a chance with that one (because of Connell and Selby), but I figured what the hell, I could hardly afford to gear the sort of fast-moving synchro-mesh operation I had in mind to a couple of exceptions—which, after all, only went to prove the consarn rule, so to speak. Anyway, there it was, the end of the third week and the old job going smoothly enough, except that I had developed quite a little dexie habit by then—not actually a *habit*, of course, but a sort of very real dependence . . . having by nature a nocturnal metabolism whereby my day (pre-*Lance*) would ordinarily begin at three or four in the afternoon and finish at eight or nine in the morning. As a top staffer at *Lance*, however, I had to make other arrangements. Early on I had actually asked John Fox if it would be possible for me to come in at four and work until midnight.

“Are you out of your *nut*?” (That was his standard comeback). “Don’t you know what’s happening here? This is a *social* scene, man—these guys want to *see* you, they want to get to *know* you!”

“What are they, faggots?”

“No, they’re not *faggots*,” he said stoutly, but then seemed hard pressed to explain, and shrugged it off. “It’s just that they don’t have very much, you know, *to do*.”

It was true in a way that no one seemed to actually *do* anything—except for the typists, of course, always typing away. But the guys just sort of hung out, or around, buzzing each other, sounding the chicks, that sort of thing.

The point is though that I had to make in by ten, or thereabouts. One reason for this was the “pre-lunch conference,” which Hacker, or the “Old Man” (as, sure enough, the publisher was called), might decide

to have on any given day. And so it came to pass that on this particular—Monday it was—morning, up promptly at nine-three-oh, wash face, brush teeth, fresh shirt, all as per usual, and reach for the dex . . . no dex, out of dex. This was especially inopportune because it was on top of two straight white and active nights, and it was somewhat as though an 800-pound bag, of loosely packed sand, began to settle slowly on the head. No panic, just immediate death from fatigue.

At Sheridan Square, where I usually got the taxi, I went into the drugstore. The first-shift pharmacist, naturally a guy I had never seen before, was on duty. He looked like an aging efficiency expert.

“Uh, I’d like to get some Dexamyl, please.”

The pharmacist didn’t say anything, just raised one hand to adjust his steel-rimmed glasses, and put the other one out for the prescription.

“It’s on file here,” I said, nodding toward the back.

“What name?” he wanted to know, then disappeared behind the glass partition, but very briefly indeed. “Nope,” he said, coming back, and was already looking over my shoulder to the next customer.

“Could you call Mr. Robbins?” I asked, “he can tell you about it.” Of course this was simply whistling in the dark, since I was pretty sure Robbins, the night-shift man, didn’t know me by name, but I had to keep the ball rolling.

“I’m not gonna wake Robbins at this hour—he’d blow his stack. Who’s next?”

“Well, listen, can’t you just *give* me a couple—I’ve, uh, got a long drive ahead.”

“You can’t get dexies without a script,” he said, rather reproachfully, wrapping a box of Tampax for a teenybopper nifty behind me, “*you* know that.”

“Okay, how about if I get the doctor to phone you?”

“Phone’s up front,” he said, and to the nifty: “That’s seventy-nine.”

The phone was under siege—one person using it, and about five waiting—all, for some weird reason, spade fags and prancing gay. Not that I give a damn about who uses the phone, it was just one of those absurd incongruities that seem so often to conspire to undo sanity in times of crisis. What the hell was going on? They were obviously together, very excited, chattering like magpies. Was it the Katherine Dunham contingent of male dancers? Stranded? Lost? Why out so early? One guy had a list of numbers in his hand the size of a small flag. I stood there for a moment, confused in pointless speculation, then left abruptly and hurried down West Fourth to the dinette. This was doubly to purpose, since not only is there a phone, but the place is frequented by all manner of heads, and a casual score might well be in order—though it was a bit early for the latter, granted.

And this did, in fact, prove to be the case. There was no one there whom I knew—and, worse still, halfway to the phone, I suddenly remembered my so-called doctor (Dr. Friedman, his name was) had gone to California on vacation a few days ago. Christ almighty! I sat down at the counter. This called for a quick think-through. Should I actually call him in California? Have him phone the drugstore from there? Quite a production for a couple of dex. I looked at my watch, it was just after ten. That meant just

after seven in Los Angeles—Friedman would blow his stack. I decided to hell with it and ordered a cup of coffee. Then a remarkable thing happened. I had sat down next to a young man who now quite casually removed a small transparent silo-shaped vial from his pocket, and without so much as a glance in any direction, calmly tapped a couple of the belovedly familiar green-hearted darlings into his cupped hand, and tossed them off like two salted peanuts.

Deus ex machina!

“Uh, excuse me,” I said, in the friendliest sort of way, “I just happened to notice you taking a couple of, ha ha, Dexamyl.” And I proceeded to lay my story on him—while he, after one brief look of appraisal, sat listening, his eyes straight ahead, hands still on the counter, one of them half covering the magic vial. Finally he just nodded and shook out two more on the counter. “Have a ball,” he said.

I reached the office about five minutes late for the big pre-lunch confab. John Fox made a face of mild disgust when I came in the conference room. He always seemed to consider my flaws as his responsibility since it was he who had recommended me for the post. Now he glanced uneasily at old Hacker, who was the publisher, editor-in-chief, etc. etc. A man of about fifty-five, he bore a striking resemblance to Edward G. Robinson—an image to which he gave further credence by frequently sitting in a squatlike manner, chewing an unlit cigar butt, and mouthing coarse expressions. He liked to characterize himself as a “tough old bastard,” one of his favorite prefaces being: “I know most of you guys think I’m a *tough old bastard*, right? Well, maybe I am. In the quality-Lit game you *gotta* be tough!” And bla-bla-bla.

Anyway as I took my usual seat between Fox and Bert Katz, the feature editor, Old Hack looked at his watch, then back at me.

“Sorry,” I mumbled.

“We’re running a *magazine* here, young man, not a *whorehouse*.”

“Right and double right,” I parried crisply. Somehow Old Hack always brought out the schoolboy in me.

“If you want to be *late*,” he continued, “be late at the *whorehouse*—and do it on your own time!”

Part of his design in remarks of this sort was to get a reaction from the two girls present—Maxine, his cutiepie private sec, and Miss Rogers, assistant to the art director—both of whom managed, as usual, a polite blush and half-lowered eyes for his benefit.

The next ten minutes were spent talking about whether to send our own exclusive third-rate photographer to Viet Nam or to use the rejects of a second-rate one who had just come back.

“Even with the rejects we could still run our *E.L. trade*,” said Katz, referring to an italicized phrase *Exclusively Lance* which appeared under photographs and meant they were not being published elsewhere—though less through exclusivity, in my view, than general crappiness.

Without really resolving this, we went on to the subject of “Twiggy,” the British fashion-model who had just arrived in New York and about whose boyish hair and bust-line raged a storm of controversy. What did it mean philosophically? Aesthetically? Did it signal a new trend? Should we adjust our center-spread requirements (traditionally 42-24-38) to meet current taste? Or was it simply a flash fad?

“Come next issue,” said Hack, “we don’t want to find ourselves holding the wrong end of the shit-stick, now do we?” Everyone was quick to agree.

“Well, *I* think she’s absolutely *delightful*,” exclaimed Ronnie Ron-dell, the art director (prancing gay and proud of it), “she’s so much more . . . sensitive-looking and . . . *delicate* than those awful . . . *milk-factories!*” He gave a little shiver of revulsion and looked around excitedly for corroboration.

Hack, who had a deep-rooted antifag streak, stared at him for a moment like he was some kind of weird lizard, and he seemed about to say something cruel and uncalled for to Ron, but then he suddenly turned on me instead.

“Well, Mister Whorehouse man, isn’t it about time we heard from you? Got any ideas that might conceivably keep this operation out of the shithouse for another issue or two?”

“Yeah, well I’ve been thinking,” I said, winging it completely, “I mean, Fox here and I had an idea for a series of interviews with unusual persons. . .”

“Unusual *persons*?” he growled, “what the hell does that mean?”

“Well, you know, a whole new department, like a regular feature. Maybe call it, uh, ‘Lance Visits. . . .’”

He was scowling, but he was also nodding vigorously. “‘Lance Visits. . . .’ Yeh, yeh, you wantta gimme a fer instance?”

“Well, you know, like, uh, . . . ‘Lance Visits a Typical Teeny-bopper’—cute teenybopper tells about cute teen-use of Saran Wrap as a contraceptive, etcetera . . . and uh, let’s see . . . ‘Lance Visits a Giant Spade Commie Bull-Dike’ . . . ‘Lance Visits the Author of *Masturbation Now!*’, a really fun-guy.”

Now that I was getting warmed up, I was aware that Fox, on my left, had raised a hand to his face and was slowly massaging it, mouth open, eyes closed. I didn’t look at Hack, but I knew he had stopped nodding. I pressed on . . . “You see, it could become a sort of regular department, we could do a ‘T.L.’ on it . . . ‘*Another Exclusive Lance Visit.*’ How about this one: ‘Lance Visits a Cute Junkie Hooker’ . . . ‘Lance Visits a Zany Ex-Nun Nympho’ . . . ‘Lance Visits the Fabulous Rose Chan, beautiful research and development technician for the so-called French Tickler . . .’”

“Okay,” said Hack, “how about *this* one: ‘Lance Visits Lance,’—know where? Up shit-creek without a paddle! Because that’s where we’d be if we tried any of that stuff.” He shook his head in a lament of disgust and pity. “Jeez, that’s some sense of humor you got, boy.” Then he turned to Fox. “What rock you say you found him under? Jeez.

Fox, as per usual, made no discernible effort to defend me, simply pretended to suppress a yawn, eyes averted, continuing to doodle on his “Think Pad,” as it was called, one of which lay by each of our ashtrays.

“Okay,” said Hack, lighting a new cigar, “suppose *I* come up with an idea? I mean, I don’t wantta *surprise* you guys, cause any *heart attacks* . . . by *me* coming up with an *idea*,” he saying this with a benign serpent smile, then adding in grim significance, “*after twenty-seven years in this goddam game!*” He took a sip of water, as though trying to cool his irritation at being (as per usual) “the only slob around here who delivers.” “Now let’s just stroke this one for a while,” he said, “and see if it gets stiff. Okay,

lemme ask you a question: what's the hottest thing in mags at this time? What's raising all the stink and hullabaloo? The *Manchester* book, right? The suppressed passages, right?" He was referring, of course, to a highly publicized account of the assassination of President Kennedy—certain passages of which had allegedly been deleted. "Okay, now all this stink and hullabaloo—I don't like it, *you* don't like it. In the first place, it's infringement on freedom of the press. In the second, they've exaggerated it all out of proportion. I mean, what the hell was *in* those passages? See what I mean? All right, suppose we do a *takeoff* on those same passages?"

He gave me a slow look, eyes narrowed—ostensibly to protect them from his cigar smoke, but with a Mephistophelian effect. *He* knew that *I* knew that his "idea" was actually an idea I had gotten from Paul Krassner, editor of *The Realist*, a few evenings earlier, and had mentioned, *en passant* so to speak, at the last prelunch confab. He seemed to be wondering if I would crack.

A test, like. I avoided his eyes, doodled on the "Think Pad."

He exhaled in my direction, and continued: "Know what I mean? Something *light*, something *zany*, kid the pants off the guys who suppressed it in the first place. A satire like. Get the slant?"

No one at the table seemed to. Except for Hack we were all in our thirties or early forties, and each had been hurt in some way by the President's death. It was not easy to imagine any particular "zaniness" in that regard.

Fox was the first to speak, somewhat painfully it seemed. "I'm, uh, not quite sure I follow," he said. "You mean it would be done in the style of the book?"

"Right," said Hack, "but get this, we don't say it *is* the real thing, we say it *purports* to be the real thing. And editorially we *challenge* the *authenticity* of it! Am I getting through to you?"

"Well, uh, yeah," said Fox, "but I'm not sure it can be, you know, uh, *funny*."

Hack shrugged. "So? *You're* not sure, *I'm* not sure. Nobody's sure it can be funny. We all take a crack at it—just stroke it a while and see if we get any jism—right?"

Right.

After work that evening I picked up a new Dexamyl prescription and stopped off at Sheridan Square to get it filled. Coming out of the drugstore, I paused momentarily to take in the scene. It was a fantastic evening—late spring evening, warm breeze promise of great summer evenings imminent—and teenies in minies floating by like ballerinas, young thighs flashing. Summer, I thought, will be the acid test for minies when it gets too warm for tights, body-stockings, that sort of thing. It should be quite an interesting phenomenon. On a surge of sex-dope impulse I decided to fall by the dinette and see if anything of special import was shaking, so to speak.

Curious that the first person I should see there, hunched over his coffee, frozen saintlike, black shades around his head as though a hippy crown of thorns, should be the young man who had given me the dex that very morning. I had the feeling he hadn't moved all day. But this wasn't true because he now had on a white linen suit and was sitting in a booth. He nodded in that brief formal way it is possible to nod and mean more than just hello. I sat down opposite him.

“I see you got yourself all straightened out,” he said with a wan smile, nodding again, this time at my little paper bag with the pharmacy label on it.

I took out the vial of dex and popped a quick one, thinking to do a bit of the old creative Lit later on. Then I shook out four or five and gave them to the young man.

“Here’s some interest.”

“Anytime,” he said, dropping them in his top pocket, and after a pause, “You ever in the mood for something beside dexies?”

“Like what?”

He shrugged, “Oh, you know,” he said, raising a vague limp hand, then added with a smile, “I mean you know your moods better than I do.”

During the next five minutes he proved to be the most acquisitive pusher, despite his tender years, I have ever encountered. His range was extensive—beginning with New Jersey pot, and ending with something called a “Frisco Speedball,” a concoction of heroin and cocaine, with a touch of acid (“gives it a little color”). While we were sitting there, a veritable parade of his far-flung connections commenced, sauntering over, or past the booth, pausing just long enough to inquire if he wanted to score—for sleepers, leapers, creepers . . . acid in cubes, vials, capsules, tablets, powder . . . “hash, baby, it’s black as O” . . . mushrooms, mescaline, buttons . . . cosanyl, codeine, coke . . . coke in crystals, coke in powder, coke that looked like karo syrup . . . red birds, yellow jackets, purple hearts . . . “liquid-O, it comes straight from Indochina, stamped right on the can” . . . and from time to time the young man (“Trick” he was called) would turn to me and say: “Got eyes?”

After committing to a modest (thirty dollars) score for crystals, and again for two ounces of what was purported to be ‘Panamanian Green’ (“It’s ‘one-poke pot’, baby.”), I declined further inducement.

Then an extremely down-and-out type, a guy I had known before whose actual name was Rattman, but who was known with simple familiarity as “Rat,” and even more familiarly, though somehow obscurely, as “The Rat-Prick Man,” half staggered past the booth, clocked the acquisitive Trick, paused, moved uncertainly towards the booth, took a crumpled brown paper bag out of his coat pocket, and opened it to show.

“Trick,” he muttered, almost without moving his lips, “. . . Trick, can you use any Lights? Two-bits for the bunch.” We both looked in, on some commodity quite unrecognizable—tiny, dark cylinder-shaped capsules, sticky with a brown-black guk, flat on each end, and apparently made of plastic. There was about a handful of them.

The young man made a weary face of distaste and annoyance.

“Man,” he asked softly, plaintively, looking up at Rattman, “*when* are you going to get buried?”

But the latter, impervious, gave a soundless guffaw, and shuffled on.

“What,” I wanted to know, “were those things?” asking this of the young man half in genuine interest, half in annoyance at not knowing. He shrugged, raised a vague wave of dismissal. “Lights they’re called

. . . they're used nicotine-filters. You know, those nicotine filters you put in a certain kind of cigarette holder."

"Used nicotine-filters? What do you do with them?"

"Well, you know, drop two or three in a cup of coffee—gives you a little buzz."

"A little *buzz*?" I said, "are you kidding? How about a little *cancer*? That's all tar and nicotine in there, isn't it?"

"Yeah, well, you know . . ." he chuckled dryly, "anything for kicks. Right?"

Right, right, right.

And it was just about then he sprung it—first giving me his look of odd appraisal, then the sigh, the tired smile, the haltering deference: "Listen, man . . . you ever made red-split?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Yeah, you know—*the blood of a wig*."

"No," I said, not really understanding, "I don't believe I have."

"Well, it's something else, baby, I can tell you that."

"Uh, well, *what* did you call it—I'm not sure I understood. . . ."

"'Red-split,' man, it's called 'red-split'—it's schizo-juice . . . *blood* . . . the blood of a wig."

"Oh, I see." I had, in fact, read about it in a recent article in the *Times*—how they had shot up a bunch of volunteer prisoners (very normal, healthy guys, of course) with the blood of schizophrenia patients—and the effect had been quite pronounced . . . in some cases, manic; in other cases, depressive—about 50/50 as I recalled.

"But that can be a big bring-down, can't it?"

He shook his head somberly. "Not with *this* juice it can't. You know who this is out of?" Then he revealed the source—Chin Lee, it was, a famous East Village resident, a Chinese symbolist poet, who was presently residing at Bellevue in a straightjacket. "Nobody," he said, "and I mean *nobody*, baby, has gone anywhere but *up, up, up* on *this* taste!"

I thought that it might be an interesting experience, but using caution as my watchword (the *Times* article had been very sketchy) I had to know more about this so-called red-split, blood of a wig. "Well, how long does it, uh, you know, *last*?"

He seemed a little vague about that—almost to the point of resenting the question. "It's a *trip*, man—four hours, six if you're lucky. It all depends. It's a question of *combination*—how your blood makes it with his, you dig?" He paused and gave me a very straight look. "I'll tell you this much, baby, it *cuts acid and STP* . . ." He nodded vigorously. "That's right, cuts both them. *Back, down, and sideways*."

“Really?”

He must have felt he was getting a bit too loquacious, a bit too much on the old hard-sell side, because then he just cooled it, and nodded. “That’s right,” he said, so soft and serious that it wasn’t really audible.

“How much?” I asked, finally, uncertain of any other approach.

“I’ll level with you,” he said, “I’ve got this connection—a ward attendant . . . you know, a male nurse . . . has, what you might call *access* to the hospital pharmacy . . . does a little trading with the guards on the fifth floor—that’s where the *monstro*-wigs are—‘High Five’ it’s called. That’s where Chin Lee’s at. Anyway, he’s operating at cost right now—I mean, he’ll cop as much M, or whatever other hard-shit he can, from the pharmacy, then he’ll go up to High Five and trade for the juice—you know, just fresh, straight, uncut wig-juice—go c.c.’s, that’s the regular hit, about an ounce, I guess . . . I mean, that’s what they hit the wigs for, a go c.c. syringe-ful, then they cap the spike and put the whole outfit in an insulated wrapper. Like it’s supposed to stay at body temperature, you dig? They’re very strict about that—about how much they tap the wig for, and about keeping it fresh and warm, that sort of thing. Which is okay, because that’s the trip—go c.c.’s, ‘piping hot,’ as they say.” He gave a tired little laugh at the curious image. “Anyway the point is, he never knows in front what the *price* will be, my friend doesn’t, because he never knows what kind of M score he’ll make. I mean like if he scores for half-a-bill of M, then that’s what he charges for the split, you dig?”

To me, with my Mad Ave savvy, this seemed fairly illogical.

“Can’t he hold out on the High Five guys?” I asked, “. . . you know, tell them he only got half what he really got, and save it for later?”

He shrugged, almost unhappily. “He’s a very ethical guy,” he said, “I mean like he’s pretty weird. He’s not really interested in narcotics, just *changes*. I mean, like he lets *them* do the count on the M—they tell him how much it’s worth and that’s what he charges for the split.”

“That *is* weird,” I agreed.

“Yeah, well it’s like a new market, you know. I mean there’s no established price yet, he’s trying to develop a clientele—can you make half-a-bill?”

While I pondered, he smiled his brave tired smile, and said: “There’s one thing about the cat, being so ethical and all—he’ll never burn you.”

So in the end it was agreed, and he went off to complete the arrangements.

The effect of red-split was “as advertised” so to speak—in this case, quite gleeful. Sense-derangementwise, it was unlike acid in that it was not a question of the “Essential I” having new insights, but of becoming a different person entirely. So that in a way there was nothing very scary about it, just extremely weird, and as it turned out, somewhat mischievous (Chin Lee, incidentally, was not merely a great wig, but also a great wag).

At about six in the morning I started to work on the alleged “Manchester passages.” Krassner might be cross, I thought, but what the hell, you can’t copyright an idea. Also I intended to give him full and ample credit. “Darn good exposure for Paul” I mused benignly, taking up the old magic quill.

The first few passages were fairly innocuous, the emphasis being on a style identical to that of the work in question. Towards the end of Chapter Six, however, I really started cooking: “. . . wan, and wholly bereft, she steals away from the others, moving trancelike towards the darkened rear-compartment where the casket rests. She enters, and a whispery circle of light shrouds her bowed head as she closes the door behind her and leans against it. Slowly she raises her eyes and takes a solemn step forward. She gasps, and is literally slammed back against the door by the sheer impact of the outrageous horror confronting her: i.e., the hulking Texan silhouette at the casket, its lid half raised, and he hunching bestially, his coarse animal member thrusting into the casket, and indeed into the neck-wound itself.

“*Great God,*” she cries, “how heinous! It must be a case of . . . of . . . *NECK-ROPHILIA!*”

I finished at about ten, daxed, and made it to the office. I went directly into Fox’s cubicle (the “Lair” it was called).

“You know,” I began, lending the inflection a childlike candor, “I could be wrong but I think I’ve *got* it,” and I handed him the ms.

“Got what?” he countered dryly, “the clap?”

“You know, that Manchester thing we discussed at the last prelunch confab.” While he read, I paced about, flapped my arms in a gesture of uncertainty and humble doubt. “Oh, it may need a little tightening up, brightening up, granted, but I hope you’ll agree that the *essence* is there.”

For a while he didn’t speak, just sat with his head resting on one hand staring down at the last page. Finally he raised his eyes; his eyes were always somehow sad. “You really *are* out of your nut, aren’t you?”

“Sorry, John,” I said. “Don’t follow.”

He looked back at the ms., moved his hands a little away from it as though it were a poisonous thing. Then he spoke with great seriousness: “I think you ought to have your head examined.”

“My *head is* swell,” I said, and wished to elaborate, “my *head* . . .” but suddenly I felt very weary. I had evidently hit on a cow sacred even to the cynical Fox.

“Look,” he said, “I’m not a *prude* or anything like that, but this . . .”—he touched the ms. with a cough which seemed to stifle a retch— . . . “I mean, *this* is the most . . . *grotesque* . . . *obscene* . . . well, I’d rather not even discuss it. Frankly, I think you’re in very real need of psychiatric attention.”

“Do you think Hack will go for it?” I asked in perfect frankness.

Fox averted his eyes and began to drum his fingers on the desk.

“Look, uh, I’ve got quite a bit of work to do this morning, so, you know, if you don’t mind. . . .”

“Gone too far, have I, Fox? Is that it? Maybe you’re missing the point of the thing—ever consider that?”

“Listen,” said Fox stoutly, lips tightened, one finger raised in accusation, “you show this . . . *this thing* to anybody else, you’re liable to get a *big smack in the kisser!*” There was an unmistakable heat and resentment in his tone—a sort of controlled hysteria.

“How do you know I’m not from the C.I.A.?” I asked quietly. “How do *you* know this isn’t a *test*?” I gave him a shrewd narrow look of appraisal. “Isn’t it just possible, Fox, that this quasi-indignation of yours is, in point of fact, simply an *act*? A *farce*? A *charade*? An *act*, in short, to *save your own skin!*?!”

He had succeeded in putting me on the defensive. But now, steeped in Chink poet cunning, I had decided that an offense was the best defense, and so plunged ahead. “Isn’t it true, Fox, that in this parable you see certain underlying homosexual tendencies which you unhappily recognize in yourself? Tendencies, I say, which to confront would bring you to the very brink of, ‘fear and trembling,’ so to speak.” I was counting on the Kierkegaard allusion to bring him to his senses.

“You crazy son of a bitch,” he said flatly, rising behind his desk, hands clenching and unclenching. He actually seemed to be moving towards me in some weird menacing way.

It was then I changed my tack. “Well listen,” I said, “what would you say if I told you that it wasn’t actually *me* who did that, but a Chinese poet? Probably a Commie . . . an insane Commie-fag-spade-Chinese poet. Then we could view it objectively, right?”

Fox, now crazed with his own righteous adrenalin, and somewhat encouraged by my lolling helplessly in the chair, played his indignation to the hilt. “Okay, Buster,” he said, towering above me, “keep talking, but make it good.”

“Well, uh, let’s see now. . . .” So I begin to tell him about my experience with the red-split. And speaking in a slow, deliberate, very serious way, I managed to cool him. And then I told him about an insight I had gained into Viet Nam, Cassius Clay, Chessman, the Rosenbergs, and all sorts of interesting things. He couldn’t believe it. But, of course, no one ever really does—do they?