


THE BROADSHEET VERSION

The Printer's Devil



**NEWSPAPER
MADNESS
THE SWEATSHOP
FROM HELL
MODERN
LOVE**



A Novella by Charles Reuben

*— And yet one word frees us of all the weight and pain of life:
That word is Love.*

(Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus)

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems without permission in writing from Charles Reuben except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

Published by Autumn Press <http://chucksville.com/>

Copyright © 1993 Charles Reuben

All the characters and situations in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, businesses or situations is purely coincidental. Printed in the United States of America

Chapter 1

My name is
Jeremy Allman though I
have been called Kip for as long as
I can remember. I was born January 17,
1957 in Glencoe, Illinois, 20 miles north of
Chicago. I grew up in a 4-story, English Tudor house
built during the 20's. My mom was 44 and my dad was
46 when I was born. I was the youngest of five children, a
brother and three sisters.

When times got hard (and I turned five) we moved up the
road to a modern and efficient house in Highland Park,
Illinois. My older sisters were about to leave the nest
anyway so we no longer needed such a big place.

Some say I was much too young to remember anything
about Glencoe but that's not true. I do have memories of a
large front and back yard, carpeted in lush, green grass and
peppered with old elm trees. The house had an enormous
living room and marble fireplace, hardwood floors, lead
windows and a crystal chandelier. There was a winding
staircase leading to a foyer with checkered tile.

My most vivid memory of Glencoe is a dense patch of snowy
white lilies of the valley growing by the side of the house.

People who live on the North Shore have the reputation of being
"rich." Some were but many of us were just struggling to get by. You
see: you had the old and the new money. The former resided in grand
houses sitting on acres of land. They lived very private, unpretentious
lives. Fitzgerald wrote about them in *The Great Gatsby*. New money,
or the Bourgeoisie, invested in brand new houses on small parcels of
land, drove BMW's and bragged about their wealth.

And then there were the rest of us. We were the upper middle
class. Our parents were lured here by the promise of a good school
system and a pleasant, suburban lifestyle.

My father owned rental property in Chicago. He did all right but
we weren't rich. Dad was the best landlord on the southside. He
kept his buildings in good order, the rents low, allowed pets, and
gave the tenants a fifth of whiskey for Christmas. He even slipped the
building inspectors a few bucks to keep them in the holiday spirit.

Mom was the eldest of 13 children and had grown up on the outskirts of
Montreal. Dad grew up in Chicago, on Maxwell Street. Neither of them had much
money but close family ties made up for that.

As a child I had everything I needed, but not always everything I wanted. No
extravagant luxuries for this boy. No exotic vacations in Hawaii, skiing in Aspen, sailboats,
fancy dinners out, or school field trips to Washington, D.C. for me.

But there was always money for the big ticket items. We lived in a comfortable house, had nice
clothes, heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer. We had music lessons and summer
camp, a handyman to help out around the house, and a maid. Milk was delivered fresh every morning
in thick, glass bottles and we were expected to go to college. But best of all, I grew up in a healthy, stable
family environment.

There were a few luxuries. Dad had a life-time membership at the Art Institute of Chicago, good for the
whole family. (That got us to the head of those very long lines at major exhibitions.) We were members of
the local synagogue. We had a Steinway grand piano in the living room (though nobody knew how to play
it) and mom had a full-length mink stole and a 1-carat diamond ring.

Dad wasn't out to impress anybody with fancy cars. He drove the most basic Chevys he could
buy. He bought Bel Airs and Impalas and didn't give a thought to trading them in until they
clocked 100,000 miles.

In lieu of cruises we'd all pile into the car and drive non-stop to Canada to visit mom's family
during summer vacation or winter break. Sure we drove each other crazy during those trips but
looking back, I think it brought us all closer together.

Mom was your typical Jewish mother in all respects except she didn't know how to cook. Her
meals were bland and tasteless. Maybe it was because of her English background.

Maybe she just hated to cook. Dad's meals weren't much better.

I was the pickiest of the lot when it came to food. I tried to avoid eating breakfast at
all costs (lumpy cream of wheat made by dad). I would eat an egg sandwich for lunch
(two eggs, sunnyside up on buttered white bread). I hated peanut butter and jelly. Dinner
was usually some sort of hamburger or tuna fish concoction with lumpy mashed potatoes.
On special occasions Mom burned us up a chuck steak. If we complained she told stories
of her poverty-stricken childhood and that silenced us. I loved her, but I really preferred
to eat out or impose on friends.

We were strictly Kosher. We didn't eat lobster, oysters, clams, shrimp or pork. We used
separate silverware for meals with milk and meals with meat. Hebrew prayers were
recited before Friday night dinner by my dad.

Washing the dishes was a ritual, an event that brought the whole family together. One sister
would clear the table, another sister would stack the dishes, and mom would wash them, I
would dry them and my brother would put them away.

Mom liked to air dry her clothes in the fresh breezes blowing in from Lake Michigan. The
neighbors, especially in Highland Park, didn't like the sight of our clothes lines and
built fences around our property. That suited us fine. It saved us the trouble.

Glencoe molded my character and aesthetics. The first five
years of life will do that to you. But I grew up in
Highland Park and that place made me what I
am today. Just about every waking hour
between the age of 5 and 18 was
spent in that town.

Highland Park is one of a
dozen sleepy suburbs
lining the shores of Lake
Michigan. My area of
town, "Ravinia" is best
known as the summer
home of the Chicago
Symphony Orchestra.

Further north is Fort
Sheridan, an army
base established
during the turn of
the century to
crush the labor
unions.

Just northwest of
Highland Park is
Highwood, a
charming Italian
community filled
with little brick houses,
blue collar workers, and
dozens of bars and
restaurants.

When I was
young I used to have
dreams of becoming a great
clarinetist. After 10 years of
private lessons it dawned on me that
I would not make it to the big time.
Despite the applause I received from
friends and family I just couldn't
measure up to the talent that was
making the rounds.

I didn't have the dedication it
takes to be great. Besides, if I learned
nothing else from my music teachers,
it was to stay out of the business.

Anyway: Kids from the North Shore
weren't brought up to become artists. Granted,
art was essential to our education, but in the end
it was regarded as a hobby or a way to keep us
off the streets. We were eventually steered
toward more profitable pursuits, like becoming
doctors, lawyers and bankers.

It was January, 1975 and I had just taken an
early graduation from Highland Park High School. I
had plans to enter a liberal arts college on the east coast in
the fall in order to study philosophy, but until then I needed time to
think. I just couldn't deal with another six months of high school.

The high school's January graduation ceremony was a joke. Most of us didn't show.
Those that did were anarchists, artists and iconoclasts. We just had to get that piece of paper.
The ceremony was not even conducted in the auditorium. Instead, a horrid little ceremony
was held within the sterile confines of the new library. The high point was a brief encounter
between the principal and the class jock, Andy Belfast.

"I hope," said Mr. Bookman, "that we at Highland Park High have not failed in giving
you something firm to carry with you for the rest of your lives...something
solid...something truly substantial."

"You sure have," Andy said. "You've given us a lot of shit."

It was all downhill from there. The next thing I knew, people were yelling, "Let's graduate
already! Let's get this over with!" The ceremony disintegrated into a chorus of howling and
shouting as we received our diplomas.

This was a far cry from the prim and proper ritual that marked the June ceremony at Ravinia
Park. No pomp and circumstances here, no endless lines of robed students stiffly
walking across the stage. Just 30 impatient seniors, grabbing freedom with the left,
shaking hands with the right.

As a clarinetist for the high school band I had played Sir Edgar Elgar's *Pomp and
Circumstance* 10,000 fucking times for people I barely knew and they didn't even play
it once for me. Not even a recording.

Mr. Bookman must have been thrilled when the ceremony finally ended and we had
received our diplomas.

Sure, we were the students who participated most eagerly in the classroom, who
dominated the discussion and scored highest on the SAT's.

But we were also the kids who had minds of our own and took the politics of the school
seriously. Especially when the administration tried to get rid of an off-beat teacher or eliminate an
unpopular academic course from the curriculum.

Bookman knew we were good students. Our voracious hunger for the liberal arts just got in the
way of doing his job. I remember when he was the principal of my elementary school and he
used to substitute teach. He cared about the pursuit of knowledge back then, before he
burned out.

I guess he considered early graduation as a way of streamlining his job
by giving us what we wanted most dearly, that is: Our freedom.

From now on his school would consist of easily manipulated
students who went to football games and wore blue satin
baseball jackets that had the name of the school
stenciled on the back.

There would be no more nude
centerfolds in the school newspaper,
no embarrassing cross-
examinations during assembly, no
backtalk. The kids that remained
would faithfully buy yearbooks,
and meticulously plan for their
future. They would raise the
banner high and proudly sing:
"Highland Park we're loyal ever
You may win or you may lose,
In bright or stormy weather
We will fight at the sight of
you..."

In a rare moment of candor
Bookman once confided that
deep down he wouldn't mind if
things were different. He would

much rather have been the principal of students that took their studies seriously and didn't make him feel like a babysitter. It would not have bothered him if some brave soul came around and did away with the interscholastic sports program. He would have preferred a more traditional form of education that taught kids how to read, write, and perform simple arithmetic. Maybe teach them a little about the arts.

Bookman didn't feel a public school had to be a vocational school either. If people wanted to study welding or computers, they could go directly into the local Technical-Vocational Institute. In short, Mr. Isaiah Bookman felt that a public school education should give children the tools with which to think and to behave like proper ladies and gentlemen. I guess the thing that bothered him was that kids could read and write half as well as their counterparts 50 years ago.

I once asked him, "Do you agree that the purpose of education is to make a man free?"

"Kip," he said, "I've known you since you were in the third grade and I want you to remember that no man who has a 30-year mortgage can truly be called free."

"So what's the point in playing this game?" I asked in despair.

"You'll never find a game so satisfying as that of acquiring a liberal education. Stay with it."

"Then it is a game," I asked.

"If it is, then play it as if you were a great hunter and the object of your pursuit were the game."

"I don't get it."

"Just remember: It is in the blood of genius to love play for its own sake. Whether you use your skill on politics or women, writing or accumulating riches or fame, don't forget: The game's the thing."

It didn't seem right and yet there was good, of Mr. Bookman, grinning at the departure of those students who were the best the school had to offer. I guess he had enough of us. The feeling was mutual.

Chapter 2

We didn't stick around after graduation. My parents, accustomed to black, flowing robes, medieval rituals and long-winded speeches found the ceremony dull. But they were glad I had received my high school diploma and not dropped out of school, as I had often threatened. So we celebrated with ice cream at 31 Flavors.

I wanted to enter St. John's College in the fall to study philosophy. Dad felt that a gentleman should rule the world from an armchair and mom just wanted me to be happy, so my plans were well received. Unfortunately college didn't start up for eight long months.

One blessed thing about my family is that they do have an appreciation for the liberal arts. Making money was not the only thing on their minds, though they did expect me to help out with tuition. After raising and sending four other kids through college, money was getting to be an issue.

But I thought it was great they were supporting my desire to study the liberal arts. Some of those parents could be so pushy when it came to success, careers and afterschool sports.

I guess they figured that when you grow up in one of the wealthiest communities in the world and your neighbors are either divorced, committing suicide or losing their minds, something's got to be wrong. After raising four kids they knew they didn't have all the answers and when my brother died, well, they just let me do whatever I pleased.

It's one thing to be poor and work your way up to riches. It's quite another thing to come from a privileged background. Behind those ivy covered walls, Spanish tiles and slate roofs was a lot of pain. It is, by no means, an easy thing to grow up on the North Shore of Lake Michigan.

On the way back from graduation mom said she didn't want me hanging around the house all day and that I just had to find a job. I said I would start looking first thing in the morning.

We took the scenic route home and as we were driving past Ravinia Elementary School I asked to be let out.

It was 4 o'clock on a Friday afternoon. I figured that with a little luck my best friend Antonio D'Angelo would be on his way home from junior high school.

Ravinia School is a massive red brick building standing on a few acres about a half mile from the lake. With its 18th-century Georgian architecture, grand arched entryways, steep-pitched roofs, and bell tower, it looks more like a mansion than a school. Nothing much had changed since I had attended there, except the clock that overlooked the school yard was running.

It was a brisk, cold afternoon. The sky was partly cloudy and the sun reflected off the fresh snow that had fallen the night before. The wind was quiet and the air numbed my face. I crossed the soccer field and headed toward the playground.

Where was Antonio? Maybe he was beginning to find me boring. Maybe he had found a girlfriend.

I swear, it's hard enough finding a soulmate these days. But when you fall for somebody of the same sex and that person happens to be a boy, you could have big problems. I don't care how progressive or free-thinking the world is, that kind of thing spells trouble. Me? I just knew what I liked. I didn't care what other people thought. My philosophy was: If it feels good, do it.

But just to show you how some people did care what other people thought: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky killed himself after falling in love with the underaged son of a noble family.

They sentenced Oscar Wilde to two years of hard labor in the Reading Gaol because of his weakness for adolescent boys.

And they poisoned ol' Socrates for corrupting youth.

As I walked across that virgin field of snow my thoughts returned to last summer when I first time I met Antonio. My brother had just died in a stupid kayaking accident and my dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Everything sucked. The world seemed loveless.

I was not incapable of love. I have known it once or twice. The first time when I was in the fifth grade taking private clarinet lessons with Janice Hummingbird. I knew nothing about romance yet everything seemed to come so naturally.

We walked hand in hand, we kissed, we spoke for hours about nothing important. But when my "friends" began to make fun of us and call names, I showed my true colors and fled, much to Janice's dismay.

I guess being "one of the boys" was more important than having a honey-bunch. It was only when my friends started having girlfriends did I realize how rare true love is. But the damage was done.

Then I met Alfonso, a well-educated Puerto Rican. Met him in the park. He seemed like a fairly decent person at first. He lived in an apartment in Ravinia, not far from my house. I was 14 and he was 30.

I remember our many philosophical discussions. He took me to the symphony and the theater. I even invited him to Friday night dinner at our house, a very special occasion. Then, one day in his apartment over tea, he got strange. He started calling me sweet, little pet names and telling me about other young men he used to know.

"You know, Coo-coo," he said, "I once knew this darling young boy in Puerto Rico. One day I brought him up to my house and we had a pillow fight. Before long it turned into a playful fistfight and then, well, I tore off his socks, his shirt, his pants, his underwear and we made love. That is what I'd like to do to you, Coo-coo. I'd like to..."

I didn't stop to hear the rest. I was out of there in a flash. I ran and ran and ran till I could run no more and collapsed in a park on the fresh green grass, and cried. I couldn't believe the nerve of that guy, sizing me up like a side of beef. I thought he cared about me. I had no idea he wanted to become my lover.

The next time I saw him was at the Art Institute and he had some new kid in tow. He looked through me like I wasn't there. I wanted to take the boy aside and tell him that Alfonso was a fag but something about their body language told me he already knew. Then I got mad at myself for being so naive. I went to the bathroom and threw up.

So there I was walking around the old grammar school, looking for Antonio. The snow had a crust that momentarily supported my weight before caving into soft white powder below.

And the landscape, covered with an endless blanket of white transformed the world into something magic. I walked past the new ice skating rink covering the surface of the old basketball court. It was there I first met Anton, six months ago. I paused to remember that warm, summer day. It was a twilight and I was taking a walk to the lake after playing

with the Chicago Youth Symphony. We played Tchaikowsky's Sixth Symphony, "The Pathétique," the piece he wrote just before killing himself by drinking unboiled water during a cholera epidemic. It had been my chance to prove to the world that I was the greatest classical clarinetist on the North Shore. That I deserved a scholarship to Juillard to continue my studies. That's what I sacrificed my childhood for, wasn't it? When the rest of the kids were out playing, I spent hours inside practicing, practicing, practicing. And wouldn't you know it? Moments before my 15 seconds of world fame were about to be, that is, the "adagio mosso," the essential clarinet solo, I accidentally brushed the reed against my tuxedo and cracked its fragile edge. Just a tiny split mind you, but enough to make a fatal squeak. My career was ruined.

On my way home, as I was walking past Ravinia School I saw a boy shooting baskets by himself. He instantly captured my attention, like a masterpiece at the Art Institute. He had a strong, coordinated, well-built body. His well-tanned, unblemished skin accentuated his perfect and polished limbs. His long brown hair hung comfortably over his ears and forehead. His nose was slightly bent. The mouth held its smile in reserve. And he had these big, bulging, bright blue eyes. As I walked past the school yard I stopped momentarily to study the boy. He must have been watching me because he looked up and met my gaze. We stood, our eyes in contact only for a few seconds and then I looked away. I turned scarlet with embarrassment and proudly walked to the lake. I made my way to the end of the concrete pier and peered into the milky water.

I know it sounds crazy but I realized that I had fallen in love with him. The feeling was unmistakable. I had never felt that way about a person before, except perhaps Janice Hummingbird back in the fifth grade. All I knew was that I loved that boy throwing baskets: I loved him, I loved him, I loved him, I loved him, I loved him, I loved him, I loved him, I loved him, and I didn't even know his name. I remember sitting at the edge of that old, battered concrete pier and resolving, once and for all, to add some dimension to my personal life and become his friend. Every day, in sunny or stormy weather, at precisely 4 o'clock, I walked passed the grammar school and anxiously waited for him. When he was there I felt a warm sense of contentment and well-being. When he wasn't, I was depressed and lonely. He always acted like our meetings were accidental, but now I know he was ever so slowly drawing me closer. He was totally in control of the situation.

In time we began to talk about simple matters and I found somebody who was caring and listened to what I had to say. His name was Antonio D'Angelo and he was 14 years old. Ours became a relationship that lacked in shared interests. I was quiet, introverted and intellectual. Anton was an attractive, outgoing boy whose life was steeped in sensation and whose greatest desire was to be loved. Yet, despite these differences, there grew between us such mutual affection that it hardly seemed possible that we differed in any way. What he saw in me I'll never know. As shy as I was, I worked hard to become his friend. Our meetings became an obsession. Being together for at least an hour or two a day became a daily ritual. That is how we first met.

As I was saying, on the day of my graduation the snow covering the playground of my grammar school had a crust that momentarily supported my weight before caving into the soft white powder below. I loved days like these because they made my head feel so crystal clear and uncluttered. The cold had dissolved all my petty worries and anxieties and left nothing but the most glorious sensation of freedom.

I knew today was going to be special. Off hand I could remember only one other time in my life when I felt so intimately in touch with myself. It was a couple summers ago. I was swimming naked in the cool, clear waters of Lake Killian at Camp Ma-Ka-Ja-Wan, a Boy Scout camp in Northern Wisconsin. I sat down on a swing in the playground and relived that moment. I remembered how I decided to float on my back. I deeply inflated my lungs with air and marveled as my chest obediently responded by suspending itself upon the water's still surface. Above the sky was a cobalt blue. The sun shone heavily upon my body and kept it warm. It hit the surface of the water and cast millions of particles of white light into my eyes. The water lightened my cares and left me feeling absolutely alone, free and happy in the Universe. For a brief moment I began to think that death must be something like this sensation I was feeling. And yet, if death really was like that, then how could it be regarded as evil? "Kip...Kip...snap out of it," I heard a voice beckon to me from the Real World. "Jesus, I've been calling you since I first saw you down the block. You really spaced me out that time. Didn't you hear a word I was saying? I must have been practically yelling down your ear. I don't like it when you block me out like that," the voice said softly. "It gives me the creeps." "I didn't hear a thing," I said, "I'm sorry, Anton, I didn't mean to be rude. You know I didn't do it on purpose. You know I would never intentionally hurt you." I got up from the swing and gently placed my arm around Anton's shoulder. He received this act of gentleness happily and returned the gesture by placing his arm around my waist. We walked for a short distance and then Anton turned to me and asked, "What were you thinking about anyway, Kip?" "Oh, it was nothing very important. Let's climb the bell tower, Tony. I want to talk to you." We walked up to the north side of the school building and shinned up the gutter to the low-hanging roof. Then we crawled up the slate shingles to the foot of the bell tower. We carefully climbed over an ornate railing and onto its circular floor. We sat down, just enough room for both of us, our bodies huddled closely together and spent a few minutes in silent absorption of the view. How lovely the grand old houses and ancient trees, the winding roadways and muddy ravines, half buried in snow. All that pain, buried deep beneath the silent and secret snow. "Well Anton, I'm now officially a graduate of Highland Park High School," I said. "All right, Kip! I knew you could do it. You can do anything. You can write, you can play the clarinet...shit, compared to you, I'm ignorant." "Hey! You're not ignorant, Anton," I said. "There's a lot of things you can do that I can't and when you do them, you make me feel ignorant." "Like what?"

"Well, you can build anything. Like that little pyramid you welded. That was impressive."
 "Oh yeah, I worked hard on that and I made it just for you, you know."
 "I know. I really like that thing. It means a lot to me. And the best thing about it was that it worked!"
 "That's true."
 We were referring to some banana slices that mummified, and old razor blades that became sharp when placed inside the pyramid.
 "What else can I do that you can't, Kip?"
 "You can make friends without even trying. Everybody likes you. Nobody likes me."
 "I like you. I got you something for your graduation."
 Anton excitedly removed a long, narrow box from his day pack.
 "It's the best one they had in the store. I figured that nothing was too good for you, Kip."
 "Man, you didn't have to do that."
 "I know, but I did because you're my best friend, understand? Now open the box!"
 I obeyed and found a one foot tall glass water pipe with red roses hand-painted upon its side.
 "Oh Anton, it's just what I've always wanted: A glass bong! You are a good guy, I like you."
 "You're a good guy Kip. Hey! I also copped some Matanuska Thunderfuck. Straight from Alaska. Wanna check it out?"
 "Oh, hell yeah."
 I partially filled the bong with water from my handy bota and also some snow. I stuffed a few scarlet buds into the bowl.
 I held the mouth of the bong to my lips as Anton ignited the contents of the bowl. I slowly began to draw in the white, vaporous smoke of the smoldering marijuana. It gently crept up the transparent walls and into my lungs where I held it for a minute or two.
 "Oh man, this stuff is a-maz-ing."
 Anton smiled and took his own hit. We repeated this ritual one more time, then I put the bong in a safe place and gently laid my head against my friend's shoulder.
 "Man, I got off on that. How are you doing?"
 "I'm OK...Hey Kip, I got you something else. I got this puka shell necklace for you."
 I carefully took the necklace from his hand and put it around my neck. "How does it look, Anton?" I asked.
 "It looks real nice Kip, I like it."
 It did not take long before the marijuana began to take effect. The benevolent fog gradually set in. I closed my eyes and felt happy and very much at peace with myself.
 I chuckled and this turned into a laugh. And suddenly life was an absurd joke.
 "What's so funny Kip?" Anton asked.
 "Everything man, everything. When you get to thinking about life you've just got to laugh. I mean it's either that or you've got'a cry, and I've always preferred a good belly laugh myself."
 Anton reached out and gently took hold of one of my hands, removed its glove and closely examined it.
 "You've got nice hands, Kip. You must take good care of them."
 No, I let them take care of themselves. I just don't spend a lot of time doing manual labor like you."
 "Yeah, I bet the only thing you do with them is wack off."
 I let that pass. Anton snickered. He seemed to know I was terrified of sex.
 "What are you going to do now, Kip?"
 "Look for a job, I guess."
 "Good luck, man...they're not so easy to find. Specially for a guy like you who hates to work."
 "Oh, it's all right. I'll find something. Things always work out in the long run. Things only seem impossible from a distance. Up close you always find that they're not as awful as you thought. Things work out. Things always work out." A tear swelled in my eye.
 "What's wrong, Kip?"
 "Oh nothing. I was just thinking that times like this must be our reward for having to deal with all the shit in life. Here we are: My best friend and me...a point in time and space. And yet a very special point because it's like magic. This meeting of ours will be inscribed in my memory as being one of the happiest moments in my life. Everything is perfect."
 "Yeah. It's like when I'm lying in bed just before I fall asleep, or when I'm sad, I'll think back to today and relive it from start to finish and that will make me happy."
 "That's right. Our happy moments go by in a flash...faster than we can imagine. Before you know it they're over and all we've got to show for it are memories. Today is good. I am perfectly happy, Anton. I know I am happy because I want everything to stand still. I want time to stop flowing. But I know it won't. It's a god damn shame, but that's the way it is."
 "You said it Kip. It is a god damn shame."
 "Hey Tony, why do you like me?"
 "I don't know. Maybe it's because you make me think about things. Why do you like me Kip?"
 "You'll laugh."
 "No I won't."
 "Well Anton, I like you because you are everything I could never be but always wished I were. Anton: Do you love me?"
 "Yeah, Kip."
 "Do you really?"
 "Yeah, I really do."
 "That's good, because I really love you."
 Antonio snuggled closer to me. For the next half hour we sat together atop the bell tower and watched the sun as it gently set beneath the western horizon. The clouds at the edge of the earth dispersed the sun's last rays and filled the sky with a deep, scarlet hue. The full moon slowly rose and transformed the world into a mysterious, fluorescent landscape. And in the distance we watched as the weird rotating red and blue lights of the Highland Park Police department slowly approached the school in a futile attempt to arrest us. It was time to split.

Chapter 3

The snow began to fall quite heavily as I made my way home. My breath emerged like a smoky white cloud through a hole in the hood of my goose down jacket, the drawstring pulled tight against my face. The streets were beginning to ice.

But I was warm and at peace with myself. Even the bitter wind blowing in from the lake did not disturb me. All I could do was replay the events of the past few hours.

This was the first time I had ever asked Anton whether he loved me. Knowing that he did lifted my spirits higher than the finest marijuana.

When I arrived home mom and dad were at the dining room table, finishing supper. Mom was upset.

"Your dinner is cold... I hope you enjoy it. I made your favorite dish in honor of today, but since you were late, we took the liberty of starting without you."

"I'm sorry," I said, "I was unavoidably detained."

"You were unavoidably detained," mom said, "I bet you were out playing with that crazy boyfriend of yours again."

"He's not crazy!" I cried, "Anton is my best friend and alot smarter than most people I know."

"I can well imagine the deep intellectual discussions the two of you must get into," Dad said, "What was today's topic, Nietzsche or Kant?"

"We talked about love, Dad."

He paused. "What I would like to know, is why you insist on hanging around with this adolescent screwball when you could be in the company of people with well-trained minds."

"Like who, for instance?"

"Like Steve Adler. Now there's a kid with a good mind."

"Look dad, Steve's all right but all he reads these days is Dostoevsky and he's getting on my nerves. His last psychology paper began: I am a sick man...I am a spiteful man. No, I am not a pleasant man at all. I believe there is something wrong with my liver... Recognize that? Unbelievable!"

Dad laughed, "Well, that still doesn't answer my question why you hang around with that goofy kid."

"Anton's my friend. It makes me happy to be around him. Isn't that enough? He doesn't think the way you and I do. He gets his ideas from experience, not the pages of a book." I paused,

"Dad, do you think ignorance is blissful?"

"A well-educated young man like yourself must know that ignorance does not constitute a state of bliss."

"Maybe I didn't mean it that way. When I say

ignorance I mean living from day to day and not taking everything so deadly serious all the time."

"Well Kip, I agree with Plato: The unexamined life is not worth living."

"But Dad, is the unlive life really worth examining?"

"Just remember, Kip: He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf, a horse's health, a boy's love or a whore's oath."

"And there are more things in heaven and earth then are dreamt of in your philosophy."

"Sit down and eat your dinner before it turns to ice."

I sat down and began wolfing the contents of my plate. Mom stared in disbelief. I had the munchies.

"My God Kip! Slow down...you'll get sick."

"I'm starving."

"Well then, just take it easy. Sit up, act like a mensch, and don't eat with your mouth open. By the way, I saw an ad in the Daily News for a clarinet teacher at Northwestern. It pays ten dollars an hour. Why don't you go for it, Kip? You'd be perfect!"

"I don't want it."

Dad cleared his throat. "I know the music director. What's his name? Oh yeah, Barry Myers. I grew up with him. He owes me a favor."

Mom, who was clearing the table, looked at me with curiosity. "You do want the job, don't you?"

"I want to go out and find my own job. I don't want to spend another year teaching the clarinet. All that damn honking and squeaking gets on my nerves. No way. There was a help wanted ad in The Beacon: They're looking for a typesetter. Now that's a real job... working for a newspaper!"

"Are you trying to tell me that we financed you through 10 years of private lessons so that you could be a typesetter?"

"It'll be a great experience, mom."

"Experience...that's your life's motto, isn't it? You can't comfortably settle into one worthwhile thing before you're off poking your nose into something else. Fine, be a typesetter... waste your God-given talents on rubbish."

Mom glared at me.

"Where did you get those shells?" she hissed.

"Anton gave them to me."

"Well take them off! They make you look ridiculous."

"That's not true," I cried, "They look good. And besides, I don't see what business it is of yours."

"They make you look like a girl."

"Well fuck you, ma."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Is that any way to talk to your mother?" Dad said angrily.

"I cannot believe I gave birth to this kid. He told me to fuck myself," mom screamed. "I've given birth to four other children and not one of them has spoken to me the way you have."

"Jesus, leave me alone!" I stood up and walked out of the dining room. "I'll be in the pit."

As I made my way to the basement, an orange whizzed passed my head. I raced into my room and locked the door.

If there were one place I considered home, it was this little pit. This was my inner sanctum and I surrounded myself with the things I loved most.

The pit was located in the basement. It had once been part of the furnace room. Dad turned it into a spare room.

When Joe died I abandoned my airy bedroom on the second floor to live in the pit. I painted the walls a bright gold and carpeted the floor with thick, wool carpeting. In one corner was my bed, in another was a five-foot tall marijuana plant (mom thought was a fern). And in the final corner, the stereo.

I had a modest collection of classical, rock, jazz and blues albums as well as an odd assortment of art reproductions covering the walls: A Cezanne, a Van Gogh, and a Picasso.

After that scene at dinner all I wanted to do was listen to "Pink Floyd." I placed "Wish You Were Here" on the turntable, turned up the volume and prepared a bong. After several tokes I laid down on the bed, and pulled out a hardbound copy of nudes by photographer David Hamilton. This stuff wasn't pornography, it was art.

I fantasized about being a slave to two beautiful lesbians. I drove 'em wild.

Perhaps I was "the great masturbator," as Salvador Dali put it. You'd think at 18 I'd be able to cut back, but no...I was an animal, and proud of it.

After I shot my load, I took another bong, gave the air a good shot of air freshener and turned off the stereo.

I dove into the desk and pulled out a silver ring, shoved it into the pocket of my blue jeans and bounded up the stairs crying, "Mom, I'm taking the car. I'll be back soon."

Mom never held a grudge past 15 minutes. She was a manic depressive going through menopause. I humored her for the most part.

"Well, don't be late," she called, "And be careful, the roads are slippery."

I snatched a jacket from the closet and the keys from the living room table, raced out the door, jumped into the car, sparked the ignition, shifted into drive and stepped on the gas.

Chapter 4

Old Chevys never die, they just get faster and faster. This tank had just clocked 100,000 miles and was still purring like a kitten. It was a '72

Impala with a 350 horsepower V8 engine, 4-barrel carburetor, power steering, power brakes, air conditioning, and automatic transmission. It got 12 miles to the gallon and was wrapped in 20 yards of shiny, green sheet metal. Truly, the pride of Detroit.

I believed in the power of the ring in my pocket. Normally I didn't wear jewelry, but this was different. My brother gave it to me before he

died. It was made of a large, unpolished piece of turquoise set in a silver rope design. I slid the ring on my middle finger.

I decided to drive to the Bahai temple along Sheridan Road. The heater was blowing full force and I peeled off a few layers of

clothing. I set the seat into its most comfortable position and turned on a station playing "Low Spark of High Heeled Boys." The

Impala sped gracefully through the winding, tree lined streets before enormous stone mansions guarding the lake. "Turn the radio down," a voice said.

I looked to my right and saw the ghost of my brother Joe. He appeared as a 21-year-old man... just as he looked the last time

I saw him, not more than a year before. He wore blue jeans, cowboy boots and a black leather jacket. He was smoking

Marlboros.

Joe was a wrestler in high school. He was a jock and the women were all over him. Definitely a hard act to follow. He

dropped out of sports after entering the University of Arizona and began studying piano and writing poems.

He quit school during his junior year and after a mental breakdown returned to Chicago in order to undergo Primal

Therapy. He lived in an old red brick apartment building in Hyde Park. One tragic day during the spring he

drowned in a kayaking accident on the icy waters of Lake Michigan.

I turned off the music and gazed at him.

"Thank you for coming."

"I'll always be here when you call."

"Doesn't it hurt to come back?"

"Pain is a physical phenomena. I lack a body and know nothing about it.

You are imagining me."

"Does that mean you're not real?"

"I'm as real as anything. Life is but a dream."

"But Joe, some things are more real than other things."

"Can you touch the future? Can you touch the past? It was here, but now it's gone. Are ideas real? You can't kick 'em, but they can blow up in your face."

"Can you sense pleasure?"

"I sail in calmer seas these days. My craft cuts through a frictionless sea. But do not question me about these matters, you have no right to know."

My voice began shaking and I started to cry. "Hey

Joe! I didn't ask to be here... I'm just here and I don't know what to do with myself. I mean,

what is the point in living? Why do we persist in playing this crazy game?"

"Look kid, I can't accept this I didn't ask to be here crap. Nobody asked any of us to be here.

Now that you're here you might as well make the best of it, don't you think?"

"Joe, these days I'm not sure what's right and what's wrong. About the only thing I am certain of is that I don't know a god damn thing."

"So what's wrong with that?"

"I'm not sure that there is anything wrong with that, I just think that if I didn't know that I didn't know anything then I'd be much happier. I know I would."

"Not you, man. You wouldn't be happy. You'd be miserable. You'd be like every other person on the street who thinks he knows what's going on.

"Look kid," he continued, "as far as I'm concerned, the universe can be reduced into two basic elements: Love and Strife. Things are coming together or they are falling apart. When things come together we call it love. When they don't we call it strife."

"You're saying they're just words, Joe. Just words?"

My brother took a deep drag from his cigarette. "Yes, little brother, just words. Just innocent condensations and rarefactions of the air that incidentally enter your ear and wiggle your timpani.

Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

"Do you think my love for Anton is wrong?"

"No I don't. I think it's beautiful. I think everything you do is cool as long as you don't try to stick it in your arm."

"Joe, I'm really in love with Anton and this has made my life wierd. I'm just not sure whether it's right to be hanging around with a kid. People kind of stare."

"Socrates hung out with Alcibiades and what about Jonathan and David in the Bible? No Kip, finding that kid is a great thing. Anton puts life into you. He's like the first rung of a ladder that leads to the place where you want to be."

"You know Joe, sometimes I feel so alone."

"Pull over and park the car, Kip. I want to do something."

By now we had reached the Bahai temple. It's majestic dome, illuminated by powerful floodlights and silhouetted against a blanket of stars, struck me with awe. I pulled over by the curb and shut off the car. The silence of the night was broken by the sound of distant waves hitting the beach a few hundred feet away.

"Now," Joe continued. "I want you to close your eyes and try to relax every muscle in your body. Concentrate on a point on your forehead, between your eyebrows. Think back to a happy time in your life, a peaceful time, a time when you weren't so bummed out. Relax, let your mind drift."

I did what he said. I felt as if I were traveling through space, through clouds, through the past to a gentler time in my life. I broke through the pain of the present and suddenly...

I was rowing a boat along a river and entered the mouth of a cool, dense, green forest. I stopped rowing and gently placed the oars in the boat.

The sound of the forest made their way to my ears: The sickly creak of a bullfrog, the scream of a bird, the buzzing of mosquitoes and a roaring sea of crickets.

The boat crept beneath the arched trees that bounded the mouth of the forest. The song of wildlife around me built itself into a dazzling, deafening crescendo.

I drifted along the warm black water. The giant leafy trees towered over me like a great temple. The fragrance of the lily of the valley, carpeting the shores like freshly fallen snow,

embraced and transported my soul to sublime heights. Out of the corner of my eye I saw millions of tiny,

delicate, bell-shaped flowers scattered upon the river bank.

And then I awoke sitting alone in my car, parked beside the Bahai temple. The engine had died and it was getting cold.

It was time to go home. Tomorrow was a big day. I was going to find a job.

Chapter 5

Tomorrow arrived and nobody would hire me, not even the hamburger joints. I wasn't their type. I never held a steady job in my life and they wanted people with experience.

It was getting to be one cold day in January: The icy wind numbed my face, the snow drifts were unpassable and Lake Michigan was covered in ice.

I was standing in front of the Maverick Printing and Publishing Company, just a couple blocks off Highland Park's main street. For 50 years Maverick has been printing stationery, brochures, announcements, year books and invitations. He also published "The Beacon," a weekly newspaper delivered to every homeowner by the US Mail.

The company operated out of a two-story red brick building that was once a bowling alley. The word "PRINTING" was painted in huge red letters on the outside wall.

I opened the office door and walked to the front counter and asked the receptionist if there were any job openings.

The young man behind the counter was wearing a full length jumpsuit. He appeared tall, lanky and effeminate and he viewed me with contempt.

"Well," he said in an exasperated tone, doing that thing with his wrist, "There is one, but I don't think you'd be interested."

"Why is that?"

"Well, you just don't seem like the sort...I mean, we're looking for a typesetter, OK? You have to sit all day long and not move a muscle."

"Sounds like my kind of job."

"Well then here, fill out this application and when you're done, take it upstairs and give it to Mr. Plunkett."

I took the form and filled it out. I wrote down my name, address, next of kin and, lacking a work history, wrote about how I used to play clarinet.

I walked up a lonely flight of gray concrete steps. The walls were covered with paintings of flowers. At the top of the stairs was a heavy steel door that opened into the heart of the plant.

It was four o'clock on a Wednesday and the paper had just gone to press. In the distance Linotypes were tinkling like sleigh bells on a cold, wintry night. Occasionally I heard the ring of a telephone and the clang of the time clock.

A man quickly approached me on his way out. He was carrying a quart of buttermilk in one hand and a pack of Marlboros in the other. He was being chased by a well-dressed man.

The first guy turned and faced the well-dressed man. "Look are we putting out a newspaper or shopper? I've got a great story and you want me to kill it? Come on, Charlie, this story could be my ticket out-a-here. I hate this fucking place."

"Take it easy Jerry," Charlie said as he opened the door. "You run that story and we're going to lose our biggest advertiser. We can't afford to do that, we're not The Chicago Daily News. Come on, you're tired. Lemme buy you a drink."

The two walked down the steps and out the building. The building began to shake as the presses started up.

I was beginning to like the place. For some inexplicable reason, as I walked across the ink-soaked carpet and breathed in the toxic air, I felt I had found a job that was good.

A fat lady with big glasses piloted me toward a small, gray-haired man sitting behind an old desk. He wore a checkered flannel shirt, gold spectacles and baggy brown pants. At his side sat a conservatively dressed, white haired woman.

The man's attention was focused on a small car ad. I had to tap him on the shoulder to get his attention. This was the plant manager, Dave Plunkett.

After introducing myself I explained that I was looking for a job. I handed Dave my application. "You've got nice writing," he said.

He read for a while and cupped his head in his hands. He looked tired.

"I'm getting too old for this stuff. You say you want to work here? Why?"

"I need the money," I said. "I heard you're looking for a typesetter."

He removed his glasses and looked into my eyes.

"I see you don't have any work experience. You say you can type?"

"Yeah, I took typing in the seventh grade. I think I can type 30 words a minute."

"The typesetting machines have a standard keyboard. Do you mind taking a test?"

"Gladly, but are you saying that I won't be working on one of those?" I pointed in the direction of the four old Mergenthaler cast iron Linotype machines that were standing against the wall.

"We only use the hot types in emergencies these days. They're obsolete: Just a museum piece, like me."

"Oh, don't say that," Dave's wife, Nay, interrupted.

"It's true. Why use a Linotype machine that can cast only 17 lines per minute when you can use a computer that can set 60?"

"Well, for one thing, it's more romantic," I said. "A person doesn't imagine computers when he thinks about printing."

"The boy's right," said Nay. "Most people will tell you that type is hand-set, just like they did a hundred years ago."

"Then they're just going to have to get used to these computers. Before long everybody's gonna be a typesetter because, mark my words, everybody's going to have a computer in their very own home."

"No way!" I cried in sincere disbelief.

"Now don't get me wrong: I do prefer the old hot types, I wish they weren't going away."

"Well you know what I think," Nay chirped in, "Something's lost and something's gained. Printing is distancing itself from humanity: Printing has lost its heart and soul."

"They call that progress," Dave said. "I think it's a step backwards. If something ever went wrong with one of those hot types, I knew how to fix it. If a computer breaks down all I can do is call a technician. That's why I like to keep a working Linotype machine around: Just in case."

"And you know something," Dave continued. "You couldn't just walk into the plant and become a typesetter because you happened to know the keyboard. You see these white specks?" He rolled up his sleeves and revealed a muscular pair of arms covered with little white scars.

"This is what happens when you screw up on the Linotype. These burns were made by squirts of molten lead. My line machine when I cast it. The lead burned my skin and didn't come off until it hardened."

Now Dave was a very powerful man in the company. He awarded raises, handed out promotions and hired people. He also worked long hours, directing the flow of work from one department to another.

As I prepared to take my typesetting test a small, long-haired, ink-covered teenager approached us holding the cover page of The Deerfield Phenomena.

"Hey Dave, do you want to take a look at this page, we're about to run Deerfield." He stared at me, "Say, don't I know you from somewhere?"

"Sure," I said, "I'm Kip Allman ...and you're Scott Morrelli, right?, I was in your freshman homeroom at Highland Park High!"

"That's right, big-guy...you applying for a job?"

"You bet! I want to be a typesetter."

"Oh yeah?" He turned to Dave. "Well, you've got a good man here. I give you my best recommendation."

I was taken off-guard. Scott used to beat me up. "Hey, thanks man," I said.

Dave Plunkett looked over the page that Scotty had given him and said, "OK Scotty, this looks all right. Just tell them to ease up a little bit on the red."

"All right, big guy."

Scotty slugged me on the shoulder and walked out the door.

Nay was ready to give me the typing test. She sat me behind a machine that looked like a typewriter only it had no carriage. Typesetting in 1975 had just become an electronic process. The operator sat behind a keyboard and typed away for hours on end. Each keystroke was transformed into eight little holes running the width of the tape. You could see what you were typing on a one-line screen made of tiny, red diodes. Mistakes could be fixed by backspacing over the error and typing the correction in its place.

When the job was done, the yellow ticker tape was fed into a six-foot high computer which "read" the holes. Inside the housing of the computer was a rotating drum that had a long negative strapped around its edge. A beam of light, triggered by the holes in the ticker tape, was sent through the negative at just the right time. The negative contained the alphabet and numbers of a given typeface. The light passed through the letter on the negative and formed a positive image of the desired character on a piece of photographic paper. When the paper was developed the type would magically appear. The computer could be told to change the width of the lines, as well as the space between words, letters, paragraphs and even the size of the type by the simple flick of a few toggle switches. I caught on quickly and was able to set an article about a new bank at around 25 words per minute. When the article was sent through the computer, developed and dried, my fate was sealed. Dave took a long look at the article, nodded in approval and turned to me with a smile, "It will be nice having a man in the typesetting department again. It will be like old times."

"Does that mean I have a job?" I asked.

"As long as you don't mind working with a bunch of gabbing women all day. I swear Kip, that department reminds me of one of Nay's bridge clubs. We'll start you off at three seventy-five an hour and increase your pay as you get better."

I frowned.

"What's the matter? You look like something is bothering you."

"Well something is. It's like this, Mr. Plunkett..."

"Call me Dave, everybody else does."

"It's like this Dave: Something seems to be lacking. I had thought there would be more to it. I had envisioned weeks of training as an apprentice. You make it sound so easy."

"Well, if you know the keyboard, it is easy."

"Yeah, but I had expected more."

"I think you should have been born fifty years ago. Then you could have lived in a world more to your liking. That was a time when a newspaper plant was a shop."

"A shop?"

"Yes, a shop. I remember leaving the old shop in Ohio during the thirties. I was a boy back then and wanted to get away from home. I wanted to be free. I had a few dollars in my pocket and somehow stumbled on this place. By that time I was more than happy to get back to work. I found that when I was away from a shop, I didn't have a home and I needed a home more than anything else. You probably would have fit in well in the old days. You could have been The Printer's Devil."

"Who's that?"

"He swept up, ran errands, cleaned machines and was the butt of everybody's jokes. We'd keep him running for sky hooks, left-handed monkey wrenches and make him hunt for type lice."

"What are type lice?"

Dave laughed. "What? You never heard of type lice? They are little insects that live in the galleys of lead type after they have been set for a page. We used to tell the new boy that the lice had to be flushed out with water before we could run it.

"The boy poured water on the galleys and we'd tell him that he had to look very closely if he wanted to see the little drowning type lice. When his head was about an inch away from the galley, we'd snap a pica pole against the back of his head and his face would splash against the type. Ha! Ha!"

"That's horrible," I said.

"Oh, it wasn't all that bad. It was funny as long as you weren't The Printer's Devil. It was just a practical joke and it was part of becoming a full-fledged printer, but I think we'll spare you that anguish, Kip."

"Good."

"At any rate, you look like you'll suit our needs. You come in tomorrow and Friday for training and on Monday we'll have you on machines. You'll be working on Mondays and Tuesdays, all day, and part of Wednesday. The rest of the week is your own. Sorry, we can't hire you full time."

"That's all right with me."

I was pleased with the working arrangement. I thanked Dave and headed for the door but before I left the plant I lingered behind the back of an old man with thin, white hair and enormous muscles sitting behind a Linotype machine.

By means of a peculiar keyboard, matrices (small pieces of brass that have letters, numbers and symbols carved deeply into their edges) are assembled. Molten lead is pumped into the mold, producing a slug line. The lines of type (thus the name "Linotype") are assembled in long paragraphs or "galleys" and a "proof" is run off on a hand press so that it can be read and corrected by the proofreader.

I watched the operator type out a line on the machine's black, blue and white keyboard and listened to the little brass matrices fall from the magazine into the casting position like falling pennies. After typing a full line he pressed a lever on the right hand side of the keyboard. The line of type was transferred against a casting mechanism. A small amount of molten lead was pumped into the mold and then released to the operator in the form of a warm slug. An elevator removed the type from the mold and carried it to another level. The type was transferred to a distributing box that dropped them into their exact proper positions in a storage "magazine." When the lead type was no longer needed it was melted back into a pig of iron and recycled.

This mechanical process fascinated me so much that I could not drag my eyes away from the machine or its burly operator. The Linotype operator's name was Howie, a strong, warm-hearted, slightly deaf man wearing a green tee shirt and baggy brown pants. He turned around and faced me.

"What do you want?" He asked.

"Nothing. I was just watching."

"You're new here. You working in paste up?"

"No. I just got hired as a typesetter."

"What?"

"I'm working in typesetting," I screamed.

"Oh, they're getting rid of these machines in a few months. You'll be working in cold type with all them women... You'd better control yourself."

"What is going to become of you?"

"Oh, I dunno. I guess I'll work in the bindery. What you say your name was?"

"I didn't say."

"What?"

"Kip Allman."

"What?"

"Kip Allman."

"Well, listen here Daniel Driessen, I'm going to make you a souvenir. Jus' don't let nobody tell you that Howie ever felt jealous of a nice kid like you who is taking over my job...ain't your fault."

Howie sat down behind his Linotype machine and began to set the following message for me. He cast the words, "Dan Driessen was here," and gave me the warm slug. I thanked Howie for the present and tried to ask him why he insisted on calling me by the name of the famous Red Sox third baseman, but he only laughed and turned back to the copy. I watched him awhile longer and walked out the steel door, down the steps and into the bitter cold. Meanwhile Nay Plunkett turned to her husband and surveyed him with curiosity. "Now I'll admit he was a good boy, but are you sure that he's going to meet your needs?"

He's not that fast of a typist..."

Dave looked up from an ad and smiled. "He may not be that fast now but he'll get better. Did you notice how accurate he was at 25 words a minute? Nay, if you want to find a good typesetter, one that will be dependable and last, you don't look for speed."

"Well, what do you look for?" Nay asked.

"You look for the dreamers. They're the ones that will do you proud. We may be using computers but we're still typing shit for the most part and the requirements for a good typesetter have not changed since the old days. You've got to look for the dreamers. They're the ones that will do you good, you'll see."

"All right, Dave."

And on this cheerful note ended another long day at the Maverick Printing and Publishing Company. Dave got up from his desk, walked to the coat rack and slipped on his plaid winter jacket and tweed hat. He felt satisfied with the events of the day. The demise of the old Linotype machines did not bother him nearly as much as the prospects of not being able to find eager, hardworking and dependable workers for his new computerized typesetting department. The evening had arrived and the presses, as well as the great Linotype machines had become silent. The sky turned a gentle shade of purple and the time clock could be heard ringing in rapid succession. Only a few people remained in the ghost town of machinery. They were the electronic typesetters, punching out the stories for next week's paper. The articles may be written and the pictures may have been shot, but the presses cannot roll until every word in the company's six local papers are set in long, flush columns. So the typesetters work late and try, though their minds may be as numb as their fingers, not to make many mistakes. That night I, the new Printer's Devil, lay restlessly curled in my bed, within my little pit, excitedly dreaming of old, burly, deaf angels setting type for God. The printers were working on Mergenthaler Linotype machines, casting lines with molten gold instead of lead.

Chapter 6

I took advantage of a lull in the Wednesday morning flow of copy in order to compose this obituary: A requiem will be sung for three Mergenthaler Linotype machines that passed away at The Maverick Printing and Publishing Co., in Highland Park, Thursday afternoon (April 19). The Linotypes are survived by two ungrateful children, Bertha and Hal, cold-blooded bastards of the kindly old hot types. Concerned persons are asked not to contribute flowers, however pigs of lead will be welcomed. It was a perfect spring day...the air from the lake smelled clean and fresh while trees and flowers awoke from their long hibernation.

I confess, I could not help wishing I were anywhere besides work. Maybe it is the long, cold winter that makes spring fever so intensely felt in the Midwest. After all, six months of the year is spent shuttling between work and home, living in climate controlled boxes, storing up fat and killing time. April arrives and so does spring, just like T.S. Eliot and e.e. cummings said it would. Suddenly life is a thousand times brighter and hopeful than e're before.

I wanted to practice my clarinet and I wanted to do my job and I wanted to dance but the spring weather distracted me from thinking about little more than Nature, God and Sex. All I could do was stare at all the things I needed to do and thank God I was alive.

Unfortunately there was some truth to that obituary I wrote. The Mergenthaler Linotype machines had been removed from the plant after over a half-century of dependable operation. The computer age had arrived! All this depressed me so much. I had grown fond of the old Linotypes. Now the place seemed much too quiet.

Thirty minutes passed and the lull in production ended. I had to go to work. Copy from editorial began dribbling into the typesetting department. I started setting a recipe for chopped liver. My concentration was broken by Antonio who had entered the typesetting department. He just waltzed in, like a member of the family.

"How you doing, Kip?" He asked radiantly.
"Anton! Am I glad to see you. I'm going out of my mind!"

"Why?"
"I can't stand to be working in this place when it's so beautiful outside."
Anton looked at me curiously, "You call this work?"
"Give me a break."

"Well, I can't change the weather but I probably can change your state of mind. D'you wanna go out back and smoke a bowl, goo-guy?"
We had just gotten into the practice of playfully calling each other, "Good guys," only we left out the "d."

"Sure," I said, "I'd love to get stoned. Jus' a sec." I walked up to Dave Plunkett's desk and asked if I could be excused for a couple minutes. He grudgingly said yes but warned me to check out on the time clock before I left the building. We went out the rear entrance, down the fire escape and into the back lot, overgrown with monstrous weeds. There were a few wrecked cars back there.

We climbed into the front seat of a rusty, blue Volvo and settled ourselves comfortably within the ragged interior. Anton pulled out a pipe and a baggy, and we proceeded to smoke a bowl.

"I love working at this place," I said. "There's always new things to learn and something exciting going on. I like working in a place where there's constant movement."

"That's good Kip."
"I figure that I must have black ink running through my veins."
Anton yawned, politely laughed and said, "Oh yeah? Maybe you should see a doctor."

"You know something Anton?"
"What?"

"I'm convinced that work is good."
"Yeah?"

"Sure...a guy can't sit around all day and feel sorry for himself. It feels good to get out and do something. Keeps the mind active and teaches you how to get along with people you can't stand."
We sat in silence for a bit then I turned to my friend, "I better get back to work before Dave gets mad. Thanks for the buzz, man."

"Don't mention it, what are friends for anyway?" Anton turned to me and asked, "Goo-guy?"
"Goo-guy!" I cried.

And so we went our separate ways. I pranced up the fire escape, through the back door and proceeded to the typesetting department but bumped into old man Maverick, picking his nose.

Normally I acted timid before the white-haired patriarch of the publishing world and kept a respectful distance. I mean this guy signed my paycheck. I didn't want to get to know him that well.

So I bumped into the old codger and instead of averting my eyes and meekly apologizing, I stared him in the eyes and smiled. For once I was not the least bit afraid. After all his wealth and power he was no different than me. I skipped into the typesetting department, punched the timeclock, and cheerfully greeted Nay, who was setting ad copy.

"Alas Naomi, is April not the cruelest month? Does it not afflict your soul with grave, melancholy thoughts at one moment and ecstatic, subliminal flights of fancy the next?" Naomi frowned, "Now listen here young man. I've had enough of your shenanigans. Maverick doesn't pay you to have spring fever. Get to work right away, there's plenty of copy waiting for you."

"Well, it's about time," I said smartly.
"And don't work the hook."
"Yes mother."

Working the hook was an expression from the days of hot metal. It meant you shuffled through the jobs and picked out the most interesting news stories instead of the boring shit, like legal notices and ad copy. Stories to be set used to be hung from a real hook, but somebody once got skewered and they started using a rack.

I sat down behind my machine, grabbed some fresh copy, assumed my favorite slouching posture and began typing. I started out at 30 words per minute. I typed thoughtfully, consciously avoiding typographical errors. I did not understand a single word I typed and yet I was able to instantly detect spelling and grammatical errors and correct them.

After ten minutes I blanked out the noise of the print shop and the frantic commotion of the sales people. While part of my mind was typesetting, another part transcended the ink stained floors of the plant.

I began to type at 130 words per minute. That's two words, or ten letters every second, which is really quite fast. Yet it all came quite easily. I had never learned to play the piano but I figured that it must have been much like setting type at 130 words per minute. I set type as though I were playing the solo in Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto and the more I got lost in the orchestration, the more accurate became my typing.

I let my mind slip back to precious moments I had known during my life. Sometimes I thought about Anton. Sometimes I lingered over the memory of a beautiful place I had once visited.

On this particular occasion I thought about my brother Joe. I remembered that warm, summer day we went sailing on Lake Michigan. As I began to type furiously, every detail of the expedition came back in startling clarity.

Joe had a small, blue racing boat. It was 14 feet long, four feet wide, held a 20 foot mast and 80 square feet of sail that carried us far from shore.

Joe taught me the basics of sailing and how to get a feel for the boat. He taught me how to capture the wind in the main sheet so that the boat was heeling on her side. He showed me how to keep it from tipping over by throwing my weight to the other side, my feet secured to a hiking strap running down the middle of the boat.

There were times when the sailboat was riding on its edge and the boat seemed to be flying with the wind. Our lives were delicately balanced between the force of the 25 mph wind against the sail and the resistance of our combined weight.

We sailed to Lake Forest making 12 knots and we talked. Our words were honest and genuine.

"What do you want to be when you grow up, Kip?"

"A writer, more than anything..."

"There's too many people," Joe muttered. "Too many people, all over the fucking place. When I'm out here I find peace and quiet. Even though I'm alone, I'm not lonely. There's nothing I'd rather do. Nothing. I'll

always live on the water."
 "My whole life has been a struggle to find happiness," I said quietly. "I'm happy now."
 "I think I am, too..."
 And there was the silence. The beautiful, precious silence and the crash of the waves against the hull.
 "Pull in the main sheet," Joe bellowed. "You're pointing too high...All right, they're in irons! ...You're pointing too low! ...Prepare to come about...Come about! ...We've got 'em kid...we've got 'em...All right, we won!"
 Suddenly I felt a gentle tap on my back. It was Dave Plunkett repeating the words, "Earth to Kip, Earth to Kip, come in Kip...this is your boss calling." I jumped up, looked around, rubbed my eyes, relaxed and then took a moment to regain my bearings.
 "Welcome back to Earth, Kip. Where have you been?"
 "Sailing on Lake Michigan."
 "Oh yeah?" He smiled. "I always made a point of drifting off to sea myself when I sat behind the old hot types. I used to mess around on a little 14-footer."
 "Oh yeah?"
 "Sure, it was great! I used to go out whenever I had the chance. It was a religious experience for me: Communion with the waves..."
 "Wow..."
 "Yeah, it was very nice...but Kip, the reason I disturbed you is you've got to go home now."
 "But Dave, I was just getting into it."
 "You get into it anymore and there won't be work for anybody else in this department. Leave your tapes on top of the computer and Regina will run them off later when she has nothing else to do."
 I stood up, stretched and yawned, placed the tapes on the computer, put on my jacket and wished Dave a pleasant good evening. It was not unusual for me to lose track of time now that I had mastered the typesetting equipment. I unconsciously punched out and stumbled down the grey concrete steps to the office and through a door with a sign reading, "Authorized Personnel Only" and into the bindery.
 I would linger there after setting type. The bindery, with its ear-splitting machines brought me back to planet earth. I liked being in the company of all the boys who worked down there. Their skin may have been inky but their souls were in the right place.
 Everybody working in the bindery waved to me. I happily sat cross-legged on the top of an unused giant roll of paper, placed my chin in my fists and watched them work.
 Scotty was around, working like an old pro, proud to display his skills to me. He was yelling out orders to the heavier set people around him, "Hey, lem'me have the wrench. OK, inch her, inch her, take it easy, easy. I said EASY big guy! ALL RIGHT STOP! Good. Now lem'me get this mother tightened up and we'll be in business. There, let's see if she works now...Hey big guy, not so fast...Jesus! Lem'me get out of this contraption. All right, start her up. OK, stop it. Looks like we're in good shape now boys! All right big guy, wanna fly?"
 The green button was pushed.
 The bindery was filled with the great clamor of metal interacting with metal and hard rubber rollers pressing against paper. The blank newsprint glided off the paper rolls, ran through the roller units and received an inked impression. Then the paper was folded into sections that were neatly jogged by hand and stacked on a wood pallet.
 These sections, usually three to an average sized paper were forklifted over to a large green machine in the back of the bindery called the stitcher. Sections were fed into several "pockets" on the stitcher. These sections fell with the force of gravity at certain precise times on a conveyor that carried the compiled newspaper to a point where they were stapled together.
 The stapled paper then turned a corner and entered a trimmer which cut the paper to its proper size. The trimmed scraps fell down a chute onto the floor where it was raked up and thrown into a bailer. The paper made its way down a conveyor belt to a man who jogged and stacked them into two-foot high piles. These piles were tied into little bundles on a package tying machine and placed on a wooden pallet. They were then taken by truck to a private labeling shop.
 After a few minutes my ears began to ring. I started to imagine hearing people shout when there were, in reality, no people shouting at all. A half hour passed and I could take no more abuse. I waved farewell to my friends, hopped on my 10-speed and rode to the lake as twilight arrived.
 I drove down Sheridan road until I came upon a side street that led to a winding lane. It was a rather steep lane, twisting its narrow way downhill through a half mile of ravine. It was not necessary for me to pedal down the hill. Instead I carefully positioned myself at the top of the lane and with the slightest pressure of my foot against the pavement, pushed off. It was always slow at first but it was pleasant to watch the houses crawl by.
 When I reached a certain turn in the road I came upon the steepest part. The trees flew by, the road was a blur, the wind slapped my face. And I thought, "This time I won't brake, I'll ride this out to its end." But my heart always jumped when I came to the bend because I never knew what lay beyond. So I applied the brake, but as usual, there was nothing there.
 I pedaled down to the beach, jumped off my bike and abandoned it in the warm sand. I walked to the edge of the pier. The waves crashed into the shore and beneath the sparkling transparent blanket of water, the dark-green algae danced upon a rock's tired, jagged face...danced to the gulping of the restless lake.
 I walked to the pier, all crushed and broken yet strangely defiant and proud. The ruins of a beautiful thing. I sat at its edge and wrapped my arms around my legs and stared across the lake. Night arrived and the stars came out. I turned my back to the lake and made my way home.
 Chapter 7
 Hot and sweaty days and nights marked the arrival of summer on the North Shore. That and an occasional drought and a few horrific thunderstorms.
 There were the Good Humor trucks, a welcome sight, parked by the forest preserves. Black people from the inner city angled for catfish along the Skokie Lagoons. Inchworms dangled by long sinuous filaments from trees covered with thick, green foliage.
 With the passage of the seasons I became more comfortable with my job at Maverick Printing. One day old man Maverick asked me if I might be interested in working in the circulation department during my days off, at a lower rate of pay. I accepted the job. Little did I realize how tedious the job would prove to be. Among other things, the company was six months behind in its billing of new subscribers.
 The papers, hot off the press, were delivered to a private firm that stuck a mailing address label on each individual paper. The labels were supposed to follow the route of each mailman. It turned out that the labeling company was making so many mistakes that Maverick decided to buy his own labeling machine and do the job right.
 There was a mountain of dreary clerical work to be done before we could begin labeling papers however, and it all fell upon my competent shoulders.
 My venomous artistic temperament began to rise to the surface the moment I sat down at a World War II typewriter in the so-called "circulation department." I was overcome by a strange feeling, as though my soul was being constricted by a huge, seven foot python.
 I felt as though I had wandered away from a path I had diligently followed for so long: I had not picked up a book in a long, long time. I had not listened to a symphony in ages. I quit playing the clarinet. I scoffed at learning and ridiculed my responsibility toward the arts. And for what?
 There was one redeeming virtue about working in the circulation department and this was my boss, a silver-haired man, well into his 60's, name Harold Lyons.
 Harold was a wealthy man. He was the president of a big electronics firm before retiring. His wife recently died and he was lonely, so Maverick, feeling sorry for an old friend, offered him a job working in the circulation department. Harold earned minimum wage and worked 20 hours a week.
 I liked Harold because he was what my dad might have called a "regular guy." His father had been a skipper of a fishing boat off the coast of Maine and he had worked his way up in the world. Harold had long, white hair, brushed backwards, and a distinguished face. His hands were strong and weatherbeaten. He sat at his desk, next to Phil Ballinger, an ad salesman.
 Phil and Harold didn't talk much. I think Phil resented Harold's wealth.
 I would sit quietly at Harold's side, typing away at the billing, trying my best to stay sane.

Harold would interrupt my concentration with a strong, authoritative voice, "Say Kipper, I promise not to disturb you again if you'll just type this little white card for me."

I would look up angrily at Harold and cry, "Damn it Harold, that's what you said five minutes ago. Can't you just leave me alone and let me get this billing done?"

"But Kipper! There will never be an end to this billing and besides, you're such a fast typist and I'm such a slow one, surely you'll type this one little white card for me...won't you, please?"

"All right, gimme that thing." I grabbed the index card, typed the required information and handed it back.

"You know Kipper, I don't know what I'd do without you. Without you, I'd be lost."

"All right Harold, cut the bullshit," I was starting to lose it. "This job sucks. I can't stand it any more. It's driving me crazy. And you know something, you're driving me crazy, too. It's just not worth a lousy \$3.25 an hour. I hate this fucking job. I hate you. I regret the day I ever walked into this hell hole."

"You need a break, that's what you need, Kipper." Harold leaned back in his leather chair and took out a pack of Marlboros. My eyes lit up and I asked if I could bum one. I never smoked cigarettes until I started working for that newspaper. The job had driven me to it.

Harold reluctantly offered me a smoke and said, "You know Phil, taking out a pack of cigarettes here is like taking out your pecker in a whore house."

Phil spun around on his leather chair, laughed and helped himself to a cigarette as well. We lit up and the three of us collapsed in our respective, vintage World War II leather chairs and faced each other, timelessly drawing the smoke into our lungs.

I turned to Harold and remarked, "You know Harold, I sometimes think the main purpose of business is to crush a man's soul and trample him into the dust."

Harold laughed heartily, "That's a lot of bull crap. Business has only two purposes: To provide a service and to make a profit. That's it."

I was puzzled. "I thought you'd hand me a romantic line out of a Horatio Alger novel..."

"Who ever said business was romantic?" Harold interrupted. "I didn't. About the only thing romantic about business is the pretty ladies, like Kelly here."

This beautiful, young lady from the paste-up department passed by our trio on her way to the washroom. Harold stopped her and asked, "Say Kelly, what do you think of Kip? Do you think he's a nice guy?"

Both Kelly and I turned a bright shade of red. Kelly replied, "Sure."

Harold continued, "Well, would you go out with him?"

"Damn it Harold," I shrieked. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Well Kelly, would you go out with him?"

Kelly smiled at Harold and said, "I probably would, if I wasn't already married."

I smiled and Harold remarked, "But what difference does that make?"

"Harold, you're being silly," Kelly said and walked away.

Harold turned to Phil with a smile and said, "Well, you know what they say: A man gets married because he's tired, a woman because she's curious...both are disappointed. As far as I can see Kip, you're still in the ball game."

"Say Harold," said Phil, "You know the difference between a wife and a job?"

"No, what's that Phil?"

"After five years the job still sucks."

The two men laughed and continued smoking. I broke the silence with a totally irrelevant question.

"Do you guys think money can buy happiness?"

Harold had a ready answer for that one. "No Kip, you can't buy happiness with money but you can buy the kind of misery you enjoy most. I will say this however: I have known poverty and I have known wealth and were I to choose one over the other, I would invariably choose the latter."

Just then Eugene Maverick walked by and stared at our trio with intense disapproval. He was, as always, meticulously dressed.

We snapped back to our work with secret grins.

After a couple hours I saw Scotty pass by my desk on the way to the bindery. He was wearing nothing but a pair of old shorts and tennis shoes, his small frame covered with ink and sweat. I waved to him.

"How you doing Scotty?"

"Not so good, big-guy. The press is fucking up because the humidity is making the papers stick together. It's going to be a long one. Man, this place sucks."

"I'll tell you what Scotty, let's trade jobs!"

"No way man. I don't think I could stand doing this all day. At least downstairs I can move around and feel the blood flow through my veins. It's not that bad, especially if you smoke a doobie every now and then, big guy!"

I laughed. "Say Scotty, I've got a friend who's looking for a job. He's a hard worker. Are there any openings downstairs?"

"For sure, we're a man short. Tell him to come up and talk to Vince Dinelli, he's my godfather. I'm sure there won't be any problem. Vince likes you, man. He kind of looks forward to seeing you hang around the bindery. Told me so. You're like a mascot."

Scotty shot down the stairway and I slouched back in my huge leather chair, musing about how nice it would be if Anton worked in the same building with me.

My meditations were interrupted by Rose, the bongo-lipped secretary who viciously said, "Who does that kid think he is anyway? This is a business office. He should put a shirt on before he comes up here. I'm going to Maverick about this."

I grew angry and rushed to my friend's defense.

"Oh, you can dish it out, can't you Rose?"

"What are you talking about, Kip?"

"It's tough up here, isn't it? You're sitting in air conditioned comfort, typing bills, gossiping and sipping coffee while Scotty is down in that dungeon, sweating away and working till he drops so you can get paid on Friday. And you complain because he doesn't wear a shirt when he enters these sublime regions. Well, let me tell you something Rose, you wouldn't last five minutes down there."

"Well, I never..."

"And furthermore," I began to whisper, "if I hear that you get my friend Scotty in any trouble about this stupid shirt business, I'm going to start spreading some vicious rumors about you."

"Are you threatening me, young man?"

"You bet I am... does the name Howie mean anything at all to you? Don't you think your husband would like to know about him?"

I was referring to Howie, the ex-Linotype operator, who now worked in the bindery and with whom she was having a steamy affair.

Rose turned a bright shade of red. "How on earth did you ever find out... all right, I won't say anything."

"That's a good girl."

I nestled back into my chair and continued to type little white cards. Harold turned to me, a jolly expression his face.

"You know Kipper, people seem innocent enough but I would say that 99 percent of them have something up their sleeves they don't want to talk about. I've lived a good many years," he held out an open pack of cigarettes to me and Phil. We proceeded to take another break.

"I've lived a good many years and have found one piece of wisdom that has done wonders to make my life ten thousand times more bearable."

"What's that?" I asked.

"I found that I would never find peace of mind until everything has been said, once and for all time. I found that when I finally came out with every little terrible secret there was a beautiful silence in its place and everything was all right."

I was struck by what Harold had just said and kept thinking about it throughout the day. I seriously wondered whether things would ever be all right with me.

Chapter 8

With the passage of time I became an established member of the Maverick Printing and Publishing Company family. My extraordinary typesetting abilities were admired, applauded and rewarded. And in an inspired display of company spirit I brought delinquent subscription billings for The Beacon up to date.

Anton's frequent visits did not go unnoticed. At times they were a hot topic around the old lunchroom table. Who was that kid anyway, and why was an 18-year-old teenager hanging out with a 14-year-old boy? They did say some unpleasant things about me behind my back. But when they probed me for information I shyly said that he was my cousin. I don't think they believed me but much to my relief, they left me alone.

I asked Vince Dinelli, the bindery foreman, if they happened to have a summer job for Anton. He seemed interested when he heard the kid's last name was D'Angelo, and told me to send him in for an interview. Anton went in to the bindery, lied about his age and got a job raking scheduled paper out of the stitching machine for \$3.75 an hour. He was scheduled to work two days a week, all day Wednesday and part of Thursday.

It was the middle of July, the time of the year in Chicago when it is unthinkable to venture outside air-conditioned homes into the sweltering outdoors.

On this particular day the sun scorched the earth unmercifully. The asphalt roadbed began to melt under my feet and release a stinking odor. The air was stagnant. The tap water reeked of chlorine. No wind blew off the lake.

The humidity was the real killer though. It penetrated heavy machinery and made it break down. And it did the same thing to people.

At the Maverick Printing and Publishing Company everyone enjoyed the blessings of air conditioning except for the bindery. They received no ventilation aside from the occasional breeze that happened to make its way through the open garage door. Before they attached the labeling machine to the assembly line, the men who worked the stitcher went home at 9:30. Now that they had made that adjustment (on the hottest day of the year) everything was going wrong and it looked like they would never leave.

I continued to work in the circulation department on Wednesday afternoons where it was cool and quiet. Yet I felt a sense of guilt when I saw Anton walk up the concrete stairway in order to buy a Coke or junk food in the lunchroom.

He reassured me that he was getting along just fine downstairs. But I could see, behind his inky smile, a terrifying pain.

I realize now that I was responsible for the way things were. After all, why was the boy working at Maverick Printing in the first place? The pay certainly did little to justify the aggravation Anton had to put up with in the bindery. Besides, Anton came from a very well-to-do family. So then, why did he work in that sweat shop?

The answer was simple enough: It was because Anton loved me and would have done anything in order to be close.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. I decided that it was time to check on Anton's progress. I walked through the steel door of the composing room, down the gray, concrete stairwell and into the bindery. A blast of sweltering heat greeted me.

The presses were running at full capacity, filling the bindery with a high-pitched, ear-splitting noise. And in the back of the shop the stitcher was operating with some difficulty.

Vince Dinelli was a 30-year veteran of Maverick Printing. He was a big, hairy Italian who sweated prodigiously. His gray uniform hung loosely over his body, a body not meant to wear western clothes.

His forehead was etched with anxiety. He had a quick temper and the reputation of being either a real sweetheart or a god-damned asshole, there was no middle road.

Vince was working the stitcher, feeding newspaper sections onto pockets that in turn were dropped onto a conveyer belt. There were three pockets, Vince watched over two of them and the third was operated by Maria.

Maria was in her late 50's and had worked at the same pocket for over 25 years. At first glance she seemed delicate and frail. In reality she was a hard worker, a loyal employee and a moral influence on the rest of the crew. She was also deaf and dumb and communicated by sign language.

When the conveyer had picked up all the sections from the pockets, the compiled paper was stapled together. Then, after turning a sharp corner, it was sent through a trimming device which cut the paper to its proper size.

The trimmed scrap paper would fall down a chute and be swept up by Anton who diligently manned the rake and tried his best to stay awake. After the paper was cut to size it was conveyed through the infamous labeling machine that would glue a little one by three inch label onto its cover. Then the paper would roll onto another long conveyer belt where they would eventually be jogged into little stacks by my old high school buddy Scott Morrelli.

The words "jogging" or "jogged" mean picking up a stack of about fifty papers and shuffling and shaking them in such a way that they all fall into nice, even piles.

The jogged papers are then neatly piled about two feet high, securely bound with string on a package tying machine and placed on a wooden pallet by Howie, the burly ex-linotyper.

From this vantage point he was able to see the complete newspaper production process and able to warn Vince when he saw a jam-up in the assembly line.

I walked up to the stitcher and began to watch this enormous hunk of green metal from Switzerland interact with my new friends in the bindery. After a few minutes of steady operation I heard Howie's voice break through the clamor of the stitcher.

"Woah," he cried, "Too much glue!"

Vince immediately kicked a black safety lever at his feet that stopped the entire assembly line process.

He took one look

at the situation, turned a

bright shade of red and yelled,

"Cock-suckin' sonuvabitch! This

dumbshit labeling machine is all fucked-up.

Maverick and his great ideas...Christ! We're never

going to get out of here at this rate!"

And Scott cried, "Bummer in the summer. What I need is a

doobie, big-guy!"

And Howie shouted, "Ice cold beer! Get your ice cold beer! Right

here...ice cold beer!"

Too much glue was being applied to the labels making all the newspapers

stick together. This made them impossible to jog. Also, the forms were

beginning to fall out of the pockets at the wrong times, yielding papers that had

much of their contents chopped off and raked away.

I was witnessing a jam-up that would be responsible for a 15-minute delay in

production. It would take that long just to adjust the timing. Vince and Howie set

to work on that problem.

Anton and Scott ducked into the locker room for a drink of water. Then they jumped

into a dumpster full of waste paper by the now silent press, laid down on the soft, make-

shift bed and relaxed. The pressmen were taking naps on top of the giant rolls of paper

because they were way ahead of schedule. They were waiting for metal plates to be

brought down from engraving. I stood by the dumpster and began talking to Scott, "You

know, I've always wondered what it was like to grow up in Highwood."

"Highwood is a nice place to grow up. I've got no complaints, big-guy. Most of the people

who live there are working class Italians who stick real close together."

"I wish I could say the same thing," I said. "Growing up in Highland Park was always a bit

weird. I figure one of the big problems is that people had too much money."

Anton perked up and turned to me, "So what's wrong with that, goo-guy?"

"I guess there's nothing wrong with a lot of money, as long as you don't let it go to your

head."

"I'll go along with that. The kid's living proof. His family has money and he turned out

OK. Then of course, he's Italian. But I'll tell you the truth: Walking down some of those

streets in Highland Park gives me the creeps. The kids are so stuck up about their

parents' wealth they think they're better than everybody else. They get everything

they want out of life and before you know it they just don't understand what money

means anymore. They don't understand that somebody has to fuckin' work hard

for it. Well, I'll tell you this right now: It's not every kid that gets a Camero when

he reaches his seventeenth birthday."

Anton looked away from me and said, "You know Scott, you're right! I

figure that what every fuckin' spoiled-rotten Highland Park person needs

is to spend an entire Wednesday in the bindery of Maverick Printing. That

will definitely put some hair on his chest."

Scott turned to me and said, "Hey, you know this kid is all right." Anton

smirked and I looked away. I hated being on the defensive like that,

especially when I knew he was talking about me. I then turned to

Scott and tried to change the subject, "So you've been working

here a while, haven't you?"

"Four years, big-guy, four long years. Vince Dinelli is my

godfather...he got me my job, bless his heart."

"And do you have any advise you can give to Anton that would make

his life down here any easier?"

"Stop caring, big-guy. You've just got to stop caring. One thing you can

always count on is that something down here is eventually going to fuck

up. So why even bother worrying about it? Of Vince here does enough

worrying for all of us. They pay him the big bucks to worry. Think about

nice things and just let the day slip by. Never look at the clock, just do your

job. Nobody ever really gets a hard time...You can get away with a lot of

shit. Just stop caring, and always be cool, big-guy."

"But Scott, why on earth doesn't Maverick buy new equipment?" I asked.

"I guess he can't afford it...no sin in that. This stuff is pretty expensive.

That press there costs a half million. What I would like to see down here,

big-guy, is an air conditioner."

"Do you think they'll put one in?"

"Oh sure," Scott laughed. "And then they're gonna start installing the walnut

paneling and white shag carpeting. No big-guy, this place is most definitely

not going to see any improvements. Hell, when these papers start sticking

together you know you'll never get out...I remember Maverick once had an

efficiency expert come down here to check things out."

"What was his verdict?" I asked.

"He took one look and said, the best thing you could do is to rent a bulldozer and work

your way from the front of the plant to the back. And then just start all over again from

scratch."

"Aw, you're making that up," said Anton.

"No, it's the truth."

"But the thing of it is: Why should he even put any more money into this

operation? You know that when the old man dies his son is gon'na

sell the joint."

Just then Howie appeared at the bin and frowned at the trio.

"Hey! What the fuck you guys doin'? We've been

lookin' all over the place for you. This ain't no seed

catalog!"

I turned to Scott, "I don't get it."

He looked at me and smiled, "A seed

catalog only comes out once a year.

We come out once a week. He's

trying to tell us to get back

to work."

Anton and Scott

sleepily climbed out

of the dumpster

and made their

way back

to the

stitcher.

I

stopped my buddy.

"Say Anton, how late do you think it will be before you get out tonight?"

"I don't know man, we're not even half done and it's almost time for dinner. I don't like to think about it too-guy."

I felt guilty and placed my hand on his shoulder, "Hey, I had no idea that things would turn out this way. Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"I'll be all right."

"You're not mad at me for getting you this job are you?"

"How could I be mad at you? You're a goo-guy."

Vince took his place at the helm of the great stitcher and finding that everything was in order, pressed the green "go" button. The production process ran smoothly for a few minutes until Eugene Maverick walked into the bindery. He was dressed to the hilt: Three piece suit, ruffled shirt, gold watch, silk tie. He looked like a great metropolitan newspaper publisher, not the struggling patriarch of a throwaway rag.

A black cloud of "respect for authority" descended on the bindery. Everybody stood a little taller and worked a little harder. Only Anton seemed relaxed and unaffected by his presence. As the old man inspected the newspapers it happened that a single label got hopelessly torn up as it came off the new machine. Anton grabbed the paper and tried to piece together the label on the cover. His efforts did not please the old man. Maverick pressed the red shut-off button on the control panel and the entire stitcher went dead. Absolute silence filled the bindery. Vince silently cursed and walked up to Maverick.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Well Vince," answered the old man. "You can see that the machine has not properly pasted the label on can't you? I want to know why!"

"Because it's a piece of shit," cried Anton.

"I dun'no Gene," answered Vince. "It's hard to say...the boy might have a valid point. All I know is that if we stop for every label that doesn't get pasted on the paper properly, we'll never get out."

Maverick, finding himself in the midst of a very hostile audience, turned brighter red. He spent a few minutes meticulously piecing the mutilated label together like a jigsaw puzzle. Then he made an effort to make up for the delay by helping Vince push a loaded skid of forms into position behind one of the stitcher's pockets.

The sight of the primly dressed old man seeking forgiveness for his sin made a strong impression on me. As I made my way back to the circulation department I could not help thinking that there was much more to the business world than I had thought. At that moment I decided to get on the production line so that I could arrive at a pure understanding of the business of printing (and be with Anton).

I sat down at my desk and began to type out a few white and green cards but gave up quickly when I discovered that I did not have the patience to do the inane clerical tasks of the circulation department. I grabbed my things and punched out.

Then I went downstairs into the bindery again, sat down on an enormous roll of paper and kept Anton company.

There is something that exists between two very good friends which says, "I will spend time with you...I want to be within the calm of your presence even if there is nothing to say or do. I'll never get bored when I'm around you."

Occasionally Anton looked up from his work and our eyes met and we exchanged a smile. Or, perhaps I would say the words "goo-guy" and Anton having read my lips, would smile joyfully and happily return the greeting.

But the time came when I realized that I wanted very much to leave the plant, despite the desire I had to be with my friend. I'd had it with newspapers for the day. I waved good-bye to Anton (which was returned with the most woeful look you can imagine) and walked up to the front of the bindery where I had parked my blue ten speed. I hopped on the bike and maneuvered out the garage door into the late afternoon sunlight and refreshing warm air.

I set my sights for Steve Adler's house on the far east side of Highland Park close to the lake. But before I arrived I made a point of smoking a bowl beneath an old bridge that crossed a ravine. I hadn't seen Steve for months. I didn't even particularly like Steve, but you know how it is: Sometimes you hang out with people you don't like: I grew up with him, I knew him well. Beneath his arrogance and pride were a few good points.

I parked my bicycle before a four-story Victorian mansion that sat on a large piece of property on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan. I rang the doorbell again and again. In High School Steve was one of those vain, most likely to succeed types, hell-bent on making his mark on the world. He didn't party much. Chess was his game. He opened the door.

"I hope I wasn't interrupting something important," I said. "I suppose I should have called first."

"Oh, that's all right. You can hang out for a while. I've got lots of little things to take care of before I leave for school next week. You know Harvard accepted me. Where are you going?"

"I dun'no," I replied.

"You don't know?" Steve began. "Well what in the name of God are you going to do with yourself? What are you going to be? Aren't you going to make anything of your life?"

"I dun'no," I replied. "And I don't care to talk about it. Do you think I could come in? It's pretty fuckin' hot out here."

"Oh yeah, sure. Come in. Sorry."

Inside the house was cool, comfortable and very clean. We walked upstairs into Steve's bedroom, overlooking the swimming pool in the backyard. Steve's room was barren except for a bed, a desk and many books that looked like they had been started but not finished. There was little to adorn the cream colored walls except a large map of Europe. On top of the desk was a bottle of speed weighing down a copy of the Chicago Tribune. Steve sat down on his leather executive chair and I collapsed on the bed. I heard his voice beckon, "So Kip, what are you doing these days?"

"Oh...I'm working at the printing plant and I'm living at home."

"Whatever happened to the clarinet...you were into it rather heavily at one time as I recall."

"I've taken a vacation from that for a while. Now I'm mostly concerned about getting my head together. I need to establish new values. All that stuff I was into when I was younger doesn't mean much to me anymore. Like being a success. Now, what does it mean to be successful? What are your goals, Steven? What are you living for?"

Steve seemed uncomfortable by my display of feeling. He said simply, "Frankly I've no immediate goals other than the construction of a large personal fortune. When I've got money..."

"But what is the good of money if it can't buy you happiness?" I interrupted.

"Money can buy anything," Steve said. "Money can buy you a Rolls Royce, it can buy a mansion in Lake Forest, it can buy you everything you want or need. Money is happiness. Money is love and money is sex. What is your problem anyway?"

"I want to know exactly what became of our childhoods. I mean one minute we were rowdy kids and now all of a sudden we're expected to figure out how to pay the bills for the rest of our lives. It's unreal. I want to know why most middle class houses are jammed together in subdivisions and yet are individual units

with space in-between. And how is it a person can grow up right next to another person his whole life and not even know him? I want to know why one person cannot choose to love anyone he pleases without attracting attention. And why are people so uptight? That's what I want to know!"

"Kip, Kip, Kip," Steve Adler said condescendingly. "Why do you torment yourself with so many questions? Just live your little life and try to enjoy yourself."

"Steven, I'm sure I was meant to live in a castle and spend all day writing poetry. Something went wrong. I was meant to live during simpler times, say two hundred years ago."

"Our generation and our father's generation have lived better than the kings in their old drafty palaces and cold stone floors. So we spend the evening living like kings and spend the day making money to pay for this privilege. You get nothing for nothing in this world. And oh yeah, by the way, do you want any herb? I just happen to have some."

"I was thinking about an ounce."

"No problem." He threw me a baggy of some weed that almost seemed to glow in the dark. "Good shit. Thirty."

I dug into my wallet and counted out thirty dollars. Then I was ushered down the stairway and to the front door. We exchanged our best wishes and I was back on my bike headed toward the lake.

I drove to my favorite winding road off Sheridan that leads down to the lake. It was slow going at first. I lightly pushed off at the top of the hill. It was pleasant to watch the grand old homes crawl by. When I reached a certain turn in the road I picked up speed and then all at once I came upon the steepest section of the ravine. The trees flew by, the road was a blur beneath my feet, the wind felt like a silk scarf brushing against my face and I thought: "I won't brake this time. I'll ride it out to the end."

As I approached the bend I carefully adjusted my weight so that I could maintain a proper balance on the turn. I quickly and expertly executed the bend without applying the brake even once. As usual, there was nobody approaching me from the opposite direction. I triumphantly glided my ten-speed into the sandy banks of the lake shore until it stopped of its own accord, inches away from the water's edge.

I felt happy beyond measure. I had broken down a barrier of fear that had haunted me for years. I no longer felt afraid of death.

As far as Anton was concerned: I heard he left the bindery at 5:30 the next morning, a totally spaced-out zombie. And as a result of eating too much junk food from the candy machines and drinking too many Cokes, he awoke the next morning only to throw it all up. He was sick for days but never mentioned a thing to me. His parents were shocked and insisted that he quit working at Maverick. But he wouldn't hear a word of it.

Chapter 9

I asked Vince Dinelli if I could work in the bindery and he said, "All right, I don't see why not home-boy, you work in every other department now." Which was true. I was writing stories about city council meetings, setting type, pasting up, proofreading and working the circulation department. It only made sense that I would round off my work experience by doing some manual labor. So I was allowed to spend Wednesdays working with the boys in the bindery.

I awoke at 6:30 on this Wednesday morning to the sound of chirping birds. God, it was a beautiful morning. The sun streamed into my room, flooding every dark corner with light. I had a half-hour to sleep before getting out of my nice, warm bed. The air blowing off the lake smelled fresh and clean. I drifted back into my dreams.

At 7 o'clock the alarm went off and I dragged myself out of bed, threw on a pair of blue jean cutoffs, an old t-shirt and a couple beat up gym shoes. I ran upstairs and wolfed down a bowl of raisin bran, a glass of orange juice and shot out the front door. I grabbed my trusty blue ten-speed out of the garage, hopped on its shiny, slippery-black leather seat and rode a half mile to Anton's house. The D'Angelos lived in a huge, old brick house on a secluded cul-de-sac off Sheridan road. Anton was waiting for me on the front porch, oiling his bicycle chain. As I approached he turned to me and called happily, "Hello Goo-guy!"

Anton stuffed his lunch into his carrier rack and we rode off into the sunrise and made our way onto the Greenbay Trail, a gravel path that runs alongside the Chicago and Northwestern Railway. At one point the path ended abruptly in a forested bit of land. This was a block or so away from city hall, at the foot of an old bridge that had long been demolished. Few people ever ventured here unless they had lost their way. From our secret hiding place we could view the mainstream of life proceeding under our feet. We carelessly dropped our trusty blue ten speeds on the ground next to a fallen tree.

We sat down upon our trunk, our hot, sun-baked legs pressed together. No words were exchanged. It was too hot to speak...too humid. I reached into my handy canvas gas mask bag and pulled out a beautiful stone pipe, inlaid with turquoise, and filled it to the top with some weed. Anton took the pipe and placed it into my mouth, flicked the lighter and held it to the herb. When the marijuana had ignited, he brought his mouth to the bowl and lightly breathed into it as I inhaled.

We passed the pipe between us several times until our attention became fixed upon an ant hill and thousands of industrious workers. We excitedly pressed together to watch the spectacle and stayed in this mesmerized state for a half hour.

We walked our bicycles down the steep railroad embankment onto downtown Highland Park's main street. The city was just starting to wake up. The barometer and thermometer were beginning to rise. We rode on for a few more blocks, over streets pitted with huge potholes and into the open garage door at Maverick Printing.

It was 9 a.m. when we punched in, which made us exactly one hour late for work. Vince looked up in relief and anger and yelled at the top of his lungs, "Wha the Hell!" Sweat was pouring down his forehead, his uniform drenched. He looked like he was going to have a heart attack. But he kept yelling, "What do you think this place is anyway? You report to work at 8 o'clock!" Scott took one look at us and smiled, "Hey, Kip looks kind of dazed this morning. Do you suppose it could be..."

"No!" Said Greg, a tall, long-haired pressman, "It's not day-time doobies? Is it? Is that it, Kip Allman?"

"You guessed it, big-guy!" cried Scott. "But you know I've called it quits long ago. I said," and here he began to dance and sing on a roll of paper, "Daytime Doobies, good-by...Daytime Doobies, don't cry..."

Just then a pigeon flew into the plant through the garage door. The frightened little thing immediately drew the bindery's attention away from me. The bird gracefully flew through the shop, from rafter to rafter, blithely avoiding the paper projectiles which Greg and Scott were throwing.

Howie yelled out, "Ice cold beer! Ice cold beer!" And then he started shouting, "Ice cold mary wahna!" Anton began calling "Pi-geon! Pi-geon!" After a few minutes the bird finally found its way out of the shop through the garage door.

"Aw right, you've all had your fun...now lez get to work!" Vince muttered.

Suddenly the sound of the press filled the bindery. The stitching crew congregated in their proper places: Vince and Maria on the platform feeding forms into the pockets, me dutifully manning the rake, Anton jogging the papers and Howie tying the jogged papers into stacks and placing them in neat piles on a wooden pallet. For the first hour or so everything operated smoothly. It actually looked like we might get out early. But things always seem to go wrong when hopes are at their highest and it was not long before the papers began sticking together, causing great jam-ups. These jam-ups knocked the timing of the machine out of order and produced massive delays in production. By the time noon arrived everybody was touchy and irritable. Already the temperature had reached 100 in the shade and 110 in the bindery. And when the clock struck 12, Anton and I were out of the infernal place in a flash, riding our ten-speeds into the blinding sunlight to the lake.

We drove our bicycles down the long, winding road we have read about earlier and abandoned them on the beach. Then we stripped off our tee shirts and excitedly ran into the water just like little children. The chilly, transparent green water instantly dissolved our anger, frustration and impatience. The cool water had a way of clearing one's head. After a few minutes of frolicking about we climbed back on the beach and ate lunch. The sun dried our skin. Then, when we had finished eating, we smoked a heaping bowlful. I pulled a Frisbee out of my gas mask bag and we spent the remainder of the hour tossing it

around between ourselves. When we became tired we rode our bikes up to the grassy city park that

fronted the lake and lay down on our backs in the soft grass and daydreamed. Anton felt content with dissecting a dandelion and I only desired to stay close at his side, our bodies touching. Attention absorbed on the flower and the workings of his hands. He had rough hands, working hands, and long fingers with nails that were bitten to the quick. The wrist was slender, the forearm strong and well-muscled. I reached out and took Anton's hands in mine and began to study them. He resisted momentarily but then surrendered.

"Your hands are coarse," I said, "but your touch is gentle."

"I work hard, damn it!" I protested. "Don't you make fun of me. I do the best I can. I'm sorry if I don't meet up to your expectations but..." My voice drifted away and I almost cried.

"But what?" Anton persisted.

"I'm not used to working around such big, noisy machinery. It frightens me. Sometimes I think the stitcher is going to take my hand right off..."

"It will if you're not careful," Anton interrupted. "The trimmer don't care if there's a newspaper or your fuckin' arm under its blade. It's all the same to it, big-guy!"

"And other times I get hot and tired and I want to leave and say fuck this shit. I just don't care anymore."

"That's because you just started. It's not easy to break into the shop routine. Especially when you're as weak and skimpy as you are."

"I'm not skimpy," I loudly protested.

"You are. You're thin and you're weak and you don't have any stamina." Anton caught himself when he saw that I was going to cry. "But you're getting stronger everyday...I can see it, man: Soon you'll be just as strong as me. Come on...we're late for work."

I held Anton back. "There are times when I feel I would have been better off being born 200 years ago. Those were the days of clipper ships and horse

drawn carts. I could have gotten into that."

Anton looked into my eyes and said, "Don't you think that 200 years ago a couple guys just like us were talking like we are right now? My dad says

that as a race of people we only stand on the very edge of technology...Come on goo-guy, we've got to get back." Then Anton bent forward and

lightly kissed me on the lips.

I smiled and followed Anton to the bicycles and the two of us reluctantly rode back to work.

We flew our bicycles through the open garage door at Maverick Printing and entered the building. What a hideous place for a civilized human

being to have to work in, I thought. Surely God did not create us for this purpose.

Sunlight was prohibited from entering the bindery. Instead, the bleakness of that pit was split by three long rows of harsh fluorescent tubes

suspended from the ceiling. Damn it, it was the lighting that made everything look so unbearable. Fluorescent light has a way of revealing

too much reality for our inspection. And I always found too much reality to be difficult to take. I always preferred the soft, lazy rays of sun

that drifted through my bedroom at twilight to any other form of light.

As was to be expected, we got a real Italian bawling out when Vince got a hold of us. "Hey you little dumbshits, the door swings both

ways at Maverick Printing. Next time you're late, you've had it."

Howie yelled out, "I bet they've been smoking some of that mary wahna again!"

"Day time doobies good-by," Scott Morrelli sang merrily.

"All right you spoiled-rotten faggots, get over there..." Vince began.

I was pissed. Nobody talked to me like that. Nobody. Not even my boss.

"Now wait a minute there Vince," I cried, "Who the hell do you think you are anyway: God? Don't we suffer enough shit

without you adding to it? Just because I get paid shit doesn't give you the right to treat me like a piece of shit!"

"Way to tell 'em," Anton yelled.

"I'm your boss," Vince returned. "You do what I say, understand? If you don't like it, you can leave. Jesus H. Christ, I don't

know what's the matter with kids these days. I'm an old man...I'm 60 years old and I bet I can still out-work and out-fuck

anybody in this place."

"So what do you want," I asked, "a medal?"

Vince chuckled. "Nah, I just want you to do your job...now let's get going, big boy!"

And of course I obeyed. I took up my position behind the rake and expertly began to knock the stubborn paper leaves out of the

trimmer and toss them into the bailer.

The long, hot afternoon dragged on. The stitcher was constantly breaking down. Vince was not to be bothered, his temper had

reached the boiling point and he was ready to quit, as he had quit dozens of times in the past. I heard him muttering to himself, "Jesus Christ,

I hate this cock-suckin' job. We'll never get out of here. Maverick doesn't give a shit. Damn it's hot in here."

The lake's refreshment soon wore off and it was not long before Anton and I were flipping coins to see who would make the next trip to

the Coke machine.

Whenever there was an especially long delay Anton and I slipped out the back door and took a few tokes. Or else we sneaked a puff as

we were loading a ball of waste paper onto the recycling truck. It was the only way we could bear the endless monotony of the work, the

car-splitting noise and Vince, without leaving. And it seemed that leaving early on a Wednesday was simply something that people did

not do until the paper was completely out.

The idea of holding a job and doing it as best I could was becoming important to me. It is difficult to say precisely why this began to

happen. Perhaps I was beginning to see that the failure to do my job properly adversely affected the happiness of the good people

around me. Perhaps I noticed that within the borders of what I believed to be a rather meaningless life, setting type on Monday and

Tuesday, raking paper on Wednesday and working in the circulation department on Thursday and Friday added an important structure. It

added a foundation upon which everything else in my life could revolve. When people asked me "what I did for a living" I could say I

worked for The Beacon and hold my head high.

Physical work in the bindery wasn't all that bad once you worked up a sweat. When I was younger and studied ballet I noticed that even

dance was a labor until I worked up a sweat. Then everything came effortlessly and I began to enjoy myself. Similarly, I reasoned, sweat

must be the essence of work as well as dance. Once I transcended the ugliness of the bindery and worked up a sweat, I found the place

bearable and even enjoyable. When I set my mind on the performance of my job and did not think about other things (like when I was going

home) I found the whole pathetic business easier to take.

Slowly but surely the daylight expired and it was time for supper. Anton and I staggered outside the bindery and made for the hamburger

joint next door. We ordered two cheeseburgers, two fries and two Cokes.

We brought our greasy meals back to the bindery and munched away as we kicked back on a couple of old, ragged, leather executive

chairs by the open garage door. Not a single word was exchanged between us. We were too fatigued and irritated to do anything but

sit together. We just gazed outside at the cars and the pedestrians making their way through the sweltering heat, absorbing the

peace and quiet.

After we ate, we went behind the plant and caught a buzz. The marijuana did little to lift our spirits this time. The reality of

the bindery had become absolutely insurmountable and all we could do was to try to be patient as the long night wore on

and the stitcher kept breaking down.

When 10 p.m. arrived everybody looked like zombies. We had abandoned all hope. And yet nobody quit. Wednesdays

were sacred to everyone in the bindery and anybody who left before the paper was out was a quitter.

At 4 a.m. the sun was slowly beginning to rise and a new day begun. The last paper (number 85,325) had finally been

stitched and the work was over. Vince Dinelli heaved a sigh of relief and shut off the machine's air compressor and

motor. Suddenly, a silence so empty it rivaled the noise of the presses reigned in the bindery. 'Ol Vince haggardly turned to

loyal Howie, knee-deep in waste paper and said, "I love my job. When I die I want my body to be buried under this god damned

stitcher. I want Maverick to make me a plaque that says: Never despair, but if you do...Work on in despair."

"We'll be laughing all the way to the bank, big-guy," Howie said softly.

"Don't kid yourself, big-guy. Maverick gets the last laugh around here. Buy you a drink?" Vince let out a chuckle and headed toward the locker

room where he would wash up and change before going home. As he walked away he began to whistle, "As time goes by..."

After we punched out on the timeclock Anton lead me through the back door into what appeared to be a tropical garden growing wild behind

the paper. He made me promise that I would not breathe a word of it to anybody.

He led me to a small, secluded spot in the yard that was faintly illuminated by the fluorescent light from the gas station next door. There,

proudly towering over a mass of weeds and assorted grasses were about a dozen huge marijuana plants. They stood four feet tall and had a

breadth of two feet, but were growing so thickly that you really couldn't tell what they were.

Anton turned to me with a greedy look in his eye. I merely stood in shock, my mind boggled by the sight of so many plants I had become accustomed to

seeing in a pulverized state at the bottom of a small plastic sandwich bag. "Jesus Christ," I whispered, "It's a fuckin' forest!"

"They've been growing here all summer long. I think we should harvest one, don't you?"

I quickly caught his hand. "I don't think you should touch it...I have a bad feeling. I think we'd be better off if we simply left it alone."

"If we don't grab it, somebody else is going to."

It didn't take much argument to sway my spineless position and before long we were cruising down the middle of Greenbay road on our ten-speeds. The cool, fresh

morning air caressed our skin while a huge marijuana plant lay securely fastened to my bicycle rack. It didn't get any better than this.

And then, out of nowhere, a police car showed up and pulled me over to the side of the road. Anton flicked off his light and split.

I felt abandoned but my courage did not leave me as the officer rolled down his window and began the interrogation.

"What are you doing out at this time of the night?" He asked.

"I just got out of work."

"Don't give me that, it's 4:30 in the morning."

"I know what time it is," I answered smartly, "I work at The Beacon."

Suddenly everything made sense to the officer. He looked me over, stared at my bicycle and then said, "what's that stickin' out of the back of your bike?"

"What's what?" I answered dumbly.

"That plant you've got there."

"What plant?" I inspected my bike and laughed. "Oh that! Christ, I don't know, must have gotten snagged on me when I was leaving work." I reached over, yanked the plant

off the rack and carelessly threw it on somebody's front lawn.

Then I turned to the officer and said, "You know, I'd really like to continue this little chat but I am a bit tired. You see, I've been up for the last 20 hours.

Do you mind if I catch a little shut-eye before they make me go back to work again?"

The policeman eyed me suspiciously and then drove away without even saying good-by. I retrieved the plant, hopped on my bike and rode home.

Anton was waiting for me on the front porch. "Some friend you are," I said. "You deserted me!"

"I did not desert you! I just didn't think it was a good idea to hang around. I knew you'd be able to talk your way out of this one. I figured it wouldn't have helped to have a minor argument to

make your job any more difficult. Come on, let's not fight. Everything's all right now. Let's just drop it, OK goo-guy?"

I hesitated, then turned to Anton and whispered, "Goo-guy."

We entered my house and quietly descended into my bedroom. I lit an incense and a candle while Anton began to clean the marijuana plant. He stripped off some of the dead leaves, powdered them

and rolled a big joint. Through the window on the east side of the room the sun rose, gradually breaking through the clouds. The birds began to sing.

Anton and I passed the joint several times. We shed our clothes and crawled into the inviting sheets of my bed, where we snuggled up, just like a couple of spoons, and fell asleep.

Chapter 10

There were times when I actually felt that the work I performed in the bindery contributed to my intellectual and spiritual development. I suppose this is the why I made the decision to abandon the pressures of the circulation and typesetting department for the freedom of the bindery.

Afterall, since the money was not especially important to me, why shouldn't I spend my time doing something I enjoyed? The summer heat waves had gone and the bindery was becoming a comfortable place to work.

Anton was a freshman in high school now and quit his job at the paper. I missed him terribly but knew that change was inevitable. Afterall, it was only a couple weeks until I left for college.

My responsibilities in the bindery expanded. It was only a matter of time before I was behind the control box of the stitcher and my boss, Vince Dinelli, was goofing off behind the rake, knocking out the stubborn pieces of paper that got stuck in the trimmer. I liked being stitcher operator. I began to understand the machine's ways and figured out how to keep it running for hours on end without a jam-up. I developed a sixth sense for when it was going to break down.

Whenever anything sounded in the least bit strange I was ready to pounce on the problem and cure it. I even foolishly risked my limbs to keep it running. But it was worth it. With this expertise came the friendship of my fellow bindery workers, who would always be ready with a can of beer, a kind word and a "doobie" in times of ultimate despair.

It was an honor to be part of a real shop, I thought one incredible autumn day, as I was feeding forms into the pockets of the stitcher. It felt good to work.

The bindery wasn't noisy. Not really. Why, within the midst of the earsplitting cacophony of sound... the clatter and the crunching of the stitcher, the howl of the presses (like a locomotive bearing down a lonely track) I thought that I could hear a choir of Sirens singing.

They sang to me sweetly about many matters, but mostly about man and his need to work. They sang of the joys of hard work and building up a sweat. They sang of the compassion and love which one worker can feel for another when they are under pressure.

They say I looked like a man possessed when I was operating the stitcher. The rest of the bindery crew joked about it at first. But this joking turned into respect because I was, afterall, able to get that stitcher running faster, and keep it running longer than anybody else. And that meant they were able to go home earlier.

I remember it was a cool autumn evening and I was diligently standing behind the control box of the stitcher, feeding the last thousand forms of the Lake Forest paper into the pockets of the stitcher. It was 7 p.m. and I was hoping to be finished in a half hour. I had that stitcher running at full capacity, about 8,000 papers an hour and so far I had only encountered one minor jam-up earlier in the day.

I felt I had almost become one with the machine. I was attuned to its proper operation and able to see a problem out of the corner of my eye and repair it before it jammed up.

Suddenly it was 7:30 and the last paper of the day was trimmed. I cleared the stitcher of all the extra papers, turned off the main power and shut down the compressor.

An awesome silence filled the bindery, much like the quiet of an empty cathedral. Vince Dinelli's voice broke through the stillness. "Good work, Kip. I don't know what I'd do without you: You're my right hand man. Say, will you help Kirby make the Lake Forest delivery today? You'll be back by 8:30, I promise."

"All right, big guy," I said wearily.

Kirby was a man in his early 20's. He had long, brown hair, tied in the back, and a gentle face that could mean no possible harm. He recently married and his wife was about to have a baby.

Kirby loaded the papers into the truck and I jumped inside the cab. After a good deal of swearing he managed to shift the truck into gear and maneuver it through downtown streets and onto Sheridan Road, heading northbound at 45 miles per hour. He dug into his jacket and lit a pipe filled with good 'Columbian

Gold. We passed the pipe around a few times.

"Cruising! Can you dig it?" Kirby said.

"I can handle it, big guy!"

"Oh man, you know what I would like to get my hands on someday? A custom built cab, made to my exacting specifications."

"Yeah?"

"Wool carpeting, quadraphonic stereo, an oven, a toilet and a bathtub. And a bed of course."

"You're dreaming, big guy."

"No... I swear." Kirby lit up a Marlboro and continued. "I've got the plans all worked out. The whole family could live in it. You'll see..."

Suddenly we hit a large bump followed by the crashing sound of falling objects. I looked behind me and saw the Lake Forest papers falling out of the truck and scattering all over the finely manicured lawns of some very wealthy people. I looked at Kirby in horror.

"Stop this truck, big guy. I think we're in trouble." I said.

Kirby stopped the truck and looked at me. "You did lock the door of the truck, didn't you?"

"No big guy, I thought you did."

"I didn't big guy. We lost all the papers."

"Oh shit."

The sounds of police sirens filled the air and we quickly stashed away the reefer and the pipe and aired out the cabin. A police officer drove up the side of the truck and began talking to Kirby. They spoke for a few minutes and then Kirby turned to me.

"He says we've been dropping papers for the last half mile and that we've got to pick them all up."

So, for the next two hours, we bravely chased and picked up all the papers we could and threw them into the back of the truck. It was incredibly difficult work and when we were finished we laid down upon the massive truckload of crumpled paper and laughed. We were beyond caring for our jobs at this point. The whole thing was such an insane joke.

We drove the truck back to the shop, parked it alongside the building, went into the office and called the boss.

Kirby did the talking.

"Hello Mr. Maverick. Yes, this is Kirby... yes, there is something wrong... no, nothing broke down... no nobody got hurt... well, we were driving down Sheridan Road, see? And we hit a bump and the door flew open and all the papers dropped out... yes, all 14,000 of them... no, it wasn't his fault... I dunno, I figure that we must have shut the door, but the latch didn't catch because something was in the way... oh no, it won't happen again... Yes sir... thank you sir... and give my best to your wife, too. Good by."

Kirby turned to me. "It's cool. He's not mad. We caught him at a good time: He sounded like he just had a few. Let's forget it and be more careful next time big guy! Well, I guess I'm outa here, see you later."

He was out the front door in a flash and I was left in the desolate front office. I picked up a phone and telephoned Anton's house. It was 9:30.

"Hello." I was so glad. It was Anton.

"Anton! I've just got to see you now. I feel so incredibly depressed."

There was a pause and I could hear two voices speak sharply behind a cupped receiver.

"I can't see you now, Kip."

"Why not?"

"I'm busy."

"But aren't you my friend? Aren't we goo-guys?" my voice cracked.

"Yes... No... This is different."

"Why is it different? Don't you love me?"

"I love you. I just can't see you."

"Why?"

"Well, if you must know, I'm making love to my girlfriend."

I dropped the receiver into its cradle and sadly walked into the bindery to get my bicycle. I felt betrayed and abandoned by forces I once thought loyal.

I felt depressed and rejected and most terribly... I felt alone, unloved and very jealous. But I didn't want to hurt Anton. I just wanted to put an end to my pain once and for all time.

I jumped onto my bike, flipped on the generator, flew out the open garage door and headed for the lake. I got onto Sheridan road and made the turn into my favorite ravine drive. I barreled down the road at 40 miles per hour, blithely maneuvering the turn without slowing and approached the infamous bend doing 50.

This was not one of my luckier days however and there just happened to be a car waiting to hit me at a vigorous 30 miles per hour in the opposite direction. I was thrown 25 feet in the air and landed in the soft, leaf-padded wall of the ravine. The guy who hit me drove on without stopping, his face white with fear.

I awoke the next morning, my body sore and covered with dew, but miraculously unbroken. I looked up into the clear blue sky and shouted angrily, "Fuck this shit!"

I knew that it was time for a major change in my life. Not only was it time to go to college, it was also time to leave Highland Park forever.