

Long Gone Blues

Sam Martin

Down in the Dirt Chapbook
Scars Publications 2008

Table of Contents

“Blue Mesh” (1251 Words)	3
“Fittim Fee” (949 Words)	7
“Cherse” (867 Words).....	10
“The Unerringly Bad Judgment of James Dean Harbinger” (1270 Words).....	13
“Hank’s Guitars” (1389 Words)	17
“Tempus Boogies” (1043 Words).....	21

The Present is merely the Past
(Personal, Historical, Genetic);
The Future is a false construct.
In sum: the Past is Present,
the Present is absent,
and the future will never be.

Blue Mesh

“They all gone.”

Stick had asked the old black man about the bluesmen so commonly seen at one time on the corners of this (or any) small town in South Texas. The old man’s look had turned inward before he responded, and Stick suspected he sought words to match his images.

“You ‘member any uv ‘em?”

“Sho’.” He spat tobacco juice.

Stick decided to be equally reticent, so he just waited. *I bet he’s thinkin’ ‘bout encounters he had with the white man when he ‘uz as young as I am now.* The old man shifted in the metal chair under the porch roof of “Rudy’s BBQ Shack,” a former residence set slightly back from the main street of W....., where (Stick mused) his father might well have rocked on a baking hot evening, imagining a cooling breeze generated by the trains speeding through the middle of town.

Stick had returned to W..... this “summer-after-Mama-died,” to confirm his memories. On their last visit, he and she had found the family-owned General Store shut down. The notice on the door announced that the final remaining family member had died. Ironically, the walls on both external sides of the huge corner building looked freshly repainted in Red, White and Blue (a somewhat delayed gesture of respect for the Bi-Centennial), in apparent anticipation of another hundred or so glorious years of operation. Anyway, Stick couldn’t believe the decision to close hadn’t been reversed, for the sake of, if nothing else, the pepper-laced hot-links, sustenance of the local poor for decades. It hadn’t. That’s why he had stopped at “Rudy’s BBQ Shack,” to search for the missing hot-sausage links.

“Little Tinnie Mann.”

“Tinnie??”

“Yeh. He played on a old steel-body Broadcastah.”

“Aah. Did they call him ‘The Tin Man’?”

“Huhnn?”

“Oh, nothin’.”

“Yeh. He played the dances on Sat’idy nights at the ‘Honey Drippah.’ Fo’ they got ho’ns. Fo’ they got fancy. The mens useta go down theah justa watch the gulls dance.” He chuckled.

“Yeah, I know whatchou mean.” Stick said. “I hate this modern stuff.

I just like a plain old guitar, maybe a harmonica. Some rattle-bones.”

He looked a little surprised. “You know them?” He worked his tobacco wad around.

“I sure do. I even like a tappin’ board. Like Bull City Red used.” He added, “I drum a little; they call me ‘Sticks.’”

He reached out to the side and spat. “You know some.”

“Thank ya. Yeah, this modern junk aint nothin’ but a perfession. Make money.”

They quit talking for a while. Stick was finishing his Big Red, and tooth-picking the sausage gristle out from between his teeth.

But the old man had something to say. It was both a true story and a philosophy of truth.

He started out, “The Lawd makes doubles, y’ know.”

“You mean twins?”

“Sometimes they is.” He paused. “Tinnie had a brotha’. Wadn’t no twin. He ‘uz older. He played the guitah betta’n Tinnie did. Made his own songs. But the peoples didn’t like ‘im. He finely gave up and went in the Ahmy. Lef’ Tinnie his name and his guitah. After the Wah he went ta Chicago. Played in clubs.”

Stick decided to wax eruditic. “I’ll wager people detected a tinge of modernism in his offerings. His very being was devoid of blue mesh.”

“What’s ‘at?”

“He ‘uz a fake. He didn’t have the blues, so he couldn’t sing ‘em.”

“You right.” He paused. “The Good Lawd said they had to be a Tinnie Mann, so he made backup. God cain’t trust people to do the right thing. “

“Where’d jou get that idea?”

“‘Bout God not trustin’? From the Good Book.”

“No, I mean about backup.”

“Huhnn. I seen it.”

“Well, believe it or not, I saw the same thing.”

He didn’t respond, so Stick continued,

“I come from the Rock ‘N’ Roll era, you know, Elvis?The King. He had a still-born twin, Jesse Garon; he also had imitators?The Blonde Elvis, The British Elvis, The Elvis Voice. God decreed there would be an Elvis, so he made extras.”

(Stick started to bring up Nietzsche’s Theory of the Eternal Return, but he wouldn’t have known what he was talking about.)

The Old Man stood up. “I betta go.” While he was replacing the chair, and brushing off his pants, Stick asked him,

“Where ya goin’?”

"I'm gon' visit my little brotha's grave." He ambled off, but just before he got out of ear-range, Stick hollered,

"What's your name?"

The Old Man laughed loudly, and hollered back,

"Big Tinnie!"

Damn! He was a fake. Oh, well, Blues is solitary, but the tellin' art needs ears.

Stick just stood there, watching the Old Man. Rudy walked out and Stick asked him,

"Who was that old man?"

"What old man?"

"You didn't see 'im?"

"I didn't see nobody."

Stick sauntered down Main Street toward his car, looking for somebody to ask...what, he wasn't certain. But for sure, nobody had ever heard of Tinnie Mann...or any other bluesman in W....., until one middle-aged black man said, "Wait!" "Uncle Ivory!" he called, then walked up to an ancient black man with cottony hair and talked a few minutes with him. He returned to Stick. "Uncle Ivory say they wadn't but one 'Tinnie," and he died a long time ago."

Stick sighed. *Well, hell! I'm goin' home.*

As he pulled his car away from the curb, he noted the anachronistic hitching-rings still anchored in the tall, cement-sidewalk steps, and his mood darkened in sympathy with the sudden cloud-cover, portending at least rain, perhaps a rare summer storm. Just before he reached the corner, to turn right and head for the big city, he recalled the "grave-covers" he'd noticed on his way into town (he had at first concluded the coffins were risen partway out of the earth, until he realized the covers were composed of cement), and he jerked the wheel to the left instead, in the direction "Big Tinnie" had taken.

Despite the sheets of rain, Stick found the cemetery and pulled into its turn-around at the front gate. At that instant, a glaring flash of lightning illuminated the entire burying grounds. Atop one of the grave-covers lay a figure apparently playing the guitar and singing, although Stick had to exit the car to hear the notes, and the words: "Please keep my grave swept clean." Another ferocious strike of lightning so frightened Stick, he jumped into the car, spun briefly in the mud, caught some gravel and sped away. He looked back so quickly he wasn't sure he even saw a grave-site, much less a human form. *I better go back* his heart said. *You better not* his mind countered.

He did return, though, a year later to the day, found the grave, and tidied it up, a trip and task he undertook annually for the next twenty-two years. Sometimes he brought his wife with him; it was she who pointed out the

grave was gradually sinking. Health problems kept him from his annual pilgrimage two years running, and, sure enough, on the next visit, they found the grave-cover hidden by neatly-mown grass and wildflowers. Early one morning, a few months later, Stick choked to death on the medley of pills the Doctor had prescribed to keep him alive.

NOTE

DEAR MRS. DRUMGOOLE: WE'RE SORRY ABOUT YOUR RECENT LOSS. REGARDING YOUR QUESTION: THERE WAS NO TOMBSTONE, BUT THE OFFICIAL REGISTRY SHOWS THE GRAVE HOLDS ONE "TINTERN MANNUS—1902-1942.

COUNTY RECORDS OFFICE

Fittim Fee

Henry's words were born in his brain, but matured in the back of his throat. His left mouth corner would pull back, and he'd spit the sounds out in an even stream. I rarely stood face-to-face and close-up when he spoke, often.

He was an old Jewish man ("I'm pushing eighty.") born in Chicago, with an older Jewish wife ("She's pushing ninety.") born in Argentina. His mother, born in France, had, in a strange reversal, taken Henry to Europe in the middle 1930's to work for Jewish Release. Really, she acted as factotum and amanuensis to a French General. Henry was yet young enough to learn languages, so, luckily, he mastered the French and German vernaculars. By the time of this story, his mother was dead, and Henry was a "kid convict" in a German prison in Marseille.

"Mon General!"

"Speak German, Jew!"

"Mein Fuhrer!"

"Hah! Ya?"

Actually, it was a mutual ruse. No one could stand before the General's desk without having the keys to several sets of doors, and Henry had these keys, and the General had given them to him.

"Mein Commandant! Your potatoes."

By the General's own decree, every man, including he, had to pick two handfuls of potatoes each day, but the General had too little time, and too much food, so he assigned Henry a double-pick, first Henry's, then the General's, a half of which he gave to Henry. Today he gave his whole ration, plus a small loaf of bread, to his field hand.

"You look like you need it. Now, Dismissed!"

Henry executed a fake salute and a clumsy about-face, then ran from the room, and down the long hallway, pausing to unlock doors, but running between them.

Henry had a market for the bread. Lately, on an irregular basis, one prisoner, older and feebler, was selected to grace the gallows. Henry had been self-appointed to grant the condemned a last meal. Outside, Henry lounged against the wall, near the door, as no one would question his access to the General. Sgt. Schmidt was nowhere in sight.

("Tsam, I shvear to you, he looked exactly like Sgt. Schultz on T. V.: too

fat und too oldt to serve on de frondt.”)

So Henry sauntered up to the old prisoner sweeping the foot path, looked down at the opened hand, then handed off the bread-baton. As he looked up, his nose almost touched Sgt. Schmidt’s rifle muzzle. Henry’s gaze switched to the iron cross on the Sgt.’s helmet.

“Mein Gott!” Henry muttered involuntarily.

After an eternity, Sgt. Schmidt responded,

“Yah. Mein Gott, alzo.”, lowered his rifle, and walked away.

Henry didn’t see the old man again until he was gone. Late one afternoon, just at sunset, Henry noticed light bouncing off something in the nearby forest. He looked around, saw nobody (even the guards were at Mess), then ran toward the object, stopping under it. The old man’s head looked abnormally large, and his neck extra long: Henry realized the old man’s body had been too light to break his neck. The glint had been a reflection off the mock medal he’d been awarded by the guards for his skill in cleaning their boots of the ubiquitous mud. Henry scouted around for a sharp rock, found one, climbed the tree, and sawed through the rope. He then scampered down, straightened the rumpled body, and laid it so the morning sun would n’t shine in its eyes. Then he cried.

A week later, just as the potato harvest ended, the bombings began.

(“Tsam, tzey bombed all around us, but I guess tzey didn’t vant to kill tze ducks along mit tze chiggins.”)

One day, a B-17 crash-landed in the frozen potato field, but the crew survived. Armed guards quickly surrounded the plane and took the crewmen to the clinic, then to the basement.

(“Tsam, I heard tze screams, tzo I had to get ein look.”)

Henry used his keys to get to the basement door, banged brazenly on it, and demanded to give his last potatoes to the prisoners. A bewildered guard obliged.

(“Tsam, tzey vere in French uniforms, and vould shpeak only French, but I shvear tzey vere Americans. One of tzem beckoned me, for potatoes, I pretended, and gave me inshtructions, which I followed to tze T. Anyhow, a few days later tzey vere executed. I heard tzey vere granted the soldier’s prerogative, to be shot by a firink squad.”)

A week later, Henry heard music coming from the chapel, where he was n’t welcomed. He recognized the song, “O’, Tannenbaum.” It reflected the pagan attitude of the Germans toward Christmas. Henry had watched prisoners, under heavy guard, ride a flat wagon to the woods early one morning, and return late, walking beside the wagon, now laden with green trees. The largest one, elaborately decorated, was displayed in the General’s office. One day, Henry was invited in.

“Hey, Jew. How do you say ‘Tannenbaum’ in English?”

Henry searched his early childhood memories, and finally responded, “Fittim Fee.”

“Vas!?”

“Fittim Fee.”

“Ach! Ya?”

On New Year’s Day, the prison camp was overrun by French underground liberators, and early the next morning, Henry witnessed the Commandant being led into the woods. He turned and looked at Henry and tried to smile. Reflected sunlight made his teeth look like they’d been tearing at raw flesh.

Henry smiled back, and said, “Fittim Fee!”

(Old Henry looked lost in thought.

“What did the pilot instruct you to do, Henry?”

“Huh? Ach! To make a tzee-on-tzee, using shticks und potatoes.” He paused. “I vondered all tzeze years vhy he wanted a shvastika in tze field.” He paused again. “Nobody effer came for tzem.”)

Cherse

“J.B.’ That’s your name, idn’t it?”

Jess smiled. “No, kid. That’s what I drink—J&B.”

“Oh. What’s ‘at?”

“Scotch, kid.”

“Oh, yeah. Ha!”

Jess was always sober, even when he drank. Even more so when he drank, which he did after every watch. Jess looked a man the worse for wear and tear, from both the alcohol and the war wounds—both physical and mental, from both WWII and the Korean Action. In this latter, he had been peppered, on deck, no less, at his gun station, by lucky hits from the very plane his crew was trying to shoot down. He felt heavier, even after the lead was probed for, found, and removed, but his head also felt heavier, and had ached ever since, from seeing his crewmates shot to death in their gun harnesses, and from he, alone, having survived the bullet barrage. He had drunk alcohol since then, to pretend the pain disappeared. He had the wet eyes of the alcoholic, the lower lids sagging, exposing his ocular blood vessels. He ears were not only abnormally large, but hung down in great circular lobes that appeared to show traces of puncture holes, although he denied having ever worn earrings. His nose was big and bulbous, and his face was enlarged, swollen, as was, in reality, his entire body, including his rounded hands, from his abuse of spirits.

The kid was too young to recognize that something was biting Jess. He just took all things as they were, to him—new.

“I may have made a bad cherse, kid.”

“A what?”

Jess’s face brightened slightly.

“That’s how we say “cho-iss” (he exaggerated) back east, son.”

Jess’s gloom lifted as he realized he’d found somebody who hadn’t heard his story.

“Cap’n Kid” he began, and fought off a smile, “they do call me J.B., for “Jess Barnacle,” ‘cause I stuck close to ships all my life. Hell, I was in the Merchant Marine before Dubyah Dubyah Two, and in a few skirmishes since then. I’m just a Gobber, got sense enough to follow orders. But one time I made a mistake, I think.” Jess shifted his weight around on the coil of rope-line on the bulk-head he was sitting on. “What’s your name, kid?” he added.

After hesitating, the kid answered, "They call me 'Goober'."

"H'll be damn! Well, I guess everybody's got a nickname in this man's Navy, and yours fits ya. Y'aint no bigger'n a peanut."

Goober felt good, but he didn't say anything, except, "Whadjou do?"

"I saved a man's life."

Goober didn't see how that could be wrong, and he said so. (Every minute he lived, he grew older.) "How? What happened?"

"I was in the Bosun's compartment one night after watch, and I heard some noises in the next compartment. I thought it was some swabbies tus-slin', but when I hit the hatch, it barely moved. I pushed in somehow and found the Chief down on the deck, trussed up like a hog with a 'apple in' is mouth. His eyes looked scared—and sump'n else, too."

Jess paused too long for Goober.

"Well, what happened? Whadjou do?"

"I untied 'im, and took the gag outta 'is mouth."

"Whad he do?"

"He rubbed 'is wrists 'n' 'is ankles. Then he looked at me—"Don't you say nothin' about this to anybody—you hear!?"

"But they'uz gonna throw you overboard!"

"That's an order, sailor!"

"I braced. 'Sir!' I said. I had to. It was a direct order from a superior!" Jess almost whined. Goober grew a little. He waited.

"About a week later, it happened. I was amidships, but I heard the bursts from the bridge. The Chief had secured a large-bore weapon from somewhere (Supply said it wadn't theirs.), and blasted the officers on watch. Some of 'em died; some of 'em wished they had. Of course, the watch-guard killed the Chief, but there was still a hearin', and they called me to testify. I reckon they found my name on the Chief's log."

"The Captain on the Hearings Panel ordered me to tell my story, so I did. Then he asked me,

"Why didn't your report this, sailor?"

I braced. "Sir, I was under orders!"

I swear his lips didn't move, but he said, "I see. Alright, dismissed!"

"I did'n about face and stepped out o' there as fast as I could."

"I got a lot of s..t assignments for years after that, but I stuck to my guns. I always followed orders from a superior."

Goober mumbled something Jess didn't hear.

"What's 'at?"

I said, "I don't know if it 'uz justice or revenge."

"I don't either. But I know what they tried to do to the Chief, and I know what he did to them."

“Yeah.” said the kid, now ready for the rest of his life.

Jess died a few months later of alcohol poisoning, and was buried at sea, at his request. The Ship’s Captain who presided over the burial service, and who knew Jess’s story, remarked, just as the package slid into the water, “We all get chances to do right in this life; some of us get only one.”

The Unerringly Bad Judgment of James Dean Harbinger

“James Dean Harbinger, get in this house and eat your supper, boy!”

James Dean didn't want to, so he hid in the bushes in an outer corner of the back yard. He had hooked the top part of one set of toes on the fence he had tried to clear, and had further flattened his nose. It was bleeding, and he didn't want his Mama to see it, because he knew what she would say:

“Boy, whadjou do to yoreself this time? Don't you ever use good judgment?”

No, he never did. He had tried again to jump over a fence he knew he couldn't jump over, knew it because he had tried to and failed to so many times before. He knew it, but he couldn't resist trying again and again, not because of any daring or bravado on his part, but because, as his Mama had long ago concluded, to her sorrow but not to her surprise (she knew his father), he had, so far at least, developed no judgment except bad, and, furthermore, unknown to everybody but the two of them, him and his Demon, had been egged on by the Latter, a more common companion to both boys and men than Man had yet discovered, or would discover, at least until 1955 A. D. (ANNO DEMONI)

The weather hadn't yet turned cold in South Texas, but if it had, it wouldn't have mattered to J. D., because he would have stayed out in it (hiding from his Mama's calls) until he caught a cold that would have migrated into pneumonia, a fatal illness if treatment of it is denied, as would have been done if left to J. D.'s estimate of the situation, which might have been a blessing-in-false-face to all involved when you think about it, as I, his life-time narrator, certainly have (thought about it, you see).

Anyway, his Mama found him out in the yard squatting in the bushes like a defecating monkey, and branch-whipped him into the house to eat his supper, attending to his nose before he sat down at table.

Sure enough, halfway through the meal, he agitated the dog again, got bit, and had to have his hand washed, monkey-blood and a band-aid applied to it, and sent to bed without the rest of his supper, which he had mostly anyway already given to “Brownie.”

J. D.—“Mama, gimme ‘nother piece o’ meat.”

“Here, Brownie. Here, Brownie.”

Brownie: “Slurp. Swallow.”

J. D.——“Mama, gimme ‘nother piece o’ meat.”

“Here, Brownie. Here, Brownie.”

Brownie: “Gulp. Wolf.” “Clamp. Tear.”

(J. D. had showed the bad judgment to reach out to pet Brownie, who concluded that J. D. wanted to be an Indian-giver, and so defended his supper.)

SCHOOL DAYS

ELEMENTARY

Predictably, J. D. chose the biggest, meanest girl in the sixth grade to pick on. “Bertha Boots” (her big feet fit only in her brother’s cast-off Army brogans) was a mixed-breed?half-boy and half-girl?and she truly didn’t know who she was, or how she felt about anything. She seemed to be of two minds, not a dual personality, understand, but just confused: one day she had a crush on a boy, the next day on a girl, even though nobody, boy or girl or beast, wanted to be anywhere near her. She was both large and fat, pock-marked and smelly, with stringy hair and piggy eyes. She looked bad, but most sad, she smelled bad.

One day, J. D. attempted a mimic (of his no-good father) but managed only a mis-speak:

“Bootsie,” he declared, “your breath bowls me over, like a buzzard.” When Bertha heard this iteration of only one of her many self-acknowledged failings, she knocked him off his pins. She then set him up, and refinished his surface, meanwhile utilizing descriptive terminology not only foreign to the rescuing academics, but describing traits and suggesting activities they had never considered actual, but only potential, and then only in the “minds” of the lower strati of “human society,” so called.

Principal: “Dam’n it, J. D.! Ain’t you ever gonna learn to use good judgment?!”

J. D.——“Mumph!”

Nurse: “Hold still! Lord, child, ain’t you even got sense enough to sit still?! Dam’n! (She blushed.)

SIGN ON THE PRINCIPAL’S WALL

Intelligence + Experience = Good Judgment (hopefully)

J. D. persisted, so before the school year ended, Bertha had whipped him down several more times, although she ultimately would rather have not anymore. She had gone through phases with him?hate, then love (as a woman has for a man she can control), then hate (as a woman has for a man she can control), but this latest phase was exhaustion, physical and emotional. After the school year ended, Bertha was sent to work behind the meat counter in the local grocery store, and J. D. was promoted (among a conflicting mixture of sighs) to Junior High.

SHOULDER SITTER

“Mmm. Let’s see. What now?” The Arbiter of Agony was, ironically, agonizing over his next move?to develop the common man, uh, teenager, into an even worse enemy of himself, in particular, and of the doomed human race, in general. “I’ve got it!” He snapped figurative fingers and spoke illiteral language.

Of course, he “kept after it,” as a term of the time had it, and stuck closer than the devil to J. D. throughout the rest of J. D.’s “schooling,” to assure his ultimate, ignominious demise. But wait!

HIGH SCHOOL

(Because even an Instruction Manual Of Bad Behavior couldn’t contain all of J. D.’s gaffes, but mainly because more than one more would spoil the reading, I’ll cite only one more.)

J. D. had been sent to the Principal’s office to answer questions about a “rotten egg” smell in the Chemistry Lab that apparently involved real rotten eggs, but he couldn’t get in because a blonde woman was sitting in the chair across from “Skeeter” (the fond appellation assigned, by some students, to the Principal, due to his resemblance to, and reputation as, a “blood-sucking insect.”)

Unhappily, J. D. ventured the first query: “Who was that good-looking blonde?” (He meant to say “pretty lady.”) Therefrom came the one general-public condemnation ever (up to that time, anyway) of a school official for granting unmerited mercy. “Id’a killed the little son-of-a-bitch.” reflects a typical expression of the appropriate professional response. “Skeeter” had only whomped J. D. enough for him (J. D.) to enjoy a brief hospital stay. Both men left school soon thereafter.

WORKING LIFE

(So I lied.)

J. D. managed to snag a job at the local service station, raising hoods and looking up skirts, until one day he was caught by a race driver's wife, who, inexplicably, and quite surprisingly, invited him out to the race track in the nearby (rougher) town. *Everybody is scheduled for at least one fatal error in this life.* snickered The Demon.

J. D. became a fixture thereat, and was eventually asked by his new friend's husband to drive his street car (and his wife) to the track on Sunday.

J. D. "He sees us."

Wife "No, he doesn't! He's gonna turn! Slow down!"

J. D. "He sees us!"

THE DEMON

"Next?!"

TWO YOUNG MEN

"Have you seen the new movie at the *Crystal*? It's cool."

"Naw. What is it?"

"It's about racin'. 'sGot that new actor, James Dean. He's cool!"

"He's dead."

"No, he ain't!"

"Yeah, he is. Sure, he is. He uz killed in a car wreck. An ol' farmer turned right in front uv 'im. He uz takin' his car to the track. His racin' car."

THE DEMON

"Next?!"

Hank's Guitars

Jess Barnacle was on shore-leave from the Merchant Marines during the Korean War, so he decided to visit a girl he knew in Nashville. He knocked on her back-door step at eight o'clock one summer morning.

"Why, Jess, you old son-of-a-gun! Come on in this house!" She was all smiles, not because she was sweet on Jess, but because she loved life. Jess smiled back because he liked pretty girls, and she was just another one. "You want somep'n to eat?" He didn't, but while she cheerfully scarfed up bacon and eggs and toast and jelly, he drank a cup of Scotch.

After breakfast, they were resting in the bedroom (Jess had been up all night on the bus ride from his port of entry to her town), and things were going real good, when they heard a scratching on the window screen. Trixie pulled back the shade and smiled. "It's a friend o' mine!" she exclaimed. *Oh, Shit!* Jess said (to himself).

She motioned to her "friend," then slid out of the bed and pulled her robe together. Jess followed her through the house to the same back door he'd come in at. She opened it, and there stood a slim young guy with fresh scratches on his face. He wore a cowboy hat tilted back, a torn Western shirt, and Levi's, the bottoms of which almost reached the soles of the stylish Cowboy boots with the blue stripes down the sides. His nose was long and straight, and his brown eyes showed more knowledge of sorrow than young eyes should. His ears resembled the handles on a water-pitcher, and the lobes were conspicuous by their absence.

"You been in another fight with a woman!?"

"Yeh. And a man."

Jess then noticed the bruises on Hank's swollen hands.

Trixie said, "J. B., I wan'chou to meet a good friend o' mine, Hank. Of course, he's a friend to all women." she admitted grudgingly.

"Jis' the good-lookin' ones." Hank responded, half-heartedly.

"Are you a performer?" (Jess winced at his own word.)

"Yeh. Somep'n like 'at." Hank answered.

The rest of the day, Trixie and Jess walked and talked softly, because Hank slept all day in the only bed in the house. Jess did nap a little, on the floor, using his sea bag for a pillow. Trixie went to sleep on the couch, but woke up when Jess approached her.

About dusk, Hank got up, spent a few minutes in the bathroom, and

asked Jess to lend him a shirt. Jess never saw the shirt again, but considering what happened later that night, he wasn't surprised.

They cruised the main drag for a while in Trixie's car; Hank seemed to be looking for something, or somebody. Suddenly he said, "Stop!" They did, and he got out, and they got out and followed him. He had hocked his guitar and went to get it out.

"Come on, Joe! You know I'm good for it."

"Sorry, Hank. You've done this before; I caint carry you no more."

"Dam'n, Joe! You're a poet. Maybe you could write a song for me."

"NO, Hank."

So they hit the bars, guitar-less, but that didn't keep Hank from performing...or drinking. People bought for him, and most of them traded a drink for a favor, a memory. "Here, Hank. Play my guitar." one aspiring C & W star would demand, then another. And he played them all, a little, and sang a little, each request, so that Jess then understood the pain behind the brown eyes, not from the words rendered, but from the sound of them, not from the brief glimpses of Hank's eyes, but from the scarred soul revealed in even his quick, partial glances.

They ended up in a crowded dance hall where nobody paid them much attention. No sooner had they sat down than Hank staggered up, bowed from the waist to Trixie, and invited her to dance. As the duo swung away from the table and onto the dance floor, Jess, who hadn't been able to get drunk no matter how much he drank, began to grow intoxicated with Trixie's figure, both concealed and revealed by her crinoline skirts and petticoats. Although she wasn't particularly shapely, or even pretty, and couldn't boast even one outstanding feature (like two big, beautiful eyes, for example), she still attracted men. Jess decided it must be her personality that allured them; she was simply always cheerful; she could help a man lose the blues.

While dancing, she flailed her arms around and waved her hands, shuffled and slid her feet across the sawdust-covered floor, and circled and swirled, screaming, and pushing down on her flaring skirts, but only after everybody had seen everything. Meanwhile, Hank guided her, mainly staying in the same small circle, and executing only the tiniest of moves and steps. After the set ended, she lurched, laughing, toward the Ladies Room Area, and Hank found his way back to the table where Jess sat waiting.

"Boy!" Hank said. "I made her look good, didn't I?"

Jess laughed out loud, and decided he could get drunk after all.

"Hank," he declared, "After they made you, they broke the mold."

"No, Jess," Hank said, with the saddest look of their short history, "They broke the mold before they made me. I come from a broken mold."

This was a knee-slapper for Jess, and when he raised his head from down

between his knees, Hank was gone. Jess almost instantly grew sober.

At that instant, the announcer stepped up to the microphone in front of a crowd silent except for scattered female screeching. He proudly boomed out over the mike,

“And now folks, the one you all been waitin’ for...” (He waited patiently through protracted, loud applause, and interspersed whoops and hollers, and after it nearly all died down, he continued),

“And now folks, here ‘e is, the pride of the Hayride, the star of the Grand Ole Opry, Mr. Hank Williams!”

To great applause, a man walked out onto the stage, followed by several men in cowboy outfits, carrying musical instruments, and before the applause died down, launched into a country ballad with a driving rhythm and a sweet delivery.

Jess stared at the stage for a moment, then shook his head and looked again...at Trixie’s Hank’s near-identical twin! Jess solemnly arose, and soberly and carefully threaded his way through the now-rapt fans to the Men’s Room. Hank wasn’t there, and when Jess couldn’t find him or Trixie anywhere, he went outside and caught a cab to Trixie’s house, but when he and the driver together couldn’t find it, the cabbie took Jess, at no extra charge, to a nearby flop house.

The next morning brought both light and clarity to Jess, so he knew how to get to Trixie’s on his own. This time, he knocked on the front door, and he at first look believed he was at the wrong house when finally the door creaked open and there stood Trixie nearly unrecognizable, not solely due to her puffy face and red eyes which Jess couldn’t decide had been caused by crying or by punches, but because her essence had apparently been polluted, her equilibrium upset.

“Yeah?”

“Trixie?”

“Yeah?”

“You okay?”

No answer.

“Where’s Hank?”

“Disappeared.”

Jess paused. “Don’t worry, Trixie. He’ll come back.”

She stared at him. “That’s what I’m afraid of.”

On the Greyhound, headed back to his ship, Jess was awakened from a shallow sleep by the sound of singing. He opened his eyes wearily, and saw a cute young girl swaying from side to side, and moving her mouth to the words of the song. Jess looked around, but couldn’t find the source of the music. “Where’s that comin’ from?”

She reached inside her shirt pocket and pulled out a small plastic rectangle. “From my radio.”

“That?”

“Yep, it’s a new transistor. No tubes. You never seen one?”

“I been in Korea. In the War.”

“I’m sorry, Mister.”

“That’s okay, kid. Who’s that singin’?”

“Luke the Drifter. He’s singin’ ‘You’ll never get out of this world alive.’”

Just then, the D. J. cut in with an announcement:

Tempus Boogies

“Eternity ain’t a lonngg time!” the radio preacher shouted. “It’s the absence of time!” Danny (Daniel Luke, seer first-class) reached to lower the volume, but abruptly clicked the set off. It was a bulky old Army receiver, and, since Danny knew all the on-air preachers, and that the one just speaking was deceased, was “gone on to be with the Lord,” and that no recordings, possible then only with L. P.’s, anyway, had been left behind, he concluded he must have picked up a “harmonic bounce” off somewhere unknown to Danny, some place had had not yet “looked into,” so to speak. The sudden ending got him to thinking about his buddy Jerry’s descent into eternity—or was it infinity?

Jerry had disappeared on the three-day break after their sixth mid-shift, but he was a shack-pappy by reputation so his trick-mates weren’t too worried about him. Besides, Jerry had tested out at Level-3 Yurti, the major language of the main Island; as it turned out, however, Jerry hadn’t been on the Island, not on the main one, anyhow.

The best Danny could make out from what happened later is that Jerry was on one of a chain of islets around the mainland. “At least that’s where I think I saw him last. I may have seen him in the fifth dimension.” he later confessed to the P. D.’s (Psychiatrist Debriefers). “Ennyhoo, we looked for him in the 3-D world, 4-D according to you P. D.’s.” “ ‘After all, we 3-D’s must ambulate through some medium.’ ” He mimicked their stilted speech.

When it was time to start day-shifts and Jerry was still missing, his friends told the Trick-Chief. He yelled at them for not reporting the absence earlier. “Don’t you punks know what we’re doin’ here!? You ought to! You all have a ‘Cosmic Clearance!’ ” He mumbled, as he turned away, “If we didn’t need clean people, you young squirts wouldn’t be here!” Danny rode the walker to his pod and put on his eyes. His guard’s face shifted slightly. “Damn! He’d die to protect my young ass...I mean, brain. What a joke!”

Danny was young, as were all his fellow “lookers,” (as they liked to call themselves; the Trick Chief called them “lookie-loo’s”) about as useful, uh, youthful, as any group of boys, except for their inherited talent; they shared a gene few could boast of, but they were not genetically related in any other way (known to man, at least). Oddly, they bore great physical resemblance to one another: light-colored hair, scant, and so slow-growing they seldom needed a haircut, modest height and weight, all other features regular in all

respects, apparently manufactured beings, but known to be home-grown. Their only distinction from the rest of the race: large round eyes, which were judged never to be filled.

Within twenty-four hours, Danny found himself, along with six guys he didn't know but had seen on-station, squatting in a small boat operated by six black-haired, dark-skinned men sporting blue berets, and dressed in blue fatigues with the cuffs secured in the tops of their tightly-laced jump boots. They didn't respond to English or Yurti. They only stared—with large, round eyes punctuated by tiny pupils the size of maculae.

Danny's crew weren't so tightly attired, just fatigues and brogans, and an M-1 and ammunition clip each they had been issued from Supply at the last minute. The Supply Sergeant said goodbye without looking at them. They were hustled into a covered six-by, told not to look outside, then driven a long way to some coast.

And now they were moving fast and almost noiselessly toward a place Danny had never seen before and wished he'd stop seeing in his dreams (“which are in 4-D, by the way”).

As they neared the shore, they were invited to leave the boat by the jerk of a hand, thumb extended. They got wet to the knees.

“What the hell're we doin'? Who's in charge here? What the hell's goin' on?” Danny's crew-members demanded. He pulled out a tiny, folded paper given him by a C-7 who saw them off at Supply. It read, in Yurti, “You're his friend. Find him. Kill him.” Danny didn't know what to do, so he put the paper in his mouth, chewed it, then spit it out in pieces.

Danny's Revelation

“I can't tell you what happened that night, because I can't remember what happened. I did recall some of it for the De- B.'s, who then suggested I forget it, which I did—until my dreams lately:

I see a figure a few yards off, and when I fire at it, it begins to move away—into something, into some place I can't go. Strangely, it moves to the rhythm of a boogie beat. It's made me wonder whether the Theoretical Physicists' idea of “intersecting dimensions” couldn't be validated experimenting with different tempos, as the keys to moving between different time-space continuums. Well, it works in dreams, the most obvious 5-D through which the 4-D moves.

Well, after I emptied my clip, the other guys went running in all directions, and it was only with the use, not the threat, of the butt-end of my M-1 that I could keep us all together.

Just at light, the boat returned, and the Leader, some grey hair showing

in the sunlight, thumbed us back on board.”

Danny recuperated in the Hospital until the guys sent him word to meet them on a nearby beach at three o'clock the next afternoon, and to wear an old uniform. He expected a beating, but as he walked down, the smell of perfume and Bar-B-Q sauce wafted toward him, and he saw a bunch of smiling guys and gals. They presented him with a new uniform. “You bastards!” he said, affectionately.

Danny's Further Revelation

“I saw us referred to as The Lucky Seven in documents classified way beyond Top Secret. But we, I mean I, failed in the mission to free Jerry. The Lucky Six have succumbed to Einstein's insistence that 3-D moving through 4-D at less than light speed generates gravity, and yields to it. I submit that gravity is a euphemism for grave. I'll return to 3-D, but Jerry won't.”

Long Gone Blues

Sam Martin

scarsuoqpeayqnd

Editor@scars.tv
<http://scars.tv>

Down in the Dirt magazine
ISSN 1554-9623
(Internet ISSN 1554-9666)



Freedom & Strength Press



the Copyright for the written pieces is retained by the author
Design Copyright © 2008 Scars Publications and Design

other publications from Scars:

Books: Hope Chest in the Attic , the Window, Close Cover Beafre Striking , (Woman.) , Autumn Reason , Contents Under Pressure , the Average Guy's Guide (to Feminism) , Changing Gears, the Key to Believing, Domestic Blisters, Etc., Oeuvre, Exaro Versus, L'arte, The Other Side, The Boss Lady's Editorials, The Boss Lady's Editorials (2005 Expanded Edition), Duality, Seeing Things Differently, Change/Rearrange, Death Comes in Threes, Moving Performances, Six Eleven, Life at Cafe Aloha, Creams, Rough Mixes, The Entropy Project, The Other Side (2006 Edition), Stop., Sing Your Life, The Beauty and the Destruction, cc&d v167.5 (Writing to Honour & Cherish, editor edition), Blister & Burn (the Kuypers edition), S&M, cc&d v170.5 Distinguished Writings editor edition, Living in Chaos, Silent Screams, Taking It All In, It All Comes Down, Rising to the Surface, Galapagos,

Sulphur and Sawdust , Slate and Marrow , Blister and Burn , Rinse and Repeat , Survive and Thrive, (not so) Warm and Fuzzy, Torture and Triumph, Oh., the Elements, Side A/Side B, Balance, Chaos Theory, Writing To Honour & Cherish, Distinguished Writings, Breaking Silences, Unlocking the Mysteries, the Book of Scars, We The Poets, Life on the Edge, Revealing all your Dirty Little Secrets,

Infamous in our Prime , Anais Nin: an Understanding of her Art , the Electronic Windmill , Changing Woman, the swan rood, the Significance of the Frontier, The Svetasvatara Upanishad, Harvest of Gems, the Little Monk, Death in Malaga, Memento Mori, In the Palace of Creation, R.I.P., Bob the Bumble Bee, Remnants and Shadows, I Saw This, the Drive, Thoma at Tea, Crashing Down Nineteenth

Compact Discs: *Mom's Favorite Vase* the demo tapes, *Kuypers* the final (MFVInclusive), *Weeds and Flowers* the beauty & the desolation, *The Second Axing* Something is Sweating, *The Second Axing* Live in Alaska, *Pettus & Kuypers* Live at Cafe Aloha, *Pointless Orchestra* Rough Mixes, *Kuypers* Seeing Things Differently, *5D/5D* Tick Tock, *Kuypers* Change Rearrange, *Order From Chaos* The Entropy Project, *Kuypers* Six One One, *Kuypers* Stop., *Kuypers* Masterful Performances mp3 CD, *Kuypers* Death Comes in Threes, *Kuypers* Changing Gears, *Kuypers* Dreams, *Kuypers* How Do I Get There?, *Kuypers* Contact•Conflict•Control, the *DMJArt Connection* the DMJArt Connection, *Kuypers* Questions in a World Without Answers, *Kuypers* SIN, *Kuypers* WZRDRadio (2 CD set), *Mom's Favorite Vase* and *The Second Axing* These Truths, *assorted artists* String Theory, Oh (audio CD), *Life At The Cafe* (3 CDset), *DMJArt Connection* Indian Flux, *DMJArt Connection* Manic Depressive or Something, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #1, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #2, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #3, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #4, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #5, *Chaotic Radio* the Chaotic Collection Collection #01-05 (5 CDset) etc. (audio CD, 2 CDset), *Chaotic Elements* (2 CDset), *Chaos*