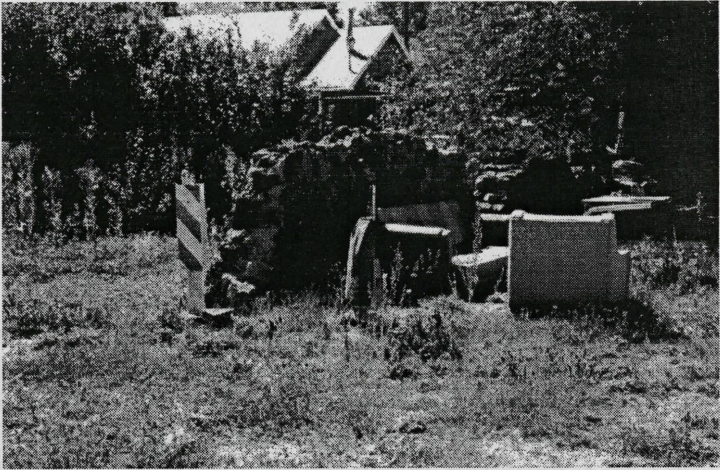


\$2.00

MY BROKE
AND
HOMELESS ASS



A SHORT STORY

BY

SEAN CARSWELL

MY BROKE AND HOMELESS ASS

A SHORT STORY

BY

SEAN CARSWELL

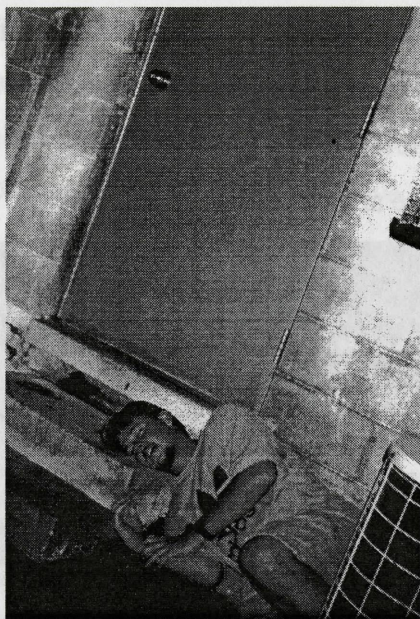
What follows is not a zine as much as it is something Gorsky Press can trade for zines. All of the events within are fiction except for the parts that are true, and all of the characters are wholly a part of the author's imagination, just as most of his friends are. We at Gorsky Press apologize for the low quality of this publication. Our full length books are of a much higher quality, and hopefully this lo-fi story will encourage you to purchase one of our hi-fi novels. Though "My Broke and Homeless Ass" is not an excerpt from Sean Carswell's new novel (very tentatively titled *Crazy Broads and Dead People*), it is the story that inspired the novel. The photographs are not intended to illustrate the story. They are included only to add to the mood of the story. Plus, everyone likes books with pictures. For more products from Gorsky Press, send a self-addressed stamped envelope or two stamps and no envelope to:

gorsky press

PO Box 320504

Cocoa Beach, FL 32932

Or check out our website at www.gorskypress.com.

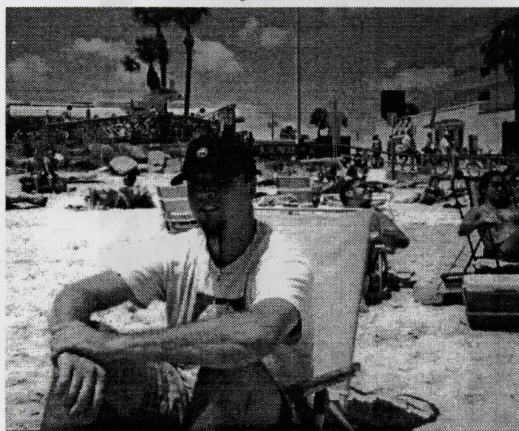


On my way to the Casablanca to see Helen, to have her feed me swill beer and deal out my weekly dose of rejection, I ran into Danny. It was purely by chance. He was on his way to a topless bar to hide from his girlfriend. "I may have to ship her ass back, Bart," Danny told me. "She's spinning her head around in circles and shoving crosses up her cunt again."

"You know you're going to the first place she's gonna look," I said. But he knew. That's probably why he was going there. "Let's get a beer somewhere else."

"I ain't going there," Danny said. He knew me too well. He heard the slur of my words; he saw the red in my eyes. He knew where I was headed.

"Then we're at an impasse."



We looked at each other. Traffic rolled down A1A; no breeze blew off the beach. Even as evening approached, it wasn't getting any cooler. It wasn't going to. I looked up at the sign for Miguel's. Until I did, I hadn't realized how hungry I was. But it had been since breakfast, and it wasn't like I had food at home. Danny thought the same thing, so we went in.

Miguel's was a favorite haunt, good food but also the kind of place you could come into straight from the

beach, barefoot and sandy, and it was no problem. One of the waitresses was a Cuban girl, probably twenty, with hair so black it sometimes looked blue and a low, sultry voice. We stood by the door until we could see which section was hers, then took one of her booths. When she asked, I ordered a beer. "We still don't serve beer here," she said. I knew that. I just ordered one so she'd remember that I was that gringo who always comes in drunk and orders a beer. I figured she could look at me in one of two ways. Either I was an idiot with no short term memory, or I was a hopeless romantic, knowing that the world doesn't conform to my needs but never giving in, always grasping on to the shred of hope for a better life, of a world where I can get a beer with my pork and rice.

"Coke, then," I said. Danny ordered the same. She left two menus and headed back for the kitchen.

Neither of us picked up the menus. "So Danny," I said. "The drugs ain't doing Sophie any good?"



He shook his head. "They were. She was fine for the first couple months. She's fine when she don't drink.

But the last few nights, dude..." He stared off. He didn't have to tell me. It was always the same story. Only the places changed. She'd spend a couple months in rehab or institutionalized, then she'd come out the vision of an angel, soft spoken, polite, friendly, and Danny'd fall for her all over again. It usually lasted about six weeks, then Miss Hyde would come back, and Danny would be right back where he started from. I think he liked it that way. At least she wasn't boring, and he could cheat on her six months out of the year. He just had to keep her from beating his ass too badly.

The waitress came back with our drinks and said, "You guys gonna try something different this time?"

"I ain't," Danny said.

"Me neither."

"Pork and rice?" she asked. We both nodded, and there it was. She was the same kind of hopeless romantic, grasping on to the belief that someday we'd try the beef or chicken or one of the sandwiches; one day we'd go for potatoes or mixed vegetables. Yeah, I started to think, we were made for each other.

"She told me she'd quit it all and straighten up if I could tell her what the meaning of life is," Danny said.

"The waitress did?"

"No, dumbass. Sophie."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her I'd ask you and get back to her."

Ask me? If there were ever a low point in my life, I was there. Six months earlier, my girlfriend had heinously dumped me, and, during the course of that week, my DUI fines and other debts had built up to the point where I had to sell my car to pay them. Then my parents kicked me out of their house because they said it was the only way I was going to get my life together. I'd been living on couches from that point on. Then I got fired from my job of selling frozen meats. Then I got another job and got fired from that. Then it happened

again. Then again until I finally ended up working for the county, watching kids for the summertime. And I was spending all my time and money at the lowest of dives on the beach, hitting on Helen the bartender and having no luck at all. If anything, I was the one person who didn't know shit about anything. To ask me the meaning of life was like asking Michael Jordan for tips on your batting stance. "How the fuck would I know?" I said.

"You wouldn't," Danny said. "But Sophie likes you. She told me that you're the smartest guy she knows."

"If all the people you know in the world are idiots, and one person is just a little less of an idiot than everyone else, he'd look like a genius, wouldn't he?"

"What are you saying?" Danny asked. "That we're all idiots?"

"No. Just me and Sophie."

This calmed Danny. He watched the waitress walk by and stared at her ass all the way to the kitchen.

"So?" he said.

"So what?"

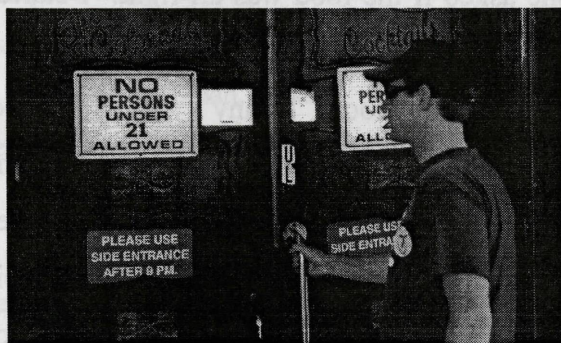
"So what's the meaning of life, Bart?"

"I don't know. Carbon?"

"Carbon?" Danny said. . "That's the dumbest fucking answer I've ever heard."

I shrugged my shoulders. I wasn't going to apologize for my lack of intelligence again. The waitress came back to refill our cokes and tell us that the food would be ready in a minute. And there was something about the way she leaned over the table, breasts close to my nose and her eyes looking into mine so that I couldn't ogle. It got me thinking that maybe she was thinking of something. So I asked her the question: "What's the meaning of life?"

She stood up straight and smiled. "Everyone knows that." Then, she walked back to the kitchen,



"Well, there you have it," I said.

"Carbon," Danny said. "I can't tell Sophie anything that stupid."

"Well it's a stupid fucking question," I said. "If you want to know the meaning of anything, look it up in the dictionary."

"You know that's not the answer she's looking for."

Of course I knew. All I could say was, "She ain't my girl."

The waitress came back with our food. We ate in silence. While we did, the waitress kept circling around our table. Every time she'd walk by, she'd look me in the eyes and smile. Every time we'd take a sip of our cokes, she'd come by with a pitcher and refill them. Four times she asked if the food was all right. I started feeling good about my chances.

I kept thinking about Danny's question, too, while I ate. Finally, I started sobering up a bit and returning to the belligerent state that I'd fallen into when I was at the beach earlier that day. "It wasn't a stupid answer, if you think about it," I said. "Because if you



can bring everything down to atoms, all the world is is a random collection of atoms, built on each other to form things, and the only collection of atoms that all life has in common is carbon. And if all we are is a random collection, then that's what we mean. And it seems to make sense that the only thing life is is random. Random events and chaos."

Danny shook his head. I knew he wasn't buying it. I wasn't really buying it, but I wanted to badly enough to be ready to defend myself if he called me stupid again. "I can't tell Sophie that," he said. "That would just make matters worse. Her life is too random and chaotic as it is."

"Well, hey man," I said. "So's mine, and that's the belief that keeps it going. I'm doing fine."

"I wouldn't call how you're doing 'fine.'"

I sopped up the last bit of spices and grease off my plate with a chunk of bread. "I would." I put the bread in my

mouth, but kept talking. "Outside of the lamentable fact that I ain't been laid in six months, my life's pretty damn good."

"Oh yeah," Danny said. "How much money do you have?"

I reached into my pocket and pulled out my wad. A fifty, six twenties, a ten, and a couple ones. "I still have almost two hundred bucks left."

"How much do you have to your name?"

I smiled. "I still have almost two hundred bucks left."

"How much of that do you think you'll have Sunday night?"

I shook my head. "Hey, anything could happen. This could be the week I land on my feet."

"More likely it'll be the week that I have to let you sleep on my couch."

"But, see, you don't know because it's all random events and chaos."

Danny stood up. "I ain't buying it." He turned and walked to the bathroom.

The waitress came back at this time. She sat in the booth across from me, crossed her arms, and leaned on the table. A gold cross dangled in her cleavage. God liked me. "You were born here in Cocoa Beach, weren't you?" she said.

I nodded.

"I knew it. You have the look."

"What look is that?"

"You know," she stuck out her chest and threw back her shoulders. "That cocky look. Like you just outsurfed someone and no one saw you so you got to strut around to make news of it."

"I don't surf."

"That's good. That's points for you." She looked over her shoulder. Danny was coming back from the bathroom. "Tell me," she said, standing. "Would you like to be my escort to a picnic tomorrow?"

"I'd love to." I tried to hold back my surprise, to be as cool as I could, but after a six month dry spell, this was too perfect.



"Pick me up tomorrow morning. Ten o'clock. I'll draw you a map before you go." She smiled to me and seemed to look through my eyes. I

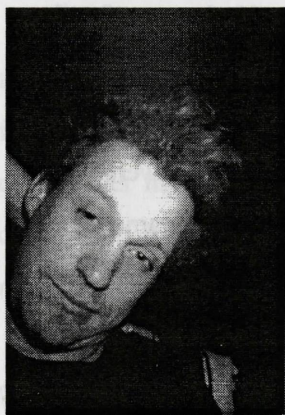
tried to smile, too, but did a bad job of it. Then she walked away.

She gave me a map when I paid the bill and, from there, we went back to Danny's place, a few blocks away,

where a party was going on and I went on to drink myself back into a stupor. Then, we went to a raw bar across from Miguel's. The only thing standing out in my mind about it was the Magic/Pacers game, and a guy sitting next to me who remembered me from my days at Tennessee, when I was a Division I athlete and kind of a great white hope, six foot tall and slow, but first team all SEC two years running and averaging just under seventeen points a game. He bought me a shot every time the Magic took the lead back, which happened too often. Everything after that was a blur. But I did blow a good bit of my paycheck, as prophesied.

I woke up the next morning on Danny's living room floor. It was about seven o'clock. The duffel bag I was living out of was my pillow. I grabbed a towel and some clean enough clothes and showered. No one else in the place was awake. The longer I stayed up, the worse I felt. The whiskey the night before had been a bad idea but nothing compared to the tequila. Visions of vomiting came to me followed by visions of schnapps. I tried to convince myself that many of them may be a dream, but I knew better. At least it wasn't me who vomited. Still, the pain killers that dude who bought me the shots gave me marked the beginning of my descent and the end of my memory. And vomit could've easily fit itself into my morning. I searched out Danny's passed out body. Evidently, Sophie had found him

because they were sleeping together in his bed. I kicked him until he woke up, then talked him into getting up and drinking with me until I was supposed to go to the party with the Cuban goddess.



We found a bottle of Rumplemintz in the freezer and a couple bottles of Busch in the refrigerator. Between the two, we had no problem making it until ten. Other passed out bodies scattered across the living room floor came to life and joined us at the table, but we wouldn't share our hooch. We all sat around, filling in aspects of the night before that others had forgotten. And I spent most of the time trying to bum a car off someone. No one but Danny believed that I had a date, even though I had showered. Danny wouldn't loan me his car, either. I guess he wanted a way to escape Sophie if she started to wig. My buddy, Jeff, needed his car because he was living out of it. Rick surfaced out of one of the bedrooms, but when I asked him to loan me his car, he told me that he'd given me a job and that was enough. He also pointed out to everyone else that I didn't have a driver's license. After that, no one was going to loan me their car. I finally decided to steal Sophie's keys. She was crazy, but she wouldn't call the cops. No one

at the kitchen table tried to stop me. So, wearing the best duds my duffel bag held and carrying a healthy but inconspicuous buzz, I set out in my new Geo Storm to pick up my new love.

I followed the map into Snug Harbor, a family neighborhood up around Fourteenth Street. She lived at the end of a cul-de-sac in a two story house that was a little upper class for me. I knocked on the door. Her father answered and that was my first problem. I'd forgotten her name, so I couldn't ask for her. I tried to make a joke of it. "I've come for you daughter," I said.

A look came across his face like he'd just finished having this nightmare, then he invited me in. Inside was a showplace, black velvet couches and chairs, space age furniture, and a huge parrot in an elaborate cage that kept saying, in the father's voice, "I kill you. I kill you." The father sat me down and sat himself down facing me and said, "My son, have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal savior?"

"Yes. Yes indeed," I nodded. What the fuck else was I going to say?

He looked at me for a long time to see if I'd crack, but I held up, met his stare. Then, he smiled and slapped me on the back, "You can have my daughter then," he said and laughed a gruff and sinister laugh that he should've had

patented. "Maria," he called out. "You must not keep the gentleman waiting."

That's right, I thought. Give the gentleman some respect, Maria. He and Jesus are tight.

Maria came out looking fucking hot in a black halter top and white shorts. I could see it was a situation that called for old world etiquette. I stood when she entered the room. I offered her my arm. I opened all doors for her. I figured I could keep it up until we hit the party, then gradually drink myself out of a buzz. Or get her to drink herself into one.

As we drove along, I did all the talking. I was very cautious, not rambling at all but measuring everything I said, trying to see what was cool and what was taboo, like did she smoke pot and how much did she drink and was it just a picnic or a party and just what were her views on sex on the first date. But it was all very subtle. If she were game, she'd figure it out. If she weren't, then I'd only seem random.

She answered everything in one syllable. The only full sentences she put together were the ones telling me where to drive to. She sent me north into Cape Canaveral, then west across the bridge into Merritt Island, north again up State Road 3, and when she leaned up and said, "Take your next right," I knew I was going to the fucking Calvary Chapel. Dead center into the religious right.

I parked and walked around and opened the door for her, all the while trying to think of the quickest way out of there. I knew these bastards. They'd tried to save me before. I had a feeling that Maria's intentions were less honorable than mine. I was just trying to fuck her, not fuck with her eternal soul and worldly cash.

I offered my hand as she stepped out of the car, but she didn't take it. She walked a step ahead of me. I followed like a sheep. Or I guess like the flock. Anyway, she brought me into the white shining heart of it. Introduced me to the minister. He was a tall man, balding but with that long bang that he wrapped around his head so that it looked like it should look like he had a full head of hair. He grabbed my hand tightly, like someone was going to cuff me before he let go, and asked, "Are you thinking of joining our congregation, Bartholomew?"

Bartholomew? Who was this fucking clown? "Oh yeah," I said. "I talk to God every day. It just seems right that I should do it in a church."

"I look forward to seeing you here tomorrow morning," he said.

I thought about leaning forward and whispering in his ear, asking if I could get at some of that blood of Christ that these places are so famous for, but he turned away. He had other souls to save.

Maria led me through more of the congregation, introduced me to the deacons, showed me all of the Chapel, told me of all the wonderful things the church had opened up for her. As she preached the word, my buzz faded and my hangover bulldozed in. I started to sweat so badly that I could smell the booze seeping out of my skin. More than once my vision shrunk down to the size of a pinhole and I thought I might pass out on the spot. The heat and humidity didn't help at all. I was dying in God's steam room. Then she dragged me out to the back lawn, where the food was set up and her boyfriend was waiting. Lucky for me, though, I knew him. Frank Jones, the one-time biggest dealer on the Island. He used to sell the cleanest acid in the area. He mixed his own speed. He had two acres in the swamps where he managed to raise the fattest Indonesian plants. He saw me and shook my hand suspiciously. "Maria," he said. "Would you mind getting us a couple cups of punch?"

Maria smiled the smile that reminded me why I was sucker enough to get into this mess in the first place, then strolled over to the refreshment table. I looked around to see if anyone was within earshot. When I felt it was safe, I said, "Goddamn, Frank, am I glad to see you. I'm fucking dying here. Say, sorry about moving in on your woman. I didn't know. I'll back off. Don't worry. But look, bro, I'm so

fucking hungover. Do you have anything to help me out? Please, man, help me."

Frank looked at me with no sympathy and said, "Don't use the Lord's name in vain."

"Goddamn," I said. "What's gotten into you?"

"The Lord." And then, for the second time in a day, a man asked me, "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal savior?"

"Fuck you, man," I said. "I need drugs."

"I'm out of that, Bart."

"Bull fucking shit," I said. "What about that sack you sold me a week and a half ago?"

"That was before Maria showed me the way. Maybe you should open your eyes, look around you. Your soul's at stake."

"Man, Frank, I can hardly stand hanging out with these people now. I sure as fuck don't want to spend eternity with them."

"You don't know how blind you are."

I didn't feel like arguing. It wouldn't do me any good. "Maybe you're right," I said. I looked over at Maria, looking virginal with her little Christian sisters, pulling her whore for Jesus routine. And how I would've liked to fuck them all in their pristine summer outfits, but I always thought church a suspicious place to hound chicks. I reached into my

pocket. I still had almost one fifty of my chased paycheck. I separated the fifty from the wad and said, "Check it out, Frank. Half a bill for whatever fair deal we can make."

Frank looked at the fifty. He seemed to think for a minute. "Meet me at my truck," he said in a whisper.

He had ten hits of acid, a half full bottle of vicadin, and a little more than an eighth of weed in the glove compartment. He gave me all of it for the fifty. "I know it's worth a lot more, but I'm out," he said. "And I hope to see you rot in Hell."

I took it all indeed, and for the first time that day I thanked God, whoever She may be. "I hope to hell Maria's worth it," I said, then I hopped in the Storm to meet up again with my people.

I stopped at the Gas and Sip across from the Calvary Chapel, where I picked up a Gatorade and a pack of wraps. I rolled a pinner in the parking lot. It would be another thirty minutes of driving before I reached Danny's. My head just wasn't feeling any better. I lit the joint as I pulled out onto State Road 3. I washed down two pills with the Gatorade. I turned up the radio. By the time I reached the Cocoa Beach city limits, the world blended into a nice fuzz. So Maria turned out to be the evangelistic version of a Krishna in an airport. It was still Saturday morning. Danny was still having a party that day. So was the city of Cocoa Beach: the

annual start of summer block party. With any luck, Helen the bartender would be there and be there drunk and I could turn the tables on her. It was her who I'd wanted all along. Not that Cuban priestess.

The sky was a light blue and the beach was something out of a poster in a travel agency. I'd made a score that would make my broke and homeless ass a hero. It may not have been the week when I was going to finally land on my feet, but at least it could be the week when I finally landed a woman on her back.



When I parked across the street from Danny's, one crowd was sitting around an already tapped keg in his front yard, and another group was shooting hoops in his driveway. I stepped out of the car thinking, yes indeed, this is my day. That was when Sophie tried to tackle me. She took a running leap and landed on my back, wrapped her arms around my neck and tried to bite my ear off. I managed to shake her without hitting her. Then, she started swinging at me, closed

fisted, really trying to fuck me up. Mostly, though, she just hit my arms and stomach until Danny pulled her off.

"You son of a bitch," she screamed. "You stole my car. You son of a bitch."

"No, no," I said. "You told me I could take it this morning. Remember when I woke you up and asked you? Told you I had a date?"

She looked up at Danny, who was still holding her back. Danny nodded. "He's telling you the truth." Sophie looked up to see if he was lying. Even though he was, his face didn't betray him. When she finally believed him, she became suddenly calm. So suddenly it was scary. Her face became a blank slate. She smiled to me, turned on her heel, walked back to the keg, and poured herself another beer.

I let that whole scene slide when I joined the others at the keg. Instead I told the story of my big drug score and everyone was pretty amazed. Scoring drugs at wholesale prices at the Calvary Chapel isn't the easiest thing in the world to pull off. Still, they all let me know that part of my problem could be that I buy drugs even at church. No one squawked, though, when I twisted up a couple more joints and passed them around the circle. I twisted the rest of the weed into four joints and fit them into the long bottle that the pills were in. I figured I'd go through that over the course of the weekend. The acid I'd keep until Sunday night, then

unload it so that I'd have enough money to make it through the week.

Sitting around the keg, shirts off, sweating, telling tales in the front lawn summertime was perfect for a while. Time whittled away that way. After a couple hours, the beer and weed and sun started to make me a little groggy and my plans that night were too big to be sleepy for, so I joined the game of hoops. A game to eleven and I hit eleven straight outside shots. Make it, take it. It really wasn't fair. My friends banned me from the game. They left me with no choice but to take a nap.

At around seven, Danny woke me up. He told me that Sophie was dead set on going to the psychic before she went to the block party. Since I owed him for saving my ass in the stolen car incident, I had to take her.

I crawled out of bed, slapped my face a couple times, and said, "As long as I can bring beer."

The psychic was that much cooler than I expected her to be. She was late twenties with curly blond hair, a wrap around floral skirt, a plaid flannel shirt, and platform shoes that still didn't raise her to three eleven. She held out her tiny hand and I shook it. "Do you mind if I drink beer in the waiting room while you two take care of business?" I asked her.

"Not at all, sweetie," she said. I headed across A1A to the 7-11 to grab a quart.

Sophie was in the back room with the midget prognosticator for quite a while. I finished the quart and downed a couple more pills. The nap had killed my buzz, but it came right back, just like a faithful dog: feed it and it'll make you happy. There wasn't much in the waiting room to look at, some new age magazines, tie-died drapes, a framed picture of the psychic standing in front of the shop with Burt Reynolds. I walked around in circles, impatient. The sun was down, the night had cooled to about ninety five degrees, but the ocean breezes brought it down to probably ninety. The block party had already begun, and I was itching to get there, to listen to the cheesy cover band set up in front of the Cocoa Beach PD, to buy a polish sausage and beer from the Jaycees, to throw down my buck and try to dunk the mayor. And it would be the perfect night for romance amidst the insanity of the summertime heat, under the half moon, two blocks off the Atlantic. It was definitely my kind of night. The kind of night that kept me stuck to this coastline for so many years, and I was wasting it pacing back and forth, waiting for Sophie to find out what her future held. I could've told her that. She'd wig out at some point in the next three days, disappear for a week and a half or so, lost in the haze of a binge, then show up at her father's place greasy

haired and smelling like shit, eyes bleeding, and five to ten pounds lighter. She'd probably sell her car during that binge for three or four hundred dollars worth of crank. I'd have to go with Danny to work over the guy who bought the car and bring it back. Her father would send her to a shrink to decide which institution to stick her in, and that would be that. Right back into the cycle.

But that wasn't what the psychic was telling her. I was sure of that. I was sure that she was telling Sophie that she'd find love that night or riches or some shit like that. That's what I'd say if I was that psychic. That's where the money is. That's why Sophie went to her instead of me.

Sophie finally came out with the psychic and told her that I'd pay. I'd figured as much. Sophie's dad was loaded, and he'd give her anything she wanted but cash. I asked the psychic how much I owed her.

"Twenty dollars," she said.

I handed her the twenty and said, "Did she ask you the meaning of life?"

"No," the psychic said. "Do you want to know what it is?"

"Do you know?"

The psychic grabbed my hand and turned it to look at my palm. She ran her tiny finger between my forefinger and thumb, across the palm. "Interesting," she said.

"What's that?" I asked.

"You have no life line," she said. She looked up into my eyes. "I can't believe you're still alive."

"No one can," I said.

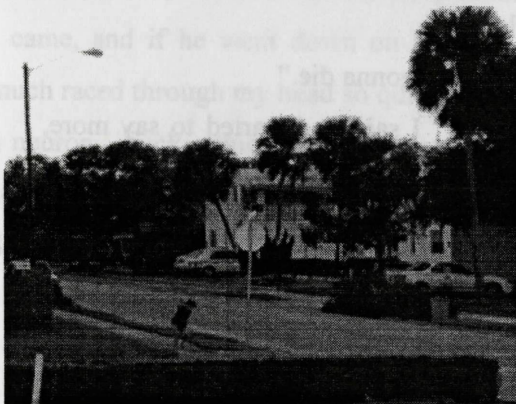
"This is serious." She tilted my hand so that more light shone on it. Then she shook her head. "I've never seen this before."

"I probably just rubbed it smooth beating off," I said. I laughed, but Sophie and the psychic didn't think it was funny.

"I think you're going to die tonight," the psychic said.

"Then I better get some drinking in while I still can. Come on, Sophie."

Sophie didn't budge. She stared at the psychic. I grabbed her arm and dragged her out. Sophie followed, but like she was in a trance. I rushed her along, anxious to unload her on Danny.



We
walked along
A1A without
talking. I could
see the lights of
the block party
up ahead. I
could almost

taste the beer, smell the women. Sophie snapped out of it in front of the topless bar. She reached down, grabbed my hand, and stopped walking. "Oh Bart," she said. "You're gonna die."

I pulled my hand from her grip. "Not necessarily. There's five billion people wandering around this earth who were all born and haven't died. This could be our time. We could be the first generation of immortals. All of us stuck here together forever." I smiled. "That's a scarier thought than death, ain't it?"

"Be serious, Bart. You don't have much time left."

"Don't buy that psychic shit. What else did that midget tell you?"

"That I'd go on a bender in the next week and end up selling my car and in rehab before the next full moon."

I looked up to the sky, the moon halfway to full. Like I said, that psychic was that much cooler than I'd expected. The thought made me laugh.

"Don't laugh. You're gonna die."

"Get off it, Sophie," I said and started to say more, but then I felt her hand on my dick. She stood on her tiptoes and kissed my earlobe. I jumped back. She grabbed my hand again.

"Have sex with me, Bart," she said. "Right now."

It startled me so much that I couldn't respond. This was Danny's girl. I couldn't do it to him. He gave me a place to crash for free when my parents wouldn't. He was my oldest and closest friend. But shit was fucked up between him and Sophie. They cheated on each other so much that there couldn't be a betrayal because there was no loyalty. And something about the way she stared up at me with those big brown doe eyes and stood close to me with that tall, slender frame. Even if she was slender because of all the speed and even if the beauty of her eyes was because of the insanity behind them, she was so pretty in her cotton dress, and it was summer and hot, and I was horny, and there was no law of the universe to guarantee that just because six months had passed without me getting laid, six more wouldn't. But because of where we were, we'd have to go back to Danny's to fuck, and Danny wouldn't be there, but Sophie and I would fuck in his bed, and he'd have to sleep in the dried spot where I came, and if he went down on her that night, damn. So much raced through my head so quickly that I thought I'd pull a neuron. Fuck, ethical choices should be left up to ethical people and leave me out of the loop altogether. I pushed Sophie away.

"You have to leave me something, Bart."

"I'm not gonna die."

Sophie lunged at me and pushed me onto A1A. I jumped back on the sidewalk just in time to feel only the wind of a passing car. "Fine. Fuck you. I hope you do die. I'm going in to look for Danny." She disappeared behind the door of the topless bar.

"Have a good time," I said after she was gone. She wasn't really looking for him. She was hurt and embarrassed and, if I knew her at all, she would think that I'd rejected her not because of loyalty to Danny but because she was somehow deficient. She'd go in and surround herself with women and give up on men for that night.



But, hey, that was cool. Alone was just how I wanted to be walking into the party. No baggage, nothing holding me down. No one to freak out on me. That incident could slide, too. Just elements colliding and dispersing: nature. Thoughts that beer could soak up.

With every step my enthusiasm grew. I checked out the cars on the street, recognizing some: my old basketball

coach's, my ex-girlfriend's little sister's, people like that. Everyone showed up for this bash. There'd be chicks I'd known since high school, people I hadn't seen for years. My parents, probably. I was also sure that the lovely Helen would be out from behind the bar and maybe looking for love. It was the event of the season, and I was primed perfectly, ready to go. I turned west on Minuteman, towards the band, and headed straight for the beer concession. There was no line and my high school chemistry teacher was behind the counter. "Hey, Bart. Long time, no see," he said.

"Too long, Mr. Winters," I said. "Thought about coming in to see you a couple times." Which was true, actually. Mr. Winters was a bright guy, deeply schooled in the mysteries too involved for the untrained eye. Every time I blacked out from booze, I thought about going in to see him. I figured it was a chemical reaction. If anyone knew how to avoid it, Mr. Winters would.

"What about?" Mr. Winters asked me.

"The meaning of life."

"That's easy," he said. "Carbon. What are you drinking?"

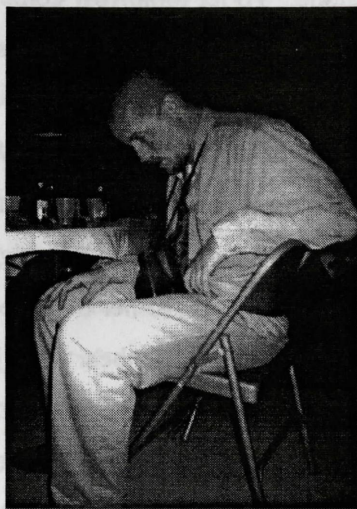
I grinned. "The biggest beer you got."

Mr. Winters poured me a thirty two ounce draft. I paid him, threw a buck in fro the Jaycees, and said good-bye to him. Minuteman was crawling with people, so many that I

couldn't pick anyone out in the crowd. I worked my way towards the band. If my crew wasn't hanging out around the beer stand, they'd be in front of the band doing some sort of silly dances. On the way I ran into a few people I knew. Not really friends but people who I liked to see out on the town and enjoyed talking to if the conversation lasted five minutes or less. None of them knew the meaning of life. One had heard of my acid score and was looking to buy a few hits. I sold him three for fifteen bucks.

As I made my way through the crowd, I kept my eyes open for Helen. If there'd ever be a night for us, this would be it. She'd had the day and night off. She'd told me that she would when I was in the Casablanca the Thursday before. She'd also probably started drinking early in the day at the beach, which would put her in the perfect state of mind. She wouldn't hook up with me when she was sober and my drunk and homeless ass sat across the bar from her, drooling over her legs, asking her for the thousandth time what it was like meeting Hulk Hogan on the set of *Thunder in Paradise*, the late night cheese show that she'd been on one time for exactly as long as it took to walk in front of the camera in a bikini. No, nights like that were just prep work for when she hit the streets drunk and alone and looking for a friendly face, like I thought she probably was at the exact moment I looked for her.

As I neared the band, I saw what looked to be the top of her head. It could have been anyone, but as I got closer, I knew it was her. She was dancing with some guy who I couldn't see. Doing the lambada to a Georgia Satellites cover. I figured I'd try to cut in anyway. It all went back to carbon. Just because two elements were combined at one point didn't mean that they'd stay that way. Nature constantly rearranges itself. It could rearrange so that it was me and Helen bonding.



I weaved through the dance area until I was ten feet from her. That was when she kissed the guy she was dancing with. That was when I saw it was Danny. That mother fucker. I held back for him. Sure Sophie was crazy but she was damn pretty and there was little I'd've enjoyed more that

night than fucking her. But I was loyal to my friend. I crossed no line. I figured there'd be a perfectly good woman wandering around the block party. I didn't figure this could happen. Fucking chaos. I turned and worked my way back out of the crowd.

All of it was getting to be too much for me. Shit builds and builds and I think it doesn't bother me and then a point comes when I realize that I've been pissed off all along. Fuck the party. I was going back to Danny's vacant home to smoke pot and be alone. To let tomorrow come and let there still be money in my pocket and let things start to work themselves out.

Just before I got to the corner of Woodland and Minuteman, I saw a little girl standing in front of a booth, holding her mother's hand and pointing at a big stuffed bear. Her mother was trying to explain to her that she couldn't win the bear. It was impossible. The bear was just there for decoration. I stopped and checked the booth out.

It was one of those where you get three basketballs for a dollar, and the balls are about the same size around as the hoop. It wasn't a long shot, but it had to be right on. I looked at the girl and recognized her as one of my nine year olds from camp. "Hey, Sarah," I said. "You having a good time?"

She smiled. "Yeah."

"I'm Sarah's camp counselor," I told her mom.

"The famous Mr. Bart," her mother said. "Glad to meet you."

"So you're trying to win the bear, huh?"

"It can't be won. You have to hit nine shots in a row."

I gave the guy behind the counter three bucks. I figured, what the hell. There was only one fucking thing in the world I could do well and that was hit an outside shot. The guy handed me a basketball. I looked down to Sarah. "Now don't get your hopes up, kid," I said.

Sarah smiled and bit her lip.

I took the first shot and sunk it. The guy handed me the ball back. "Eight to go," I said to her mother.

"It's your money," she said.

I nodded. I hit the second shot. And the third, the fourth, and so on. Nine straight. I didn't expect it, but then, I never expected my basketball experience to help me out in the real world and there it was, putting a smile on a little girl's face. The guy handed me the big bear. I put it under my arm and started to walk away. "Nice meeting you," I said to Sarah's mom. "See you later, Sarah."

Sarah looked at me, stunned. Her smile turned into a frown.

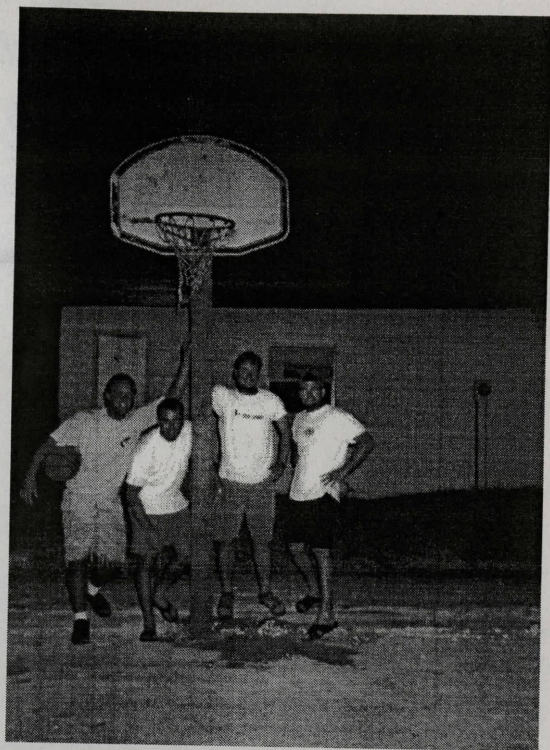
"What is it? You didn't want the bear, did you?"

Sarah shook her head.

"Good," I said. "I'll see you later."

I turned and took a step, then figured I'd tortured Sarah enough. I went back and gave her the bear. Both she and her mother thanked me. I just smiled and walked back to Danny's place.

His house was across from a warehouse about two blocks off Minuteman. No one was there. A basketball lay in the front yard. I picked it up and took a shot. Sunk that one, too. All luck against me that day, but I still managed to sink twenty-one shots in a row. I flashed back to my days of college hoops, but that didn't make me feel any better. I still had a few joints in my pocket. I lit one up. As I smoked, I thought back to the meaning of life I'd given Danny. I started to like it. The only solace I could find was in thinking that it was all random. That I could stand and take another shot and it didn't matter that I'd sank the last twenty-one. There was no force or universal law stopping me from sinking twenty-two. I walked halfway across the lawn, far beyond where a three point line would've been, bounced the ball a couple times, then set it flying for the hoop.



another lo-fi product from



gorsky press

PO Box 320504

Cocoa Beach, FL

32932

www.gorskypress.com