

## "Make It There, Make It Anywhere"

New York is a field of tireless and antagonistic interests—undoubtedly fascinating but horribly unreal. Everybody is looking at everybody else—a foolish crowd walking on mirrors.

**Wallace Stevens**

As part of the deal they struck, Bob Maynard called in a favor with an old friend of his in the bureau. Telling Ruth that an aunt of his had died unexpectedly, Gib got a plane ticket and flew out to New York City to pick up some explosives on loan. Somehow, in a half-empty flight, a blond suitboy still ended up trying to use Gib's knees as a headrest. Throughout the entire flight, the suit would press the button on his armrest and try to lower his seat, at which point Gib would hit it as hard as he could and bounce the suit back to a fully upright position. During the endless struggle of the flight, Gib reviewed his conversation with Masturbatin' Bob over and over, trying to see if there was any way he could have gotten out of the trip.

"Kid," Maynard had said, "the only guy I know who'll give us the boom-boom, no questions asked, is an old buddy of mine in the Big Apple. Guy named 'Late Night' Carson."

"Is his real name Johnny?"

"Johnny? What the hell are you talking about?"

"Um, why do you call him 'Late Night'?"

"Ask him when you see him," Maynard had laughed. "'Johnny'. I don't know where you come up with this shit, kid. Anyway, Late Night is expecting you tomorrow morning. I got you booked on the red eye into JFK."

"Why do I have to go to New York? Why can't they just, I dunno, *ship* the damn explosives?"

"For one thing, the fewer people who know about this, the better. That way, we get all the credit without some damn Supervisory Agent or U.S. Attorney butting in and stealing all the glory. And two, UPS ain't exactly qualified to handle semtex."

"Well, neither am I!" Gib had yelled.

"Kid, relax. You got nothing to worry about. Late Night'll set you up with a van, and all the shit will be packed up and safe. No detonators. You could get into a ten car pileup, and it wouldn't even bother the boom-boom a bit."

"OK, two things," Gib had tried again. "One, I still don't see why I have to drive. And two, could you please stop calling it 'boom-boom'?"

"You don't like what I call things, go fuck yourself. And the reason you drive is because I don't want some nosy son of a bitch delivery man taking a peek at his cargo."

"Jesus Christ, why don't you just mark the cargo as top secret, and put it on a plane? We'll have it tomorrow!"

"Fuck tomorrow! I don't trust anybody with this kind of thing, kid. I don't trust you, I don't trust me, I don't trust anybody!"

"Then why are you trusting this Late Night guy to give you the explosives?" Gib had asked.

Maynard had been silent for a long while.

"I'm done arguing," Maynard had finally said. "This argument is over. You only

got a couple hours to make the flight. Either you go, or we start the pissing match."

Gib had sighed. "I'm going."

Gib had the time to stop and get a bag full of food before he got on the flight, so at least he ate well. Over Kansas, he unpacked the sandwich fixings, the chips and dip, and the beer. The plane staff confiscated the beer, but only after he'd had three of them. So he slept, if badly, across most of the Midwest.

Gib woke up around the western edge of Pennsylvania when the blond suitboy in tried to lower his seat again. Half-asleep, Gib kicked up so hard with his knees that the suitboy flew forward and smacked his face into the seat in front of him. The two of them unbelted and rolled into the aisle, ready to start fighting, but the flight attendants moved in quickly. They moved the suit to a seat in first class, which was fine with Gib.

When he got off the plane around 10 a.m. at JFK, there was a slender, sandy-haired man waiting for him, with a sign that said "FBI Agent Gibson", which Gib found kind of embarrassing. The man introduced himself as Dennis Berg. "But I'm not Jewish", Berg was at great pains to point out.

"Did someone happen to mention to you that I'm undercover?" Gib asked.

"Of course," Berg responded in a brisk tone. "That's why I had the sign. I assumed you wouldn't be dressed like an FBI man." Berg looked at Gib's jeans, t-shirt, and tennis shoes, which confirmed his assumption.

Agent Berg led Gib to a Chevy that looked like it was owned by an anal-retentive with paranoid tendencies. The paint job had the gleam of a fresh wash, and Gib noticed that even the hubcaps were polished. When he slung his carry-on bag into the immaculate trunk, he spotted a small dustvac and what appeared to be a set of clean clothes. Sliding into the car, ready to sleep all the way to the FBI office, Gib banged his knee on a small trash bin hanging from the glove compartment, and felt guilty when dirt from his sneakers speckled the spotless floor mats.

As Agent Berg drove out of the airport, he started to regale Gib with questions, opinions, and outrages. It was better than a white noise machine. Gib closed his eyes briefly, and when he opened them, the car was parked in a garage. Agent Berg got Gib out of the car, then spent five minutes shaking out the car mats and vacuuming the seats with the hand-vac from the trunk, before finally leading Gib up to the FBI offices.

Upstairs, Agent Berg walked him through a series of cubicles until they reached one of the corner offices. After knocking five or six times, Agent Berg eased open the door, which had a name plate that read "Agent Steven Carson".

"Wait here," Agent Berg said, then slipped through the door trying not to allow Gib a view into the office. While he waited, Gib leaned against the wall and tried to rub away the grainy feeling from behind his eyes.

As he looked around the floor, Gib saw a bustle of activity all over the floor, except for the area near Carson's office. Here, there were only two Agents, one of whom was reading a well-thumbed copy of *Hustler*, and a number of empty cubicles. The Agent not reading porn leaned forward in his chair, smoking, while he angrily stared at the phone on his desk, willing it to ring. After a minute, the smoking Agent noticed Gib's attention, and hid the side of his face with the flat of his hand.

After ten minutes or so, Agent Berg came back out of Carson's office. Without a word to Gib, he walked down to the Men's bathroom. Irritated, Gib looked around some

more before turning to open the door.

"I wouldn't do that," said the *Hustler*-reading Agent.

"What? Why not?"

"Just trust me. If you want to get out of here without teeth buried in your ass, don't open that door." The Agent hadn't bothered put down his magazine while he spoke to Gib.

Gib tried to stare down the Agent, but the man only had eyes for his glossy girlfriends. Finally, Gib leaned back against the door and closed his eyes.

After a short, grey time, Gib felt a hand shake his shoulder. Opening his eyes, he saw Agent Berg standing in front of him, holding a glass of water.

"Sleep at night, why don't you?"

*Get off my ass, you little twerp*, Gib thought, but only muttered an ambiguous sound, which seemed to satisfy Berg.

"Look," Agent Berg said, "I don't care if you're some kind of undercover hotshot who can ignore the dress code. You should be aware of one thing. Agent Carson is a fine man with a long and distinguished record. When you go in there, I want you to show some respect."

Both the *Hustler* Agent and the smoking Agent laughed, which caused Agent Berg to spin around to confront them. Gib saw Berg's mouth open and close as the two other Agents looked up expectantly.

Finally, Berg said, "Idiots" before he turned back around and walked into Carson's office, waving for Gib to follow.

Getting his first look at "Late Night" Carson, Gib wondered if the man had been on the redeye flight with him. Thin as a two by four, Carson wore a rumpled grey suit that looked like it might have started out in Armani territory, but now, after few bankruptcies, had moved further and further down until it was begging for change on the street. Both Carson's shirt and eyes looked yellowish, though neither had started out that way. The tie, blue with little grey handcuffs on it, was the only thing in the entire office that looked fresh and clean. Gib suspected it Agent Berg had pulled it out of a desk drawer only minutes ago. Berg had probably tied it, too.

Agent Berg handed Carson the glass of water. Carson stared at it bleakly, then waved at Gib to sit down while he rummaged in his desk. Slowly, Carson pulled out an unmarked bottle of pills and handed it to Berg, who dutifully opened it and shook out three pills into Carson's outstretched hand.

Looking at Gib, Carson carefully enunciated, "God damn this ulcer." Then he threw the pills into the back of his throat and drank the whole cup of water in one long draw. Some of the water spilled out dribbled onto his neck and shoulders. Agent Berg had some tissue paper waiting to dab up the spill.

After that, there was a long silence, broken only by Carson finally clearing his throat. It sounded like a steel I-beam being dragged over five miles of bad road.

"Um..." Gib began

"What can I do for you, Agent?" Carson shouted. "Don't just sit there! Spit it out!"

Agent Berg coughed quietly. Carson looked back at him.

"I believe you said this had something to do with the call you received from Agent

Maynard, sir. In San Francisco."

Carson thought about it for awhile. As he did, his fingers started to beat out a jittery march on the desk top. Then he reached into his desk again and fumbled around some more, this time with a growing manic energy.

With a yell of triumph, Carson produced a white envelope. He bared his teeth in feral expectation and threw it at Gib. Instinctively, Gib stabbed out and caught the envelope, hearing keys jingle inside it. Carson looked disappointed that he had missed Gib's teeth.

"There's directions in there," Carson said. "Now beat it."

Gib got up to leave, when Carson stopped him.

"Tell that prick Maynard," Carson said, "that this is the last one. If I ever hear another word from him, I'll track him down, crawl up his ass and eat his black heart."

Then Carson stood up, leaned over the desk and demanded that Gib repeat the message word for word ("...eat his, uh..." "Black." "...black heart"), until Carson was sure Gib had it memorized. Then Carson collapsed back into his chair, deflated, and weakly signaled to Agent Berg to shake out a few more pills.

Gib walked to the door while Carson dry swallowed a few more unmarked "ulcer" pills. As he opened the door, Gib looked around at Carson and decided to ask a question.

"Sir?"

Carson looked up, and Gib saw his eyes were a glowing red, as if all the blood vessels in his eye were desperately trying to escape.

"Why do they call you 'Late Night'?"

Carson leaped to his feet and lifted his chair up over his head in a manic rage. Gib barely got the door closed in time before the heavy metal chair flew from Carson's hands and smashed against it. As Gib held the door closed, he could hear the sounds of a rampage going on inside. Agent Berg's voice rose above the sounds of destruction, and Gib thought it sounded like a marmoset trying to herd a gorilla stampede.

The *Hustler* Agent stared up at Gib in open admiration. Even the smoking Agent had stabbed out his butt so he could give Gib a sarcastic round of applause.

"Jesus, you called him 'Late Night'? To his *face*?" the *Hustler* Agent asked.

"Not really," Gib started, but the *Hustler* Agent interrupted.

"You got some *balls*, man!" The Agent stood up and shook Gib's hand. "I'm Bobby Zivojinovich. You got to come out with us tonight. This is Bar Night. You gotta come out. The guys have *got* to meet you!"

"I'm busy," Gib told Agent Zivojinovich.

## "Fed's Night Out"

I like it here in New York. I like the idea of having to keep eyes in the back of your head all the time.

**John Cale**

The drinking started near Wall Street.

"We always meet here, get a couple of cocktails in, maybe some food to lay down a base," Bobby Zivojinovich told Gib.

Gib had reserved a hotel room after trying to reject Zivojinovich's invitation. But he was exhausted from the flight. So when Zivojinovich had suggested Gib crash in one of the few empty offices, Gib had wearily agreed. He slept for a few hours on top of a desk. When Zivojinovich woke him up, it actually seemed like a good idea. Better than drinking alone. And god knows, Gib need needed a drink.

Gib unpacked and put on a suit for the first time in months. Hell, he realized it was the first time in months he had even tucked in his shirt. The suit felt like a Halloween costume now, which Gib found disturbing. He filed the observation away to be examined later.

Zivojinovich's crowd was a mix of young agents, lawyers, and bankers. There was no easy way to tell which was which, except perhaps the labels on the suits. Zivojinovich started Gib out on martinis.

After the third one, Gib decided it was foolish to keep count, and decided that he would only judge his evening by whether he "needed another" or had "had too much". He took his fresh drink back to the table and found Bobby Zivojinovich telling everyone how Gib had gotten into a brawl with "Late Night" Carson and had left the Senior Agent screaming, bleeding and defeated in his office.

"Hey, is Berg coming tonight?" asked one of the Agents.

"I hope not," Zivojinovich replied.

"Then fuck it, everyone's here. It's time for nudie!"

The group started up a chant of "Nudie! Nudie! Nudie!" while those who had drinks finished them off. Then the group stormed out into the street and piled into cabs. Gib found himself crowded into one cab with four other guys in the back seat and Bobby Zivojinovich in the front. The cab driver, whose name on the hack license was Peter Desjardins, but whom Zivojinovich insisted on calling "Mohammed", told Zivojinovich that four was the legal limit on passengers in a New York City cab.

The guy next to Gib, an assistant district attorney named Roy, laughed and muttered to Gib, "This happens every week. Watch Bobby go to town o the towelhead."

"I think the driver's French."

"Whatever. Just watch."

"Look, Mohammed..." Zivojinovich pulled out his FBI identification and tried to browbeat Desjardins into taking the entire party to the "Honey Doll Exotic Lounge" where, Zivojinovich assured the cabbie, there was a major sting operation in progress even as they spoke. The entire back seat broke into giggles.

"What kind of 'sting' operation uses drunk frat boys?" Desjardins asked.

Zivojinovich stopped, puzzled, and Gib jumped into the conversational gap.

"Look, sir, we're federal agents. If we look like drunk frat boys, then our cover is pretty effective, isn't it?"

Desjardins looked over his shoulder and through the protective glass at Gib, who shrugged his shoulders. Desjardins returned the shrug.

"As long as you can fix the ticket, I guess I don't give a shit," the cabbie relented.

At the "Honey Doll", Zivojinovich gave Desjardins a lousy tip until the rest of the group shamed him into adding a few dollars.

"If you're gonna act like an asshole, Bobby, you at least gotta tip big!" a lawyer named Roy said. The cabbie Desjardins added enthusiastic agreement.

Gib had wondered if his experience in Vegas could be repeated, but it didn't seem like that was possible with Zivojinovich's group. All the dancers who came by to offer dances maintained hard, brittle grins in the face of Zivojinovich and his pals. It was kind of awful.

After an hour or so, Zivojinovich got up and announced to all nearby that this place now sucked, and it was time to move on.

"Bobby's just tired of the dancers calling him names again," Roy the Lawyer announced.

"What do you mean?" Gib asked

Roy the Lawyer said, "I'll bet every dancer in the whole city has a nickname for Bobby."

"Like what?"

"Well, here at Honey Doll, they call him 'Cheap-o'. Bobby likes to gets his dollar's worth."

Outside the club, the group got into an argument over where to go next. Zivojinovich wanted to get more drinks "where they don't water them down", and four bankers wanted to go straight to the next strip club.

Roy the Lawyer continued his epic tale of Zivojinovich nicknames. "At Third Base, the dancers call him 'Captain Cheapskate'. Tie and Tails, they call him 'Wet Spot'. That was a bad night, let me tell you.

"Hey, does anybody remember what they call him at Tommy's Topless?" Roy the Lawyer asked three other guys standing around on the sidewalk.

"Isn't it 'One Bill Bobby'?" said one guy.

"No, that's the Ritz and Tits," Roy the Lawyer argued.

Zivojinovich heard the discussion and herded people into cabs, suddenly letting the bankers win the argument. The next place, Tommy's Topless, was a dive. The stage, an uneven piece of carpentry with a solid wood banister six inches away, appeared to be covered by a faded orange indoor-outdoor carpet with an indistinguishable pattern on it. The stage held three dancers at a time, who moved down the stage in three shifts of more or less ten-minutes each, two songs. One dancer would start fully dressed, which generally meant some sort of gown, spandex, or short dress, at the far left. The first shift would be given over to stripping down. Then, topless, the dancers would dance at the second and third stations until they got off stage after the third and dressed. The dancers carried clean blankets with them, which they carefully laid down at each new dance spot on the stage.

Assembly line stripping.

As Zivojinovich and his friends began hooting and passing out green, Gib realized with striking clarity that he was hanging out with the Khaki Team, the fraternity of assholes he had laughed at in Vegas. In Vegas, Zivojinovich would trade in his suit for a polo shirt and a Gap khaki shorts (for easy access).

*This is no good*, Gib thought.

The dancer in front of him, a blond with long black hairs sticking out from under her wig (making her a blonde brunette), suddenly leaned to one side and grimaced. She dug her fingers into the back of her knee. To Gib, it looked like she had a cramp and was trying to massage it out. As he watched her, he saw her notice him watching. She frowned briefly, then stuck her tongue out at him.

Gib asked her, "Was that a cramp? In your knee, I mean."

She nodded her head, then lowered herself down to accept a ten from Roy the Lawyer, before his attention was drawn away.

As she danced, Gib noticed that she had a scar in an unusual place. Many of the dancers had obvious implant scars, but the blond brunette had a long, nasty scar on one side of her left knee. The baseball jock in him was intrigued.

"That's a great scar," he said, and she gave him an odd look, then pulled out the side of her g-string while Gib put a dollar between the string and her hip.

"On my knee?" she asked.

"Yeah. Ligament?"

"ACL tear. Soccer," she said. Then she sat down on her blanket and did a series of splits. Gib recognized them as stretching exercises, though he had never seen someone doing them quite like that.

"Hey, I can show you a couple of things to help with the knee," Gib said to the blond brunette. She looked at him, judging how much of a come-on he was making, then nodded her head.

"Buy me a drink while I sit?" she asked.

"Sure."

Gib's group was one of three large groups in the place. One of the groups was a bachelor party with two women, the only women wearing pants in the whole place. As the last song of the shift ended, the tape at the bar ended a side, and one of the women in the group yelled out, "Start the music! My god, you're hanging these women out to dry! For god's sake, start the music." The whole bachelor party laughed.

*Why can't I be hanging out with them?* Gib thought, thinking about Ruth.

The blond with black roots sat down in an empty chair next to him. She had put her clothes back on -- a white bikini top underneath a ripped black sweatshirt and a high cut leather miniskirt. She signaled the waitress to come over, and the waitress took both their drink orders -- a beer and a screwdriver.

"I assume that's just orange juice, right?"

"Not even that. Some generic orange drink mix. Like Kool-Aid, but nastier."

"How'd you fuck up the knee?"

"Well, I was on a breakaway, and this bitch chopped me from behind, and my knee just buckled. They red carded the cunt, but that was the last time I ever played soccer. You said something about being able to loosen it up?"

"Yeah. Give me your leg."

"OK, but no fucking around."

The blond brunette put her ankle up into his hands, and Gib rested her calf on the top of his thigh. After taking off her high heel shoe, he dug deep into one of the muscles just above the ankle, and she let out a small yell.

"Sorry, I should have warned you that was going to hurt. It'll feel OK in just a second."

She relaxed as the muscle loosened up. "Hey, that does feel better."

"Yeah. Just sit back and relax. Drink your cheap-ass Kool-Aid."

Gib felt a little better, if still bleary and a little teary, while he massaged the blonde brunette's lower leg, careful not to let his hands wander any higher than the top of her scar. She laughed every time he noticed his hands drifting up the scar tissue and moved them back down. Gib also kept buying her drinks and giving her dollar bills to hand to the dancer on stage.

Gib realized what the problem was. In Vegas, Ruth had found a way to stop them feeling like total suckers, like cash machines on legs. But Zivojinovich and his buddies had no interest in being anything but an audience. They probably conceive of any other role.

After a while, Gib figured he had done as much good to the knee as he could. So he put the blonde brunette's leg back down, he suggested, "You know, you really shouldn't dance without a knee brace."

When she started laughing, Gib realized what an unlikely image that was. But he pressed on, regardless. "OK, that was dumb. But I'll bet you're not warming up well enough before work. You should stretch more, loosen the muscles out."

Gib felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Hey, is this bitch giving you trouble?" Bobby Zivojinovich asked.

The blonde brunette curled her lip. "You're here with Limpdick Bobby?" she asked.

"Don't call me that!" Zivojinovich yelled. "You fucking cunt!"

The bouncers moved in.

Gib helped drag Zivojinovich out of the bar before things got totally out of hand. Zivojinovich's tantrum continued until the group ended up at a bar south of Houston on Allen that was still crowded even at three in the morning. As they all walked up to the bar to get the first round, Bobby Zivojinovich announced to Roy the Lawyer and Gib that he had decided it was time to start drinking *seriously*. Both of the other men gave each other wary looks at hearing this statement. Gib was having trouble focusing, and Zivojinovich was in much worse condition.

"Good thing he's not carrying his gun," Roy said into Gib's ear. Gib nodded.

Zivojinovich's volume increased with every new shot of whiskey, every fresh bottle of beer. At a certain point, Gib went up to the bar to get another beer and decided to stay there for a while to get some respite.

His alcoholic flameout probably wouldn't be quite as bad as Zivojinovich's, but Gib was feeling no pain. Numbness was okay, but he wondered if that meant he was feeling no pleasure, either. That got him to thinking about Ruth. And that led to thinking about Sidney, and what was probably going to happen to him. At that point, Gib even started to feel guilty about turning Haddal in.

Ruth was going to find out everything, he realized. That he was a Fed. A Fed just like Bobby Zivojinovich or Late Night Carson or Masturbatin' Bob Maynard. And Ruth probably wouldn't be exceedingly grateful about him keeping her out of jail, since it was for a plan that he had concocted, and that she wasn't even involved in.

*Feel no pain, feel no pain*, Gib repeated to himself. He ordered two shots of Jack Daniels and pounded them one after another. Novocaine for the brain.

He waited a few seconds, then pinched his arm as hard as he could.

*Nothin. Din't feel a fuggin thing. Good job, good job.* No pain, he was feeling no pain. What about pleasure? He had better be sure there was numbness there as well.

Quickly looking for some assistance in what was turning into an important (and attention-diverting) scientific experiment, Gib turned to the good-looking redhead sitting next to him and realized from her curious expression that she had been watching him pinch himself. He gave her what felt like a reassuring smile and asked, enunciating each word carefully, "Would you mind if I asked you a personal question?"

She tapped her teeth with a finger once or twice, thinking, then shook her head. "I suppose not." She had a nice, amused contralto, Gib noted. "But only if I can ask two. One before your question, and one after."

"Two for one? Well, okay." *Anything for science*, Gib thought. "Ask away."

"Why were you pinching your arm like that? It looked pretty nasty. You've already got a bruise."

Gib smiled. It was clear he had asked the right person to help him conduct his experiment. "I just realized, that right now I'm feeling no pain. Had to prove it, though. I was making sure I was feeling no pain."

The woman considered the answer for a moment. "Oddly enough, that actually makes sense."

"OK." Gib shook his head, clearing. The red-head looked really familiar. "Here's the thing. OK. I want to see if anything else I am feeling besides pain." Gib thought about that last sentence, not sure if it actually tracked. "If I am feeling anything else."

"What else did you have in mind?"

"Well, with no pain, I gotta test the opposite. Pleasure."

She tapped herself on the side of the head with two fingers. "I should have figured that out. So you need me to do something, is that it?"

"In the name of science, yes. Would you kiss me?"

She leaned forward, grabbed Gib by the back of his head, and stuck her tongue in his mouth. After a few minutes of rigorous scientific testing, she leaned back, grinning.

"So?"

"Turns out it's just pain I'm not feeling," Gib said, suddenly more awake than he'd been in hours.

"Anything for science," the redhead said. "And here's my second question: would you like to come home with me? Right now?"

Gib said, "Anything for science."

# "Old Friends in New Bottles"

Or, "The Robert B. Parker Tribute Chapter"

I regret to say that we of the F.B.I. are powerless to act in cases of oral-genital intimacy, unless it has in some way obstructed interstate commerce.

**J. Edgar Hoover**

Gib's first thought the next morning was, "This is a *great* apartment." Sunlight streaming in through the huge windows was what had woken him up in the first place. The walls were of uncovered brick in a New York-style that Gib had always admired during his visits to Wallis during college. The walls were covered in bookcases and framed prints. The furniture in the room was made out of walnut with a rich, shining tone. Gib was very impressed. Whoever he had come home with, she had spent a lot of money, both on the apartment and on the furnishings.

Gib realized that he was alone in bed when he reached over carefully with his hand and felt only stacks of pillows next to him. Quietly, he lowered himself out of the high bed and looked around for his pants. All of his clothes were on a Queen Anne chair next to the large windows.

As he was lifting his left leg into his boxer shorts, Wallis Arlen walked into the room carrying a glass of orange juice. Standing on one leg, frozen, his eyes tracked her as she walked over, set the glass on the window sill next to him and kissed him on the cheek.

"Get dressed. I'm making breakfast out in the kitchen." Then she walked back out of the bedroom and closed the door behind her.

Gib stared at the bedroom door.

"Guh," he said.

After a while, he lowered his leg, the boxer shorts still caught around his ankle. He leaned down on the window sill, his ass half on the sill, half pressing up against the pane. Then he crossed his arms.

Then he stared some more.

His brain churned a strange white noise, until he felt a cold liquid suffuse the right side of his ass. Looking, he noticed that the orange juice Wallis had formed condensation, which had trickled down to kiss his hip.

"Gib!" Wallis shouted from out in the apartment. "Come on! The eggs are done! Get your ass out here!"

Gib picked up the orange juice and drank it.

Then he got dressed and went out to have breakfast.

The bedroom opened up into a large living area, where Gib followed the smell of eggs into the kitchen. There, he found Wallis and the redhead, who was now dressed in workout clothes, looking like she'd just finished a run. Even sweaty and disheveled, the redhead struck Gib as extremely sexy, with muscular legs and a flat stomach. Her breasts looked small, just as he recalled from the night before, but nicely shaped. She had an Orioles cap on, a ponytail hanging out the back, and it obscured her face so that Gib could only see her eyes when she happened to glance furtively up at him. She seemed to be holding in laughter.

The redhead had a plate piled high with scrambled eggs, sausage, potatoes and a

toasted bagel with cream cheese. Ignoring Gib's faint attempts at small talk, she walked past him into the living room, sat down, turned on the TV to Saturday morning cartoons, and began eating.

Gib turned back to Wallis who was filling a plate with food herself.

"Is this your apartment?" Gib asked.

Wallis nodded.

"Is that your roommate?"

A nod.

Nonplused, Gib decided to try another tack.

"Is all of the rest of that food for me?"

Wallis finished arranging her plate. Another nod, but this time with a smile.

"Toast your own bagel," she said.

A few minutes later, they were all sitting out in the living room, eating and listening to multicolor mayhem. Once, Gib started to ask questions, but Wallis just shook her head, nodding at the TV and her food. Shrugging his shoulders, Gib got up to get more coffee for everyone.

As he poured, getting grateful looks from both Wallis and the redhead, he felt an extreme level of apprehension, like a man with Tourette's Syndrome sitting in a room with two voice-activated nuclear bombs. Luckily, neither of the bombs in question seemed to be angry at him. Wallis seemed to be carefully thinking, and the redhead was just enjoying the cartoons.

As he speared the last of his sausage into his mouth, Gib realized that this situation was somewhat unique in his experience. He was sitting in a room with two women he'd both slept with, yet no one was pissed off. And if he felt apprehensive, well, he had felt that way during every breakfast growing up with his parents. So apprehensiveness almost added to the comfort. It made the scene familiar.

Gib leaned back on the couch and rested the warm mug of coffee on his chest. As he sipped from the cup, he forced his thoughts to baseball, and he started building his personal all-star team again, the best players he had ever personally see play (even on TV). Cal Ripkin at short, of course, though Trammel and Yount were right there. Mike Schmidt at third, Ryne Sandberg at second. He couldn't decide who he wanted as the #1 starter, but Rick Reuschel would always be the guaranteed #5 guy, just for the entertainment value. His thoughts drifted away like the steam rising from the coffee mug.

Gib finally drifted back to the here and now when Wallis turned off the TV, and said to both Gib and the redhead, "All right. We have to talk."

"Awwwwwww," the redhead complained.

"Shut up, you," Wallis said to the redhead. Then she looked at Gib. "You still haven't figured it out yet, have you?"

Gib looked expectantly at her.

"Don't give me the Sally Field face, for shit's sake! You try that on me again, and I'll slap it off your face with a frying pan."

The redhead started laughing.

"And *you*," Wallis said to the redhead, who stopped laughing and lowered her head so the cap hid almost her whole face. "What in the holy name of *hell* were you thinking, Alice? Do you really think someone like *Gib* is going to be able to deal with this?"

Glancing up from underneath the cap, the redhead said, "He's an adult. Besides, he looked so damn sad last night. I thought I was doing him a favor taking him home."

Wallis threw her hands up in the air and stalked over to one of the huge windows looking out onto the street.

*Just like breakfast with the Gibsons*, Gib thought. Now that the explosion was here, he felt perfectly fine. *Now someone has to go find a bottle of vodka. Just start talking.* "Wallis, if you're jealous I had sex with your roommate --"

"Jealous?" Wallis asked, spinning around from the window. Both she and the redhead broke down in laughter.

"Same old Gib," the redhead choked out. She lowered her voice to impersonate Gib. "Are you jealous or something? Duhhhhhhhhh..." Something about her voice suddenly sounded familiar.

Just when the laughter was about to fade out, Wallis looked at the redhead and said, with a perfectly straight face, "Jealous."

That was when both women completely lost it and moved from the Duchy of Giggles to the Kingdom of Howling Laughter. The redhead slid off the couch, holding her stomach.

Five minutes of whooping later, Gib asked, "OK, what's so funny?" in an aggrieved voice. That just set them off again.

Eventually, they got themselves under control. The redhead was sitting Indian-style on the floor, holding her side, saying "Ow. Ow. Ow." in a happy voice and breaking out in subdued giggles. Wallis wiped the tears from her eyes as she sat down in a chair next to Gib on the couch.

"Gibby, my love, can you keep quiet for just a second and just listen?"

Gib was about to answer when he thought better of it and just nodded his head.

"Good. Are you still working for Joseph Senior?"

"Well," Gib said, not wanting to talk in front of Alice. "I'm here in town on business, anyway."

"I was afraid of that. Joe Junior told me you had started working for Daddy Arlen a few months ago, but then nothing. I hoped you had come to your senses and quit."

"Why would I quit?" Gib asked.

Wallis looked at his face closely as he spoke. "Senior has really got you in the shit, hasn't he?"

"No. Why would you think that?"

"Because once Sally Field went away, Peter Lorre showed up."

"Peter Lorre?"

"That's what we always called your 'trapped rat' face," Alice said.

"We'?" Gib exploded. "Do I know you?"

"Yes, you know her," Wallis said. "Meet the sister I always wanted to have."

Alice tilted her Orioles cap back on her head, and Gib stared into a familiar face.

"Owen?" he asked, quietly.

Alice nodded.

Gib said, "Hell."

Then, "You know, you're looking pretty good."

Then he got up to refill his coffee cup.

Gib heard Alice say to Wallis, "I *told* you he'd be able to handle it. *Your* problem is, you fuck someone, and you think you know everything there is to know about them."

"I do *not*."

"Yes, you do. How about that guy who stole your stereo and all your CDs?"

"That was *different*."

Gib poured the coffee. "Anyone want any more coffee?" he called.

"Gib, get out here!" Alice yelled. "How have you been? What kind of shit has our father gotten you into now?"

Gib walked back, deciding he should avoid that topic. "Some guy stole your stereo, Wallis?"

"Gibby, stop trying to change the subject," Wallis said.

"*She* thought he was going to ask her to *marry* him," Alice said.

Wallis looked pissed. Gib decided it was best to move off that topic as well.

"Weird that I would run into someone I know, isn't it?"

"New York's a small town, Gib," Wallis said. "People in our groups tend to congregate around certain trains. The 1/9, the 2/3, the F. It's almost weirder *not* to run into somebody you know."

Alice added, "If you'd been paying attention, you would have seen Joe Junior last night, too. Don't you remember? Joe Junior had a bachelor party at Tommy's Topless last night."

"Joe Junior's getting married?" Gib asked.

"Sure. I'm sure he'll invite you to the wedding."

"And he took you to a strip club?"

"For Joe Junior, the world doesn't change. I'm still his brother, even if I've got tits. And any brother of Joe Junior would obviously would want to go to a bunch of strip clubs with him."

"Hey, wait a second," Gib said. "Were you the one screaming about the music?"

Alice laughed. "Sure. Boy, that Tommy's is a real skanky place, isn't it?"

"Yeah." Gib paused. "I was surprised. You sounded like you were having a good time."

"Well, I'm bi."

"Oh." Gib thought about it. "So that makes you a bi-sexual transsexual. A bitranssexual? A transbisexual?"

"I think you covered everything. Anyway, I followed you guys outside after that friend of your –"

"No friend of mine," Gib interrupted.

"The guy who started the fight. You were already in a cab with him by the time I got outside. So I asked the guy who seemed to be in charge, and he told me what bar you were going to. I showed up about an hour after you guys got there."

Gib leaned back and drank some of the coffee.

"Well," he said. "Okay." Then he drank some more coffee.

Wallis looked at him. "That's it? That's all you have to say?" she asked.

Gib thought about it. "I guess not. Alice, do you mind if I ask a personal question?"

"Go right ahead."

"Did we actually, uh, do anything?"

"Sure!" Alice made a circle with one hand and pumped her other forefinger through the circle.

"OK." Gib said. He drank his coffee, thinking about whether to ask the next question.

Alice started giggling again. "Uh-oh. I know where this is going," she said.

"Come on, ask already!"

Gib sighed. "How was I?"

Wallis shouted something incoherent. Alice got up and shook her fist in the air. "I *knew* you were going to ask that!" She danced around the room. Finally, she turned to Gib and said, "You were fine."

Gib nodded his head, satisfied.

Wallis gave him a bleak look. "Don't look so smug, asshole."

The rest of the morning passed in comfortable discussion of surgery and cosmetics and work. When Gib's stomach started growling, they all realized it was lunch time. So they ordered in Chinese food.

"How did you afford everything?" Gib asked. "Uncle Joseph?"

"Are you kidding? No." Alice looked chagrined. "He more or less disowned me after I went into rehab for the last time. That's where I finally admitted why I was so unhappy. This was about four years ago. I still have a trust from Mom's side of the family, and I get paid pretty well to do what I do."

"What are you doing?"

"Building web sites."

"Really? Weird. I'm kind of, uh, working in the industry, too."

"Really?" Wallis asked. "I thought you said you were still working for Senior."

"No, I don't think I said that. Hey, I should really go check my messages. Can I use your phone?" Since Wallis stared at him suspiciously, he actually did check his messages.

There were twelve. Three of them were the inevitable hangups from marketing computers. Two were from Ruth, one was from Masturbatin' Bob, both of them "just checking up on him". The rest were from Sidney Pinkwater.

"Gibson, where *are* you? We have to fly out and give a pitch in New York on Sunday. The venture capital people called the meeting all of a sudden. I think they're going to back out. Now, of all times! But they're making a special Sunday meeting, just to hear what we have to say. I think those bastards Bodio and Feyrer are trying to fuck us.

"Ruth told me you were already in New York for a funeral. I am sorry to hear about your aunt. I am in desperate need of moral support, Gibson. I need you at this meeting. I need you!

"Call soonest, call quickly, call right away. Call, call, call."

The other messages were more of the same, only more and more frantic. At one point, Pinkwater referred to Gib as a "good luck charm", which made Gib grimace.

Gib dialed the 212 number Sidney had left and got the front desk of the Waldorf. In a second, he was on the phone with Pinkwater. He tried to argue his way out of the situation, but Pinkwater wouldn't stop until finally Gib agreed to help with the pitch. Gib

arranged to meet Pinkwater in a hotel the next morning to get ready for the pitch on Monday.

Gib walked back to the two women, sat down and groaned.

"So what are you doing on the web?" Alice asked.

"I'm kind of writing a column."

"What column?" Alice asked.

"It's called 'Stupid Things'."

"Jesus Christ, you're J. Spiderman?" Alice said. "I read that column every day! You're an *asshole!*"

Gib decided to take it as a compliment. Non-disclosure be damned, he told Alice what he was doing for Pinkwater, about Black Helicopter, and about the Black Box project. Alice was suitably impressed.

"That's amazing," Alice said. "How did you get involved in that?"

So Gib described how Ruth had introduced him to Sidney Pinkwater, trying to leave out exactly how he had met Ruth in the first place. Wallis honed in on the evasion.

"Why were you at this 'Space' in the first place? It doesn't sound like your kind of place."

"It's really not important. Hey, did I mention I wrote a piece for *Rolling Stone*?"

That got Alice so excited that Gib was able to escape from Wallis' interrogation. Wallis didn't look happy about it.

"Gib," Alice said, "it sounds like you have a pretty successful writing career going on. I never even knew you liked writing. You seem really happy."

*I have two successful careers going*, Gib thought. *I'm happy about one of 'em.* "You seem really happy, too, Alice."

"Years of therapy."

## "Having it Out"

Everybody wants to see justice done, to somebody else.

**Bruce Cockburn**

A short while later, Alice announced she had to go to a meeting. When Gib asked what kind of meeting she could have on a Saturday night, Wallis looked at him pityingly. Alice explained it was a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, made up mostly of transsexuals.

"I may be a woman now, but I'm still an ex-junkie," Alice said. "I used to go to a regular meeting that had a lot of transvestites in it, but they get so bitchy. It's all about finding a community where you're comfortable."

Alice leaned over and kissed Gib on the cheek. "Maybe we can do this again some time," Alice said. Then she left.

Wallis didn't wait a second. "Spadecalling. Can you take it?"

Gib said, "I can take it. Can I get a drink first?"

There was a pause while the Oban scotch was broken out, along with some lowball glasses.

Then Wallis asked, "How freaked out are you that you slept with Alice?"

Gib thought about it. "You were the only member of the Arlen family I ever expected to do that with."

"But ...?"

"I don't know why, but I don't feel freaked out at all."

"Will your girlfriend mind that you slept with Alice?"

"How do you know I have a girlfriend?"

"Gibby, you *always* have a girlfriend."

Gib thought about it a long time. "I don't know what Ruth will think. It's not like we're married." Gib hesitated, thinking about that. "But I don't think I'm going to tell her. I'm not the same person in San Francisco. This was the old me that did this."

"All right. If you say so," Wallis said. Then a light of comprehension glowed in her eyes. "Gibby, are you in love with this girl?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes."

"Spadecalling!"

"I know. The answer's still yes."

Wallis stared at him for a long while. "Don't look so sad, Gib. It happens to everyone sooner or later."

"If you say so. I still don't quite know what's going to happen, but I'm going to see it through."

"Good. Are you still working for Senior?"

"Yes."

"I knew it, damn it. The next question has to be: how many people are going to get hurt?"

"I don't know. None, I hope."

Wallis snorted in disbelief. "Spade calling, remember? How many people are going to get hurt?"

Gib leaned back and close his eyes. After a while, he said, "Maybe a lot. It

depends on me."

Wallis said, "Hell, I figure you're the one who's going to get hurt the most."

Gib had drunk just enough to take a chance. If he saw pity when he opened his eyes, he thought, then the conversation would end right here. He would manufacture an excuse and go drink until he had to meet Pinkwater the next morning. But he hoped he would see something that meant he could tell Wallis everything. He needed to tell her. Tell someone.

He opened his eyes. No pity. Sympathy, perhaps. Concern. But mostly, he saw in Wallis's eyes what he expected Catholics must hope to see on the other side of the confessional screen. Awareness. And if not forgiveness, then at least judgement.

Gib told Wallis all about it, spadealling all the way, from the time he left Virginia, included every bit of what he'd done in San Francisco, and then ended with what he was doing in New York.

At first, she asked questions, but as he went along, she just listened. The only movement she made was to pour more Oban in their glasses.

After over three hours of talking, Gib finished by telling her about the call he'd just had with Pinkwater. Then he reached for something more to say and realized he'd said it all. He looked at the bottle of Oban and realized that it was empty. He pushed himself up off the couch and stumbled into the kitchen, where he vaguely remembering a bottle of Isle of Jura.

"Holy shit," he heard Wallis finally say. He cracked the fresh bottle of scotch, filled his glass with ice.

Walking back with the glass and bottle, he said, "Holy shit. I agree."

Wallis didn't seem so much stunned as overwhelmed.

"This all wasn't quite what you expected to hear, was it?" Gib asked.

"No," she finally said. "I expected you were just fucking over another girlfriend, like Katy."

"Who?"

"There, that's what I expected," Wallis said. "Katy Maitland. You lived with her for the last year, remember? Then you disappear one day in August and all she finds is this ridiculous note. *Dear Katy, thanks for everything.* For at least a day, she thought it was some bizarre practical joke. When she realized it wasn't, she called me in a panic."

"Oh, Katy. Right. Sorry if she bothered you. I'd forgotten about her."

"About three seconds after you walked out the door, I'd imagine. Just another situation where you don't give a shit. I'll bet you remember what sex with her was like, though."

"Sure. She liked to lick my asshole."

Wallis stopped short. "She *what*?"

Gib shrugged. "Why are you looking at me? It's not like I *asked* her to lick my asshole. I think she just liked everything to be clean. The house, her clothes, my bunghole. Did you know she changed the sheets once a day? She was a little obsessive."

Gib drank some more scotch while Wallis gathered her thoughts.

"Okay," she said, shaking her head. "Let's move on from *that*."

"Fine by me."

"What are you going to do?"

"What would you suggest?"

"Gib, you can't deliver *explosives*, for god's sake."

"Why not? The only thing I really care about in all this is..." Gib paused.

"Is what?"

He said, "Ruth."

"Oh," Wallis said.

"I guess I'd like to get out of this with my skin intact. But all I really care about is Ruth."

"That's not good enough."

"Of *course* it's not," he shouted suddenly, angrily. "Don't you think I know that? Why the hell do you think I told you about all this? Just because I thought you might be *amused*? Christ, Wallis, what am I going to *do*?"

Wallis sat still for a long while.

"I really don't know."

Gib's anger collapsed. "Great. Thanks."

He looked at his half-full glass. Got up.

"Then I'll guess you'll just have to trust me to figure out what the right thing is, Wallis, and to do it."

"Gib, how can I? How often have you ever done that?"

Gib shrugged. "This time is different."

"How?"

"Well," and Gib smiled deadly as he said it, "This time I actually give a shit."

Wallis looked at him. He looked back. No help there.

"Thanks for your hospitality," he said. He drained the rest of his glass. Set it down. "Thank Alice, too."

## "Nothing Like Enthusiasm"

You will find it a distinct help ... if you know and look as if you know what you are doing.

### IRS training manual for tax auditors

At the Waldorf the next morning, Gib called up to Pinkwater's room. Sidney picked up and started yelling excitedly into the phone. Then he told Gib to wait, that he would be right down. Sitting underneath the huge wooden clock, Gib thought about the story that Ethan Garrity had told him, about running away to the Coney Island Cyclone. The more he thought about Pinkwater, the more he wanted to go outside and hail a cab to Coney. Gib checked his pockets, found three twenties. That should be enough to get there.

Gib had just stood up to ask the concierge how easy it would be to arrange a car ride when Pinkwater stormed into the lobby, bellowing his delight at seeing Gib. The lobby went silent as half the people in it turned to watch Sidney Pinkwater, resplendent in his glaring Hawaiian shirt and khaki shorts, charge across the lobby and lift Gib off the floor in a bear hug. Actually, it was a bigger hug than that. If a group of Grizzlies had been sitting in the cocktail lounge, wearing Armani and sipping martinis, they would have seen the hug, shrugged their hairy shoulders, and agreed, "OK, from now on, we call it a Pinkwater Hug."

When Pinkwater put Gib down, he looked at Gib's bedraggled suit and shook his head disappointedly. "Now that suit will never do. You look like the accountant for a traveling carny," Pinkwater said. "It's *my* job to look like a crazy, visionary bastard. You, on the other hand, have to look like a million dollars in diamonds. Right now, you look like you're hiring temps to run the Tilt-o-Wheel."

Pinkwater dragged Gib off to the gift shop, bought him a t-shirt and a pair of shorts, then dragged him back to the lobby.

Pinkwater leaned on the desk and squinted speculatively at the concierge. "I have a belief," Pinkwater said.

"The concierge said, "Yes, sir?"

"What I believe is that this sorry specimen of a suit can be made to look as if it just came off the rack at Barney's."

The concierge nodded her head before Pinkwater added, "In an hour." The concierge head's switched from nodding yes to shaking no. She was about to speak when Pinkwater raised on meaty hand.

"Before you say anything," Sidney said, "let me show you the bedrock of my belief." He brought up his other hand and slid three hundred dollar bills across the desk. The concierge went back to nodding yes.

"Will an hour and a half be acceptable, sir?" she asked.

"That will be just fine," Sidney said.

Then he looked back at Gib and said, "Strip."

"Take off your suit, and give it to the nice young lady here."

"Are you crazy? Right here in the lobby? No!"

Pinkwater leaned in close and whispered in Gib's ear. "Gibson, smell me. Take a whiff. Do you know what that sour smell is? Do you recognize it? It's desperation. You

are smelling a man with the potential for poverty."

"What do you mean, Sidney?," Gib said in confusion. "You're rich."

"I was rich. Most of the money that has gone into Black Helicopter is mine. And I took out loans which I personally secured with all my assets, including my house."

Gib pulled back and stared at Sidney, who gave him a demented, sickly show of teeth. It was an addict's smile, the smile of a gambler trying to scramble out of a deep, deep hole by taking bigger and bigger risks who now realizes it's time to put everything he's got left into the pot and wait for the cards to come.

"You secured loans with your personal assets? What kind of fucking idiot are you, Sidney? You can't trust a fucking bank with your life!" No wonder Pinkwater had been so deflated, so acquiescent in all those meetings with the venture capital people.

"That's not who I'm trusting with my life, Gibson. I'm trusting *you* with it."

"What?" Gib asked.

"You're doing the pitch. I saw how you handled Bodio and Feyrer. These people don't frighten you. Jackson and OddGreg just aren't able to lead a pitch like this. And I'm too damn frightened. That means you have to be perfect, or as perfect as I can make you. So if you don't strip off that suit *right now* and give it to this nice woman, I am going to shred it off you and then we'll go buy you a new one instead."

Gib got undressed.

As Gib was slipping into the shorts and t-shirt, Pinkwater looked at his boxer shorts and clucked disapproval.

"We'll have to replace those entirely. Then we'll get the shoes shined, and get you a haircut."

Pinkwater's list of improvements continued as he led Gib to the elevator.

Up in the suite, Taylor Jackson and OddGreg were playing Quake against each other using two Black Boxes connected to a laptop and a desktop. Both he and Beef had attached portable speakers and cranked the volume up as high as they could without blowing out the windows. As each digital rocket impacted, the speakers overloaded and distorted, and the room was filled with the grunts and screams.

Pinkwater sat Gib in a chair and started talking to him, quizzing him about the Black Box. He ran Gib through the demonstration that Gib had seen performed a thousand times at the Black Helicopter offices. After forty minutes, he declared himself satisfied. Then he took Gib to the shower, tossed him in and threw hotel soap and shampoo bottles at him until Gib turned on the water.

Ten minutes later, clean and refreshed, Gib walked out to find a barber waiting in the room. He was about to object to a haircut, but one look at Pinkwater's face convinced him otherwise. While Gib was getting the haircut, Pinkwater jumped into the shower, then came out of the bathroom wearing a clean seersucker suit and a Panama hat. Pinkwater had also put on a tan-from-a-bottle, darkening his skin to the color of a walnut.

"With my face this dark," he whispered to Gib, "I hope they won't notice how terrified I look."

Then he bullied and terrorized Jackson and OddGreg into getting clean and dressed for the presentation. They put on matching black suits, white collarless dress shirts, and freshly shined Doc Martens. When they were finished, Pinkwater announced, "You look like new media hit men. Perfect!"

When they were all done, a knock on the door announced the arrival of Gib's suit, Lazarus rising from the grimy grave. It looked better than new. Once Gib had it on, Pinkwater refused to let him sit down, in fear he might ruin the perfect creases.

Hired delivery men arrived to pack up all the computer equipment and take it to the venture capital firm (Bennett, Jaffe and Geller). After watching the equipment being carefully packed, Pinkwater closed the door to the suite and sighed with his head lowered against the door. Then he gathered the four of them into a circle in the middle of the room. He reached into his suit jacket and pulled out a silver flask. He carefully unscrewed it, then reached back into his jacket with his empty hand and produced a butterfly knife. Pinkwater flicked open the blade over the back of his hand and it gleamed evilly in the middle of the circle of men.

"It come to this, then. Today, all of our work, our investment of time, effort, sweat and love, all of it is put to the test. Here, fortify yourselves."

Pinkwater took a drink from the flask and passed it around. Both Jackson and OddGreg looked nervously at the knife and drank quickly. Gib smelled the flask first, discovered it was full of Jack Daniels, then tipped it in a salute to Pinkwater before drinking and handing it back to the big man.

Pinkwater held out both the flask and the knife, as if presenting them as sacrifices. "These are the possibilities, the final options. A celebratory drink or the knife. I earnestly hope that after this meeting is over, it's the celebration."

"Or what, Sidney?" OddGreg asked.

Pinkwater held out the butterfly knife. "Or I shove this up some venture capitalist's ass. And if I can't catch one, this knife'll do for *seppuku*."