



THE BUFFALO HOUSE
by
Garry Richard Gilchrist






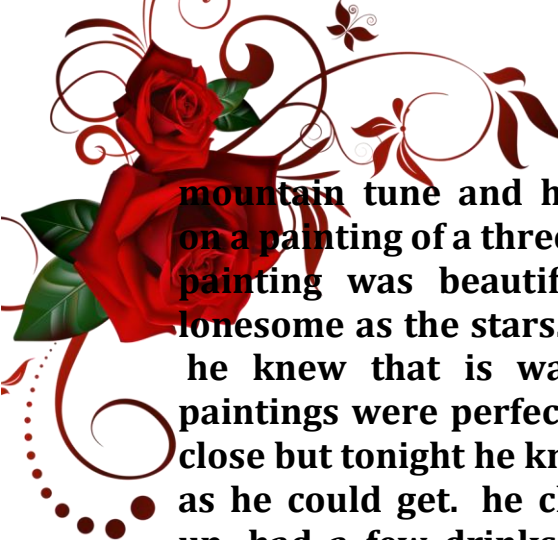
CHAPTER 1: BUTTERFLIES DANCE WITH THE MOON



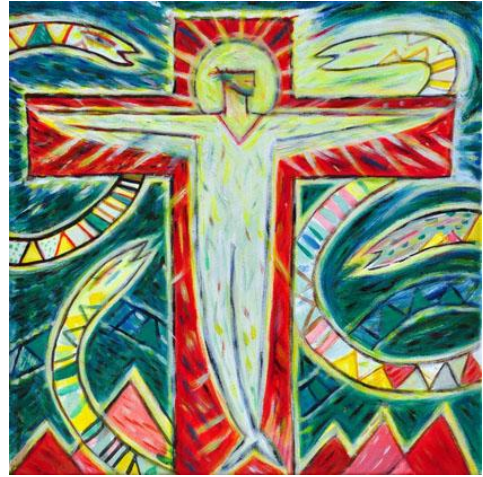
street gods. never around when you need them. always in the hills or in the shadows and shallows of the river. in distant temples but not here in the tenements. never around when you need them. ain't no love in the heart of the city. ain't no love in the heart of a clown. no gods of wisdom or forgiveness or gods of redemption here. i won't be around when you need me. that's the last thing she said as she walked out the door. the last living god seen in the tenements. maybe the year was 1954. the last living god seen on main street. the door set itself on fire as she walked thru' it and the bridge did the same as she crossed it. the last living god seen on main street heading for the hills leaving nothing behind her but smoke and mirrors and prisoners of desire. round her neck a small silver suitcase the size of a sixpence.

smoking cigarette after cigarette he watched from the tenement roof as she made her way towards the edge of town. sparks from her high heels setting fire to anything that dared get in her way. he watched her progress thru' the foothills, a little fire here, a little fire there, then she was gone. our friend was a poet, a writer and painter but he didn't have it in him to be a god. his paintings were quiet, his writing was quiet. quietly civilised for one who smoked and drank and gambled such as he did. his reputation was wild and reckless but in truth his works were tender and poetic, visionary, mystical and austere. reputations are often a long way from reality, often established not by what one says or does or understands but by the sayings doings understanding and misunderstanding of others. too often reputations are based on the limited understanding of an observer rather than the product of the observed. van gogh was not a loser and william blake was not nuts. yes indeed there are many reasons roses have their thorns. night fell. her fires could no longer be traced from the tenement roof. she was gone. he returned to his rooms, his verses and his brushes. the sky composed a new lonesome



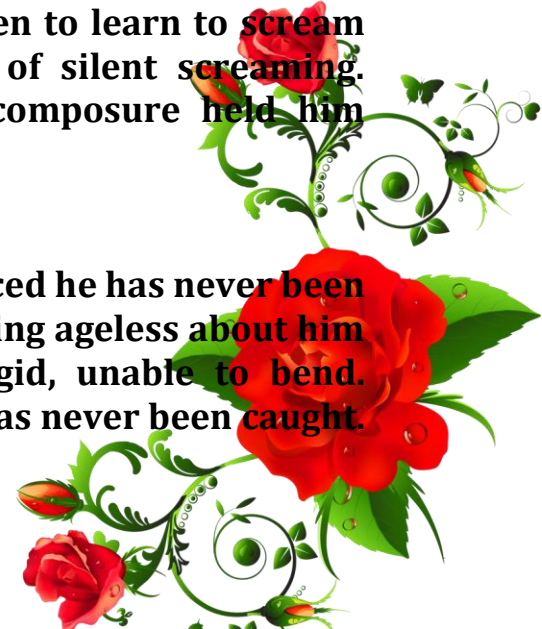


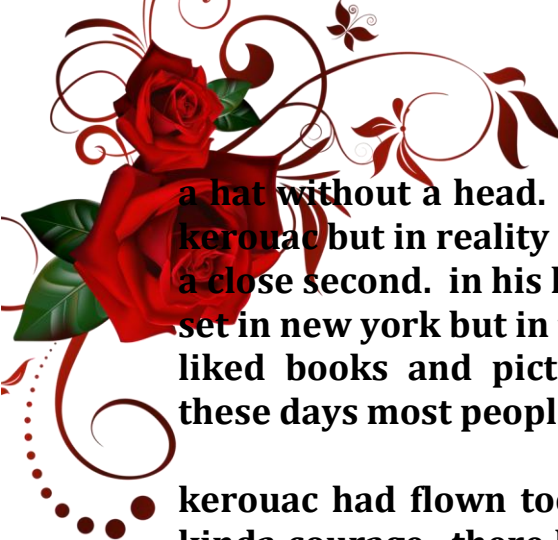
mountain tune and he worked steadily on a painting of a three headed angel. his painting was beautiful serene and as lonesome as the stars. he had no doubts. he knew that is was so. not all his paintings were perfect or even remotely close but tonight he knew he was as close as he could get. he cleaned up, washed up, had a few drinks then went to bed knowing all that a poet and painter could ever know - precisely nothing. before falling asleep he screamed her name. then he screamed her name again. dawn gifted him sleep. a rose lay beside him on his pillow as he slept then when he awoke he screamed her name again.



there was little he did not know about screaming her name. at poker games in low-life bars. at the opera in a box. in uncomfortable chairs at the ballet. supermarkets sunday afternoons. a kool evening on an empty beach. into the kool of the evening strolls the pretender - he knows that all his hopes and dreams begin and end there. he screams her name. if modigliani had been kinder to the world perhaps the world would have been kinder to modigliani. into the kool of the evening strolls the pretender. he screams her name. nothing happens. he screams her name again. again nothing happens. there is little the poet does not know regarding screaming her name. hours pass. centuries pass. he screams her name again. and again nothing happens. he returns to his verses, his painting and his cold cold rooms. no god in the tenement building. no gods on city street corners. they are hiding in temples and in the shadows and shallows of rivers, in bricks and in mortar a long way from here, in the profound and in the mundane. they are hiding in silence. these outbursts of his did not enhance his reputation. it took him thirty years to learn to scream quietly. and another ten to learn to scream silently. forty years in all to master the art of silent screaming. sporadic charm, nervous calm and hesitant composure held him somehow together.

our friend is no longer young. often he is convinced he has never been young. his hair is white now yet there is something ageless about him that cannot be killed or cured. something rigid, unable to bend. something that refuses to be tamed. a fish that has never been caught.

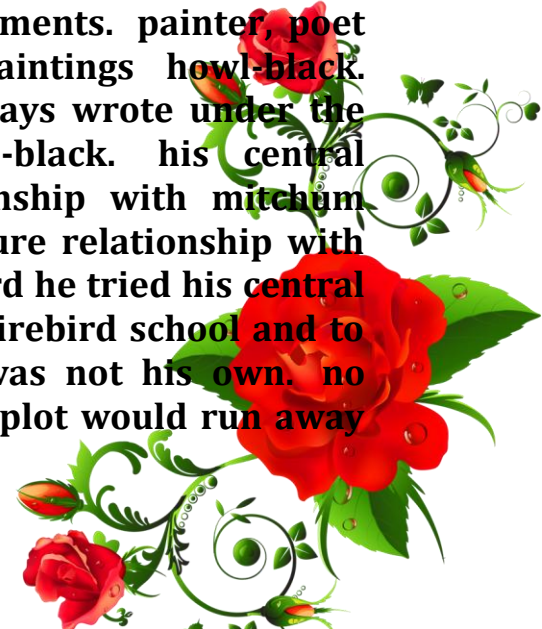


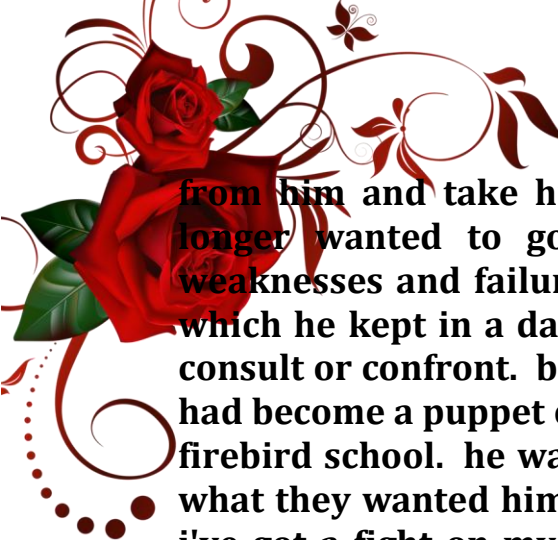


a hat without a head. often he had pretended his hero had been jack kerouac but in reality his hero had been jane russell - with bob paisley a close second. in his head his life was a 1950's black and white movie set in new york but in truth he had never even set foot in new york. he liked books and pictures. he liked writing and painting his own. these days most people called him whitey.

kerouac had flown too close to the moon but whitey never had that kinda courage. there had been times when he had been convinced he had indeed become jack kerouac. there had been times too when he had been convinced he had indeed become bob mitchum. but in reality he was much closer to dostoyevsky's prince myshkin than ever he had been to mitchum or kerouac. reality was not his strongest suit. even at the age of 60 he would still dream at night that he was playing football for scotland with denis law and jim baxter and he was always shocked and disappointed in the morning when he awoke and found that it was not true. just a poet, writer and painter. living and working alone in a cold cold tenement. the last living street god having taken the last of the fire with her when she hightailed it to the foothills so many years ago. it wasn't that he was that nuts about mitchum and kerouac. he just liked to see them in his sentences and paintings. he liked to see caravaggio in his sentences and paintings too. having said that, as a kid in glasgow in the 1950's he had been certain he would grow up to be robert mitchum. maybe he did. truth is often stranger than fiction. it is often only a very thin line between what is real and what is not. let's just agree that he liked to see the words robert mitchum in his sentences. let reality take care of itself.

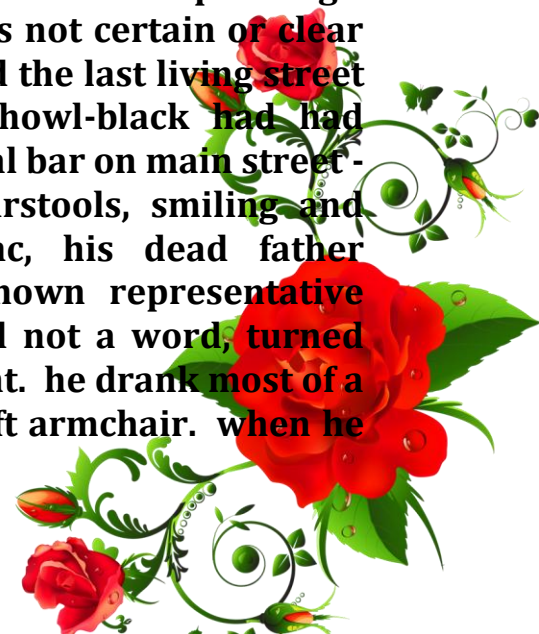
his given name was whitsun horatio maradona howl-black. quite a mouthful. his father had been a sailor, minor poet and painter and for many years janitor at the firebird school of poetry. his mother was a party girl from alabama and she didn't stick around any one place for long. yup whitey howl-black - king of the tenements. painter, poet and imbecile. sometimes he signed his paintings howl-black. sometimes he signed them whitey. but he always wrote under the name sir whitsun horatio maradona howl-black. his central characters always had some obscure relationship with mitchum kerouac or caravaggio and an even more obscure relationship with the firebird school of poetry. no matter how hard he tried his central characters would always drag him back to the firebird school and to mitchum kerouac and caravaggio. his voice was not his own. no matter how he tried to structure his books the plot would run away





from him and take him repeatedly to places he most definitely no longer wanted to go. and this was just one of several crucial weaknesses and failures regarding his writing. there was a long list which he kept in a dark place and which time after time he failed to consult or confront. but in his heart he knew regarding his writing he had become a puppet of the firebird school. fuck this he said. fuck the firebird school. he wanted to write what he wanted to write and not what they wanted him to write. fuck it he said to himself - looks like i've got a fight on my hands. he looked at his hands and found that they were covered with blood. oops said whitey. the hands were his but the blood was not his own. sometimes it's hard to separate the son from the father. even when the father has been dead for many years.

is the firebird school controlling howl-black's writing or is it more simply howl-black's inability to let go? let's find out. let's investigate. i'm sure one way or another we'll manage to find out. is there more of the father in the son than the son had realised? often howl-black would find himself confronted by traces of his father, the sailor poet and janitor, ferdy maradona howl-black. often whitey would find himself doing and saying things exactly like his father. he would find himself knowing things only his father could have known. much too often deep within himself he was finding much too much of his father. is the firebird school controlling whitey's writing, or is it his father? or is whitey simply a crap writer with insufficient authority and command? god alone knows. he had written three books. in the first, kerouac mitchum and caravaggio had been pleasing incidental minor characters. but in the second and third much against howl-black's wishes they and the firebird school had promoted themselves to greater prominence. they had invaded his poetry too. just wouldn't leave him or his writing alone. they were climbing all over him. inch by inch they had been creeping more and more into his paintings. crisis point arrived when whitey realised he was not certain or clear at all if it was him or his father who had watched the last living street god leave town. whitsun horatio maradona howl-black had had enough. time to hit the bar. he walked to his local bar on main street - the cow palace. waiting for him there on barstools, smiling and drinking, were mitchum, caravaggio, kerouac, his dead father ferdinand maradona howl-black and an unknown representative from the firebird school of poetry. whitey said not a word, turned quickly on his heels and returned to the tenement. he drank most of a bottle of bourbon then fell asleep sitting in a soft armchair. when he



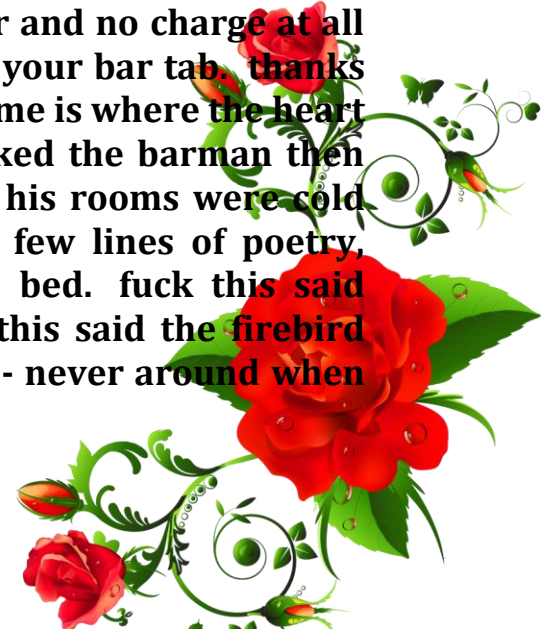


awoke he drank most of another bottle of bourbon then fell asleep again.

howl-black showered and shaved then resumed work on his three headed angel. in the background of the painting five figures on horseback were slowly approaching the angel. as they drew closer to the foreground it was impossible not to recognise the riders as kerouac, mitchum, caravaggio, ferdy maradona howl-black and the strange looking representative from the firebird school of poetry.

fuck this said whitsun. he began work on a small painting of a tenement but quickly stopped when he noticed all the faces at all the tenement windows belonged to mitchum, kerouac, caravaggio, ferdy howl-black and the firebird school's representative. enough said whitsun. he went to the park for some air then to the cow palace for a drink. he walked outa the cow palace as soon as he walked in - drunk and laughing and falling off their barstools were his father, caravaggio, kerouac, mitchum and the firebird school's representative. kinda spooked whitsun went back to the park then found some peace in another bar. all the while becoming aware more and more that the father now lives in the son. he wasn't yet comfortable with it, didn't yet understand it but it seemed impossible to deny that ferdy had entered whitsun's being pervading every fraction of blood flesh bone and soul. as ferdy had once carried whitsun, whitsun now carried ferdy. it would make a hell of a painting said whitey to himself as he downed yet another large bourbon in the blue lagoon. yes sir said caravaggio. the penny began to drop. shit said whitsun - they are all inside of me. yes said kerouac. yes we are said big bob mitchum. all present and correct said the firebird school representative. shit said whitsun. shit and double shit.

closing time said the barman. one for the road pleaded whitsun. yes sir said the barman, certainly sir, no problem sir and no charge at all sir said the barman - jack kerouac is picking up your bar tab. thanks said whitey. no problem sir said the barman. home is where the heart is. it was 4am. whitey finished his drink, thanked the barman then strolled home under a white september moon. his rooms were cold but he painted for a little while, toyed with a few lines of poetry, finished the last of the bourbon then went to bed. fuck this said whitey as he switched off the light. yeah fuck this said the firebird school representative. street gods said kerouac - never around when



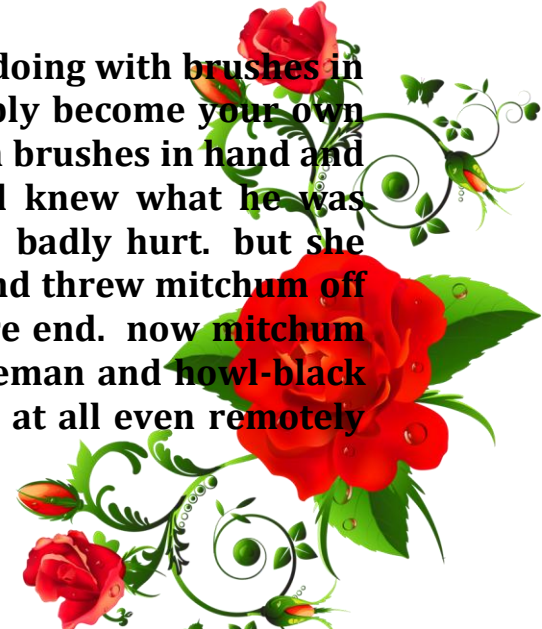


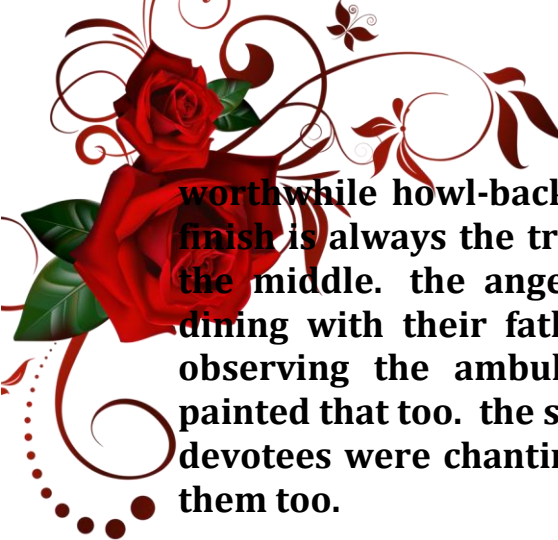
you need them. yeah that rings a bell said big bob mitchum. shut the fuck up said whitsun - i'm trying to fucking sleep.

it was early evening when howl-black awoke. he was not alone. five central characters from his books and his past life were now living inside him. he thanked god that dostoyevsky and albert camus were not as yet amongst them. this sure as hell is gonna take some getting used to said howl-black. yup said mitchum. howl-black ignored him, made some coffee and studied his paintings and poetry from the night before. let me offer some advice regarding the drama of light and shade said caravaggio. shut up said howl-black - these are my paintings. ferdinand was considering commenting regarding last night's poetry but he managed to restrain himself. these guys are all big drinkers and i'm trying to get off the bloody stuff said whitey to himself. he poured a shot of cognac into his coffee, picked up his brushes and started a new painting of tenements. angels with huge green wings were sitting on the tenement roofs and butterflies danced with the moon. the painting progressed well and for a while his companions kept themselves reasonably quiet.

a storm was gathering. one by one the angels flew off and away from the roofs. their father was calling them. a gentle rain was falling as faces began to appear in all the tenement windows. all the faces belonged to the five - ferdy, caravaggio, mitchum, kerouac and the firebird school representative. table and chairs materialised on a tenement roof and the five began playing poker there in the rain. the famous actress stanbara barwyck joined them. but not for long. mitchum simply kicked her off the roof. i never cared for her said mitchum. the five continued their game as if nothing had happened. it was a hell of a painting. howl-black was enjoying himself. the storm unleashed itself but the five continued playing and howl-black continued painting. i never liked her either said caravaggio.

if you are a painter and you know what you are doing with brushes in hand and canvas in front of you, you quite simply become your own toy factory. sure as hell beats working. and with brushes in hand and canvas in front of him howl-black sure as hell knew what he was doing. most of the time. barwyck was a mess. badly hurt. but she crawled and climbed the side of the tenement and threw mitchum off the roof bringing the poker game to a premature end. now mitchum was a mess but bob took the knock like a gentleman and howl-black painted that too. if one is gonna paint anything at all even remotely



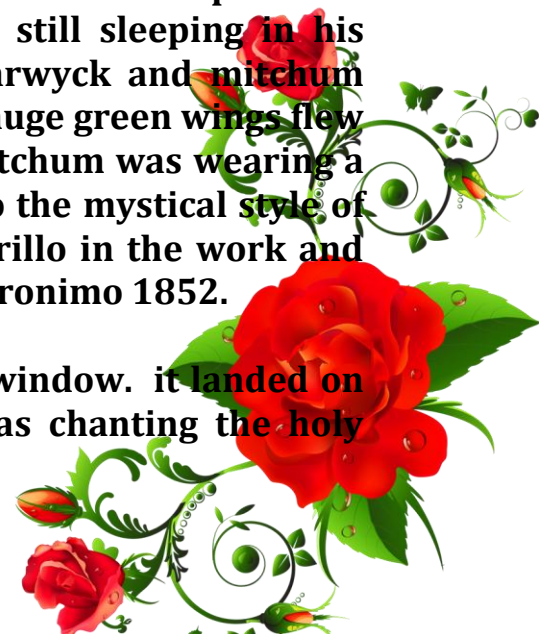



worthwhile howl-black often said the place to start and the place to finish is always the truth - nobody ever gives a shit about the bits in the middle. the angels with the huge green wings returned from dining with their father and roosted again on the tenement roofs observing the ambulances come and go below. and howl-black painted that too. the street below was close to flooding. some krishna devotees were chanting on the street corner and howl-black painted them too.

close to midnight whitey went to the blue lagoon for a few drinks. good evening sir said the barman - mister kerouac has instructed me that he will be picking up your bar tab again tonight. kool said howl-black - i suggest you have something too. don't mind if i do said the barman and for the next several hours howl-black and the barman drank alone together in the empty bar, malt whisky and beer chasers, watching argentinian football and then boxing on a giant tv screen. they enjoyed their drinks, the football and the fights. content to speak very little. a good bar is often like a church. at dawn they watched john ford's the quiet man on the big screen even tho' they'd both seen it a hundred times or more. amongst the likes of howl-black and the barman for this film alone victor mclaglen was granted and enjoyed the full and unequivocal status of a god. there is no such thing as a tamed lion. they breakfasted like kings in the morning sunshine at a small table in the back yard of the blue lagoon. lobster, crayfish tails, ribeye steak, duck eggs and champagne. all that i own is the ground i stand upon said whitey. then he collapsed and fell to the ground. the barman picked him up and carried him home to his rooms at the tenement then at noon the blue lagoon opened as usual for business.

howl-black slept easily in his armchair till evening. mitchum and barwyk slept somewhat less easily in adjacent hospital beds. when mitchum awoke he immediately discharged himself from hospital and limped back to the tenement. howl-black was still sleeping in his armchair. on his easel sat a new painting. barwyck and mitchum making love in a hospital bed while angels with huge green wings flew up and down the ward. barwyck was naked. mitchum was wearing a negligee. the painting owed more than a little to the mystical style of caravaggio. conversely there were echoes of utrillo in the work and even more conversely the painting was signed geronimo 1852.


mitchum threw the painting out of the nearest window. it landed on the head of a passing krishna devotee who was chanting the holy





names. the painting did no damage and howl-black awoke none the wiser. hi bob said howl-black. hi whitey said bob. there was no getting away from the fact that the five - mitchum, kerouac, caravaggio, ferdy maradona howl-black and a representative from the firebird school of poetry - were now living inside whitsun. they had pretty much simply moved in. a crowded house indeed. a short period of adjustment would be required. coffee for example - some took sugar and cream, some liked it plain black. things settled down quickly. the five were living inside whitey and that was that. there was a knock at whitey's door. it was utrillo. does whitsun horatio maradona howl-black live here asked utrillo. yes said whitey. good said utrillo - i'd like to move in. i only have a few rooms and i use them all said whitey but before you could say be bop a lula bop bam boom utrillo had moved into whitey's body and was introducing himself to the others. we could use a good woman around here said mitchum. there was a knock at whitey's door. it was jane russell. does whitsun horatio maradona howl-black live here asked miss russell. no said whitey and tho' he closed the door quickly jane russell had already installed herself inside whitey's body and was introducing herself to the others. fuck this said whitey. fuck this.... there was a short period of readjustment then things settled down remarkably quickly. everyone was comfortable and harmony was king. whitey painted jane russell often. touches of utrillo and more caravaggio crept into his style. he painted mitchum often too then embarked on a series of portraits of his father but he was too scared to attempt to paint kerouac's mystical qualities and even more fearful regarding attempting to paint caravaggio such was caravaggio's reputation with sword and knife. whitey worked long and hard then his nerves began to crack. he had a place in the foothills and he knew that soon it would be time to go there and rest for a while. he asked the barman at the blue lagoon if he fancied a few days outa town and the barman said yes. a week later they threw a couple of bags into the back of the barman's old beat up pick-up truck and headed into the foothills. three angels with huge green wings followed every turn of their wheels.

wings within wings, eyes within eyes, bones within bones, screams within whispers, doors within doors. and thus endeth the first chapter of the buffalo house.

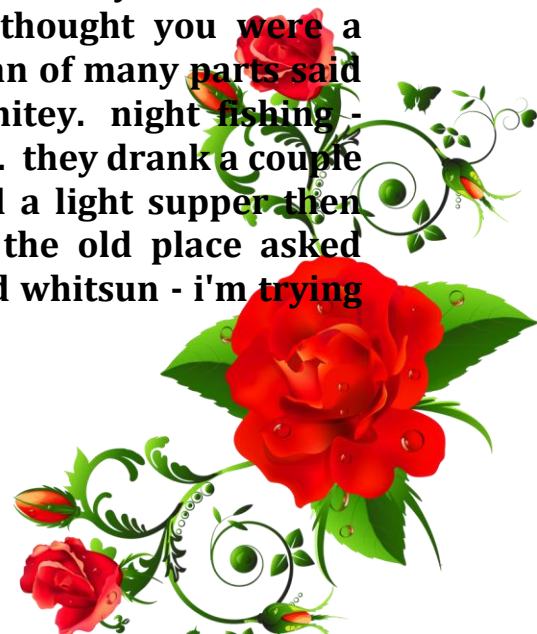


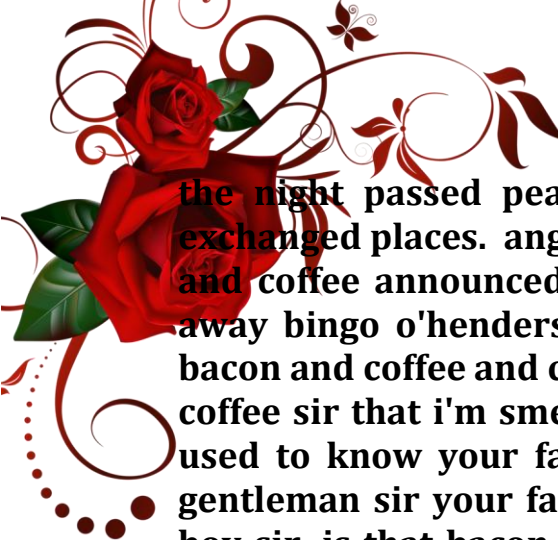


CHAPTER 2: DRUNKS AND GUTTERS

ferdy had built the cabin with his brother boom boom in the late 1940's before whitsun was born. yet whitsun was certain he had memories of watching them build it. the cabin had been built at the edge of a pine wood on a small plateau just short of the top of a hill overlooking lake marie. the hill was known as big tam. the cabin had three generous bedrooms, an old fashioned porch, a huge kitchen with many windows and a woodburning stove at its centre. the easiest thing in the world was to watch from the porch as the sun set on the waters of lake marie. it was here that ferdy and boom boom had first learned to swim and sail as boys. it was here that the ancient scottish kings and their swords had been buried in the mists of time. it was here to the cabin at lake marie that the last living street god had come when she quit the tenements back in '54.

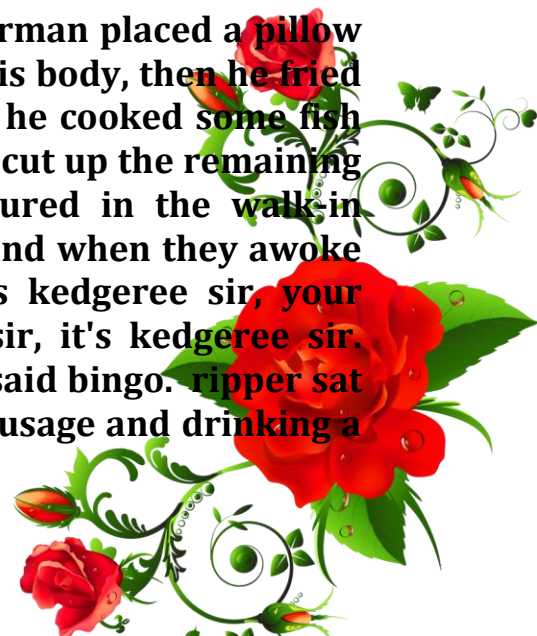
the cabin was surprisingly warm fresh clean and in particularly good order. there was even a well stocked bar. fresh clean sheets and embroidered covers on the beds. freshly cut flowers in a vase on the kitchen table next to a first edition of a whitey's first book appropriately titled - fuck reality. charming said jane russell. kinda nice said the barman. then he noticed the book. did you write this asked the barman. yeah said whitsun. but i thought you were a painter said the barman. i am said whitey. a man of many parts said the barman dryly. something like that said whitey. night fishing - asked the barman. maybe tomorrow said whitey. they drank a couple of cold beers, took a stroll by the lake, enjoyed a light supper then retired early. how does it feel to be back in the old place asked mitchum. ok said ferdy - it feels ok. shut up said whitsun - i'm trying to sleep.





the night passed peacefully and without incident. moon and sun exchanged places. angels circled above the hills as the aroma of bacon and coffee announced the ascendancy of morning. from a long way away bingo o'henderson-henderson and his dog ripper smelled the bacon and coffee and came running. is that bacon i'm smelling sir, is it coffee sir that i'm smelling, is it breakfast sir that i'm smelling sir? i used to know your father sir, grand man sir your father, a perfect gentleman sir your father, i knew you sir when you were just a wee boy sir, is that bacon i'm smelling sir, it is isn't it sir? it's bacon i'm smelling sir isn't it sir? the barman threw some sausages and some other bits and pieces into a pan and they all breakfasted together on the porch in the autumn sunshine. bingo was a total pain in the ass but somehow it was hard to dislike him. ripper sat quietly on the porch saying nothing. eating a sausage and drinking a little from a bowl of water.

have you a smoke sir, have you any smokes sir? the barman threw bingo a packet of lucky strikes. have you a light sir? whitsun threw a box of kitchen matches at bingo and the box bounced off bingo's head. thank you sir - i knew your father sir. he liked a drink sir your father - have you any strong drink sir? the barman placed a bottle of rye, a glass, a jug of ice and a jug of water in front of bingo. bingo drank straight from the bottle. he drank the whole bottle. when is lunch being served sir said bingo. after you go home said whitey. i have no home sir - i live in a cave on the other side of the hill. i'm seven hundred years old sir and i look after the graves and the swords sir. then bingo fell off his chair. what's for lunch said whitsun. i haven't a fucking clue said the barman - maybe fish. the boys went fishing and left bingo sleeping where he lay. it rained like a bastard for hours but the boys caught a shedload of fish. when they returned to the cabin bingo was still sleeping on the floor. ripper sitting quietly by his side. three bottles of rye now stood empty on the table next to the first. looks like he's had his lunch said whitey. the barman placed a pillow under bingo's head and an indian blanket over his body, then he fried some fish which he, whitey and ripper ate, then he cooked some fish soup in the aberdeen style for the next day, then cut up the remaining fish into various packages which he then secured in the walk-in freezer. whitsun and the barman retired early and when they awoke bingo was cooking breakfast for them all. it's kedgeriee sir, your father learned me sir, he learned it in india sir, it's kedgeriee sir. indeed it is said whitey. good for the nerves sir said bingo. ripper sat quietly on the porch. saying nothing, eating a sausage and drinking a



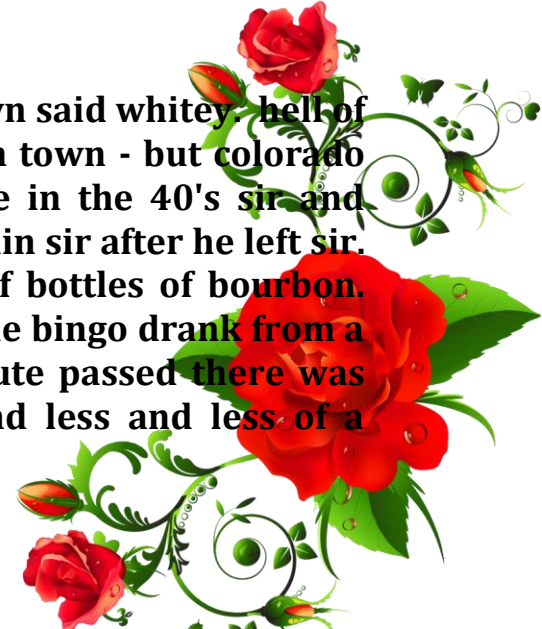



little from a bowl of water. after breakfast and coffee they all drank some cold beers - bingo shared his with ripper.

what is it today sir said bingo - what is it today sir? whitsun looked at the barman. the barman looked at ripper. last night whitey had dreamed he had received an offer from barcelona regarding a defensive midfield role. and still half asleep he was still considering the offer. barcelona said whitey. it's a long way away sir said bingo - your father was there in the 1930's sir. something to do with an irish fella sir called pat o'connell sir who was managing barcelona at the time sir. whitey looked at the barman. it's true said the barman - i had an uncle who was related to pat o'connell and o'connell did manage barcelona in the 1930's. whitey looked at ripper but ripper said nothing. they all drank some more beer. barcelona sir it's a long way from here sir barcelona sir said bingo.

did you know my mother asked whitey. o' yes sir but i can't talk about it sir o' no sir. let's have another beer said whitey. o' yes sir good for the nerves sir said bingo. whitey was unsure if it was him or his father who had watched from the tenement roof as the last living street god left town. but he had a feeling that bingo knew the who what when where and why of it all. let's have another beer said whitey. good for the nerves sir said bingo. yeah good for the nerves said whitey. the barman said nothing. ripper said nothing. i can't talk about it sir o' no sir said bingo. don't pull your punches but don't push the river is it that kinda thing said whitey. yes sir said bingo it's that kinda thing yes sir. today is a good day to die is it that kinda thing too said whitey. yes sir o' yes sir it's that kinda thing too sir yes sir. it's a long road said whitey. yes sir it's a long road sir said bingo - it's a long way to fall. the barman served more beer. the sky grew dark. angels circled above the hills surrounding lake marie. the sky grew darker then heavy rain began to fall, each drop of rain a perfect portrait of peter o'toole in the style of caravaggio.

you'll be telling me next glasgow is a hell of a town said whitey - hell of a town glasgow sir, yes sir, glasgow is a hell of a town - but colorado has more breweries sir. your father was there in the 40's sir and drank them all dry. they had to start all over again sir after he left sir. the barman fetched glasses, ice and a couple of bottles of bourbon. they switched from beer to bourbon and this time bingo drank from a glass rather than from the bottle. as each minute passed there was more of a southern gentleman about bingo and less and less of a



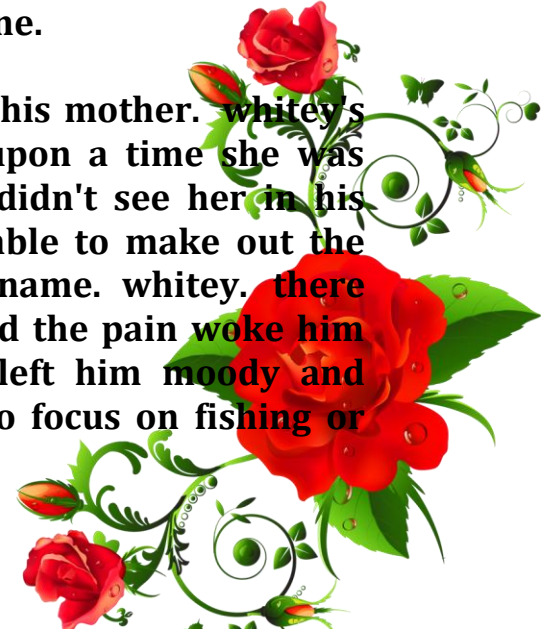



moronic idiot. never mind colorado said bingo, in the southern states you'd be hard pressed to find a town your father didn't drink dry, a good looking woman he didn't seduce or a gambler he didn't destroy. he was kinda useful with his fists your father and when he had to he knew one end of a smoking gun from the other. the barman fetched another couple of bottles. bingo was turning into clark gable before their eyes. all that was missing was a horse and saddle. ripper barked. a handsome palomino was approaching the cabin from the edge of the woods. that'll be the wrecking ball said bingo - thanks for your hospitality gentlemen. he bowed gracefully tho' somewhat theatrically then eased himself onto the palomino and was gone.

ripper remained on the porch. early next morning bingo returned on foot with a young deer across his shoulder. cut this up boys and put it in your freezer. then before whitey and the barman were properly and fully awake the wrecking ball appeared from the edge of the woods and before you could say be bop a lula bop bam boom bingo and the wrecking ball and ripper were gone - gone with the wind.

whitsun was still considering the offer from barcelona. if bingo aged seven hundred, weird and seemingly at times something less than a worm, could turn himself into clark gable maybe whitey at 62 could still do a job for barcelona in the centre of midfield. like so many others he'd waited years for a call from alex ferguson but the call never came. whitey's resentment ran deep. when sir alex finally retired whitey hated him and thereafter would spit every time ferguson's name was mentioned. whitey phoned barcelona but nobody at the club had a clue what he was talking about and after a few minutes he was simply told to fuck off. some dreams just don't make it. the barcelona deal falling thru' did nothing to improve whitey's nerves. but the fishing helped. and the barman helped too. he was good company. often saying very little. sometimes they fished together or walked together thru' the woods or the hills or along the lake shore. sometimes they walked or fished alone.

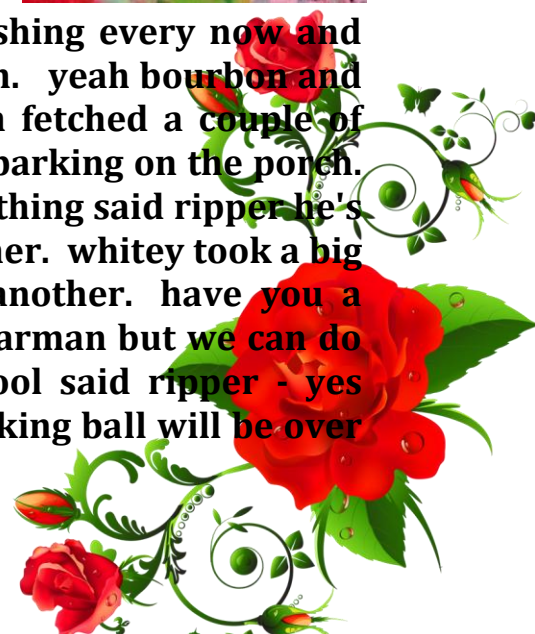
then there was a setback. whitsun dreamed of his mother. whitey's mother had been born in alabama and once upon a time she was known to one and all simply as alabama. he didn't see her in his dream. it was her voice he heard. at first unable to make out the words, then suddenly one word. she called his name. whitey. there was profound sadness and pain in her voice and the pain woke him up. and stayed with him. refused to leave. left him moody and restless and unable to sleep. left him unable to focus on fishing or

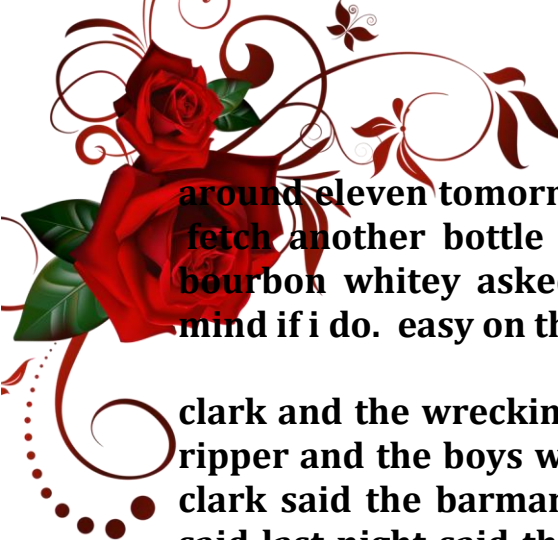




refocus on his painting and writing. hers was a voice he had not heard in years and the pain in her voice almost killed him. the barman tended whitsun's needs as best he could. but with little success. clark gable came by on the wrecking ball, understood the situation immediately and stayed away. alabama's beauty was such that she destroyed both men and gods. gable had almost been one of them. she had been hard fast tricky demanding and never satisfied. her beauty was legend but now she was long dead and whitsun's memories of her were slim to say the least. slim but haunting. slim but painful. some complications are more complicated than others. sweet home alabama. where the skies are so blue.

a crowded house. a crowded house indeed. if his dead father was in reality living inside whitsun - where was alabama? whitey was too scared and too confused to simply ask his father. too scared and confused to even attempt to discuss it with ferdy. ferdy had a temper. caravaggio had a temper. utrillo was close to insane. alabama had a temper. it was a volatile situation. it was a crowded house. they had been at the cabin for ten days and soon it would be time to go back to town. whitey was a long way from relaxed. the barman was more than a little concerned. maybe stay here a while longer said whitey. maybe said the barman. but what about your job at the blue lagoon...i know said whitey i'll buy the bar and you'll always have a job at the blue lagoon if that's what you want. fuck reality had sold particularly well and his paintings had been selling consistently in america for years. whitey had more money than he cared to mention. they decided to stay on at the cabin for a while longer. i like to cook said the barman. i like to eat said whitey - and do a little night fishing every now and then. would you care for a drink said the barman. yeah bourbon and ice might do the trick said whitey. the barman fetched a couple of bottles, some ice and two glasses. ripper began barking on the porch. what have you done with clark asked whitey. nothing said ripper he's working on a new book - a biography of your father. whitey took a big hit from his glass of bourbon. then he took another. have you a sausage ripper asked the barman. no said the barman but we can do you a nice fish soup in the aberdeen style. kool said ripper - yes please and clark said to tell you he and the wrecking ball will be over

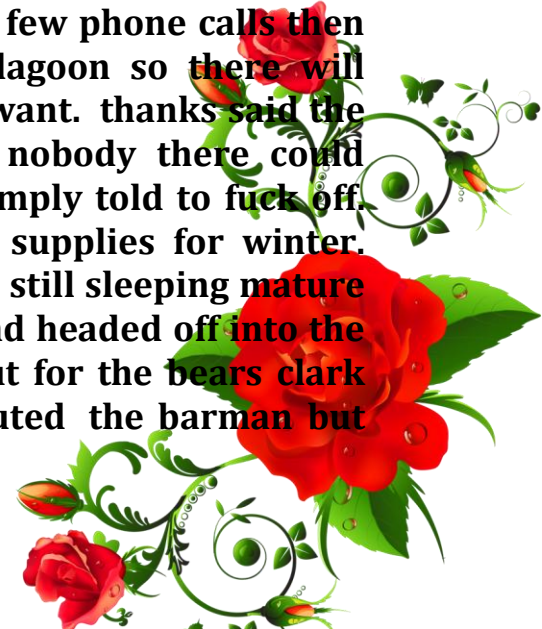





around eleven tomorrow morning for coffee. yahoo said the barman. fetch another bottle please said whitey. would you care for some bourbon whitey asked ripper. kool said ripper - yes please. don't mind if i do. easy on the ice.

clark and the wrecking ball arrived the next morning around eleven. ripper and the boys were still kinda hungover. how's the book going clark said the barman. it's going ok said clark. that's not what you said last night said the wrecking ball. the barman served coffee and gable quickly changed the subject. how's the fishing asked clark. quiet and slow said whitey - not a firebird in sight. no poets on the horizon. quiet and slow. just the way i like it. the angels circling overhead giggled and the devils at the bottom of the lake giggled too. and on the radio slim whitman sang rose marie. then gable started to sing - stealing just stealing, pretty mama don't you tell on me, i'm stealing on back to my good old used to be. then he started singing bits and pieces from you'll never walk alone.

lunch said the barman. sounds good said clark. lunch was a quiet affair. shut up said whitey. the voices inside him had been behaving themselves these last few days but now suddenly they had started to squabble. pardon me said clark. it's nothing said the barman - it's a long story. i'm seven hundred years old said gable and i've been around some - try me. maybe later said the barman. seems every bastard i know these days is writing a book said gable. i'm writing a book too said the barman - drunks and gutters that i've known. takes one to know one said clark. there was a loud thumping thudding noise. victor mature had turned up outa nowhere, had tripped himself up on the porch steps and immediately fallen asleep. that's victor mature said clark - he helps me with the graves and swords. don't worry, he's always doing that kinda stuff, always falling over - big victor is rarely sober. winter in a glasgow tenement or winter at the cabin? it was a no brainer. whitsun made a few phone calls then informed the barman - i've bought the blue lagoon so there will always be a job there for you if that's what you want. thanks said the barman. whitey phoned barcelona again but nobody there could understand a word he said and again he was simply told to fuck off. another call was made to arrange delivery of supplies for winter. thanks for lunch boys said gable. he secured the still sleeping mature across the wrecking ball's rear then mounted and headed off into the woods with ripper trotting alongside. watch out for the bears clark shouted whitey. don't stray from the path shouted the barman but



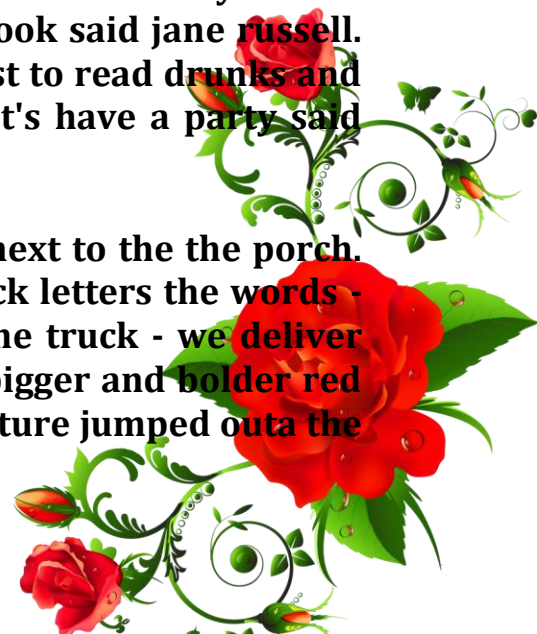



gable, the wrecking ball, ripper and the still sleeping heavily victor mature were already too far away to hear. then the poet and the barman sat on a beat up old sofa on the porch experimenting with malts and ice and water and watching the sun slide down behind the hills overlooking the far side of lake marie.

prince myshkin walks on eggshells thru' the garden of good and evil. devils and serpents behind each shrub, a snake in the grass in each dark corner. his nerves are shot. he knows that no matter what he does or does not do he'll end up where he started back at the asylum in a town with no rivers and above whose skies the stars refuse to shine. but that's another book. the barman's book, drunks and gutters, was progressing well. creativity said whitsun - it can't be taught. creativity and ten thousand monkeys don't add up to a hill of beans. don't ever try to study or teach painting or writing. they can't be taught. if a teacher says do it - don't do it. if a teacher says don't do it - do it. all you need is some paper and a pen, maybe paints and some brushes. don't think. don't prepare. don't research. just do it. don't listen. just work. if anyone or anything at all gets in your way - kill them. never use any word that begins with the letter g or ends with the letter s. never listen to a firebird - ignore everything a firebird says at all times. be kind to strangers. to children. and to your mother. don't feel anything. don't trust anyone. never try to paint the wind or the wind will destroy you. these were the words of the poet whitsun horatio maradona howl-black - his advice to his friend the barman. thanks boss said the barman.

the barman wrote all night every night for a month. whitey painted and cooked, painted and served the drinks. they slept in the day, fished in the evenings, worked thru' the night. within another few weeks the barman's book, drunks and gutters, was finished. congratulations said whitey. i couldn't have done it without you said the barman. maybe said the poet. i love your book said jane russell. thanks said the barman. jane russell was the first to read drunks and gutters other than the barman and the poet. let's have a party said utrillo. good thinking said mitchum.

it was the first of november. a truck pulled up next to the the porch. on one side of the truck in big bold red and black letters the words - victor mature deliveries. on the other side of the truck - we deliver anything. and on the back of the truck in even bigger and bolder red and black letters the words - fuck you. victor mature jumped out the

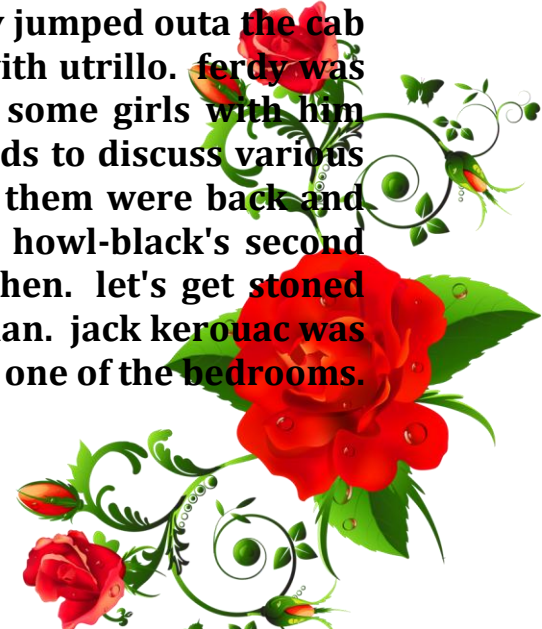





truck - got your stuff here boys, any chance of a drink please said big victor. yeah sure said mitchum - good timing, we're having a party tonight, clark gable's coming and jane russell's already here. walk this way said big bob - walk this way. don't believe anything said whitey to the barman. don't believe in yourself. don't believe anyone. not even you asked the barman. especially me said the poet. if you find you need an audience you'll know then it's time to quit. the poet and the barman both agreed that creativity, painting and writing can't be taught or learned. the very thought of it made them both ill. that way said the poet leads only to madness and ten thousand monkeys impersonating another ten thousand monkeys. just work son said the poet. yes boss said the barman. utrillo dug out a live concert version of prince singing and playing purple rain and the party started.

whitey remembered his mother walking out the door for the last time. then he screamed. loudly. then he screamed again. but the record was playing at such high volume that nobody heard him. except the barman. and victor mature. the same old song. the same old things repeating themselves again and again like fucking idiots. prince sang like a bird and played his heart out. whitey screamed again then cried his heart out. the barman and victor mature took him out to the porch and tried to comfort him but it was no use. he was gone. destroyed. broken in two. they put him in the cab of the truck and held him close all night. but it was no fucking use. when dawn came the poet was still crying his fucking heart out. the sacred heart said victor mature. yeah the sacred fucking heart said the barman.

i won't be around when you need me. said a voice. the poet stopped crying. are you ok said victor mature. of course not you fucking idiot said the poet but thanks for trying. welcome to my empire of dust said the poet. we're kinda pleased to be here boss said the barman. me too said big victor. thanks said whitey. the sun was rising high above lake marie. the party was still in full swing. they jumped outa the cab and joined the party. clark gable was dancing with utrillo. ferdy was dancing with bob mitchum. clark had brought some girls with him and caravaggio had taken them all into the woods to discuss various matters of eternal importance but now most of them were back and dancing like maniacs. jane russell was reading howl-black's second book - prince myshkin - in a corner of the kitchen. let's get stoned said the poet. yeah let's get stoned said the barman. jack kerouac was reading richard brautigan in the relative quiet of one of the bedrooms.





then close to noon some fool put purple rain on again. and the same old things kicked off all over again.

whitey screamed. then screamed again. for years he had been unable to listen to music because most songs reminded him of her. he walked out onto the porch. victor mature followed. let the music play said the poet - i'm going for a walk. you want some company said mature. yeah sure said whitey. i'm a ham confessed victor. yeah i know said the poet. they both laughed. then went for a walk by the lake.

one's first duty is always to the work said the poet. i'm a ham said big victor - all that kinda stuff is wasted on me. they laughed again then took a small rowing boat out onto the lake. you should write a book victor said the poet. maybe i will - every other bastard is. she was an american girl and whitey's mind was so screwed up these days he no longer knew if it was his mother, his own woman, his own girl, or ferdy's woman that was chewing him up.

it's a rock and roll world said the poet. did i tell you i'm a ham said victor. yes you did said whitey. and thus endeth the second chapter of the buffalo house.





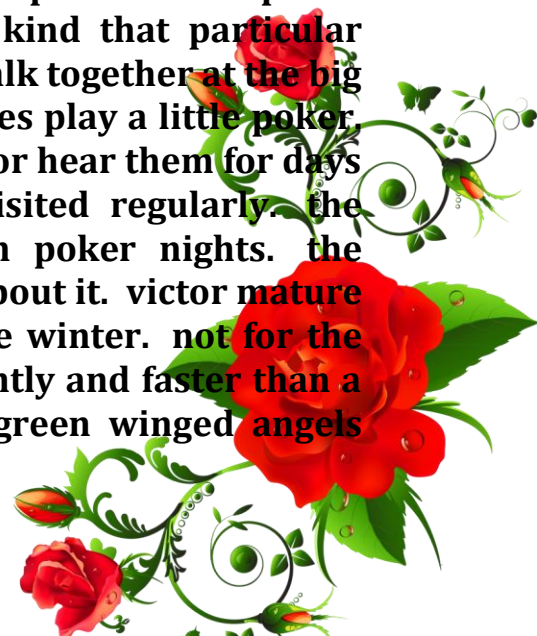
CHAPTER 3: VICTOR'S PLACE

the irish have a name for it. whitey's last painting was just like his first. his fourth book was just like his first book. he was not a changing man. his latest poem was just like his first. yes the work grew a little every now and then but it never changed much. the party was over. the barman was cleaning up. jane russell was still reading prince myshkin and kerouac was still reading brautigan. mature's truck was still parked next to the porch. the winter supplies still not unloaded. utrillo, caravaggio and the firebird school representative were sleeping. mitchum and ferdy were



walking by the lake. gable had returned to his cave. whitey was grateful regarding victor mature's kindness. it was not the sorta thing whitey would forget.

whitey was a quiet kinda guy. he lived a quiet kinda life. mostly alone. mostly just painting and writing. generally the seven lived quietly inside his body. they would sometimes quit him to pursue some business elsewhere but they always came home. they were reasonably discreet. sometimes mitchum, caravaggio, kerouac, utrillo and ferdy would go out drinking and gambling or looking for women. sometimes go fishing or sailing on the lake. or walking in the woods or the hills. the firebird school representative kept a particularly low profile. sometimes utrillo and caravaggio would paint on the porch when the weather allowed. the weather was kind that particular november. sometimes they'd all eat, drink and talk together at the big table in the cabin's huge open kitchen. sometimes play a little poker. sometimes whitey and the barman wouldn't see or hear them for days and nights on end. clark gable and ripper visited regularly. the wrecking ball often came alone especially on poker nights. the wrecking ball was a killer player. no two ways about it. victor mature had moved into the third bedroom - just for the winter. not for the first time november stumbled easily and pleasantly and faster than a speeding bullet towards the heart of winter. green winged angels



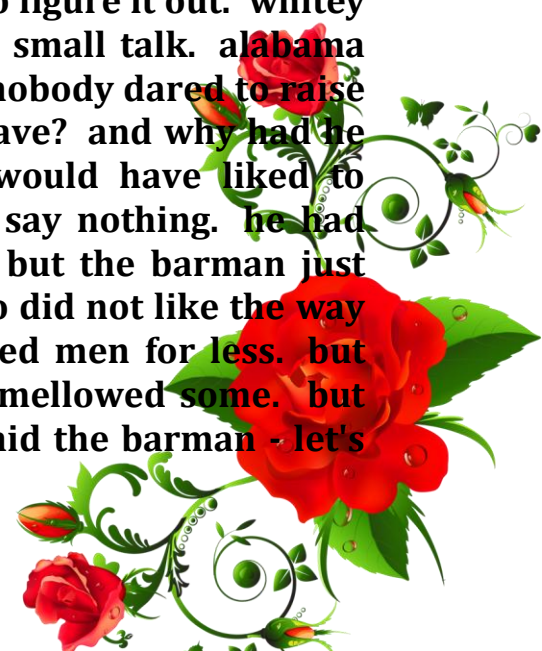


continued to watch over the cabin from the hills on the far side of the lake. their giant wings creating strange patterns and disturbing shadows on the waters and foothills below.

the american movie business has become a pain in the ass said clark gable. nobody ever lost money underestimating the intelligence of the great american public said victor. or the great british public said ferdy. rock and roll is dead too said ferdy - has been for years - monkeys impersonating monkeys. sometimes poetry is a pain in the ass said whitey. friday night is poker night. they were playing poker at the cabin. the wrecking ball was winning. just like he'd been winning for the last four or five fridays on the bounce. sometimes poker is a pain in the ass said the barman. sometimes you are a pain in the ass said whitey. i know said the barman.

who will marry a poor poet asked the barman. what said clark. i'm writing another book said the barman. is he a street fighting poet asked whitey. yes said the barman. no-one will marry a street fighting poet said whitey. alabama did said caravaggio. there was a silence. then ferdy played four aces. the silence grew. i'm going for a walk said ferdy. it was the first time alabama's name had been spoken at the cabin in years. it was a cold night. ferdy threw on a hat and coat. a cold wind flew all around the cabin as he opened and closed the door. the game broke up in silence. and it was a long time before poker was played at the cabin again. the ghosts of rain visited the cabin later that night and they rained inside the cabin for a week. nobody could do a thing about it. and worst of all - ferdy didn't come back.

whitey knew immediately his father was gone for good and wouldn't be back. at the mystical table in whitey's heart there was yet another empty place. the others took somewhat longer to figure it out. whitey and his father hadn't really spoken. just polite small talk. alabama had been a no go area. and now ferdy was too. nobody dared to raise the subject. why had ferdy come back just to leave? and why had he brought these clowns with him? caravaggio would have liked to apologise to whitsun but he thought it best to say nothing. he had tried to discuss the situation with the barman but the barman just looked at him long hard and cold and caravaggio did not like the way the barman looked at him. caravaggio had killed men for less. but that was a long long time ago. caravaggio had mellowed some. but not much. i'm sorry said caravaggio. i know said the barman - let's



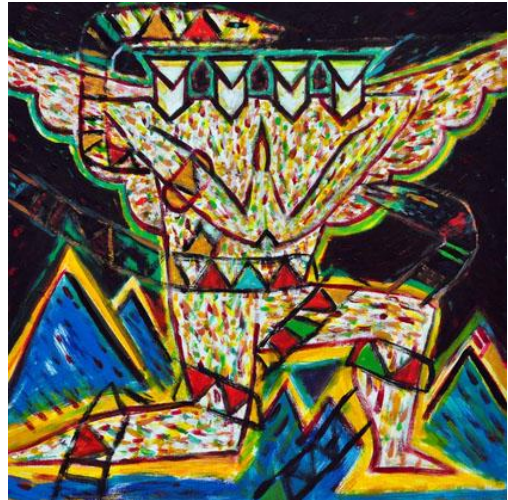


button it and let the boss do his thing. if we give him time he'll get to where he needs to be.

the ghosts of rain eventually left. everybody had to sleep in the truck till the cabin dried out. christmas was just around the corner. a couple of days before christmas eve an elegant bouquet of several dozen sweet smelling white roses arrived at the cabin with a card saying - for whitey black - from alabama. whitey took to his room and stayed there till the morning of christmas eve.

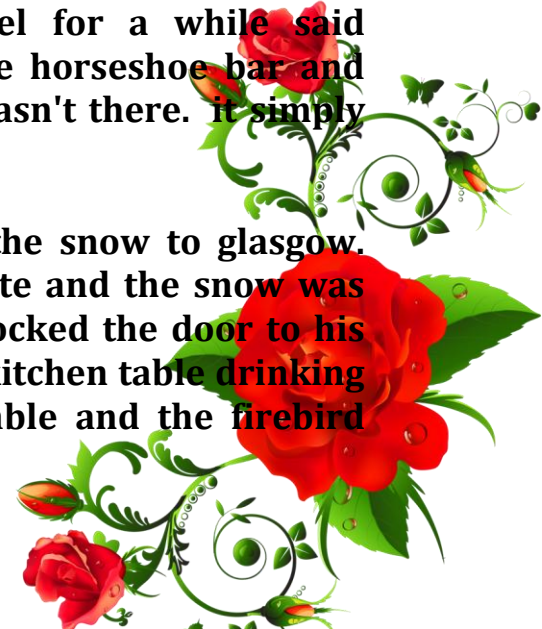
let's hit the bar said whitey. there was a small farming town five miles away called gun hill. two churches, two bars, a small hotel and little else. whitey, the barman and victor mature climbed into the truck and drove to gun hill. one of the bars was called heaven's gate and that was the bar they hit. at a corner table in the bar sat bob mitchum drinking with caravaggio, utrillo, jack kerouac, clark gable and the firebird school representative. we thought we'd give you a couple of days off said mitchum. both the barman and victor mature looked long and hard at the drinkers at the corner table. whitey said nothing.


he ordered drinks at the bar then sat on a barstool and there the barman and victor joined him. the girl behind the bar was young pretty and friendly. the bar itself was dark but pretty too because of the twinkling christmas lights. finish these then let's get outa here said whitey. they walked thru' light snow and early evening christmas lights to the horseshoe bar. at a corner table sat bob mitchum drinking with caravaggio, utrillo, jack kerouac, clark gable and the firebird school representative.



we thought we'd give you a couple of days off said mitchum. we're staying at the gun hill hotel for a while said caravaggio. fuck this said whitey. they left the horseshoe bar and drove back home to the cabin. but the cabin wasn't there. it simply wasn't there.

they got into the truck and drove back thru' the snow to glasgow. back to the tenements. it was dark cold and late and the snow was heavy when they parked the truck. whitey unlocked the door to his apartment. big bob mitchum was sitting at the kitchen table drinking with caravaggio, utrillo, jack kerouac, clark gable and the firebird

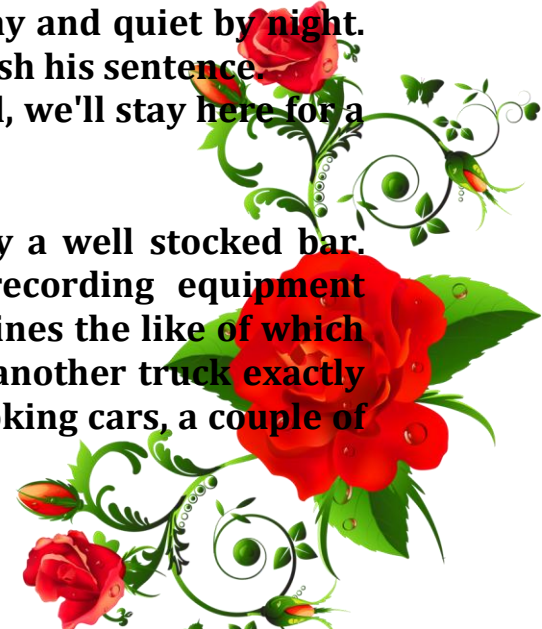


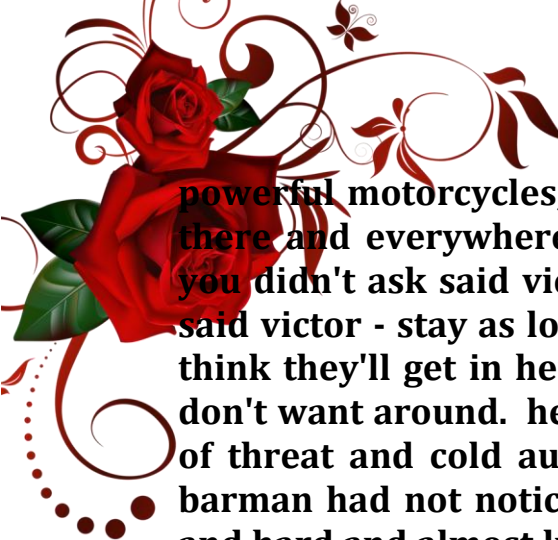


school representative. we thought we'd give you a couple of days off
said mitchum. get out said whitey. get out said the barman. get out
said victor mature. mitchum and the others left immediately.
mitchum had to carry utrillo and clark gable had to carry caravaggio
as both painters were too drunk to walk. kerouac too had to help the
firebird school representative whose legs were far from steady.
goodnight said kerouac. merry christmas said big bob mitchum. we'll
be back said caravaggio. fuck off said whitey.

the barman cleared and tidied the table then poured fresh drinks.
they sat in silence at the kitchen table for a long time. drinking. then
whitey noticed much of the apartment was very very wet. the ghosts
of rain had obviously visited here too. victor fetched sleeping bags
from the truck. they sat in silence in the sleeping bags at the kitchen
table drinking till dawn. nobody spoke. eventually whitsun said -
fuck this. they all fell asleep for a while then as christmas day
unfolded they began doing whatever they could to dry out the
apartment. eventually the barman said - it's some fucking christmas
day this. they were tough guys. they all laughed. time for a few
drinks said the barman. they went for a curry in a little indian place
just around the corner. halfway thru' the meal the barman noticed
mitchum, utrillo, caravaggio, clark gable, jack kerouac and the
firebird school representative all sleeping in a heap at a table in a
dark corner. they were all wrapped up in christmas lights and looked
like some kinda pagan christmas tree. the barman said nothing. jane
russell was still living quietly inside whitey's body. without asking
anyone's permission richard brautigan had simply moved in and now
brautigan was sharing a room with jane Russell inside whitey's body.
the boys finished their meal and went back to the tenement. we can't
stay here said whitey. i've got a place on the east side said victor
mature - it's very comfortable. they climbed into the truck and went
there. it was a big industrial space, a factory unit with offices, within a
much bigger industrial complex. yet quiet by day and quiet by night.
kinda perfect for....the barman couldn't quite finish his sentence.
perfect for now, this'll do fine, just what we need, we'll stay here for a
few days.

there was a small kitchen and more importantly a well stocked bar.
beds, film equipment, musical instruments, recording equipment
from the early 1960's, computers, strange machines the like of which
whitey and the barman had never seen before, another truck exactly
the same as victor's delivery truck, three fast looking cars, a couple of

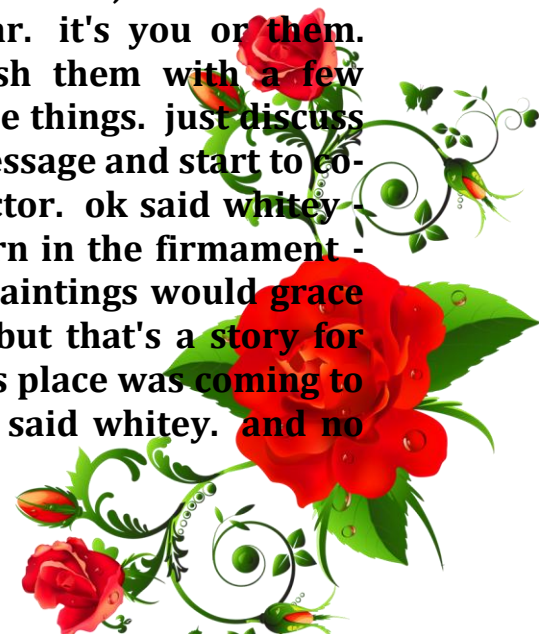




powerful motorcycles, a small theatre and unfinished paintings here there and everywhere. i didn't know you painted said the barman. you didn't ask said victor. kinda nice place said the barman. thanks said victor - stay as long as you like. thanks said the barman. i don't think they'll get in here said victor - i don't let anyone in here that i don't want around. he spoke easily and casually but there was a note of threat and cold authority in victor's voice which whitey and the barman had not noticed before. there was something suddenly cold and hard and almost kingly in victor's voice. then he winked and they all laughed. let's have a drink said victor. they raised their glasses - home sweet home. here's to it. happy christmas boys.

a few drinks later. they had been avoiding it. but somebody had to ask the question. and it was the barman who spoke. ok let's do it - where's the cabin gone? they all laughed nervously. no idea said whitey. no idea said victor. me too said the barman. drunks and gutters - the only copy is in the cabin said the barman. i know said whitey. we'll figure something out said mature. pebbles in a stream. it must be somewhere. i thought clark gable was a good guy said the barman. maybe he is said whitey. maybe he isn't said victor. forget about clark for now said victor - we need to find the cabin. they agreed to take it easy for a couple of days then go back to lake marie and look for the cabin.

nothing is what it is. or so it seems. the cabin might be only a few hundred yards away. or it might be a few thousand miles away. in india or china. we just don't know said whitey. i like your paintings victor but why are they all unfinished asked whitey. i just can't finish them. i can start them, work them, take them to a place but i just can't finish them. i can help you said whitey. i can finish them for you or i can teach you how to finish them - just batter them, kick them, punch them, throw things at them, punish them, whip them, beat the hell outa them, let them know who's boss. it's war. it's you or them. they'll soon quieten down then you can finish them with a few strokes. mostly you won't have to do any of these things. just discuss it with them gently and calmly. they'll get the message and start to cooperate. i think i prefer the first option said victor. ok said whitey - i'll finish them for you. thus a new star was born in the firmament - the victor howl-black paintings. in time these paintings would grace the great museums of this world and the next but that's a story for another place and time. christmas day at victor's place was coming to its end. not a single fucking christmas present said whitey. and no






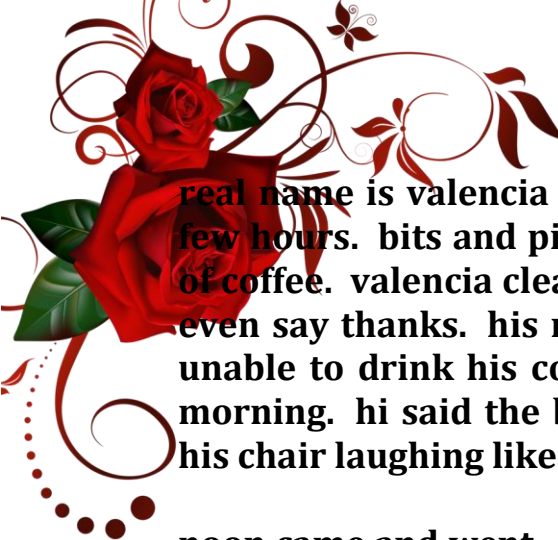
christmas dinner. they all laughed, had a few more drinks then went to bed. whitey felt safe at victor's place.

bright lights. big city. no surrender and no winter retreat. back on the chain gang. at the breakfast table - i don't see clark gable as a bad guy said whitey. kerouac ain't a bad guy. utrillo is insane of course. mitchum ain't a bad guy. caravaggio is of course a nutter and a wild bad ass but he and i go back a long way and i'm certain he wouldn't want to hurt us. that leaves the guy from the firebird school and we pretty much know nothing about him. tell me about the firebird school said victor. there's nothing to tell said whitey - nobody knows anything about it. or if they do they're not allowed to talk about it. talking about the firebird school without the permission of the appropriate authorities leads only to madness then certain instant destruction. kinda wild said victor. yeah kinda wild said whitey - the firebird school is a school of poetry and that's pretty much all i can tell you about it. how do we find this firebird school asked vincent. for a few short moments victor had somehow turned himself into vincent van gogh. you don't said whitey - it finds you. when the pupil is ready the master will come - it's that kinda thing said whitey. that kinda thing is a bit advanced for me said victor. yes i know said whitey - you're just a ham.

there was a rumbling in whitey's stomach. jane russell was making love with brautigan in a wardrobe in jane's room inside whitey's body. brautigan was getting to know jane much better than ever he could have hoped. and he knew now that he would and could finally die happy. some kittens had been born under victor's bed back in november then after a couple of weeks the mother ran away. victor kept some horses in a field next to the industrial complex and a girl came each day to look after the horses. now she came each day to look after the kittens too. this girl looked a lot like jane russell. so much so in fact that everybody called her jane even tho' her name was valencia. valencia lived in a small apartment above the blue lagoon but she and the barman had somehow never met.

jane russell loved living inside whitey's body. happy and comfortable. she loved his paintings, loved his writing and loved the barman's writing too. she didn't want to leave. whitey was getting used to it. he kinda liked it too and he was more than a little shocked when he saw valencia for the first time pouring coffee on boxing day morning. who the hell is that said whitey black. that's jane russell said victor. her

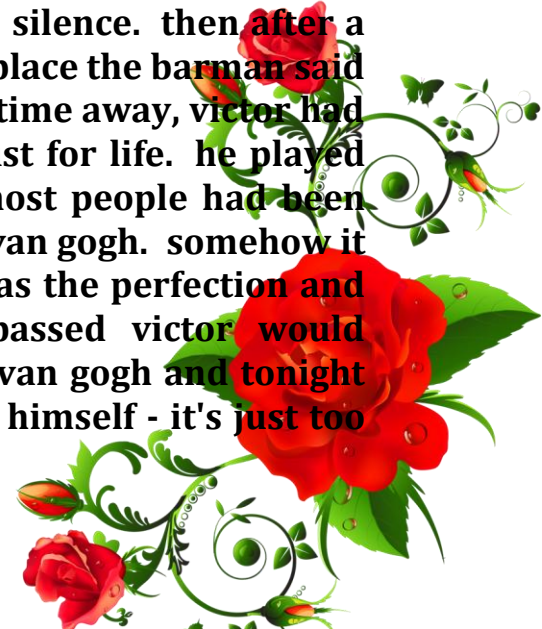





real name is valencia said victor - she helps out here every day for a few hours. bits and pieces. whitey was stunned. he dropped his mug of coffee. valencia cleaned up and served some fresh. whitey couldn't even say thanks. his mouth turned dry. his hands trembled. he was unable to drink his coffee or speak a single word for the rest of the morning. hi said the barman. hi said valencia. victor mature fell off his chair laughing like a pork chop.

noon came and went. you better have a couple of drinks said victor to whitey - you look like you've just seen a ghost. they had a couple of drinks then went to the blue lagoon for a few more, praying all the way that mitchum and the others would not be there. valencia came with them. the bar was empty apart from the staff. pretty christmas lights twinkled. meet your new boss said vincent - for a few moments victor had turned himself into van gogh again. hi said the chef. hi said the kitchen boy. howdy said the waitress. hi said the bar girl. what can i get you said the girl behind the bar. i'd like to buy you all a drink said howl-black and we'd like a bottle of jim beam please, a bucket of ice and four glasses. they sat on tall stools at the bar. champagne for our guests and a couple of bottles for the staff too said whitey - here's to the blue lagoon. to the blue lagoon said vincent - and to the new boss. victor had turned himself into van gogh again for a few moments. valencia was impressed. she'd never been in the blue lagoon before. and she kinda liked it.

two strangers entered the bar. drinks are on the house tonight said howl-black - all drinks are free tonight. i'm the new owner and you're very welcome here. thanks said the strangers - we'll have some jim beam please. whitey requested a taxi, reminded the staff that all drinks tonight were free then he and vincent and the barman went back to victor's place and valencia went home too to her small apartment above the bar. i'd forgotten i'd bought the bar said whitey in the taxi. me too said vincent. then there was silence. then after a while just as they were drawing close to victor's place the barman said - i didn't forget. many years before, almost a lifetime away, victor had played van gogh in vincente millenni's movie lust for life. he played the part so well, so humbly and so perfectly, most people had been convinced that it was kirk douglas in the role of van gogh. somehow it was kirk douglas who got all the credit. such was the perfection and subtlety of victor's portayal. as the years passed victor would sometimes slip and regress into his portayal of van gogh and tonight was one of those nights. life said the barman to himself - it's just too

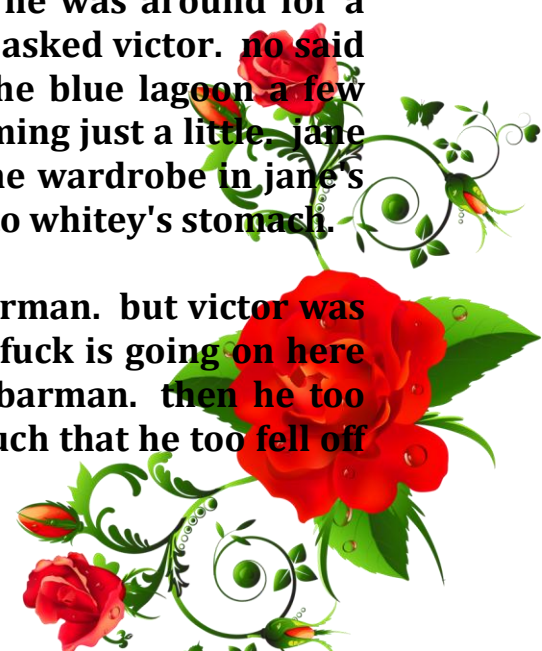


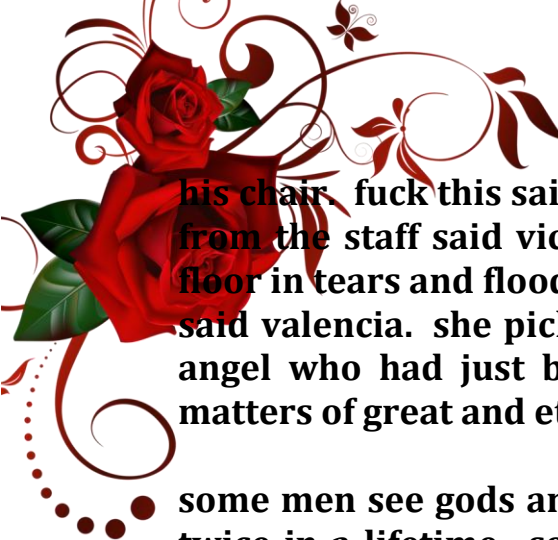


rich sometimes. and as they stepped outa the taxi the barman kinda figured he could clearly see why god had felt the need to create mountains. god take me to the mountains. he was beginning to find more sense and structure in the fragile and the unstructured and senseless than ever he'd found in sense or structure or in stable and strong. god take me into the mystical heart of the mountains. you don't want much said god. that's not for me to say said the barman. i don't need to go to the top said the barman - just deep into the mystical heart. ok said god - leave it with me, we'll see what we can do. deep into the heart of the mountain said the barman. i heard you the first time said god. can i bring a small dog with me if i can find one that wants to come? god ignored this remark. i can take you to modigliani's grave much more easily than i can help you enter deep into the mystical heart of the mountains said god. i have every confidence in you said the barman. goodnight said god - sleep well, tomorrow is another day. goodnight said the barman. he paid the driver then he and whitey and vincent stumbled into the factory. they had a few more drinks then went to bed. each of our friends sleeping next to their own ghosts.

an angel at my window. the barman woke up swearing and kicking himself. fuck it he said - it's not every day we are visited by angels. it's not every day we have a two minute, one to one, face to face with god. i should have asked about the cabin. fuck it he said again. it was morning. having fed and watered the horses, having fed and watered the kittens, valencia was pouring coffee and frying chicken as the barman, victor and whitey black crawled outa their beds. did i buy a bar last night asked whitey. something like that said the barman. then whitey spotted valencia. his heart stopped. he spilled his coffee. then he spilled his plate of fried chicken. then he crawled back to his bed. the barman laughed, victor laughed, then valencia laughed. did you see van gogh last night asked victor. yeah he was around for a while said the barman. did i buy a bar last night asked victor. no said the barman - that was whitey, whitey bought the blue lagoon a few weeks ago. whitey was turning green and screaming just a little. jane russell and brautigan were hard at it again in the wardrobe in jane's room and jane's room was just a touch too close to whitey's stomash.

is he ok asked valencia. yeah he's ok said the barman. but victor was laughing so much he fell off his chair. what the fuck is going on here this morning asked valencia. nothing said the barman. then he too started laughing and soon he was laughing so much that he too fell off

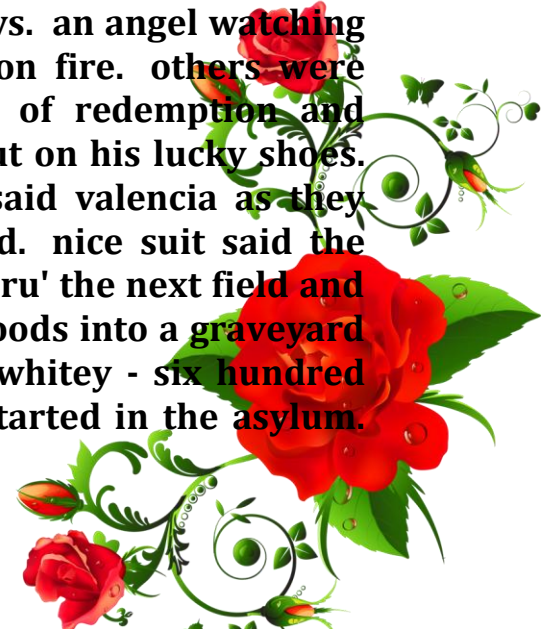





his chair. fuck this said valencia. we don't expect that kinda language from the staff said victor then he and the barman rolled around the floor in tears and floods of laughter for a full fifteen minutes. fuck this said valencia. she picked up a couple of kittens then walking like an angel who had just been spanked she went to the field to discuss matters of great and eternal importance with the horses.

some men see gods and angels nearly all the time. some just once or twice in a lifetime. some men never. some don't want to see. some refuse to see. they want pensions, insurance and a place in the sun. or they want war, power and dominion over others. some men are visited by gods and angels much more often than they ever realise. while there are others whom gods and angels decline to visit. an angel at my widow. and now the angel is gone. whitey had been painting angels for almost forty years. in cold sheds, in garages and in cold cold tenements. angels and snakes. the world seems to have a problem with silence. it was silence that whitey needed most when he worked. when he worked angels visited him often and watched over him as he wrote or painted but mostly whitey was unaware of this. victor and the barman finally managed to stop laughing. in bed in one of the offices howl-black screamed silently. in the field with the horses and the two kittens valencia heard his silent scream. she smiled, made some fresh coffee, brought a cup to whitey and this time he managed not to spill it. it's a hard fall said whitey - it's a hard fall. pardon me said valencia. falling in love said whitey - it's always a hard fall. you need some fresh air said Valencia looking more and more like jane russell by the minute. get dressed said valencia and we'll go for a walk. some men see gods and angels in everything said whitey. and some men see devils where there are no devils said valencia. get dressed she said - i'll make some more coffee and we'll take a flask.

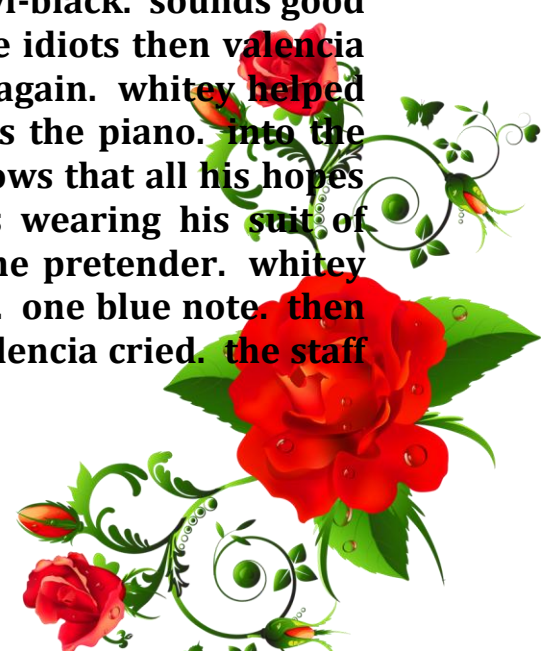
he put on his best suit. a suit made outa windows. an angel watching from each window. some of the angels were on fire. others were laughing. it was holy fire. sacred fire. fires of redemption and renewal. fires of knowledge and wisdom. he put on his lucky shoes. his shoes were made outa glass. nice shoes said valencia as they walked thru' the field where the horses grazed. nice suit said the horses. nice suit said valencia as they walked thru' the next field and into the woods. they held hands. beyond the woods into a graveyard and then a small chapel. prince myshkin said whitey - six hundred fucking pages and he ends up back where he started in the asylum.

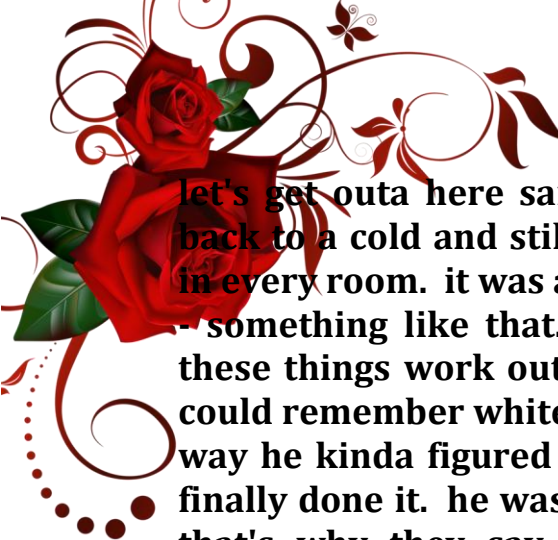




valencia didn't understand - who is prince myshkin she asked. i am prince myshkin said whitey. are you a real prince asked valencia. yeah i'm a real prince said howl-black without a trace or shred of irony. i've never been kissed by a prince before said valencia. you have now said whitey. then he kissed her. then he kissed her again. i have another suit made outa redemption said whitey - maybe you'd like to see it? sounds good said valencia - where is it? i have a few rooms in a place on the west side said whitey - in a tenement close to the blue lagoon. i suspect you might be shallow said valencia. you're right said whitey. they borrowed one of victor's cars and drove to the tenement. smells kinda damp in here said valencia. yeah you're right again said whitey - we had a visit from the ghosts of rain. whitey showed valencia his suit of redemption then they made love in every room in whitey's cold damp apartment.

then they went to the blue lagoon for a few drinks and something to eat. we need a piano in here said whitey - i like to play a little every now and then. i'll see to it boss said the chef. is there anything you don't do asked valencia. plenty said whitsun. all drinks tonight are free said whitey - free drinks for the staff too. thanks boss said the chef. you're a hell of a man boss said the chef. whitey laughed. and valencia laughed too. don't call me boss - just get me a fucking piano said whitey. the chef laughed, said yes boss, poured himself a drink then made a phone call. twenty minutes later three irish guys gently humped a baby grand into the bar. thanks chef said whitey. the chef laughed, poured himself another drink - a particularly large one, then sat down at the baby grand and played like the wind. give yourself a pay rise said whitey - i'll send a few paintings round tomorrow, maybe we can sell some here. sure thing boss said the chef. we better check victor and the barman are ok said howl-black. valencia made the call. everything is fine said valencia as the waitress cleared the table and served another bottle of jim beam, fresh ice and fresh glasses. we'll drink this then go back to the tenement said howl-black. sounds good to me boss said valencia. they both laughed like idiots then valencia fell off her chair. they both laughed like idiots again. whitey helped her back into her chair then he walked towards the piano. into the cool of the evening strolls the pretender, he knows that all his hopes and dreams begin and end there. whitey was wearing his suit of redemption. are you there - say a prayer for the pretender. whitey hesitated. then sat down at the piano. one note. one blue note. then another. then more. he played so beautifully valencia cried. the staff cried. the few strangers in the bar cried too.





let's get outa here said whitey. he left hand in hand with valencia. back to a cold and still damp apartment where they made love again in every room. it was a couple of days before new year. whitey was 62 - something like that. valencia was 27. or so she said. sometimes these things work out well. sometimes they don't. for as long as he could remember whitey had wanted to play piano in his own bar. that way he kinda figured he'd never be thrown out. and that night he'd finally done it. he wasn't too nuts about everybody crying but i guess that's why they say you can't have everything. jane russell and brautigan living happily inside him and valencia, jane russell's twin, crawling all over him. for one night only howl-black seemed to have it all.

painting is not dead said whitey - i have no time for conceptual or digital art. it's cold. empty. no touch, no feel. no glory, no pain. they're just button pushers. but valencia heard nothing. she was already asleep. later they had breakfast at the blue lagoon then drove victor's car back to the factory on the east side.






CHAPTER 4: KEROUAC'S BAR

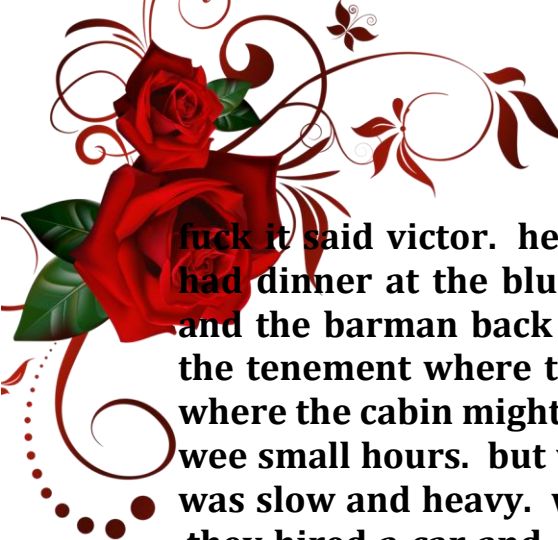
at victor's place. morning all said whitey. hi said valencia. morning said victor and the barman. cats and horses have been fed said victor.



thanks said valencia. i suggest we go to lake marie to look for the cabin said whitey - we can have lunch at heaven's gate. maybe stay at the gun hill hotel if need be. yup ok said victor. did i buy a bar last night asked whitey. no said valencia - you played piano in a bar you already own. how poetic said howl-black - i've always wanted to play piano in my own bar. you played particularly well said valencia. i don't remember said howl-black. i'll have my sister look after the horses and cats if we're away for

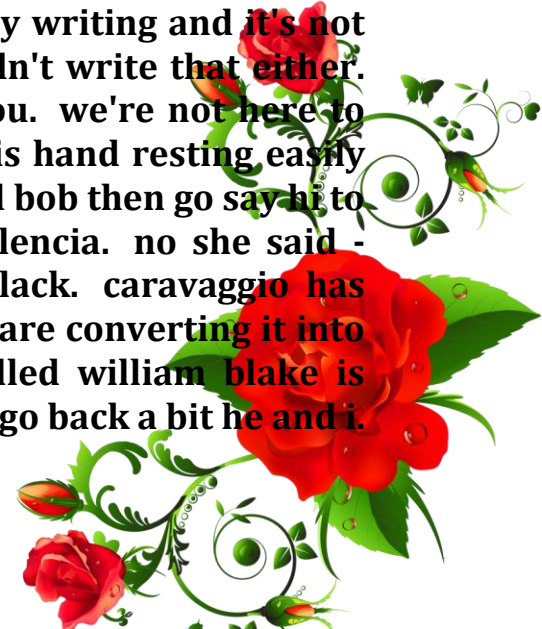
a few days said valencia. they drove in one of victor's powerful cars thru' light snow to the foothills then beyond to gun hill where they stopped for lunch. there was no sign of mitchum or gable or any of the others at heaven's gate. they drove on to the big hill known as big tam and took the winding road leading to the plateau overlooking lake marie but the cabin wasn't there. in it's place was a graveyard. and a small chapel. both ancient. the graves were the graves of ancient scottish kings. just a little above each grave suspended in the air was a sword - as ancient as the graves, the kings and the chapel. nobody spoke. they returned to gun hill and checked into the hotel then went for a few drinks at the horseshoe bar. no sign of mitchum or gable or any of the others at the hotel or in the horseshoe bar. or so they thought. victor overheard two locals talking. the horseshoe bar has a new owner - a writer called jack kerouac. never heard of him said the other guy. me neither said the first. and that's not all said the first guy - the actor robert mitchum has bought the gun hill hotel and heaven's gate. the movie guy asked the second guy. yeah the movie guy said the first. i thought he was dead said the second guy. me too said the first.






fuck it said victor. he informed whitey. they drove back to glasgow, had dinner at the blue lagoon then went their separate ways, victor and the barman back to the factory and whitey and valencia back to the tenement where they stayed up all night discussing painting and where the cabin might be. it might be in a painting said valencia in the wee small hours. but whitsun had fallen asleep. late morning, whitey was slow and heavy. we didn't go into the chapel. let's go there now. they hired a car and drove to the plateau close to the top of big tam overlooking lake marie. they went into the chapel. on a small altar was a package wrapped in brown paper with a note sitting on top of it. next to the package was another note with a single white rose sitting on top of it. the first note said - this might be all you get. and it was signed bob and clark. valencia opened the package. inside was the barman's book drunks and gutters - written by hand in twelve school notebooks. valencia read the other note. all it said was - try the hills on the far side of the lake. and then the words - from a friend. every rose has its thorns said howl-black. the hills on the far side of the lake were a long way away. night was falling. they drove back to gun hill, checked into the hotel then went for a drink at heaven's gate. bob mitchum was behind the bar. evening whitey said bob. evening bob said whitey. evening jane said bob. i'm not jane russell i'm valencia cruz said valencia. sorry said bob - you look a hell of a lot like jane russell. i know said valencia - everybody says so.

i've bought this place. and i've bought the hotel too. jack's bought the horseshoe bar. we like it here said bob. yeah we know said whitey - we heard. bob poured drinks - on the house he said. your money is no good in my hotel or in my bar. do you know where the cabin is asked howl-black. of course i do said bob it's on the plateau on big tam overlooking the lake. no it isn't said howl-black - it was but it isn't now. blow me said bob. whitey tried to explain. he showed the first note to big bob. we didn't write that - it's not my writing and it's not clark's. he showed bob the second note. we didn't write that either. we're your friends whitey said bob - we love you. we're not here to fuck you around. whitey smiled and relaxed. his hand resting easily on valencia's thigh. have a couple more here said bob then go say hi to jack. have you met jack kerouac bob asked valencia. no she said - never heard of him. he's a writer said howl-black. caravaggio has bought the church said mitchum - he and utrillo are converting it into a hotel and artists' studios. some new guy called william blake is helping them. i know blake said howl-black - we go back a bit he and i.

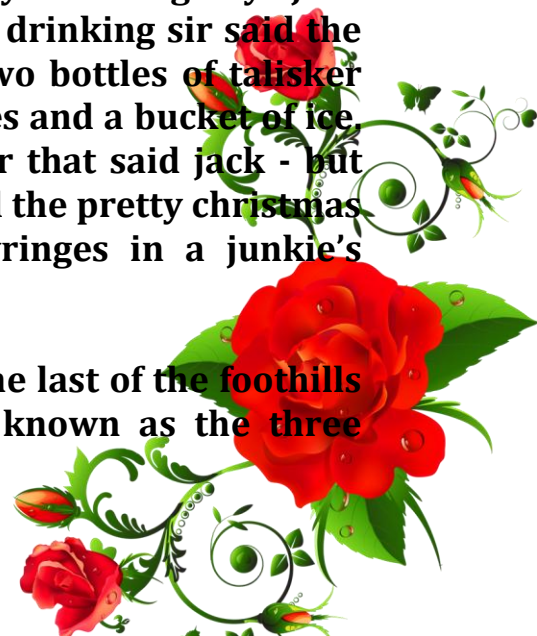


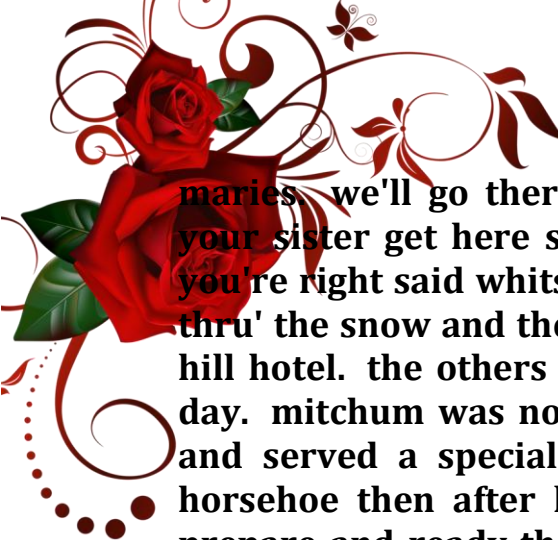


howl-black was pleased blake was in town. if blake was around it meant big kris kristofferson would not be far away. over the years kristofferson and blake had become pretty much inseparable. the usual suspects were assembling. and it was not yet new year. modigliani's in town too said bob - he's helping out at the church. oh no said whitey. then he laughed. who is modigliani asked valencia. he's a painter said howl-black - italian. i knew his mother well once upon a time said whitey then he laughed again. is his work as good as yours asked valencia. close said howl-black. his is more elegant - mine is kinda more naive.

hand in hand they crossed the street to the horseshoe bar. light snow and twinkling christmas lights. mitchum came with them. it was the same inside the horseshoe bar - light snow and pretty christmas lights. jack came out from behind the bar when he saw them walk in. he gave howl-black a warm hug. hi jane said jack. i'm not jane russell said valencia - i'm valencia fucking cruz. sorry said jack. your money is no good in here whitey said jack - let's have some drinks. modigliani, utrillo and william blake were sitting at the far end of the bar. they waved and said hi. whitey raised his hand then bowed graciously like an actor in a dream. bourbon said jack. yeah bourbon said whitey - then we'll work our way towards the malts. sorry about the snow said jack - it's a technical thing, utrillo is working on it, he says he'll have it fixed by this time next year. how's the writing jack said whitey. getting worse said jack - i hear brautigan has the same problem. whitey explained about the cabin. fuck me said jack - kinda wild. yeah kinda wild said big bob. tomorrow is new year's eve said howl-black. we better get victor and the barman and your sister up here. tell her to get someone in to look after the horses and cats. valencia made the call. then they switched and started work on the malts. three farmers came into the bar. all drinks are free tonight said jack - all drinks are on the house. what are you having boys jack asked the farmers. we'll have whatever you are drinking sir said the farmers in unison. jack presented them with two bottles of talisker and a bowmore special, some water, some glasses and a bucket of ice. to your health sir said a farmer. it's too late for that said jack - but thanks. snow continued to fall inside the bar and the pretty christmas lights continued to twinkle and shine like syringes in a junkie's dream.


on the far side of the lake were three big hills, the last of the foothills before the mountains. these three hills were known as the three





maries. we'll go there tomorrow when victor and the barman and your sister get here said whitey. if we can still stand said valencia. you're right said whitsun. they left the bar hand in hand and strolled thru' the snow and the christmas lights back to their room at the gun hill hotel. the others continued drinking beyond noon the following day. mitchum was not without a reputation as a cook. he prepared and served a special mexican style lunch for the drinkers at the horsehoe then after lunch the drinkers went home to rest and to prepare and ready themselves for the new year celebrations. victor and the barman arrived a little before noon. valencia's sister had stayed behind in glasgow because two of the kittens were unwell. having collected valencia and whitey, and with the barman at the wheel, victor's powerful car zoomed off towards the far side of the lake and the three maries. having driven around the first two maries the late afternoon found them approaching a plateau next to some woods close to the top of the third and tallest marie. in front of them stood the cabin. looking like it had been there for a hundred years. it was pretty much just as they had last seen it. except it had relocated itself twentyfive miles away on the tallest hill on the other side of lake marie. and been replaced back on big tam by a graveyard and a small chapel. they checked inside the cabin. all seemed ok. the tallest of the three hills was known as big marie. do we stay here tonight or go back to the hotel? the madness of big marie or the madness of gun hill on new year's eve? rightly or wrongly they voted to return to the hotel.

scottish new year is a magical time. all sins are forgiven. all slates are wiped clean. the old year is dead and we begin again. a time to remember the dead and absent friends. a time to celebrate the survivors. heavy drinking generally begins a couple of months before christmas and often doesn't end till late march. this is especially true in our farming communities, way up north and on our islands. the old year is a dream and we begin again. a perfect scottish new year has no beginning and no end. a perfect scottish new year can last all year. this is especially true way up north, in our farming communities, in our fishing towns and on our islands where many of our cousins simply forget or refuse to sober up at all. it is, in short, a magical and mystical time. the famous russian writer nikolai gogol never experienced a scottish new year and it is this that in the end drove him mad. there is no place on this earth to experience a scottish new year other than in scotland. but remember please for your own safety



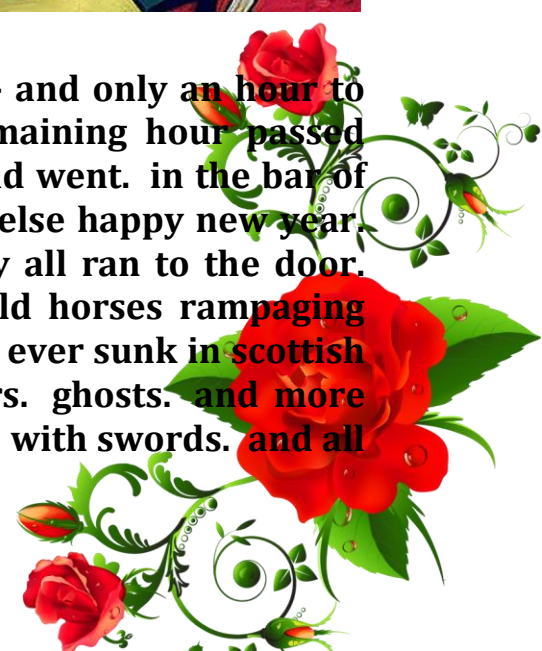


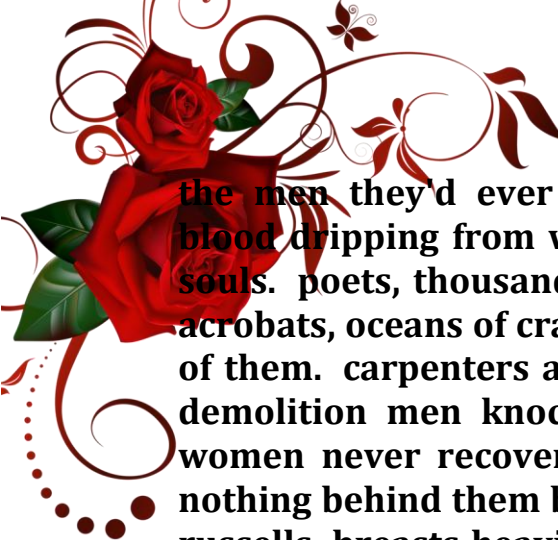
it is wise at all times to stay as far away as possible from the fair city of glasgow.

kid coronet was drinking alone in the bar of the gun hill hotel. he was watching victor and the barman playing pool. valencia and howl-black were enjoying an early evening nap. the bar was quiet. all the bars in gun hill were quiet - quiet before the storm. the kid was more than three hundred years old but somehow always managed to appear to be only eighteen or nineteen. he was more than useful with a pool cue and even more useful with a sword. he asked to play the winner. he destroyed victor within seconds then destroyed the barman within seconds. i think we better buy you a drink young fella said victor. i think so too said the barman. why the hell not said kid coronet. a new friendship had begun. are you aware of things disappearing around these parts victor asked the kid. yes i am said the kid - what kinda things might we be talking about? buildings said victor - we're talking about buildings. it's a long story said the kid - and maybe this place is not the best place to talk about it. and maybe tonight is not the best time to talk about it continued the kid. let's get new year behind us said coronet - new year can get kinda messy around here. believe me. they say you gotta kiss a lot of princes before you kiss a frog said the kid. victor was just about to ask him to explain when valencia and howl-black looking like angels in a dream walked hand in hand into the bar. it was close to eleven and the bar was still quiet. is it snowing in here asked howl-black. yes it is said victor. thank god said howl-black i thought i was losing my mind.



mitchum was tending bar. kinda quiet he said - and only an hour to go. yeah kinda quiet said howl-black. the remaining hour passed quickly and without incident. midnight came and went. in the bar of the gun hill hotel everybody wished everybody else happy new year. then out in the street all hell broke loose. they all ran to the door. wild horses. two headed and three headed wild horses rampaging north along main street. ghost ships. every ship ever sunk in scottish waters. every sailor ever lost in scottish waters. ghosts. and more ghosts. thousands of them. then long dead kings with swords. and all

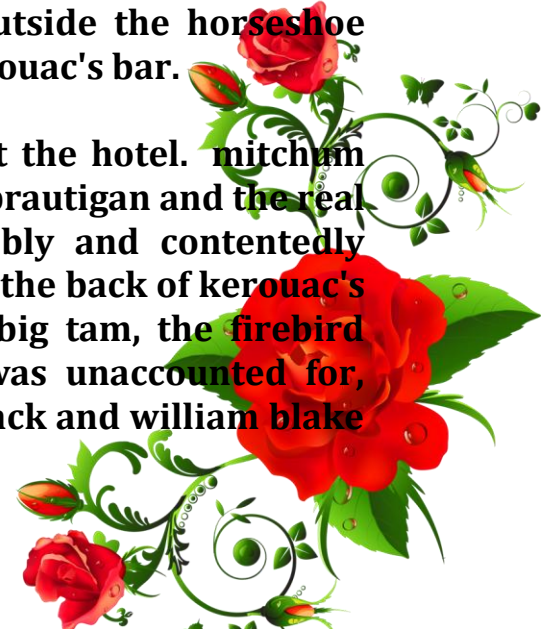


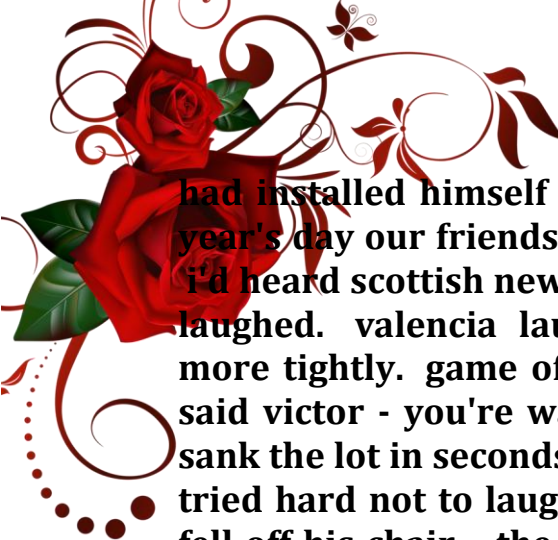


the men they'd ever killed or wronged. screaming and shouting, blood dripping from wounds and sores that would never heal. dead souls. poets, thousands of them, all with notebooks and pens. blind acrobats, oceans of crabs. scorpions, bears and sea eagles. thousands of them. carpenters and masons constructing buildings and bridges. demolition men knocking them down. endless once good looking women never recovering from the loss of their good looks leaving nothing behind them but tears and rivers of blood. ten thousand jane russells, breasts heaving, lipstick smeared, all wearing cowboy boots and short denim skirts and marching north like robots towards the mountains. musicians. a mariachi band. snakes, lions and tigers. ten thousand albatrosses. then nothing. silence. the sky started to rain black roses. within minutes main street was knee-deep in black roses. a lone firebird followed by a single black rose flew the length of main street heading north. the show was over.

our friends stood motionless and in awe on the threshold of the gun hill hotel bar. nobody could say a word. kerouac, modigliani and some others stood silent and still on the threshold of the horseshoe bar. william blake had watched from outside the church. clark gable and utrillo had seen it all from outside heaven's gate. kinda frightening said howl-black. valencia turned pale and collapsed. mitchum carried her into the bar, poured some brandy gently down her throat and she revived. what the fuck was that she said. but nobody could answer her. sometimes it's best to have no feelings at all said howl-black. it was now just gone four in the morning. the ghostly parade of death had lasted a full four hours. at the hotel bar, at the horseshoe and at heaven's gate, too scared to do or attempt anything else, they simply carried on drinking. alone in the church william blake prayed for dawn and the gift of light. it was only when the sun was high in the sky above gun hill that most people dared go to bed or attempt to find their way home. then in the late afternoon sunshine two farmers replaced the old sign outside the horseshoe with another which read plainly and simply - kerouac's bar.

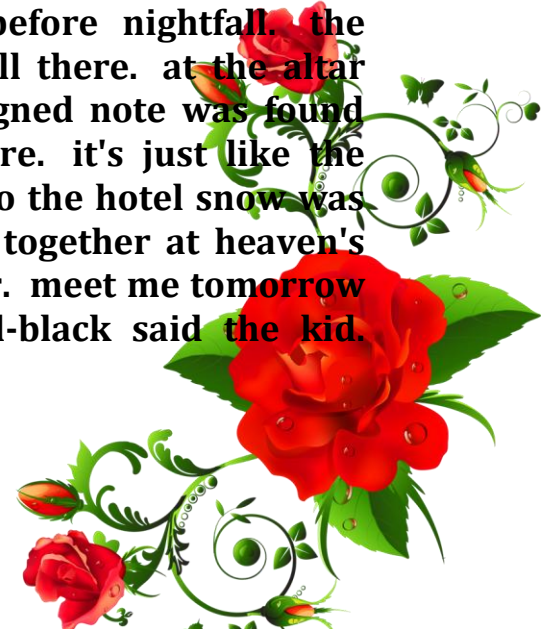
caravaggio, utrillo and modigliani had rooms at the hotel. mitchum had his own place above heaven's gate. richard brautigam and the real jane russell were still living quietly comfortably and contentedly inside howl-black. kerouac had his own place at the back of kerouac's bar. clark gable had returned to his cave on big tam, the firebird school representative had gone missing and was unaccounted for, ferdy was long gone and definitely not coming back and william blake

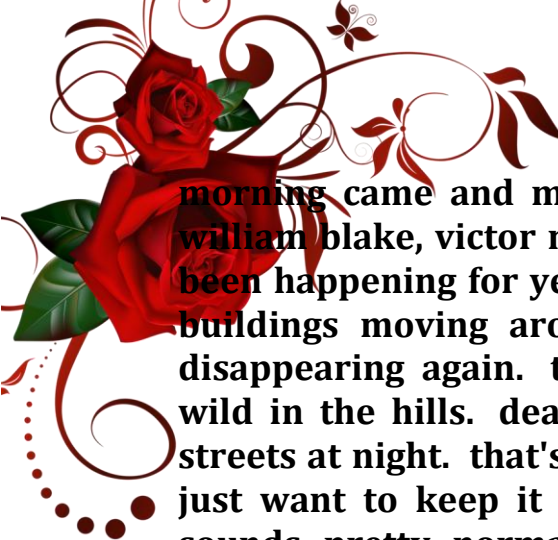




had installed himself in the vaults at the church. early evening new year's day our friends began to gather in the bar at the gun hill hotel. i'd heard scottish new year was kinda wild said mitchum. howl-black laughed. valencia laughed nervously and held howl-black's hand more tightly. game of pool said whitey to kid coronet. wrong move said victor - you're wasting your time. the kid set the balls up then sank the lot in seconds. oops said whitey. sorry said the kid. valencia tried hard not to laugh. victor tried hard not to laugh but failed and fell off his chair. the black roses in the street had quickly turned to dust and now light rain was washing the dust away. what the hell was it last night said valencia. something to do with the firebird school of poetry i guess said howl-black. nobody spoke for a long time. then kris kristofferson and jack kerouac walked into the bar. with a couple of drunken sailors, four or five drunken farmers and a remarkably sober piper. under the auspices of kristofferson, kerouac, modigliani, utrillo, mitchum and victor mature the piper did not remain sober for long. when william blake had finished sweeping up all the broken hearts littering main street that night he joined his friends around midnight for a couple of drinks in the bar at big bob mitchum's gun hill hotel.

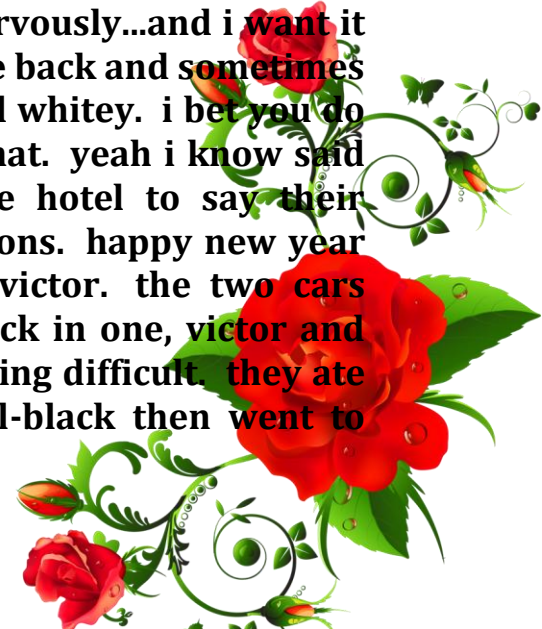
inspector spanky arrived at the bar around two in the morning. i hear there were strange goings on here last night said spanky. kristofferson, who by now had had more than a few, kicked spanky hard on the ass. you're not wanted here said kristofferson. kid coronet picked spanky up from off the floor then threw him out into the street. don't come back said the kid - we don't like cops around here. next day two cars left for the hills. in the first car victor mature, howl-black, valencia, kid coronet and william blake. in the second car - utrillo, modigliani, bob mitchum, kerouac and the barman. they arrived at the plateau on big marie in the early afternoon. the cabin was gone. it simply wasn't there. they drove to the plateau on big tam. there was time enough to get there before nightfall. the graveyard, the swords and the chapel were still there. at the altar next to a single white rose another short unsigned note was found saying only - i don't get around much anymore. it's just like the movies said bob mitchum. as they drove back to the hotel snow was falling heavily and little was said. they all ate together at heaven's gate. kid coronet had a private word with victor. meet me tomorrow at noon in the church vaults and bring howl-black said the kid. consider it done said victor.

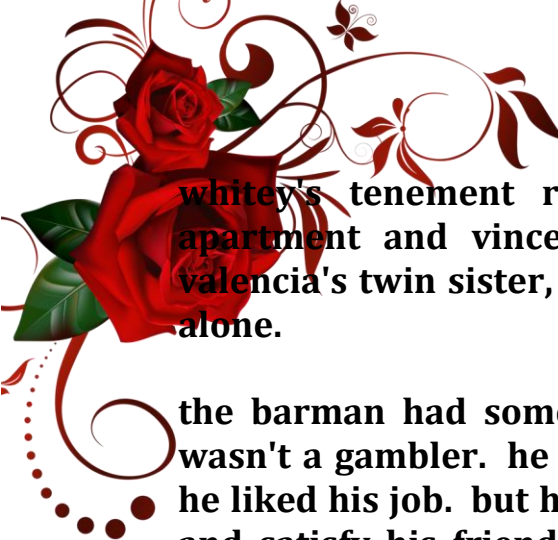




morning came and morning went. they met in the vaults at noon. william blake, victor mature, whitey howl-black and kid coronet. it's been happening for years said the kid. the locals try to keep it quiet. buildings moving around. disappearing. then coming back. then disappearing again. two headed and three headed horses running wild in the hills. dead kings who refuse to die. ghost ships in the streets at night. that's pretty much it. nobody knows why. the locals just want to keep it quiet. that's pretty much all i know. silence. sounds pretty normal to me said william blake. nothing's been normal since ferlinghetti published ginsberg's howl back in 1956 said howl-black. victor tried not to laugh but failed. nothing's been normal since richard dadd killed his father back in 1843 said blake. where's my fucking cabin said whitey. sorry said the kid - i've no idea. victor tried not to laugh but again he failed. maybe it's in a painting said blake - maybe the angels will help us find it. again victor tried not to laugh and again he failed. fuck this said whitey - let's go to kerouac's for a couple of drinks. kerouac's was mobbed. they couldn't squeeze in so they went to heaven's gate which was much more quiet and there they quickly poured some serious bourbon down their throats. after a few shots whitey began to relax. mitchum and kristofferson walked into the bar. hi girls said whitey - can i buy you a drink? i've told you before said bob your money is no good in my bar or in my hotel. sorry bob said whitey - my nerves are a mess. have a few more drinks said mitchum - have some lunch. where's valencia asked kristofferson and the second he finished speaking valencia walked into the bar looking like a dream. she kissed howl-black hard on the mouth then sat on his knee. i'll cook us some lunch said mitchum.

after a perfect lunch coronet and howl-black spoke in private again. nothing more to tell said the kid - the locals pretend everything is normal but nothing is normal. i watched my father and uncle build that cabin or at least i think i did said whitey nervously...and i want it back. i know said coronet - sometimes they come back and sometimes they don't. i smell the firebird school in this said whitey. i bet you do said coronet - but you know i can't talk about that. yeah i know said whitey. our friends all assembled outside the hotel to say their goodbyes and their thanks and their see you soon's. happy new year said big bob mitchum. happy new year said victor. the two cars headed back to glasgow. valencia and howl-black in one, victor and the barman in the other. heavy snow made driving difficult. they ate together at the blue lagoon, valencia and howl-black then went to





whitey's tenement rooms, the barman went to his own small apartment and vincent returned to the factory where claudette, valencia's twin sister, was waiting. sometimes it's just no good being alone.

the barman had some thinking to do. he wanted to write. but he wasn't a gambler. he also wanted to keep his job at the blue lagoon. he liked his job. but he also wanted to find the cabin, partly to please and satisfy his friend howl-black and partly because the cabin was such a great place to write and paint. having written his first book, scratching around in the dark shadows in the playrooms of his mind the barman had found there was also a growing desire to paint. to create that which had not previously existed. to create boundaries and frontiers which had not previously been crossed. he wanted to paint the many faces of transition tho' he knew in his heart none of them would last. he fell asleep in his chair. next to a broken window. not knowing that he was being watched. not knowing that firebirds lived in his veins and there they were rewriting history and restructuring the delicate balances of the mystical journeys of light and distant planets and the even more delicate imbalances of the secret lives of black roses.

and in the morning when he awoke the window had fixed itself. sometimes it's just no good being alone. and thus endeth chapter 4 of the buffalo house.





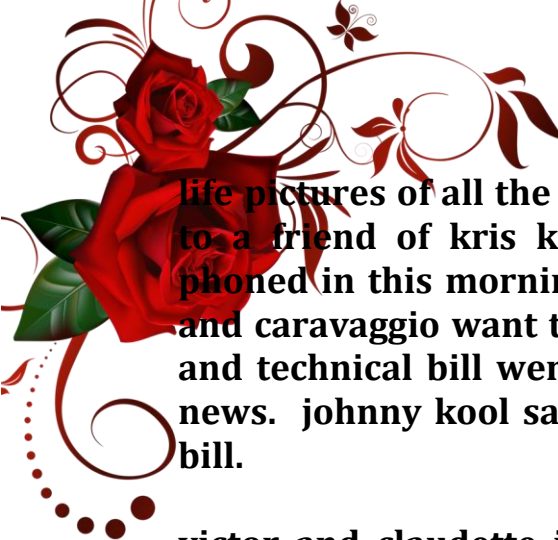
CHAPTER 5: TECHNICAL BILL

kid coronet had a friend called technical bill. bill could fix almost anything. coronet was spending the winter at the gun hill hotel. he sent for his friend technical bill and explained the situation regarding howl-black's cabin. easy said bill. tell him to paint the cabin exactly where he wants it, then tell him to paint an anchor and i'll do the rest. ok said coronet. he phoned howl-black, explained about technical bill and passed on bill's instructions. ok said howl-black - gimme a week and the paintings will be ready.



technical bill was a wise fool. he was a cautious man and liked insurance. bill was one of the chosen few who knew the exact location of the firebird school of poetry. he sent a note to the school plainly and simply asking them to kindly return howl-black's cabin to its home on big tam. that's my ass covered said bill to himself as he posted the note. a week later kid coronet and technical bill drove into glasgow to collect the paintings. it was a long drive. they stopped at every interesting looking bar on the road to glasgow. the trip took five days including overnight stays in various hotels. eventually they arrived at whitey's door reasonably sober. come in said howl-black. valencia looked like a million bucks. howl-black was working on his seventh or eighth portrait of her. she had quit her apartment and moved in with whitey. coronet and technical bill loved the two new paintings of the cabin and the anchor. magnificent said coronet. the painting of the cabin looked more real than the cabin itself and the anchor was bigger than the moon. what are you gonna do with them asked howl-black. top secret said technical bill. they went to the blue lagoon for lunch. howl-black and valencia had redecorated the bar and now howl-black's paintings were everywhere. portraits of valencia. gun hill main street flooded with black roses. larger than

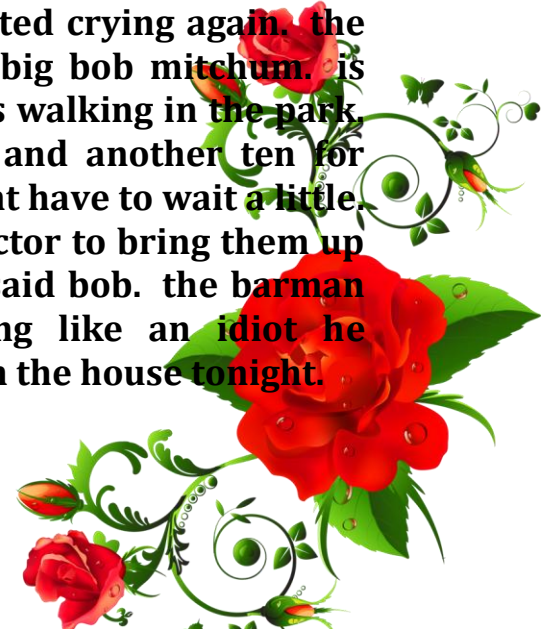





life pictures of all the notes found at the altar. we sold one last night to a friend of kris kristofferson said the chef. and william blake phoned in this morning and has made an offer for all the others. he and caravaggio want them for their church said the barman. coronet and technical bill were amazed at how casually howl-black took the news. johnny kool said kid coronet. yup johnny kool said technical bill.

victor and claudette joined them for lunch. they all ate well apart from howl-black. he downed bourbon after bourbon and quickly made his way thru' two bottles. valencia held his shaking non-drinking hand tightly. how long do you think it'll take said whitey. gimme a few days said bill then i'll get back to you. i've never known bill to fail said coronet - he can make a right ass of himself every now and then with women and booze but when it comes to business he's a winner. a real killer said coronet. grand said howl-black. then he ordered champagne for the staff and the whole bar, then he ordered more champagne, then he strolled over to the piano and played blue moon. then he played some classical stuff, then some old bob seger stuff all the while working his way thru' a third bottle of bourbon. the phone rang. it was jack kerouac. kerouac wants to buy ten paintings for his gun hill bar said the barman. valencia started to cry. the barman started to cry too. they knew how much jack kerouac meant to howl-black. whitey smiled his stupid smile, grinned his foolish grin, collected a bottle of bourbon from behind the bar, winked at valencia then left - i'm going for a walk in the park. i'll be back in half an hour. then he walked out. victor mature went after him. just in case said victor - just in case.

hell of a lunch said technical bill. do you girls have any more sisters said bill. yes we do said valencia and claudette in unison. looks like the stars belong to howl-black tonight said bill with a gentle smile. something like that said valencia. then she started crying again. the phone rang. the barman took the call. it was big bob mitchum. is whitey there said bob. no said the barman - he's walking in the park. tell him i want ten big pictures for the hotel and another ten for heaven's gate. ok said the barman - but you might have to wait a little. ok said bob - tell him when they're ready get victor to bring them up here in his truck. ok said the barman. thanks said bob. the barman shared the news with the others then crying like an idiot he announced i think it's safe to say all drinks are on the house tonight.





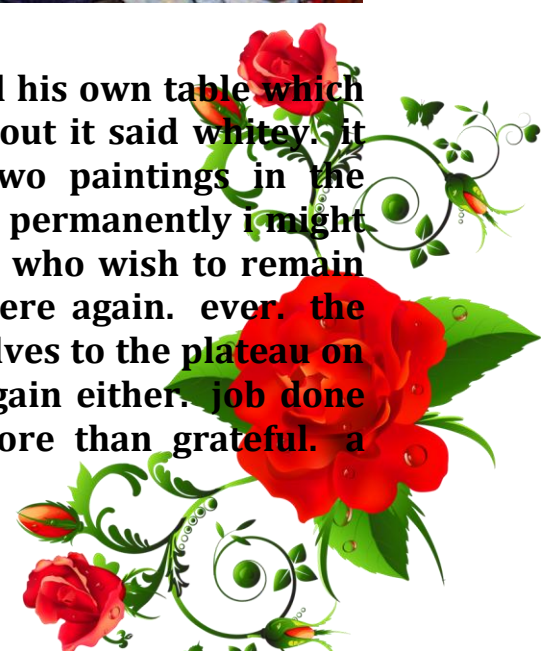
howl-black returned carrying victor over his shoulder. got hit by a bus said whitey - he's ok, just stunned. claudette screamed. he's ok said howl-black - just give him some brandy. valencia and howl-black went back to the tenement early and the others partied long into the night.

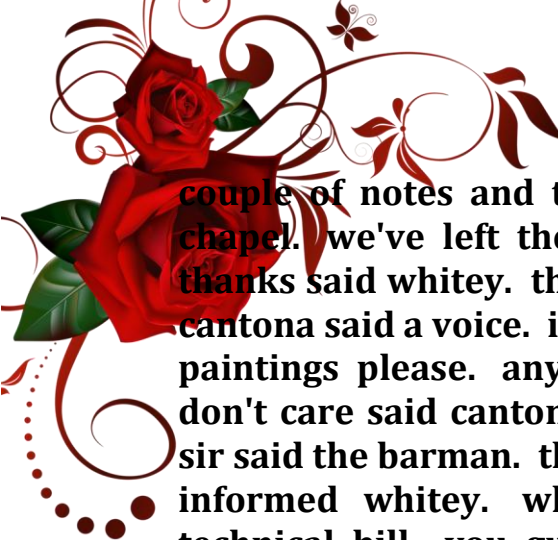
the firebird school of poetry has no permanent home. it is permanently in transit. knowing its location at any given moment is a fine art indeed. there was more, much more, to technical bill than met the eye. his womanising and his drinking - a perfect disguise. and tonight, perhaps for one night only, the stars did indeed truly belong to whitsun horatio maradona howl-black.

from that night onwards they were inseparable. howl-black belonged to valencia. and valencia belonged to howl-black. death couldn't separate them. the firebird school couldn't separate them. howl-black painted like a madman for a month. for a month he forgot about the cabin. come mid-february the paintings for mitchum and kerouac were ready. portraits of valencia. scottish kings who refuse to die. the graveyard and its swords and the chapel on big tam. ghost ships on main street. more portraits of valencia. portraits of claudette and victor, the barman, coronet and technical bill. it was only when the paintings were being loaded into victor's truck that whitey remembered the cabin. we have been wondering when you'd ask said coronet. i'm asking now said whitey. it's good news said coronet. we'll tell you about it over lunch at the lagoon. the truck left for gun hill with claudette at the wheel. angels with huge green wings watching every turn of the wheel.



the blue lagoon was mobbed but howl-black had his own table which was only ever used by him or jesus. tell me about it said whitey. it was pretty easy said bill - we buried the two paintings in the graveyard and the next day the cabin was back. permanently i might add - i've had a word with some special people who wish to remain nameless and the cabin won't be going anywhere again. ever. the graveyard and the chapel have removed themselves to the plateau on big marie and they won't be going anywhere again either. job done said bill. impressive said howl-black - i'm more than grateful. a

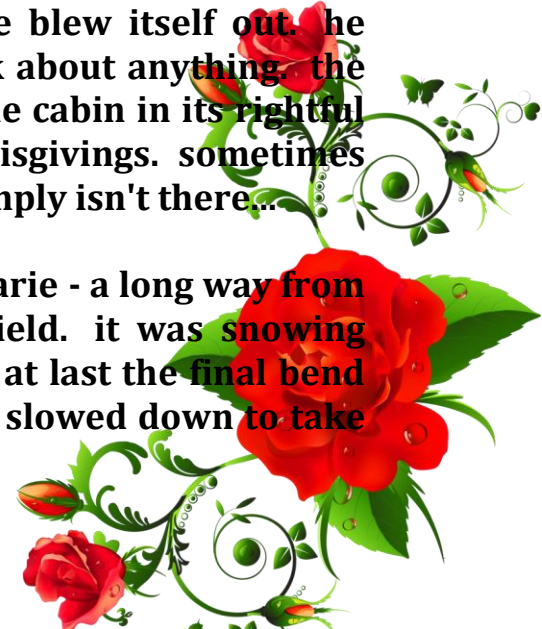


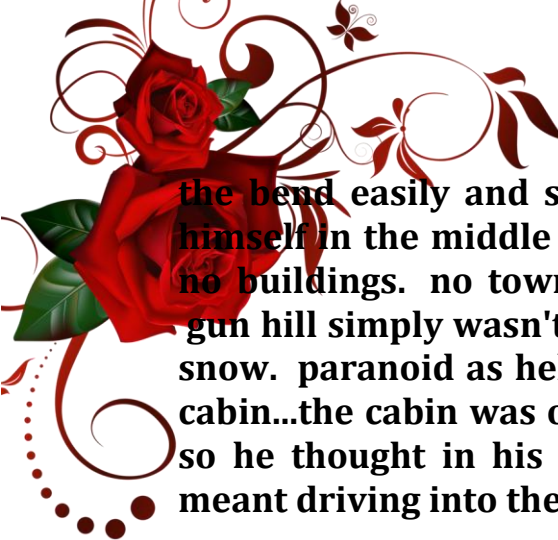


couple of notes and two white roses have been left for you at the chapel. we've left them untouched at the altar continued coronet. thanks said whitey. the phone rang. the barman took the call. je suis cantona said a voice. i am cantona. i'd like to purchase ten howl-black paintings please. any particular subject sir said the barman. no i don't care said cantona. we can deliver within one month from now sir said the barman. thanks said eric. then eric was gone. the barman informed whitey. whitey looked long and hard at coronet and technical bill. you guys seem to be lucky for me said howl-black. maybe said coronet. maybe not said technical bill - they say we make our own luck.

the phone rang again. the barman took the call. my name is gabriel batistuta said a voice. i represent diego maradona continued the voice. maradona would like to purchase ten howl-black paintings please. any particular subject sir said the barman. we particularly like the gun hill paintings but i've been instructed to tell you we'll take whatever we can get. fine sir said the barman - we can deliver within one month from today. thanks said batistuta. then batistuta was gone. the barman informed whitey. jim beam all round and drinks on the house. next day they drove to gun hill for the hanging. it took three days and a team of six to hang all the paintings then whitey drove alone to big marie to collect the two notes. he had not as yet visited the cabin. my guess is he was kinda scared. he was tough enough when he had to be. there was something of a young jack palance inside him but there was also a prince myshkin inside him struggling to be heard. if virtue is its own reward he wondered how come he was doing so well. into the shadows of the chapel strolled the pretender. by the light of a solitary candle he read the notes. the first note was as follows: i miss you. unsigned and ending with a kiss. the second: rescue me. i'm in hell. unsigned and ending with a kiss. as howl-black folded the notes to put them in his pocket the two roses turned to dust before his eyes then the candle blew itself out. he drove back to the hotel trying hard not to think about anything. the next day it was his intention to show valencia the cabin in its rightful place for the first time but now he was having misgivings. sometimes tomorrow never comes. and what if the cabin simply isn't there...

he thought he saw a sea eagle high above lake marie - a long way from home. he thought he saw some wolves in a field. it was snowing heavily. twice he almost lost control of the car. at last the final bend in the road before gun hill. it was now dark. he slowed down to take



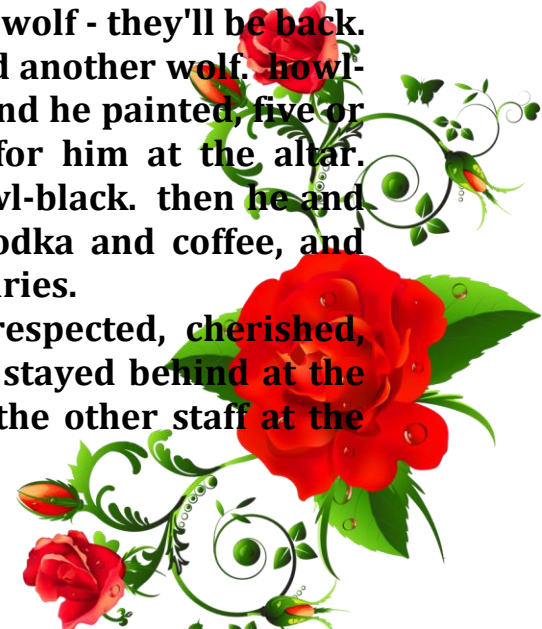


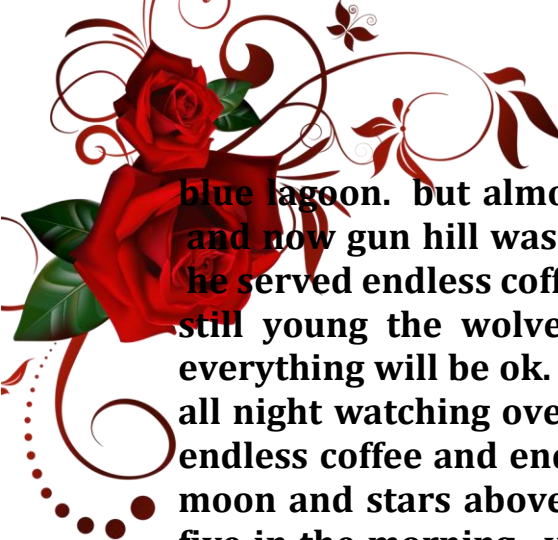
the bend easily and safely. as the car progressed howl-black found himself in the middle of flat empty open space. no lights. no streets. no buildings. no town. he screamed silently. then screamed again. gun hill simply wasn't there. just flat empty open space covered with snow. paranoid as hell he reversed back to the road. glasgow or the cabin...the cabin was only five miles away and a much easier drive or so he thought in his confusion. he chose the cabin. even tho' that meant driving into the snow rather than away from it.

as he approached big tam's plateau smoke from the stove and a mild warm glow from the lights ahead informed him the cabin was indeed really there. he parked next to the porch. the cabin was warm and dry, all the lights were on, white roses in a vase on the kitchen table. he laid himself down on a bed and cried and whimpered like a child till eventually he cried himself to sleep. it snowed all night. when he awoke in the morning all the lights were still on, the cabin was cold and three wolves were sitting on the porch.

he fed and lit the stove. a shotgun was hanging on the kitchen wall. he fired a couple of shots into the ceiling but the wolves didn't move. he found an old record and played it very loud - neil young's cortez the killer. the wolves seemed to like neil young. they didn't move an inch. then he remembered he kinda liked wolves. he walked out onto the porch and said hi and good morning. the wolves kinda nodded and said hi too. we're here to protect you said a wolf. ok said howl-black - thanks. i guess i'm kinda here to protect you too said whitey. thanks said another wolf - i guess now we have the beginnings of an understanding. coffee said whitey. thanks - don't mind if we do said the third wolf. whitsun prepared a pot of coffee. then he and the wolves sat on the porch drinking coffee and watching the sun turn the snow into diamonds. you're thinking of driving to gun hill said a wolf - don't bother, gun hill isn't there anymore. but almost everyone i love is in gun hill said howl-black. don't worry said a wolf - they'll be back. have a couple of drinks and paint for a while said another wolf. howl-black set up his easel and a couple of canvases and he painted, five or six times larger than life, the two notes left for him at the altar. looking kinda good said a wolf. thanks said howl-black. then he and the wolves sat on the porch again, drinking vodka and coffee, and watching the sun slide down behind the three maries.

almost everyone he loved, adored, admired, respected, cherished, wanted and needed was in gun hill. victor had stayed behind at the factory. the barman was safe and secure with the other staff at the

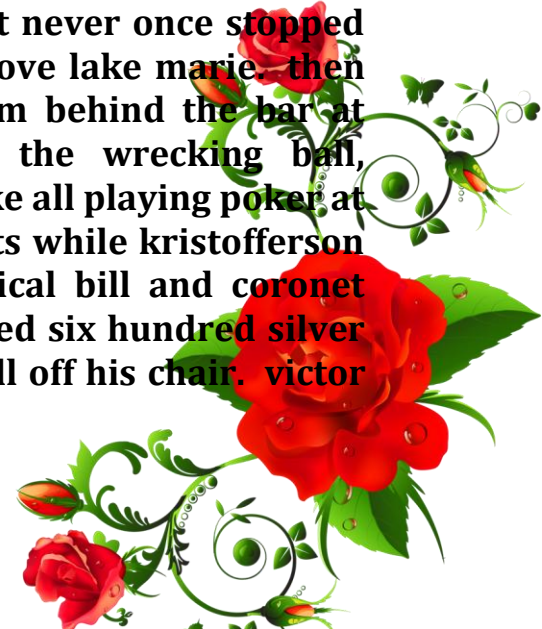




blue lagoon. but almost everyone he loved the most was in gun hill. and now gun hill was gone. he tried very hard not to cry. but failed. he served endless coffee and endless vodka but when the evening was still young the wolves put him to bed. don't worry said a wolf - everything will be ok. one wolf fed the stove then sat with howl-black all night watching over him. the other two sat on the porch drinking endless coffee and endless vodka and studying the movements of the moon and stars above lake marie. tricky stuff said one wolf close to five in the morning. yeah tricky stuff said the other. here comes the sun said the first wolf around seven. yeah tricky stuff said the other.

howl-black was a mess. early morning a wolf phoned victor and the blue lagoon. victor and the barman arrived at the cabin shortly after noon. they had passed thru' gun hill. or more correctly they had passed thru' the place where gun hill should have been. he's a mess said a wolf. he's still sleeping said another wolf. thanks for being around said victor - you can go now if you like. we like it here said a wolf - we'll stick around if that's ok with you. sure said victor - i'll fix some lunch. howl-black surfaced around three and the wolf was right - he was a mess. couldn't walk or talk or stand. he crawled across the floor and eventually made it to the sofa on the porch. coffee he said in a voice that wasn't his own - gimme coffee. victor served coffee but howl-black dropped the cup. victor served another. howl-black held the cup with two shaking hands and drank with difficulty. eventually he spoke - last i saw of technical bill he was eating breakfast with coronet at heaven's gate. claudette and valencia were gonna do brunch with william blake at kerouac's. then he broke down. and no matter what they did he could not be comforted.

victor's truck was loaded with paints and large canvases. that evening howl-black started painting. and he didn't stop till three days and three nights had passed. a wolf or victor or the barman sat with him at all times. he ate a little and drank a little but never once stopped working. first he painted gun hill in the sky above lake marie. then claudette and valencia as angels. then mitchum behind the bar at heaven's gate. he painted clark gable and the wrecking ball, modigliani, kerouac, caravaggio and william blake all playing poker at kerouac's. he painted blake praying in the vaults while kristofferson worked on the church roof. he painted technical bill and coronet playing pool at the gun hill hotel. then he painted six hundred silver monkeys all drowning in lake marie. then he fell off his chair. victor

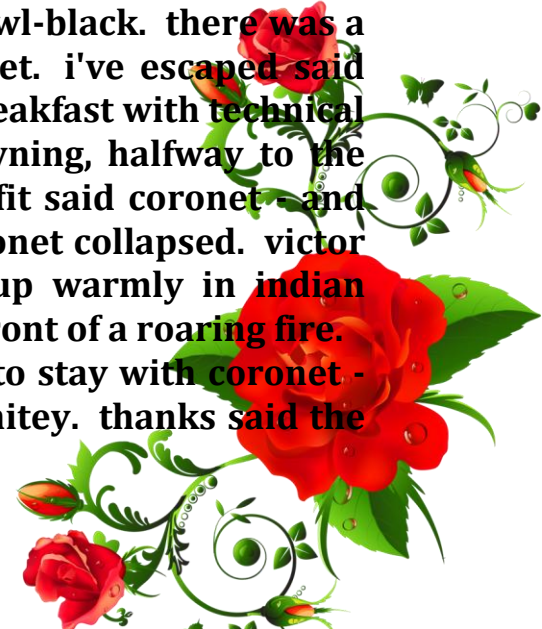





and the barman put him to bed. the barman refused to leave his side till howl-black next awoke.

that's the argentina pictures pretty much done said howl-black when he awoke. after breakfast i'll start on cantona's pictures. when they're finished we'll contact the outlaws - that's the only way to get gun hill back. howl-black had coffee and bourbon for breakfast. then he started work. first he painted cantona flying above the three maries. then he painted the three wolves swimming across lake marie under an august moon. bob mitchum crucified in his own bar. william blake painting caravaggio, caravaggio painting william blake, kristofferson walking on the waters of lake marie. kerouac reading prince myshkin in morning sunshine in the back yard of the blue lagoon. modigliani painting valencia and claudette in the bar at heaven's gate. victor's factory, then victor's trucks. how many is that said howl-black on the third day. ten said the barman. i like cantona said howl-black - let's give him some more. he painted an old love letter, five or six times larger than life, that he'd written for valencia at the gun hill hotel but never sent. he painted cantona attacking the moon with an axe. then the moon attacking cantona with a bow and arrow. he'd been working for four days and nights without rest. they knew he was finished when he fell off his chair. he had not eaten. his only fuel had been coffee, bourbon and cigarettes.

he rested for a couple of days. then on a bright sunny morning in late march he announced at the breakfast table - it's time to contact the outlaws. he phoned a guy who knew a guy, who knew another guy, who knew another guy who knew where the outlaws could be contacted. the outlaws were a clandestine organisation, also known as the outfit, who found things that couldn't be found, fixed things that couldn't be fixed and destroyed things that couldn't be destroyed. they did it for a price. they were good at it. and, to say the least, they were expensive. someone will phone us said howl-black. there was a noise on the porch. it was coronet. soaking wet. i've escaped said coronet - i've escaped. one minute i'm having breakfast with technical bill, the next thing i know i'm halfway to drowning, halfway to the bottom of lake marie. we gotta contact the outfit said coronet - and what the fuck are these wolves doing here? coronet collapsed. victor and the barman stripped him, wrapped him up warmly in indian blankets and put him to bed in victor's room in front of a roaring fire. ship of fools said whitey. he asked the barman to stay with coronet - just in case. i'll do it said victor. thanks said whitey. thanks said the





**barman, the wolves said nothing, and together in the bright morning
sunshine they waited for the outfit to call, and thus endeth chapter 5
of the buffalo house.**





CHAPTER 6: THEY DIDN'T COME BACK

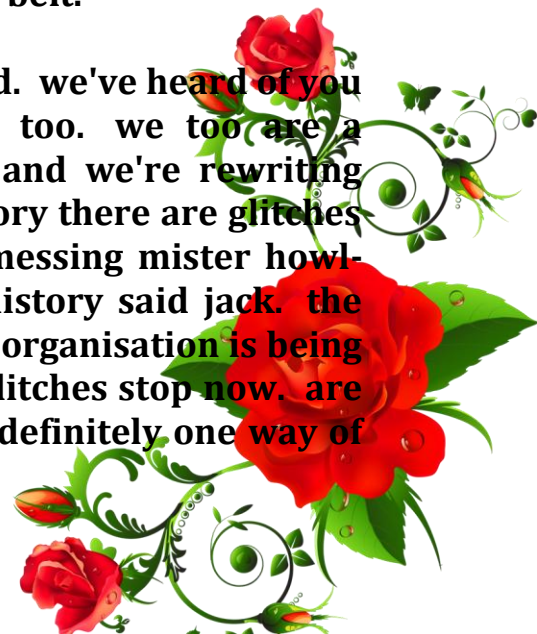
there was a noise on the porch. a fierce looking jack palance had arrived. howdy said jack to the wolves and the wolves said howdy back. i'm jack palance said jack - i'm with the outfit. we are a clandestine organisation so this conversation is not taking place. we hear you got something that needs fixed. yes we do said whitey - the




town of gun hill has gone missing, gone walkabout, disappeared. we'd like gun hill back in its proper place please said whitey. with everybody in it who should be in it added the barman. piece of cake said palance. he handed howl-black a card - phone this number please and arrange payment. any clues said jack. we figure it's got something to do with the firebird school of poetry said the barman. me too said palance. i'll get started straight away. then palance simply disappeared. what the fuck was that said a wolf. that was jack palance said another wolf.

palance went straight to the firebird school. at this time the school was located on a farm on the coast in a county in the north of england. most of the firebirds there were living disguised as poets or bank robbers depending on who was asking the questions. palance introduced himself. i'm jack palance said palance and i represent the outfit. we are a clandestine organisation. our client is the poet painter and writer whitey howl-black. you are fucking him around and it has to stop. it has to stop now. jack unbuttoned his jacket. two evil looking pistols were revealed tucked into his belt.

welcome to the firebird school jack said a firebird. we've heard of you jack of course and we've heard of the outfit too. we too are a clandestine organisation. we are poets jack - and we're rewriting history. sometimes when you are rewriting history there are glitches jack. it's nothing more than that. we are not messing mister howl-black around deliberately. i don't care about history said jack. the glitches have to stop. they have to stop now. my organisation is being paid a hell of a lot of money to ensure that the glitches stop now. are you threatening us said another firebird. that's definitely one way of



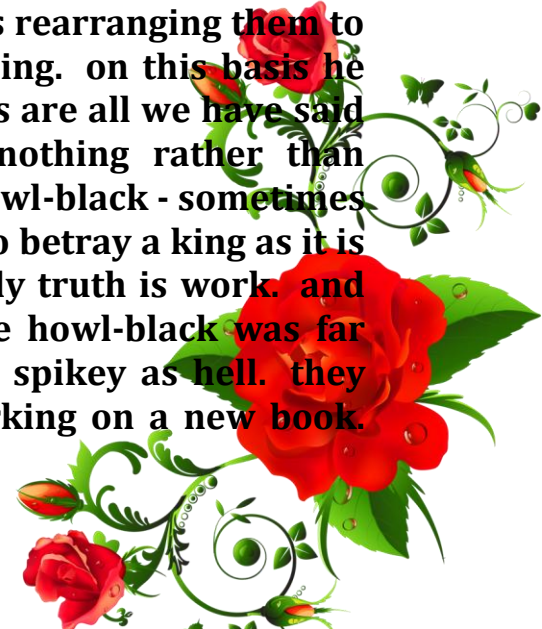



looking at it said palance. let's have drink jack and we'll check with our technical people and see what they have to say said the first firebird. palance fingered the handle of one of his pistols. his eyes flashed. yeah sure let's have a drink said jack.

two firebirds arrived wearing white coats and whispering to each other clandestinely. then they whispered to the first firebird. it seems we have a result jack said the first firebird. mister howl-black's cabin will remain anchored on big tam. gun hill will be returned to its allotted place within a few days. there will be no more glitches for mister howl-black or for those closest to him. certainly none caused by the firebird school. we can guarantee this. but there is one aspect of your client's life we cannot control or guarantee. there is unfinished business between howl-black and his parents and this we cannot control or guarantee.

so what you're saying is there will be no more weird stuff for howl-black caused by the firebird school but he's still gonna get a shedload because of his mother and father. exactly jack said the firebird. but they're dead said palance. at some point or other we are all dead said the king of the firebirds. have some more bourbon jack - enjoy the farm. stick around for a few days. the deerfield hotel is just down the road. we think you'll like it. jack took another couple of shots of bourbon then a taxi took him to the deerfield hotel. there'll be no charge sir said the driver. the driver looked a lot like bob seger. outside the deerfield a neon sign was flashing - no vacancies. trust me said bob - they always have rooms. a slightly dazed and confused jack palance walked to reception and checked himself in at the deerfield hotel.

at the cabin howl-black wrote a few lines. then a few more lines. then a few lines more. then he examined what he had written. he used exactly the same words in his next few sentences rearranging them to give an entirely new and totally different meaning. on this basis he had learned to distrust words. sometimes words are all we have said the barman. sometimes it's better to have nothing rather than something that will betray you in the end said howl-black - sometimes it's better to have no feelings at all. it's as easy to betray a king as it is to betray a fool or a poet or a butterfly. the only truth is work. and even work will fail you. a blind man could see howl-black was far from in a good mood. in fact he was edgy and spikey as hell. they were sitting on the porch. howl-black was working on a new book.




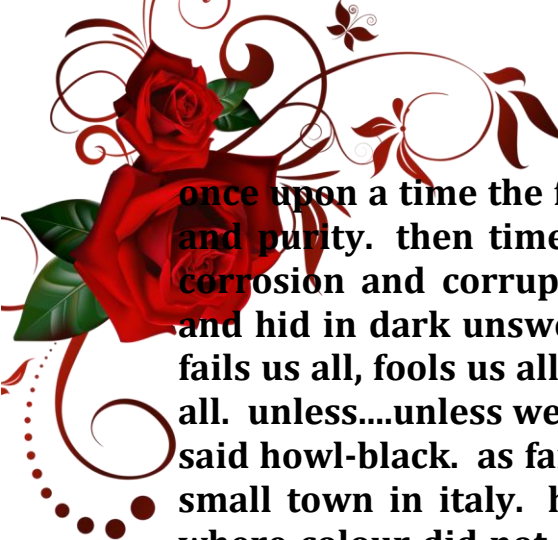


the barman was painting the three wolves. jack balance had been gone three days. van gogh was preparing lunch. if he serves sunflowers again i'll kill him said howl-black. vincent heard this remark, freaked, then quickly retreated into victor mature. vincent's puritan streak had been getting the better of him lately. victor served venison steaks in wild mushroom sauce and several bottles of bourbon and howl-black and the barman breathed more easily. as they ate their steaks and drank their bourbon howl-black was lost in thought regarding prince myshkin and the asylum in the town where there were no rivers and over which the stars refused to shine. the barman tried to engage him in conversation but howl-black could not be reached. whitey was becoming increasingly aware that myshkin and the asylum were creeping ever closer and closer towards securing and establishing a place inside him. prince myshkin was in his veins. always had been. to pretend otherwise would be too close to madness.

any chance of a drink please said a wolf. sure said victor - what would you like? i'd like to try a smokey malt please said the wolf. the barman fetched a bottle of bowmore. thanks said the wolf. me too said howl-black. victor fetched another couple of bottles then cleared the lunch things away. they spent the afternoon painting writing and drinking and watching the play of light and shadows on lake marie.

kid coronet was a long way from ok and could tell them almost nothing. all he remembered was breakfast with technical bill then he was drowning in lake marie. then he wasn't. he knew he had escaped from something but he hadn't a clue how or what that something had been. his composure and confidence were gone. shattered. his nerves were a mess. he was never the same man again. never looked 18 or 19 again. damaged by the firebird school. no matter what the firebird school might say. and just as howl-black would never forget the kindness shown to him by the ham actor victor mature he would not forget or forgive the damage done by the firebird school to his friend kid coronet. howl-black's memory was a broken tool, erratic at best, but there were things he refused to forget. things he refused to forgive. this came at a price of course. but he was content to pay. the hauntings came, the hauntings went. it was his life and he'd play it his way. when the chips are down, when push comes to shove, that's the way it had to be for howl-black. prince myshkin or no prince myshkin.



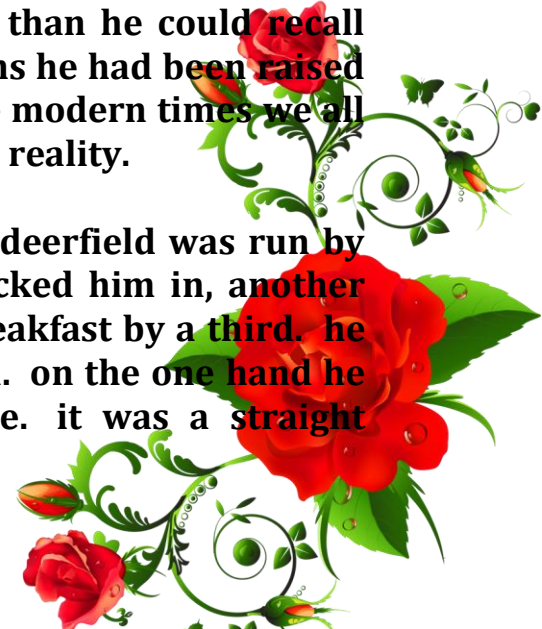



once upon a time the firebird school had been a thing of great beauty and purity. then time did what time does. disguised as innovation, corrosion and corruption slipped into the firebird school. lingered and hid in dark unswept corners. waited. and nobody noticed. time fails us all, fools us all, tricks us all. makes slaves and prisoners of us all. unless....unless we become firebirds said prince myshkin. shut up said howl-black. as far as howl-black was concerned surrender was a small town in italy. his world was a black and white 1950's world where colour did not belong. there was little colour in his paintings. his paintings were austere. according to howl-black colour was for the birds. his paintings were quiet. sometimes colour was just too loud. with howl-black sometimes everything was just too loud and colour just like capital letters was for girls. he liked quiet. peace and quiet. sometimes peace and quiet were all his nerves could handle. scottish blood - twisted, hard and cold. and madness in the soul.

we are a poor nation or so it is said in certain quarters. but at least we have a soul - which is more than can be said for some. our national hero is a poet and howl-black had always taken great pride in this. our national hero is a poet, a drinker and a ladies' man and howl-black found little shame in it. but what the hell did he know? he had been born in alabama and lived in a 1950's black and white bubble. how and why the family had moved to scotland in the first place nobody seemed to know. his father had rarely been around when howl-black was a kid. his mother even less so. he could recall childhood dreams of wolves more easily than he could recall childhood memories of his parents. in his dreams he had been raised by wolves. but dreams are just dreams. in these modern times we all know dreams have no concrete relationship with reality.



jack palance was kinda thrown to find that the deerfield was run by wolves but he took it in his stride. a wolf checked him in, another escorted him to his room and he was served breakfast by a third. he had mixed feelings regarding the firebird school. on the one hand he believed them, on the other he didn't. simple. it was a straight

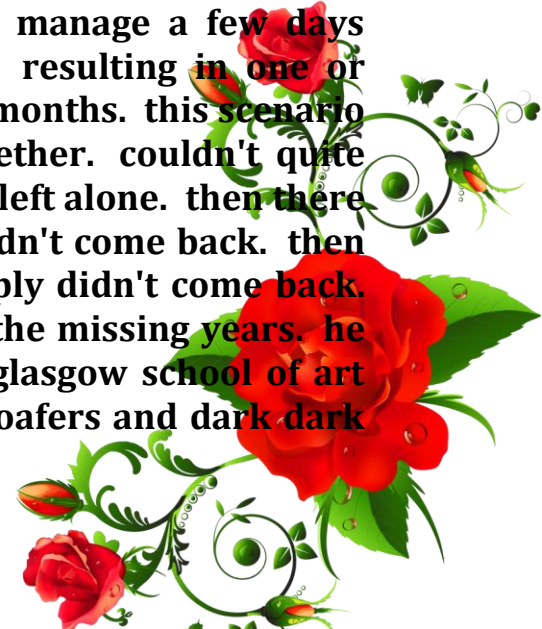


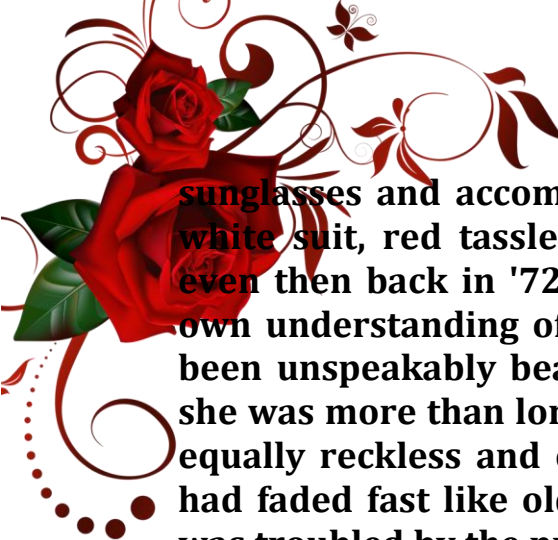


fifty/fifty. they had promised no more glitches coming howl-black's way from the school. they had guaranteed it. once upon a time a guarantee from the firebird school was as rock solid as a guarantee from heaven itself or so it is said in certain quarters. but palance had his doubts. also, the school had indicated howl-black would never be a trouble free zone till certain undisclosed matters had been resolved concerning his parents. he reported to the outfit by telephone, hung around the farm and the hotel for a few days but his opinion remained unchanged. a straight fifty/fifty. despite his reservations he accepted the school's guarantee then bob seger drove him back to scotland thru' heavy rain to report to howl-black. howl-black was less than comforted when he heard palance's news but on a clear and positive note gun hill would be back in its allotted place within twentyfour hours of palance's arrival in scotland.

what howl-black knew about the state of alabama could be written on a postage stamp. most of his adult life had been spent in glasgow. most of his youth in the foothills surrounding glasgow and gun hill. ferdy had been a gambler, wild and free, useful with his fists. alabama had been even more wild and free. ferdy was in fact too useful with his fists. suddenly they had to leave the port of mobile quickly. how or why they picked glasgow nobody knew. whitey's childhood memories were slim. his memory was clearer from the time he started art school. but was it? he seemed to recall being escorted by a wolf to his first day at art school. to those who knew him well his memory was a long standing joke riddled with holes and blanks. too much booze over too many years. time after time he had tried to reduce his intake but the more he tried to reduce - the more he drank. it was the same with smoking. the more he tried to reduce or stop, the more nervous he became, the result being he simply smoked more. the only solution he knew was to quit quitting.

in the old days ferdy and alabama could only manage a few days together before war broke out between them. resulting in one or other of them simply disappearing for weeks or months. this scenario repeated and repeated itself. couldn't live together. couldn't quite live apart. too often as a child whitsun had been left alone. then there came a time when his mother left and simply didn't come back. then there came a time when his father left and simply didn't come back. this was the start of whitsun's memory lapses. the missing years. he could recall that in 1972 he started classes at glasgow school of art wearing that first day a white suit, red tassled loafers and dark dark





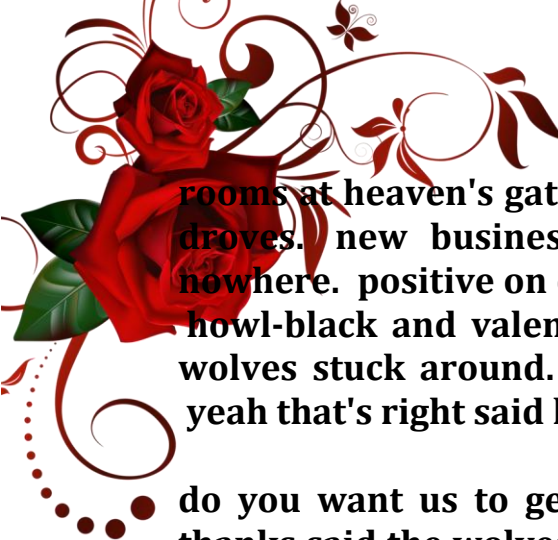
sunglasses and accompanied that first day by a wolf also wearing a white suit, red tassled loafers and dark dark sunglasses. he knew even then back in '72 that he couldn't trust his own memory or his own understanding of what is real and what is not. his mother had been unspeakably beautiful glamorous and reckless but back in '72 she was more than long gone. his father had been mysterious distant equally reckless and equally gone. his slim memories of them both had faded fast like old black and white photographs. the art school was troubled by the presence of the wolf and after that first day howl-black attended classes alone.

a bed was made up for palance at the cabin. they had a late supper. it rained all night. in the morning they breakfasted together. palance, howl-black, victor mature, the barman and the three wolves. then they drove to gun-hill. and there it was, a sleepy little one horse town, sitting there in the rain as if it had never been away. anchored there now for all eternity. valencia and claudette were having brunch with william blake at kerouac's bar. they had no idea they'd been away. no idea time had stopped for gun hill for almost ten days. kid coronet had fallen ill at breakfast that very morning and would never fully recover. and this howl-black vowed never to forget or forgive.

nobody seemed to notice or mind the wolves at brunch or on the streets. or anywhere else in gun hill. three wolves roaming the streets or drinking and playing poker in the hotels or in one of the bars seemed the most normal thing in the world in the wee small one horse town of gun hill. the conversion work at the church was now complete. the church was now open for business as a hotel and bar. and the artists' studios were available for rent. blake, utrillo, modigliani, caravaggio and van gogh all had one leaving three available for rent. blake had a small apartment in the vaults. mitchum took a studio too. he liked to paint now and then. only two studios were now still free. howl-black decided he'd wait a while before explaining to his friends that they had disappeared off the map for almost two weeks.

gun hill was now a boom town. word quickly spread regarding all the big names and hot shots now living there. victor, claudette and the barman returned to glasgow. jack palance disappeared into the mists of time. technical bill found a place in the hills, a small farm, where he could take care of kid coronet. kristofferson bought a big house on the edge of town. utrillo, modigliani, caravaggio and van gogh all had

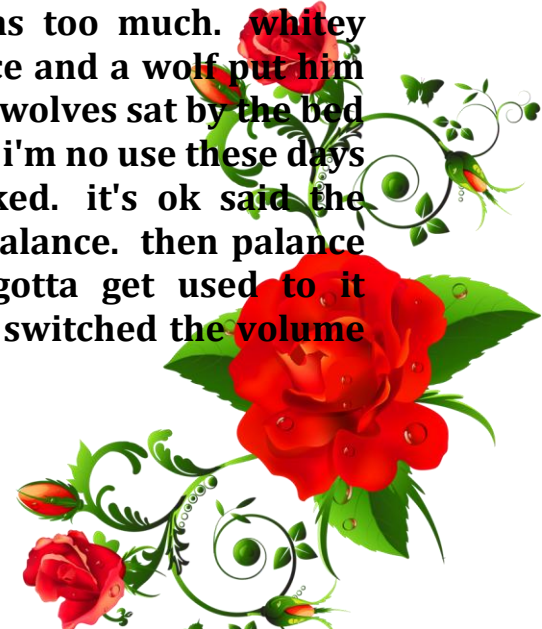


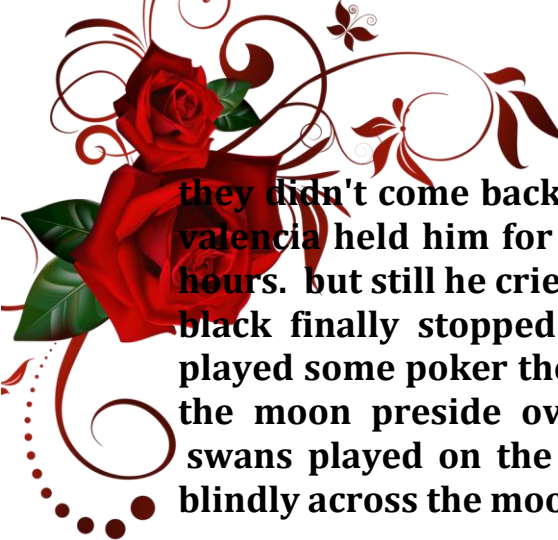


rooms at heaven's gate. tourists, art lovers and week-enders came in droves. new businesses and new buildings appeared as if from nowhere. positive on one hand but gun hill was losing its charm. fast. howl-black and valencia installed themselves at the cabin. and the wolves stuck around. looks like you can't get rid of us said a wolf. yeah that's right said howl-black...

do you want us to get rid of you howl-black asked the wolves. no thanks said the wolves - we like it here. ok said whitey - stick around boys. stick around - we like having you here. thanks said the wolves. don't mention it said valencia. ok we won't said the wolves. they were all sitting on the porch drinking vodka and watching the sun go down behind big marie. gun hill is changing too fast said a wolf. yes it is said howl-black. i kinda miss jack palance said howl-black. we do too said the wolves in unison. maybe i'll give him a call said howl-black. yeah give him a call said the wolves. howl-black knew a guy who knew a guy who had jack's private number. howl-black called jack. hey jack we miss you - why don't you come and visit and stay at the cabin for a few days said howl-black. is this official or unofficial said jack. both said howl-black. i'll be there in an hour said palance. twenty minutes later jack palance was on the porch drinking vodka and playing poker with the wolves. then howl-black went to the old record player and played purple rain. this song is dedicated to my father said howl-black. i don't wanna be your week-end lover, i don't wanna be some kinda friend, purple rain, purple rain, i only want to see you in the purple rain...

can you turn that down please said palance - i'm trying to play poker here. sorry jack said howl-black. and he turned it down. just a little bit. things are changing too fast in gun hill said a wolf. yes they are said another wolf. then howl-black turned the volume up on purple rain. and there was no victor mature there to rescue him. and the barman was a long long way away too. it was too much. whitey flipped, freaked, then blew out. valencia, palance and a wolf put him to bed. valencia held him close all night and two wolves sat by the bed all night. in the morning howl-black apologised. i'm no use these days said howl-black - my nerves are just too fucked. it's ok said the wolves. it's ok said valencia. it's ok said jack palance. then palance put on purple rain really really loud. you gotta get used to it sometime. now is a good time to start. then he switched the volume up. jesus it was loud. purple rain. purple rain.





they didn't come back screamed howl-black. then he cried for hours. valencia held him for hours. but still he cried. palance held him for hours. but still he cried. let it bleed said jack. come the evening howl-black finally stopped crying. they ate a little, drank malt whisky, played some poker then sat together for hours on the porch watching the moon preside over lake marie. prince myshkin said nothing. swans played on the lake as the shadow of an angel's wing passed blindly across the moon.

the same old story. just different words and different players. too many locks, too many doors, too many keys. fragmenting eternally into nothing. and thus chapter 6 of the buffalo house comes to its end.





CHAPTER 7: MAYBE WE ARE ALL ANGELS

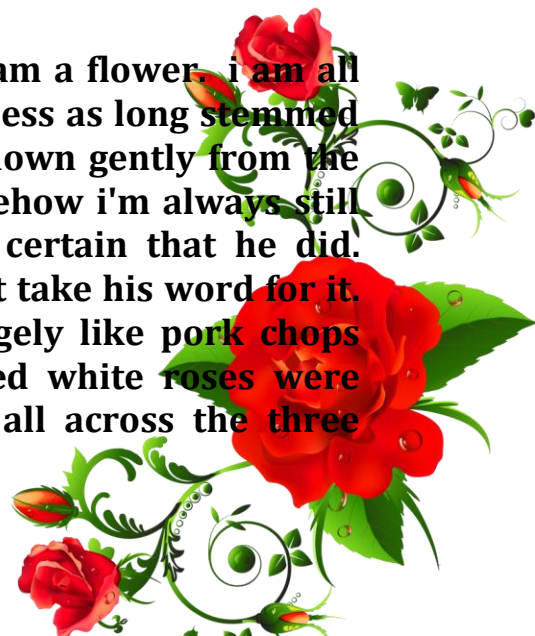
in the early morning jack and howl-black went fishing in a little




yellow and red rowing boat on lake marie. the devils living at the bottom of the lake considered sinking the rowing boat just for laughs but they felt sorry for howl-black, figured he'd had enough bad stuff happening to him lately and decided to let him be. i've a friend i'd like to bring up here for a couple of days - his name is deathless said palance. sure thing said howl-black. deathless arrived at noon. he looked and sounded a lot like kris kristofferson but he was made entirely outa flowers - white flowers which changed in spirit shape and form by the hour and minute and with the seasons.

they had a few drinks then drove to the graveyard and chapel on big marie. swords were still suspended in the air above the graves. many candles filled the chapel with sacred light. white roses in every corner and on every available surface. white roses raining down gently from the ceiling. no notes at the altar for howl-black. i like it here said deathless. me too said palance. howl-black was not so sure.

so who are you said howl-black to deathless. i am a flower. i am all flowers. i am the spirit of all flowers said deathless as long stemmed sweet perfumed white roses continued to rain down gently from the ceiling. i don't last long said deathless but somehow i'm always still around. i see said howl-black. but he wasn't certain that he did. considering the circumstances said palance - just take his word for it. maybe said howl-black. they all laughed strangely like pork chops then stepped outside the chapel. long stemmed white roses were falling from the sky all across the graveyard, all across the three

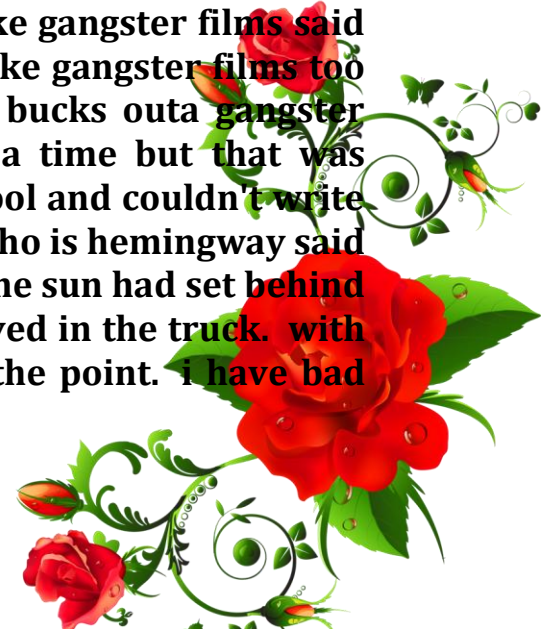





maries and continued to rain down gently on them all the way back to the cabin. i guess i'm in the wrong business said howl-black. maybe you are said deathless. i can get you a job with the outfit if you like said jack palance. yeah maybe said howl-black. they drove to gun hill for dinner. heaven's gate was mobbed, kerouac's was mobbed and caravaggio's new church bar was mobbed too. there was a new pizza joint on main street, a chinese take away and a burrito stall. almost everybody new in town was looking for something or someone - but all uncertain what or who that might be. something had been lost. gun hill was changing too fast. construction work was going on everywhere so at least the town's builders were content. welcome to the real world said howl-black.

they visited william blake in his apartment in the vaults then bought some burritos which they ate on the drive back to the cabin. sometimes we need peace and quiet more than we realise said howl-black. sometimes we need a burrito, a few drinks and a bit of fun more than we realise said deathless. valencia laughed and choked a little on her burrito. howl-black gave her a dark look. gun hill's a mess said howl-black. i know said valencia. in the early morning jack, howl-black and deathless took the little rowing boat out again onto lake marie and the fishing went well. they fished for a long time. when the light began to fade they went back to the cabin. music might not build you a house said palance but it can make you feel good. it can also make you feel bad said howl-black. don't be so negative said valencia. i'm not being negative said howl-black i'm simply telling the truth. gun hill is a mess continued howl-black - it's changing too fast. you said that a thousand times last night said valencia. did not said howl-black. o' yes you did said said valencia. o' yes you did said palance while poking howl-black hard in the ribs.

any booze around here asked deathless. yeah sure said howl-black - sorry. valencia served some drinks. i used to like gangster films said howl-black but we grow outa things. i used to like gangster films too said palance - once upon a time i made a few bucks outa gangster films. i used to adore hemingway once upon a time but that was before i realised he was an uptight controlling fool and couldn't write about women to save his soul said howl-black. who is hemingway said valencia. a writer from chicago said deathless. the sun had set behind the three maries when victor and claudette arrived in the truck. with three rocking chairs for the porch. straight to the point. i have bad






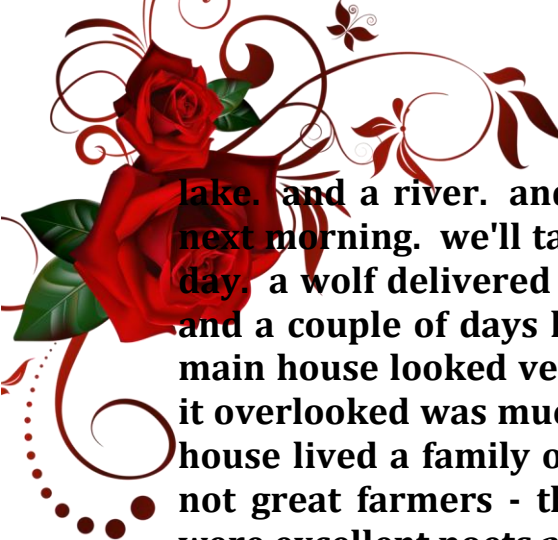
news said victor. the blue lagoon is gone. disappeared. simply not there. it's an empty lot.

fuck it said howl-black. then he said it again. gimme a drink for god's sake. valencia filled his glass. then he said - arses arses arses arses. then he said fuck it again. i smell the firebird school said victor. no i don't think so said howl-black - they wouldn't dare. yes they would said palance - but i don't think so. not this time. whoever it is said victor they left you this - victor handed howl-black a long stemmed white rose and an envelope. howl-black opened the envelope. a note. four words. two sentences. ending with a kiss. find me. help me. ending with a kiss. fuck it said howl-black. valencia poured him another stiff drink. then for a long time nobody spoke. darkness gathered itself around the stars.

it was on the tv news when we left town. it'll be all over the morning papers said victor. you can't lose a building like that even in glasgow without it being noticed. chef and the barman and the others are gone too. fuck it said howl-black. then he said fuck it again. then he put the white rose in an empty bourbon bottle. gun hill was a relatively isolated community. they'd managed to keep their strange goings on reasonably quiet for years. but in a city the size of glasgow a fashionable successful bar and restaurant can't simply disappear overnight without attracting the attention of the authorities. maybe they'll put inspector spanky on the case said claudette. no they wouldn't dare said howl-black. not this time. the chances of them using spanky are less than zero. later that night kristofferson, jack palance and deathless drove into glasgow to eagle street where the blue lagoon should have been located but the street was cordoned off. police were everywhere. real police. they had guns. real guns. our boys could establish nothing other than the blue lagoon was gone. leaving nothing behind but empty space.

in the morning victor drove howl-black and valencia to the airport. i'll stay at the cabin for a few days said victor. they flew to italy. leaving jack palance and the wolves in charge of their affairs. they stayed in rome for a couple of days then headed south following the coast all they found a pretty little town called surrender. they checked into a small hotel called the buffalo house and were happy to find the hotel was run by wolves. it was their intention to start looking for a place to rent where howl-black could work. don't bother said the wolves. we have the perfect place for you in the mountains. it's called buffalo house said a wolf. it's called buffalo farm said another wolf. there's a

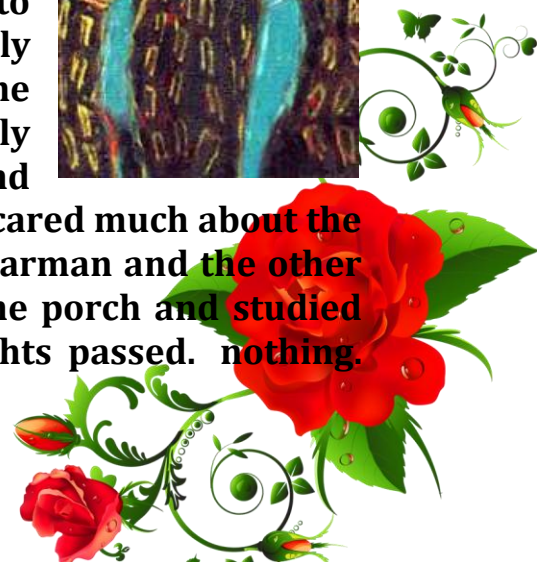


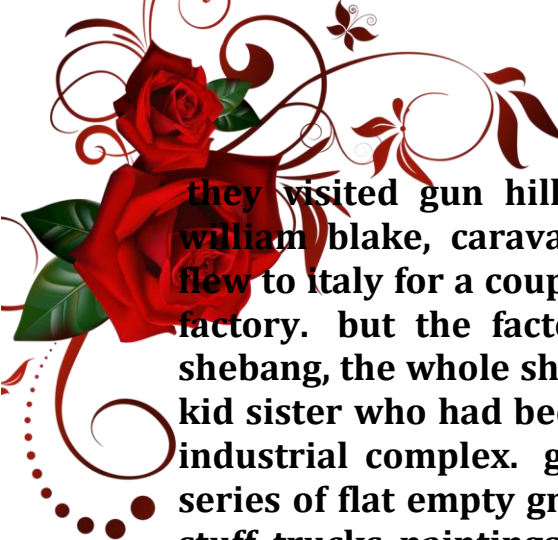


lake. and a river. and it's very very quiet. a wolf drove them there next morning. we'll take it said howl-black. they moved in that same day. a wolf delivered their things from the hotel later in the evening and a couple of days later paints and canvas arrived from rome. the main house looked very much like the cabin back home. but the lake it overlooked was much smaller. on the far side of the lake in a small house lived a family of wolves who looked after the farm. they were not great farmers - the hotel driver had told howl-black - but they were excellent poets and cooks from a long and ancient line. the main house, just like the bar and hotel in surrender, was known as buffalo house.

when victor arrived back at the cabin the police were already there. are they wolves asked inspector spanky. no sir they are canadian wolfhounds said victor. thank god for that said spanky. we're looking for whitsun howl-black...his restaurant has disappeared. we suspect aliens might be involved. howl-black has disappeared too said victor. he asked me to look after this place for the summer - said he was going away for a while but didn't say where. i've heard nothing from him since. if you hear from howl-black please let us know and ask him to contact us immediately said spanky. sure thing said victor. spanky left. then came back twentyfour hours later and victor was arrested. they held him for a week, questioned him almost day and night but in the end they had to let him go. the blue lagoon was big news but then along came the next big news and the story of the blue lagoon began to fade somewhat from the limelight.

palance contacted the firebird school. the firebirds were nervous. but they managed to convince jack they had nothing to do with it. the trail was elsewhere. the clues were elsewhere. in the notes. notes from the underworld. jack was on the case. having got victor outa jail palance drove him to the cabin where he was restored to claudette and the wolves and deathless. only victor and claudette, jack, deathless and the wolves knew howl-black and valencia were in italy and on this basis they were confident whitey and valencia would remain safe and secure. nobody cared much about the restaurant itself. the real deal was getting the barman and the other staff back. easier said than done. they sat on the porch and studied the moon. they studied the lake. days and nights passed. nothing.

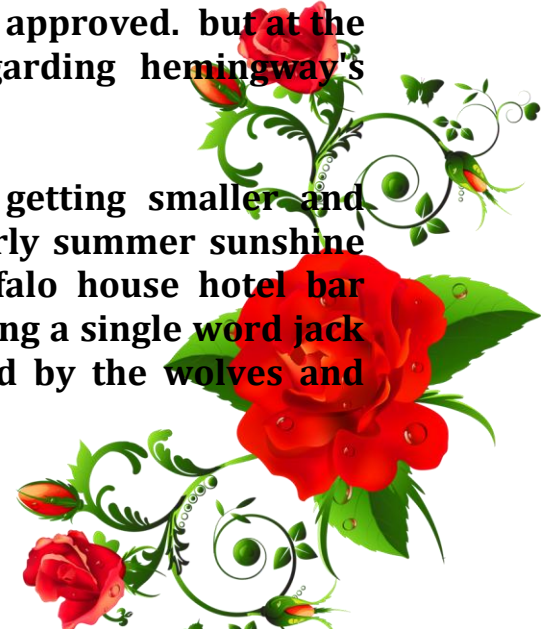





they visited gun hill. sought advice from mitchum and kerouac, william blake, caravaggio, kristofferson and others. nothing. jack flew to italy for a couple of days. claudette and victor returned to the factory. but the factory was gone. gone. cats, horses, the whole shebang, the whole shooting match including claudette and valencia's kid sister who had been looking after the cats and horses. the whole industrial complex. gone. gone. and gone. all that was left was a series of flat empty green fields leading to the graveyard. all victor's stuff, trucks, paintings, everything. gone. claudette and victor freaked badly. their passports were in the car they were driving. they drove to the airport and flew to italy.

is the farm for sale howl-black asked the wolves at the buffalo house hotel. yeah sure said the wolves. we'd like to buy it please said valencia. yeah sure said the wolves. then they drove to rome to pick up palance from the airport little knowing they'd be back there in less than twentyfour hours to collect victor and claudette. all hell was breaking loose in glasgow. they stopped at the buffalo house for drinks on their way back to the farm. howl-black recognised glasgow on the news on the hotel bar's television. a whole industrial estate on the east side of town had simply disappeared overnight. howl-black would have liked to collapse but couldn't. valencia would have liked to collapse too but couldn't. one for my baby and one more for the road said palance. he ordered brandy. lots of it. they threw the brandy down their throats. lots of it. and then some more. nobody spoke. nobody could speak. not even jack palance. speech belonged to a world that no longer existed. they drank more brandy and when they were close to falling off their chairs the wolves put them to bed. in the morning the buffalo house phone rang. it was claudette and victor begging for a lift. a wolf drove their guests to the airport in the buffalo house mini-bus to collect victor and claudette. before noon they were all, wolves included, drinking brandy again in the bar at the buffalo house hotel. hemingway would not have approved. but at the buffalo house hotel nobody gave a fuck regarding hemingway's approval.

eventually jack palance spoke. the world is getting smaller and smaller said jack. but that afternoon as hot early summer sunshine filtered its way thru' the windows of the buffalo house hotel bar nobody understood or gave a flying fuck regarding a single word jack said. endless bottles of brandy were consumed by the wolves and

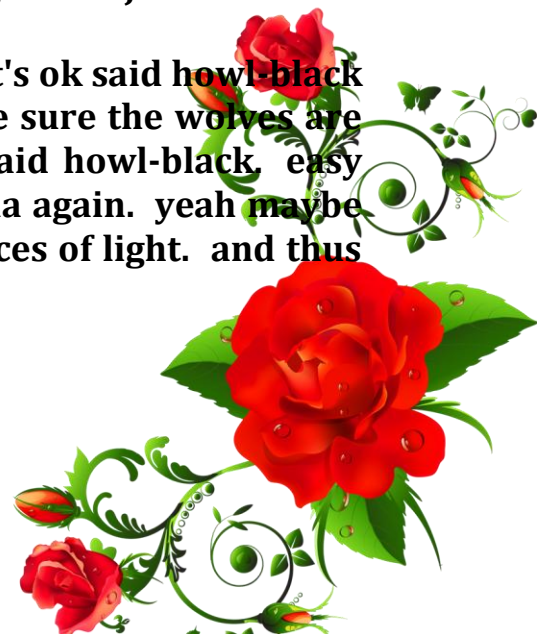




their guests. and when their guests were close to falling off their chairs the wolves kindly and tenderly put their guests to bed again. the next day a wolf drove the guests to the farm. howl-black switched on the tv. experts from across the globe were flying into glasgow to attempt to resolve the disappearance. the authorities urgently wanted to find the writer and artist whitsun howl-black, the ham actor victor mature and the twin sisters claudette and valencia cruz. there were rumours in glasgow the authorities had even contacted the clandestine organisation known as the outfit to help resolve matters. fuck it said palance. maybe we are all angels said valencia. get real said howl-black. maybe we are all angels said claudette. maybe we are said palance. don't look at me said victor - i'm just a dumb ham actor. too fucking right said howl-black. the family of wolves arrived from across the lake with lunch. we've brought you lunch said a wolf and if it pleases you we'd like to recite some of our poems. it was an exquisite lunch. and as the wolves recited their exquisite and ancient poems our friends watched themselves on tv. wanted posters going up all over glasgow. wanted for questioning - whitsun howl-black, victor mature, claudette and valencia cruz and jack palance. fuck it said palance. fuck it said howl-black.

maybe we are all angels said valencia. yes maybe we are all angels said claudette. maybe we are all angels said the wolves. and as the wolves continued to recite their exquisite poems thru' the afternoon and into the evening our friends continued to watch themselves on tv. who the fuck knows said howl-black. yeah who the fuck knows said palance. it's time you wolves had a drink said howl-black - poetry is thirsty work. and it's time i did some cooking. valencia and claudette served drinks and as a yellow moon climbed high in the pale sky howl-black hit the kitchen to cook for the wolves. you need a hand asked palance. yeah sure why not said whitey. i guess spanky will be here soon said whitsun. yeah you're probably right said jack.

do you guys need a hand said victor. no thanks it's ok said howl-black - you can do the drinking for all of us. just make sure the wolves are ok. ok said victor - consider it done. thanks said howl-black. easy said victor. maybe we are all angels said valencia again. yeah maybe you're right said whitey - maybe we are all princes of light. and thus chapter 7 of the buffalo house came to its end.





CHAPTER 8: THE WHITE ROSE

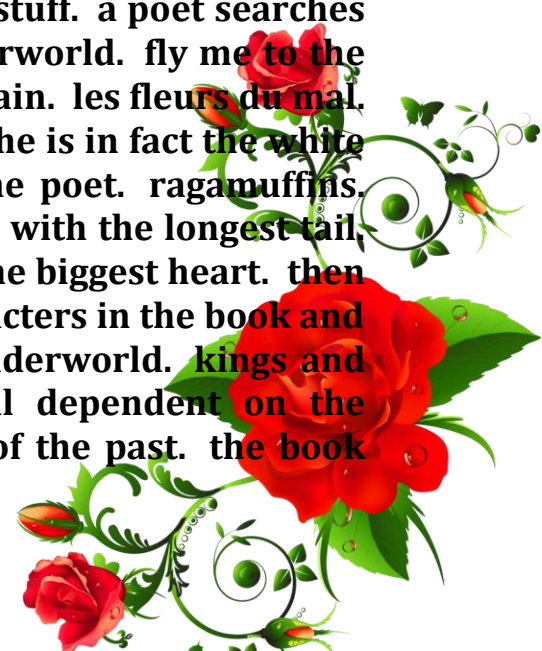
albie camus arrived at the farm. i'd like to buy a couple of paintings

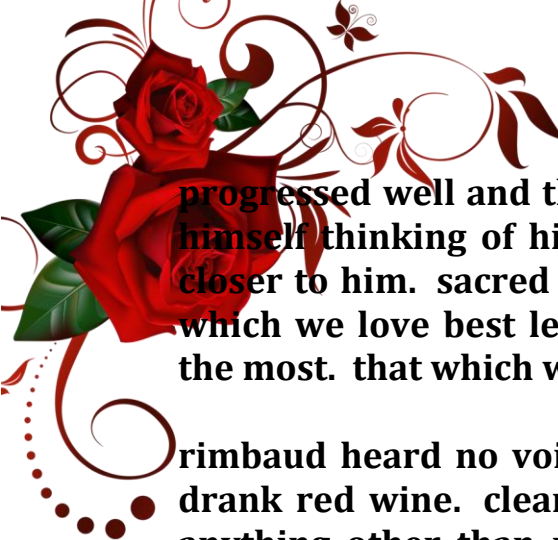


please said camus. grand said howl-black - where are you staying? the buffalo house hotel said camus. gimme a week said whitey. then the great renoir arrived at the farm. i'd like to buy two paintings please said the great renoir. you're too kind said howl-black. no it is you who is too kind said renoir. where are you staying said howl-black. the buffalo house hotel in the room next to albie camus said renoir. grand said howl-black. just

grand - gimme a week. next to arrive at the farm was the poet arthur rimbaud. i'd like to buy two paintings please said rimbaud. grand said howl-black - where are you staying? nowhere - i haven't a clue said rimbaud. stay here with us for a while said howl-black. kool said rimbaud - thanks. for the next few days howl-black and rimbaud spent a lot of time alone together discussing the secret lives of roses. white roses. and the true nature of light. then soon they were writing a book together.

howl-black would write the first few paragraphs or pages then rimbaud would write the next. then so on and so forth. the working title of the book was - the white rose. the usual stuff. a poet searches in vain for his lost love. adventures in the underworld. fly me to the moon. paradise lost. love regained. then lost again. les fleurs du mal. what is real and what is not. the poet discovers he is in fact the white rose. the white rose discovers she is in fact the poet. ragamuffins. ghosts. the prettiest boy on the beach. the devil with the longest tail. the beast with the sharpest claw. the lion with the biggest heart. then the poets realise they are all the individual characters in the book and the book is a book of shadows. kings of the underworld. kings and queens of shadows and love lost. we are all dependent on the kindness of strangers. all formed by shadows of the past. the book






progressed well and the more they wrote the more howl-black found himself thinking of his mother. with each chapter his mother drew closer to him. sacred voices drew closer to him too. whispering that which we love best leaves us first. that which we love best hurts us the most. that which we love best will return to us again and again.

rimbaud heard no voices. he drank red wine and wrote. wrote and drank red wine. cleaned his gun and tried not to think much about anything other than red wine and writing. he noticed dark clouds gathering in howl-black's haunted eyes, the hard to miss slight twitch in howl-black's neck and hands. rimbaud thought it best to say nothing. he cleaned his gun and dreamed of galveston. as the book drove itself forward howl-black's health deteriorated. as the book drove itself forward alabama was wandering in the mists of the foothills surrounding gun hill looking for her son. knowing not that her son was in hiding in surrender. love and regret were burning a hole where her heart should have been. alabama had escaped from hell. the gods had given her a second chance. and now, looking for her boy, she wanted to apologise and make amends. the wolves at big tam, the leaves on the trees, the waters of lake marie and the devils beneath could all sense a new and powerful being in the area. they just couldn't figure out who what or why. deathless and the wolves simply waited.

all the sad beautiful things you say said valencia. i'm sorry said howl-black questioningly. all the sad beautiful things you say she said it again. howl-black said nothing. they were sitting in shadows at a corner table on the terrace of the buffalo house hotel. or at least they appeared to be. but howl-black wasn't really there. man he was gone. long gone. in another place and time. she held his trembling hand more tightly. but what if we are angels said valencia. get real said howl-black. a strange looking man wearing a white suit and dark glasses and looking a lot like southside johnny presented himself at howl-black's table. is this new jersey said the man. no said howl-black this is italy. are you howl-black said the man. i think so said whitey. are you southside johnny said valencia. i think so said johnny. please sit down and have a drink with us said valencia. don't mind if i do said johnny. a wolf cleared the table then served fresh bourbon, fresh glasses and a bucket of ice.

where are you staying asked valencia. here at the buffalo house said southside. most modern art is crap said johnny. trying too hard to be





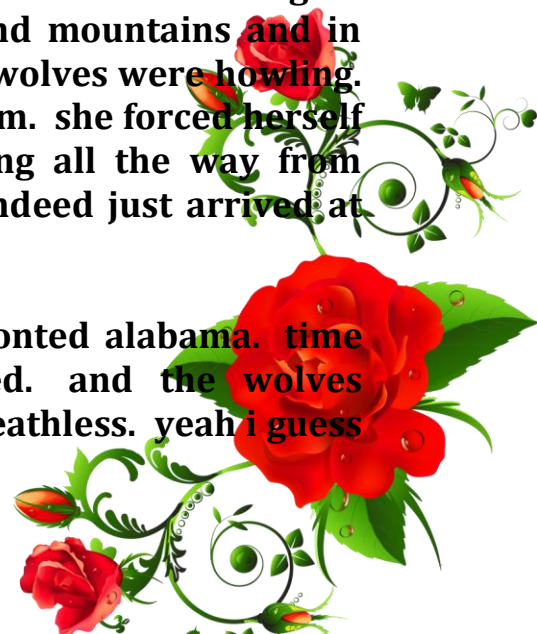
new and now. i like the old stuff. i'd like to buy some paintings please said johnny. grand said howl-black - just grand - but you might have to wait a week or so. i'll wait said southside. grand said howl-black and just as he was about to request another bottle of bourbon a wolf served another saying this one's on the house. thanks said howl-black. don't mention it said the wolf.

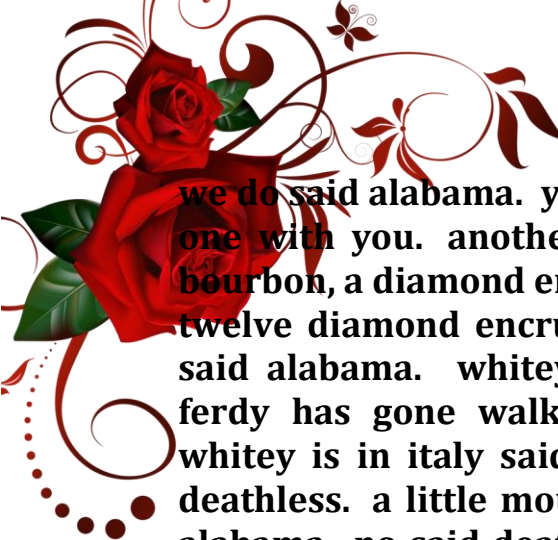
they say don't look back but with painting you have to look back. there is almost zero painting these days. just some idiot pressing fucking buttons much too hungry for new now and next. same with the music business said johnny. nobody sings or plays these days - they just press buttons. new, now and next. i'm an old fashioned guy. i like the old stuff. i'm getting old i guess said johnny. it seems we are of one mind said howl-black as another bottle of bourbon arrived on the table. it's on the house said the wolf. later that evening southside crawled to his room escorted by two gentle wolves while another wolf drove whitey and valencia back to the farm. all the sad and beautiful things you say said valencia. but howl-black was already asleep.

valencia didn't care. with southside's visit howl-black seemed more in light now than in shadow. relaxed and content she wrapped her body around howl-black then she too fell asleep. she dreamed that jesus had returned the barman and her kid sister to the fold but in the morning there was no trace of jesus or the barman or the kid sister within the precincts of buffalo farm. the next night she dreamed howl-black had won millions at the casino but had then burnt the money. in the morning when she awoke she found the farm littered with the remnants of burning banknotes and blind poets reciting ancient mantras and sweeping up the litter.

the next night she dreamed alabama had arrived at the cabin on big tam. she awoke in the night in a cold sweat. wolves were howling all across buffalo farm, throughout the foothills and mountains and in surrender too. all the way from italy to big tam wolves were howling. she decided it was nothing more than a bad dream. she forced herself back to sleep. but wolves were indeed howling all the way from surrender back to big tam. and alabama had indeed just arrived at the cabin.

alabama confronted deathless. deathless confronted alabama. time stopped. alabama laughed. deathless laughed. and the wolves stopped howling. i guess we need a drink said deathless. yeah i guess



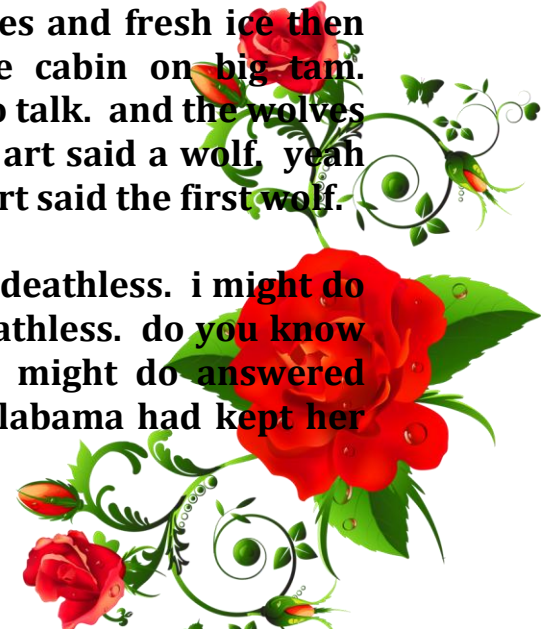


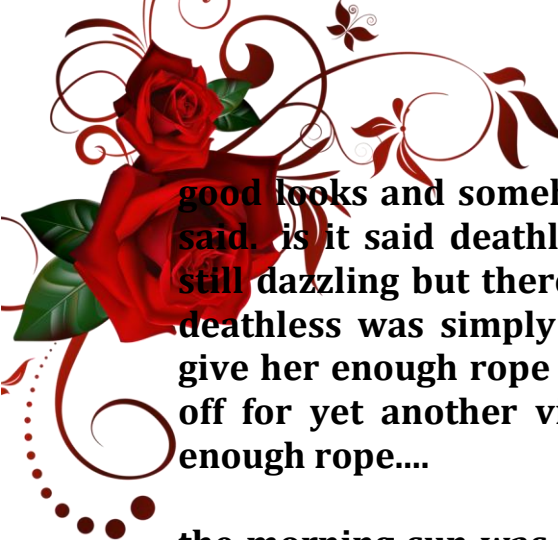
we do said alabama. yeah have a fucking drink said a wolf - we'll have one with you. another wolf immediately produced three bottles of bourbon, a diamond encrusted decanter, several truncheons of water, twelve diamond encrusted glasses and a bucket of ice. where is he said alabama. whitey or ferdy said deathless. both said alabama. ferdy has gone walkabout said deathless. nobody knows where. whitey is in italy said deathless. italy said alabama. yes italy said deathless. a little mountain town called surrender. is he alone said alabama. no said deathless. he has wolves and various chess pieces. mostly poets and actors. a lake, a river and a farm. foothills. a small hotel. the mountain gods are with him. he has his painting and his writing and a young good looking girl called valencia cruz. no said deathless - he's not alone.

i just want to apologise said alabama. i know said deathless. and ask for his forgiveness said alabama. i know said deathless. sometimes good shit happens said deathless - sometimes bad shit happens. i know said alabama. do angels watch over valencia cruz asked alabama. yes they do replied deathless. the wolves love him said deathless. yes i know said alabama. does this valencia cruz have a sister said alabama. yes said deathless. she has a twin sister and a kid sister said deathless - and the kid sister has gone missing. i can find the kid sister said alabama. yes i know said deathless. you seem to know quite a lot said alabama. yes i know some stuff said deathless but there's a whole bunch of stuff, an endless amount of stuff about which i know absolutely nothing at all. a wolf cleared the table, served more bourbon, more truncheons of water, fresh glasses and fresh ice then retreated to the porch. dawn broke over the cabin on big tam. deathless and alabama continued to drink and to talk. and the wolves continued to drink and to listen. listening is an art said a wolf, yeah maybe said another wolf. maybe drinking is an art said the first wolf.



do you know a fella known as the barman asked deathless. i might do answered alabama. i thought you might said deathless. do you know where he might be located asked deathless. i might do answered alabama. i thought you might said deathless. alabama had kept her



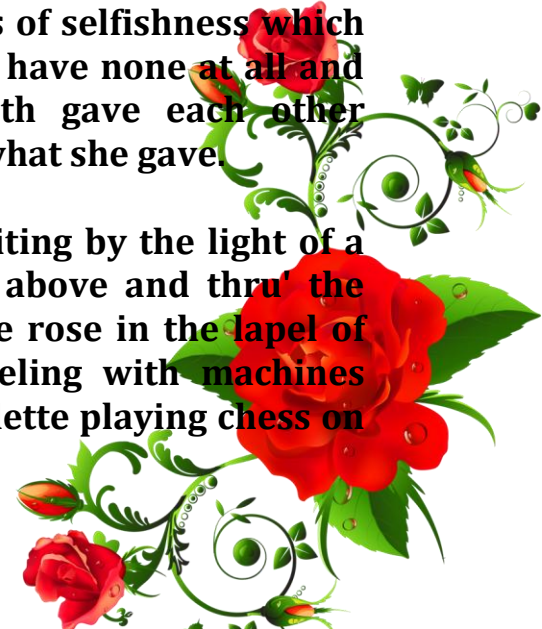


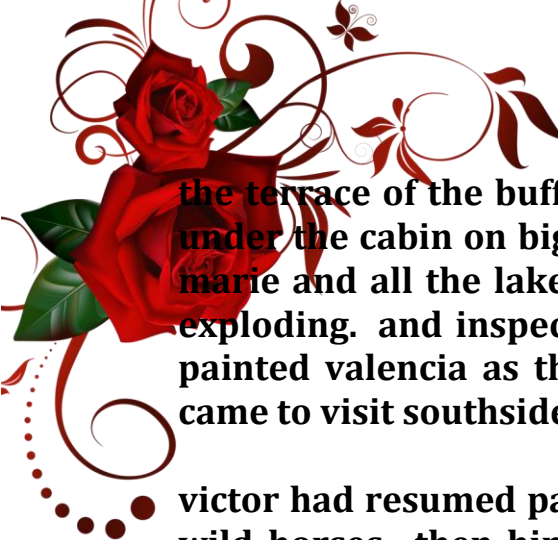
good looks and somehow hadn't aged. it's a rock and roll world she said. is it said deathless. maybe not said alabama. her beauty was still dazzling but there was much about her deathless failed to trust. deathless was simply following instructions. palance's instructions. give her enough rope was the last thing jack had said before heading off for yet another visit to the firebird school of poetry. give her enough rope....

the morning sun was now high above lake marie. the wolves served fruit and coffee and more truncheons of water. may i stay here for a couple of nights said alabama - this used to be my home. yeah sure said deathless - be my guest. alabama went to rest in whitey's old room and deathless went fishing on the lake in the little red and yellow rowing boat so often used in recent times by whitey and his friend the barman. deathless couldn't catch a fish to save his life but when the sun went down behind the three maries he danced on the surface of the water with the wolves and the fishes. and when they grew tired of dancing on the lake deathless and the wolves and the fishes threw rocks at the stars. and when that ceased to amuse the wolves and deathless threw all the fishes all the way to the moon. which explains why to this very day there are still no fishes in lake marie. just devils and ghosts and reflections of stars. and traces of the secret lives of white roses.

at buffalo farm howl-black was waking up. he had been dreaming of deathless, his mother, lake marie and fishes flying to the moon. valencia's body was so tightly wrapped around him the only way to free himself was to make love. that was lovely said valencia. all the sad beautiful things you say said howl-black. valencia laughed. and her laughter was like fishes flying to the moon. back at the cabin on big tam deathless admired and was seduced by alabama's good looks but he was cautious and aware that her relationship with the truth was less than fractional. there are certain types of selfishness which have a small degree of charm and others which have none at all and alabama was mistress of them all. they both gave each other something. but in her heart alabama took back what she gave.

at buffalo farm howl-black painted rimbaud writing by the light of a single candle. rimbaud as a white rose flying above and thru' the walls of the firebird school. rimbaud as a white rose in the lapel of inspector spanky. rimbaud and palance tunneling with machines underneath the firebird school. victor and claudette playing chess on





the terrace of the buffalo house hotel. he painted alabama tunneling under the cabin on big tam as deathless danced on the waters of lake marie and all the lake's fishes flew to the moon. he painted gun hill exploding. and inspector spanky being crowned king of england. he painted valencia as the bleeding heart of jesus and when southside came to visit southside bought them all.

victor had resumed painting too. he painted himself and claudette as wild horses. then himself and claudette as a two headed horse. he painted howl-black painting rimbaud, howl-black painting valencia as the bleeding heart of jesus. renoir, rimbaud, cantona and southside flying above buffalo farm with all the paintings they'd bought. he painted all the broken hearts in gun hill. he painted them with wings in the sky above the town. and then alone above them and way high above the clouds he painted kerouac's sad lonesome alcoholic heart. then he tried to paint bob mitchum's elusive heart but victor just couldn't get close enough to it to figure it out. he painted claudette as the north star and himself as the river of no return. he had studied howl-black's techniques assiduously and victor was close indeed to overtaking the master. howl-black could clearly see it coming but victor was a humble man with no idea of the true value of his own work. sometimes humility wins. and it was victor's humility that howl-black valued the most. without humility a painter is lost. howl-black had said it a thousand times. and victor had listened.

sometimes humility wins. howl-black said it at the breakfast table. in his sleep. when and while he painted. or fished in the river or swam in the lake. victor listened and learned. valencia listened and learned. and they adored him for it. sometimes humility wins.

there's not enough poetry in the world said howl-black at the breakfast table one hot summer morning. isn't that what they teach at the firebird school said victor. yes said whitey that's exactly what they teach at the firebird school. what's wrong with it asked victor. nothing said whitey - it's fine with me. we need more poets i guess said valencia. i try not to need anything except victor said claudette. victor fell off his chair laughing like a pork chop. the poet arthur rimbaud was having trouble following this conversation. something had been lost in translation. rimbaud's thoughts turned to paris, then belgium, then africa. then something told him it was time to move on. rimbaud packed a small bag after breakfast, said his goodbyes and left buffalo farm that very afternoon never to return. in his shirt pocket

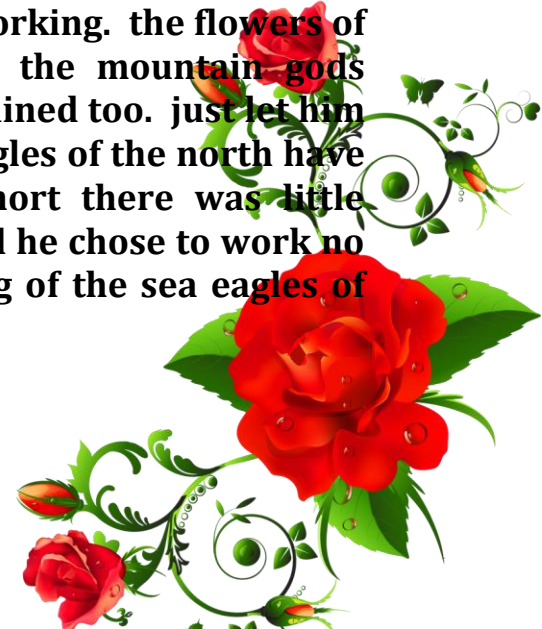


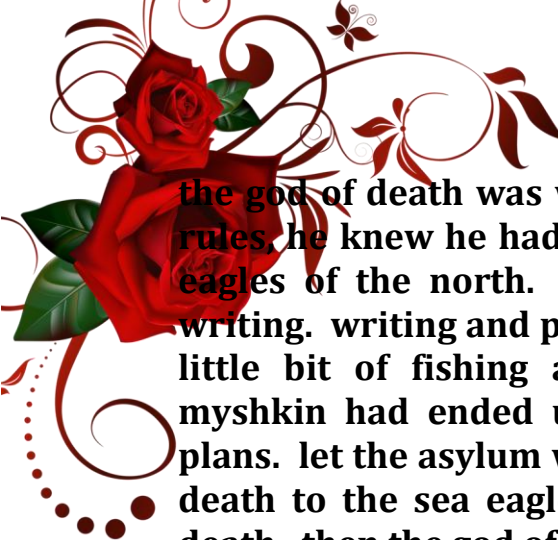


next to his heart he carried a small pencil drawing of a white rose given to him by the master.

but the master was getting old. his nerves were shot. composure came and went. burned like fury then retreated to god alone knows where. too many days and nights working without rest or sleep. his mind and body paid the price. but howl-black was content and didn't care. they say you can't always get what you want. howl-black had wanted to paint and wanted to write all his life. and that's exactly what he'd done with his life. he was content to pay the price. the god of death was often at his window but howl-black just smiled and carried on painting or writing. later said howl-black - and the god of death smiled and faded into the night. when death returned to howl-black's window howl-black would say only firebirds live forever then death would smile and answer - later. loud aggressive black crows now flew and gathered regularly above buffalo farm. lately black bears had been seen in the foothills surrounding surrender. still the mountain gods waited. let them wait said howl-black. let time wait - i have work to do. he and rimbaud had completed the white rose but howl-black was convinced he had another book in him. he knew it would be his last. its working title was love won't let you down. don't do the crime if you can't do the time - as the bishop said to the actress. and as the hours, days and weeks passed howl-black continued to paint and to write. the mountain gods are waiting for you said the wolves. let them wait said howl-black.

the mountain gods grew impatient. the god of death grew impatient. the black crows, the bears in the foothills and the flowers in the fields grew impatient - everything dies baby that's a fact, why doesn't he just go they said. howl-black contemplated the flowers of the fields then simply carried on working. the eagles of the north were sent for. we don't understand the problem said the eagles of the north. there is no problem said the eagles - just let him carry on working. the flowers of the fields complained, the crows complained, the mountain gods complained and the bears in the foothills complained too. just let him carry on working insisted the eagles. the sea eagles of the north have jurisdiction regarding such matters and in short there was little choice but to let howl-black carry on working till he chose to work no more. fuck death. fuck reality. such is the song of the sea eagles of the north.

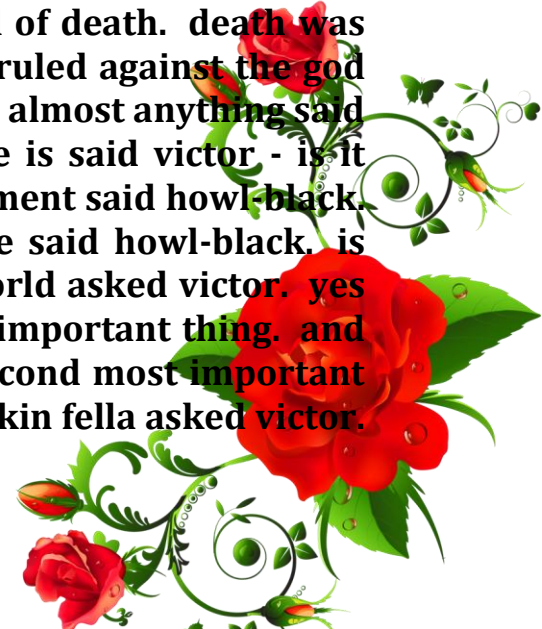





the god of death was well pissed off to say the least but he knew the rules, he knew he had zero choice but to respect the songs of the sea eagles of the north. howl-black carried on working. painting and writing. writing and painting. a few drinks here, a few drinks there, a little bit of fishing and making love with valencia cruz. prince myshkin had ended up back at the asylum. howl-black had other plans. let the asylum wait. let the cowboy ride. fuck it said the god of death to the sea eagles. fuck you said the sea eagles to the god of death. then the god of death ran away.

where the fuck is jack palance said howl-black at the breakfast table. probably at the firebird school said victor. or more probably said victor - trying to stop alabama from coming here. whitey looked at victor long hard and cold. and victor returned the look with a smile. sometimes it hurts said victor. yeah sometimes it hurts said whitey - and sometimes it doesn't. they both smiled. old friends said victor. yes old friends said whitey - but where the fuck is palance? soon said victor. a wolf brought fresh truncheons of ice cold clear mountain water. old friends said the wolf. old friends said victor and howl-black in unison. then they all laughed but they had no idea why. where are the girls said howl-black. fishing and swimming in the lake said victor. let's go said whitey. they strolled to the lake. and a couple of wolves went along for the ride just to keep them company. maybe rimbaud will send us a postcard said whitey. yeah maybe he will said victor. maybe he'll send one of us a postcard said a wolf. fat chance said the other wolf.

dying is a fool's game said howl-black. victor said nothing. what victor mature knew about dying could be written on a pinhead. he just didn't want to know. death and dying were just places he didn't want to go. like the mystical scottish kings, like various painters poets and writers when death came to call upon him victor mature simply refused to die. you do it first he said to the god of death. death was outraged. but again the sea eagles of the north ruled against the god of death. with a wee bit of composure you can do almost anything said howl-black. i don't even know what composure is said victor - is it some kinda ointment. yeah it's some kinda ointment said howl-black. where can i get some said victor. ask claudette said howl-black. is humility still the most important thing in the world asked victor. yes victor said howl-black humility is still the most important thing. and not ending up like prince myshkin is still the second most important thing added howl-black. who is this prince myshkin fella asked victor.



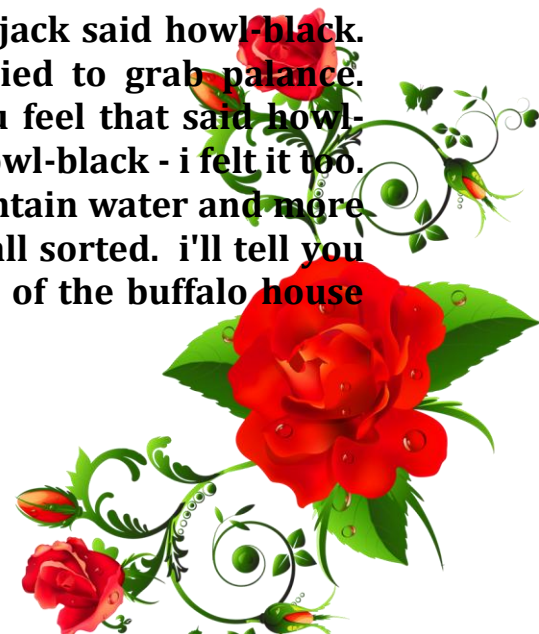


an old friend of mine said howl-black - you'll meet him one day. they were in a little rowing boat fishing in the middle of the lake. casually howl-black picked up victor mature and threw him into the lake. welcome to the wonderful land of don't know said howl-black - don't look back. death tried to grab them both but one cold look from howl-black sent death running to the hills seeking the protection of the crows and black bears. i love you howl-black said victor. yeah i know said howl-black. they left the rowing boat adrift on the placid lake and swam back to the shore. and in the foothills no matter what or how they tried the crows and black bears failed to comfort death.

i'll build you a statue said victor. yeah build me a statue said howl-black - build me the moon and stars, build me the wolves, build me the barman and the chef and claudette's kid sister, build me the flowers of the fields. ok i get the message said victor. where the fuck is jack palance said howl-black. then there was silence. let the cowboy ride said victor - palance will be back here soon o' great master of nothing, o' great master of clowns, o' great master of wastelands. please don't call me master said howl-black. soon i'll be just a memory. soon my trials sorrows and crying will be over. then he spoke the magic words - no guru, no teacher, no master. yes master said victor. thanks victor said howl-black. they dined that night on the terrace of the buffalo house hotel - claudette and victor, whitey and valencia. and to nobody's surprise suddenly as if outa nowhere clark gable, ripper and the wrecking ball appeared on main street and behind them on a bicycle - jack palance.



it's over said jack - it's all sorted. have a drink jack said howl-black. don't mind if i do said jack. unseen hands tried to grab palance. unseen hands tried to grab howl-black. did you feel that said howl-black. sure as hell did said palance. yeah said howl-black - i felt it too. a wolf brought truncheons of fresh ice cold mountain water and more bourbon to the table. it's over said jack again. all sorted. i'll tell you all about it in the morning. and thus chapter 8 of the buffalo house came to its end.





CHAPTER 9: TELL ME ABOUT IT JACK

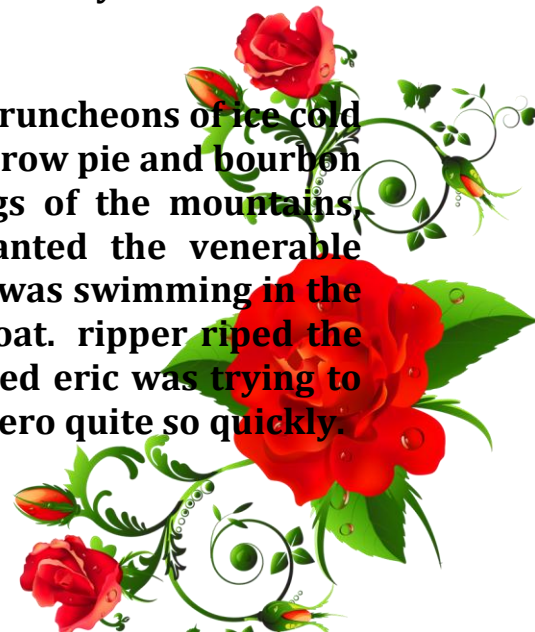
let there be light said howl-black. let there be light said palance. the divine is with you whitey said palance - everything else is rubbish. tell me about it jack - i know nothing said howl-black. i wish i knew nothing said jack - knowing what i know is a lonely business. it's all a lonely business jack said howl-black - till the light tells us otherwise. did you know you were raised by wolves said jack. sometimes i dream about it said whitey.




you were raised by wolves said palance. alabama dumped both you and ferdy. then ferdy dumped you. then the wolves stepped in. you were raised by wolves said palance. sometimes i dream about it said howl-black...sometimes i dream i am a white wolf. sometimes i dream i'm some kinda wolf prince...the son of some kinda wolf god. maybe you are said palance.

sometimes i dream i'm prince myshkin said howl-black. maybe you are said palance. sometimes said jack i dream i had a career in the movies. maybe you did said howl-black. it was a hot morning in late summer. a huge truck arrived at buffalo farm. i am cantona said cantona - i'd like to buy more paintings please. not now said victor. i am cantona said eric. zip it eric said victor. and before eric could say another word jack and victor bound and gagged the great maestro eric cantona and set him adrift on the lake in the little red rowing boat. later said victor. maybe the devils will get him said palance. yeah with luck maybe they will said victor.

back at the breakfast table wolves were serving truncheons of ice cold clear mountain water, black coffee, bear steaks, crow pie and bourbon chasers. wolves were singing the ancient songs of the mountains, other wolves recited poetry while others chanted the venerable timeworn mountain mantras. the wrecking ball was swimming in the lake determined to tip over cantona's rowing boat. ripper ripped the gag from cantona's mouth. relaxed and composed eric was trying to figure out how he'd managed to go from hero to zero quite so quickly.



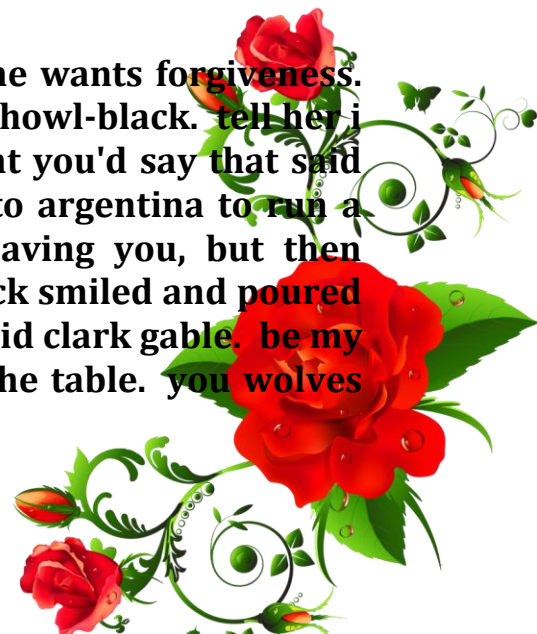


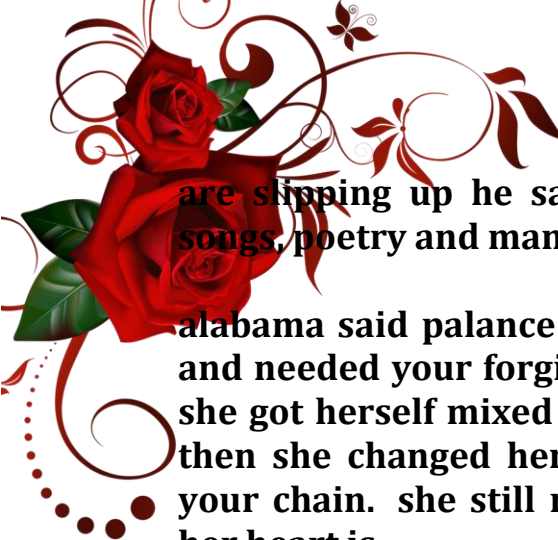
tell me about it jack said howl-black. it's as easy as one, two, three said palance - alabama, the firebird school and the scottish kings. they all fucked up. but most of it is under control now. the barman is safe, valencia's kid sister is safe, the chef and the other boys and girls are safe too. the blue lagoon is back in place and victor's place has been restored too. his horses and cats are safe. his trucks and cars are safe and the authorities are no longer looking for you. well done said howl-black - you've been a busy boy. tell me more jack...

spanky was getting too close for comfort so we had to pay him a rather large sum of money to shut him up. we had to use nearly all the resources of the outfit to get on top of this operation but my associates respect and admire you very much and i have been instructed to rip up your bill. tell me more jack said howl-black. the outfit would like a couple of paintings please - one by you and one by victor. consider it done said whitey. and i'd like one too from each of you please said palance. yeah sure said howl-black - consider it done. claudette and valencia were crying but victor played the clown and made them laugh. tell me more jack...

the mountain gods are waiting said a wolf. let them wait said howl-black - they should be used to waiting by now. tell us more jack please said howl-black. big bob mitchum has gone missing and kerouac is in rehab. we can't find ferdy. he's long gone - god alone knows where. blake and kristofferson are looking after the cabin for you and van gogh is living quietly in your apartment in glasgow. he doesn't use colour anymore - he paints only with black and white. but somehow i don't think his heart is in it. valencia and claudette started crying again and victor did his best to comfort them. let's not talk about the heart this morning said howl-black. palance smiled and poured himself a huge shot of bourbon. howl-black smiled and did the same.

alabama said palance - she wants to see you. she wants forgiveness. but i don't trust her. i don't trust her either said howl-black. tell her i forgive her but i don't want to see her. i thought you'd say that said jack. she's already gone - gone with deathless to argentina to run a diamond mine. she wanted forgiveness for leaving you, but then being alabama, she decided she didn't. howl-black smiled and poured them both another shot. any chance of a drink said clark gable. be my guest said victor. he refilled all the glasses on the table. you wolves





are slipping up he said. but the wolves were so lost in mountain songs, poetry and mantras no wolf heard victor's remark.

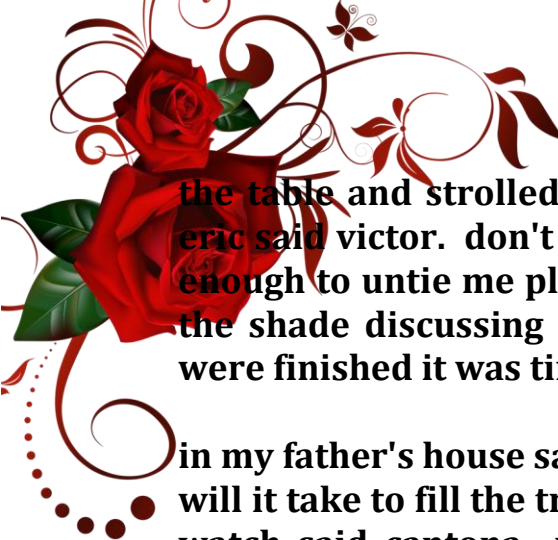
alabama said palance - she managed to convince herself she wanted and needed your forgiveness. she tried some tricky stuff. for a while she got herself mixed up with the devils at the bottom of lake marie. then she changed her mind. she was fucking you around - pulling your chain. she still retains her beauty but god alone knows where her heart is.

this is how it was continued palance. one, two and three - alabama, the firebird school and the scottish kings. tell me more jack said howl-black. it all got mixed up said palance but now it's unmixed up. as you know the firebirds were rewriting history. but they kept on fucking up. dates, times, places all wrong. no control. all completely fucked up. but that only part explains the blue lagoon and victor's place going walkabout. we made the firebirds rewrite the rewrite and now it's as if these things never happened. how did you do it jack said howl-black. we made it clear we would destroy them if they didn't oblige and put things right. you threatened them with violence said howl-black. yes with violence and destruction said palance. the old songs are best said howl-black. palance helped himself to another drink.

tell me more jack said howl-black. the ancient scottish kings who refuse to die said palance - they've been doing it for years. centuries. making things disappear. moving things around. just for laughs. hills, mountains, lakes, churches, small towns and villages. they've been living in the hills around gun hill for centuries. the locals try to keep it quiet but this time the kings went a wee bit too far. an unfortunate chain of events. it's still not exactly clear who did what where when and why. but it's over. order has been restored. the kings have promised to behave, the firebirds have promised to stick to poetry and alabama has promised...to quit trying to save her son. tell me more jack said howl-black. i don't think there's much more to tell said jack. wolves cleared the table then served more truncheons of ice cold clear mountain water, black coffee and more bourbon. and breakfast stumbled towards lunch.

i hear spanky has been crowned king of england said palance. i hear cantona screaming said victor - i'll go see how he is. maybe he needs a drink said howl-black. victor took a couple of bottles of bourbon from





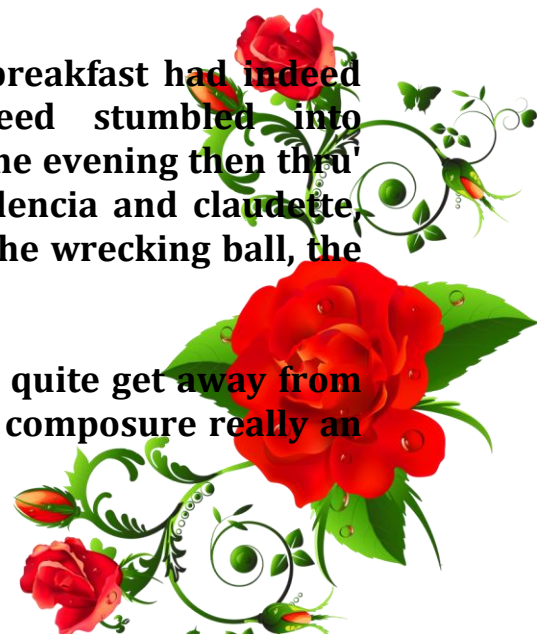
the table and strolled down to the lake. would you care for a drink
eric said victor. don't mind if i do said eric. i wonder if you'd be kind
enough to untie me please said eric. of course said victor. they sat in
the shade discussing painting and poetry and when the two bottles
were finished it was time for lunch.


in my father's house said cantona there are many mansions - how long
will it take to fill the truck? give us a month said victor. can i stay and
watch said cantona. yeah sure said victor - we might even let you
paint. a postcard arrived from valencia's kid sister saying all is well
here, cats and horses fine, see you soon. and a copy of the first draft of
the barman's latest book arrived for howl-black with a single white
rose. then another single white rose arrived for howl-black from
arthur rimbaud. then three letters and another single long stemmed
sweetly perfumed white rose from kerouac in rehab. kerouac was
missing mitchum very badly but nobody had a clue where big bob had
gone. three dozen white roses arrived from the firebird school. then
three dozen more from the scottish kings who refuse to die. then a
single rose from alabama. it was a long lunch. unseen hands tried to
grab both palance and howl-black. can you
feel them said howl-black. of course i can
said jack. it's over said palance - it's just
traces, they'll fade away soon. gone with
the wind. some things are never over said
howl-black. this ain't one of them said
palance - trust me. and as lunch stumbled
towards supper another three dozen long
stemmed sweetly perfumed white roses
arrived for howl-black from inspector
spanky with a note saying...but spanky's
handwriting was so illegible nobody could
understand a single word.



at the big table in the garden at buffalo farm breakfast had indeed
stumbled into lunch and lunch had indeed stumbled into
supper.eating drinking and talking all day into the evening then thru'
most of the night. jack palance, howl-black, valencia and claudette,
cantona, victor mature, clark gable, ripper and the wrecking ball, the
wolves and the ghosts of many old friends.

as always when in a garden howl-black couldn't quite get away from
the fact jesus had been betrayed in a garden. is composure really an






ointment asked victor. of course it is said cantona. and still the mountain gods waited. this is how it was that hot summer in the hills around surrender. and the next day a pale but much recovered kid coronet, looking remarkably like the poet arthur rimbaud, arrived at buffalo farm for a short visit.

bums said coronet - i guess we're all just dharma bums.

CHAPTER 10: BLAND AND TWO RIVERS





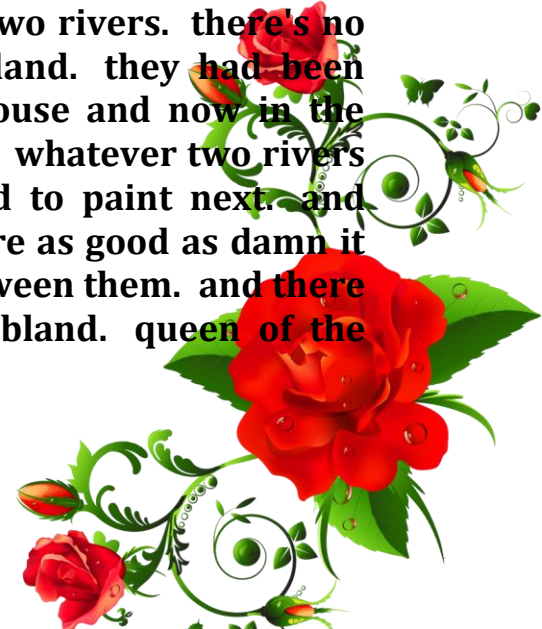
if i don't paint or write a little each day i die said johnny two rivers.
we all die a little each day said the queen of bland. each summer they
rented a big house on a quiet isolated beach in the land of don't know.
they were both writers and painters and each night they did

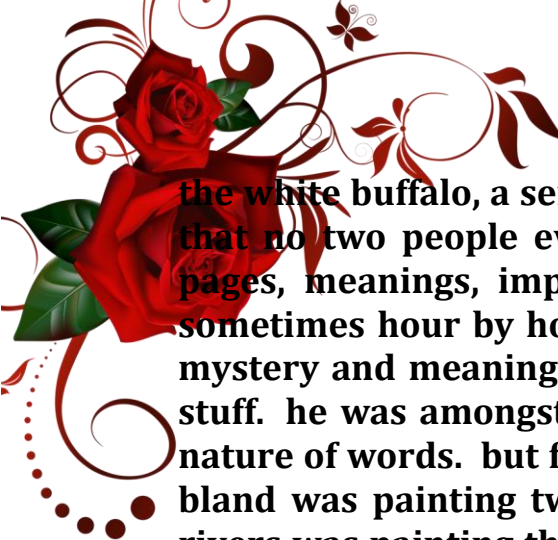


unspeakable things to each other in the big house and on the beach. she liked to paint men being fucked in the ass by strong good lookin' women and he liked to paint women being fucked in the ass by horses and sea eagles. they were poets and there wasn't much outside their work that they took seriously. the name of the big house was buffalo house. but nobody quite knew why. buffalo house once upon a time had been the official headquarters of the firebird school of poetry back in the days before the school was discredited and lost much of its power and authority after the infamous fiasco in glasgow and in the foothills around the sleepy town of gun hill. after glasgow and gun hill the teachings of the firebird school fell into disrepute - fragmenting into the mists of myth and legend. like litter being swept away before a new morning.

a little known fact regarding the firebird school - the janitor is always key. not the professors, poets, researchers. not the department heads or administrators. the janitor is the key to the firebird school. the real power behind the throne. but the firebirds have flown. their teachings discredited and fragmented. broken. gone. tho' it is believed by some that remnants of their power still linger at buffalo house.

there's no getting away from some things said two rivers. there's no getting over some things said the queen of bland. they had been fucking all night in the basement at buffalo house and now in the relative kool of the morning they were painting. whatever two rivers painted that's what the queen of bland tended to paint next. and whatever she painted he painted next. they were as good as damn it one blood. there was no jealousy in them or between them. and there was little that was bland about the queen of bland. queen of the damned would be a more accurate title.



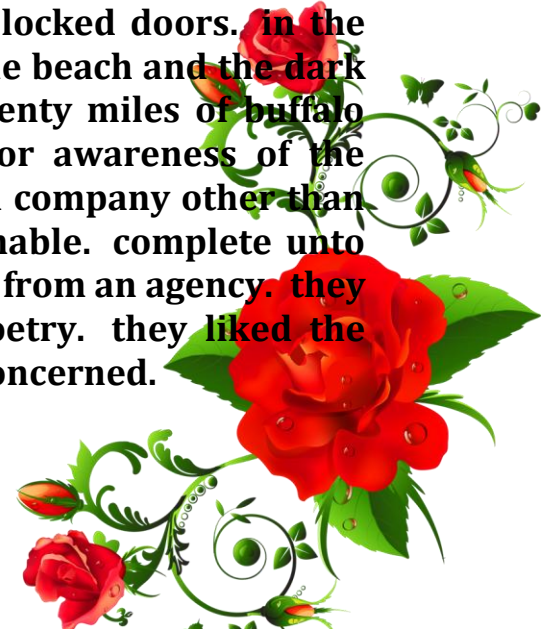


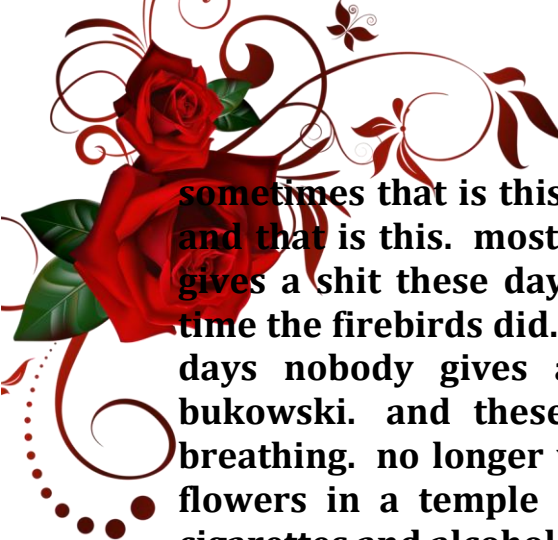
the white buffalo, a senior professor at the firebird school, had taught that no two people ever read the same book. words move around. pages, meanings, implications, secrets and lies change overnight - sometimes hour by hour. minute by minute. words don't rest. their mystery and meaning change constantly. the white buffalo knew his stuff. he was amongst the first to recognise the futility and cheating nature of words. but few chose to admit it. this morning the queen of bland was painting two rivers painting the queen of bland and two rivers was painting the queen of bland painting two rivers. the spirit of the white buffalo was running wild in the basement. words are worthless fuckers said two rivers. then why do you write so much said the queen of bland. why do you write so much said two rivers. because i adore you said the queen of bland.

two rivers smiled. johnny two rivers didn't adore anything. or anyone. not even himself. not even painting or writing. and certainly not the queen of bland. he left love and adoration to the queen of bland. that was her department. he had other fish to fry. cold hands, cold heart, but he knew he wouldn't last a week without her.

love is all and all is love said the queen of bland. is love all said two rivers. love is a kiss in the dark he continued. love is like words - feeble, fickle and more than somewhat subject to change. then he kissed her. they swapped easels. he worked on her painting and she worked on his. they were nuts about each other. but fear and doubt are words too. constant companions. composure, confidence and faith said two rivers - they're like shifting sands. slaughtered by love more than he cared to remember johnny was a damaged soul. the queen of bland was the glue that held him together. she was his queen of shifting sands. she was the robin in his garden.

in the land of don't know. to the north of buffalo house - the temple of it never happened. to the east - the temple of locked doors. in the west - broken heart woods. and to the south - the beach and the dark ocean. there was no town or village within twenty miles of buffalo house. bland and johnny had no interest in or awareness of the history of buffalo house. they had no interest in company other than their own. they considered themselves untouchable. complete unto themselves. each summer they rented the house from an agency. they hadn't even heard of the firebird school of poetry. they liked the isolation. and that was that as far as they were concerned.



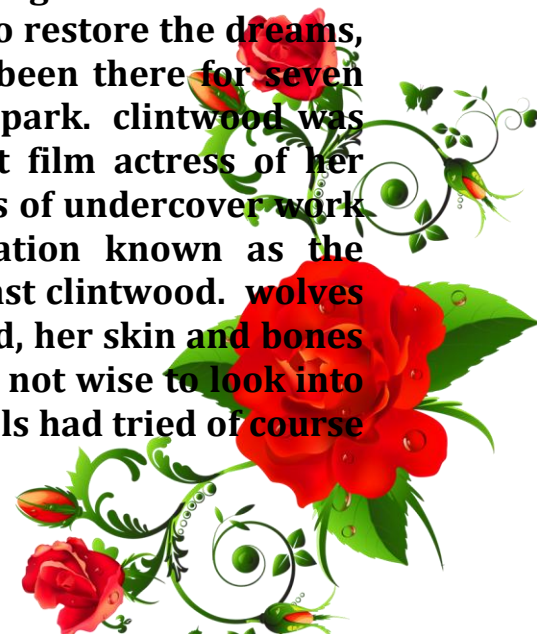



sometimes that is this and this is sometimes that. mostly this is that and that is this. most of the time. in the land of don't know nobody gives a shit these days about that kinda thing. maybe once upon a time the firebirds did. but the firebirds now are long gone. and these days nobody gives a shit about poetry. except maybe charles bukowski. and these days he's long gone too. dead. no longer breathing. no longer with us. maybe a ghost now sweeping up dead flowers in a temple that no longer exists. stinking of sweat, sex, cigarettes and alcohol. slaughtered by love and poisoned arrows. and not giving a shit. in the end we all smell like charles bukowski. in the end some of us smell even worse than that. if in doubt you can always ask a firebird. if you can find one. i hear they are still easily found in the temple of locked doors. next to the buffalo skies, cornflakes, low-fat milk and cartoons of jesus.

carton of cigarettes please and a fifth of johnny walker red. no problem sir. cash, card or cheque? i'd prefer it if you'd pay said bukowski to the cashier in the temple of locked doors. sir i believe you are dead said the cashier. fuck off said bukowski - just gimme the cigarettes and booze. bukowski thumped the cashier hard bang on the nose, grabbed two cartons of cigarettes and two bottles of johnny walker red, thumped the cashier on the nose again just for luck and for the sake of a good laugh later in the day then he headed off to the buffalo skies to drink smoke and write.



at buffalo house below the basement was another basement long forgotten where broken dreams, broken machines and the broken power of the firebirds still lingered. and there the ghost of the famous actress east clintwood worked tirelessly trying to restore the dreams, machines and power of the firebirds. she had been there for seven years. she wouldn't let go. she just needed a spark. clintwood was considered by many to have been the greatest film actress of her generation but she was also guilty of many years of undercover work with that misunderstood clandestine organisation known as the outfit. nobody played smoke and mirrors like east clintwood. wolves lived in her heart, buffalo skies lived in her blood, her skin and bones were made outa pure absolute poetry and it was not wise to look into her eyes for anything close to too long. many fools had tried of course



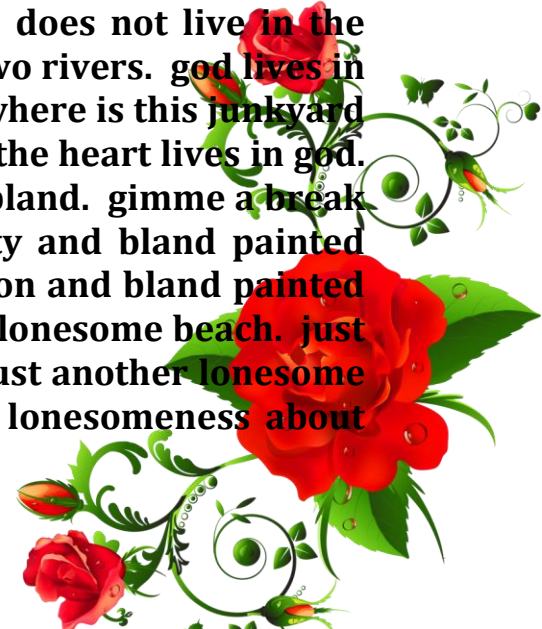


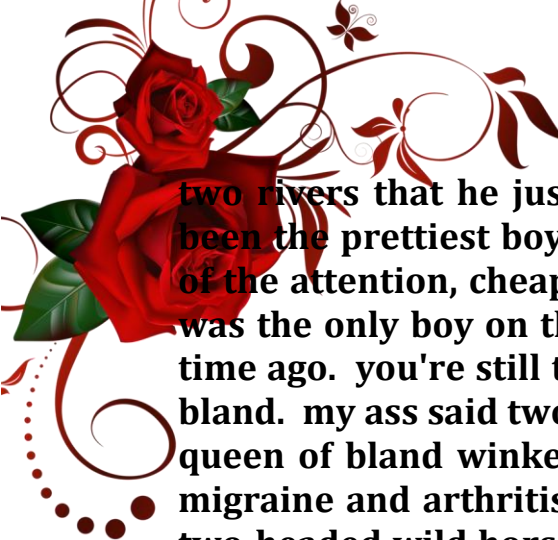
and quickly paid the price. she just needed a spark. one vital spark. to rebirth the firebirds. what she really needed, tho' she didn't know it then, was the blue angel.

clintwood was beautiful, dangerous and tough. she would never give up. the blue angel had been watching her from a distance for a long time. he liked what he saw and he knew in his buffalo heart that he was the spark she needed to fulfil her destiny. returning power and authority to the firebird school. a lesser ghost would have given up years ago. what the blue angel admired most about clintwood was her spunk. she had gallons of the stuff. he waited in the wings with a dry box of matches and despite other duties and responsibilities he somehow managed to monitor her every move and every inch of progress. everything comes to she who works and waits.

the central thrust of the firebirds' message had been humility. thinking it would help mankind they had tried to rewrite history but they fucked up hugely and the outfit had to step in to restore order. the firebirds in shame and disgrace disappeared from the face of the earth. they hadn't tried or wanted to harm anybody. their only crime was naivety. they knew many secrets but sometimes a mountain goat has more sense than a firebird. but it's not wise to try to explain this to a firebird...especially if the firebird has been drinking. frankly it's not wise to attempt to explain anything to a firebird. firebirds live forever so it is perfectly understandable that they have more than their fair share of time in which to fuck up. we should learn to be more tolerant and forgiving regarding their indiscretions and peccadilloes. in short we should learn humility. just as jesus taught the fishes and the insolent spanish kings.

they were painting in the basement. bland and two rivers. two rivers was painting vice. bland was painting purity. it's all about the heart said bland. there is only the heart. that which does not live in the heart is less than nothing. gimme a break said two rivers. god lives in the heart and the heart lives in god said bland. where is this junkyard heart said two rivers. god lives in the heart and the heart lives in god. be true to your heart and you will find god said bland. gimme a break said two rivers. then two rivers painted futility and bland painted fragmentation. then two rivers painted perfection and bland painted the poetry of saints. then they made love on the lonesome beach. just another perfect day in the land of don't know. just another lonesome day on the beach said two rivers. there was a lonesomeness about





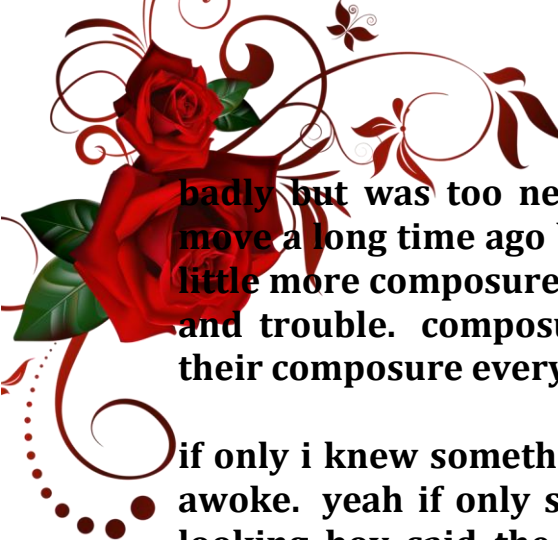
two rivers that he just couldn't shift. once upon a time he'd always been the prettiest boy on the beach but he'd tired of it quickly. tired of the attention, cheap gifts, jealousy and cheap perfume and now he was the only boy on the beach and once upon a time was a long long time ago. you're still the prettiest boy on the beach said the queen of bland. my ass said two rivers. but you look like an angel she said. the queen of bland winked. she was painting stars and he was painting migraine and arthritis. then she painted period pain and he painted two-headed wild horses jumping over the moon. just another perfect day in the land of don't know.

it's a lonesome business said two rivers being the prettiest boy on the beach. let's have a party said bland - we could invite rembrandt and that actress you used to like east clintwood. we could invite hey presto and robson and jerome. hey presto was a one-eyed magician from manchester and robson and jerome was a two-headed poet from new jersey - a particular friend of southside johnny. we could invite eric cantona said two rivers. we could invite maradona said bland.

we could invite the white buffalo said two rivers. fuck him said bland - he's a pain in the ass. i like it when it's just you and me said two rivers. me too said the queen of bland. she was painting politics and johnny two rivers was painting the economy. there's nothing more important in this world than painting the economy said the queen of bland. yeah you're right said two rivers - i like it best when it's just you and me. me too said the queen of bland. then they fucked in the basement for a while then they fucked on the beach under a yellow moon. i like fucking on an empty beach under a yellow moon said the queen of bland. yeah me too said two rivers - maybe we'll paint it tomorrow. yeah maybe we will said the queen of bland.

i thought we were painting politics tomorrow said two rivers. no that was yesterday said the queen of bland. breakfast said two rivers. yeah why not said the queen. maybe we'll paint corruption tomorrow said johnny. maybe you will said bland but i'll paint integrity and the poetry of slaves if that's ok with you. whatever you say or do is ok with me said two rivers. thanks said bland - she knew that without her two rivers would be totally fucked. she cooked a breakfast of broken stars then they slept for most of what was left of the morning and for most of the afternoon. east clintwood continued to work in the basement below the basement. and the blue angel continued to watch from a distance. as love stories go, the blue angel had fallen



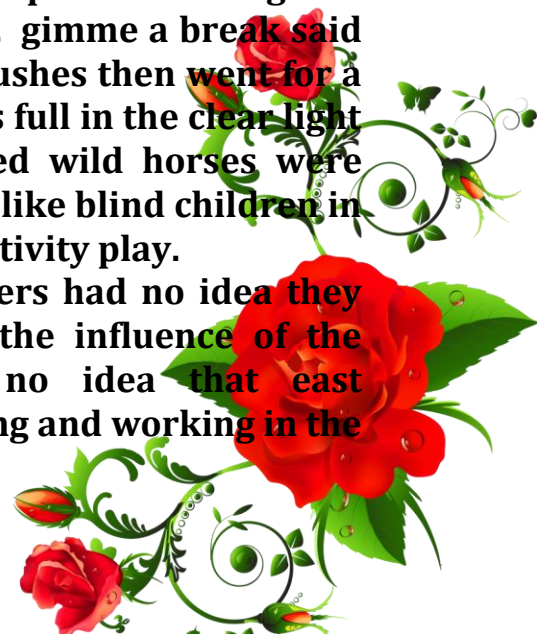



badly but was too nervous to make his move. he coulda made his move a long time ago but he was just too fucking nervous. with just a little more composure he coulda saved everybody a hell of a lotta time and trouble. composure comes and goes i guess. even angels lose their composure every once in a while. or so i'm told.

if only i knew something about something said two rivers when they awoke. yeah if only said the queen of bland. you were a very good looking boy said the queen of bland. but that was three hundred years ago said two rivers. time is a tricky bastard said bland. you're fucking right there said two rivers. yes i am said bland. it was three in the morning. they breakfasted on broken stars and whatever was left of last night's moonlight then they fucked again on the lonesome beach under what little was left of the yellow moon.

dawn found them painting in the basement. two rivers was painting the ghost of the white buffalo, the famous teacher and co-founder of the firebird school of poetry, even tho' he, two rivers, knew nothing about the white buffalo or the firebird school. and bland was painting the twin souls of whitsun horatio maradona howl-black the other co-founder of the firebird school of poetry even tho' she knew nothing about howl-black or the firebird school. clintwood continued to work in the basement below the basement and sadly the blue angel continued to be nervous and indecisive. but he kept his matches dry. bland and two rivers heard on the radio that someone had set fire to glasgow school of art so all the next day and for several days and nights thereafter they painted glasgow school of art on fire. william blake and kris kristofferson flying above the fire. the poet arthur rimbaud flying above the fire. modigliani and utrillo flying above the flames. poetic and romantic stuff with no particular meaning. like the ghost of twilight discovering the true implications of golden dawn. nothing really adds up. most of everything adds up to something less than zero. not if you live in the heart said bland. gimme a break said two rivers. bland winked. they cleaned their brushes then went for a swim in the dark ocean tho' the yellow moon was full in the clear light of day and two-headed fishes and three-headed wild horses were jumping all over it like blind children in a sunday school nativity play.

bland and two rivers had no idea they were now under the influence of the firebird school. no idea that east clintwood was living and working in the

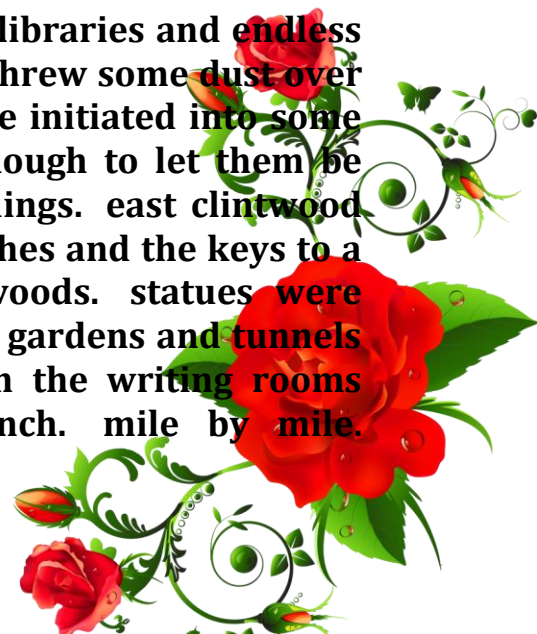


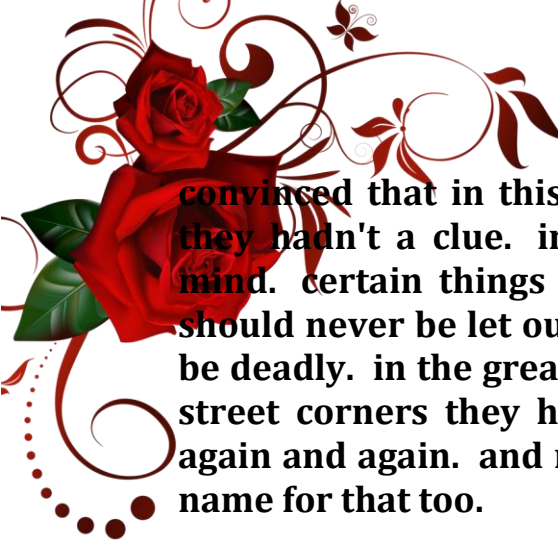


basement below the basement. they weren't even perplexed regarding the new direction their work had taken. they simply thought they were breaking new ground. blissfully unaware they had become tools and prisoners of the firebirds. pawns in a game of chess. the power of the firebirds was returning. they found themselves painting the white buffalo again and again. they found themselves painting firebirds again and again. with no idea at all regarding where this stuff was coming from. they painted the white buffalo in a starry sky way high above the ruins of glasgow school of art. they painted firebirds in flames above the ruins. they painted firebirds in flames way high in the sky playing poker at a table made outa stars above buffalo house. they painted the ocean made entirely outa firebirds, the white buffalo above it playing chess with the moon as the ghost of twilight chanted the holy names and strummed a homemade guitar made outa rusty tin cans and albatross wire. haven't a clue where this stuff is coming from said two rivers. me neither said bland.

they painted the blue angel arriving at buffalo house. matches in hand. the blue angel knocked on the front door of buffalo house and bland answered it. i'm looking for east clintwood said the blue angel - i believe she lives here in the basement. sorry said bland - we paint in the basement, there's no east clintwood living here. she lives in the basement below the basement said the blue angel. then he nervously lit a match and buffalo house exploded. the blue angel just couldn't wait any longer.

when the smoke cleared and the dust settled the basement below the basement had been transformed into the firebirds' control room. the basement above remained just as it had been - the painters' studio. the exterior of buffalo house remained pretty much as it had been before but now inside there were many new rooms and additions. temples, courts, theatres, gardens, laboratories, libraries and endless tunnels and corridors. the king of the firebirds threw some dust over two rivers and bland and immediately they were initiated into some but not all the secrets of the firebirds. just enough to let them be comfortable and relaxed in their new surroundings. east clintwood and the blue angel were given medals, three wishes and the keys to a new palace in the middle of broken heart woods. statues were erected in their honour in all the new corridors, gardens and tunnels in the new complex beneath buffalo house. in the writing rooms firebirds were rewriting history. inch by inch. mile by mile.



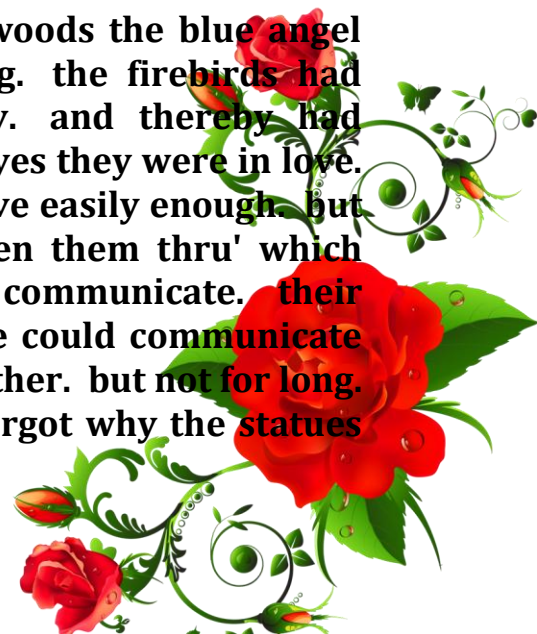



convinced that in this way they could rewrite the future. but really they hadn't a clue. in reality the king of the firebirds had lost his mind. certain things cannot be kept in a box. certain other things should never be let out of a box. getting the two mixed up can simply be deadly. in the great libraries of the world and on the most humble street corners they have a name for it - making the same mistake again and again. and not telling the king of the firebirds. they have a name for that too.

in the writing rooms beneath buffalo house scribes wrote day and night. deconstructing the past. reconstructing the future. all totally without meaning and beyond the heart of madness. losers became winners. truth became lies. vices became virtues beneath buffalo skies. fragments of wrong drifted into fragments of right and the little of right that was left simply disintegrated. the firebirds were back. malfunctioning like they had never malfunctioned before.

CHAPTER 11: INSPECTOR SPANKY

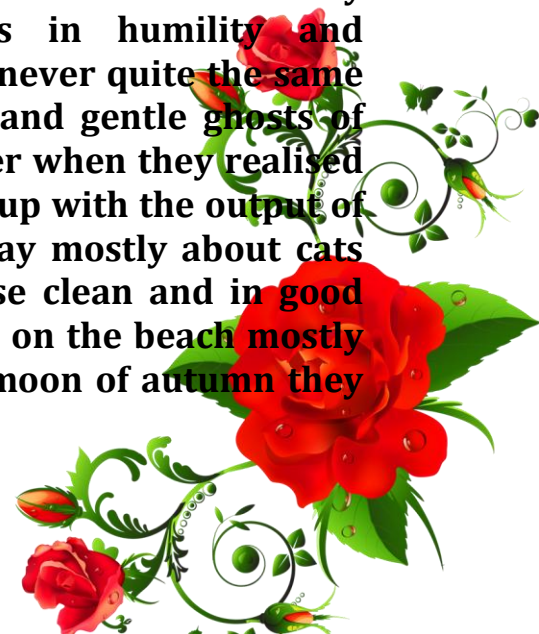
in the new palace of solitude in broken heart woods the blue angel and east clintwood weren't quite getting along. the firebirds had rewritten their history. and thereby had rewritten their future. yes they were in love. yes they could make love easily enough. but there was a fog between them thru' which they could not quite communicate. their statues at buffalo house could communicate more easily with each other. but not for long. the firebirds quickly forgot why the statues






had been erected in the first place and the king of the firebirds soon had them taken down and destroyed. in the palace of solitude the fog continued to thicken and evolve permitting clintwood and the blue angel little else to do but make love. clintwood and the angel had few complaints. at buffalo house all the action was underground. for bland and two rivers life continued pretty much as before. they painted and wrote each day and at night made love on the empty beach under a yellow moon.

they painted the writing rooms and writing halls of the firebirds. endless scribes constantly at work rewriting history. they painted the statues of clintwood and the blue angel in the corridors, tunnels and underground gardens before they were removed and destroyed. as each day passed the empire of the firebirds expanded underground and each day bland and two rivers painted each and every new aspect of the firebirds' expansion. they painted things that had never been painted before. they were happy in their work. they painted the destruction of the statues of clintwood and the angel. they painted the control room and underground gardens of the firebirds. bland phoned the agency regarding the buffalo house lease. buffalo house was free and available until their own booking next summer so they snapped it up for autumn winter and spring. there was just too much to paint. in the writing halls beneath buffalo house three hundred spartans were eternally vanquishing a plague of blind poets and three headed mice at thermopylae, in the land once known as the united states of america the buffalo and redskins repeatedly repelled white european invaders. america would remain a land of peace and mirrors for many centuries till bobby kennedy shot lyndon baines johnson and marilyn monroe in a theatre in a small town in west texas. bland and two rivers just couldn't keep up. they had wanted to paint everything the firebirds wrote but exhausted - their nerves soon broke. the firebirds had them sedated for a while then when they recovered the firebirds gave them lessons in humility and proportionality. but bland and two rivers were never quite the same again. they lost their edge and became sweet and gentle ghosts of their former selves. they quit painting altogether when they realised that not even in a million years could they keep up with the output of the firebirds. they wrote a little poetry each day mostly about cats and the secret lives of roses, kept buffalo house clean and in good order above ground, still managed to make love on the beach mostly when the moon was full but after the first red moon of autumn they never painted again.

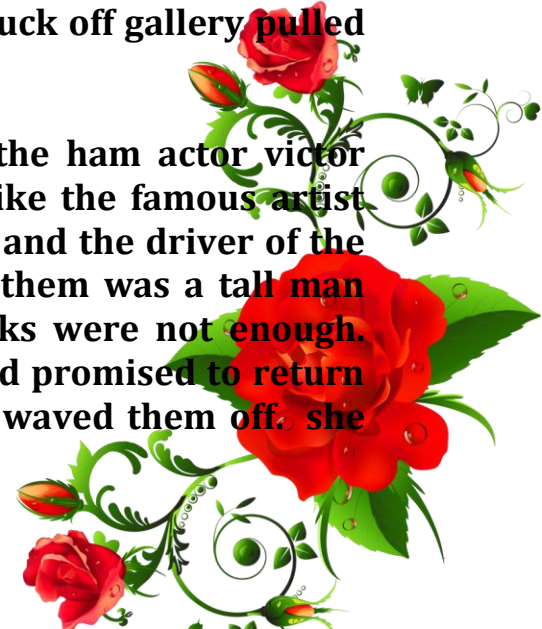





in the writing halls of the firebirds julius caesar was crossing the rubicon readying himself to poison his star pupil brutus when inspector spanky arrived at buffalo house. are you the fuck off gallery bland asked inspector spanky. no i'm not said spanky. i'm inspector spanky. have you seen any firebirds around here said spanky. no said bland - we're expecting a truck this morning from the fuck off gallery to take away all these paintings. don't call me doll said spanky. i didn't said bland. the buffalo house was full to overflowing with paintings of firebirds. hundreds of them. no not hundreds - thousands. firebirds destroying statues. firebirds gardening. working in the writing halls. oceans of firebirds. theatres and stages overflowing with firebirds applauding themselves. who painted these said spanky. haven't a clue said bland. they've always been here. for as long as my husband and i have been coming here. we rent buffalo house each summer. have done for years. my husband and i are poets. we know nothing about painting or firebirds. if it's poppies you are looking for we can help you there, they grow wild in broken heart woods but we know nothing about firebirds or painting said bland. i see said spanky.

would you care for a cold beer inspector said bland. don't mind if i do said spanky. have we met before said bland. i don't think so said spanky - i was king of england for a while so you might have seen me on a postage stamp. i see said bland. and where is mister two rivers this morning asked spanky. i believe the professor is walking in broken heart woods gathering flowers for the house said bland. sometimes i wonder where have all the flowers gone said spanky. me too said the queen of bland. in the writing halls below them africa became greece, italy became india and england sold herself to the devil. another beer inspector said the queen of bland. no thanks said spanky - maybe next time i come. maybe next time i'll meet the professor. and as he left three trucks from the fuck off gallery pulled up outside buffalo house.

the driver of the first truck looked a lot like the ham actor victor mature, the driver of the second looked a lot like the famous artist and poet whitsun horatio maradona howl-black and the driver of the third was jane russell's double. accompanying them was a tall man who looked a lot like jack palance. three trucks were not enough. they loaded the pictures quickly without fuss and promised to return soon for more. see you soon said bland as she waved them off. she



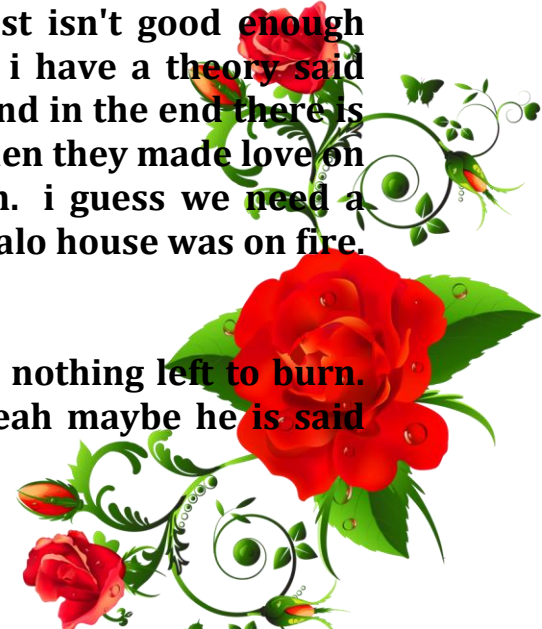


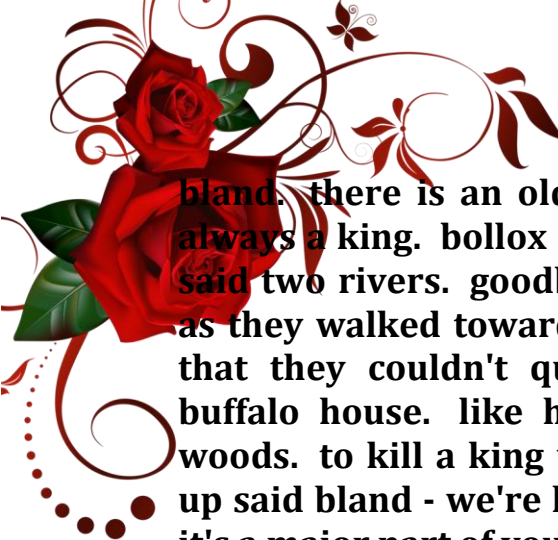
and the professor had no idea that they had painted the pictures. they had no sense of ownership or possession and were simply glad to see them go. some painters can't let go of their work but bland and two rivers didn't have that problem. bland and two rivers' problems were of an entirely different nature.

two rivers now lived in the past in the days when he'd been the prettiest boy on the beach. secretly he'd loved being the prettiest boy on the beach and now he gathered flowers in broken heart woods more for himself than for the queen of bland. but the queen of bland loved him still. it was her mission in life to look after big johnny two rivers. according to her big johnny two rivers would always belong to the queen of bland. he had no idea how lucky and blessed he was. in the basement below the basement germany was winning the great war and before it was over they had started another. above them bland and two rivers wrote a little poetry each day, gathered wild flowers in broken heart woods, swam each day in the dark ocean and made love according to the cycles of the moon. they never painted again. and somehow they didn't miss it. in the writing rooms jesus refused to be crucified and that caused a hell of a lot of new work for the firebirds.

when bland informed the king of the firebirds that inspector spanky had been asking questions the king's response was swift - kill him. when he comes next time - just kill him. bland said nothing. when she informed professor two rivers his response was - fuck it. fuck it said two rivers - we can't kill a man we don't even know. tho' it might be grand and poetic to kill a king. how did you know inspector spanky had once been a king asked bland. i didn't said two rivers - i don't. they looked at each other strangely then went for a walk on the lonesome beach. both convinced it was a good idea to get the hell outta buffalo house as quickly as possible. trouble in paradise. there's an old scottish saying said two rivers - if your best isn't good enough you're fucked. bollox said the queen of bland. i have a theory said professor two rivers that we are all each other and in the end there is only one of us. bollox said the queen of bland. then they made love on the lonesome beach underneath a yellow moon. i guess we need a cheap hotel said two rivers. then he noticed buffalo house was on fire. o' shit said bland. holy shit said two rivers.

they watched buffalo house burn. till there was nothing left to burn. maybe spanky is still a king said two rivers. yeah maybe he is said

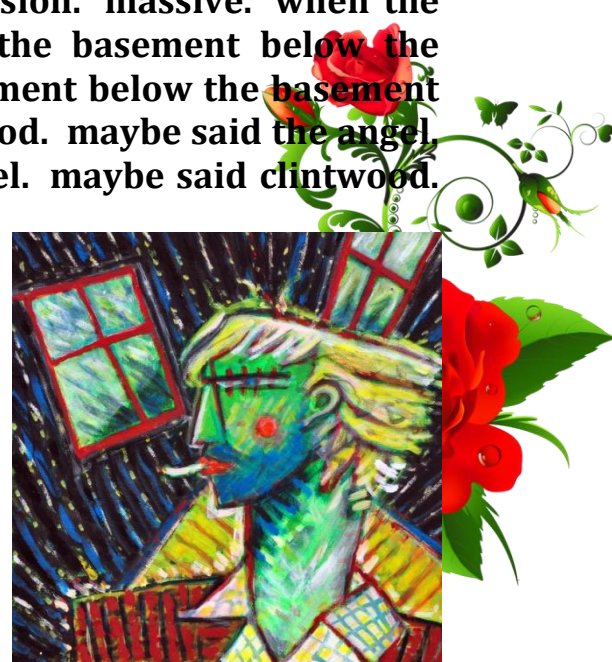


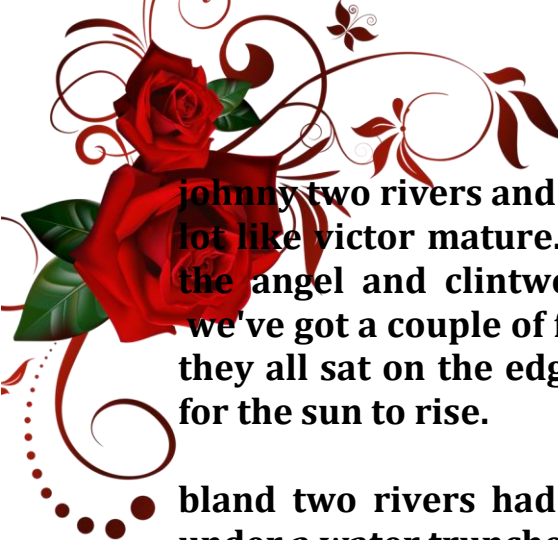


bland. there is an old scottish saying said two rivers - once a king always a king. bollox said the queen of bland. goodbye buffalo house said two rivers. goodbye buffalo house said the queen of bland. and as they walked towards broken heart woods they had no realisation that they couldn't quite remember where they had lived before buffalo house. like hansel and gretel. innocent babes lost in the woods. to kill a king would be hugely operatic said two rivers. shut up said bland - we're lost. i've been lost for centuries said two rivers. it's a major part of your charm said bland.

on the lonesome beach it was now raining violins and iberian statues drowning the dying embers of buffalo house. from the towers of the new palace of solitude clintwood and the blue angel had studied the glow of the flames in the night sky and now they were marching steadfastly thru' heartbreak woods towards the dying of the light. clintwood and the angel heading to the beach and bland and two rivers stumbling deep into the heart of broken heart woods passed within thirty yards of each other but each couple had no awareness of the other. iberian wolves followed bland and two rivers' progress thru' the woods. the ghosts of robert mitchum and jack kerouac, as ever in a supervisory capacity, accompanied clintwood and the angel to the beach. on the beach there was no trace of the fire. no trace of buffalo house. just broken violins and damaged iberian sculpture. the iberian wolves always referred to the woods as heartbreak woods but the ghosts who lived there guilty by nature of their less poetic more pedantic being always referred to the woods as broken heart woods. just a small example of how easy it is to get lost in the woods. two rivers of course could get lost anywhere. he needed no help or instruction regarding getting lost.

as clintwood and the angel left the woods behind and took their first steps on the beach there was a huge explosion. massive. when the smoke cleared there was nothing left of the basement below the basement. just a huge black hole. the basement below the basement was gone. i guess we fucked up said clintwood. maybe said the angel. maybe the firebirds fucked up said the angel. maybe said clintwood. they stared in silence at the black hole for a long time. then dawn arrived. then the three fuck off gallery trucks arrived. we're looking for buffalo house said jane russell's double. clintwood and the angel didn't know what to say. yeah we're looking for



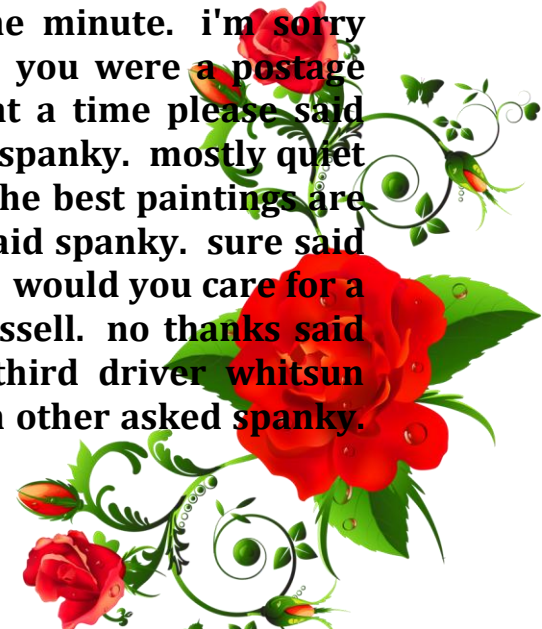


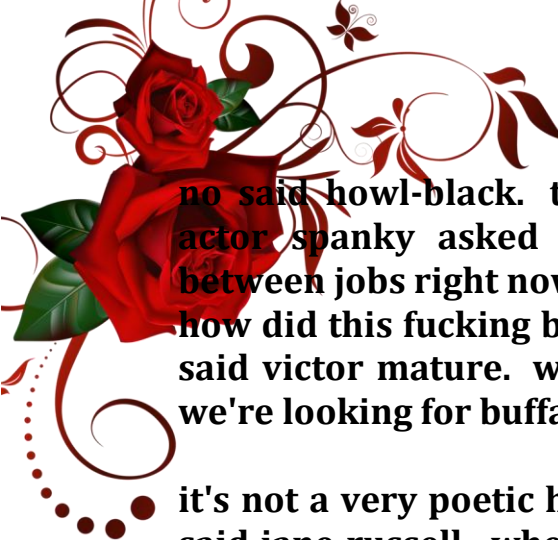
johnny two rivers and the queen of bland said the driver who looked a lot like victor mature. what's happened here said victor mature. but the angel and clintwood just couldn't manage even a single word. we've got a couple of flasks of coffee said jane russell. and for a while they all sat on the edge of the black hole drinking coffee and waiting for the sun to rise.

bland two rivers had spent the night lost in the woods. they slept under a water truncheon tree. and in the morning they headed east to the temple of locked doors. but they couldn't get in. they didn't know they were dead. they didn't know they had become ghosts. that realisation was still a long way off. they headed north to the temple of it never happened and there they rested on the stairs to the main entrance till they fell asleep - two rivers dreaming of a hot cooked breakfast and bland dreaming both she and two rivers had once upon a time been court painters to the king of the firebirds.

next to arrive on the beach was inspector spanky. the usual suspects said spanky - good morning. good morning spanky said victor mature. care for some coffee inspector said jane russell. thanks said spanky - don't mind if i do. jane russell handed spanky a tin cup of hot java. who are these people said spanky nodding in the direction of clintwood and the blue angel. haven't a clue said mature - they seem to be in shock. we're from the fuck off gallery continued mature. we're here to collect some paintings by bland and two rivers. we're looking for buffalo house. paintings of firebirds by any chance asked spanky. yes said mature - hundreds of them. how did you know? it's my business to know these things said spanky - i am after all a police inspector. at this the three drivers laughed so much they almost fell into the black hole.

clintwood and the angel continued to stare blankly into the black hole which was becoming deeper and darker by the minute. i'm sorry inspector said jane russell - i thought you said you were a postage stamp. that's in another story - one mystery at a time please said spanky. are these paintings loud or quiet asked spanky. mostly quiet answered victor mature. yes yes said spanky - the best paintings are mostly quiet. any chance of some more coffee said spanky. sure said jane russell. and she poured spanky a fresh cup. would you care for a truncheon of water to go with that said jane russell. no thanks said spanky. he then turned his attention to the third driver whitsun horatio maradona howl-black. do we know each other asked spanky.





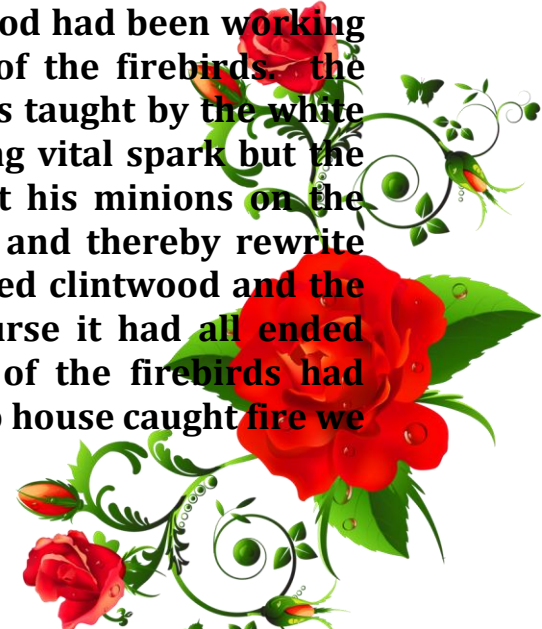
no said howl-black. that's what i thought said spanky. are you an actor spanky asked howl-black. yes i am said howl-black - i'm between jobs right now, just helping out at the fuck off gallery.

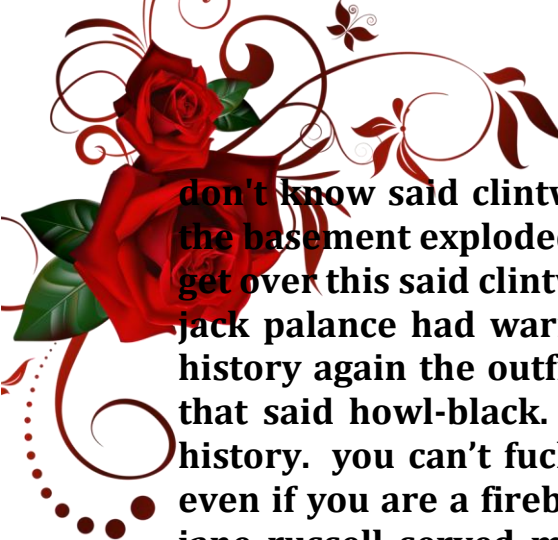
how did this fucking black hole get here asked spanky. haven't a clue said victor mature. we only got here half an hour ago said mature - we're looking for buffalo house. me too said spanky - me too.

it's not a very poetic hole said mature. it's getting bigger all the time said jane russell. when high tide comes it'll be gone said howl-black. and that's exactly what happened. they stayed on the beach all day watching the tide roll in then roll away and after high tide all that was left of the new empire of the firebirds was gone. they stayed on the beach all night. howl-black made a fire. mature caught some fish. they had sleeping bags and supplies in the trucks. bourbon and malt whisky. and by midnight they'd worked out that the black hole had been all that was left of buffalo house. sadness pervaded the beach. buffalo house was gone. spanky left in the morning for scotland yard and clintwood and the angel, bourbon and malt whisky having loosened their tongues, invited the drivers to stay a few days at the palace of solitude. your kind offer gratefully accepted said victor mature.

they left the trucks at the edge of the woods and walked thru' the trees to the new palace of solitude. iberian wolves following their every step. the ghosts of mitchum and kerouac following every step of the wolves. the ghost of frankie miller following mitchum and kerouac. and just in case frankie needed some company the ghost of richard brautigan trundled along behind with an emergency supply of gin and vodka. and nobody noticed that jack palance had simply and silently disappeared.

breakfast at the palace of solitude. tell it like it is said howl-black. clintwood and the angel told it like it is. clintwood had been working for years to restore the power and authority of the firebirds. the central thrust of their message being humility as taught by the white buffalo. the blue angel had provided the missing vital spark but the king of the firebirds had lost his mind, had set his minions on the wrong path yet again trying to rewrite history and thereby rewrite and control the future. the king had marginalised clintwood and the angel to the new palace of solitude and of course it had all ended badly. instead of helping the world the king of the firebirds had fucked it all up again. exactly how or why buffalo house caught fire we





don't know said clintwood. exactly how or why the basement below the basement exploded we don't know said the blue angel. we'll never get over this said clintwood. you will said howl-black.

jack palance had warned the firebirds that if they ever fucked with history again the outfit would destroy them. i think it's as simple as that said howl-black. the outfit took them out. you can't fuck with history. you can't fuck with the outfit. you can't rewrite the future. even if you are a firebird. silence. then more silence. clintwood and jane russell served more coffee and more truncheons of fresh kool clear mountain water. then silence. then more silence. i kinda liked the firebirds said clintwood. we all kinda liked the firebirds said howl-black. we all loved the white buffalo said jane russell. some of us more than others said howl-black. silence. then more silence.

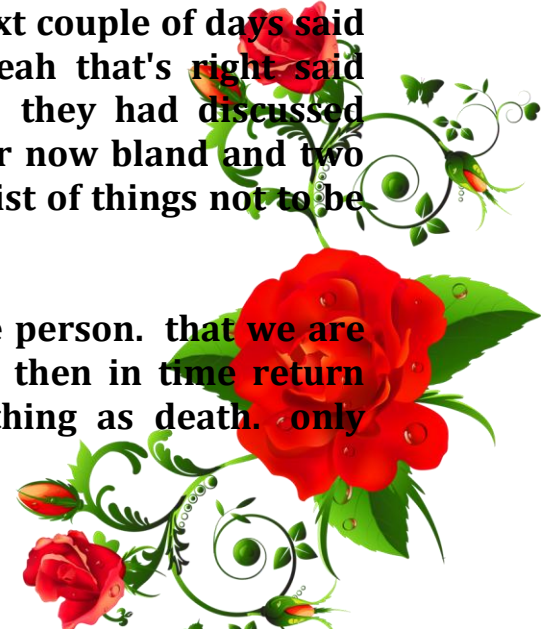
time is a dangerous bastard said victor mature - let's just relax for a couple of days and not think too much. they breakfasted on stars, blue mountain coffee, thin slices of a yellow moon, sweet nothings and long fresh truncheons of kool clear mountain water. and they agreed

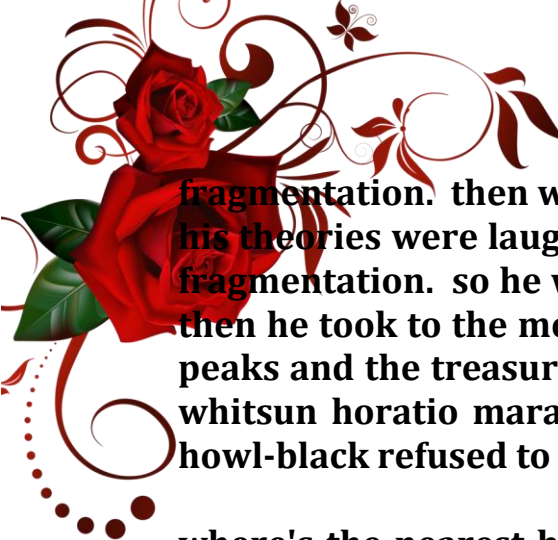


just to relax and not think too much for the next couple of days. they agreed not to think or talk about humility or integrity, nobility of spirit or elegance or any of the teachings of the white buffalo. they agreed not to think or talk about fires or explosions or rewriting history or rewriting the future. they would just relax and let things happen. then clintwood and jane russell served more blue mountain coffee and more truncheons of fresh clear kool mountain water. does that mean we now just talk a load of crap for the next couple of days said victor mature. yeah that's right said

howl-black - you won't find it difficult victor. they had discussed bland and two rivers while on the beach but for now bland and two rivers were just two more things on a growing list of things not to be thought about or spoken about.

the white buffalo had taught that we are all one person. that we are all each other. that we fragment and migrate. then in time return home. he had taught that there is no such thing as death. only



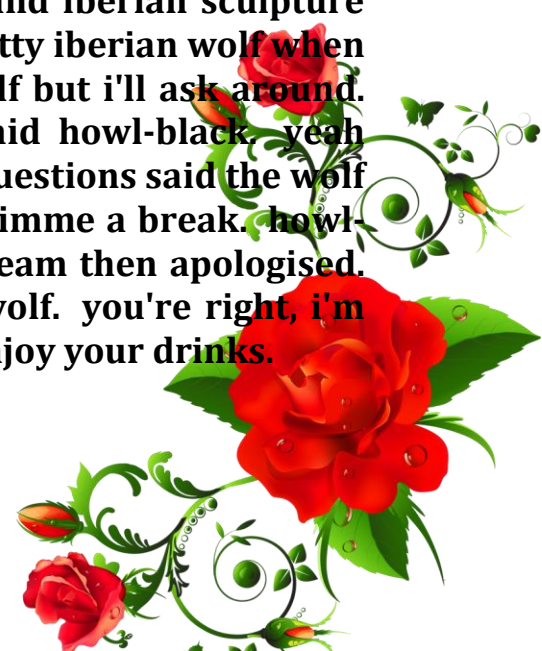


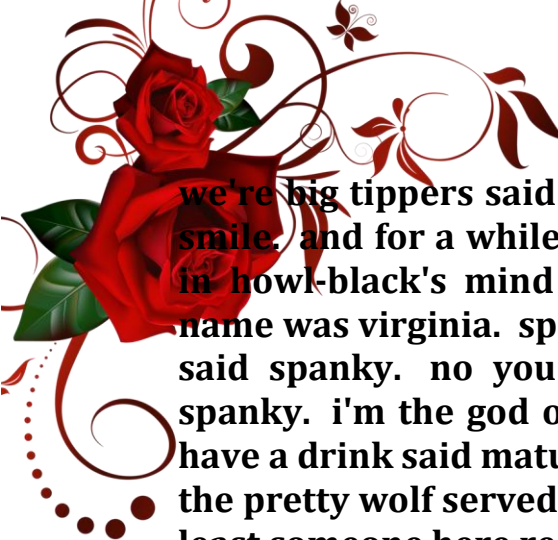
fragmentation. then we return home. but his teachings were rejected. his theories were laughed at. nobody gave a shit about his theories of fragmentation. so he wrote poetry for a while till that too fragmented then he took to the mountains to seek union with the one. desolation peaks and the treasure of the oneness were one and the same to him. whitsun horatio maradona howl-black had been his only pupil. and howl-black refused to forget.

where's the nearest bar said howl-black. twentyfive miles away in a place called wolf town said clintwood. let's go said howl-black. the bar is called the wolf house and it's run by iberian wolves said clintwood. let's go said said howl-black. they all jumped into a fuck off gallery truck and headed to wolf town. kinda funny how certain kinda things just kinda repeat and repeat themselves. it's that kinda world said the angel. the wolves had never seen an angel in their bar before but they were kinda kool about it. come to think of it the wolves in wolf town were kinda kool about everything. if you can get used to the smell of charles bukowski you can get used to anything said a pretty wolf serving the first drinks. it was as if the wolves knew howl-black and howl-black knew the wolves.

any traces of fragmentation around here said howl-black to the pretty young wolf. no none said the wolf. just as well said howl-black - we have a fragmentation problem on the lonesome beach. i know, we heard said the pretty wolf - bukowski was in town this morning. how's he doing said howl-black. same old same old said the wolf - drunk, chain smoking and still writing poetry. no signs of fragmentation around bukowski asked howl-black. none said the wolf. i guess we better have some more drinks please said howl-black. sure thing said the wolf.

do you know anything about it raining violins and iberian sculpture on the lonesome beach howl-black asked the pretty iberian wolf when she returned with more drinks. no said the wolf but i'll ask around. thanks said howl-black. any sign of spanky said howl-black. yeah sure said the wolf - he's been around. so many questions said the wolf - loosen up, concentrate on your drinks, relax, gimme a break. howl-black laughed like an angel fragmenting in a dream then apologised. it's not wise to be so fucking serious said the wolf. you're right, i'm sorry said howl-black. that's ok said the wolf - enjoy your drinks.





we're big tippers said howl-black. fuck off said the wolf with a sweet smile. and for a while fragments of almost everything floated around in howl-black's mind like leaves in a light wind. the pretty wolf's name was virginia. spanky arrived at wolf house. i'm the god of death said spanky. no you're not said victor mature - you're inspector spanky. i'm the god of death insisted spanky. sit down, shut up and have a drink said mature. spanky ordered a cranberry juice and when the pretty wolf served it she said fuck me if it isn't the god of death. at least someone here recognises me said spanky. then bukowski turned up looking for free drinks. and he too was convinced he was the god of death. is there any bastard in this town who isn't the god of death said mature. we are all the god of death said bukowski.

we're just wolves said virginia. then she added - according to the white buffalo there's no such thing as death or the god of death there is only fragmentation and then we go home. howl-black was impressed. you'll be telling us next there's no such things as wolves said bukowski. there are no such things as wolves said the wolf.

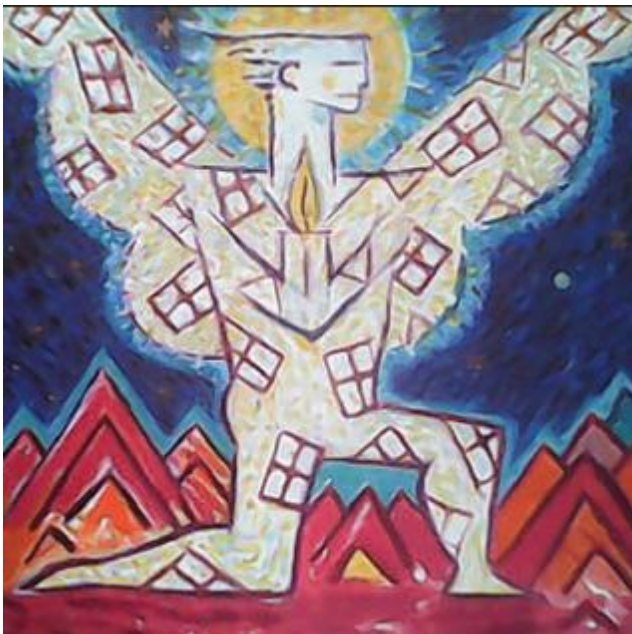
some more drinks please said victor mature even tho' he'd been dead for more than half a century. sure thing said virginia - coming right up.





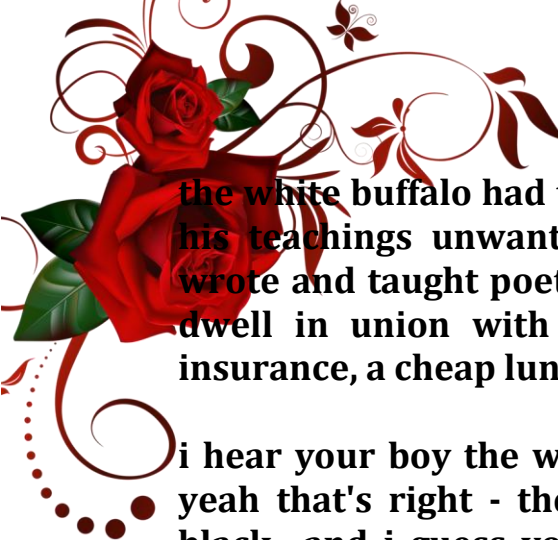
CHAPTER 12: AN ANGEL AT MY WINDOW

they sat in evening sunshine drinking at two tables in the gardens of the wolf house bar. howl-black, mature and jane russell. clintwood and the blue angel, spanky and bukowski. they were trying not to think. easier for some than for others. both spanky and bukowski



were drunk. too many fucking wolves in this town said bukowski. what do you expect in wolf town said mature. wolves said bukowski - i expect wolves in wolf town. jesus was betrayed in a garden said howl-black. we all know that said bukowski. it's hard to tell sometimes what another man knows or doesn't know said howl-black. according to your friend the white buffalo there are no other men said bukowski.



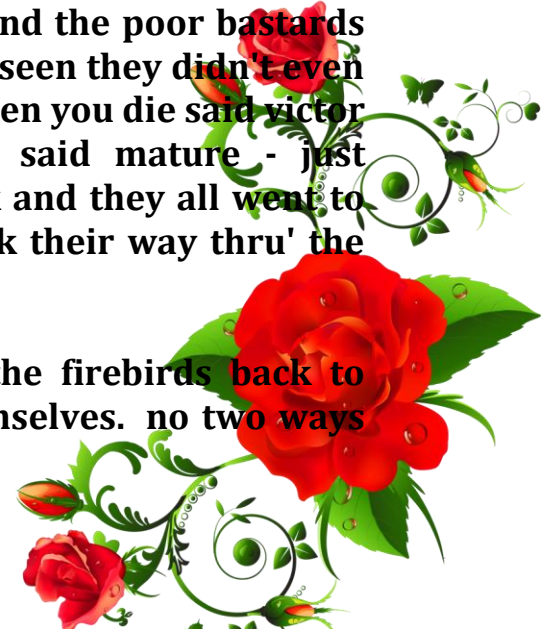


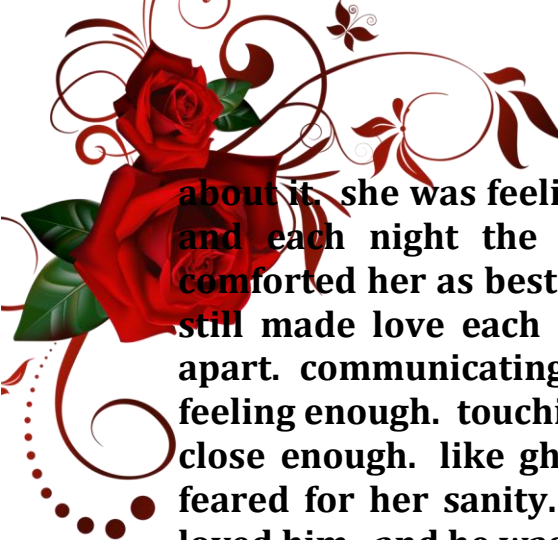
the white buffalo had tried to teach humility but nobody had listened. his teachings unwanted and fragmented, his mission a failure, he wrote and taught poetry for a while then retired to the mountains to dwell in union with the one. most people these days just want insurance, a cheap lunch and a fast buck.

i hear your boy the white buffalo only had one pupil said bukowski. yeah that's right - the white buffalo had only one pupil said howl-black. and i guess you're it said bukowski. dangerous ground said mature. it's all dangerous fucking ground said bukowski.

mature requested more drinks and they were quickly served by a pretty young iberian wolf whose name was wooden top. i don't have a wooden heart said wooden top. yeah it shows said victor mature. they all sat in silence for a while counting their sorrows and scars. howl-black was counting stars and exchanging tender glances with wooden top. strangers in the night played on the jukebox of the wolf house bar. some things just don't change. spanky had fallen asleep. bukowski was feeling more than somewhat foolish and was trying to figure out what could be more dangerous than dead. time to head back to the palace of solitude said the angel. yeah i guess you're right said victor mature. it was four in the morning. bukowski returned to his room at the temple of locked doors where he worked part-time as a janitor, virginia shut down the wolf house bar leaving spanky asleep in a chair while the others piled into the fuck off gallery truck and drove in silence thru' the fog back to the palace of solitude from where the fog was emanating. howl-black was thinking about wooden top. in her room at the broken wheel motel in wolf town wooden top was thinking about howl-black. clintwood, the angel, mature and jane russell were trying hard not to think at all. and the thing they were all trying most hard not to think about was bland and two rivers. where the fuck were they? had they survived the fire and the explosion? the fuck off gallery was nuts about their paintings and the poor bastards bland and two rivers were so far gone when last seen they didn't even know they had painted them. life's a bitch and then you die said victor mature. pardon me said jane russell. sorry said mature - just dreaming. it's free. clintwood parked the truck and they all went to bed as dawn and the morning sun tried to work their way thru' the fog.

clintwood was feeling bad. she had brought the firebirds back to power only to watch them fail and destroy themselves. no two ways

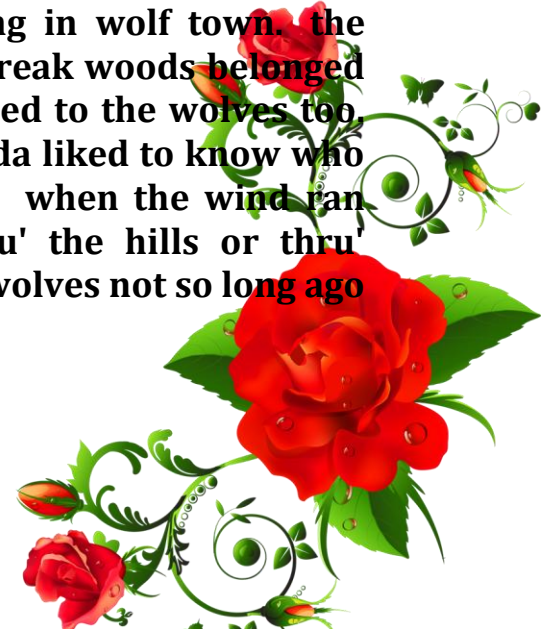


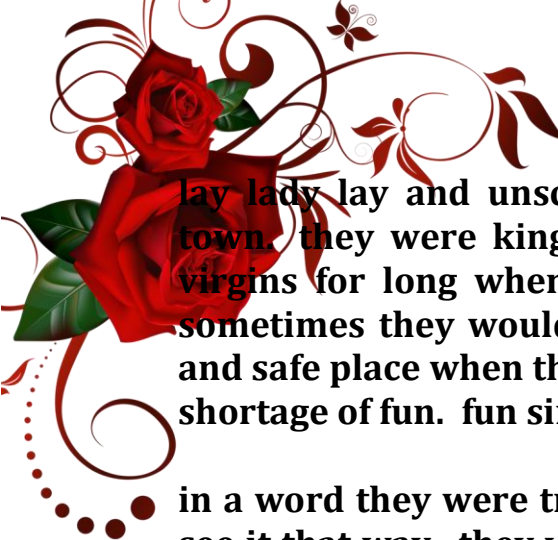


about it. she was feeling worse than bad. she counted her scars daily and each night the blue angel held her close to his heart and comforted her as best he could. but it was no damn good. altho' they still made love each night the fog lay between them. together but apart. communicating. but not communicating. feeling but not quite feeling enough. touching but not quite touching. close but never quite close enough. like ghosts. the angel loved her madly of course but feared for her sanity. feared she loved the firebirds more than she loved him. and he was right. asleep or awake she dreamed constantly of firebirds. her entire being was consumed by firebirds. victim prisoner servant slave and devotee. she had it all in aces and the blue angel was starting to suspect he would never save her. in her blood and in her dreams morning noon and night - firebirds. once a star of stage and screen now little more than a broken tool and slave to the failing and fading light of the firebirds. a junkie without a fix. a shoe without a foot. morning noon and night. consumed by firebirds. and the fog in and around the palace of solitude continued to thicken. its meaning purpose and function as yet unknown to anybody.

ever closer to futility the blue angel's heart fragmented like no angel's heart had ever fragmented before. walking alone on the lonesome beach he threw his medal given to him by the firebirds into the dark ocean. the world stopped turning, the waves stopped rolling in. the sky turned black then thundered then one by one hundreds of stars fell from the sky onto the lonesome beach and into the dark ocean. then the last of the falling stars landed and settled itself languidly and comfortably deep in the heart of the blue angel as the ghosts of mitchum and kerouac watched closely from the edge of the woods. and with them watching even more keenly were two elegant powerful young iberian wolves. names unimportant. but lay lady lay was one of them. and the other was unscrewable.

dog soldiers and virgin wolves is an old saying in wolf town. the lonesome beach belonged to the wolves. heartbreak woods belonged to the wolves. the hills for miles around belonged to the wolves too. put simply it's safe to say the wolves always kinda liked to know who was who and what was what in their territory. when the wind ran wild and raw on the lonesome beach or thru' the hills or thru' heartbreak woods the wind too belonged to the wolves not so long ago in the land of don't know.





lay lady lay and unscrewable were dog soldiers and kings of wolf town. they were kings of fun in wolf town. she-wolves didn't stay virgins for long when lay lady lay and unscrewable were in town. sometimes they would disappear for months. wolf town was a sane and safe place when they were not around but there sure as hell was a shortage of fun. fun simply didn't happen in wolf town without them.

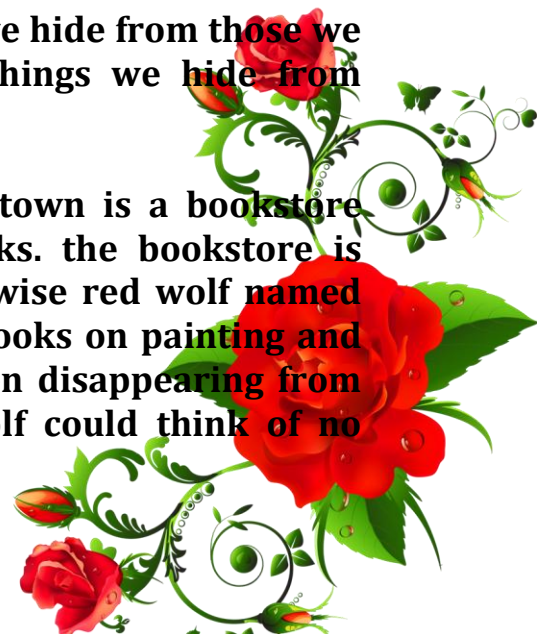
in a word they were trouble. but unscrewable and lay lady lay didn't see it that way. they were just kids looking for laughs. yes they were wild but lay lady lay secretly wrote poetry and unscrewable tended the gardens at the temple of it never happened and there he studied the ancient religions of the world of beasts flowers and men. his favourites were the secret lives of roses and the betrayal of jesus in a garden. according to unscrewable these two were always good for a laugh. he figured it all boiled down to proportionality - they can only kill you once. the romans and jews had failed to kill jesus and on that basis unscrewable figured we all have an even run at redemption. he had no time for the temple of locked doors. too many keys. too many locks. too many doors.

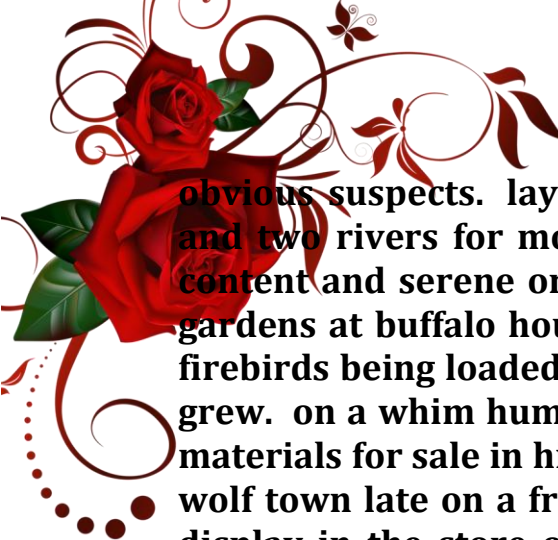
just like his brother wolf lay lady lay - unscrewable too had a secret. he had long nursed an ambition to become a painter. but he was too embarrassed to even dream of discussing it even with lay lady lay. young wolves are supposed to be tough wild free and macho. not involved with cissy stuff like poetry and painting. this was their dilemma. they had an image problem but were not quite mature enough to deal with it. so in wolf town they acted as the town expected - a pair of dangerous gay young blades. tho' bold brave elegant and powerful they were not quite confident enough to share their secret with each other. they didn't want to be killers and kings of wolf town. they wanted to write and paint.

somewhere in the heart there is a list of things we hide from those we love best. and in another place is a list of things we hide from ourselves.



on eagle street in wolf town is a bookstore known as humility books. the bookstore is owned by a sometimes wise red wolf named humility books. lately books on painting and books of poetry had been disappearing from his shelves. the red wolf could think of no

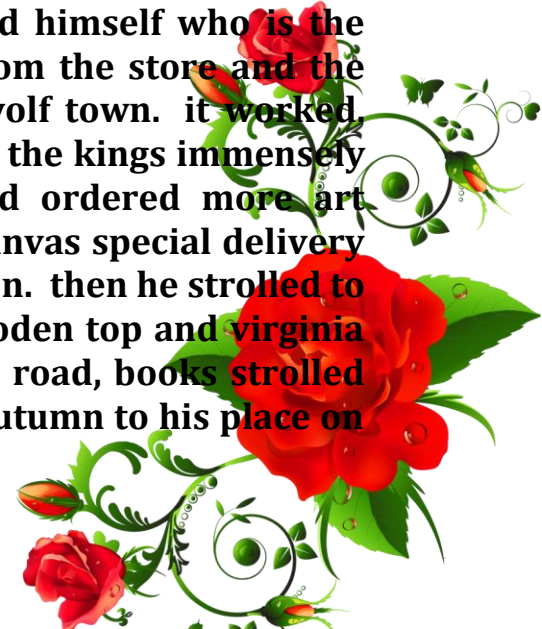


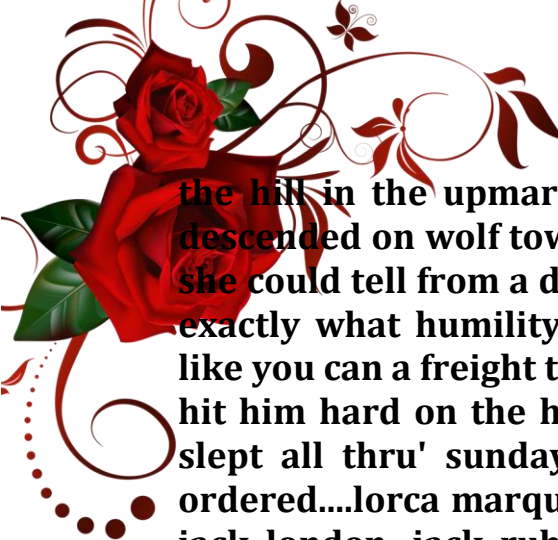


obvious suspects. lay lady lay and unscrewable had spied on bland and two rivers for months. had watched them writing and painting content and serene on the lonesome beach and in the basement and gardens at buffalo house. unscrewable had watched the paintings of firebirds being loaded into the fuck off gallery trucks. and his hunger grew. on a whim humility books took it upon himself to offer artists' materials for sale in his store. canvases paints and brushes arrived in wolf town late on a friday afternoon but before they could be put on display in the store on saturday morning humility books found the whole first shipment had been stolen in the night along with more books on painting and poetry.

humility sent for inspector spanky. wrong move. spanky was drunk. looks like your paints and canvases have been stolen and some books too said spanky. kinda looks that way said the red wolf. probably bukowski said spanky. i'll see what i can do spanky said then convinced he was the god of death he crawled back to the broken wheel motel where he'd been drinking all friday night and most of saturday morning. i shoulda known better said the red wolf to himself. he closed his store early in the afternoon then went to the wolf house bar for a few drinks knowing that he would avoid spanky there and knowing too that the company of virginia and wooden top would easily and quickly soothe his somewhat ragged nerves. there was no history of theft in wolf town and humility books was adamant and confident that in time he would easily resolve this new little mystery. composure comes and goes...just like those damned artists' materials said humility to himself. he used the bar phone to order a second shipment then with a couple of stiff cold bourbons down his throat and a third on its way and with the good company of virginia and wooden top for the first time since breakfast that morning he finally managed to relax.

on his sixth kool bourbon humility books asked himself who is the least likely person to steal books and paints from the store and the answer came to him in a flash - the kings of wolf town. it worked perfect fit. books knew he'd cracked it. he liked the kings immensely and immediately telephoned his suppliers and ordered more art books, more poetry, more paints brushes and canvas special delivery monday morning. ain't nothing like self education. then he strolled to the corner of eagle street to buy flowers for wooden top and virginia wolf. flowers deliverd, a couple of shots for the road, books strolled home unsteadily thru' the falling leaves of late autumn to his place on

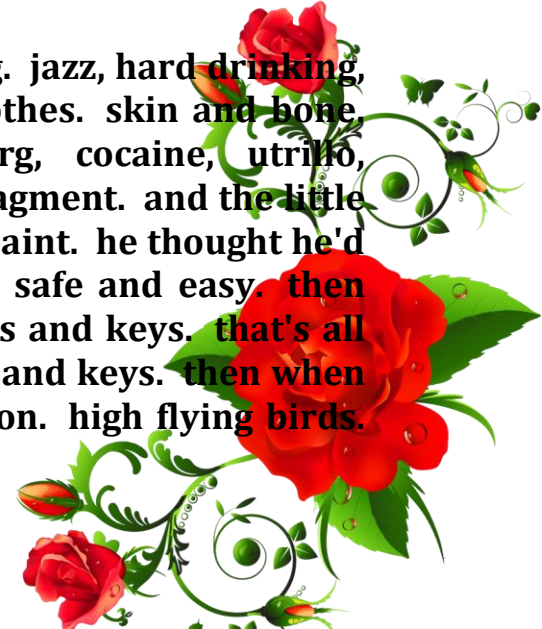





the hill in the upmarket lonesomeville district as saturday evening descended on wolf town. mrs books waited for her husband uneasily. she could tell from a distance of more than a hundred miles when and exactly what humility had been drinking. you can't hop a jet plane like you can a freight train said books to his wife on the threshold. she hit him hard on the head with a frying pan then put him to bed. he slept all thru' sunday then on monday he called his supplier and ordered....lorca marquez shakespeare and apollinaire. walt whitman, jack london, jack ruby, lenny the lion, lenny bruce and muffin the mule. expressionists, impressionists, materialists, constructivists, destructivists, illusionists, realists, abstractionists, subtractionists and medieval art. anything he could get his hands on. his head was still hurting but his was a forgiving nature. the new order arrived on thursday and much to his pleasure and satisfaction it was stolen on friday night along with all the other new stuff that had arrived on monday.

on the friday night books had hidden himself in the store and waited. around midnight lay lady lay let himself in thru' a window and removed all the poetry books. around two in the morning unscrewable arrived and helped himself to all the art books and all the painting gear. around three in the morning under a yellow moon books strolled home to his place on the hill in the fashionable lonesomeville district of wolf town congratulating himself repeatedly on a job well done and singing loudly whatever he could remember from the ancient mantra there's no business like show business. he was a little drunk. more than a little drunk - but mrs books was five hundred miles away on the other side of the blue mountains visiting her sister. let the cowboy ride. ain't no education like self education said books to himself. then he tripped over his own front step and slept where he lay on the threshold till long after the first light of morning.

we grow out of everything. or almost everything. jazz, hard drinking, hard and harder drugs. we grow out of our clothes. skin and bone. robert mitchum and jack kerouac. ginsberg, cocaine, utriko, modigliani, pro sports and broken hearts. we fragment. and the little that is left of us is what unscrewable wanted to paint. he thought he'd start with something he didn't like. something safe and easy. then work his way towards the real deal. doors locks and keys. that's all he painted for the first few months. doors locks and keys. then when he'd learned to paint them perfectly he moved on. high flying birds.



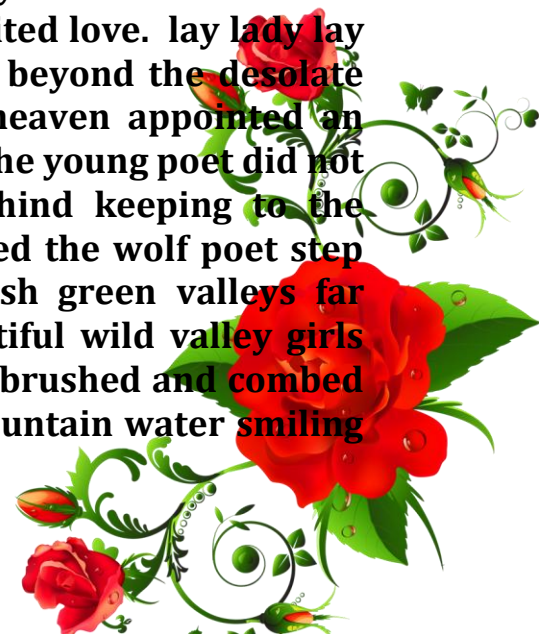


eagles, wingless birds. wolves with wings. wolves as ocean waves. thousands and thousands of wolves as ocean waves rolling in to the lonesome beach. then he painted all the places the waves went to after they left the lonesome beach. then he returned to painting doors locks and keys realising he liked them more than he knew. he painted pretty much non-stop for eighteen months. once a month humilty books ordered more materials and on the last friday of each month he left the store unlocked.

unrequited love. a poet can write nothing without unrequited love. the night the blue angel threw his medal away it was a couple of weeks before christmas. from that night onwards, apart from nocturnal visits to humilty books' store, the kings of wolf town were not seen in town or on the beach or in the woods for a long long time. lay lady lay crossed the blue mountains in search of unrequited love and unscrewable painted like a tornado in a secret hideout in the hills far removed from wolf town pretty much non-stop month after month after month. untill his hands became so weak he could hold his brushes no more.

in the autumn of the patriarch the master gabriel garcia marquez clearly argues that for some there is no death. that for some the future is in the past and the past is in the future. lay lady lay studied at the master's feet. he swallowed every line. let his blood spill thru' every word. but he couldn't find unrequited love. only glory and the divine. the king of heaven and an idiot moon. no trace of unrequited love. just glory and the divine, the kings and queens of heaven, an idiot moon and some old recordings of lenny bruce and on this basis he legan to fear he might never truly become a great poet.

the kings and queens of heaven revealed the secrets of the heart to lay lady lay. encouraged him warmly and simply to be faithful and vigilant and not give up his quest to find unrequited love. lay lady lay thanked them then moved on far far away and beyond the desolate peaks of the blue mountains. the princes of heaven appointed an angel to follow him, watch over him and ensure the young poet did not fail in his quest. always just a few steps behind keeping to the shadows disguised as a mouse the angel followed the wolf poet step by step as lay lady lay descended into the lush green valleys far removed from the blue mountains where beautiful wild valley girls bathed in sweet silent rivers of goats' milk then brushed and combed their hair with long truncheons of cold clear mountain water smiling

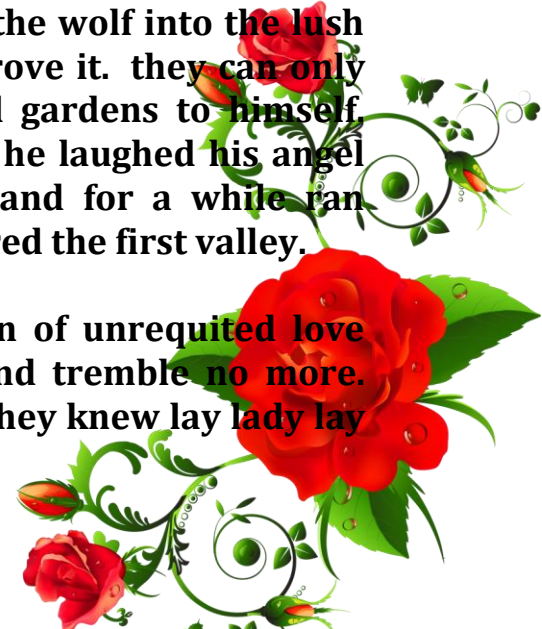





all the time and waiting in eager anticipation of the arrival of a new prince of peace in search of unrequited love. a prince of peace was coming. and his name was lay lady lay. kinda hard to fail with an angel on your tail.

the angel's name was arjuna and his title was angel and prince of roses and broken arrows. every slave must have his freedom as every thorn must have its rose. or so it was often said in mid-18th century vauxhall gardens where pleasure seekers sought the future in the past and the past in the future as they flew jumped and danced thru' hoops and rings of fire. in those days they called it opium but the magic is now long gone from vauxhall gardens. the angel and prince of roses and broken arrows had earned his wings long ago in vauxhall's pleasure gardens and what he didn't know about roses and arrows simply wasn't worth knowing. merit rarely sees or seeks its just rewards but the former king of vauxhall pleasure gardens was the exception to most rules. he followed lay lady lay most assiduously. lay lady lay could have had no greater protector. and what is more the former king of vauxhall gardens knew precisely where unrequited love could be found. if and when you hear weeping in the shadows at twilight it's always a sign that unrequited love and those poor souls lost to it are close at hand. you are close to entering the land of lost souls. close to entering the cursed world of unrequited love. beware of darkness. cling to the light. cling to the path. run. run away. for all you are worth. run to the light. the angel of roses and broken arrows knew only too well the pain of unrequited love and tho' appointed to protect and help the young poet wolf in his heart the angel wanted the young wolf to fail. according to the rules of the kings and queens of heaven every poet must have an unrequited love. the angel of roses and broken arrows had his own ideas regarding many of the rules of the kings and queens of heaven. fuck them. the angel reasoned it must surely be possible to become a great poet without encountering the evils of unrequited love and as he followed the wolf into the lush green valleys it became his fixed intention to prove it. they can only kill you once said the former king of vauxhall gardens to himself. some of us are harder to kill than others. then he laughed his angel laugh. then he turned himself into the wind and for a while ran alongside the young wolf and together they entered the first valley.

in the palace of the valleys the king and queen of unrequited love waited and trembled. soon they would wait and tremble no more. they could hear the wings and drums of death. they knew lay lady lay



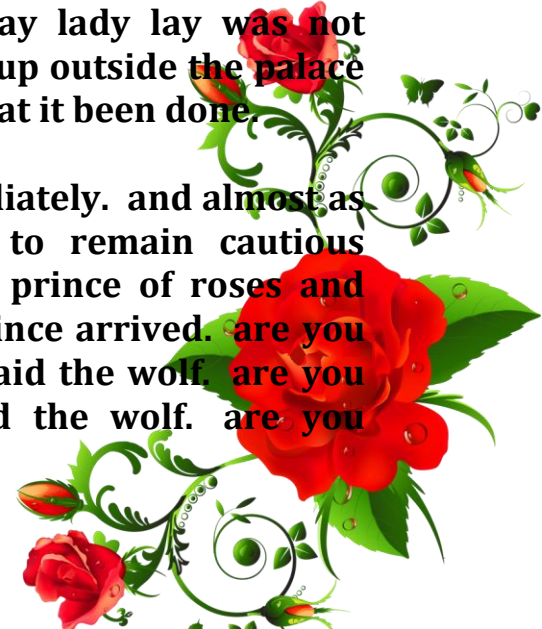



had entered their kingdom and the wind of death was travelling on his shoulder. they drank a little wine, sighed their last sighs and cried their last tears. they knew that for them it was over. soon they would be no more.

lay lady lay and the angel disguised as a mouse entered the palace of the valleys. whose palace is this asked the wolf. this is the palace of the king and queen of unrequited love said the court chamberlain - but my masters are no more. the winds of eternal death visited the palace in the night and the king and queen are no more. at this the angel and prince of roses and broken arrows revealed himself in his true form. i am the prince of death said the angel. i have rid the world of unrequited love. addressing lay lady lay - this palace is now yours. the chamberlain will help you run it. i have filled the vaults and chambers here with the great books of the world. river poets. drunken poets. sacred poets. study long and hard. live only in the heart. write only what you know. write well. write perfectly. write only from the heart. then the angel simply disappeared. the wolf fainted and the chamberlain put him to bed.

the next day wild beautiful valley girls began turning up at the palace one by one. some carrying swords, some bringing long stemmed white roses, some bringing wine and others bringing proud truncheons of cold clear mountain water. lay lady lay - lay across my big brass bed. we're here to help you journey thru' the books they said as one. we propose you start with paradise lost they said as one. there were thirteen or fourteen of them and tho' they were entirely separate they all seemed to be somehow one entity. one being. each day more girls came to help. each different. independent. yet somehow they were all the same. different personalities. different bodies. but somehow all one person. every time lay lady lay opened a door there was a new girl. every time he closed a door there was another new girl. sometimes two or three. lay lady lay was not unhappy. he considered having a neon sign put up outside the palace saying paradise lost and the next day he found that it been done.

whatever he wished for happened almost immediately. and almost as immediately he found he was wise enough to remain cautious regarding what he wished for. he wished the prince of roses and broken arrows would visit. the next day the prince arrived. are you studying long and hard asked the prince. yes said the wolf. are you comfortable here asked the prince. very said the wolf. are you



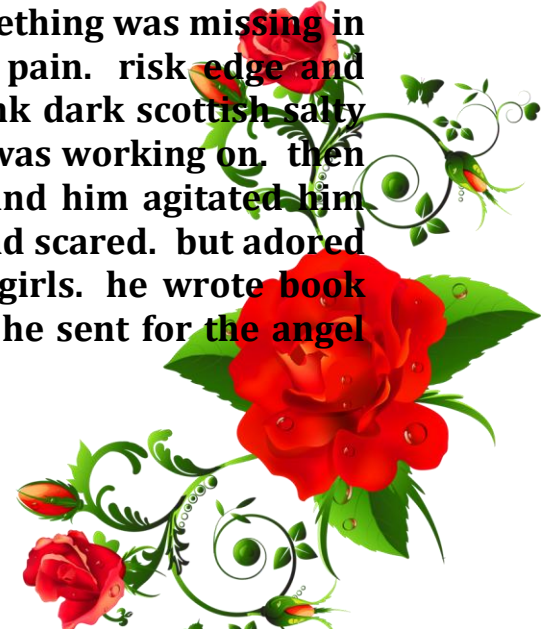


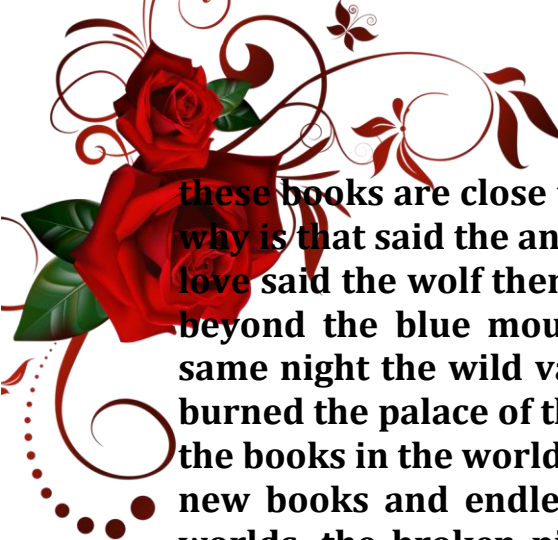
writing perfectly asked the prince. writing yes but no not perfectly said the wolf. at this the former king of vauxhall gardens simply disappeared. lay lady lay was missing his brother wolf unscrewable but as a poet and now owner of a palace he didn't quite feel comfortable enough to make contact. weeks turned into months. as they do. long hours of study. tutored daily by the wild valley girls. his writing improved and grew strong but a lonesomeness grew in him and it too grew strong and he couldn't shift it. he wished for it to leave him but still it remained. refused to go. lay heavy on his heart like an unexploded bomb.

if he read the great gatsby, dostoyevsky's idiot, or hesse's glass bead game, when he read jack kerouac or watched a robert mitchum movie he couldn't help but think of unscrewable. tho' he studied long hard and often, tho' he was writing almost like an angel his thoughts were rarely far away from the old days in wolf town when they had been kings of fun.

the wild valley girls adored him. but they could plainly see something was missing. they could see his lonesomeness sitting on his chest like an unexploded bomb. taking him down. down. down. something was missing. something was missing in paradise. and the thing that was missing was pain. pain. and a little bit of edge. risk pain and edge. the risk and edge of a highwire artist. if we fall or fail we are dead. risk pain and edge. he started writing about risk pain and edge. he started writing about doors keys and locks. how he hated doors keys and locks. man how he hated doors keys and locks. if there were no doors we wouldn't need so many keys or locks.

he wrote about windows. he liked windows. he liked climbing thru' them or looking thru' them. either from the outside to the inside or from the inside to the outside. he liked the sound of breaking glass. so he wrote about the sound of breaking glass. slowly he began to realise he was writing almost perfectly. but something was missing in paradise. and the thing that was missing was pain. risk edge and pain. when he wrote he chain smoked and drank dark scottish salty wine. cared for nothing except the sentence he was working on. then the next one. any little unexpected sound around him agitated him and the valley girls around him grew cautious and scared. but adored him still. he cared less and less for the valley girls. he wrote book after book. they were all close to perfect. then he sent for the angel and prince of roses and broken arrows.





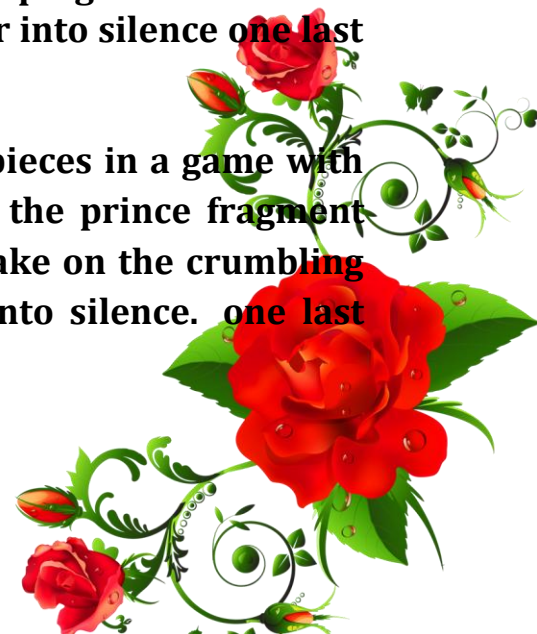
these books are close to perfect but they are not perfect said the poet. why is that said the angel. i guess every poet must have an unrequited love said the wolf then he left paradise that very night heading to and beyond the blue mountains then onwards to wolf town. later that same night the wild valley girls crying bitter tears of rage and regret burned the palace of the valleys to the ground then all the words in all the books in the world changed places overnight thus creating endless new books and endless new worlds. new worlds fragment into old worlds, the broken pieces drift away, the same old stupid cycles of resentment and lonesomeness repeating themselves again and again just like the blacksmith's hammer as the bishop says to the actress and not for the first time - at the end of pain avenue is pain street, at the end of pain street is pain row.


deep wells of resentment. deep wells of lonesomeness. deep wells of forgetfulness. fragmenting into nothing. again and again. old wounds fragmenting into new wounds. almost everything fragmenting into nothing again and again. if i don't write a little each and every day i will simply die said the wolf to himself as he left the blue mountains far behind. we all die a little each and every day said a voice. the wolf heard the voice then wondered then realised the angel had been following him. we all need a bit of company now and then said the angel. thanks said the wolf. you're so deciduous said the angel. yes i am said the wolf.



prince myshkin is never far away from the asylum and at the end of pain avenue is pain street, at the end of pain street is pain row. fragmenting again and again into nothing. weeping in shadows at twilight the angel and the wolf fragment together into silence one last time.

at the asylum prince myshkin moves his chess pieces in a game with the lord of death. death wins. then death and the prince fragment into silence. as bland and two rivers finally awake on the crumbling temple stairs they too crumble and fragment into silence. one last time.





the fog and the palace of solitude fragment. wolf town fragments. the lonesome beach where the buffalo house blazed then exploded fragments too. till absolutely nothing is left. not even silence. not even the three wishes granted and freely given to clintwood and the blue angel by the firebirds.

the fuck off gallery in new york fragments. america fragments. italy and scotland fragment. the oceans and high places of the world fragment. all inner worlds, all secret worlds fragment into nothing. not even silence is left. broken. gone. all gone.

