

CHAPTER 1: THE MISSING KING

some writers can't let go of their characters. some writers become their own central characters. they forget the so called real world and live only in their own books. for some writers it's best and wise to steer clear of crucifixions and other murders. i am one of them. lord help us all.

he couldn't tell if he was shaking because of nerves or because of whisky. too much whisky or not enough. he never could tell. a shooting star or faulty vision. lord protect us from the fall. most nights he studied the stars and the ghost trains in the sky. station to station. never quite arriving. never quite departing. he offered prayers to the nearly departing. o' nearly departed ghost riders may the great lord protect you from the fall. the riders were grateful. they showered him with rose petals as he slept and promised to protect him in times of need and want. and tho' asleep he felt the rose petals rain gently down on him. and tho' asleep he heard the prayers and kind promises of the riders and he too was grateful.

a new morning. everything in its place. or so it seemed. rose petals scattered pleasantly on the bed covers and floor. eggs, bacon, lightly buttered toast and black coffee. bourbon on the rocks. then another. he read again his work from the night before and was not displeased. that coming night he would offer prayers to the nearly arriving but not quite and to and for those who simply never arrive. and to and for those poor souls who for whatever range of reasons never even come close to close to arriving. coast to coast. then the next night he would pray for the engine driver. if indeed the next night came at all. let's get thru' today. another bourbon on the rocks. then he started to write. he wrote about angels, da vinci's madonna of the rocks and da vinci's assistants. if jesus had been a painter would jesus have had assistants? assistants he could trust? another bourbon. assistants can be mischievous. assistants can be a pain in the ass. on reflection he decided that if jesus had been a painter he would not have had assistants. what if tomorrow never comes? he decided he would pray for the engine driver that very night.

i will build thee a tabernacle said the poet to his love. yes build me a tabernacle said the poet's great love. if i were a thief i would steal you said the poet to his love. you are a thief said his love - steal me. then make me a poster of an old rodeo. the poet continued to write thru' the afternoon, into the evening and into the night. and he continued to drink steadily bourbon on the rocks. late at night he studied the stars again then prayed for those riders who had failed to arrive and for those who didn't manage to even leave the stations. then he prayed for the engine driver. then before dawn he built his love a tabernacle of dust then made her a poster of an old rodeo. these guys knew how to fall said his love. yeah i guess so said the poet. at the coming of dawn he decided to build a tabernacle for the engine driver, for those riders who failed to arrive, for those who failed to depart and for those who failed to leave the stations in any way shape or form. his work completed they breakfasted on orchids and lilies at noon then the poet and his love retired to bed. before falling asleep his last words were tomorrow might never come. if tomorrow comes you must steal it said his love. then she held him close till evening all the while counting the rose petals falling like stars in the poet's bedroom.

altho' there were many ghost trains with many riders not quite arriving and not quite departing there was only one engine driver. many stations but only one station master. the station master and the engine driver looked exactly alike. the station master had a guard but he had no need of one. the engine driver he too had a guard yet he too had no need of one. how did the poet know this? he just knew. in his guts he just knew. he was after all a poet and it was his job and central function to know such things. sometimes it weighed heavily on his shoulders. like the tired

wings of an over worked angel. sometimes he wore it like a crown. the windows in the poet's bedroom were the windows of the world and when he looked thru' them he saw things he wanted and desired but when he went out there the things he wanted and desired weren't there or didn't want him and in this way he learned about deception. the deception of windows. the deceptions of desire. yet when he looked thru' his bedroom windows from the outside to the inside he saw rose petals scattered on the bed and on the bedroom floor and love gently and tenderly sweeping them up as if they had been gifts from heaven itself.

love had her own place but her favourite place in the whole world was the poet's bedroom. love indeed had a soft spot for the poet. when he was working she lingered in his hair like a cool breeze or rested still and easy in his heart to help keep him balanced and composed. but there were times when even love couldn't keep the poet in shape or on line. or safe. postcards from the edge. temptations even love could not control. it's an ill wind that blows no good. and an ill wind blew thru' his heart almost each and every second of each and every day. in the nights he had a little peace. studying the stars and love trying to comfort him. he looked like a poet. an elegant wasted wreck. broken into myriad parts. broken but somehow still functioning. still writing. working. defiant. broken but undefeated. somehow still handsome. more like a perfect painting of a poet rather than the reality of a poet. which makes perfect sense. he had less than zero understanding regarding the workings and mechanics of reality.

the restless reckless years were behind him now. when we get down to the wire and find that only love remains it is a fact that we can safely conclude we must have done something right somewhere along the line. maybe. love remained in the windows, curtains and doors. in the rose petals on the bed and on the floor. in the sheets. and in the poet's heart. she refused to leave him alone. he had built her a tabernacle of dust and made her a poster of an old rodeo. and she would not forget or betray her poet. no matter how old or broken he became. love has wings. his writing had wings. only the brave fly alone. we are all witness to the fall - but so very few of us dare to climb the ladder.

the poet lived in poets town in a small low rent apartment. above a gambler's bar. he had shined their windows, parked their cars, cut their grass, served their tables, washed their dishes and swept their drives. when eternity called he knew that it was time. pencil and paper. notebooks and pens. no more bosses. his first book sold three copies. then three hundred. he quit his job at the bar but kept the apartment. in time he bought the apartment. in time he bought the bar. after his first book he never left the poets town district of wolf town. when he bought the bar he changed its name to poets town. love came often to his flat roof apartment above the old gambler's bar. each night the poet studied the stars from the roof of his apartment. and there he made love a roof garden and a tabernacle of dust and there at love's request he made her a poster of an old rodeo. love too had her weaknesses. regarding the poet's failings there's a list somewhere as long as a lazy river. but generally he lived quietly and often soberly in the small apartment above the bar. a modest income from his books and from the bar. and love was a regular visitor to poets town.

jeopardy. we are in jeopardy every day. all day. all of us. said the poet. maybe said love - maybe that's where composure comes in. maybe said the poet. i seem to know less and less these days said the poet. he had no name. only a bad reputation. and love would never tell him her secret name. but we have the nights said love. yes we have the nights echoed the poet. and the stars said love. yes we have the nights and the stars echoed the poet. and with this he began to feel a bit better regarding jeopardy and the comings and goings of composure. he had heard

somewhere that composure is some kinda ointment but this he had found simply too hard to believe. make me an angel that flies from montgomery, make me a poster of an old rodeo said the poet. then love made him an angel that flies from montgomery. then she made him a poster of an old rodeo.

they were sitting at a corner table in the poets town bar. the poet and love. his notebook and pen. a bottle of bourbon, two glasses and a bucket of ice. when the station master and the engine driver walked thru' the door. impressive said love. the door was locked and barred. the station master and the engine driver had simply walked straight thru' it. like ghosts. like heavenly twins. good morning said the poet. good morning said the heavenly twins. care for a drink said the poet. don't mind if we do said the station master. love fetched another bottle of bourbon and two glasses. we hear you have been receiving postcards from the edge said the engine driver. the edge of what said the poet. exactly said the station master. the engine driver laughed. are they threatening postcards asked the station master. yes you could say that said the poet. perhaps we can help said the engine driver - love can't protect you forever. underneath the table love kicked the engine driver hard on the ankle. then the station master kicked the engine driver hard on the other ankle. the engine driver blushed. then composed himself. with a small jar of ointment.

what is the nature of these threats said the engine driver. dark said the poet - their nature is dark. darker than dark. are you guys detectives asked the poet. of a sort - detectives of a sort answered the station master. love fetched some more bourbon. we like our trains to run on time said the engine driver. having studied the ghost trains for many long hours this remark seemed kinda strange to the poet but he said nothing. the bar was now open for business. no matter what came along or didn't come along love would never leave the poet. she would linger forever in his heart like dust in a tabernacle. but there were many in wolf town who doubted the veracity of love. the poet was not one of them. thru' much misadventure he had learned and understood the truth about love. she would always be with him. even if and when she appeared not to be. it had been a long and painful journey. but finally he had understood. absurd as it might seem the poet truly expected a new age of miracles. the sorta thing you keep quiet about in wolf town and one of several reasons the poet rarely if ever left the poets town district. the wolves woulda eaten him alive if he'd tried pushing a new age of miracles around in wolf town. so he stayed in his own district. mostly in his own small apartment, in his own bar or roof garden where love was always around. even when she wasn't. frankly there was nowhere outside of poets town that he wanted to go. if the world wanted him he would let the world come to him. just as love had done. and if trouble wanted him the poet was easily found.

back to the postcards. dark and threatening said the station master. yeah dark and threatening said the poet. love was tending bar. the bar was busy. poets, painters, acrobats, carpenters and angels. nobody had much money but most of the drinks were free. even in the old days when it had been the gambler's bar most of the drinks had been free. the gambler just wanted a place where he could play cards and where nobody would or could try to tell him what to do or not do. love brought another bottle of bourbon to the corner table. dark and threatening repeated the engine driver.

a big fierce looking man entered the bar. i am trouble said the man to love - i'm looking for the poet. over here said the poet. the big man walked slowly towards the corner table. i am trouble said the big man - i've lost my chessmen. board and all said the big man. the wolves tell me you might know where to find them. please sit down and have a drink with us said the poet. these two

gentlemen run the ghost trains said the poet. the station master and the engine driver nodded somewhat nervously. love served another bottle of bourbon. she winked at the poet. all my chessmen are gone said trouble. have you tried the wrong hospital asked the poet. yes said trouble - my chessmen aren't there. we have a lost offices department at the ghost train company said the station master - they might be able to help you. let me give them a call. what do your chessmen look like asked the poet. i can't tell you that said trouble but you'll know they're mine when you see them. the station master phoned the lost offices department. yes a board and some chess pieces have been handed in. then addressing the big man - can you describe your chess pieces please? no said the big man but you'll know they're mine when you see them. i guess we need another bottle of bourbon said the poet.

i made them myself said the big man. with my own hands. but i can't tell you what they look like. because i'm blind. the pawns are wolves said trouble. the knights are sea eagles, the castles are bears and the bishops are fools. the queen is love and the king is a poet. it seems we have your chessmen said the station master - but one of your kings is missing. which one said the big man. which one said the station master into the phone. we can't tell said the voice of the clerk in the lost offices department. because all the pieces are the same colour. the big man wept. and couldn't stop. love and the poet put him to bed in the poet's apartment. love remained in the apartment and the poet returned to the bar.

trouble awoke in a panic. i think the wolves have set me up for a fall. my chessmen he said - when i touch them they become real. i am the missing king. if we can't find the missing king it means i'm not real. love had her own place. she took trouble there. you'll be safe here she said no matter what happens. then she reported to the poet in the bar. trouble is the missing king. if we can't find the king trouble will cease to exist. if trouble is the missing king said the poet that means he's a poet too. we all need a bit of trouble in our lives. it's tension pain and adversity that make us humble. without lows there are no highs. without trouble there is no serenity - serenity would have no meaning. a world without trouble would be a disaster. we have to find the missing king as soon as possible concluded the poet.

the poet had a quiet elegance and authority about him when he spoke. trouble was his exact opposite. awkward. clumsy. and blind. trouble is a poet too said love - we must find the missing king. but where the hell do we start? we could try the outfit said the poet. the outfit was a clandestine organisation expert in solving the unsolvable. expert but expensive. jack palance and i were pretty close once upon a time said the poet. we could try the underworld and the prince of darkness said love - once upon a time the prince of darkness and i were pretty close. they put the engine driver and station master in charge of the bar then headed straight to the underworld. before love had left her place trouble had told her - your poet is the other king. if i cease to exist your poet will cease to exist. your poet will be lost. if the sea eagles cease to exist truth and its authority will be lost to the world. chaos and devils will rule and the world will crumble. love thought it best to keep this information to herself.

they arrived at the underworld. we'd like to see the prince of darkness please said love to the gate keeper. regarding what business might i ask said the gate keeper. we'd like to discuss trouble and the lost offices department of the ghost train company. please inform the prince that i am love and this gentleman is my poet. please come in said the gate keeper. and he opened the gate. the poet was kinda nervous. he'd never met the prince of darkness before. a red-tailed devil led them thru' an intricate web of corridors within which there were many doors. they stopped outside a door marked trouble and the lost offices department. please wait here said the red-

tailed devil then he walked away. time passed slowly. the door creaked as it opened itself. love and the poet entered the chamber. the prince of darkness was sitting on a throne. the throne was on fire. the flames were the only source of light in the room. long time said the prince of darkness. long time said love. welcome to trouble and the lost offices department said the prince of darkness - who is your companion? he is my handsome poet said love. a handsome poet indeed said the prince. the poet was too nervous to speak. too nervous to breathe or think. too scared to fall.

we're looking for a missing king - a chess piece said love. are you indeed - and what will you give for this missing king said the prince. what would you like said love. i already have what i like snarled the prince - what can love do for a devil? love can forgive she said. perhaps we can come to some arrangement she asked. perhaps we can said the prince - return here one week from today. then the prince of darkness and his throne of flames simply disappeared. in the darkness the door creaked open. the same red-tailed devil as before was waiting in the corridor. he escorted them to the gate keeper. see you one week from today said the gate keeper. you will said love - thanks for your help. love and the poet returned to the poet's apartment where she gently and tenderly put the poet to bed. man he was gone. then she went to her own place to check on trouble. trouble was asleep in her bed. three empty bourbon bottles resting on a pillow. she went to the bar. we've cancelled all trains tonight said the station master. thanks said love - i guess we better have a drink. good thinking said the engine driver. they sat on tall bar stools all night drinking champagne and bourbon. the clean up guy arrived at dawn but love and the engine driver and the station master just carried on drinking then at noon love opened the bar for business as usual just like any other normal day in the poets town district of wolf town yet she knew full well that there was no such thing as a normal day in wolf town.

shortly after noon the station master phoned the lost offices department. we'll run a restricted service until further notice. put the apprentices in charge of the trains and stations for the next few days and nights. put the whipping man in charge of the board and chess pieces. await further instructions. understood boss said the clerk. trouble stumbled into the bar. how long can the other chess pieces survive without the missing king said love. about a week said trouble. and when did the chessmen first go missing. about a week ago said trouble. fuck it said love - fuck it. then she paused - on a positive note we don't know when the missing king went missing. on a negative note said trouble we don't know where or how. love gave him a dark look. then poured herself a cognac. the poet entered the bar. we better call palance said love. ok said the poet. how are you feeling she asked the poet. pretty poor he said - i feel like i'm slipping away. call palance right now please said love. ok said the poet. he went back to his apartment and phoned jack palance. half an hour later jack palance strolled into the bar looking kool and dangerous. and mean as hell.

hi jack said the poet. what is it this time said jack. trouble said the poet. o' really said jack. trouble has lost his king said the poet - without the missing king the other chessmen will die. the poet was less than coherent. love took palance outside into the street and they spoke privately in the rain for five minutes. jack came back into the bar. what you need is some time said jack. i'll buy you some time. i'll give you a week. i'll go to the wheels of time. i know the janitor there. he owes me a favour. we'll stop the wheels of time for a week. you've got a week. gotta go. thanks jack said the poet. expect my bill said palance. he winked then left the bar looking even more kool and dangerous than when he'd first walked in. didn't he used to be in the movies said the station master. yes he did said the engine driver. the poet was feeling lousy and again love gently and tenderly put the poet to bed then she returned to the bar. trouble too was feeling lousy

and had fallen asleep at a corner table. gentlemen she said to the station master and the engine driver - we have a week to find the missing king. can't he just make another said the engine driver. it's not as simple as that said love - it's too complex for me to even attempt to explain.

the longer the king is missing the weaker the poet and trouble will become said love. take trouble to my place please and put him to bed. he'll be safe there. the station master and the engine driver put trouble in a taxi which took them to love's place and there they tenderly and gently put the sleeping giant to bed then returned to the bar. the station master phoned the lost offices department. who found the chessmen please? where and when? the guard found them in an otherwise empty carriage on the blue train in the shunting yard around midnight three nights ago said the clerk. tell the whipping man to bring the board and the chess pieces immediately to the poets town bar in the poets town district of wolf town. tell the whipping man to travel with a guard. tell them to mention this matter to nobody. the same applies to you. top secret. understood chief said the clerk - consider it done.

as evening turned to night love checked on the sleeping poets. she guessed they would continue to sleep. she guessed that as the minutes and hours passed they would grow weaker and weaker. but what she didn't guess was that her poet would grow smaller and smaller and trouble would grow bigger and bigger. it was a little after midnight before she noticed. o' shit she said - holy fucking shit. trouble was taking up more and more room in her bed and the poet was shrinking inch by inch back at the apartment. love had worked out that trouble was not what he seemed. his chess game was a means of controlling order and balance in the three worlds. the wolves were the bad guys - the wolves were devils. without the missing king the game is dead. sabotaged. the wolves would win and the heavens will fall. without the missing king's magic touch to bring the sea eagles and the other major pieces to life the game is over and the three worlds are doomed. bigger than i thought she said to herself. then she twitched nervously. then she twitched again. then she laughed nervously. then she returned to the bar where she tried to explain to the station master and the engine driver. but the station master and the engine driver didn't have a clue. they thought she'd lost her mind. trouble is just a big stupid blind lump of a man said the station master. love restrained herself.

messengers from the gods she said - messengers from the gods. for many years the poet trouble has been entrusted to play a chess match each week against himself. the purpose of the game was to control and eliminate the pawns. or at least as many pawns as possible. in reality the pawns are wolves and devils. in this way the world as we know it remains reasonably safe and reasonably sane. the wolves and the devils are one and the same. if the pawns are not eliminated we are doomed. the station master and the engine driver looked strangely at each other in disbelief. where the hell is the whipping man and the guard said the engineer. the station master phoned the lost offices department again. where the hell is the whipping man and the guard said the station master. they left immediately you rang chief - shoulda been with you hours ago said the clerk. o' fuck - o' fuck said the station master. what is it said love. the station master hesitated then mumbled - shoulda been here hours ago. something bad has happened to the whipping man and the guard.

were they travelling on one of your trains said love. definitely not said the station master somewhat defensively. listen said love - palance has stopped the wheels of time. we have a week to get on top of this. yes said the station master - let's get serious. love laughed nervously then went to check again on the two sleeping poets. she was certain in her heart that trouble was living under a curse. certain the gods would not have put an idiot in charge of such an important

chess game. certain that in reality trouble was an even more elegant profoundly serene poet even more beautiful than her own handsome poet. but for now both poets were growing weaker and weaker. her poet was shrinking inch by inch and trouble had grown so big love's bed had collapsed. balance has stopped the wheels of time she said to herself - but the missing king is still missing. lord help us all.

then she reached for a blue syringe.

CHAPTER 2: THE WHIPPING MAN

the whipping man was sharp. he decided to take the slow train. thinking this might fox his enemies. he too had been receiving postcards from the edge. photographs of devils, wolves and strange looking chess pieces and small parcels of blue syringes in the mail. he trusted no-one. least of all his guard. as the slow train crossed the bridge way high above the river blue the whipping man bundled the guard outa the carriage window. never liked that bastard said the whipping man to the empty carriage. the empty carriage responded - we're not convinced he found the board and chess pieces how and where he reported it. me too said the whipping man. and why return the board and chessmen but keep back the missing king? the wolves are playing with us continued the empty carriage. yup said the whipping man. they are playing with us - they don't need the board or the other chessmen, all they need is the missing king. without the king there is no game. it's the missing king that brings the game to life - without the king there is no game.

man you are sharp said the empty carriage to the whipping man - you should be the central character in a grand poetic novel. cut it out said the whipping man or i'll...he didn't finish his sentence. tear this carriage apart said the carriage. yes said the whipping man i'll tear this carriage apart. temper temper said the carriage. cut the crap said the whipping man. the whipping man was fond of the engine driver and station master but he knew they were a pair of well intentioned buffoons and that it was mostly wise to always do pretty much the exact opposite of whatever it was they requested. the whipping man left the slow train at wolf town and went straight to the underworld. i'd like to see the prince of darkness please said the whipping man to the gate keeper. state your business said the gate keeper. the missing king said the whipping man. a red-tailed devil escorted the whipping man to a door marked the missing king. the devil left the whipping man alone in the corridor. the door creaked open. the prince of darkness was sitting alone on his throne of flames. i have something that you want said the whipping man to the prince of darkness. what might that be said the prince of darkness. that's for you to figure out said the whipping man. fuck off snarled the prince.

and you have something i want said the whipping man. what might that be said the prince. the missing king said the whipping man. fuck off snarled the prince of darkness. then throne and prince disappeared in a flash. the whipping man escorted himself from the underworld and headed back to wolf town. to the poets town district. then to the poets town bar. it was four in the morning. the bar was closed. the engine driver and station master were sleeping in the back

office. the whipping man noticed a candle burning in a window in the apartment above. he climbed the stairs and found love smoking a cigarette in the garden. twitching nervously. drinking cognac. hi stranger said love. long time said the whipping man. yeah long time - my handsome poet is shrinking and trouble is growing so big so fast i fear he will explode she said. i know said the whipping man as he poured them both a drink. jack palance has stopped the wheels of time for a week said love - we have a week to save them. yup said the whipping man - we'll work something out. i've been painting angels for more than forty years said the whipping man - kinda safe to say i've learned a few tricks. i'm running outa love said love. no you're not said the whipping man. he poured them both another drink then pulled a cigarette from behind his ear, lit it then handed it to love. you've not lost your style said love. i never had any style said the whipping man. they studied the stars, watched the ghost trains crash and burn...the apprentices were not quite as capable as the station master had hoped. then they sat in silence drinking cognac. smoking cigarettes and waiting for the morning star.

dawn arrived. love fell asleep. the whipping man gently placed a cushion behind her head and covered her with a blanket of warm dust then he strolled to wolf town where some of the bars and clubs were still open. picked her up on a friday night sha la la la lee was blasting out from a wolf club bar at six in the morning. the whipping man strolled in. but nobody wanted to know. the whipping man was just too strong, too wild, too powerful. too fucking crazy. he hit another bar but the reaction was just the same. might as well be playing tiddlywinks said the whipping man to himself. in another bar t-bone walker was singing gimme one more chance. but here too the wolves were exactly the same. scared witless. they just wanted him to leave. they knew if they gave the whipping man even the slightest provocation he'd simply whip the shit outa them. all of them. he returned to the poet's garden and slept on a chair next to love. long stemmed white roses rained down on them both. birds sang in the garden. then love awoke just in time to open the bar two or three minutes before noon.

the poet continued to shrink. trouble continued to grow bigger and bigger. they were both unable to wake up. the whipping man was convinced trouble was labouring under a curse. convinced the chessmen had not been lost but stolen. he went to see the wolf king. it's not me you need to see said the wolf king - try the king of thieves. the whipping man went to see the king of thieves. it's not me you need to see - try the wolf queen said the king of thieves. but the wolf queen could not be found. she hadn't been seen in wolf town for more than a month. the whipping man always saw the truth as a shining light and he could smell a lie from more than a mile away. i guess it's the wolf queen said the whipping man to love when he returned to the bar. love was looking tired. the engine driver and station master had been trying to help in the bar but they kept on messing up. best you guys go back to the trains said the whipping man - i hear the apprentices are screwing up pretty badly. ok said the station master meekly. thanks for your help said love as she waved them goodbye. i'll be in touch said the whipping man. he bowed his head to the station master and the engine driver and they in turn bowed graciously and elegantly to love and the whipping man. then they were gone. love slept that night in the poet's bed and the the whipping man slept in the garden on a bench under the stars. in a dream the wolf queen came to him and she was wearing the missing king in a miniature cage strung on a silver cord around her neck. the whipping man woke up startled and alone under the stars in the poet's garden.

the whipping man fell asleep again. again he dreamed the same dream. on the silver cord next to the cage tormenting the missing king was a small silver key which locked and unlocked the cage. when the whipping man awoke he found the poet's garden knee deep with keys. thousands and thousands of keys. and a huge quantity of blue syringes mixed in with the keys. when the bar

opened at noon he hired a couple of out of work acrobats to tidy up the mess. love passed no comment regarding the garden being filled with keys and blue syringes and the whipping man considered it best they didn't attempt to discuss it. but he told love about his dream. then love told the whipping man she too had dreamed the same dream - the wolf queen had visited love in a dream. when she awoke the poet's bedroom was filled with miniature versions of trouble and when she tried to touch them they exploded like chinese firecrackers. didn't you hear the noise in the night said love. no said the whipping man. look after the bar for me please said love i'm going to my place to check trouble is ok. ok said the whipping man. it took the acrobats almost two full days to restore order to the poet's garden.

trouble is ok said love when she returned. still sleeping. still getting bigger. my handsome poet is ok too. still sleeping. still getting smaller. but the whipping man could plainly see pain and anguish in her eyes. tears were not far away. you can't paint angels for all eternity said love. i know said the whipping man. in her eyes he could see the wolf queen running fast towards a yellow moon thru' mountainous terrain he didn't recognise. you need rest he said. i don't want to sleep - i don't want to dream said love. sometimes we all have to do things we don't want to he said. sometimes it hurts so much we simply can't said love.

then the attacks started. random at first. soon poets painters actors acrobats and angels were no longer safe in wolf town. the attacks quickly spread into the poets town district. the whipping man knew the big one would be coming soon. and he knew he would be ready. it was not for nothing that he was known as the whipping man. the wolves were fools. fools and idiots. they flew madly thru' the doors and windows of the poets town bar. thousands of them. wrong move. the whipping man whipped them all. poets town angels erected an eternal ring of fire around the poets town district thru' which none could pass without the angels' permission and blessing. then they burned the remains of the wolves in the sacred fire. love had watched all this from the roof garden while her handsome poet and trouble continued to sleep. the whipping man had been magnificent. and now poets town rested uneasily but safely within an eternal ring of fire. the bar was wrecked of course but the whipping man had no wounds. not one. not a mark, not a scratch. it's safe to say the whipping man was kinda useful in the whipping department. whatever it was, he still had it.

a ghost train, engine number sixteen, arrived and hovered above the roof garden and the engine driver stepped down. we've found the wolf queen said the engine driver. fuck me said the whipping man - where? in a cave on desolation point in the blue mountains said the engine driver. she's under the protection of the witch of desolation said the guard. the whipping man liked the guard. they had studied history and medieval art together once upon a time at glasgow school of art. the whipping man looked at love. get some carpenters in and rebuild the bar he said. then he spoke to the guard - please stay with this lady and protect her till we get back. then he spoke to the engine driver - let's go. the whipping man and the engine driver boarded the train. nobody shouted all aboard. nobody rang the ghost bell. we have an engineer and an apprentice in back just in case said the engine driver. grand said the whipping man - just grand. engine number sixteen traversed the night sky heading for the blue mountains.

it was a long journey. the whipping man went for a sleep in the first carriage behind the engine and there he dreamed of a girl in a field with a dog. the girl barked like a dog and the dog laughed like a young girl. when he awoke, for the rest of the journey and for most of the rest of his life he couldn't get the young girl outa his mind. she looked a lot like love. sometimes dreams and memories are a pain in the ass. sometimes dreams and memories of dreams are all we have.

some of us don't even have that. then he tried to remember his own soul but that kinda stuff was all so very long ago and so very far away he didn't have a clue where to start looking. i guess that kinda stuff just doesn't matter any more.

now thanks to the angels the only way to enter poets town was thru' eternal fire. i guess that's how come poetry went out of fashion in the world. many times the poet had prayed to the gods begging for protection. often it had seemed to the poet he had no protection at all. but now poets town was protected by eternal fire. there was another way to enter poets town of course - ride the ghost train. just ask the engine driver or engineer if you can find them. but don't bother looking for the ticket office - it's been closed for years. engine sixteen continued to journey thru' the night sky and back in poets town the poet and trouble continued to sleep restless and uneasy under a curse. if trouble's chess game was not played a couple of times each month to eliminate the pawns and maintain balance in the world the heavens would fail, the wolves and devils would win and chaos would be king. exactly why the wolves and devils hated poets musicians and painters so badly nobody really knew. something to do with innocence i guess. maybe something to do with forgiveness tenderness and redemption too. but frankly i haven't a clue. these days i live only in dreams.

poets - nobody gives a fuck about poets these days. except maybe love. engine sixteen arrived safely at desolation point close to the witch of desolation's cave. the whipping man entered the cave alone. the witch of desolation was sitting on a throne of flames. next to her the wolf queen sat on another. we have heard of the massacre of wolves at the poets town bar said the witch - what gifts can you give us? we can offer you peace, innocence, forgiveness and redemption said the whipping man. we will accept your gifts said the witch of desolation - tho' it is not at all clear what we'll do with them. what do you require from us asked the wolf queen. the missing king said the whipping man - we want trouble's missing king. take him said the witch of desolation. the wolf queen threw the missing king - cage and key - at the whipping man's head. but he caught them easily with his left hand. thank you said the whipping man. we have unfinished business said the wolf queen. if you say so said the whipping man. the wheels of time will turn again soon said the witch of desolation - when they do that's when the missing king will awake. but the whipping man wasn't listening. he had already left the cave.

too easy said the whipping man. too fucking easy. he knew something was wrong. dreams that pass in the night tend to bump into each other in the morning. i'm a simple man said the whipping man as he climbed up and into engine sixteen with the missing king, the silver cage and the silver key on a silver cord around his neck. i'm a simple man said the whipping man again - somethin' ain't right here. somethin' stinks. like a dead rat. take her away he said to the engine driver. engine sixteen pulled away from desolation point as dawn began to break over the blue mountains. silver threads and golden needles said the whipping man. pardon me said the engine driver. nothing said the whipping man - take us home. yes sir said the engine driver. sea eagles followed the ghost train all the way home to poets town. every inch of the journey the whipping man saw love's face in front of him, behind him and anywhere else he looked. with his eyes closed he saw love's face everywhere. little buddhas and bodhisattvas raining down on her pleasantly and gently like the little princes and gods they truly were. man he just wanted to leave this world. but where to go? love needed him. and that was that. the lonesome bus stations and blind alleys of other worlds could wait in vain for now. their time would come. and soon the wheels of time would be turning again.

maybe said the whipping man. pardon me said the engine driver. nothing said the whipping man
- let's go home.

and thus endeth the second chapter of the whipping king.

CHAPTER 3: THE LAZY RIVER MOTEL

two angels were sitting on high bar stools in the new poets town bar. purity and magnificence are never enough said the first angel. along comes fragmentation and everything fragments. but all that is good always comes back said the second angel - love always comes back. love was tending bar. she looked at the two angels strangely and tried not to laugh. the white buffalo taught fragmentation said the first angel - nothing lasts. everything fragments. even love. rubbish said the second angel - love always comes back. you don't understand the white buffalo's teaching said the second - love never leaves. love never fragments. the essence of the white buffalo's teaching was and is humility. you must study harder said the second to the first. but if love never leaves how does she manage to always come back said the first. that is a secret said the second. at this love lost control, dropped a glass, watched it smash and fragment on the floor then she laughed out loud like an angel. sorry boys she said - let me buy you a drink. does bourbon sound good? yes said the second angel - bourbon sounds good.

it's quiet now that there are no wolves in poets town said the first angel. yes said the second - it's quiet now that there are no wolves in poets town. it would be quieter still if there were no wolves in wolf town. jack palance strolled into the bar. hi jack said love. palance looked at the guard and the guard looked at palance. the wheels of time will start turning again at midnight tonight said jack - any chance of a drink? only if you promise to behave said love. she placed a bottle of bourbon, a glass and a bucket of ice on the bar in front of palance. he poured the contents of the bottle into the bucket of ice then drank from the bucket. then he gave the first angel a silver dollar. my horse is outside said jack - find a stable for him. yes my noble lord said the angel. does your horse have a name asked the second angel. yeah said palance - firebird books. his name is firebird books. kinda stupid name for a horse said the guard. palance smiled then winked at the guard. love laughed again like an angel. she who laughs best laughs last said love. more bourbon please said jack. there's a stable behind the crazy horse saloon said the returning angel - i've parked your horse there my noble lord. thanks sonny said palance. promises promises said love. sometimes we forget said palance.

how are the poets said palance. still sleeping said love. where is the whipping man asked palance. he'll be back tonight answered love. where can i get some sleep said palance. try my place said love it's quiet there. or try the crazy horse saloon - they have rooms and it's quiet there too. or there's a couch upstairs jack. i'll try the saloon said jack. and the missing king asked

jack. the whipping man has him - they'll be back tonight. then palance disappeared. love put some coins in the jukebox. put my letter in the mail box, marked it special d, bright and early next morning it came right back to me. elvis and return to sender spilled out the jukebox thru' the bar and into the rainswept street. do you remember stevie marriott said the first angel. yes said the second angel - he could rock. yeah he could rock said the first angel. when i was a kid i used to like billy fury said the first angel. me too said the second angel. some people don't believe in angels said the first angel. some people don't believe in cheese responded the second.

engine sixteen hovered above wolf town then deposited the whipping man within the ring of fire. he went straight to love's place where the sleeping giant now filled the whole of love's bedroom. he unlocked the cage and placed the missing king in the sleeping giant's hand. immediately trouble awoke and returned to normal size. his rough looks fell away and his beauty shone like the sun. he was far more beautiful than love's handsome poet. where am i, who am i, how did i get here said trouble. you've been bewitched - living under a curse. you told us your name was trouble but we suspect you are the prince of poets - the king of poetry. you are in love's bedroom and how you got here is a long story. fuck me said the prince of poets. yeah king of poetry that rings a bell said trouble - i like the sound of that said the prince of poets but who the hell are you? i'm the whipping man said the whipping man. where are my chessmen said the prince. hidden in the handsome poet's garden above the poets town bar. they are waiting for you. let's go there now said the whipping man - you have to play a game against yourself. yeah that rings a bell said the prince of poets. the whipping man placed the silver cord, the little silver cage and the silver key around trouble's neck and together they left love's place and headed to the poets town bar. the missing king travelled in the prince of poets' pocket.

my handsome poet is awake and well said love. permit me to introduce trouble said the whipping man - this handsome gentleman is trouble, prince of poets, king of poetry. the prince of poetry was so damn good looking it was unreal. he looked like a god. with a terrifying light in his eyes. love smiled - my handsome poet will be jealous she said. put these dark glasses on she said to the prince of poets - to shield the innocent from your eyes. you are too kind said the prince - where are my chessmen please? board and chessmen materialised on the bar. the prince sat on a high bar stool and played a game against himself. as the first pawns were taken balance was restored to the world. for a short while.

please keep these dark glasses on at all times unless you are alone said love to the king of poetry - your eyes will kill most normal people in an instant. ok said the king. there are no normal people in poets town said the guard. then love laughed like an angel and poured everyone another drink. do you think it's over she asked the whipping man. of course not - not in a million years he answered. oops said love. she asked the king of poetry how he was feeling. not bad he answered - but my memory is full of holes. palance arrived at midnight. the clocks are ticking again he said - the wheels of time are turning. who's this guy said palance nodding his head towards the prince. the king of poetry said love - whatever you do don't look into his eyes jack. gimme a drink please said jack - anyone for a game of chess? i only play myself said the king. yeah that figures said jack. you're welcome to use my chessmen said the king but be careful the pawns don't rip you apart. you are too kind said jack. then he stepped behind the bar and helped himself to a bottle of bourbon. i'll tend bar for a while said palance. sure said love - be my guest. would you care for a drink palance asked the king of poetry. yes please said the king. that would be delightful. i'd like a lemonade please. anything in it asked jack. just some ice please answered the prince. jack served the king lemonade with ice. thank you said the king. don't mention it said jack - you're too kind. palance downed the bottle of bourbon in one hit, kissed

love hard on the mouth, said to her i guess you're back on duty - then dancing a tango with an invisible partner while whistling strangers in the night palace left the bar. who is that guy asked the king. that's jack palace said love - he used to be an actor. the guard tried hard not to laugh. now he works with the outfit said the whipping man. is he a poet too asked the king. no said the whipping man - he's an assassin.

around one in the morning a small bird flew into the bar. is that a firebird said the king of poetry. don't be silly said love - all the firebirds have been dead for years. are you sure asked the king. i'm not sure about anything these days said love. i want to dance said love. i want to dance with somebody - i don't want to dance alone. i'll dance with you said the king of poetry. the guard put a few coins in the jukebox. bob dylan's positively 4th street started to play. love and the king of poetry started to dance just as love's handsome poet walked slowly into his own bar. they stopped dancing. this is my handsome poet said love - and this spectacular gentleman is the king of poetry. don't look into his eyes whispered love to her poet. the poets shook hands. didn't you used to be trouble said the handsome poet. i think so said the king of poetry - a long time ago. i've been living under a curse for a while and my memory is full of holes. me too said the handsome poet. let's have a drink boys said the whipping man. the king of poetry ordered strong black coffee and the handsome poet requested a tall bourbon on the rocks. love served them then poured herself a stiff cognac. the whipping man and the guard were drinking beer. there were no other customers. is that a firebird sitting on the jukebox said the handsome poet. don't be silly said love. then the small bird flew out the nearest window smashing the glass. fuck it said love's handsome poet - fuck it. language please said love - we have an important guest. it was a firebird said the handsome poet. he looked at the whipping man. but the whipping man said nothing. he looked at the guard. and the guard looked away. it was a firebird said the handsome poet. i'll fix the glass in the morning said the guard. where are you staying the handsome poet asked the king. the crazy horse saloon said the guard - i've booked a room for the king at the crazy horse. i'll take him there when we're all done here. the guard put some coins into the jukebox and bob dylan's lay lady lay began to play. at dawn the guard escorted the king of poetry, his board and his chessmen, to the crazy horse saloon. the king slept badly. he could hardly find his bed. the room was full almost to overflowing with blue syringes.

love opened the poets town bar at noon. as usual. the first one in was jack palace. that bum the king of poetry is in the room next to mine at the crazy horse. i gotta get out there - gimme a drink please. bourbon said love. bourbon said palace. she served him a bottle, a glass and a bucket of ice. jack poured the contents of the bottle into the bucket of ice then drank from the bucket. good morning jack said love. yeah something like that said palace - gimme another bottle please. whatever you say jack - you know we love you. yeah i know said jack - just gimme another bottle. love served another bottle. jack poured it into the bucket and halfway thru' the second bottle palace began to relax. lovely morning said palace. it ain't bad said love. i think i saw a firebird on the street last night said palace. don't say that said love - tell me you didn't say that. i didn't say that said palace. what would you like me to say said palace. tell me you love me jack said love. i love you said palace. i love you too said love. i know said palace - gimme another bottle please. love served another bottle. tell your poet to throw away my bill - i don't want his money said jack. thanks said love. that fucking prince of poets is a fucking pain in the ass said jack - i gotta get away. he's very beautiful jack, the gods trust him with an important task but whatever you do never look him straight in the eye. i know said palace - i know. stay at my place for a few days jack - i'm certain we're gonna need you here. stay at my place jack. it was a firebird said palace. don't say that said love.

next to arrive at the bar was a horse named arjuna made entirely outa broken arrows. nice looking horse said palance to love. what can i get you said love to the horse. bourbon please said the horse. sure thing said love. she served arjuna a bottle of bourbon and a bucket of cold water. lovely day said palance. yes lovely day said arjuna. next to arrive at the bar were the poets richard brautigan and arthur rimbaud. they walked in hand in hand. crawling in behind them was the poet jack kerouac. the usual suspects said love - what can i get you boys? bourbon please said brautigan. love served three bottles of bourbon, three buckets of ice and no glasses as the poets installed themselves at a corner table. i swear i saw a firebird on the streets last night said brautigan. are you ill said rimbaud. probably said brautigan. they caused a whole load of trouble in glasgow a few years back said brautigan. who did said rimbaud. the firebirds you idiot said brautigan. glasgow is that kinda town said rimbaud - there's always someone causing trouble in glasgow. kerouac said nothing. he was simply too drunk to speak. next to arrive at the bar were two acrobats made entirely outa blue syringes. what can i get you guys said love. we'd like a couple of buckets of blue syringes please replied the acrobats in perfect unison. coming right up said love. the guard was next to arrive. he'd been sleeping in the back office of the bar. he fixed himself a coffee. i'll tend bar said the guard to love - please give yourself a break. love climbed the stairs to the apartment above to spend some time with her handsome poet. but the poet wasn't there.

another bottle please said palance. another bottle please said the horse. two more buckets of syringes please said the acrobats in perfect unison. three more bottles of bourbon please and three more buckets of ice said arthur rimbaud. coming right up said the guard. two angels were sitting drinking on high stools at the bar. there's an old scottish saying said the first - if your best ain't good enough you're fucked. rings a bell said the second. they say the old songs are the best said the first - does that mean the new songs are crap? yeah that's right said the second angel. you've got it - all new songs are crap. really said the first. yeah really said the second - you should write a book. do you really think so said the first angel. yeah really said the second. arjuna ordered another bottle of bourbon then the angels ordered more drinks too.

the whipping man had taken a room at the lazy river motel and there he was discussing the king of poetry with love's handsome poet. he's much too good looking said the poet - it's unreal. people don't like people who are that good looking continued the poet. he's not quite as innocent as he looks said the whipping man - don't look into his eyes. i know said the poet - don't look into his eyes. his eyes can kill. he looks like some kinda god said the poet. maybe he is said the whipping man. there's no such thing as the god of poetry said the poet. are you sure said the whipping man. the poet hesitated then said nothing. are you jealous said the whipping man. fuck off said the poet. then they both laughed. what will happen next asked the poet. haven't a clue - something bad i guess said the whipping man. your memory will never fully recover. the same applies to the king of poetry. the witch of desolation's curse is very strong. she is a devoted servant of the prince of darkness. how did it all start said the poet. the youngest daughter of the prince of darkness fell for the prince of poets said the whipping man - he used her, spurned her then sent her home to her father. he's been mad ever since. wants his revenge. hates all poets. but your friend trouble now has no recollection of this. to some extent he is innocent, to some extent he is not. how do you know all this asked the poet. that's a secret said the whipping man. is there anything you don't know said the poet. yeah plenty said the whipping man. there was a girl once a long time ago. but then the whipping man didn't finish his sentence. for a few seconds he was no longer in his room at the lazy river motel but in a field with a girl and a dog. the girl was barking like a dog and the dog was laughing like a young girl. the whipping man didn't want to leave the field but the sound of the poet's voice dragged him back. where did you

go - where were you? in a field said the whipping man - just in a field. the whipping man knew there would come a day soon when he wouldn't leave the field. it was a poppy field. and at the far end of the field there was a lazy river.

whatever you do don't look in his eyes. his eyes can kill you. get yourself some strong dark eyeglasses. get some shades man said the whipping man. you too said the poet. yeah me too said the whipping man. but in reality his thoughts were with the girl and the dog in the poppy field. the poet could sense that the whipping man to quite some extent was now no longer there in the room that afternoon at the lazy river motel. the poet's sense that the whipping man was in reality absent from where he appeared to be increased over the coming days. and he wasn't too crazy, too nuts or too convinced either concerning the whipping man's advice regarding dark eyeglasses. if the king of poetry's eyes can kill the handsome poet figured dark glasses wouldn't be much of a defence. the poet could plainly see that the whipping man simply wasn't there - wasn't at all where he appeared to be. yet in all the years he'd known him the poet had never once known the whipping man to be wrong. the poet could hear return to sender playing on the jukebox in the lazy river bar below. let's go said the poet - let's have a drink. when you awake said the whipping man - don't stop dreaming. it's your round cowboy said the poet. they sat in the gardens of the lazy river motel drinking red wine and coffee and eating small cakes. at the far end of the gardens there was a lazy river. my happiest memories said the whipping man....but again he was unable to finish his sentence and now it was the poet's turn to worry. the whipping man was drifting. back and forth to the poppy field. the whipping man was drifting towards the end of his powers.

in an old cold shed in the garden of good and evil time checked his clocks and found to his relief that they were working once again to his satisfaction. it had been a difficult week. time knelt down in the garden and gratefully and humbly offered all obeisances to the stars and to his superiors.

and thus endeth the third chapter of the whipping king.

CHAPTER 4: GHOST TOWN

i want to quit my place and move in with you said love to her handsome poet. ok said the poet - but it's a small apartment. i don't care said love - as long as you're in it that's enough for me. you're crazy said the poet. guilty as charged said love - you are where i want to be. i thought you were supposed to love everyone said the poet. that would be crazy said love - i'm not a saint. it's a crazy world said the poet. love moved in. and that was that. the poet was pleased. love felt better than she had felt in years. she was tired of loving everybody. tired of dancing alone. he

was her handsome poet. she was his madonna of the rocks. what god has joined together let no man put asunder. they exchanged rings. he had built her a tabernacle of dust and made her a poster of an old rodeo. and she adored him for it. she gave him a little silver cage to wear around his neck. and a little silver key to open it. he gave her a miniature ghost train made outa miniature syringes to wear around hers. and that was that. for love it was a shorter walk each morning to open the bar just before noon. palance accepted the keys to love's place, bought a new bed and promised to stick around for a while.

writing came easily to the poet. it was a gift. a million miles away from work. mostly all the poet did was hold the pen and supply the paper. the nuts and bolts of the real world were a mystery to him which he would never fathom. words came to him because of his innocence and lack of duplicity. writing chose him. not the other way round. words and phrases chose him. sentences chose him. paragraphs and chapters chose him. he simply held the pen. supplied the paper. and waited. he did nothing. words loved him. adored him. came to him freely. words wrote themselves. words did the work. gave themselves to him. if you asked the poet where words came from he would tell you it had something to do with white rabbits and fairies living at the bottom of his garden when he'd been a kid. he hadn't a clue. love adored him for it. this not knowing. and the charm of it. modigliani and caravaggio with brushes in hand sure as hell knew what they were doing but our handsome poet didn't have a clue. he sat at his desk and waited. words came to him. he wrote them down. that was it. nothing more. words chose him. not the other way round.

the handsome poet was a natural. words adored him. he did not try to control or contort them. he let them express themselves. words came to him. and he set them free. gave them a home, a function and purpose. he didn't try to chain or nail them down. they were free to leave any old time. and for this words adored him. he gave words a home. and they were grateful. according to words other writers were a pain in the ass. too demanding. too controlling. offering only a grave, a corpse, a jail cell or an endless shift in a factory with no windows. our handsome poet didn't care if words ran off to play in the woods or in the park or went to a bar now and then for a few drinks and for this words adored him. he was their servant. not the other way round. mostly he simply waited. and when words came he simply let them fall where and as they wished on the page. later if they wanted to go to the park or visit a bar that was ok with the poet. he had a life of his own and he wanted words to have a life too. he was not their master. not their keeper. words would do anything for the handsome poet. play us a tune and we'll dance for you they often whispered in his ear. and dance they did. his books were well received in the wide world beyond poets town but he knew in his heart his words were not his own.

most words detest most writers. gardeners write about gardening. ship builders write about ship building, historians about history, the french about france but in their hearts they don't know or care about or truly understand words. they don't love words. the writers words detest the most are those who pretend to know what they plainly do not know. man words hate them. those who research a subject for six months then try to write about it with authority without even the remotest glimpse of understanding of the heart of the subject or the heart of words. man words hate them. words need to breathe, to play and to be left alone sometimes. they like fireworks now and then. they like to pray, to contemplate, get outa town now and then, watch the ocean waves. they refuse to be prisoners of the witless. they only love writers who write from the heart. they refuse to work for any other kind. words are tough little bastards. tricky. enchanting. sometimes false and deceitful. but only for laughs. tricky little bastards. there are some writers for whom words simply refuse to perform and these writers are so fucking dumb they don't even notice.

they blindly carry on making prisons and prisoners of themselves and boring the ass of anybody dumb enough to try to read their work. sometimes it's tough being a saint in the city. sometimes even saints have to beg borrow or steal.

words continued to fall and rain down gently onto the poet's pages. he continued to watch them fall and rain down gently and to let the words arrange and rearrange themselves into some kinda order. it wasn't hard work. he was drinking cold beer and a tall glass of bourbon on the rocks. let the cowboy ride. the handsome poet was a founding member of both let the cowboy ride and the not giving a flying fuck schools of poetry. he was an old fashioned union man - the poets artists and writers union. left leaning to say the least. adored by love. loved by words. thru' the eyes of love and thru' the eyes of words he could do no wrong. and that was more than enough for the handsome poet. frankly there were times when it was too much for him - so much love adoration respect and trust was quite a responsibility but he trusted humility and humility saw him thru'. a working class hero is something to be. in the poet's heart humility was king. humility kept him straight and reasonably sane. without humility we are nothing or even worse - less than nothing. he was adored by love and that pretty much tells us all we need to know about the handsome poet. unless of course we choose to remember it is often said that love is blind.

the remembered horse was sitting on a high bar stool in the poets town bar drinking buckets of memories. the remembered horse was made entirely outa memories. gimme another bucket of memories please said the remembered horse to the guard. coming right up sir said the guard. the remembered horse was sitting next to the poets town night watchman and the bird catcher. we're looking for a firebird said the bird catcher. dangerous move said the remembered horse. what are you doing in poets town asked the night watchman. delivering a new desk to the handsome poet answered the remembered horse - the desk is made entirely outa memories. i think he'll like it continued the horse. i see said the night watchman. but he didn't see at all. he was just pretending. not wanting to appear dumb. he'd never heard of a desk made entirely outa memories. never met a horse before in a bar made entirely outa memories. frankly he'd been promoted way beyond his abilities. he was entirely the wrong person to set about catching a firebird. there are no firebirds in poets town said the guard. that's not what we hear said the bird catcher. we have enough trouble in poets town right now without firebirds. there are no firebirds in poets town continued the guard. it's no easy matter to catch a firebird. and if you do catch one what the hell do think you're gonna do with it. it's more a question of what it's gonna do with you. please take my advice said the guard - forget about firebirds.

he's right said the remembered horse - forget about firebirds. gimme another bucket of memories please said the horse to the guard. coming up - on the house said the guard. the last thing we need in poets town is firebirds said the guard - and the next last thing we need is some fucking idiot trying to catch them. did you just call me an idiot said the night watchman. yes i did said the guard. i see said the watchman. have a drink buddy said the guard - on the house. he poured the watchman and the bird catcher two tall shots of bourbon then said - please forget about firebirds. we already have enough trouble in poets town. too fucking dangerous said the guard. then he poured the boys two more tall shots of bourbon and served the horse another bucket of memories. on the house boys said the guard - on the house.

i'll make you an offer said the guard - if you guys stop talking about firebirds and promise to stop looking for one you can drink here forever for free. offer accepted said the watchman. done deal said the bird catcher. wise move said the remembered horse. good boys said the guard - we already have enough trouble in poets town. the king of poetry walked into the bar and politely

requested a lemonade with ice. coming right up said the guard. it's not about tables and chairs for example said the king of poetry. poetry is all about the spaces between such things. o' shut up said the guard silently to himself. what a fascinating remark said the watchman. are you a poet said the bird catcher. i am the king of poetry responded the king. are you made outa memories too asked the watchman. no i'm made outa secrets and lies answered the king. now you're talking said the remembered horse - that's more like it. pardon me said the king. you remind me of something unpleasant i stepped on a long time ago said the horse. fuck you said the king of poetry. fuck you said the remembered horse. everyone in the bar was wearing dark glasses except the remembered horse. the king of poetry's eyes flashed behind his dark glasses. you can't kill a remembered horse with those eyes said the horse. thanks for the memories said the horse to the guard - i've got a desk to deliver. see you all later. then the remembered horse left the bar. nobody spoke for a long time.

as i was saying said the king of poetry - poetry is not about things but more about the spaces between them. o' shut up said the night watchman - you're much too good looking for a small town bar like this. the king's eyes flashed behind his dark glasses. the watchman fell off his stool. dead. murder in poets town. o' fuck said the guard. it wasn't me said the king of poetry - it's the curse. evening all said inspector spanky - what's going on here? the night watchman simply fell off his stool and died said the guard. who called me then said spanky - it wouldn't be a firebird by any chance? haven't a clue said the guard. an ambulance came and collected the body. spanky took statements then promised to return in the morning to speak with the owner of the bar.

composure and serenity where do they go when they leave said the handsome poet. shopping said love - they go shopping. he gave love a dark look. i wish you'd take these things more seriously said the poet - we don't need a dead body in the bar and spanky is looking for firebirds. sorry said love - i guess i'm nervous. the whole of poets town is nervous said the poet. it was the next morning. spanky arrived at the roof garden at precisely ten. the poet, love and the whipping man were already assembled. sitting at the garden table drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. i'm inspector spanky said spanky - do we know each other? i don't think so said the whipping man. i've had dealings with poets and painters before said spanky. i used to be king of england for a while continued spanky - you might recognise me from my picture being on postage stamps. no we don't recognise you said the whipping man - we don't deal much with postage stamps.

who owns the bar said spanky. i do said the poet. name please said spanky. i have no name said the poet. i see said spanky. and who might you be sir and what do you do said spanky addressing the whipping man. me i'm the whipping man said the whipping man - for forty years i painted angels in a cold shed then i became one said the whipping man. and i too have no name. i see said spanky. and who might you be madam said spanky addressing love. i am love said love. i'll take that with a pinch of salt madam if you don't mind said the inspector. then he made some notes in his notebook. what can you tell me please regarding the king of poetry? he's labouring under a curse said the whipping man. who is responsible for this curse said spanky. the witch of desolation and the prince of darkness said the whipping man. i see said spanky - i'll be back at the same time tomorrow. thanks inspector said the poet - we'll be waiting for you. then silence. then a few not so gentle thuds. and a yelp. as spanky stumbled and fell down the stairs to the street. love tried hard not to laugh. impressive if he was a comic she said. the poet gave her a dark look. the whipping man fetched glasses, ice and a couple of bottles of bourbon from the bar.

wee willie winkie runs thru' the town upstairs and downstairs in his night gown mumbled the whipping man. pardon me said the poet. nothing said the whipping man - just dreaming. the poet wasn't really there in the garden. he was in the poppy field with the barking girl and the laughing dog. is this chapter nearly finished asked love. no said the poet - long way to go. what are we gonna do with the king of poetry said the poet - what if it happens again? the whipping man said nothing. time to open the bar said love. a place of confinement mumbled the whipping man - we'll have to take him to a place of confinement before spanky arrests him. trouble was waiting downstairs outside the entrance to the bar. it wasn't me said the king - it's the curse. i can feel it inside me. if i lose my temper - bang - it just happens. it's beyond my control. we've worked that out said love. we believe you. come in and have a drink. we'll work something out.

a place of confinement mumbled the whipping man. we gotta get you outa here before spanky nabs you. the whipping man phoned the station master. some of our hotels have stations - some of our stations have hotels said the station master. come immediately please and get the king of poetry the hell outa here. the guard will travel with him. the guard fetched the board and chessmen from the crazy horse saloon. engine sixteen hovered above the roof garden. the king of poetry and the guard boarded. keep him safe mumbled the whipping man. will do boss said the guard - safe as custard. then engine sixteen was gone. what did he mean by safe as custard asked love. i haven't a fucking clue mumbled the whipping man - let's have drink. they adjourned to the bar where arjuna and the remembered horse were drinking with sandy the elephant. hi said the elephant - i'm sandy the elephant. i bet you are said the whipping man. love panicked a little. she ran upstairs to the poet - there's a fucking elephant in the bar. kinda normal in a place like poets town said the poet - is his name sandy? yes said love. he's a painter said the poet - an old friend of mine. the fact that he's an elephant is not the problem said love - the problem is he has the same light in his eyes as the king of poetry. o' shit said the poet - o' shit.

the poet and love returned to the bar. the poet and the elephant got their hellos outa the way. as usual the elephant's shoes shirt tie and suit were covered with paint. years of paint. how are you feeling asked the poet. kinda odd said the elephant. itchy trigger finger. i feel as if i could kill someone with my eyes. oops said the poet. put these dark glasses on said love - might help. the poet explained about the king of poetry. we figure you are the victim of a curse said the poet. oops said the elephant. i guess we better call the station master said arjuna. the station master will find you a safe place said the poet. i don't want to kill anyone said the elephant. keep the dark glasses on at all times said love - they might help. engine sixteen arrived and took sandy away. love cried - she had taken a shine to the elephant. will i be able to paint where i'm going? yeah sure said the station master. the railway hotel has a big pool so you'll be able to swim each morning before breakfast. you'll love it sonny said the station master - and you'll be safe there. i need to paint every day said the elephant. i know said the station master - just like i need to run my trains every day. you'll be ok with us said the station master - don't worry. whatever it is the whipping man will get on top of it. he always does. but the station master didn't know the whipping man was close to the end of his powers. and the other thing the station master didn't know - within the next few days almost every second person in poets town be they angel acrobat poet painter actor or carpenter would have the strange terrifying light in their eyes and the ability and uncontrollable desire to kill. the witch of desolation's curse was becoming more and more powerful and more and more effective. jack balance was the first to notice.

spanky arrived at ten the next morning. the meeting was short tense and meaningless. but the poet noticed a strange flickering light in spanky's eyes. fuck it said the poet to himself. again spanky fell down the stairs when leaving the garden. the whipping man did not attend the

meeting. love and the poet opened the bar at noon. first in were arjuna and the remembered horse. how's the new desk asked the remembered horse. we're getting along just fine thanks answered the poet. then palance rode firebird books into the bar. morning all said palance. every second bastard in this town has got that light in their eyes - we gotta get outa here fast. i'll fetch the whipping man. jack left for the lazy river motel and there he found the whipping man. dead. face down in the shallows of the lazy river. his soul had returned to the poppy field. to the barking girl and the laughing dog. fuck it said palance. a tear crept into his eye.

palance returned to the bar. the whipping man is dead. every second citizen in poets town has that fucking light in their eyes. it's gonna get very very bad here very very quickly. love cried. the poet's face turned ghostly white. none of that said palance - phone the station master now. nobody moved. we gotta get outa here now said jack. nobody moved. so palance made the call. engine sixteen hovered above the roof garden. love and the poet boarded. palance and firebird books boarded. arjuna and the remembered horse stayed behind to look after the bar. i'm just a memory said the remembered horse - you can't kill a memory. and you can't kill broken arrows said arjuna. engine sixteen sped off into the clouds. then all hell broke loose in poets town.

where is the whipping man said the engine driver. don't ask said palance. engine sixteen arrived at central station, ghost town 3. love and the poet, palance and firebird books were given rooms on the top floor of the railway hotel. above their rooms was a roof garden similar to the poet's own. in the roof garden was a marble statue of the handsome poet. they had passed another as they passed thru' the hotel foyer. what's that about asked the poet. you're a hero here in ghost town 3 said the station master. what the hell for said the poet. exactly said the station master - humility lives in your heart. gimme a break said the poet. love smiled sadly. a tear had crept into her eye. firebird books was more than happy in the roof garden. another beautiful horse lived there made entirely outa stars. her name was starry night. palance had already installed himself in the bar of the railway hotel. drinking hard with the engineer, teaching a couple of apprentices card tricks and telling tall tales of his days in the movies. but it was all an act. his heart was with the whipping man. nobody in the bar could tell even in a million years jack palance's heart was in bits.

marlene dietrich was sitting at a dark corner table showing a dangerous amount of thigh. sitting next to her were the poets rimbaud and verlaine. rimbaud had just shot verlaine in the arm and verlaine had just shot rimbaud in the leg. the bar paid little attention. rimbaud and verlaine were constantly shooting each other in the bar of the railway hotel in ghost town 3. also at the table was the boxer marcel cerdan reading victor hugo by candlelight. dietrich was watching palance carefully. she liked what she saw. rimbaud verlaine and cerdan weren't real. they were made entirely outa dreams. spirits having flown. the only thing that was real at dietrich's table was dietrich's thighs. and they wanted jack palance. the thighs approached jack's table. would you care to dream said dietrich's thighs. don't mind if i do said jack. palance and the thighs headed to the lifts in the foyer as love and the poet and the station master walked into the bar. we get a lotta stars from the movies here at the railway hotel said the station master.

they settled themselves on high stools at the bar and ordered cocktails. love, her handsome poet and the station master. where is the elephant said the poet. with the elephant king in ghost town 7 said the station master - the elephant king is very powerful so your friend is very safe. where is the king of poetry please asked the poet. the weeping willow hotel just outside ghost town 8 answered the station master - it's a private estate owned by the elephant king, it's also very safe. where is our friend the whipping man asked the station master. the whipping man is dead said

the poet. impossible said the station master. the whipping man is dead said the poet. jesus said the station master - sweet jesus. then the station master slowly fell off his barstool. it can't be said the station master when he had somewhat recovered. jack palance has seen the body said the poet. he's just a fucking actor said the station master - what the fuck does he know? jack is a little bit more than just an actor said the poet.

it can't be said the station master - the whipping man is my son. he is the wind and rain, the flowers of the fields. he is the moon and stars. he can't be dead. then when the station master fell from his barstool a second time the hotel staff put him to bed. love and the poet sat by the bedside all night and waited. when breakfast time came the station master was still asleep. the poet went to jack's room. i'm sorry to have to ask but are you sure the whipping man is dead said the poet. gimme a break said palance - of course he's fucking dead. i'm an assassin - i know about these things. of course he's fucking dead. sorry that i had to ask said the poet - the station master is the whipping man's father. o' shit said palance - o' shit. as noon approached the station master still refused to awake. a doctor was sent for. a nurse relieved love and the poet so that they could have some breakfast then get some rest. outside the railway hotel it was raining blue syringes and in their room love and the poet couldn't eat and were unable to sleep.

nothing is permanent i guess said the poet. everything is permanent said love - all things fragment and then regroup. one way or another.

and thus endeth chapter 4 of the whipping king.

Chapter 5 - the halls of albert

when the station master awoke love and the handsome poet were at his bedside. it just can't be said the station master. he's not dead. the whipping man is the son of the moon goddess. the whipping man is immortal. i've not always been an old man running trains from nowhere to nowhere. once upon a time i was a handsome young poet said the station master looking directly at love's handsome poet. the station master refused to change his tune. love and the poet didn't know what to think. they knew palance was not an idiot. go to the halls of albert said the station master - you'll find there what you need to know.

on the edge of ghost town 3 - the great halls of albert. halls within halls. all containing secret knowledge. secret histories. the poet was shocked again to find more statues of himself in the entrance hall. love and the poet studied the map in the entrance hall of the great halls of albert giving directions to the various halls and museums. poetry and other minor distractions. the failures of socialism. the secret history of the firebird school. secrets of the ghost world. history of the moon and stars. water truncheons and other mysteries. the teachings of the white buffalo. where to start said love. they were more than a little overwhelmed. the moon and stars said the poet. they entered the great hall of the moon and stars and there they were quickly able to establish that the whipping man was indeed the son of the moon goddess and that his father had been all the rivers of the three worlds. it was all too much for them. the station master had indeed once upon a time not always been a station master.

in a daze they returned to the railway hotel and from there they phoned the poets town bar. arjuna answered the phone - everybody's dead. total wipeout. everybody killed everybody. everybody's dead except the remembered horse, the bird catcher and five angels. the leader of the angels is called johnny five angels. we burned the bodies in the sacred fire. the bar is safe, your apartment is safe, love's place is safe but poets town is a ghost town. jesus said the poet - sweet jesus. then the poet and love lay down on their bed and cried. it was all too much. they held each other for a long time then eventually fell asleep. in the evening they joined the station master for a drink in the bar of the railway hotel. set a thief to catch a thief said the station master - what you need is a good witch. a white witch. pretty much anything you need to know you'll find in the halls of albert. i know for a fact there's a white witch department there next to the mysteries of water truncheons. love and the poet didn't know what to think or do. jack palance joined them at the bar. palance looked cold and hard at the station master. the station master looked long and hard at palance. the ghosts of miniature blue syringes rained down gently from the ceiling. the rivers of the three worlds said palance. yes said the station master - all the rivers of the three worlds. we get a lot of people in here from the movies said the station master. yes i can see that said palance. humphrey bogart was playing solitaire at a corner table. the ghost of big bob mitchum was drinking alone at another. the rivers of the three worlds repeated palance. then he said to the barman - gimme a drink. bourbon. tall. plenty of ice. on my tab please said the station master. too kind said palance. love and the poet didn't know what to say or do. but in a matter of minutes tension drifted away. like a river gently changing course.

palance put a coin in the jukebox. the jukebox played bob seger's famous final scene. switch it up please said palance to the barman. yes sir said the barman. you like that kinda stuff said the station master. yes i do said palance. me i like trains said the station master. i like their whistles said the station master. me too said palance - i like their whistles too. i have more than one son said the station master. let's not go there said palance. a cold wind swept thru' the bar and somehow blew all the lights out. the barman lit some candles. palance put another coin in the jukebox and played seger's final scene again. i like trains said the station master. me too said the poet. i like the remembered rose said palance. the remembered horse said the poet. no said palance - the remembered rose. again a cold wind swept thru' the bar and blew out all the candles. gimme a drink said palance. the barman served palance a tall bourbon with plenty of ice then relit all the candles. funny old world said the station master - we'll talk tomorrow about poets town.

all the rivers of the three worlds said the station master - both great and small. we change shape. we change course. we fragment. we return to source. fight fire with fire said the station master - get yourselves a white witch. whatever you say pops said palance - let's get ourselves a white witch. have you ever worked with a white witch said the poet. once or twice said palance - but only in the movies. over here whispered a voice - over here. two white roses had materialised on the bar next to love. we are sisters of the moon, we are the remembered rose, we are the white witch you seek said the roses. then one rose disappeared and the other remained. we live everlastingly behind the veil said the rose. she pinned herself to the poet's lapel immediately above his heart and love was instantly a wee bit jealous. as one door opens another slams in your face said love. the station master winked then retired for the night. are you irish the rose asked the poet. just a wee bit answered the poet. a wee bit i can forgive said the rose. i guess so said the poet. there's more than one way to play this game said the remembered rose - sometimes it's wise to do nothing. then she disappeared.

the next day love and the poet returned to the halls of albert and went straight to the white witch department. you've already been selected said the girl at the desk - here in the ghost world it is the witches who select the clients and not the other way round. where can we find the remembered rose asked the poet. i can't tell you that said the girl at the desk - the remembered rose will find you. that's it for today said the girl - enjoy the museum. it's the same old story said the poet. the same old characters. different forms, different names. the same old structures, the same old outcomes and endings. it's always the same old story. life is the same old story said love. birth and death. day and night. fear and serenity. there is a key somewhere said the poet. it's around your neck said love. yes said the poet - the answer is often right under one's own nose. often right under one's own nose is the heart said love. yes said the poet - my cold black empty lonesome heart. the museum is now closed said the girl from the information desk - you must leave the halls of albert immediately please. thank you said love. they walked back hand in hand thru' heavy rain to the railway hotel and there they found the girl from the information desk tending bar. small world said the girl from the information desk. bourbon please said the poet. tall glass please, plenty of ice. me too said love. two white roses materialised on the bar next to their drinks. the roses said nothing. love and the poet drank in silence. then after a time the poet said again - my cold dark empty heart.

after a time the poet said do you think balance might be the son of the station master. might be said love. might be said the roses. it's a small world said the information girl. what are we gonna do about poets town said love. haven't a clue said the poet. we could transport your bar and your apartment here to ghost town 3 said the remembered rose. or we could transport the whole of the poets town district to anywhere you like in the ghost world. the poet didn't know what to say or do or think. i don't even do most of my own writing he said - my writing mostly writes itself. you're too modest said the rose - take your time. there's no shortage of time here in the ghost world said the information girl. they drank in silence for a while then the station master arrived. good evening children said the station master - it's raining like a bastard out there tonight. the engine driver had followed the station master into the bar. he pumped a few coins into the jukebox and soon the atmosphere began to pick up. now there was only one white rose sitting on the bar next to the bourbon glasses. the other had disappeared god alone knows where. sailing paper boats with swans on a lazy river at the bottom of a poppy field i'd guess said the remaining rose but nobody was listening. pearls before swine mumbled the remaining rose. was it robert the bruce who burnt the cakes said the station master. no ya dope it was king albert said the engine driver. you're both wrong said love - it was robert burns who burnt the cakes. the poet hadn't a clue what they were talking about. he was thinking about inspector spanky and the night watchman. and his particular friend the whipping man. he phoned the poets town bar. the remembered horse answered the phone. is spanky dead asked the poet. yes said the remembered horse - everybody's dead 'cept me and arjuna, the bird catcher and the five angels. phone me if you need anything said the poet. thanks said the remembered horse. talk soon. yeah talk soon.

in the railway hotel bar it was raining miniature blue syringes but nobody seemed to mind. a blind man could see that the handsome poet was plain and simply sad sad sad and sad. love held his hand like it was the only hand in the world. and for love it was. the poet was a lucky man. more blessed than he realised. sea eagles ran thru' his veins where his blood should have been. god reveals himself to us in strange ways said love. spanky is dead said the poet - i liked him. what's strange about that? love found she had no answer. she held his hand more tightly. as much for love as for the poet. only love can break your heart played on the jukebox. only love can break your heart said love. what heart said the poet. your black lonesome empty heart said love. have

you noticed that the ghost world trains run silently asked the station master. yeah we've noticed answered the poet. more drinks for everybody please said the poet. coming right up sir said the information girl.

palance arrived at the bar with firebird books and starry night. it's a family affair said the engine driver. hi children said palance. everybody said hi jack. and hi too to the horses. we live behind the veil said the remembered rose. sisters of the moon said palace - i bet you do. palance bought everybody a drink. we should visit the king of poetry soon he said and check on your elephant pal too. yeah you're right jack said the poet. sometimes said palance - sometimes. sometimes we all live behind the veil. the next day love and the poet took the ghost train to the weeping willow hotel on the edge of ghost town 8 to visit the king of poetry and palance rode starry night to ghost town 7 to visit the elephant. love and the poet were warmly received by the elephant king. the king of poetry is fine said the elephant king. perfectly safe. we play a little chess each day and he writes his verses each evening in our gardens. he still has the evil light in his eyes but he is in no danger of losing his temper. things are so perfect here said the elephant king - he's perfectly safe. we're very grateful said love. don't be silly said the elephant king. the king of poetry joined them for coffee. happy and relaxed. disturbingly more beautiful than ever. still wearing his dark glasses. i like it here said the king of poetry - i'm thinking of staying on if the elephant king permits. they shared the news regarding poets town and inspector spanky. the king of poetry became sad. he apologised and withdrew to his new quarters.

palance was warmly received by the elephant king in his winter palace on the edge of ghost town 7. the elephant king had long ago mastered the art of being in more than one place at one and the same time. your friend is fine said the elephant king. happy and relaxed. he paints every day. and the evil light said palance. still in his eyes said the elephant king - but he's in no danger of losing his temper here. thank you said palance - we're very grateful. don't be silly said the elephant king.

let me show you the wonders of my palace said the elephant king. sure thing said palance. i like your horse said the elephant king. she's not mine yet said palance - she lives in the roof gardens above the railway hotel in ghost town 3, she belongs to the station master i gather. not for much longer i suspect said the elephant king. the elephant king took palance to his stables. my pride and joy said the elephant king - meet mustard. mustard was a fine handsome yellow stallion. the finest palance had ever seen. he's yours said the elephant king - a gift for helping love and her handsome poet. you're too kind said palance. yes i am at times said the elephant king but be warned - mustard is more than a little wild. me too said palance - me too.

when the time is right said the elephant king please tell the poet he's more than welcome to transfer his poets town bar and his apartment to my weeping willow estate. my estate is huge. my estate is perfect. we have lakes rivers and mountains. the poet will be safe there. it is impossible he and love will be unhappy there. impossible repeated the king. i might consider moving there myself said palance. you might be a bit too crazy for us jack said the king. you might be right said jack - i'll pass the message on when the time is right. when the time is right repeated the elephant king. and how will you know when the time is right said the king. i'll know said palance - i'll know. the gods have placed many fishes in our lakes and rivers, goats and deer in our hills and mountains said the elephant king - they live peacefully among us. i don't think we can trust you with our goats and fishes and deer. i think you're right said jack - once a killer always a killer. i've never been much of a man for fruit and vegetables and brown rice said jack. you said it jack said the elephant king - but you have hidden depths dear boy. maybe said

palance. don't worry i won't eat mustard. careful jack said the king - i am not without a temper. time for me to go said jack. yes jack said the king - time for you to go. palance saddled up mustard then rode back to ghost town 3, a melancholy starry night tagging along behind in tow on a rope. she had thought she was in love with firebird books but now she was thinking differently. she had never seen a horse before as wild noble and savage looking as mustard. she kinda liked him instantly. she didn't yet know that mustard kinda liked her instantly too. palance sang as he rode - yippee i'm a cowboy i live on the the range, without wild women and whisky life's too fucking strange, yippee i'm a cowboy jack palance is my name, killing and whisky and pretty girls are my game, yippee i'm a cowboy jack palance is my name. all together now said jack. the two horses joined in nervously and tentatively at first then soon they were singing like maniacs jack's stupid song in the rain all the way back to ghost town 3. if he had known the elephant king would not have been best pleased. mustard had indeed been the king's star possession. but the elephant king was nobody's fool. he knew he would never regret his gift. there was little that the elephant king did not know.

dietrich and her thighs were drinking again at a dark corner candle lit table in the bar of the railway hotel. palance hit the bar with his two singing horses. bottle of bourbon please said jack - and drinks for everyone in the bar. bottle of bourbon please in a bucket said mustard. bottle of bourbon please in a bucket said starry night. do i serve them jack said the information girl. of course you do said palance. you want ice with that the information girl asked the horses. just water thanks answered the horses. dietrich had never seen two horses on barstools before. she'd seen most things in her time. she was impressed. drinks for everyone she said. my round. drinks are on me. sure thing said the information girl. dietrich approached the bar. settled herself on a barstool. palance introduced her to the horses. nice thighs said mustard. thank you said marlene. starry night was immediately just a wee bit jealous but she managed to button it and keep her mouth shut. but not for long. gimme another bottle of bourbon please and a bucket of cold water said starry night. coming right up said the information girl. starry night kicked the bucket hard and straight into dietrich's face. i guess you didn't see it coming said starry night. then she left the bar. shit said dietrich. then she said shit again. mustard left the bar looking for starry night. then dietrich and her thighs and palance left the bar and took the lift to palance's room.

our trains are very silent said the station master. he had been sitting quietly at another dark corner candle lit table. we live quietly behind the veil said the sister of the moon. but he has been a great servant to love and to the handsome poet said the station master. he has indeed said the remembered rose. the handsome poet loves him said the station master - and love adores him. the elephant king likes him very much said the remembered rose. he is my son said the station master. he is my son said the remembered rose.

come let us adore him said the station master. the station master and the remembered rose left the bar and went straight to the roof garden and there they built a tabernacle of dust and made a poster of an old rodeo for their son jack palance. firebird books watched them carefully from a dark corner in the garden. and in another dark corner of the garden mustard and starry night made love.

behind the veil - silent trains.

we burned the bodies in the/ - pretty much anything you need to know you'll find in the halls of albert. water truncheons

Chapter 6 -

the walking talking man walked into the bar of the railway hotel in ghost town 3. i'm the walking talking man he said to the information girl who was tending bar. care for a drink sir said the girl. don't mind if i do - bourbon please said the walking talking man. i'm looking for trouble he said. do you mean the king of poetry said the girl. probably - i guess so said the walking talking man. is that what he calls himself these days asked the walking talking man. you need to see the elephant king said the information girl - have a word with the elephant king. thank you said the walking talking man.

more bourbon sir said the girl. yes please said the walking talking man - how do i find the elephant king? he has a palace on the edge of ghost town 7 and a big estate close to ghost town 8 - he comes in here most friday nights for an hour or so said the girl. thank you said the walking talking man - i have something for trouble. what might that be sir said the girl. a cure said the walking talking man. why are you called the walking talking man the girl asked politely. because i can walk and talk at the same time. i'm a toy made entirely outa spare parts. i have no heart and no soul but i have a cure for trouble answered the walking talking man. i had a soul once he said but i left it in the north country - it didn't want to travel south.

dietrich and her thighs had been watching from the shadows. she liked what she saw and heard. she approached the bar and invited the walking talking for a drink in her rooms. why not said the walking talking man. giggling like school children they took the lift to marlene's rooms. it was friday night. the elephant king arrived at the railway hotel and entered the bar at his usual hour. he liked to hang out with the poets actors and artists whe frequented the bar. he had no entourage, no minions, no security. he was his own boss. liked to travel alone. dig his own groove. it's misery that needs company. charles bukowski was asleep at the bar. sitting next to him was arthur rimbaud looking less like a poet, more like a haunted white rose.

good evening sir said the information girl - a gentleman has been asking for you. says his name is the walking talking man. says he has a cure for trouble. what does he look like asked the king. he looks like a mountain but very light on his feet said the girl - he's having a drink with marlene in her rooms. the elephant king laughed. i know him said the king - he's an old friend of mine, quite a ladies' man and a shedload of trouble when he has drink taken. the king laughed again. you have been warned my dear he said. thank you said the girl. bourbon said the king. yes sir said the information girl.

is he a poet asked the girl. yes said the king - but when he's drunk he's just a royal pain in the ass. talk of the devil...the walking talking man stumbled outa the lift into the bar wearing nothing but a stupid grin. i failed the audition said the walking talking man. put this on said the king handing him his coat. you're too kind my noble lord said the man who looked like a mountain. don't gimme shit said the king. it's hard to change the habits of a lifetime said the mountain. don't gimme shit said the king. bourbon said the girl. yeah bourbon said the king. yes please said the mountain.

they sat at the bar for hours laughing a lot and talking about old times. as the hours passed the information girl found herself falling more and more under the spell of the man who looked like a mountain, who claimed he had no heart or soul, who claimed he was a toy yet swore he had a cure for trouble. it was with hidden sadness and regret that she waved the king's limousine goodbye at dawn.

yes despite the king's warning she had fallen for the mountain. the king and the walking talking man were both sitting in the back seat. as the limo sped away towards the coming of the light the information girl slowly began to realise there had been no sign of a driver at the wheel. then even more alarmingly she began to realise she had fallen in love with a mountain.

sisters of the moon. just as the information girl was finishing clearing up two white roses materialised on the bar. so you've fallen for a mountain said a rose. kinda looks that way said the girl with a shadow of a smile. scorpions cannot kill him, devils fear him, lions trust him, time is but dust in his hands - you have chosen well my dear said the rose. i've chosen nothing said the girl - it's not me who's done the choosing. you have wisdom beyond your ears said the rose. beyond my years you mean asked the girl. no my dear said the other rose in your case we mean beyond your ears. whatever said the information girl. her chores now finished she took a tram in the early morning rain to her rooms in the idiotville district of ghost town 3. does this tram stop at the pier she absent mindedly asked. if it doesn't love there'll be a hell of a splash said the conductor. tired and looking forward to bed. and there to dream of her mountain. and that's exactly what she did till late in the afternoon. when she awoke she considered the ability to change and the inability to change. she decided they were one and the same. she concluded we are all sisters of the moon. one mind, one flesh. she concluded even mountains need love.

if you paint angels in a cold shed for more than forty years you either eventually quit, go mad or become an angel - that's what the whipping man told me said the walking talking man at the breakfast table in the palace of the elephant king. did you ever paint asked the elephant king. no said the walking talking man i became a mountain - mountains don't paint. i have a couple of nice suits your size said the king - help yourself when you are ready. i think the information girl has fallen for you. yeah i kinda noticed said the mountain - modesty has never worked well for me. yeah i kinda noticed said the elephant king as they breakfasted on black lilies, blue orchids, huge ice cold water truncheons, strong black blue mountain coffee, buttered toast and clam chowder in the new england style.

we hear the whipping man is dead said the elephant king. impossible said the walking talking man - the whipping man is immortal. jack balance found the body said the king. but not the soul said the mountain - he's probably just gone back to the poppy field where he belongs. that's where he should be so that's where he most likely is if i know the whipping man. you're probably right said the king. where are the suits said the mountain. walk this way said the king. can i use the limo asked the mountain. sure said the king - but what about the cure for the king of poetry? let him wait said the mountain - i never liked him much. the king of poetry is ok - you're such a pain in the ass at times said the elephant king.

the limo pulled up outside the halls of albert. the walking talking man went straight to the information desk. i've come courting said the mountain. we have many fascinating departments here said the information girl - what would you like to see? you ya dope said the mountain - when do you get off duty? employees of the halls of albert are never off duty sir said the girl. you're off duty now said the mountain. he took her by the hand and led her into the cool evening air past the limo towards a nearby park - the park of princes. is this what courting couples do asked the girl. yes said the mountain - this what courting couples do. what about my job asked the girl. the janitor has already locked up said the mountain. are we an item now asked the girl. yes we are an item now replied the mountain.

they made love in the shadows in the park of princes till the park keeper came to lock the the gates. then they made love in the back seat of the limousine as the limo drove itself back to the elephant king's palace. guess who said the walking talking man. looks like the information girl to me said the elephant king - i thought i warned you about him. you did said the girl but we are an item now my

noble lord. i guess you'll be staying with us for a few days said the king. yes my noble lord said the girl. cut the crap said the king - let's have a drink. the lovers remained in their room at the palace making love for the next few days and nights. how old are you asked the mountain. 22 said the girl - how old are you? around 3000 years old, i lost count years ago said the mountain - but 3000 is young for a mountain. the girl didn't know what to think or say so she said nothing. when they finally emerged from their room the mountain requested a meeting with the king of poetry. the meeting took place in the palace gardens. the elephant king, the king of poets, the mountain and the information girl.

i'm not exactly mister humility said the mountain - i've never liked or trusted things that are too clean, too pure or too perfect. the witch's curse is perfect. too perfect. throw a little dirt into the mix said the mountain and the curse can and will be broken. he collected a handful of earth and threw it into the king of poetry's eyes. the evil light faded never to return. immediately random chunks of the king of poetry's memory began flooding back to him, the first thing he remembered was alberta - the beautiful daughter of the prince of darkness. her image cut into his brain. he had loved her once upon a time but had treated her badly and now he was ashamed. you can lose your temper safely now said the mountain. thank you said the king of poetry. the elephant king was pleased and impressed but said nothing. the king of poetry was grateful. he hungered to behave more modestly but he hungered more for alberta the beautiful daughter of the prince of darkness. little miracles said the information girl - we all need love and little miracles. some of us don't even need that the elephant king whispered to himself. little miracles. little murders. sometimes it's hard to tell the difference.

at the railway hotel in ghost town 3 love and her handsome poet were nervous and uncertain. poets town had become a ghost town. their road ahead was a long way from clear. they were drinking in the hotel bar with prince myshkin. the prince as ever was even more nervous and uncertain than love and the handsome poet. arthur rimbaud was asleep at one end of the bar. charles bukowski was asleep at the other. big bob mitchum strolled into the bar. good evening prince he said - you look nervous. i am nervous said the prince - i'm always nervous. let me buy you a drink said bob. just a small one please said the prince. bob bought the prince a drink and drinks too for love and the poet. a girl looking very much like the information girl was tending bar. then at a dimly lit corner table big bob spotted marlene dietrich's thighs. within seconds mitchum and dietrich left the bar to discuss urgent matters of great importance in marlene's rooms. bob never liked to waste time. he often said time is strictly limited - we have a lot less time than we think. marlene cared little for time. and her thighs cared even less.

the sometimes sober kid strolled into the bar. fucking hell said the handsome poet - i thought you were dead. me too said the kid - a thousand times. but you can't kill the kid. we're all dead. all of us. we just don't know it continued the kid. you're right said prince myshkin. yes i am said the kid. the prince immediately became visibly more anxious and agitated. more drinks here please said the handsome poet to the girl who looked much too much like the information girl. coming right up sis said the girl. are we all dead asked love. possibly said the poet. probably said the prince. of course we're all fucking dead said charles bukowski as he stumbled by on his way to the men's room. thanks charles said the prince. was that charles bukowski asked the sometimes sober kid. sure was mumbled bukowski as he stumbled back to his perch at the far end of the bar where he immediately fell asleep. i thought he was dead said the kid. he is said the handsome poet - kinda takes us back to where we started. the world is a confusing place said the kid. more drinks please said the handsome poet.

i talk with jesus a lot said the prince. what does he say asked love. he tells me he loves me said the prince. then why are you so nervous. i haven't a clue said the prince - i'd talk with him all the time if i could. the only time i feel safe is when i talk with jesus. i guess it's all just another journey said the poet. yes to and from the asylum said the prince. enough about asylums please said the kid - i'm nuts enough already. life is a series of mystical journeys said the poet. from one asylum to another said the prince - from one cage to another. like the station master's trains said love. going from nowhere to

nowhere. never quite arriving. never quite arriving. enough said the sometimes sober kid - you're all making me feel ill. more drinks please said the poet. then the poet's face turned white. then green. o' no he said - over there. pointing hesitatingly towards the jukebox. sitting on the jukebox was a firebird wearing a cowboy hat and sporting a pair of yellow roller skates. the firebird squawked vaguely once or twice then flew out the nearest window breaking the glass. the handsome poet howled like a wolf then collapsed and fell onto the floor in a disorganised heap without even the slightest hint of a shred of elegance.

the kid hoisted the poet over his shoulder then he and love put the poet to bed. the kid noticed the silver key and miniature cage around the poet's neck but said nothing. love remained at the bedside. the kid returned to the bar to keep the prince company. i suspect we are all firebirds said the kid - they say you can't kill a firebird. please said the prince - enough. can't we talk about something safe and kind? ok said the kid - i like a well cut suit sometimes on a friday or a saturday night. me too said the prince - a well chosen perfectly co-ordinated silk handkerchief in the breast pocket can say so much said the prince - can be so telling. yup said the kid - the chosen few and all those fucking glittering prizes. more drinks please said the kid to the girl who looked too much like the information girl. coming right up sir said the girl.

some chessmen arrived in the bar looking mean and dangerous. we're looking for trouble said the chessmen. if you're looking for trouble you're in the right place mumbled bukowski. you might know him as the king of poets said the chessmen. i'm the fucking king of poets said bukowski - more asleep than awake. the king of poets we're looking for plays chess with himself almost every day these days said the chessmen - do you play chess? never in my fucking life said bukowski. then he fell back to sleep. the elephant king will know where to find your king of poets. you'll find the elephant king here most friday nights said the girl who looked much too much like the information girl. we'll be back on friday said the chessmen. then they left the bar. kinda tough looking chessmen said the kid. frightening said the prince. more drinks please said the kid. they look more like savage wolves rather than chessmen said the prince. if they are who i think they are they always travel with a vicious endless army of suicidal rag dolls said the kid. enough said the prince - please take me back to the asylum. one for the road said the kid then we'll go.

friday night came along quickly. the chessmen returned. the elephant king arrived alone at his usual time. sharp and elegant in a particularly well cut three piece suit. man he looked like a king. we're looking for the king of poets said the chessmen. there's no such person said the elephant king. we've been told you know where to find him said the chessmen. there's no such person said the elephant king. we want to give him a game of chess - we want to play him with our chess pieces and not with his own said the chessmen. i play a little chess said the elephant king - i'll give you a game. where and when said the chessmen. what's wrong with right now said the elephant king. the chessmen produced a board and chess pieces. the pawns were rag dolls, the major pieces were wolves bears and red tailed devils. the kings were mountains, the queens were rivers. your move said the elephant king. the king destroyed the chessmen with only six moves. the chessmen disappeared. an army of insane rapacious rag dolls invaded the bar crashing in thru' all the windows and doors. man they simply wrecked the joint. destroyed it. smashed it up beyond recognition. the elephant king escaped without a scratch taking the girl who looked like the information girl with him. the girl giggled nervously as the king drove her home. the limo paused outside the gates of the park of princes. a stroll in the park suggested the king - i know the park keeper. he'll let us in. don't mind if i do said the girl.

after they had wrecked the bar and punched a few poets and movie stars on the nose the army of rag dolls vanished. carpenters were sent for. the bar was soon restored and re-opened within a few days under a new name - the elephant bar. at the asylum myshkin was talking with his nurse. i speak with jesus all the time said the prince. what does he tell you asked the nurse. he tells me he loves me said

the prince. how do you feel about that asked the nurse. i feel safe said the prince. do you feel safe here at the asylum asked the nurse. only when i talk with jesus said the prince. i'll have to report this conversation to the controller said the nurse. does he talk with jesus every day asked the prince. i don't think so said the nurse. well if that's the case said the prince please tell the controller i don't want to talk with him ever again. the nurse promised to pass on the prince's message. the prince was a voluntary patient at the asylum and his relationship with the controller was darker and more complex than he realised or understood.

opening night at the elephant bar. the army of rag dolls arrived at midnight. crashed thru' all the windows and doors. destroyed the bar. assaulted guests and staff. then simply vanished. again carpenters were sent for. again the bar was rebuilt. this time re-opening as the new elephant bar. love and the handsome poet had managed to miss the attacks of the rag doll army. they had been visiting the poet's painter friend sandy the elephant at the elephant king's weeping willow estate. the walking talking man had removed the evil light from sandy's eyes and he was painting like a mad delirious beast every day in a new studio gifted to him by the elephant king. as usual he was covered from head to toe with paint. i'm deliciously happy here he told love and the handsome poet - the king has given me this studio and a house in the hills and they're mine forever. sandy cried with joy. and love and the poet cried with him.

ghost town 3 is no longer safe for you the elephant king told love and her poet in a private meeting at the weeping willow estate. it's best you stay here for a while or at the palace until these evil matters are resolved. there are no security issues here or at the palace. none. my palace and estate are impregnable said the king with a strange sad smile. then he laughed. love and the poet thanked the king and agreed as instructed to linger for a while at his weeping willow estate.

the nurse was kind, attractive and had exceptionally long beautiful elegant legs. but she had a job to do. she reported her recent conversation to the controller. no i don't talk with jesus every day and after tomorrow neither will you said the controller to the prince. shock treatment. tomorrow said the controller we start a new course of electric shock treatment and soon you will never talk to jesus again.

that very night jesus came to the asylum and took the prince away to a quiet place of serenity and tenderness where he could talk with jesus any time he wanted and for as long as he wanted. and there the prince would never be lonesome or nervous or afraid again. you will always be safe here said jesus. always he repeated - and you can talk to me any time you like and for as long as you want. always. one more thing said jesus - elephants never forget.

Chapter 7 -

Chapter 8 -

Chapter 9 -

same old story. different words. different story. same old words. some insist that most writers only have one story that they tell differently each time. the same old story. different names. same old words. some insist there is truly only one story. death and god. rivers and mountains. war and peace. loss and redemption. who the hell knows? the elephant king is always a good bet. the lords of silence are an even better bet. and once upon a time the firebirds knew all there was to know about everything. that was before the collapse of their empire of course. these days it's best not to mention firebirds. best leave sleeping dogs alone. most writers are empty inside, can't cope with the real world

so they create their own. buffalo kings and ghost trains. poets who can fly. buildings with wings. talking furniture. hospitals where patients diagnose and treat doctors and nurses. empires of dust, schools of redemption, colleges of forgetfulness where the blind lead the blind. humility is often the only answer no matter the question. wee willie winkie runs thru' the town, upstairs and downstairs in his nightgown. if walls have ears do windows have beards? the handsome poet dreamed on. love entwined around his body like a vine.

swallows gather in november. circles within circles. eyes within eyes. hearts within hearts. stones within stones. nothing lasts or stays the same. everything changes. except maybe rivers and mountains, pain and the elephant king. eyes within hearts. hearts within eyes. not even the elephant king will live forever. rivers by their very nature change all the time yet somehow manage to remain unchanged. mountains will crumble. time itself will cease. eternity's clocks will fail. we know nothing. only when we accept we know nothing do we find ourselves. bubbles in a stream. rivers will cease to run. serenity lasts only five minutes. pain has a longer lease. we know nothing. we are bubbles in a stream. the poet continued to dream. love entwined around his body like a fragrant climbing rose whose thorns god has forgotten to remove.

a new morning. secrets within the walls watch the guests assemble for breakfast in the dining hall at the elephant king's palace. the walking talking man and the information girl, love and her handsome poet. jack palance and the king of poetry, the gods of broken things and the lords of silence. a council of war. the elephant king is the last to arrive. he enters the hall with bob mitchum. they sit at a huge table made outa diamonds and water truncheons. bob has done a lot of work in war movies so i thought he'd come in handy said the elephant king - bob has played private investigators many times in films and i'm certain he will prove more than useful to us. palance winked at bob and bob winked at palance. now to business said the king - the prince of darkness has sworn to destroy all poets painters actors and acrobats. he's not that keen either regarding singers dancers and musicians. our task is simple said the king - we must stop him. what's for breakfast said palance. what would you like said the elephant king. bourbon please said jack. much against my better judgement said the elephant king - bourbon ice and a tall glass materialised in front of palance. the elephant king looked at mitchum. mitchum said nothing. then bourbon ice and a tall glass materialised in front of big bob. where were we said the elephant king. war with the prince of darkness said mitchum - you want us to destroy the prince of darkness. something like that said the elephant king - but not quite. we only want to stop him said the elephant king - we don't need to destroy him. i knew him long ago before he turned bad said the elephant king and frankly i quite liked him. me too said love - we just want to stop him, we don't need to destroy him. we can offer him forgiveness and redemption said love. palance and mitchum looked at her as if she'd lost her mind. more bourbon please said palance. endless bottles glasses and buckets of ice materialised on the table. thanks said jack.

so you just want us to stop the prince of darkness said palance - you don't want us to kill the bastard? you're getting there jack said the elephant king. don't kill the bastard said jack - just stop him before he kills more poets or painters or angels or actors or dancers? you got it jack said the elephant king. maybe bob and i will pay him a visit said palance - i normally charge a fee for this kinda stuff said palance. no fee this time jack said the elephant king - you're doing it for love and the handsome poet. palance laughed. love blushed. the handsome poet smiled enigmatically. what if he doesn't want to be stopped asked jack. you'll find a way said the elephant king. what if i don't asked palance. i'll take my horse back said the elephant king. palance laughed, picked up two bottles of bourbon then went for a walk alone in the palance gardens. there he almost immediately bumped into nat king cole and richard brautigan who were picking flowers for jack kerouac's mother. morning jack said the boys. morning boys said jack. they sat on a bench talking about the old days and drinking the elephant king's bourbon. when the two bottles were finished they sent brautigan back to the palace to fetch more.

the limo took palance and mitchum back to ghost town 3 where they picked up their horses. then the ghost train took them to the underworld. state your business please said the gate keeper. palance simply punched him on the jaw and knocked him out cold. they entered the underworld. the underworld was deserted. all the doors were locked and sealed. they rode to spiders town a few miles from wolf town and took rooms in a cheap hotel. from their rooms on the second floor they could clearly see the light in the night sky from the eternal fire surrounding the poets town district of wolf town. what next said mitchum. fuck knows said palance - your guess is as good as mine. a few drinks said mitchum. kool said palance. they entered the bar of the spiders town hotel. time stood still. bourbon please said bob. bourbon please said palance. the elephant king trying to negotiate peace with the prince of darkness had sent emissaries to the prince but his emissaries had failed - rejected and spurned. do you think it's wise for the elephant king to send the likes of us to negotiate with the prince of darkness said palance. yes and no said bob. i don't want to lose my horse said palance. you won't said bob - you won't lose your horse. more bourbon please said bob. more bourbon please said palance.

at a corner table under a blue light in the spiders town hotel bar the prince of darkness was playing poker with his minions. mitchum and palance presented themselves at the prince's table. are you the prince of darkness asked big bob mitchum. fuck off answered the prince. we are actors said palance - we'd like a word with you please. i know who you are - fuck off said the prince. i represent the whipping king said mitchum. and i represent a clandestine organisation known as the outfit said palance. fuck off said the prince. palance kicked the prince's chair leg and the prince of darkness crashed to the floor. then a strange thing happened - a firebird flew into the bar. the prince of darkness sniffed the air. he could detect the sweet perfume of the ghost of the shadow of a nervous fast fading rose. he could smell the gods of broken things. he could detect the sweet aroma of the lords of silence. ok ok ok said the prince. he dismissed his minions. sit down said the prince.

the elephant king would like some peace said palance - and i don't want to lose my horse. fuck off snarled the prince. we can do this the easy way said mitchum or we can do it the hard way. let's play some poker said the prince. wrong move. palance slaughtered the prince within minutes. the elephant king would like some peace please and my associate doesn't want to lose his horse said big bob. ok ok said the prince - let me think about it. mister stupido approached the table. i'm a puppet master said mister stupido. may i sit down? may i play a few hands? sure said palance. for the next half an hour mister stupido dominated the table and won every hand. that's me cleaned out said mitchum. me too said palance. me too said the prince of darkness. thank you boys said mister stupido gathering up all the cash in his hat - let me buy you all a drink. no said mitchum - we'll buy you a drink.

back to business said palance - the elephant king would like some peace please. gimme a break said the prince - let me think about it. gimme some time. palance looked at mitchum. mitchum looked at palance. ok said jack we'll give you a little time. how much do you need? a couple of days said the prince - gimme a couple of days. ok said jack. mister stupido didn't have a clue regarding what they were talking about. let me buy you all a drink said mister stupido. no said mitchum - we'll buy you a drink. palance was impressed. he couldn't remember the last time he'd lost at a poker table. there is a long list somewhere of all the things jack palance couldn't remember. sit down mister stupido said jack - we'll buy the drinks here tonight. nobody whips my ass said jack but you just did. sit down please mister stupido - me and bob will buy the drinks here tonight. you were hot tonight said the prince to mister stupido. thank you said the puppet master. stupido looked closely at the prince of darkness. are you the prince of darkness stupido asked the prince. yes i am said the prince. are you the king of all devils asked stupido. yes i am said the prince of darkness. jesus said stupido...then he fell off his chair. i thought it was just a poker game with men of honour said stupido nervously. relax said palance - it was just a poker game amongst men of honour. relax said jack - you won. settle

down. relax. have a drink. some cognac please for mister stupido - the best you've got. i'll pay for the drinks tonight said the prince. mitchum looked at palance. palance looked at mitchum. they found to their surprise they were starting to warm to the prince of darkness - king of all devils. i've been trying to get outa the business for years the prince explained but old habits die hard. they got me wrapped in chains boys - wrapped up in fucking chains boys said the prince.

i can't break the chains said the prince. maybe we can help said bob mitchum. what can you tempt me with asked the prince. forgiveness and redemption said palance. fuck that said the prince - i didn't say i wanna become a monk. i wanna play some golf, do a bit of sailing. i wanna learn to play jazz piano. i'm sick to death of doing evil. come and work with me said the puppet master. do you have your own golf course replied the prince. yes i do said mister stupido. gimme a couple of days said the prince - let's talk about somethin' else. i can teach you how to make puppets said stupido. you can teach him how to play poker too said palance. it's the wolf queen said the prince - she makes me do things i don't wanna do. the witch of desolation is just as bad. they're running the show these days not me. i'm all washed up. finished. my time has gone. the real bad guy is the wolf queen said the prince. some more drinks over here please said palance to the waitress whose long legs he had been admiring for the last ten minutes. what i'd really like to do is play piano in a jazz bar said the prince. i own a jazz club said mister stupido - and two restaurants.

the king of swords entered the bar of the spiders town hotel. shoulda known you'd turn up sooner or later said palance - who's side are you on this week? i'm like a bad penny jack said the king of swords - who's fooling who and who's paying who? palance introduced mitchum and mister stupido to the king of swords. you know the prince of darkness of course said palance. of course i do said the king of swords. then the jack of diamonds turned up. what are you doing here asked palance. i want to be a character in a book said the jack of diamonds. you already are a character in a book said palance. i like to get around said the jack of diamonds - i want to be a character in another book. easily arranged said the prince of darkness - let's play some more poker. they did and again mister stupido quickly cleaned up. sorry boys said mister stupido. we'll forgive you said the prince of darkness - maybe. the puppet master looked nervously at palance. palance winked and mister stupido breathed more easily.

i like being in books said the jack of diamonds. i like living in books he said - i like to get around. me too said the king of swords - i like being in books too. i like moving from page to page while the books are sleeping - moving things around, changing things so the books are different next time they open. me too said the jack of diamonds. you guys are nuts said palance - will you please just shut up. more drinks here please he said to the beautiful waitress with the amazing long legs. room 203 said jack. i'll be off duty in half an hour sir said the girl. me too said palance.

i thought you were a hard case said palance to the king of swords. used to be said the king - but i've spent too long in books. i used to be a lotta things said the king but i've spent too long in books - it's wise to quit while you're ahead jack. some guys never quit said palance - i just don't know how. didn't you used to be in movies jack said the king of swords. i think so yeah said palance - long time ago. me too said mitchum - long time ago. forgive me please gentlemen said palance i have an appointment - goodnight. then he left the bar for room 203. the hotel manager approached mitchum's table. gentlemen you are very welcome here he said - your drinks are on the house tonight. thanks said big bob - you are too kind. think nothing of it sir said the hotel manager. they played some more poker and mister stupido easily won every hand again. i might buy this hotel said the puppet master. i might not sell it said the prince of darkness - it belongs to me. big bob and the prince of darkness agreed to meet in the bar at six the next evening. a few cold beers and talk some business. at three in the morning they said their goodnights then went their separate ways.

around six the next evening at the spiders town hotel bar sitting on high barstools the puppet master was drinking with his particular friend mister splendid. writers tend to live only in their books said mister splendid. there they encounter some rather strange people. there no doors are closed to them. real life doesn't hold them at all and when they die they live on in their books. how do you know this asked the puppet master. i used to be a writer said mister splendid.

life is a series of crucifixions said mister splendid - that's just one reason why writers live only in their books. the thing to remember about crucifixions is they are only temporary. after winter comes spring. snow only hides flowers it doesn't kill them. after pain and sorrow comes serenity. love is the only question. humility the only answer. another drink asked the puppet master. certainly - yes please said mister splendid. two vodka martinis please - easy on the ice said the puppet master. coming right up sir said the bar girl. i am a flower said mister splendid. you are indeed said the puppet master. we are all flowers said mister splendid. we are indeed said the puppet master.

a little after six the prince of darkness entered the bar. followed a few minutes later by mitchum and palance. i need more time said the prince of darkness - kinda hard to give up the throne. i kinda love my throne of flames. we like you said mitchum - we'll give you more time. a little poker gentlemen said the prince. why not said palance. they played for hours and mitchum won every hand. fuck this said palance. jack - please try to moderate your language in front of the prince said big bob. fuck you said palance. may we join you asked the puppet master. of course said the prince. within half an hour mister stupido had blown them all away. sorry boys said the puppet master. it's ok said mitchum - i guess we're kinda getting used to it. palance was not amused - not used to losing at any poker table. but he didn't care. he was waiting for the bar girl to come off duty.

how much time do you need said mitchum. don't know said the prince. that's ok said bob - we'll give you as much time as you want. thanks bob said the prince. the hotel manager approached their table. it was close to three in the morning. your drinks are on the house gentlemen - if i can be of service i'm easily found. the hotel manager bowed then disappeared. your manager looks a lot like modigliani said mitchum. he is modigliani said the prince. i'd like to buy this hotel said the puppet master. i might not want to sell it said the prince. palance had disappeared hours ago when the beautiful bar girl came off duty. soutine was now tending bar. is that soutine asked big bob. yes it is said the prince - mad as a pork chop. aren't we all said bob. speak for yourself said mister splendid. white rose petals and blue syringes rained gently down on them. one for the road said bob. there is no road said the prince. i'll drink to that said mitchum. me too said mister stupido. i've not felt so relaxed in years said the prince of darkness. good said big bob - i'm pleased. i'm pleased you're pleased said the prince. i'm pleased you're pleased i'm pleased said big bob mitchum. gentlemen stop it please said mister splendid - i'm getting confused. sorry said big bob. sorry said the prince.

does jimmy baxter drink here asked bob mitchum. yeah all the time said the prince - we can't get rid of him. he likes a laugh jimmy baxter does said big bob. yeah he likes a laugh said the prince. a glasgow boy i think said the prince. no no no said big bob - a fife boy jimmy baxter. pardon me my noble lord said the prince. it's ok said bob - but don't get clever. it's too late for me to get clever said the prince. it's never too late said mister splendid. mitchum looked at mister splendid. the prince of darkness looked at mister splendid. mister splendid felt more than a wee bit strange. mitchum smiled. the prince of darkness smiled. one for the road said big bob. yeah one for the road said the prince of darkness. who the hell is jimmy baxter asked mister splendid. baxter is a saint said mitchum - he did a lot of charity work in west central scotland back in the 60's and is generally considered to be the father of scottish independence. let's go get stoned said big bob. we're halfway there already said the prince. halfway to somewhere is nowhere said bob. one hand of poker for the spider town hotel or you win my golf course said mister stupido. ok said the prince.. the puppet master lost. four aces kinda beats three eights. time for bed boys said mitchum - see ya later. at four in the morning as sultans of

swing played on the jukebox our friends left the bar each going their separate ways. soutine continued drinking alone till well beyond dawn and when the clean up boys came in around seven in the morning soutine cooked them a near perfect breakfast. and as they ate little falling stars, white rose petals and purple and blue syringes rained down gently all around them.

before he left the bar mitchum said to the prince - love is the only question, humility the only answer. you might just be right bob said the prince. goodnight bob said the prince. goodnight prince said bob.

palance was distracted. he wasn't used to losing at poker. frankly he wasn't used to losing at anything. he'd fallen heavily for the bar girl. he didn't want to lose his horse. he phoned the elephant king to report developments. things are moving along ok said palance - looking good. the elephant king was pleased. time to reveal the ace in the hole. the king of poetry wants to marry alberta the devil's beautiful daughter said the elephant king. palance was stunned - didn't know what to say. would you kindly repeat that please said palance. the king of poetry wants to marry alberta the devil's beautiful daughter said the elephant king. i need a drink said palance - i'll call you later.

back at the weeping willow estate more and more of the whipping king had entered the being of love's handsome poet. the poet would never be nervous again. next evening jim baxter was drinking with albert camus in the bar of the spiders town hotel when the prince of darkness arrived. hi jim said the prince. hi prince said baxter. evening albert said the prince. hi prince said albert. then palance and mitchum entered the bar and our three friends settled in at their usual table. i wanna get outa the devil business said the prince - i wanna get outa the evil business. i wanna retire. play some golf. do some fishing. we're pleased to hear it said bob. you can keep your horse jack mitchum said to palance. but what do we do about the wolf queen said the prince. leave that to us said palance. thanks boys said the prince - i'm all washed up. let's have a drink said mitchum. yeah i'm kinda dry said palance. modigliani brought a tray - a couple of bottles of bourbon, glasses and a bucket of ice.

i thought jimmy baxter was dead said palance. he is said mitchum - he's been dead for years. do you dream of crucifixions asked palance. all the time said big bob mitchum - all the fucking time. me too said palance. the king of swords and the jack of diamonds said bob - do they really move around in books at night and change the words while the books are sleeping. yup said palance - you bet they do. they're tricky bastards. don't ever underestimate the king of swords or the jack of diamonds said palance - they're a lot tougher than they look.

i've fallen for the bar girl said palance. good said bob - boys like us we need a good strong woman every now and then. there's more to life jack than horses and killing people said mitchum. does southside johnny use this bar mitchum asked the prince. yeah he drinks here now and then and some nights he sings said the prince of darkness. i like his work said bob. me too said the prince of darkness. who the fuck is southside johnny said palance. he's a singer you fool said mitchum. then mitchum turned to the prince and said - love is the only question prince and humility the only answer. i'm listening bob said the prince - i'm listening. but are you learning asked mitchum. i'm trying bob said the prince - i'm trying. you'll get there said mitchum. i'll get there said the prince of darkness. i believe you will said bob. the elephant king tells me once upon a time you and he were close said mitchum. yes indeed said the prince - he was kind to me but i was always heading south. sometimes it's best to have no feelings at all said palance. jack shut up said bob - i'm trying to help the prince.

the elephant king was always kind to me bob said the prince - i let him down. that was then this is now said mitchum - maybe you and he can be close again. regrets are a pain in the ass and no use to anyone said mitchum - change your ways prince and you can be happy again. the prince was close to tears. don't fucking cry prince said mitchum - crying is for girls. the prince laughed, mitchum ordered more drinks and soutine brought a tray. i want to change said the prince. good said mitchum - come

with us back to the ghost world. the elephant king wants to see you. ok said the prince of darkness. we'll leave tomorrow said bob. ok said the prince.

no shots fired, no bones broken said palance. jack shut up said bob. mister stupido and mister splendid approached mitchum's table. some poker gentlemen asked mister stupido. sure thing said bob. and within an hour mister stupido had spanked them all again. one hand for the spiders town hotel against my two restaurants stupido asked the prince. ok said the prince. stupido lost. three jacks beats three eights. i'll let you keep your jazz club said the prince. come with us back to the light said mitchum - be a prince of light. i will said the prince - i'll try.

that guy at the bar drinking with albert camus said mister splendid - didn't he used to be slim jim baxter. that guy at the bar is indeed slim jim baxter said robert mitchum. how come he's so fat then said mister splendid. times change said mitchum - sometimes we change with them and sometimes we don't. baxter was the greatest artist of his generation said mitchum so be careful what you say about him. sorry bob said mister splendid somewhat nervously. it's ok said mitchum. more drinks please said mitchum. soutine brought a tray faster than a speeding bullet.

the man who was afraid of hard work entered the bar. it wasn't just hard work he was afraid of. he was afraid of everything except death. he was drinking himself to death. later that night he succeeded and as pretty falling stars, pink and red rose petals and blue and purple syringes gently rained down at the coming of dawn soutine cleared up the mess. wingless birds. wingless birds sing a sad song. the sad song of a wingless bird followed soutine all the way home. death was standing alone waiting on a street corner in the early morning rain. fuck off said soutine as he passed by. death said nothing.

does this chapter have no end asked palance. there are no endings in the ghost world said mitchum. but we're not in the ghost world - you always have to have the last word said palance. no not really said mitchum. you can say a few words if you like said bob. i don't know what to say said palance. then shut up jack said mitchum. sorry said palance. it's ok said bob. the next day the ghost train collected palance and mitchum. their horses. and the prince of darkness. and deposited them at the gates of the elephant king's weeping willow estate. the beautiful bar girl, much in love with palance, travelled with them. the engine driver and the engineer almost fainted at the sight of her legs but one cold look from palance kept the boys reasonably steady. a cold look from palance could steady a sinking ship. jack was tough. tough. tough. and he didn't care who knew it.

the elephant king descended from his throne to greet his guests. mitchum bowed modestly. palance bowed reluctantly. the prince of darkness wept. who is this beautiful lady said the elephant king. she's with me said palance looking cold and hard at the elephant king. pardon me for breathing said the elephant king. then the king looked at the weeping prince of darkness. welcome said the elephant king. the prince of darkness was on his knees weeping. the bar girl helped the prince to stand but the prince could not control his weeping. the elephant king embraced the prince of darkness. you are welcome here said the elephant king - perhaps we can make you a prince of light again. but the prince of darkness could not respond. so badly was he weeping. the prince fell to his knees again. and this time the elephant king helped the prince to stand. welcome home said the elephant king - welcome home. take ownership of the ground on which you stand said the king - or someone else will. the prince of darkness continued to weep like a small child then fell to his knees again. the elephant king raised him up. welcome home said the elephant king - you are now a prince of light again. please act like one. please stop crying. at this the prince of darkness awoke as if from a dream.

master - said the prince of darkness. no no no said the elephant king - no guru, no teacher, no master. i am simply the elephant king said the king - no guru, no teacher, no master. master said the prince of darkness again. ok maybe you're right - at least now you have stopped crying said the elephant king.

any chance of a fucking drink please said palance. yeah sure said the elephant king - walk this way. this is a fucking long chapter said palance. it's ok said the elephant king - we'll give you a couple of long drinks. how is mustard said the king. mustard is ok said jack palance. bob seger's still the same filled the air loudly and as the elephant king poured drinks pretty rose petals and purple and blue syringes rained gently down on them all. and the bar girl's beautiful beautiful legs grew just a little bit longer. didn't you used to be the white buffalo's driver the elephant king asked seger. yes i guess so said seger. it's a long fucking chapter said palance. yes it is said bob mitchum. but palance didn't give a shit. all jack really gave a shit about was the beautiful bar girl's long long legs.

and thus endeth chapter 9 of the whipping king.

darkness

mister stupido - chains

Chapter 10 - goodnight mister mitchum

there's not much left to tell. the prince of darkness surrendered to the elephant king and became once again a prince of light. the king of poetry married alberta the prince's beautiful daughter. that left only the wolf queen and the witch of desolation to be dealt with. the wedding took place at the elephant king's weeping willow estate. then the prince, the king of poetry and alberta moved to miami to look

after the two restaurants and golf course the prince had won from mister stupido. the prince turned one of the restaurants into a jazz club and there most nights he played ragtime and jazz piano. mister stupido visited regularly. they played poker often. but mister stupido never again won even a single hand when playing against the prince. i guess the prince was just lucky.

palance married his bar girl in a simple ceremony at the elephant king's palace. love was maid of honour - the handsome poet best man. palance cried throughout the ceremony. he was sober the day he married and remained sober throughout the rest of his long life. he adored his bar girl like no man before. they were exquisitely happy and together they produced many beautiful little bar girls and miniature jack palances.

the underworld was deserted so the wolf queen and the witch simply moved in. palance remained sober for the rest of his days. mitchum didn't. bob had little interest in remaining sober for long. sober - palance was even more mean and dangerous than ever and as ever he continued to hang out with his pal big bob mitchum.

you act like you're some kinda super precious soul said palance. i am said mitchum. i am a super precious soul. we all are. we are all one super precious soul said bob. the problem is some of us just can't work it out or if you prefer - we can't all work it out at the same time. time is a tricky bastard said mitchum.

how come you know this kinda stuff asked palance. haven't a clue said bob - i just know. it's all god. we are all god. chairs tables clouds sky. everything. everybody. flowers trees rivers mountains. all god said mitchum. every action, reaction and interaction - all god. how do you know this said palance. by the grace of god said bob - i just kinda worked it out. it came to me one night in a flash. you're mad said palance. maybe said bob but at least i'm not sober. do you really believe that stuff asked palance. of course i do said big bob mitchum - we are all love. some of us are just slower than others to get there. maybe you need a drink jack said bob. no thanks said palance - you're doing plenty for both of us bob. it's a cold hard world out there sometimes said mitchum. a man needs a drink every now and then said bob - a man needs a good strong woman every now and then too. they were relaxing in the gardens of the weeping willow hotel at the elephant king's estate. the estate was massive, more the size of a small country rather than any normal idea of the size of a private estate. there is little that is normal in the ghost world.

i'm not love or god said jack - i'm jack palance. the elephant king is not love or god said jack - he's the elephant king. whatever you say said big bob - whatever you do jack don't stretch yourself. mitchum grabbed a passing waitress. this pretty lady is god said bob - may i have another bottle of bourbon please? certainly mister mitchum said the pretty girl - coming right up. within seconds the table had been cleared and another pretty girl had served fresh glasses, a bucket of ice, a bottle of bourbon and a jug of lemonade for palance. thanks said big bob to the pretty girl who had served the drinks. you're too kind mister mitchum said the girl. i know said bob - i have many weaknesses. if it's ok with you mister mitchum i'll accidentally scribble my phone number on this napkin said the pretty girl. feel free, be my guest. room 703 said bob. you're too kind mister mitchum said the girl.

bob you are a maniac said palance. we are all angels said bob. we are all love. we are all god. bob you're fucking nuts said palance. maybe said mitchum as he poured himself a huge shot of bourbon into a tall glass. you're a maniac bob but i love you said palance. i love you too said bob - you're a nice guy jack when you're sober. fuck you said palance. fuck you said big bob. then they both giggled like naughty school children. you're a married man jack you gotta stay sober said bob. i'm happy sober said palance. i know said bob - i'm pleased for you. i know you are said palance. a tear crept into jack palance's eye. don't cry said mitchum - crying's for girls said bob. i know said jack - i know.

you know what said bob. fuck all said jack - i know fuck all. me too said bob - we are idiots. where the fuck is jack kerouac said mitchum - i miss him. me too said palance. love and her handsome poet entered the gardens and with them was jack kerouac. over here shouted bob. bob waved. palance waved. kerouac, love and her handsome poet waved back then danced lightly and easily thru' a sea of tables and chairs towards big bob and palance. they hugged, embraced and exchanged kisses. then they hugged, embraced and exchanged kisses again. mitchum laughed like a maniac for no particular reason. love looked like a million bucks. the poet looked like he knew how to handle his sword and kerouac was reasonably sober. they say you should write about what you know but i know fuck all said kerouac. i have the same problem said the handsome poet. i'm too stupid to have problems said bob mitchum. me too said palance. sandy the elephant, as usual totally covered with oil paint, approached mitchum's table. sorry to intrude gentlemen but might i please have your autograph mister kerouac? sure sonny said kerouac. kerouac signed a napkin and handed it to sandy. all the best sonny said kerouac. thank you mister kerouac said the elephant. tears in his eyes, sandy bowed gracefully then left a trail of oil paint from mitchum's table all the way back to his own. nice kid said mitchum. yeah nice kid said palance.

the handsome poet looked much the same as ever but inside he had changed. more and more of the whipping king had entered into him. in bed at night love could feel the change in him. she liked it. it made her happy. she liked being happy and her handsome poet liked making her feel that way. blue syringes can only do so much. mostly blue syringes do more harm than good. love and her poet never discussed syringes. she knew that he knew. he knew she knew he knew. and that was that. love was not perfect. pretty much just like most everybody else. love had her own secret garden - don't think twice. in love's secret garden jesus is never betrayed. in love's secret garden prince myshkin burns the asylum to the ground. in love's secret garden she hides. one step up and two steps back.

when a painter finishes a picture there is often satisfaction but there is more often than not an emptiness too. when a writer completes a book there is often pleasure and satisfaction but more often than not there is emptiness. the painter starts another picture. the writer starts another book. addiction takes many forms. shapes many lives. the void must be filled. emptiness kills. eats souls and bones and drinks the blood. set a thief to catch a thief is the only solution i guess.

the handsome poet had tried to explain many times that he didn't write his own books. but nobody believed him. he only received the books. they passed thru' him like a train to a station. the words delivered themselves. arranged and rearranged themselves. many times he'd asked the words why they'd chosen him but the words always refused to answer this question. in time he tired of asking. tired of wondering. learned to accept the situation. he told the truth about his books. but nobody believed him. most people seem content to live without the truth he concluded. what he liked best was studying the stars and the night sky. it would be a long time before he discovered his own heart was made outa stars and the night sky. what we find at the end of the road is often a long long way from what we expect. the show must go on. i know i'm going to heaven said the bishop to the actress cos i've spent my time in hell.

i'll drink to that said mitchum. to what said kerouac. to whatever you've got said bob. i've got nothing said kerouac. i'll drink to that said mitchum. is that zen asked kerouac. no definitely not said bob. palance was perplexed - hadn't a clue what they were talking about but the handsome poet understood and tried to help. it's called bollox jack - bullshit - they're just killing time. sometimes meaningless is closer to meaningful than meaningful continued the poet. i see said palance - but jack didn't see at all. fuck this said palance. he felt like punching someone on the nose but instead went shopping with his new wife.

we are idiots said mitchum - all of us. count me in said the handsome poet. it was one of those nights when mitchum just wouldn't or couldn't shut up. his wild elusive heart letting rip like a mad giant let loose in a miniature world of fragmenting dreams. we all fragment said bob. all of us. everything. everything fragments. we all fragment. then we're put back together again by doctors and nurses of light. mitchum was in full swing. isn't that what the white buffalo used to teach said love. exactly said big bob - i knew him when he was still a fool. we were all idiots then. when the pretty waitress reported she was now off duty she and bob retired to room 703. there is no such thing as death said mitchum with a smile as he left the table arm in arm with his good lookin' waitress - goodnight boys and girls. i'm all yours said the good lookin' waitress as they entered room 703. i know said bob - i know. the waitress was kinda shocked to find bob's horse asleep in the bed. albie camus had the room next door. when they checked albie's room they found two horses in his bed. fuck this said the waitress - goodnight mister mitchum. bob went back to 703 and slept with his horse. whose name was perfidious albion.

this world is not what you think. the ghost world is not what you think. there are many different worlds. all pervaded by countless illusions. the tricks of light are endless said the handsome poet. the elephant king entered the gardens. all the drinkers and guests and those who were dining stood up and bowed. please said the elephant king - please sit down. then the elephant king sat himself down next to jack kerouac in the seat vacated only a few minutes before by big bob mitchum. there is no such thing as death said the elephant king. death is an illusion. the god of death is an illusion. death is simply a journey from one station to another. even for the smallest flower, an innocent child or the soul of a wingless bird there is no such thing as death. it is only and always station to station. the stations and the trains change. each journey is different from the last but somehow also the same. it is only and always station to station said the elephant king - there is no such thing as death.

what about loss pain and fear asked the handsome poet. illusions said the elephant king. doubt said kerouac. an illusion said the king - mostly a waste of time. love said love. you are not an illusion said the king. the wolf queen and the witch of desolation said the handsome poet. illusions said the elephant king - they will destroy themselves. i'd like to see that said the poet. you will said the king. once upon a time the handsome poet would have liked to ask about nerves but he had journeyed so far since his poets town days and so much of the whipping king was now living inside him there was no need for such a foolish question. is there anything you don't know kerouac asked the elephant king. plenty said the elephant king. love is the only question said the elephant king - humility the only answer. regarding poets town, the wolf queen and the witch a council of war will take place at the palace tomorrow evening at seven - be there. then the elephant king simply disappeared.

the handsome poet dreamed on. love entwined around his body like a wild climbing rose. at the council of war - the engine driver, station master and engineer. the walking talking man and his information girl, the lords of silence and the gods of broken things. love and her poet, mitchum and palance. the wolf queen and the witch will destroy themselves rather than surrender said the elephant king - we must help them towards their destiny. we need volunteers. everyone at the table volunteered. i can't release you all said the king - we need help here to protect the ghost world.

- doubt/love - wolf/witch - nerves - engine driver, station master, engineer - roses***

walking talking man/info girl - lords of silence - gods of broken things

Dear Diary

prisoners of shadows. prisoners of light. most of us are prisoners of shadows at one time or another. we must learn to set our own selves free. restrictions. limitations. shadows. boundaries. chains. enemies. don't wait for buddha. don't wait for krishna. don't wait for angels. don't wait for jesus. don't wait for the cavalry. don't beg for charity. don't beg for mercy. to hell with pain. open the gates. set your own self free. don't wait for publishers. don't wait for an audience. don't wait for buddha. don't wait for miracles. don't wait for doctors. don't wait for the fucking ambulance. don't wait for anything. don't wait for princes. don't wait for the vedas to rewrite themselves just for you. don't watch paint dry. set your own self free. don't wait for buddha. don't wait for bodisattvas. don't pray for rain. don't pray for firebirds. don't look back. don't pray for vengeance. don't stumble blindly into the hurricane. walk calmly and humbly towards it. don't bend or kneel. look it in the eye. see what happens next. is it different from before? no it is not. continue. do not cease. don't wait for builders. don't wait for carpenters. continue. endure. do not cease. do not come to an end. don't wait for buddha. dare to laugh.

don't watch tv. don't eat too much. don't smoke. don't wait for mountains to crumble. don't wait for winds to blow or not to blow. don't wait for wounds to heal - they might never heal. don't wait for cops. don't wait for judges. don't wait for samurai - they will not come. don't wait for dancing masters. try to remember it is sometimes wise to wait for certain poets and painters. do not wait for technicians. don't wait for waitresses. do not covet another man's ox. do not covet another man's donkey. never steal a horse in arkansas and don't tell lies in denver. don't piss off gangsters. be polite to strangers. do not doubt. forget about love. forget about sin, guilt, shame, crime and punishment. forget about italy. forget about greece. forget about fire hydrants. don't wait for buddha. forget about clowns, forget about ducks. always dare to laugh. when the bandages come off tread lightly towards the light. avoid alcohol. and when travelling or in church or at the theatre always do your best to avoid the cheapest seats. don't wait for golfers, acrobats, drunken sailors, gamblers or janitors. don't wait for giraffes.

prisoners or shadows. who knows? who cares? who gives a shit? prisoners or shadows. we must learn to be one or the other. sometimes learning to fly is the best option. sometimes learning to fly is the only option. learning to fly is often easier than standing still.

dear diary....i remember the look in her eyes when she left me for the last and final time. tread lightly towards the light when the bandages come off she said. black is black said the bishop to the actress. you're fucking right there your grace said the actress - black is indeed black. sometimes it's best simply not to give a fuck at all said the actress. it's all just a circus act she said - it's plate-spinning and nothing more. prisoners or shadows she said - i'd rather not be a guard. i'd rather just fly away. to thine own self be true she said then she was gone.