

ON THE FARM

Stanley Yuban woke up on his oversized mattress on the floor. It was late in the summer and it was a warm day. Slanted light of the summer sun lazily filtered through the cracked glass panes of the farmhouse window. He looked over at the rumpled space beside him. Emily was gone - sweet, musky Emily, spouse of his life. With the arrival of the bird's morning song, she had crept out of bed to attend mysterious tasks of her own. Stanley idly lay on the mattress awhile, staring at the yellowing leaves of the poplar trees outside. Soon it would be getting cooler, he mused, and the windows would have to be covered up with some kind of material. How would the farmer had handled it?

Stanley lived a timeless life of leisurely poverty. Barely paying any rent, he made his living by working at occasional odd jobs. The window would have to be patched up and the woodstove would have to be brought in. He'd have to get rust on his hands, alas, but that was the way life was. But no pigs and chickens and cultivating the garden for him. Nope, that wasn't the way he was going to go about it.

It must have been this way for the farmer. A half a century ago, the farmer woke up on his knobby, antique brass bed. He found his wife gone beside him to make breakfast for the children. The red beams of dawn had gone [and passed.] The farmer lay on bed for awhile, thinking about fixing the fence. All of his life's problems were reduced to fixing the fence. And feeding the pigs and the chickens and tending the garden. Of course, the farmer drove into town in his rickety pickup truck to work for the rich folks from time to time. But wait a second, pickup trucks weren't invented yet; it must have been horses that took him to town. Stanley couldn't quite be sure

about things like that. The farmer, too, thought about patching up the windows and cleaning out the woodstove. Then he got out of bed to go kick the shit out of his damn pigs.

And Stanley Yuban was getting ready to kick the shit out of somebody - namely one certain "black panther" by the name of "Kent Daniels". Somebody, the past night, had painted a black spiderweb with purple vultures above the mantelpiece. This sort of thing wasn't included in the building permit; their landlord Charlie Louis wouldn't have approved of it. Someone splashed yellow paint above the mantelpiece and scrawled that atrocious spiderweb on it, then added the purple vultures hovering in the distance. Stanley could hardly fail to notice it when he had come in from taking a long walk. What would the farmer say, had he lived to see this mark of infamy above his mantelpiece? In dripping black paint there was a signature at the bottom: "Behold - The Approach of Doom!". There was only one person Stanley could think of, whose handiwork that could have been.

He put on his shirt, his dungarees, and his workboots. He went down the narrow, creaking stairs. The stairs were a bit crooked and that was another renovation that he'd have to make. Stanley would give that some time-consuming thought sometime.

The Johnson brothers were smoking dope in the living room. They were giggling and pointing at an obscene picture in Zap comics. It was a picture of a bright-eyed young man looking for some sexual opportunity. His hard-on was obviously visible through his pants. Try as he would, Stanley could not see what was so funny about this. The Johnson brothers had been going on like this for many days now.

"It's the dope," Tom Johnson explained. Tom was the older brother. Jack Johnson rolled back and rocked with laughter. Holding in a toke, he held out the joint and said, "Good shit... Panama Gold... You should try it, man..." He coughed and giggled.

Stanley shook his head in disdain. "No thanks... I believe you." Was this to be the ruin of his generation?, Stanley thought in exasperation. What a sad fate it was. The Johnson brothers would make an excellent documentary film on those dangerous dope fiends whose morals are completely corrupted by that dire devil weed - marijuana (printed in bold black and red letters). Tom Johnson had another peek at the picture and went into violent spasms of laughter.

"Would you boys know who painted the spiderweb above the mantel-piece last night?"

They punched each other on the shoulder and howled with delight. Stanley Yuban was doing a puppet show for them.

"C'mon, boys. Search your memories now. Who painted the purple vultures on the wall?"

"Hah! Hah! Hah! You tell 'em, Stanley!" (Grim, straight-faced Stanley, teeth snarling in pointed rage.)

It was hopeless to get anything out of them. Stanley stormed into the kitchen to see...

Kent Daniels sitting at the kitchen table, snorting a fine white powder in aluminum foil through a 20\$ bill. Through a 20\$ bill; had it really come to that?

"Good morning, Kent. Having a good breakfast?"

Kent Daniels, eyes closed in sweet, cocaine-induced bliss, murmurs: "Right, baby. Oh yes... Loveliest stuff on the market. A tremendous way to start the day."

"Kent, somehow it lingers on the tip of my tongue to level with you. I am beginning to wonder if we have somehow lost our way."

"Definately, man. But it is imperative that you sample for yourself this most delicious moodlifter."

"No, Kent, I have chosen this day of all days to keep my head free of all chemical derivatives in token respect to the old man who

started this farm."

"Man, have you flipped? You cannot resist this indispensable killer powder which keeps you lifted through the cosmos all night long." He gave a long sigh.

"But what about the vultures, Kent? Surely you remember the vultures. The vultures... the vultures..."

All of a sudden, Kent banged on the table, screaming: "MAN, DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT THOSE GODDAMN VULTURES! I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANYTHING ABOUT THOSE VULTURES!" That seemed to touch upon a vital nerve. Stanley tried again.

"It was you who put them there, was it not? It was you who be-smirched the happy hearth with the vultures and the ominous spider-web... Do I uttereth not the truth?"

Breathing quickly, eyes restlessly moving, Kent replied: "Those vultures, man, are symbols of what's to come. What you saw was a dynamite vision of the chaotic future, man, the vultures being us preying upon the spiderweb of this crumbling civilization."

"But did you have to decorate Charlie Louis' mantelpiece with them?"

"Man..." Kent Daniels breathing heavily said, "You're one of them, aren't you?"

"One of who? The vultures?"

"DON'T MENTION THOSE VULTURES!" It finally happened. Kent Daniels was losing control. It was probably due to lack of sleep.

"Frankly, Kent, your dangerously destructive tendencies suggest to me distinct signs of demon possession. Have you ever considered going to see a witchdoctor?"

"You better watch it, you pink-faced honky. You're touching upon my sacred African blood. Destruction, baby, is my religion. I shall live by it, man, and I shall die for it."

Stanley smiled a half-smile, filled with bitterness. What would the farmer say about this unwholesome scene taking place here where, a half-century ago, he ate his bacon and eggs with his wife and children, staring at the morning sun through the window?

"Gird your loins with it, Kent. If Charlie Louis finds that icon above the mantelpiece, then away we go and up the shit creek we climb, you dig? Take care of it. I'm going for a walk."

Kent snorted two more hits of his breakfast. "Fuck this scene, man. I'm gonna go on a little trip to Jamaica for a lifetime's supply of this coke, and you're not gonna get any."

Stanley just nodded and went out the screen door - towards the morning glories. He went along the path that led away from the highway and through the fields to the woods. It was a place he felt the need to go to from time to time. There were things going on in that farmhouse that had been getting to him lately - the dope orgies, the paranoia, the fear of trucks roaring along the highway.

Of course, there were the animal quarters enlaced in honeysuckle vines. They had been uninhabited for about twenty years now and were inaccessible to any who had the inclination to approach. Any bums, taking a break from jumping trains, would find no shelter in these buildings. The farmer used to come out there every morning, carrying water for the pigs. Every now and then, he would trip over a log from the woodstack - or his sheep would break through the pen again. He'd slip on the mud floor of the chicken coop and the hens would attack him, so he'd have one for dinner as an example to the rest. Finally, one day the farmer had had it. He sold his farm and worked at a steady job in the city. As far as Stanley could tell, that's the way it happened.

What were they all trying to prove?, Stanley wondered as the ghost of a slaughtered piglet peeked around the corner at him. Or

what was happening to him?; he who had turned down two consecutive offers of dope that morning? Was there no way out of the "doing dope - trying to do without dope" vicious cycle? He got flipped out when he did do dope and he got bored when he tried to remain straight. There had to be some other way.

Or how about the old "city vs. farm" dichotomy? Living in the city with all its diverse distractions and exorbitant bills, he knew, was not the way to live. Nothing was going to change there, except maybe get worse. Destroying the buildings and picking off road construction projects wasn't going to help. They'd just pay someone to build more. There was really nothing to do in the city but play the straight's game and get fucked up in your spare time.

At the same time, Stanley realized that all those notions about the virtues and romance about living off the land was about ten pounds of flax-wax. He knew that before he even made the attempt to try it. All those organic food freaks, working the fields from dawn to dusk, were fooling themselves about the "good life". Actually, they were becoming more and more like the narrow-minded sort of people who survived the depression. Their philosophy was beginning to be reduced to the same bland axiom, "work, work, work". What's so noble about working hard all the time, with no days off, just to survive? Stanley could do that by working at a part-time job.

And that is more or less what he did. For some reason, Stanley always preferred to live on the edge of things rather than be thoroughly committed to one way of life or another. He had played the academic game, he worked, and now he lived on this farm. It wasn't too bad. All that was demanded of him was that he work at an odd job or see to a necessity of life every now and then. But his boots were falling apart. A tooth was coming loose in his mouth.

And now, Stanley had a sneaking suspicion that the government

was lacing the dope going around with various neurological poisons that would guarantee the user's entrance into the hopeless case ward. When the C.I.A. was slyly slipping acid into people's drinks and administering bizarre medications to people babbling too much in mental institutions, what else wouldn't the government be capable of doing? Could it be some unique case of paranoia psychosis, when the nurse refuses to tell you what those pills are in that small paper cup and you could swear it's tearing you apart? What better method could the government devise to mentally incapacitate all the poor hippie freaks than to lace their grass with unstable psychic energizers and to lace their major psychedelics with chemicals related to poisonous nerve gases? Addle their brains a bit, make them incapable of getting jobs, and starve them to death. Let them die of paranoia schizophrenia; have a good excuse to give them prefrontal lobotomies so they can't complain anymore. Of course, this could all be in Stanley's mind, and nothing more.

Ah well, Stanley was on the right path now, shuffling his feet towards the woods. It was a warm summer day with barely a faint hint of autumn. Some of the leaves were beginning to change color - the dogwoods to scarlet red - the poplars to bright yellow. Those were the real Southern trees. He had once learned that the leaves change color because the days get shorter and not because the weather gets colder. That was something he learned in a botany course. The leaves were getting prepared. He stepped from the bright meadow into the shade of the forest.

He headed downhill to the stream where he liked to do his thinking. As he got there, he saw Emily. She did not notice him; she was mesmerized by the flowing surface of the stream. She'd throw burrs into the current, watching them ride through the rocks. Then she noticed Stanley standing behind her.

"Oh... You surprised me. It's so quiet out here."

"I've been a-thinking and I've been a-pondering."

She laughed. "And what have you been a-thinking and a-pondering about?"

"Little things... Like the need for release, silent physical communication, and you."

"In other words, you want to get fucked."

"You got it."

She took his hand and pulled him towards her, clasping him and rubbing his back. He got turned on and they stroked one another, eagerly slipping hands beneath shirts, belts, and dungarees, feeling the sweet smoothness of bare skin. Then they took off their clothes and did what animals sometimes do in the fields when they are bored with grazing. Expose yourself to the sun and live the fat life.

All this got Stanley to thinking. Maybe they could get totally obsessed with sex for awhile. Do it in every position possible and explore every perversity known to man, animal, and plant. Leave no stone unturned. Do it again and again, until it's the only thing on their minds. Overload the pleasure principle's stimulus/response mechanism until the brain explodes with sexual electricity running through the central spinal cord. That could possibly detract from the whole dope-doing scene. Then again, Stanley considered, that's been tried before, through ages and ages of human lives.

He did not talk about this. Instead, he said, "Emily, we're going to have to do something about Kent Daniels."

"What did he do?"

"He's getting unstable. Last night, he painted a spiderweb over the mantelpiece."

"Do you have anything against art?" (Her forehead wrinkled slightly, ever so briefly.)

"No, not really."

"Then what's wrong with a spiderweb above the mantelpiece?" (The wind stirred slightly and she brushed her hand through her hair.)

"Intrinsically," Stanley sighed, "there is nothing wrong with a spiderweb above the mantelpiece, but it is causing all havoc in the public relations department."

"Yeah, I know. While you were gone last night, I tried to stop that dude from painting it, but he was half-crazed and kept on going."

"Terminal cocaine psychosis is what it is. I'm beginning to get worried. I have nightmares about flashing blue lights in the night. I don't think it can go on."

"I know what you mean. It's getting to be weird and chaotic. That's why I sometimes come out here; I can't stand to be in the house with all that going on."

"Same here. You know, I think Kent Daniels should leave and go wherever he wants, but I don't want to make him feel personally offended."

"It's a pretty delicate situation, but I agree."

"And the Johnson brothers are like gargoyles from the pits of hell. Their nocturnal cackling is getting to me."

"I don't know. They'd all make a pretty good gang bang, if you ask me."

"Fuck you. All right, you guessed it. I want an exclusive monogamous relationship with you."

"Oh no! Wheee! What am I hearing?" (Rolling her eyes.)

"O.K., here's what I've been building up to. We're going to have to go straight, at least relatively straight, and find a different way."

"I agree 100%. I'm glad to hear you say it, Stanley."

"I don't want to tell them to leave, though. I think they'll

leave of their own accord. Different people will come and go."

"They'll get bored. They'll probably yearn for radio, television, flashing neon lights, and drive-in burger joints again."

"Not to mention skin flicks and all kinds of goofy people. This kind of environment can't sustain them very long. They will go and the right people will come."

"Or it might just be us and us alone. Which might not be too bad. But I don't think we're going to go [totally] straight. I've always thought that self-righteous asceticism is a bunch of bullshit. If we want to drink beer or do something mild every now and then, that would be okay. But I want us to stay straight, so we can see clearly what we're doing and find other things to get into."

"I sort of wanted to tell you that a while ago, but I didn't think you would listen, because you were so tied up into your trips. We were really so insane the past few months."

"I only remember it as a blur. Let's go back and see what's up. There might be something we can do."

They went back the way they came, holding hands. Birds sang over the spot where they had fucked. That spot was now sacred. Did the farmer once have a picnic here with his wife? And while the children stole away to play, did the farmer and his wife do that same naughty thing that Stanley and Emily did?

When they got back to the farmhouse, there was a note on the kitchen table. "Gone Dealing" was the message it gave. This was an indication that Kent Daniels was on a business trip into the inner city to make some rather illegal transactions.] Part of their income came from this.

Stanley looked at Emily and Emily looked at Stanley.

"Well, well, well. What do you make of that?", Stanley said.

"It's his natural medium, I suppose."

"I better tear it up. Charlie Louis will freak completely if he happened to see that." Stanley ripped it into confetti and dropped the pieces into the garbage bag. One of the cats came meowing through the screen door. It lifted a paw and began desperately scratching the screen.

"I'm going to feed her. She's hungry," Emily said.

"Yeah, you better; she might claw her way through the screen. I'm going to have a beer. Would you like to have one with me?"

"No, thank you. I'll feed the cat."

Emily opened up a can of cat food and put it in a dish. Stanley got a quart of Schlitz out of the refrigerator. Emily let the cat in and Stanley sat at the table. Emily put the food down for the cat and sat beside Stanley.

"This is another habit I'll have to quit."

"I notice. You're beginning to drink in the day."

"What is the cat's name?" Stanley couldn't help but ask. You see a cat and right off, you wonder what its name is.

"I don't know. The Johnson brothers said they found it at a drive-in movie. I've heard that that's where people abandon their cats."

"Drive-in movies," Stanley growled. "What the fuck do they want to live in the country for, if they go to drive-in movies?" Stanley didn't think that living in the country and going to drive-in movies mixed. "They brought a cat here from a drive-in movie?"

"Take it easy, Stanley."

"Only rednecks go to drive-in movies!", Stanley roared.

"Let me have a sip of your beer, Stanley."

The Johnson brothers, like the cat, were recent additions to the farmhouse. No one knew quite where they came from or what they

*This is an
interjection.*

were doing there. They somehow evaded direct questions; nobody was supposed to know what they were about. They claimed to come from Goldsboro, N.C. or some such place, but, in his more intimate moments, Stanley strongly suspected they came from Mayberry, U.S.A. and were related to Andy Griffith. Whoever it was who first turned them on to dope made a big mistake; [he let open a Pandora's box. *By agent's own statement*]

There was somebody else Stanley could think of who might possibly be related to Andy Griffith and that was a man named Larry Griffith, who was no doubt also originally from Mayberry, U.S.A. Larry Griffith was the one who stole his sleeping bag.

It happened like this: Stanley was standing on the highway, just minding his own business. He had his thumb stuck out, which is the standard cue signal for indicating to the driver that you'd like him to stop and offer you a ride. Stanley had been doing this for about five minutes, when he realized that his sleeping bag was gone. It must have fallen off where he got out of the last car.

He ran up to where he got off. He could see his sleeping bag lying on the side of the road like a resting log. Just then, a pickup truck stopped by the sleeping bag. A man got out and threw his sleeping bag into the back.

Stanley yelled: "Hey you! That's my sleeping bag!"

Carried on the wind, Stanley heard: "Wahhhoooo! Looky at what I got here!"

The man did not hear him. To him, stopping and picking up a stray sleeping bag was routine as picking up the garbage. The pickup truck pulled into an automobile parts yard. Stanley ran there, sweating profusely. It was a hot day.

He asked an attendant. "Where is my sleeping bag? That man in the pickup truck took my sleeping bag! I saw him do it. He can't deny it. I saw him do it; he took my sleeping bag!"

The attendant whispered something to his boss. They looked at each other with a sly look. They were amused at the spectacle of this poor hippie-freak who lost one of his only possessions. *few?*

"Son, that man works over at Chatham Mills and his name is Larry Griffith. That's where you'll find your sleeping bag."

Stanley didn't know whether to believe him or not. They were obviously trying to keep from laughing outloud. They gave him the directions to Chatham Mills and he tried to thumb his way there. There was no one in that wretched, God-forsaken hick town who would give him a ride. Finally, he had to walk there. Deformed old negroes sweeping gas stations looked up at him. in shock. *This would be difficult to describe* Old men spat tobacco at his feet.

He found out that Chatham Mills was a baloney factory. The place was rank with the stench of rotting pig guts and Stanley could hardly survive the air. He could not imagine working in a factory like that for any wages whatsoever. There were men working at a huge cauldron and they looked pale as ghosts. One of them looked like he was about to collapse. Stanley explained his problem, explained that his sleeping bag was gone, and asked if Larry Griffith was among them.

A tall, pale, lanky one who was about to collapse, managed to stammer: *stammered:* "Larry Griffith... gone to Durham... be back tomorrow..." Then he just about fell back into the cauldron. *B*

Stanley tried to call Larry Griffith's number and got no answer. He jotted down the address and left. Someone explained that Larry Griffith was an honest man and had a wife and three kids; he wouldn't do a thing like that. Stanley never saw his sleeping bag again. It had been his faithful companion through many years of hitchhiking. Such was his encounter with the Siler City Scavenger Crew. Someone was going to be coming in there one day, raising a heap of trouble about a stolen sleeping bag. Stanley considered this atrocity a crime

equivalent to horse thievery. That was to be Stanley Yuban's next revenge plot. All of this had something to do with why he disliked the Johnson brothers.

The Johnson brothers had come out of the blue one night, laughing all the way and waving around a big bag of grass. That was their justification for staying; they kept bribing everybody with dope. They also had an inexplicable wad of ten dollar bills, which they doled out to pay the rent. A girl who had been living there couldn't take it anymore; she was a serious student and needed quietude. They needed the money, so Stanley let the Johnson brothers stay [there]. Ever since [they started living there,] the living room was a smoke-house. This had been going on for a few weeks. The only way to cope with it was to join them and get stoned.

"And for another thing..." Stanley started to say, half-rising from his seat.

"O.K., Stanley, O.K. I agree already."

"Where did they go?"

"I suppose they went along with Kent for the ride."

"What? He's probably using them for a subject to test out dangerous drugs on. If it kills them, they deserve it."

"Maybe you better have a cup of tea, Stanley."

"Those stupid Johnson boys..."

There was a loud knocking on the door. Bang-bang-bang. It was precisely what they feared. Stanley looked apprehensively at Emily.

"Emily, you get the door. I'll clear up potential evidence."

She went past him and went for the door. Bang-bang-bang. Bang-bang, you're dead. Stanley threw the empty beer bottle in the garbage bag. He ran into the living room. Holy shit! There was a waterpipe half-filled with marijuana ashes on the coffee table. He disposed it under the sofa. He brushed the seeds off the table. He

slipped the rolling papers under a cushion. Feverishly brushing his hand through his hair, he wondered what else there was. Oh no!, a half-lid on the mantelpiece. He crammed it into his pocket. If this was a visit from the storm troopers, he could always apologize for the mess and say, "Oh, excuse me; I just remembered I have to go to the bathroom," and flush it down the toilet. He could also eat it, but what if they came around and said, "Ho! Ho! Ho! Then we'll just have to make the old boy regurgitate the evidence. Up with it, old chap. Chug it up. That's right," they would encourage him, giving him a few hearty slugs in the stomach. It was a rough life, Stanley sighed.

False alarm. The visitor was Charlie Louis. All that work had been for nothing. It was Charlie Louis the old alcoholic, Charlie Louis and his silver-capped teeth with his ridiculous straw hat and overalls, Charlie Louis who had to bang the door like the entire Cabarrus County Vice Squad. Charlie Louis came stumbling into the living room picking his nose.

"Imitating Mr. Greenjeans, Charlie?"

"Haw! Haw! Haw! (He laughed just like a rooster.) I swear, Mr. Yuban, you do make the funniest jokes. I swear you do. Haw! Haw! Haw!" When Charlie laughed, he revealed his silver and black teeth as if they were a big harmonica in his mouth.

"Come on, Charlie. What's the occasion?" Stanley had learned how to talk to him by now.

"Why shucks, Mr. Yuban. I'm just paying a courtesy visit. Now, there's nothing wrong with that, is there?" He sniffed the air in mock suspicion. "Now you ain't been smoking nothing peculiar here, have you? Haw! Haw! Haw!" Or was it a big watermelon in his mouth?

Stanley put his arm around Emily, as if he were a rugged frontiersman and Emily were his brave but weeping wife. Beaming proudly, he said, "No, Charlie. We're going straight. Isn't that right,

Emily?" He squeezed her tighter.

"He's speaking the truth, Charlie."

"Haw! Haw! Haw! (He could get on the Ed Sullivan show with that laugh.) Why that's just plumb too bad. I was hoping I could get the sheriff over here to run you longhairs out! Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"And now you can't do it, Charlie. It sure is a crying shame."

"Well now, just between you and I...", Charlie snickered, pulling out a flask from his back pocket, "you wouldn't turn down a slug of this, would you? I've come here to celebrate your good fortune." He held up the flask like a prize turkey.

"Well, Charlie, I don't know. It might be a bit too strong for me. After all, Charlie, you might be trying to poison me."

"Haw! Haw! Haw! Mr. Yuban, I declare, you won't regret it one bit. Me and the boys made some of this the other night. This is one hundred and fifty proof White Liquorice. Take this and have a good slug of it."

Stanley took it. "Charlie, how can I refuse a drink from you? After all, you've been so good to us. And remember, we do pay our rent, so keep it in mind, Charlie." Stanley chug-a-lugged a good measure. He choked on it; a hand went up to his throat, and he staggered. Emily took the flask out of his hand and gave it back to Charlie.

"Haw! Haw! Haw! Didn't I tell you, Mr. Yuban? That'll set you up all day. That was the finest White Liquorice on this side of the county line."

Gasping, Stanley said, "What am I going to do, Charlie? You're spinning all around."

"Haw! Haw! Haw! You see what I mean, don't you? Now if you don't mind, I think I'll have a look at how you're improving the premises." Charlie took a slug out of the flask and turned around.

Of course, Charlie could not help but notice the spiderweb and vultures on the wall. It seemed to interest him. A cold sweat broke out on the palms of Stanley's hands. How was he going to explain this one away?

"Well, well, well. I do have to declare. Where did you get that picture, Mr. Yuban? Can't say I ever saw anything like it."

"Uh, I bought it at the fish market." What did he say that for? A loud buzzing began to resound between his ears. It was too late now.

"At the fish market?" Charlie looked puzzled. He didn't understand.

"Yes, you see, I wanted to get fish instead, but the man had run out and that was all he had left. He showed me to the back and there was someone who needed the money to get a cup of coffee, and so that's why I bought it. You see, I had to."

"Charity, eh? Well..."

"What he means, Charlie," Emily broke in, "is that this picture was done by a good friend of his and it's very, very personal."

"And that's why I didn't want to mention it at first. We'll take it down if you want, Charlie. I didn't know it would offend you. He was a very close friend."

Charlie just stood there and stared at it blankly for a second. It was an indistinct blur as far as he was concerned. He took another slug of that White Liquorice and said, "Shucks, you all. I didn't mean nothing. Leave it up there if you want." He started scratching his head in perplexity.

"It's okay, Charlie. We forgive you," Emily said.

"Don't reckon I've seen no birds like that before." He shrugged his shoulders and turned around. "But I don't reckon I've had no tenants like you kids before either. Haw! Haw! Haw!" Charlie showed

them the harmonica in his mouth again. It was going to be okay.

"Here, you can have the rest of this (handing them the half-full flask). I've got^{a field} to plow, if you catch my meaning. Haw! Haw! Haw! And you let me know if you want to order a case of that, Mr. Yuban."

"I'll give it careful consideration, Charlie. Thanks alot, Charlie."

"You do that. You just do that now. Well, I've gotta run. See you kids later."

Taking a slug out of the flask, Stanley yelled after him, "And we pay the rent, Charlie. Remember that!"

"Haw! Haw! Haw! Yes, I know that. Indeed I do. How else could I keep myself drowned in this White Liqorice if it weren't for good tenants like you who pay their rent? Haw! Haw! Haw!" The front door slammed behind him.

They were relieved. Stanley had a few more slugs and went upstairs to pass out on the mattress. Emily lay beside him and caressed him while he slept. While birds prepared themselves to abandon their nests and fly south, Stanley unconsciously put his hand on Emily's cunt while asleep. She told him this when he woke up. Whereas the farmer's wife probably complained to the farmer about snoring, Emily said, "You put your hand over my cunt." But she was not mad, not one bit.

When they went downstairs again, it was three in the afternoon. It was time to do some work, believe it or not. Stanley tried to shake the sleep out of his head and said, "Well, I guess we better do something about bringing that woodstove in here."

They went out into the backyard where the woodstove was lying on its side. It looked so forlorn and seemed to say, "Go away and leave me alone. I'm so tired and want to die."

"I don't know, Stanley. ~~It looks kind of rusty to me.~~ Don't you think so?"

"Yeah, I'm scared to touch it. I wonder how long it's been since it was last used?"

"We could get another one. How much do woodstoves cost?"

"I think new woodstoves are more than we could afford. We might find a used one that's better than that. It looks kind of lumpy and half-assed, if you know what I mean." Stanley gave it a tentative kick. It rolled over and moaned, "Please leave me alone. I'm so sick."

"How much money do we have?"

"Oh, about 35 or 40 odd dollars that we can spare right now."

"Will that be enough?"

"I doubt it; we'll have to see whether this one will do. C'mon, old woodstove, we're going to give you a home. You'll feel warm inside." Stanley took one end of the cylinder. "C'mon, Emily, a little rust never hurt anybody. Take the other end."

She had that woebegone look on her face again. She bent to pick it up. There were rollie-pollies, ants, and earthworms underneath as they heaved to lift it up. The woodstove groaned hoarsely and ripped apart in the middle. Emily dropped her end like a hot potato.

"Well, Stanley?"

"Well, Emily, I guess we're going to have to find a used woodstove somewhere."

She looked glad it had turned out that way. Mid-afternoon sun shone in her hair.

They returned to the farmhouse. Stanley looked at the stairs and remarked, "Emily, I think we better replace those stairs. They might break in the middle and hurt somebody."

"Well, weren't we supposed to fix up the place?"

Outside stairs, unless they lead to an upper story, 20.
are usually called steps.

"That's right. And those stairs look pretty far gone." They were; the boards were black with rain and there was a green slime on them. If they had waited much longer, they'd have to get a ladder in order to climb to the kitchen door.

Emily went in to think about a thing or two for dinner. Stanley got some measuring tape to find out what size boards he'd have to get to replace the stairs. He had a brother-in-law who was a carpenter. His brother-in-law could carry on an intelligent conversation while doing some highly skilled work:

"So didn't you like school?" his brother-in-law would ask while sawing a scrap board to the right size. Stanley was afraid he'd cut his finger off.

"No, it's been driving me crazy. I can't take it. I'm going to have to quit."

"But you have only one more year to go." His brother-in-law started nailing down a board to make a shelf. Bang-bang-bang. It was hard for them to hear themselves above the hammering.

"I can't do it. I've got to return to something more basic."

BANG. BANG. BANG.

"Didn't you like your writing?"

"I'm tired of it. What's the use of trying to put things in words all the time?"

His brother-in-law started sawing another board. "You could go to California. Are you on good terms with anyone there?"

"No."

BANG. BANG. BANG. His brother-in-law was driving in another nail. He looked more decidedly in tune with those boards than anything else Stanley ever saw. The noise didn't seem to bother him.

"You look like you're having alot of fun with your carpentry."

"Yep; I got tired of programming computers."

BANG. BANG. BANG.

After he had made the measurements, Stanley got into the pickup truck to drive to the junkyard where he thought he'd find the articles he'd need. He had to slam the door of the truck three times before it would shut right. The pickup truck was fifteen years old and its transmission was all fucked-up. It was illegal to drive it; it hadn't passed inspection for five years.

It was a rough ride from the highway to the junkyard. The road was mighty bumpy. Stanley could hardly see through the dust that was kicked up. He had to keep his feet braced on the brakes or he and the truck would plunge into a gully. Finally, he came to a stop by an old shack in the junkyard.

Abel Louis, the proprietor of this majestic pile of junk, came up to greet him. Abel Louis was Charlie Louis' nephew. His hair grew to half-way down his ears. Abel was trying to look like a hippie, but he couldn't go too far or his folks would talk.

"What can I do for you, Stanley?" Stanley got out of the truck with a handkerchief over his mouth.

"What do you have in the way of woodstoves, Abel? We want to be ready for winter."

Abel said, "Well, it's a bit early, but I'll show you what I have, if you want."

"I can only spare about 40\$."

"O.K. Follow me."

Abel led him down into a ravine where he had a few spare woodstoves stored in a shack. He showed him a good sturdy one that was better than the one back at the farmhouse. The price was one that Stanley could afford. He took it and they carried it back to the truck.

"Now, do you, by any chance, have any solid one foot by six feet,

two inch thick boards here? Our stairs are rotting away."

"I don't think I have any of that exact length. But I got a load of scrap wood from a construction site the other day. Maybe we could find some boards you could shape right. C'mon with me."

It was getting to be a long day. They managed to find some boards seven feet and others nine feet long. Stanley could see these down. They took these to the truck.

"How much will that be?", Stanley asked wearily.

"Five dollars for the wood." Stanley gave him a five dollar bill. He tried to think of what else he might need. He thought he saw a good armchair somewhere.

"Would you like to buy a pig?" Abel's nose wrinkled slightly mischievously.

"A what?"

"A pig. I have some plump medium-sized pigs I'm selling for thirty dollars apiece. It's better than what you could get at a supermarket."

"I don't have enough money. We'll think about it. Thanks anyway."

"Oh." He looked away embarrassed. Then he asked in a low voice, "Say, you wouldn't have any weed for sale, would you?" Somehow, Stanley could sense this coming. Abel not only wanted to look like a hippie, but he wanted to act like one, too. He pronounced "weed" somewhat forcibly as though it was some kind of foreign word.

Stanley shook his head. "Nope, we're going straight. Besides, we don't deal dope." Did Abel take him for a fool? They had to be careful those days.

Abel shuffled his feet nervously, looking down at them. "Oh. I just thought you might have some. It's hard to get around here. My uncle told me about you all. Say, you haven't ever been to Califor-

nia, have you? I'm thinking about going there. I've heard there's a lot of dope there and it's a cool place to be."

Stanley thought, "Oh, brother." He thought that thing had gone out ten years ago. Did Abel actually believe that every human being with long hair went to California for some sacred pilgrimage? Should Stanley contribute to the delinquency of this bright-eyed, bushy-tailed ambitious young man? "It's okay," he finally said. He couldn't stop the process; he knew that.

"Maybe I'll go there when I get enough money."

"Yeah, it's a good thing to see other places. You'd like California. I've gotta be getting back." Stanley turned to go.

"Say, my uncle isn't giving you much trouble, is he?"

"Nah, he's okay."

"He drinks a lot and gets weird sometimes. I just wondered. I'll keep him off your back for you."

"I appreciate it, Abel. Well, take it easy."

"Sure, Stanley. Come back now."

"I will. So long." Poor kid, Stanley thought. Maybe he should drop him a lid to satisfy his curiosity about what it's like. Should he? Naw, let him go to California. He'll find out.

It was getting towards evening back at the farmhouse. Stanley had been using what was left of the daylight to work on the stairs. He tore off the rotting boards and contributed them to the wood pile. He sawed the new boards to the right length and nailed them on. It was a lot simpler than he thought it would be. He always thought that carpentry was an unbelievably complex skill. All it took was a little common sense. It made him feel good to see the finished product.

"Emily," he yelled through the screen door, "come on down the new stairs and help me get the stove."

She left what she had cooking behind her and came to the door.

"That looks pretty good, Stanley. It's not bad for an amateur." She gave him a smile of encouragement.

"Come on. Let's get the woodstove."

They went to the pickup truck and carried it around the house, up the stairs, and through the door. They set it upright in the center of the living room where the other woodstove used to be. There were black ash stains where the other one used to be and there was a pipe hole in the ceiling above it. In the upstairs bedroom, there was still another pipe hole, going through the roof. Stanley didn't understand why the previous inhabitants threw out their woodstove. Maybe they wanted to make room or they wanted to install oil heat. Or maybe they didn't want to leave the house with too much comfort.

"Well, that's going to be our source of heat this winter."

"It looks good, Stanley. I hope we can make it."

"I'll wait until tomorrow to put in the pipes. We have time left until it'll start getting cold. We can also use blankets."

"We'll keep each other warm, Stanley. Well, I have to get back to dinner."

"Right. I'm going to go in the backyard and saw up some wood. I still feel like working."

"Okay."

By the setting sun, Stanley sawed wood. He sawed up the former stair steps and stray pieces of wood lying about. He was going to have to store the pieces in one of the animal shelters. That would involve a good machete to hack through the honeysuckle vines. It was going to be very hard work. Just when he was beginning to feel good and energetic, the sun had sunk and Emily called him to dinner.

She had it set up on the table. It was squash casserole with melted cheese, alongside with cornbread and butter. The squash came

from a halfway successful garden Emily tried to plant. Stanley didn't care too much about farming and left it up to Emily if she wanted to farm. The weeds and bugs got a large portion of the garden. The cheese came from a nearby farmer. They bought it wholesale. It was their major source of protein those days.

"You're getting to be a pretty good cook, Emily," Stanley said with his mouth full. Emily didn't use to know a thing about cooking at the outset of the summer. Emily nodded and continued to eat.

"I'm glad the summer is finally over. It was so difficult to work outside with the heat and gnats," she said.

They were halfway through with dinner, when a car pulled into the driveway. They could hear the Johnson boys getting out of the car, screaming with fiendish delight.

"Oh shit," Stanley muttered. All of a sudden, he had indigestion. He started wishing that he had booby-trapped the stairs instead of fixing them; he could have replaced the front stairs with the rotten boards.

"And just when we were beginning to get settled," Emily sighed.

"Let them eat dope instead of casserole," Stanley said between clenched teeth.

The Johnson brothers stormed through the front door. One of them had a television set in ^{his} arms. It was shaped like a black crystal ball and looked like an astronaut's helmet. "Hey! Look at what the fuck we got here!", Jack Johnson shouted gleefully. Stanley and Emily could see the whole spectacle through the living room door. They tried to go on eating as though nothing were happening.

"Well, don't just stand there, you dumb Jack o' Lantern! Plug the fucking thing in and let's smoke some dope!"

"Shut up, you stupid jerk-off. We have to wait for the others to come in. We have to do this ceremoniously."

"Ceremoniously, my ass! Hurry up and come in, you guys," he yelled out front, "before we shit all over the couch!" He started whistling obscenely.

Then this big tall lanky fellow came in. He moved slowly, careful not to knock anything over with his huge awkward body. He was a bit over six-and-a-half feet tall and had fingers approximately the size and thickness of cigar stubs. He had short, greyish-brown, greased back hair and freckles. He kept grinning with a mouth full of silver braces.

"Oh, fuck my nose and fuck my toes! Here comes Slim Jim!", Tom Johnson yelled, collapsing on the sofa and rolling all over it. They were pretty wrecked.

"Won't you come in, Slim Jim, and make yourself comfortable? We can be pretty friendly."

The tall fellow named "Slim Jim" just kept standing there, grinning and looking around. Then Stanley noticed that his eyes were dilated. He gagged on his cornbread.

"Well, be that way then! We don't care. Hey Jack, he's not talking to us! That's not very nice!"

"Fuck you. You can just sit there babbling away like a dumb blubbering idiot. I'm going to plug this goddamn machine in." He started feeling off the walls for an outlet. A couple of times, he tried to stick the plug into the wallpaper. "Fuck this goddamn glaze they have for wallpaper," he muttered. "A motherfucker could get shocked."

While he was trying to do this, Tom Johnson ran out to the front door and yelled, "Hurry up and get in here, Lollipop! Everybody wants to ball you!"

"All right! All right!", a small feminine voice called from the car. Maybe she was scared shitless to come in, not knowing what to

expect.

"Hurry up before I come in my pants!"

"I'm coming, you obscene asshole!"

In came a pert-looking thirteen year old chick with long black hair. She wore a loose shirt that freely revealed her dangling, pointed breasts. She had tight dungarees on that revealed her nice tight comely cunny snatch. She was bare footed and looked like she had fucked with a hundred dudes that day and was ready for more. She smiled in a secretive, seductive way and made Stanley horny for her, too. Emily looked on with disapproval. The television began to crackle and sputter. The party was on.

Then followed King Kent Daniels and his velvet-skinned African Queen. Her name was Almoreena. She had perfect white teeth when she smiled and wore an ivory tusk necklace. She also had a nice body, but she was reserved for Kent Daniels who was chewing on a hundred dollar bill in his mouth. He was wearing rings and extremely flashy clothes.

He grinned and announced, "Now, is there anyone present who would like a snort of this prime, white coke before I have mine?" He held a jeweled box between his thumb and forefinger, showing it to the crowd.

The television came on, announcing the news: "An enraged mob of housewives today, burned their money in front of the Price-Right Supermarket, causing considerable confusion by throwing bananas at the manager who..."

Kent's girlfriend politely declined his offer. The Johnson brothers were too lost in hysterics to pay attention. "Slim Jim" just kept standing where he was and grinning. Lollipop said, "Fuck you. I don't do that shit."

Kent smiled and said, "Ah, baby, you simply don't know what you're missing." He opened up the tiny box and snorted two hits

through the hundred dollar bill. Then he grinned at Queen Almoreena who pressed her breasts in his side encouragingly. He left her side and told her to wait there for a minute.

Stanley and Emily were trying to finish their supper as Kent approached them. He looked very pleased with himself.

Meanwhile, on the boob tube, the face of the manager flashed on, all plastered over with bananas. He looked aghast as he announced into the microphone, "I don't understand it. I just cannot comprehend it. Why would they want to throw a bunch of bananas at me?"

Kent Daniels said, "Ah, I'm so high, baby. Listen, man, we made a very good deal today. You people won't have to worry about having to pay rent for many months henceforth."

Stanley swallowed down the last of the cornbread. "Okay, Kent, what did you do this time?"

"Well, like man, we made a very nice deal on a large shipment of coke. Pure, perfect-quality coke, man, from a certain tropical country which I am keeping a secret, man. Then we found some very rich super-studs who had the money, an amount which I will not divulge, to buy what we had. A rare deal, man. That's all I can tell you off-hand. I extend you the offer of a snort to repay you for the offense I gave you earlier today." Kent was in an unusually good mood.

"I appreciate the offer, Kent, but you remember the commitment I spoke to you about today."

"Right, man. How could I forget? You're a good soul, man, on the right path. I can relate to that, man. When this is all over, baby, I'm going to go to Ethiopia to lead the right life, but that is going to be a long time henceforth."

"And now, before you drift off to heights you cannot come down from, Kent, who the fuck are those people in there? Where did they come from and why are they here?"

On the global television set, a fat middle-aged lady came on, gnashing her decaying teeth. "Who do they think they are?", she was telling a reporter. "Just who do they think they are? I am a widow and have five children to feed and I can't even afford a porkchop. My children have to go without their cereal. What good is the money we work so hard for when it is not worth a nickel? Do they want us all to starve?" She held up a ten dollar bill to the camera and set a match to it, with a strange satisfied gleam in her eyes.

"Exactly what I want to explain, man. You might have to keep an eye on them, man, because they are in a thoroughly unpredictable condition."

"I can see that," Stanley snapped. Cries such as "You tell 'em, you old nanny-bag!" or "Hit him in the face with a rubber brick!" were coming from the living room.

"Right. While we were cruising the various bars and pads, we happened to stumble upon a small quantity of purple microdot which we proceeded to deal and give away in the streets." Kent Daniels suddenly looked very nervous as if he remembered something he shouldn't have done.

"Holy shit, Kent! Do you realize what that is? Something like acid, strychnine, methamphetamine, and STP all packed in one pill! You mean to tell me that those fuckheads in there are doing that?"

"Uh, yeah, man. I didn't want to tell you, but I figured you might want to know, so you'd be prepared for the worst."

Stanley put his face in his hands, muttering, "No. No. No. No. What did I ever do to deserve this?"

"Don't take it so bad, man. I managed to slip them certain downers that should keep their heads from being too thoroughly unbalanced. I told them that they were chemicals that would give them a smoother trip, so take it easy, man; microdot's not that bad."

"It is for those potential psycho-ward cases. Why did you let them do it? And that tall dude, is he doing it also?"

"Unfortunately yes, man. He's a hitchhiker and while I wasn't looking, they gave it to him, telling him it was a pill for headaches."

"Oh shit, Kent. Why me?"

"Look at the mess you got us in, Kent," Emily interjected. "And who are those girls, Kent? I want to know that." She was mad.

Kent looked somewhat embarrassed and continued. "The spade chick, man, is a woman who agreed to become my old lady for a certain amount of money. I don't know who that 'Lollipop' is, man. They found her in the streets and showed her their ten dollar bills, and offering her a ride along with it. She took ten of them and got in. I think she will fuck with anyone, man." He gave Stanley a sly look.

"I'm in no mood for that, Kent. What am I going to do with them?"

"I, uh, was just going to get to that, man. I have here a container of meprobamate, should they get out of hand." Kent gave him a plastic container full of huge white pills. "Tell them it's speed and they'll probably take it."

"They would. I may need it myself before this night is over. So I have to preside over this chaos. Thank you for the honor, Kent," he sneered.

"Right, man. And now, me and the Queen are going to go upstairs to make it for awhile. Just watch them. And to repay you for any damages done..." Kent took out his embroidered billfold and dropped 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... hundred dollar bills on the table. "That ought to be good news for you, man. And there's more where that came from," Kent smiled.

"O.K., go make it with your chick. Don't be particularly dis-

turbed if you hear any violence down here. It'll be me killing them."

"Right, man. Well, see you in awhile." Kent went back to his gracefully compliant woman and they went upstairs.

"Booo. Booo," the Johnson brothers were heard to call from the living room. "Cram a bunch of bananas up his ass. Look at that damn sappy party pooper." They were criticizing the man reading the editorial.

"That don't make no sense," "Slim Jim" was heard to say, his first words. "That don't make a lick of sense."

"Turn the channel before I throw a cream pie at his face!"

"Don't make no sense..."

"Turn the channel! Turn the channel!"

"Where's the fucking knob? Hey, want to play 'catch' with this plastic basketball?" He started picking up the television set.

"That man ain't making a lick of sense."

"Fuck you. I'm going to put on 'The Hot Fudge Sundaes' and 'The Red Hot Popcorn'." Tom Johnson put on a record and turned the volume up all the way. Soundwaves blasted forth through the door, torturing the eardrums, a painful fireball of noise.

"Turn it up! Turn it up!", Jack Johnson howled.

"It won't go up any further, you dumb idiot!", Tom Johnson screamed back through the uproar.

"MAMA, YOU OLD LADY..."

DON'T YOU FUCK WITH YOUR BABY...

CAUSE I'M COMING ON...

I'M COMING ON...

WEEEEEOOOOOO!" (Drums pounding, sounds of smashing furniture.)

The Johnson brothers were writhing uncontrollably on the floor. Lollipop was looking down on them with disdain. "Slim Jim" kept standing where he was, looking bewildered. The words, "That don't

make no sense," kept forming on his lips.

"How could he do this to us, Emily?", Stanley said, putting the hundred dollar bills in his shirt pocket.

"Oh fuck it, Stanley. I'm going to wash the dishes." She was uncommunicative when she was angry. She began clearing off the table in sullen silence. There was not much he could do about that.

"SO IT'S SAUSAGES, PEANUTS, AND PEAS...

EEEEEEEOOOWWWW...

SAUSAGES, PEANUTS, AND PEAS...

EEEEEEEOOOWWWW..."

"I'll see what I can do about this situation. I'm not making any promises." Stanley left the kitchen while Emily angrily scrubbed the dishes.

He forced himself to walk into the monstrous soundwaves of the living room. Lollipop made an obscene gesture to "Slim Jim" while the Johnson boys were getting off on something on the T.V. They kept changing channels; they didn't care what was on. There was a stack of records on the turntable waiting to be played. Obviously, this was going to go on all night. Stanley couldn't take it.

Maybe he could knock them out with the meprobamate. He could offer Lollipop one, but she wouldn't need it. She was sexed up on some natural aphrodisiac being manufactured in her body. He could slip one into "Slim Jim"'s smiling mouth full of braces. He would tell him that it's excellent for headaches.

"Hey, want some pills?", he would ask the Johnson boys.

"What the fuck is it?"

"It's strychnine. It'll give a little kick to your trip."

"We'll take it." They'd pop down handfuls.

It didn't happen that way. Rather than give them meprobamate, he decided to let them freak out. Stanley went past them and out through

the front door. Standing there on the front porch, he wondered how he was going to get his shit together in that kind of environment. It wasn't easy.

Just then, a familiar-looking '64 Ford drove up in his driveway. It was Charlie Louis. Stanley was going to have to talk him into going somewhere else. He approached the car. Charlie did not bother to turn the motor off; he just kept sitting in the car. He had a bottle of nearly 75% alcohol between his legs.

"Still at it, Mr. Greenjeans?" Stanley had to force it. He didn't want Charlie to think anything was wrong.

"Haw. Haw. Haw. Mr. Yuban, I do declare. I see you're out for a breath of fresh air."

"That's right, Charlie. You see, some irresponsible long hair in there was trying to burn some wild corn silk and he just plain stank up the whole place. So that's why I'm out here. But it's a nice night, Charlie."

"Haw. Haw. Haw. (Stanley was beginning to think that Charlie Louis looked like a jackass he-hawing its ass off.). Mr. Yuban, I swear. You're getting worse every day. Haw. Haw. Haw."

"You don't look none too good yourself, Mr. Greenjeans." Stanley began to remember Mr. Greenjeans as some remote figure in some far-away, green field, always smiling and always pitching hay, always having something nice to say about the day.

"Haw. Haw. Haw." Charlie didn't notice a thing. Stanley was just his tenant spinning around and around and around... "Mr. Yuban, I can hear you boys whooping it up in there. So I thought I'd come by and drop you off a case of this fine White Liquorice, since you liked it so much."

"Well, how much, Charlie?"

"Oh, about fifty dollars, meybe."

"We can't afford it, Charlie. We had to buy a woodstove today from your nephew. We're poor people, Charlie, doing the best we can to get by."

Charlie acted slightly embarrassed. "Well, why don't I come in and join you kids? I'll bring a case in."

"You don't have to do that, Charlie. The party is going to be over pretty soon anyway. Besides, you see..." he lowered his voice, "Me and Emily are going to be kind of busy, you see?" Stanley prayed he would.

"Haw. Haw. Haw. Haw. You old rascal, you. Well, I have a special meeting with the boys to attend. They got something good going out in the woods."

"Wait, Charlie. How much for a bottle?"

"Oh, about five dollars."

"Five dollars!? You've got to be kidding!"

"That's potent stuff, Mr. Yuban. You won't regret it."

"Okay, I'll take it." They made a little transaction through the car window.

"I won't tell on you if you won't tell on me. Haw. Haw. Haw." Charlie gave him a sly wink.

"It's a deal, Charlie."

"Well, I have to run. Drink in good health. You kids behave yourselves."

"Oh, don't worry about us. You drive careful, Charlie. You're indispensable to all of Cabarrus County. Where else would all the people get their supply?"

"Haw. Haw. Haw. Well, so long, Mr. Yuban, and have a good night."

"The same to you, Charlie."

Charlie Louis finally ambled off in his old '64 Ford. Why did he

have to hold him up so long? Stanley supposed the old alcoholic was lonely. Meanwhile the music kept coming on inside. Boisterous exclamations leaked through the walls to the outside world.

It was a cool night, one of the first in the season. The half-moon shone above, moonbeams drifting through the windy trees. The insects were quieter than they had been before. The leaves rustled mournfully, knowing they must soon drop and fall away.

"Moon?" Stanley asked.

The moon cast a casual glance in his direction. "Yeah?"

"Could you try to do something about all this?"

"Okay, I'll work on it," the moon sighed. The moon continued to shine on. Stanley took a fiery gulp out of the bottle. He never thought of asking the moon before.

He took another swig and then another. That was all he must have. Any more would render him incapable of taking matters into his own hands. A plan formulated in his mind. He would crash his very own party.

First, he had to find Emily. He went through the party. One of the Johnson boys was fucking Lollipop in a very unspeakable posture. "Slim Jim" had finally sat down and was watching, his mouth wide open. The other brother was staring at the ceiling.

He found Emily on the back porch, crying.

"Stanley, this is terrible. If this keeps up, I'm going to have to go."

"I know. Something's going to have to be done about this."

"Please do something. I can't go on like this."

"I have a plan. Here, take this and drink some. It'll calm you down." He handed her the bottle and ran back into the house.

He ran upstairs to get a sheet. Kent Daniels and Queen Almoreena were really going strong at it; their grunting and groaning were loud

and clear through the closed door. He ripped off a sheet and ran back downstairs.

"I RAN TO THE STORE AND GOT A PACK OF BULLETS, WHOOO!

REALLY GONNA BLOW UP A HEAD!"

The Johnson boys started stomping on the floor as Stanley crept down, down the creaky steps of the fungoid cellar. He wasted no time about finding the electrical box that connected the electricity from the outside to the electricity flowing through the house. Upstairs, something big, heavy, and plastic crashed to the floor. It was the television. Perfect. Stanley found the correct master switch and flipped it from "ON" to "OFF". There was abrupt silence and darkness. The record player conked out. Ah, Stanley mused in his drunkenness, what a blessing an energy crisis would be.

"All right, who turned off the lights?", he could hear one of the Johnson boys yell upstairs.

"If this is someone's idea of a joke...", he could hear Lollipop say.

"Oh my gosh. Look at the patterns! The motherfucking patterns!"

Stanley Yuban crept back up the steps, tearing eye-holes in the sheet. He put it over his head to look good. Snickering to himself, he took step by step into the living room.

A voice in the darkness said, "No shit, look at the colors."

"Wow, they... Hey, WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?"

"I am the ghost," the sheet cackled demoniacally.

"Take off that fucking paper mache', you goddamn paper mache'."

"You have interfered long enough, and now..."

He didn't finish his sentence. All of a sudden, thunder and lightning burst into the living room. Lollipop screamed. A luminous caped figure appeared, wearing a leather sombrero. Through the midst of a terrific whirlwind, the figure proclaimed:

"TRESPASS NOT IN THE HOME OF THE ANCIENT ONE!"

"Holy shit! What the..?"

"DEPART AT ONCE, YOU WHO HAVE DEFILED MY WHOLESOME PEACE WITH YOUR FRAGMENTED INSANITY!" The electrical figure pointed at the Johnson brothers, Lollipop, and "Slim Jim".

"Who the fuck are you?" one of them dared ask.

A clap of thunder issued forth. "DEPART! AND DARE NOT RETURN!"

"Let's get the fuck out of here." The four of them left. They had to drag "Slim Jim" with them. They jumped into the car and drove off.

The caped figure was the lone trucker. Having accomplished his mission, he looked less terrifying now.

Stanley took off his sheet and greeted the lone trucker. "Say, that was pretty good. How did you pull that one off?"

"It is not difficult for one who has transcended the illusions of time and space. These ones who have disturbed you will not be back."

"Thank you, lone trucker. I have to admit my ploy was pretty weak. How did you come here anyway?"

"You asked the moon, did you not? I was standing in a field while communicating with the moon. The moon told me your problem and so I came to help you."

"Thank you, lone trucker."

"I am glad to be of assistance, Stanley. I would stay longer and talk with you, but my time is short and I have an errand in the woods, the woods where you often go."

"Sure, you can go out the back way. I am sorry if you were interrupted with anything important."

"Don't worry about it. Anytime, Stanley."

They arrived at the back porch. Emily asked what had happened.

"Emily, this is the lone trucker. He chased the Johnson boys and

their brood out."

"Oh, thank you. I've always wanted to meet you, by the way."

"I knew you before you were born. May I have a sip from your bottle?" Emily handed him the bottle in her hand. He took a long, hearty slug. "Strong spirits are very good for you in times of adversity." He handed her back the bottle. He looked wistfully out over the field into the moonlit distances. "Well, I must go. Live your life freely."

"But must you go so soon? I just met you."

"Yes. Call on me again and we will meet. And Stanley, whenever you need help, just ask the moon. And always do what you think is the right thing to do."

"Goodbye, lone trucker."

The lone trucker walked down the stairs and along the path. Then he drifted off the ground and disappeared into the autumnal mist. No one is quite sure where the lone trucker is.

"Hey man, what the fuck was all that noise about? The lights went out and it sounded like muffled explosions downstairs. What's going on?" It was Kent Daniels asking. He was half-dressed.

"The electricity went out and this caped figure chased the Johnson boys away," Stanley explained. That was all he wanted to say for the moment.

"Holy motherfuck, man. If you don't mind me saying so, this place is giving me the creeps, man. I'm gonna take my Queen, buy some land in Jamaica, and raise goats, coca leaves, and cannabis. Well, good night, man. Sure you don't want any coke, man?"

"I'm sure, Kent. Goodnight and sleep well with your Queen."

"Don't be surprised if we go to a motel tonight, man. This lack of electricity is most inconvenient for her, if you know what I mean."

"That's cool, Kent. Goodnight again."

~~Kent yawned and went back upstairs to ball his Queen.~~

In awe, Stanley and Emily pondered upon the day's occurrences. They talked awhile and looked over the field where the lone trucker had disappeared. Then they enjoyed the newly acquired silence. When the moon began to sink towards the west, they went to bed.