

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS

ROBERT GUFFEY

ALMOST A WEEK LATER, ON THURSDAY NIGHT, Danny called to tell me he'd finished his gig at the Holy City Asylum and was now off to play a one-nighter at some obscure lesbian club called The Dinah Shore Tea Party.

"Don't you have to be a dyke to play there?" I said.

"No, you just have to harbor a deeply imbedded hostility toward all carbon-based lifeforms with male reproductive organs. I figure I've got that down pat, so I should fit right in. I wish I could go home."

"It's just one more night. Who knows? You might get lucky."

"Yeah, right, with who? Hell, I'd have sex with you before I fucked some motorcycle bulldike with a hook for a hand."

Danny was always sensitive when dealing with alternative gender issues. His girlfriend had recently left him for another woman. Whether she had a hook on her hand or not, I didn't know. Danny tended to exaggerate.

"Oh. Why, thank you," I said. "I guess."

"No problem. Look, I was just calling to see if we're still on for tomorrow. I've gotta go. Marty set up a phone interview with one of these free newspaper rags, and they're supposed to be calling any second. Now I've gotta recite all my routines to some stranger over the phone."

"The littlest publicity helps."

"So they tell me. Jesus, sometimes I wish I was still playin' Chuckles and livin' off Top Ramen." Right, I thought, like me. "Listen, I'll see you at 4:30 tomorrow, okay?"

"I'll believe it when I see it."

"Would I lie to you?" He laughed. "Later, man."

"Night." I cradled the receiver, trying to wipe the thought of the new, successful Danny from my mind. I retired to my desk and wrote some new material for the show coming up Saturday night. The humor needed to be

perfect, just the right balance of sadomasochism and silliness, otherwise the testosterone-filled teenagers would drag me into the mosh pit and beat me to a pulp with deadly blunt objects, most notably their heads. Striking such a balance was not going to be easy. After twenty minutes of intense work, during which I drew indecipherable doodles in the margins of my notebook paper, I released a frustrated sigh and threw my pen against the wall. Creating comedy in a vacuum wasn't the easiest thing in the world. I needed real people to bounce ideas off of, people who understood my humor . . . people like Danny. I hadn't seen him in two months, ever since the beginning of his cross-country tour. Sometimes, despite myself, I regretted his recent successes.

I leaned back in my chair and spent the rest of that evening staring at the wall.

* * *

Danny, infamous for his habitual tardiness, surprised me by arriving at 4:28 the next day in his brand new Jaguar. It was strange seeing Danny behind a steering wheel, but I got used to it. Getting used to Danny's appearance, however, wasn't as easy. He looked haggard. Always lanky, today he seemed even skinnier than usual. There was a slight yellowish tinge to his flesh, purplish rings under his eyes. It appeared as if he'd been up for five days straight.

"Before we head on over to the movie I have to stop somewhere first, okay?"

"Sure," I said, shrugging.

Danny removed a Stooges CD from the glove compartment and slipped it into the player, then pulled away from the curb with jerky, stop-start motions. Somehow I knew it wasn't going to be the most pleasant of rides.

We sped onto the 405 freeway toward the suburbs while listening to Iggy Pop sing "We Will Fall." Halfway through the CD we had penetrated deep into the heart of Torrance, which, in terms of its venal fascist ideology, is worse even than Orange County, home of the John Birch Society. (Those poor souls unfortunate enough to dwell within Orange County referred to it as living "behind the Orange Curtain"—a term of endearment.)

We wound our way through the quiet, tree-lined streets. I stared at the linear square lawns and the empty birdbaths and the wizened garden gnomes and the precisely clipped hedges as if observing my past through a misty

eyeglass, remembering all over again why I had tried my best to leave it far behind. Why was Danny dragging me back here, back to this Bizarro world we had both suffered as children? Though I didn't recognize the neighborhood—this was the north side of Torrance, far from the area where I had spent my oh-so-idyllic formative years—the resemblance to my old block was nonetheless disturbing. I felt like a Vietnam vet who freaks out and falls into convulsions whenever he hears a helicopter flying too low.

"Why the hell are we here?" I said.

"Don't worry, this'll just take a second. We won't miss the movie, I promise." Danny pulled up to a curb outside a little white house that looked like all the other little white houses surrounding it. The scene was perfect enough for the setting of a '50s sitcom, where all was as right as toxic rain and no one ever seemed to hear the sound of the laugh-track behind them. "You want to wait out here?"

"Well, how long are you going to be?"

Danny chewed the inside of his cheek, something he always did when he was deep in thought. "I don't know, this might take awhile." He began climbing out of the car. "You might as well come in, I guess," he said over his shoulder.

Before I could ask him what on earth we were doing, he slammed the door behind him. Grumbling to myself, I followed him up the driveway and onto the porch. A wooden bench, suspended from the roof of the porch by a pair of thin chains, swung back and forth as if ghostly young lovers were sitting there just a few feet away from me, holding hands, whispering sweet nothings into each other's unseen ears.

Danny pounded on the door nine times in a row.

"Jesus," I said, "what're you trying to do, bring down the walls?"

"He won't hear it otherwise."

I sat down on the swing. "You mind telling me who we're visiting?"

"Just a friend of Griffin's. His name's Mike, met him just before I left on the tour."

The door creaked open slowly. The man who stood in the doorway appeared sluggish and sleepy-eyed. An aging punk rocker, he wore nothing but a ripped black t-shirt and black shorts, which accentuated his pale skin and emaciated body. The faintest blue veins stood out against his flesh like a neon billboard in the L.A. night. A thick carpet of dark hair was sprouting up from his scalp, as though he'd been too lazy to shave it during the past few days.

His icy blue eyes seemed to be filled with an all-encompassing sadness that stemmed from everything and nothing.

“Hey,” Danny said, giving him an awkward little wave. “Remember me from the Echo Lounge? You know, at the party? Griffin told me I should drop by.”

It seemed to take a few seconds for the guy to focus on Danny. At last the light of recognition flared up in his eyes. “Oh yeah, hey, how you doing? C’mon in.” He wasn’t excited, nor was he sad. Just another diversion to fill up the hours, perhaps?

The interior of the house was the exact opposite of the picture-perfect surface outside. It was dank and depressing, devoid of furniture. The light was dim, the walls bare. The place smelled musty, like a pack of wet dogs. The only objects sitting on the dull brown carpet were cardboard boxes filled with books. I ran my finger along the surface of a Time Life book about cells, and it came away coated with dust.

Danny gestured toward me as if he were about to introduce me to the guy. “Dr. Steinberg,” he said, “I’d like you to meet Dr. Steinberg.” Then he turned to me. “Dr. Steinberg, I’d like you to meet another Dr. Steinberg. And it just so happens by a very strange coincidence that I’m *also* Dr. Steinberg.” At that moment a wet Labrador retriever came padding into the room, sniffing the carpet for food. “And, uh, there’s Steinberg Jr.”

“*A Day at the Races*, MGM, 1937,” I said, identifying the source of Danny’s impromptu routine.

The man snapped his fingers and said, “Speaking of Groucho Marx, did you know that Groucho took LSD with—”

“Paul Krassner!” I said, beating him to the punch. He smiled (though it might have been nothing more than an involuntary twitch) and nodded. I was impressed that he knew this rather obscure fact.

As the man led us into the hallway Danny said, “Mike, this is Elliot. Elliot, this is Mike.”

Mike turned and said, “Hey.”

In the cramped hallway, standing only a few feet away from Mike, I noticed his skin was as smooth as porcelain. It was very hard to discern his age; he could’ve been anywhere from thirty to fifty.

Mike led us into his bedroom. The walls were gray—not due to paint, but to dirt. From the ceiling hung a bright yellow buglight around which a halo of flies buzzed, the room’s only source of illumination. Posters of ten-year-

old punk bands lined the walls. Billowing cobwebs had consumed the corners of the room as well as the piles of trash and paperback books that lay in shadowy niches. The carpet, or what remained of it, was cluttered with books about serial killers and obscure rock 'n' roll magazines.

Mike plopped down on his bed, a thin mattress lying on the carpet. Above the bed hung a series of silk-screened photographs of various famous people. Most prominent were those of Nixon, Hitler and Henry Kissinger; each of the photos had rifle sites superimposed over them. Mike pressed his back against the wall and shut his eyes for a moment. "I just woke up, man."

Danny sat down on the bed beside him. There was a wicker chair near the bed, but it was occupied at the moment by yet more books and magazines as well as an electric guitar with red rectangular "WARNING: FLAMMABLE" stickers plastered on almost every inch of it. I decided to stand rather than disrupt the pile. Who knew what was lurking beneath, waiting to bite my hand off at the slightest disturbance?

I scanned the posters on the walls, tripping out on the names of some of the bands: Johnny Fistfucker & the Strap-ons, Flesh Eating Virus, Candy Jones & the Presidential Models, Lavender Brain Tumor, Frogfall, Psychic Dictatorship in the USA, The Bilderburgers, The Flaming Quakers, Mary Ferrie and the Monkey Virus, The Bigfoot Jazz Trio, The Trouble With Chinks, and (my favorite) Nazi Fuck Boys! Now *that's* class.

When I glanced back at Danny to comment on the band names, I saw him slipping a needle out of his inside jacket pocket, followed by a plastic baggie filled with a dark, tar-like substance. Mike handed him a spoon, the bottom of which was blackened as if it had repeatedly been held over a flame. Danny placed some of the tar-like shit into the spoon, held a lighter under it until it liquefied. He soaked the liquid into a cotton ball, then drew the liquid into the needle. I watched all this, transfixed. I felt as if I had taken a turn into The Twilight Zone. I expected to see Rod Serling emerge from beneath the pile of books on the wicker chair and say, "Consider, if you will, Elliot Greeley: a small-time stand-up comedian, none too bright, lacking direction, adrift in the waters of life, suddenly plunged into the dark underbelly of the twisted narcotics underground, a grotesque wonderland of petty thieves, murderers and syphilitic junkie whores, a wonderland known in some quarters of the world as . . . The Twilight Zone." Then I started hearing that freaky music in my head and knew I'd really gone over the deep-end.

Danny handed the needle to Mike, who then held it out to me and said, "You want to do this first? I'm kind of, like, HIV-positive, you know."

Before I could respond Danny said, "He doesn't do drugs."

Mike looked at me for a moment as if I were a Faberge Egg under glass, some rare artifact he'd never seen before (certainly not in this bedroom). Then his attention drifted away from me as he ran his fingertip along his forearm, searching for the proper vein. All of a sudden I grew self-conscious when I realized I was staring at him with far too much fascination. As the needle punctured a bulging blue vein near the crook of his elbow I glanced away, embarrassed, like I was peeping through a keyhole trying to catch a glimpse of a couple making love.

Danny, at last realizing that I was standing in the middle of the room, gestured toward the wicker chair. "Have a seat," he said.

I didn't know what to do. Should I move the pile of books and risk Rod Serling biting my hand off?

"Oh, I'm sorry, man," Mike said. His embarrassment seemed genuine. "Let me clear that off for you." With the needle still dangling out of his arm Mike got up and began pushing shit off the chair. This was the strangest image of the whole evening: that needle bobbing up and down like a jack in the box as he waded through strata of dinosaur fossils, uranium deposits, dead television stars, and who knows what else.

Staring at the needle with some uneasiness, Danny said, "Uh, let me do that for you," and finished shoveling the shit onto the carpet. Mike sat back down on the bed and tended to his business.

I settled into the wicker chair. At random I plucked a paperback book out of the pile that was now on the floor. It was called *Hunting Humans Vol. I*. On the inside front cover was an advertisement that read, "Wait for *Hunting Humans Vol. III*!" How many volumes could there be?

After the brown liquid had descended into Mike's vein, he handed the needle back to Danny. I said nothing as Danny drew more of the brackish substance into the syringe. I didn't understand why Danny was using the same needle, particularly if Mike was HIV-positive. I'm not sure why I didn't say anything. I guess I just figured, hell, he must know what he's doing; Danny *always* knows what he's doing. Besides, I couldn't think of a polite way of saying, "Hey, uh, you really think you should be sharing a needle with this AIDS-ridden freakazoid?"

Within seconds he had already slipped the needle into his arm, had already injected the substance into his vein as if he were a past master at this, a life-long user. The sight brought back memories of one of Danny's earliest routines, a story about being forced to go to the doctor as a kid. He used to do five minutes on needles, on how much he hated them. What the fuck had happened to change his mind?

I glanced back at Mike again. I was surprised to see that he was staring at me; that bemused, Faberge-Egg-look had returned to his eyes.

"So . . . you don't do drugs?" he said. He looked like he couldn't believe it.

Falling back on one of my old routines, I laughed and said, "The other day I stopped at a Wienerschnitzel to buy a hot dog and I saw a big banner outside that said, *Do Dogs, Not Drugs*. I thought, What the hell is this? Does Wienerschnitzel advocate bestiality?"

Mike continued to stare at me with a stoic expression. Don't feel bad, I thought, perhaps he's laughing inside. He said, "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a comedian."

He nodded. "You make good money doing that?"

I wiggled my hand in the air. "Not as much as Danny."

"You know, you could pick up a lot of extra cash with your urine."

"Excuse me?"

"Yeah, some people even make a living off it, especially in D.C. In D.C. the whole drug testing thing is out of control. If you're arrested you can't even see a judge unless you piss in a bottle first. There's a huge demand for clean urine out there. I know a guy who makes about \$20,000 a year."

"That's pretty good—for urine, I mean."

"Fuck yeah, I'd take it! Hell, you can make fifty bucks a pop from scumbags in the street. You could probably rake in even more from the white collar areas like Orange County. Those guys are desperate cause they're all on speed. Speed will stay in your system anywhere from twenty-four to forty-eight hours. A surprise drug test on Monday morning is their worst nightmare."

"Maybe I'll head on over to Orange County tonight and set up a little lemonade stand on the sidewalk."

"Or Silicon Valley. That place *runs* on cocaine, and coke can stay in your system for up to twelve hours. Those guys have lines of cocaine waiting for

them in their office. It's a perk of the job. It wouldn't surprise me if they had a coke break clause in their contract. I think they do lines at their board meetings."

I instantly had an image of yuppies in neckties standing around a long table, all of them bent over one of those large graphs, snorting cocaine sprinkled along the jagged red line that measures the economic growth of the company. The image made me laugh. "I think I'd rather peddle my urine in D.C. It seems more appropriate somehow."

"Yeah, D.C.'s a cool place if you've got a stomach for high strangeness. I was thinking of maybe moving back there soon. Hell, any place that had a crackhead for a mayor can't be all bad. When the mayor is locked in his office smoking crack, I say that gives you license to do whatever you want."

The scariest part of this conversation was that I was only half-listening; the other half of my mind was seriously considering how to begin selling my urine. "So . . . where would I advertise my urine, the *Yellow Pages*?"

"Word of mouth would work better."

"Is, uh, selling urine illegal?"

"You wouldn't think so, but they'd probably find some way to classify it as a drug-related crime. Everything else is."

All of a sudden we heard a noise out in the living room. Mike said in a panic, "Shut the door! That's my dad. He'll get mad if he sees me shooting up heroin again."

Well, you don't hear that sentence every day of your life. I started to get up, but Danny (with the needle bobbing out of his arm) leaped off the mattress and made a mad dash for the door, slamming it shut and slipping a chain over it. Two seconds later someone knocked on the door so hard I thought it was going to fall off its hinges.

"Michael, who've you got in there?" a gruff voice boomed through the door. "Are you shooting up heroin again?"

"No, dad!" Mike said. "I've got a couple of friends over! We just want a little privacy, is that a crime?"

"If I find out you're doing heroin in there I'll rip your fucking head off!"

Mike rolled his bloodshot eyes. "So do it already! Put me out of my misery!"

"Don't tempt me!"

Mike picked up a black combat boot and threw it against the door. "Get

the fuck out of here! Leave me alone, that's all I want! That's all I've *ever* wanted from you, you stupid son of a bitch!"

I heard heavy, Frankenstein-like footsteps lumbering away from the door. My hands were clutching the arm rests of the chair as if I were hanging on for dear life. Mike leaned his head against the wall and covered his eyes with his hands. In the pocket of silence that followed Danny sat back down on the bed and slipped the empty needle out of his vein. Though I stared closely at his face, he appeared no different than before.

We see TV shows. We see movies. We see well-nourished young actors slamming pretend-needles into their veins, rolling their eyes back into their pretty little skulls to the musical stylings of whatever alternative pop star is fashionably unfashionable at the moment, and rising into make-believe clouds of opiate-induced bliss. What all of this looked like to me was something quite different than that Hollywood recreation. Neither Mike nor Danny exhibited any signs of euphoria at all. No cloud-paradise here. Perhaps the drug just enabled them to feel . . . normal . . . even average . . . for a few hours? I recalled, in that moment, reading a Lou Reed *bon mot* in the liner notes of his mid-'70s album, *Metal Machine Music*, a line in which he described his fellow heroin addicts as those "for whom the needle is no more than a toothbrush." No more than a toothbrush. Yes, no one seemed to be getting "high" in this room. It seemed as if they were just brushing their teeth, getting ready for the rigors of yet another night on planet Earth.

Finally the silence became far too nerve-wracking. I said, "It looks like *you* may need my urine in a few minutes."

Mike removed his hands from his face and groaned. "I think you're right. How much would you charge me?"

I shrugged. "Fifty bucks."

"Aw c'mon, man, no discount? You wouldn't even have thought of it if I hadn't suggested it first!"

"Okay, forty-five."

"Thirty."

"Forty."

"Thirty-five."

"Uh . . . all right."

"Bitchin'." He slipped his hand beneath the mattress and pulled out a blue velcro wallet. He withdrew three tens and a five, crumpled them up into a ball and threw them at me. They came apart and drifted through the air like

feathers, falling onto the carpet between us. I leaned over and snatched them up. You know how many cans of chicken noodle soup you can buy with that?

Mike rose to his feet and began riffling through the top drawer of his dresser. He pulled out a tangled ball of torn socks, a narrow glass jar containing a katydid on a microscope slide, and a plastic toy that looked like Ren from *Ren and Stimpy* before he found the object of his search: an empty mason jar. He tossed the jar to me and said, "Fill it."

"What, here?"

"Hey, I coughed up the cash, now you cough up the product!"

"Excuse me, but if you want me to *cough* it up we're gonna be here for awhile." Mike waved his hand in the air, then plopped back down on the mattress. I glanced over at Danny, but he just shrugged. How had I gotten into this? "Can't I do it in the bathroom?" I said.

Mike pointed at the door. "With *him* out there?"

I could still hear the echoes of those elephantine footsteps reverberating through my skull. "I guess you have a point." I released a huge sigh, rose to my feet, wandered over to the corner of the room. Turning my back to Mike and Danny, I unbuttoned my Levis and held the jar up to my penis. "Can't you run some water or something?"

The best he could do was play a New Age cassette of whale sounds. That didn't quite hit the mark, I'm afraid. While I thought of rain storms and garden hoses, desperately trying to make something happen, I said to Mike, "So your dad makes you take urine tests, huh?"

"Ever since I was fifteen." He sighed. "Man, I told myself I'd never do this shit again." He turned to Danny. "I was doing fine until you came over."

"Dude, don't worry about it," Danny said. "We'll stop doing it—tomorrow."

"Yeah, right. Tomorrow. I just realized it's been six years to the day since I was diagnosed HIV-positive. I know people who were diagnosed at the same time and they're all dead now. They took AZT, I didn't. Did you know that AZT is nothing but fucking salmon sperm? Oh God, oh God, I'm so depressed. I look in the mirror these days and say, 'Jesus, you're thirty-four. Where did all the time go? It went by so fast.' Not only that, my girlfriend's being a fucking bitch."

"I hear you," Danny said. "Hell, my girlfriend's a fucking dyke. She cheats on me almost every day. She's probably cheating on me now."

“Sometimes I start crying for no reason,” Mike said. “At night. Around three a.m. When I’m all alone.”

“I cry too,” Danny said. “All night sometimes.”

“One day I cried for twenty-four hours,” Mike said. “At least, it seemed like twenty-four hours. I cried today. I’m *so* depressed. Sometimes I feel like killing myself. I know exactly how I’d do it too. My dad keeps his .22 in the drawer next to his bed, says he keeps it there in case of *intruders*.” He released a hollow laugh. “Man, it’d be so simple to sneak in there, slip the gun out of the drawer, press it against my right temple, and then just—” He placed his index finger against his temple and lowered his thumb as if it were the trigger of a gun. Then he dropped his hand to his side, his eyes glassy and without emotion. “Actually that’s what I was thinking about right before you came over.”

There followed a long, uncomfortable moment of silence. I said, “Uh . . . I had a hangnail yesterday.”

At that moment someone pounded at the door. A long, arcing stream of golden liquid shot out of my penis. I didn’t anticipate it having such a long reach; I had to compensate as quick as possible and just barely managed to catch the piss in the jar.

The knocking became so violent, I jumped and the piss sprayed on the floor.

“Do I hear someone *pissing* in there?” said the voice.

I immediately cut off the stream, stuffed my penis back into my Levis, and buttoned up.

Mike said, “No, dad, you’re just being paranoid!”

I screwed the lid on the jar as tight as possible, then hid it behind a pile of porno magazines on the floor as Mike’s dad said, “If I find out anyone’s been pissing in there, I’ll rip their fucking head off!”

Of course, I wondered which head he was referring to. The sudden and unsurgical displacement of either one was an experience I preferred to avoid as long as possible.

“I’d like to see you try it,” Mike yelled.

“Don’t tempt me!”

I waved at Mike to please be quiet, but he wasn’t paying attention to me. “Get out of here,” he screamed, throwing another boot at the door. “Leave me the fuck alone!”

Once again those golem-like footsteps thundered away from the door. I realized I'd been holding my breath during the entire exchange. "How're we gonna get out of here?" I said.

"Oh, don't be scared of him," Mike said. "He talks loud and carries a small stick."

"How small? Small sticks can cause as much damage as big sticks if used properly."

"Speaking of getting out of here," Danny said, glancing at his watch (since when the hell did he start wearing a watch?), "we better get scootin' if you don't want to miss the beginning of the movie."

"What're you seeing?" Mike said.

"The Nuart's showing *Destroy All Monsters*."

"Is that the one where Godzilla and Mothra and Rodan and baby Godzilla are all on Monster Island and they have to fight those weird alien dudes on the moon?"

"That's the one."

"Damn, that's my favorite."

"You want to come with us?"

Mike thought about it for a second, then waved his hand in the air. "Nah, I'm way too depressed. I'll just bring you down."

I couldn't disagree with that. Danny glanced at his watch again and said, "Okay. Well, I guess I'll see you later."

"Yeah, later." He just stared at his mattress, as though thinking about smothering himself with it.

"Uh . . . you think you can walk us out?" Danny said.

"Can't we just crawl through the window?" I suggested.

"Don't worry about my dad. I'll *cut* him if he tries anything." Mike reached under his pillow, whipped out a switch blade, and dropped it into one of the pockets on his shorts. A determined, implacable expression washed over his face as he rose from the bed and opened the door. Danny and I fell in behind him, peering over his shoulders fearfully as if expecting ninja warriors to erupt from the shadows of the hallway and begin attacking us with Samurai swords. Somewhere in the house I could hear a television blaring some kind of game show. I was relieved; perhaps we could reach the front door without laying eyes on the fearsome apparition I imagined Mike's dad to be.

Just as we were about to leave the hallway one of the side doors swung open and out shambled a huge bear of a man with broad shoulders and a thick neck, two hundred and seventy pounds of angry flab that may have been firm and muscular twenty years ago but had since softened into a mass of walking dough. We froze. The man's eyes, as bloodshot as his son's (though no doubt for different reasons), bulged out of his head as they scanned all three of us, perhaps considering who to attack first. At last a pair of meaty hands reached out and grabbed my head; toughened, leathery skin pressed against my skull and began squeezing like a vice.

"Have you been giving heroin to my boy again?" he yelled.

I grabbed his wrists, which were so thick my fingers couldn't even wrap around them, and tried to scream, "It wasn't me, it was the other guy!" but he was pressing my cheeks so hard the words came out garbled and incomprehensible.

Somewhere to my left I heard Mike say, "Leave him the fuck alone!" and the next thing I knew I was watching a long silver blade plunge into my attacker's right forearm. Blood squirted out of his flesh as he howled, released my head, then swivelled around to face his son. I staggered backwards into the doorway of Mike's bedroom. Danny ducked under the mad man's outstretched hands and followed me into the room. We slammed the door shut and slipped a chain over it once again.

"Maybe the window wouldn't be a bad idea after all," Danny said.

I couldn't disagree with that. We trampled Mike's mattress, unclasped the window above it, and spent the next two minutes struggling to raise the damn thing—which apparently hadn't been opened in years—while behind us we heard shouting, the crash of large heavy objects, and the dull thumping sound of flesh beating flesh. In the end Danny and I prevailed, thank God. We slid the window open just high enough to squeeze through, landed head first into a tangle of bushes full of those annoying little brown prickly things which clung to our hair like fleas, then rounded the house and ran toward Danny's car as fast as possible. We scrambled inside with as much finesse as a pack of drunken clowns piling into a midget car in a three-ring circus, while behind us we heard the front door slamming open. I peered through the window to see Mike's dad stumble out onto the porch, blood pouring down his XXL Beefy-T Hanes t-shirt. He waved his hairy fist at us.

He yelled, "You come back here again I'll rip your head off and stuff it up your ass sideways, you hear?" This alone would've been disturbing enough,

but the fact that he said it while dashing across the lawn toward us made it even more distressing.

I rolled up the window and said, "Get us out of here, get us out of here!"

I glanced over at Danny to see him picking through the three dozen keys on his key ring. "I'm just trying to find which one's the key to the car," he mumbled.

"Hotwire the damn thing then! That guy's gonna kill us!"

Mike's dad slammed his full weight against the side of the car and blood from his stab wound splattered against the window. At that moment I noticed I hadn't locked my door. Just as he made a grab for the door handle I slammed my fist down on the lock, then did the same to the door behind me.

"Lock your door!" I said to Danny.

He didn't bother. "I'm pretty sure this is the one," he said, slipping a key into the ignition. The sound of that engine starting up was probably the most beautiful, angelic sound to ever bounce off my ear drums. We peeled out into the street with Mike's dad running along beside us, cursing our mothers and calling us bastards and faggots and even more horrible things. His kind words sparked a wave of nostalgia. For a moment I thought I was back in high school.

Mike's dad tried his best to keep up, but within a few seconds we had left him in the dust. I peered over my shoulder and watched him shrink into the distance.

A blanket of uneasy silence fell over the car, but only for a brief time. A weak smile appeared on Danny's face as he said, "Now wasn't that pleasant. We'll have to do it again sometime."

Any witty rejoinder that might have followed had been knocked out of my skull long ago. "How long have you been doing it?" I said.

He maintained that weak smile. "Doing what?"

"The heroin."

He shrugged. "Not long. This is only my third time."

"Only? Don't you know what heroin does? Haven't you seen the ads? 'This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs.' It fries eggs, Danny, it fries eggs!"

"Yeah, yeah, that's what they said about marijuana. You smoked that a couple of three or four times, right?"

"It's hardly the same thing."

"We'll see."

I sighed and slumped down in my seat. It felt as if the world were going mad and I was the only one who was even aware of it.

“Are you pissed at me?” Danny said.

“Yes.”

“Does this mean you don’t want to see *Destroy All Monsters*?”

“No.”

“No, you want to see it, or no, you don’t want to see it?”

“No, I want to see it.”

“Good. I think we’ll just make it. We might miss the opening credits, but that’s okay.”

I didn’t say anything for the rest of the ride. I strapped on my seat belt, tried to block out the sound of The Stooges, and hoped Danny wouldn’t nod out on the 405.

Dedicated to the memory of Mike Webber