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ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

History 495

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Across the Universe

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A fallen tear, the harsh, gritty, staccato beat of icy winter raindrops on a face, a cosmic shot of light flashing for a mere fraction of an instant, for a lifetime, for all the eons in the rain-slicked, mud-sloppy, potholed rear parking lot of a rundown, grafitti-decorated bowling alley in Farmingdale, New York: fine, tenuous threads binding the fates of two men across six feet of cold damp space, binding them across the immensity of the universe which exists between one vaulted-in soul and another. For the duration of the bat of an eyelid, the exhalation of a breath, the spark-throwing belch of a gunshot, the winging time of a glowing, hot-lead bullet lump on a parabolically arched six foot flight, for the imperturbable, all-embracing, devouring timelessness of infinity two men, each silenced behind the murky shrouds and heavy mist barriers which enclose every man in his own dank, shadow-immersed, inescapable cell of mortal solitude, each thrown by the dark, mystical, shifting undercurrents of fate and infernal riptides of chance into a situation catalyzed by an ozone-sparking change of desperate violence, truly touch one another in a brief, flickering connection. A mysterious, ephemeral, absurdly ironic connection woven with the most delicate as well as the most grossly coarse of threads, cloaked with the weighty ceremonies of night and stained by a drenching flow of the rich, viscous royal magenta.

Threads. They run from here:

Edward (" Fast Eddie " he liked to have people call him) Grantham lit up a Winston 100. Hot, strong, fresh broils and fast tumbling rills and convolutions and big steamy domes of smoke poured up from the the pulsing, red-glowing tip of the long, tasty, clean-white cigarette. Eddie's hand shook, quivered just slightly as he raised the cigarette to his lips. His eyes were charged with fed shards. He closed his eyes. He drew in a long puff of Winston and savored the smooth, filtered freshness of the smoke as it whirled down through him. His eyes clouded and his head swam for just a moment, but that quickly passed and he felt steadier, calmer after.

He stretched his right arm straight out in front of him and was pleased to see that his hand was more or less steady, his shivering insides relaxed a bit. He was steadier. But inside, still, huh, sometimes he could almost taste it, never left him alone. Alone, shit, it always found him alone. The bile, the bitter, simmering, never-forgotten, constant slow acid burn that might carry around monikers like frustration and hatred or some such. That never went away, that plagued him and plagued him and plagued him.

It was buried deep within him, while at the same time being all of him. But mostly it was hunched down, brooding, holding immovably fast with tenacious deep-penetrating

roots like some inextricable, malignant organism possessing a life of its own; almost animate, irrepressible, a vile phagadaena burrowed like some primeval protozoic hydra into the living tissues of his body and extending its slithering grasping tentacles out through the great visceral cavities of his body until his pulsing insides shivered against the touch of and were fouled by the phagocytic embrace of this evil, fetid polyp.

And yet he did not struggle against it, did not recoil from it. It was his curse and his hope, his weakness and his strength, his beginning and his end. He drew in another lungful of smoke. He watched the street with smoldering eyes. And he thought meanly of the bleak despair that framed every twinge of emotion in this buried, solitary and dismal life he was having, his temper pitching to a monumental fit of outrage when he considered his wasted talents and potentialities and his stifled and atrophying self, confusion varnished over with a strangely disquieting and unsatisfying veneer of highly distilled pride reigning when he thought meanly and truly about his blackness and what it amounted to in the scheme of things. Outside a breeze blew up oddly out of the grey and somber day and shrieked and howled shrilly for a moment around solid brick and concrete corners before dying back down to a low moaning lament that eventually faded unnoticed back into the oblivion of the grey.

From Here:

Patrolman Richard Ryan squashed out the smoking stubb of his Lucky Strike in the ashtray of his blue and orange Nassau County patrolcar (number 810). A slight, weary column of stale, acrid smoke coiled up from the crippled and mangled butt like some lassitudinous dirt-grey snake and got in Ryan's eyes. The resulting irritation made his eyes water a bit. One large globule of tear oozed from the moist-bright, shimmery blue crystal of his red rimmed left eye down unto the soft mound of bare, pale-with-an-Irish-florid-tinge flesh covering his gently rounded cheekbone, surface friction delayed it there for just an instant, it quivered briefly on his cheek like a glistening dot of the clearest, purest gel (its body cleanly transparent, its convex surface converting a dreary beam of simpering, mist-sallow yellow light reflected from a streetlamp overhead into a gem luminescent sheen of incredibly intense, cosmic, infinite white; a white which did not seem extrinsic or reflected but which seemed instead to be the very essence of the tear globe, a canescent, ethereal almost holy speck of a glow filtering up with prismatic highlights to complement it from the tiny but unfathomable depths of that single, inconsequential tear with an unflinching resoluteness, an idominability that was awesome and a purity which for all its simplicity was wondrous, all-embracing, universal) and then

streamed down quickly off his cheek like a tiny rivulet of irreducible light, spiralled through a dark void of space and spilled with a fragmenting, dissolving dash upon the flat gunmetal gleam of his badge (number 1616).

The welled up moisture in his eyes soon cleared; the instant of irritating discomfort passed, the bursted bits of the fallen tear quickly evaporated and there was quiet on Patrolman Ryan's Eighth Precinct, Farmingdale beat.

And there was a strange stillness to the night: Throbbing, somber, heavy, deep that peculiar stillness stirred no flutterings in Ryan's heart, imparted no message to his blearily sober brain, augured neither well nor ill to his uni-dimensionally wary, superficially alert sensibilities or to his stifled-to-dormancy and uniformed soul. The great crazy cat jungle senses in him were numbed to ineffectuality and his learned street smarts were off the beam.

To this punctillious young patrolman, this blonde haired, shock-ice blue eyed third generation Irish-American youth of twenty-three this literal stillness, which was more of an aberrant and unnatural quiescence imposed to mute the anquished wailings of tortured dreamers and muffle the baleful moanings of mpurners over the pale lifeless corpses of unfulfilled promises and brutally stubbed out hopes, presaged of nothing.

Tracing a finger, third finger, across the black mass in the mirror. The mass is image, self, reflected. Tracing a face, a person. His ? Him ? Between the reflected image and the self is there something ? Anything ? The bathroom door is open. The bathroom light, 100 watts, explodes in the small room, reaches and seers into all the corners, burns clear like truthfire off the mirror where the black self is etched with grim lines, crow's feet eyes and tight purple-brown lips.

Eddie gazes fixidly into the mirror, eyes tough and intent, seeking not dawdling wasting time or dreaming jive fools' dreams, fascinated by the awful beauty of of the honest and terrible pain that is carved into the face of the mirrored self, confused by the relevance or lack of it of the finger-tracing made around the sharply defined periphery of a mirrored self. Downstairs the T.V. drones. Giants in polyethylene suits digging man-craters on the Moon ? Steel towers like sky hypodermics pushed out from the granite of Manhattan Island ? Asia bleeding ? The world's leit motif; what me worry ?

Eddie touches the mirror self with his hands, feels the smooth cold of the flat shiney surface, works then with his eyes searching the mirror's eyes for a flush of heat. He unwraps a piece of foil covered Dentyne and watches the mirror mouth chew it vigorously. He spits it out with a

vengeance into the green porcelain hollow half shell that is the bowl, or commode if you prefer. After bobbing to the surface it floats in the sani-blu bowl water. It is squished pink surrounded by a slimey yellow-white halo of phlegm that makes it look for all the world like some horrid miscreant of an egg. He flushes the bowl in disgust and watches it swirl away in a mad chaos of seething sani-blu, in an instant his impulsive creation has vanished down into the mysterious black gurgling, chortling bowels of the bowl.

" Ouruborous, man, " spoken from into the mirrored tangle, " with them warm flappin purple lips, lips runnin' life, man, turgid, tumescent with the dark loined heat of mother blood, mother life, what's happenin', brother ? "

He stares into the mirror, his eyes aching with fire yet wrapped over glossed over with silver chill. The low throated gasping of the ebbing commode tide catches his ear. He sees his lips moving, warm moist globes around the cool ivory white of the teeth and the heavy dodgings of the full pink tongue. He sees a single soft tear in the corner of the mirrored eye, the tear catching the blast of the 100 watts like white pure diamond on black satin.

" Them polythene babies, man, all of'em growing up to atom sculptures in plexiglass, whirling and swirling, man, jacketted in their go anywhere plasti-tin flex skins, yeah, bro, that's it right there, that's what's happenin' ! "

A woman, his sister-in-law Nina, looked into the bathroom.

" Well now hmmm. You in the habit of talkin' to yourself, Eddie ? " she asked snidely with a hint of amusement in her voice. " Hmmm, " she went on, " talkin' to yourself into a mirror. What'choo lookin' at there anyway, buster, your preety face ? "

" Put a lid on it, Nina, " he said, " what'dyou think you found somethin' funny ? Who else am I-gonna talk to. 'Sides that's someone else in that mirror there. Listens, tells me the truth. Who do you talk to, woman ? Do they listen ? "

" Uh huh, they listen, buster ! " she replied, straightening up imperiously, her breasts jutting, and backing out the door.

NIGGERS KEEP GOING, he'd seen scrawled in large black magic marked letters on a section of wall above the urinal in the Sillouette Lounge in Farmingdale. Everywhere, he thought, everywhere, it just follows along (the monstrousness, the hideousness of swarming, sweating, asphalt-choked, insane, insane New York coming up over the far edge of his consciousness like a fever breathing beast all aglow with the maniacally gaudy neon baubles and grotesque fluorescent curlicues that New York wore; the cheapest, lowest, sleaziest whore bedecked with big paste and plexi glimmeratins)

Just follows along ! Oh for chrissake, what sloppy, melodramatic bullcrap. NIGGERS KEEP GOING, incredible that even now at twenty three, after eighteen years in the city and five in Amityville, he still let such cretinous infantilisms bother him. He still let them get down there under the skin and twist and twist, jive crap still set his stomach to churning; still made him ball up his hands into tight fists.

No, there was more than that. He knew it was not just that. That was just part of it on the surface where you could see it and feel it. A tiny signpost over the peebowl, the royal imprimature of humanity inscribed majestically over the silver chromed and knobbed and mirror white enameled aspersorium of its sani-magical cleansing holy waters. The imprimature scrawled hurridly by some flit-swilling, anonymous, lost toadie of a creature; by some faceless, nameless, numbered-out, sodden sop of existence whose angers and piddly balled hatreds possessed none of the proud, defiant, mighty dignity of his own great and terrible angers, a slip of a shadow soggily fleshed out and stabbed with shifty squinty rodent's eyes who hid his hates in the close urinal dankness of bathrooms and sneakily unburdened himself of his neurotic fears and snivelling disenchantments by heat-bitchily and wet-pantsed apprehensively scribbling them over yellow-streaked hoople house pee-holes, while hot yellow tears dribbled down his

leg.

NIGGERS KEEP GOING, by itself it was merely a slight irritant, an annoyance (those steamy, wicked, hot-brutal Harlem summer days—with the greasy, drenching sheets of stultifying mist-vapor rising off the squishy, syrupy black asphalted melting streets and clinging like some malodorous, venomous, non-emulsifiable agglutination to skin already stickily-slickly coated with slippery sweat-urine and crusty salt residues and those same saturnine sheets floating slowly heavily up through viciously thrown open rotting wood framed windows and after condensing into big, bloated, gelatinous drops oozing languorously down tenement apartment walls painted a sickly pale lead-based tan; milkily translucent drops pregnant with all of the accumulated slop evaporated off a gigantic steel-girded and concrete-masked, humid festering compost heap running together into staining streams that dissolved the paint off the walls and puddled up in stagnant milky-tan reservoirs upon warped and rat-tunnel catacombed floors—flickering in his mind through soft smokey whirls and forming some nightmarish image montage; yeah, those steamy, wicked, maddening days, hellish days when an unattainable buck or half-a-buck could have gotten him as far as the beer-can-strewn, transistor-electro-seared, million close hot bodied swarm of the Rockaways or Coney or Brighton or Jones, to the at-least-ocean-soothed insanity of one of the

New York beaches, or just anywhere that was away away away, out of the horrid hellfire scorched hideousness, feculent virose crushed together emptiness and droning monotonic nothingness of Summer jungle Harlem, out of the sealed uptight pressure cooker of melting Manhattan, out to the free to the infinite oceans to the placid blue skies to the wild breezy blowing sand stretches where one could splash out and whirl about and run and feel the breath-snapping cool blasts and buffeting tumbles of the surging ocean, the loving brown-green mother ocean flowing like liquid ice over one's demon-heated flesh, over one's febrific body, over one's throbbing head).

NIGGERS KEEP GOING (Where ? Down the urinal ?).

I would have loved to, whitey, he laughed, laughed, The laugh soft and easy purring through his chest and bubbling in his stomach. Loved to, whitey, if only you empowered honkey fiends would have let me, if only you devils, you diseased milk-skinned, green-eyed flaccid jelly fish would have, would have,

JELLY FISH KEEP GOING !

KEEP GOING: the usual archtypal Harlem city scenes, on the stoop, the rats, garbage piles wafting great draughts of raw stench out of alleyways, the swirling cramming manswarm, the musty Jewish candystores and hockshops, the junkies. . . the montage billowing bursting expanding to hot orange through

his mind and like a sudden strike of nervous energy volting down the spine connecting with and charging the tentacles of the pulsing polyp.

And he could feel something, understand something through the rage: that orange fading in and out was what mattered because it had the strange crackle and spark of some wild greatness. It was something inside of him that was natural and belonged to him, a glow, a flash, not a rumbling thunder out of the banal simmering brown earth and urine that was the background coloring for the complicatedly expanding montage, for his life, it was something terrible and tremendous that transcended the archetypal scenes and bland disaster of his life and self. It made him shiver, puzzled him, licked with a sharp electric flick at the raw nerve endings in his flesh like the lightest most delicate most enticing most educated pink wisp of a sharp pointed tongue.

He stands in the livingroom of his brother Ralph's Cape Cod Ranch puffing on a cigarette. He drags heavily on the ash-laden cigarette, the dead grey end breaks off and falls on his sister-in-law's white shag rug. He walks to the picture window and gazes in evil reverie out on the grey gravel, soggy brown lawned, split-ranch alternating swatch of Motor Avenue, Amityville. His face is a stern, brooding visage, his eyes sharp with a shimmery glint of frozen tear crystal, above him out of his head a seven league black warri-

or-vengeance soars and stalks, more ash on the shag, the warrior slashing savagely with a lightning-arching double edged solid gold broadsword into charging pride-packs of gunmetal fanged saurian fiend beasts, a sneeze and the hollow banging-ringing steel echoing cascade of an Oyster Bay Township Sanitation Man—Mike D'Luria of Roosevelt—at work, the flung aluminuminum garbage cans ring, the sell-sell-sell soap opera Hollywood Squares Alka Seltzer Love of Life drone of the global telly down in the den, the flush of the toiletbowl gurgles somehow into the warrior-saurian fiend beasts armaggedon.

" Eddie, watch those ashes ! " his sister-in-law hollers in from the kitchen where she has been watching him flitting the ashes nonchalantly on her rug.

No answer. He hasn't even heard her.

" Eddie ! I said to watch those ashes ! " the sister-in-law (slippers, shorty robe, panties, bra, curlers and coffee cup at the polyethylene dinette set) admonishes him again.

The world moved on, there, there out through that goddamn picture window. Look at it ! D'Luria and the others of his garbage truck crew are still down the block tossing around those already battered, dented and mauled cans. Bouncing them off curbs and poles, letting them lie dull-metal, grease-coated in the middle of the road, the breeze blows

around freely, they rattle, cars bang into them and they careen around the gutters.

" Eddie, now I called in there two times already, now you c'mon in here and getchoreself an ashtray ! "

Oh, to take arms against, what ? Was that it ? Eddie wondered in irritation. He drew on his cigarette. What was it again ? To fight the good and bold fight or take up arms against all of this petty horsecrap ? The orange screaming inside of him. The ocean. Some magnificent, orange charge cracking, some sparking in-the-big-time greatness inside of him. He knew that, was positive, but what about it ?

The cans rollehollowly in the streets. Hollowly banging and tumbling and their echoed emptiness, their sad forlorn alumosided used-up tossed-asideedness comes up at him and sets his teeth. . .EDDDDDIEEEE, GODDAMNIT. . .right on their. . .CUT THAT. . .grinding ever mother jumpin' lovin' . . .CRAP. . .edges.

PISS, he hollers. . .dull greasy used up metalo emptiness resounding hollowly through the panic switch flipped chaos of his crying hating raging twenty-three year old brain. PISS. . .did you see the heavy grey of the sky, did you see the dull leaden craggy faces of all those beat down tossed away lost and gone people. . .ON YOUR. . .damn, tossed down beaten and damned. . .FRIGGIN'. . .street ? . .RUG, NINA.!

he almost screams snatching his coat to the accompaniment of a crescendoing cascade of sprung flying spinning falling coathangers from a small hallway closet as he heads out the door all full of hot angered screwitall piss-and-vinegar. He. . .WELL DON'T. . .slams. . .COME BACK AGAIN. . .the door. . .YOU BASTARD. . .behind him.

Outside the sky was even greyer than it had appeared as the afternoon lengthened. Outside it was smack to the flesh and catch the lungs cold. The rolling hollow-dead ashcans played for him. To take christless arms against, or something like that. PISSSSSSSSSSSSS !

Stillness in time, stillness over time, beyond time, for all time. Patrolman Ryan works through time in the cushioned ease and stillness of his patrol car. And time this stillness in life, broken only by the cosmic reverberations and sonic shock vibrattoes of truth still echoing from the explosion of a fallen tear like rolling peals of summer thunder and artificially measured out with a terrible dooming precision by the nearly inaudible metronomic tickings of Ryan's blackfaced Rolex, lay upon the moment, upon the place, upon the man with a dull, leaden portentousness.

Yellow light from the streetlamp overhead filtered down and the night was a dun-colored, grey mist shrouded phantom, a secretive silent stalker, its veils and shadows

pooling up in sinister reservoirs and menacing sworls and drifts that clung like an evil mucous to the dull pink bricked and faded, cracked tan painted cinder block walls of low profiled, squatting mastodon factory buildings and stiff horizontal warehouse sheds with their heavy, weathered-to-a-washed-out-and-earthy brown wooden doors and ponderously ornate metallic locks and hard bolted skylights long since sealed from the sun by year after year of entombing layers of dust and soot. Madness flowed in those reservoirs.

But that terrible gasp and hot pant of a dread night with its energies and dangers and awesome tidal currents was nothing to Ryan but a dead calm and a soothing reassuring balm of welcome silence. No precognitive swells worked in his mind to undertow his senses out to the treacherous eddies spiralling around the hidden shoals of chaotic madness and fated violence which lay just under the gentle brown-green surface of Ryan's comfortable sea of false peace. Neither the predatory roars and wild-eyed desperation screams and howls emanating from a raging and pulsing-to-bursting demon-polyp nor the crescendoing blares and screeching ejaculates from a would-be great man's frustration symphonia found a receiving point in Ryan's mind.

He did not feel the cool blue midnight touch of

moon rivers of madness eddying in slow whorls in the depths of the night, yet even as she worked on in blissful ignorance of the forces that were moving about him, from him and toward him he, some part of him, was becoming the powerful receptive cynosure of a cyclonic pulsar of these energies.

Trismic Trooper protecting a civilization of trismic drones. He could not feel them for the taps to them, the connections were hard bolted and had been long since entombed under the ponderous layers of dust and soot shaken off the mastodonic carcasses of nebulous and unpetitionable overseeing titans.

He had street smarts but they were from the north, learned, classifiable, measureable; while his jungle senses, body senses were numbed to dormancy, exiled. His love, which was an abstinence from love, was in his hands, he worked at it quickly with confident precision: he was engrossed in and entranced to an idled-motor, purring satiation by his careful handed, neat, square placement of ghost-light illuminated, printed BIC pen machinations on the endless probing empties of triple copy legal form PO-16 and satisfied as well by the feel, the ascetically sensual hard flatness of his standard issue 8½ by 11½ brown masonite clipboard. He was involved in the hard pressure roll of the BIC BALL neatly bursting blue dashes and ciphers, all square calligraphic efforts of considerably clean precision, on the flat unyielding

ever-smooth toughness of the masonite board.

His eyes darted feverishly after the bursts, he pressed the BIC BALL upon the board with a heavy teeth-gritting relish that was actually sensual to the point of slovenly obscenity. Soon the BALL beat blasted blue like a mad runaway pile driver. The slim well shaped white fingers steam hammered faster and faster, punished, panted in tracing, exploded blue on the board and let out the deep hairy ballsy sweaty hard breathing-quivering erection of a hot thighed secret that the neatly pressed formidable and austere gold-buttoned crisp of a loud lying blue uniform proclaimed (with the dead metal heft of a .38 special to might the rightness of that proclamation) was a ghost and a phantom and a civilized away untruth. And the crisp presses of that trismic trooper's civilizing uniform were threat enough to keep that secret safely unacknowledged and keep the jungle cat of psychic awareness numbed and neatly penned inside a well-nigh impenetrable plexi cage.

The cat could be viewed, probed, prodded, registered, measured and examined, the secret could be could be smiled at, laughed at, joked about, exploited, legislated against and paid for but both, contained within and containing the other, were so chastened by the intimidating, rise-and-shine, God's-good-wholesome-land presses of that uniform that they slunk away together like whipped and bedraggled

old grey alley Toms into the furthest reaches of that plexi-cooler to wait and brood fiercely.

THE TRISMIC TROOPER: And so the fearsome forces of liferage and deathrage which writhed and strained that night beneath the suffocating umbrage of all the soberly constructed and vehemently defended shrouds and dampers designed by all the monday morning, blue-eyed gov'nor's boys of the world to protect the right and the real the safe and the sane from the vulgar and the deviant the insane and the macabre were forces that china-blue eyed, sensitively featured, genteely pale young Ryan did not feel stirring about like so many restless prodigals in the heavy gothic mists of the night.

THE TRISMIC TROOPER: Patrolman Ryan knew of these forces though, in a manner of speaking. But because he could only vaguely comprehend them as well springs for the savagery, brutality and viciousness of criminality, which he avowedly detested, he regarded them with a loud and brash contempt and a righteous loathing, both of which feelings he felt to be appropriate and morally sound and not inconsistent with the opinions and feelings of his professional associates and peers as well as most of his friends and relatives. Yet thinking about or discussing such phenomena irritated and annoyed him for he also vaguely understood that coupled with his bold and beautiful rejection of these deep midnight stir-

rings and aberrant forces was a chilling blood fascination for them that rather than being destroyed by the planned fear implicit in the starched crisp blue presses and polished up chrome of his uniform was instead nurtured by it.

So he tried to banish this low and scurrilous fascination from his mind, had to. He thought only in the light of the coffee and clear-eyed morning right, just as he knew that he should. In this dimension he could think of anything safely and his thoughts acquired a kind of calm and sober standardization which was pleasing and reassuring to him. He thought of his forms, of his pen, his jerk-out precision answer inserts, his hates, his vices, his society, his call-in time, his bowling scores, his family, he lived comfortably and securely in the womb warm banality of his tactile real and safe and sane and uncomplicatedly right. And he did not like to think about his sordid though diminishing fascination for that nether world of undisciplined vulgarity and impossible unorthodoxy because such exercises were frustratingly pointless.

"What's all the crap," he'd think, "What's here is here and what's right 'sright and what's wrong 'swrong," and then he'd stop himself because even that irritated him, wasn't one level, was frustrating. Frustrating because sometimes he wondered about all the terrible beauty which could come up from that nether world, to which his besieged

mind had relegated every ugliness, and how much more of the ugliness than he would like to think about rooted itself surreptitiously and inconceivably in the sane, clear-eyed, right world which he had volunteered to and was paid to defend.

He would purge his fascination by going straight, straight in mind, orthodox and by not bothering. He had his work, he looked at each situation as it arose with complete professional objectivity. His job was a challenge because it put him on the firing line where he could get an uncensored view of the shit blowing up from that nether world, and he handled it all with a minimum of emotion, cool, efficient precise but fair, straight and careful but flexible.

And he bowled at the County Line Bowling Alley on Wednesday nights and he played cards with the boys, he went to the movies, he played softball on Sunday afternoons with the team from the Silhouette and he drank gin-and-tonics during the week and beer on Sunday afternoons. And he listened to rock music on WPLJ and went to Timothy Tubbs and Dean's and Poor Peter's and the Naragansett Inn and the Oak Beach Inn and Dirty Ernie's.

And he went to his parent's house on the weekends and on Sunday evenings his mother cooked loin-of-pork and thick white fluffs of mashed potatoes and steaming pots of vegetables, long crisp string beans and turnips and piles

of sweet yellow corn and she filled up a pitcher with gravy that bubbled dark brown and slow and his sister and his father and his mother ate dinner in the combination livingroom-dining room and they all talked and laughed and kidded and drank deep glasses of clean white milk and his mother bustled about with her Sunday clothes and her blue apron on and his father held forth on politics and sports and the movies and television and sometimes with young patrolman Ryan on the Mafia and crime and the degeneration of New York City and the black situation in Amityville.

And the faces were clean cherubic Irish-Scotch ovals and the mouths all clicked and clacked and slurped joyfully and dimpled with glee and the gravy and potatoes swished and bubbled and gurgled and slopped and there was a great strange happy feeling of family togetherness and healthy success and well being and rightness and realness. And young Ryan felt secure and taken care of and serene in the midst of all this.

His stomach filled with big fat-streaked meatty hunks of loin-of-pork and piled drifts and mounds of gravy soaked potatoes and brimming glass after glass of chilled milk until it distended plump and luxurious and puffy-slop stuffed and hung blimp-bursting bawdy and heavy over his loosened belt buckle. And an exhaustion of satiatedness would settle down thoroughly on him and tranquilize him

into a state of euphoric contentedness as his father's phlegmily grandiloquent voice droned on blissfully, reassuringly and his sister and mother's feminine chirrups and clickings and demure purrings filtered through like warm, touching pats of summer raindrops.

And for a short time, anyway, he would be satisfied and still and untroubled and the world would be good and the truth comprehensible. His senses would grow weary and numbed, his mind dulled to a near hypnotic peacefulness, his skin pimpled with light sensuous tinglings and pleasureable ripplings. He would slowly heft his mammoth glass and joyously swallow long gulps of cool white velvety milk as his mouth prepared to surround the fluttering crustchunks and flakes and sticky cinnamon laced raisin dotted sweetness of a forked up glob of Entenmann's apple pie (not to be sold after midnight Saturday) topped with glistening puffs of Kool Whip. Then his mother would pour clean steam-columned licorice-black streams of 3 O'Clock coffee from a flat beveled finish stainless steel coffee pot into large antique-white china cups. And his mind and his body would caress the moment and cling to its bountifulness and stultifying comfortableness and later he would leave the table and go upstairs to his old room and turn on the stereo radio he had left up there and listen to the low volumed snarl and mad sneer of rock on WPLJ-FM and maybe (eyes staring blankly and dully at his high school trophies and awards and

old Beatle posters and two shelves full of half-read and annoyingly incomprehensible books) ease into a fat and benumbed sleep with his belt buckle opened and his stomach heaving and groaning powerfully in a bloated swell beneath his tee shirt and his tan desert boots dropped carelessly on the floor leaving his feet bare and stiff.

And then he would wake up in a sweat, in a hard sweat, a sheen of perspiration on his forehead, a funky dry sticky lining in his mouth on his lips, his tee shirt pulled out and rumpled, his hair wild, the room dark, black, silent.

For a moment he would not know where he was. In the dark, where ? Did he hear footsteps, voices, was someone breathing close to him in the black, something huge and horrid looming over him stirring slightly in the black, throwing a slip of a shadow across his heart, waiting ? He would lay still, rigid, tense, breaths coming in short rapid gasps that he would try desperately to hold in, his mouth agape.

In and those few moments he would have them, in those few strained moments the connections, the taps would be open and working and out there in that unfathomable limitless blackness he would feel them, all of them moving around, slithering, crawling, lurking in low shadows, beastie-eyed fiendish, all of them in a vast circle about him with his mind as their game, his mortality as their target. All of

them touching him, pawing him, putting their dirty raunchy carrion claws on him, prodding him, pinching him, breathing their foul breaths on him, gassing off on him, tweaking his nipples, lightly toying with his exposed penis and jerk-tugging his pants halfway down his thighs. All of them lewdly sneering and giggling at him, dirty, dirty fingers poking at his ribs, pecking at his pale smooth red-down tufted white flesh, pinching him in the delicate places, knowing about him, watching him through one way mirrors.

Then, his mind screaming with fear, horror etching lines into his forehead and stretching his eyes and mouth into gaping holes, his senses would latch onto something, maybe the low moaning and sobbing from the radio, maybe a soft gold glint of light off one of his highschool trophies and he would propel himself in a hysterical frenzy out of his bed, pulling his pants over his half-erected penis, pulling his tee shirt down over the loose clear flesh of his stomach, fumbling and scraping at the wall lamp over his boxspring mattress.

And right until the last, right until his desperate fingers finally managed to flip on the mercy of the church-gentle white light there would be soft obscene mewings all about him, kissing and tickling at his bare flesh, moist whisperings on the back of his neck. And even after the light flashed on like a clean explosion of right into the room his

fears would be slow in dissipating and he would wonder for a long time how his pants got unzipped and pulled down his thighs, and he would hold himself in tightly on the edge of his bed as he nervously puffed on a cigarette, shaken, rattled, feeling hollow and leaden inside.

SOLIPSISTICA: Eddie Grantham walked that whole day. He walked around Amityville under the solid grey of the snow heavy rain heavy sky. He kept his eyes down, brooding over the shards and cracks and blisters of the wet concrete sidewalks and sometimes he looked hard at the rain-slicked asphalt of the streets. He looked down but he saw everything, was everything. He reflected direly on the sinisterliness of things and was shaken by the inconsequentiality of himself measured against all of it, What was it? Part of him? All of him?

He talked to no one and no one attempted to talk to him. This did not seem to bother him. He passed people on the street. He would come abreast of them and eyes would slink down or shift sideways, sometimes they would flick imperiously over him with a cold curiosity. Mostly there were just bundled and strangely hurrying shapes.

Occasionally as he walked along Southern State Avenue toward Farmingdale younger boys in groups would pass him jangling and jiggling, eyes level and aimed with playful assault at one another, highpitched rankouts and obs-

centy strewn epithets buzzing around their little loose limbed groups like fiery but harmless gnats, flickering glimmers of white teeth bursting through quick tightlipped smiles, all goggle eyes and flicking cigarettes and flapping lips and gangly limbs and teenage bung ho, their savage bleatings and spontaneous adolescent shriekings pulsing and contracting with a systolic-diastolic thrum that had a raucous but distinct rock-steady rhythm to it.

" They don't know shit ! " Eddie would snicker after them, the thrum still laboring in his head in counterpoint to the staccato drumbeat of icy winter rain-drops which had begun to blast against his bare skin.

" Out here in this cold godforsaken bastard rain. What the shit ! It's me, man, Fast Eddie Grantham ! " he screamed out through the roar of the stacked waiting circle droves of 747's as he reached Farmingdale. It split wide open there and he knew in a vision what he wanted to do.

CHORION: Sitting on the edge of his bed curled uptight Ryan would wonder about his hideous dream and the remembrance of strange lewd cooings and touchings would send tremors through his body and chill his skin till it goosepimpled all over. He would hastily stubb out his smoke and snatching his flannel robe from his closet he would hurry to the small, warm, intimate downstairs

bathroom. He would lock the door behind him, his breathing still bated and fluttery, then, sure that all was intact and secure, he would strip naked and stand with his arms wrapped tightly about him in the quiet warmth of the small room, his toes squishing and curling through the soft cotton tufts of the pink-red rugs, his head held down his eyes closed. After a few moments he would run a shower and before stepping under the gentle hot stream of water he would carefully flip off the bathroom light listening at the door to hear if any of his family knew what was going on. Then he would step into the shower and whisper sealing the curtain behind him he would sit curled up in a ball on the shower stall floor and let the heated flow cascade caressingly over his body. And he would stay there until soft but anxious tappings at the door finally persuaded him out of the shower and in the bathroom till he could badger his mother into bringing his uniform down to him. And when he stepped out of the bathroom into the explosion of light he would be fully insulated with crisp blue presses and tinsel strips of chrome medallion, his .38 buckled at his side.

ARMORS GATHER THE EARTH: Night came with shrouds of mist punctuated by the ringing beat of pelting icedrops. And as the dark and mist deepened and moved ponderously to-

ward the weighty hours of the night circles of menacing mad blue were conjured from strange sources and they spun stealthily in particular midnight corners and cabalic alleys and cul-de-sacs. Fast Eddie, working from the split moving in a vision, had found it ridiculously easy to cop a piece long before the weight of the night.

" What fo', man ? "

" Kiss what for, mother, we makin' it or we gonna shoot through the grease all night ? " and with that he was out on the street with a .22 automatic.

And Ryan under the streetlamp was in his uniform working at his masonite clipboard with the taps numbed.

The vision was flame, gutsy, bullsy, macho mayhem, wrenching, roaring chaos that must first simmer slow, dull-throbbing and stone-hearth warm in the true central beef of a man (where the basso booms of the steady thumping, red-meat heart resound with a great force against heavy lifting sinews and thick striated muscles in whose tensioned lengths are contained the dynamic forces and powers of the body) before it bursts forth like a towering thunder rage using the big boned power and bashing, mauling, shoving strength of the upper chest and shoulders to hammer and pound. The split was testicular, jittery, out of frayed nerves and fluttering loins and snarling, cornered, ringtail rodent desperation of the pursued beast. Split and vision, passion and energy.

After midnight Eddie strolled into the Sillouette with the .22 drawn. The barroom tumult ebbed instantly.

" Let's all stay cool, mothers! " Eddie said. He could see his blue lit self in the mirror behind the bar.

" The bread, man, quick! " The bartender gave him two hundred and fifty dollars in a brown paper bag. Eddie told everyone to get on the floor face down and spread their legs. There were twelve patrons and the bartender. Eddie had them lie down in two lines perpendicular to and crossing one another. He gave each one a vicious kick to the apex of the vee that the spread legs made. Then he fired two shots into the old wooden NCR register that snarled through the wood and shattered metallic gears and grindings and one shot into the jukebox which made it gasp and expire with a tinny boxed Buck Owens and the Buckaroos chortle a smokey belch and a flash of light. Before grabbing the sack and OBLATION: Before grabbing the sack and running he picked up a bottle of Jim Crown Kentucky Bourbon and splashed his blue lit image in the ocean of obsidian brown mirror into numberless shards and fragments.

ARMORS GATHER THE EARTH: " Right 810, that's a male negro, approximately five feet eight inches tall wearing black denim dungarees and jacket moving south on Southern State Avenue. Suspect is wanted in connection with Farmingdale

bar holdup. Suspect is armed and on foot. Proceed to checkpoint 9, County Line Bowling Alley, Main Street and Southern State Avenue. Over. "

Ryan wheeled his big Ford into the County Line Bowling Alley parking lot with a gravel flying siren blaring flourish that had people rubbernecking from blocks away. He threw open the patrolcar door and stood in the mistshrouds in the shadows under the steady beat of ice-rain in a half crouch, blue uniformed chrome blaring metal heft of the .38 big and cool in his hand. Bowlers scurried behind doors and cars or simply stood gaping at this spectacle, curious with the big gun like a mysterious dart tongued snake in their eyes and tachycardiac poundings thrumming in their ears.

Lit by a single floodlight Ryan noted the rundown condition of the lot and the alley. And there, underneath a white Cadillac toward the rear of the lot Ryan saw a slip of a shadow move oddly, incongruously. He ran to the Cadillac. There, black panted, a sneaker.

" Alright, Freeze, Freeze ! " he hollered, crouching low and taking aim with two hands. The sneaker froze. Ryan closed in slightly.

" Now move out from under there ! Slow and steady, brother! " Ice-rain cold and harsh spilled off the peak of

of his hat ran down his cheeks and dribbled off his chin. Sneaker grew to calve, thigh, groin, waist, chest, Eddie slid out from under the Caddie.

" Don't move, brother, don't move a goddamn muscle! " Ryan surveyed the man momentarily. Something, a chill drop of rain, slithered like a freezing kiss down his chest and stomach, Ryan shivered.

" Alright get off your ass, stand up slow and carefully. Keep those hands out front where I can see'em, Rastus, spread'em out palms open facin' me."

Eddie stood up with his hands stretched out palms forward and stared at Ryan. The rain streamed down his face. It was a second, two, no more that Ryan caught the gust of wind and the ice in his eyes, before he cleared them Eddie had his gun drawn and stood facing Ryan, dead metal on metal. They stood for a moment, six feet apart and stared into each other's eyes and neither spoke, and there was something understood, something relaxed just before the almost simultaneous flashes spark belched from gunmetal heft.

Later, above the dark viscous circles of floodlit magenta on the ground, above the harsh bursts of flashbulbs, above the trench-coated hunched shouldered tight circles of baggy forms that shifted and shuffled nervously in soggy clothes in sloppy mudholes, on the white wall of the bowling

alley a reporter saw scribbled these words: UP YOURS MOTHER !

And in the shrouds the reporter shivered and pulled his collar up higher around his throat.