

Rubber Hose Real Estate

Los Angeles, California

I gently held Angie's wrist while she tied a lavender, paisley neck tie around her upper arm, slapping and waiting for a vein to emerge. Our eyes never left each other's, and when that vein bulged she found my soul with her gaze...then I stuck that needle in, soft and slow, pressing the plunger full of Mexican Mud into her irises.

Tino sat on the lid of his toilet while Lucy jabbed him with a speedball right in the neck.

Tino had asked me if I knew a girl who would mainline him in the jugular while he sat on the toilet in his office that was stacked wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling with books. He wanted me to photograph him, so there might remain some sort of a death mask of his existence.

Was Tino going out of his mind? I had read that between 1981 and 1985, death from speedballs had risen by 754%, and I wondered if Tino was creating courageously, or if he would end up another statistic. I knew two girls who might want to stick him in the neck--especially if he paid for their narcotics--but I'd have to go back to the neighborhood I grew up in to find Lucy and Angie.

Lucy was named after her mother's favorite Beatles song, and Angie's father had nick-named her after his favorite Stones song. Lucy and Angie were born at the height of commercialization's artistic expression spawning Rock-n-Roll's adoles-

cents.

I jumped off the bus and walked down New Avenue in South San Gabriel with Chacho, a childhood friend. I hadn't seen him in fifteen years or so and was surprised he wasn't in prison or dead.

Chacho was a spindly Mexican transvestite. He looked like a malnourished werewolf with bloodshot eyes and cracked lips and hard taste buds that were so dried out his tongue looked like rotted wood. Chacho started jittering and scratching, and his repetitive speech was beginning to annoy me as the neighborhood sweltered like the dried desert buried under the concrete of East Los Angeles. Chacho had been on a runner, low riding around town. I asked him if he knew where Lucy and Angie were.

"They're probably at Soto's."

I picked up my pace, and made my way to the old street that embodied my childhood memories, Ramona Boulevard.

As I walked onto Soto's porch I overheard him talking to Sleepy, a junkie *pachuco*, who came from a long line of junkie *pachucos*.

"Where did you get the little girl?" Soto asked Sleepy.

"I'm telling you I murdered a junkie, and you're asking me about a *chavala* I rescued from out of a demon."

A man bleeding from his ears, looking pale and stunned walked by Soto's house. I thought he was an undercover cop posing as a drug addict, but he wasn't posing.

"There goes that mother-fuckin' narc. Who the fuck's on my porch?" Soto shouted.

"I'd like to order a Fiesta-Bitch-Taco and a cup of Mrs. McGillicuddy's Cunt-Bustin' Juice," I answered.

"Motha-fuckin' Jack-off!" Soto exclaimed as he walk-ed out and grabbed me. "Dude. What-the-fuck? How long has it been, mother-fucker?"

Before I could answer Soto was yelling at the junkie walking by. "Get the fuck out of here, you lowlife narc! I got nothin' for you!"

"He said your name, *hommie*, only I heard it not so much out loud, but like he whispered it into my mind," Sleepy said with a thick *cholo* accent from inside the house.

The junkie-narc turned around and started walking in a confused circle. Sleepy sensed this and goose bumps popped all over his body. A tingling sensation vibrated his face.

Soto walked up to the junkie-narc, and checked him out.

I poked my head through the door frame and saw Sleepy swaying on his feet. Sleepy was mumbling that he could feel his feet lifting off the floor. Then he levitated, floating to the ceiling; the back of his neck pressed to it.

He cried out, "Soto! Soto! Pull me down, *hommie*!"

Soto handed a piece of paper to the junkie-narc, admonishing him, "You can't hackie-sack a turd you little bitch bone monkey. Now fuck-off!" Then he calmly walked into the house. "What-the-fuck!" Soto seized Sleepy's dangling arm and yanked his light body down from the ceiling. Sleepy's brown skin turned white. His eyes sunk deep into their sockets. He clung to Soto and in a hurried, soft voice he said, "Listen, *ese*, before it's too late. Last night in the early hours of morning my dogs were spooked by something outside, *ese*. I walked out and heard a noise I never heard before. It sounded like some kind of demonic animal. I saw a red bull across the street on my neighbor's yard. It charged me, *hommie*. It broke through my fence, *ese*. The bull smashed against the door, destroying my porch. It pounded against the door, cracking it. Then it disappeared. All of sudden this naked white devil with horns and wings was flying above me. It tried to grab me, but its hands went through me. Somehow, I wrestled it to the floor. I cried out to Jesus, but I doubted myself. Was I paying for my sins? But I'm not evil,

hommie. I slashed the devil's throat with my angel blade. Then this little girl came out of the white demon's bleeding neck. She was crying. She had been trying to escape. She reached out to me. I held her, like I'm holding you now because a demon is trying to possess me for stealing her away. Help me, *hommie*! Help me!"

Sleepy's face paled ghost white. He looked courageously terrified. He resembled someone who had been beaten with a logging chain. And then he passed out.

"What the hell's going on?" I asked Soto.

"Sleepy nodded out."

"How the fuck did he float to the ceiling?" I asked.

"That mother-fucker just got back from Chichén Itzá with his cousin, where they were shooting too much Mexican Mud and chewing mushrooms, and playing around with Palo Mayombe. He's been learning some universal language called Esperanto," Soto explained. "How the fuck should I know. Crazy *vato*'s been levitating since we were kids."

"Who's the teenager?"

"I don't know," Soto answered pissed-off. The teen-age girl didn't say a word or stir as she silently slept.

"Sleepy! Sleepy! Get your ass up, you juju, junkie mother-fucker! Come on, get up! Get the fuck out of here!" Soto commanded, nudging Sleepy with his boot. I went to the girl and quietly knelt beside her. As I stared into her face she felt my breath mix with hers and she opened her eyes. She had deep green eyes, with auburn lines running through them, leading to brown pupils. Her hair was bright, brick-red with a slight white streak running through it. Her body and nose were slender and her smile was full and embracing. When she opened her eyes she didn't look like a teenager, but more like a woman: a graceful, sexy woman. She reached out and held my chin with one hand and pulled my face to hers. She whispered in my ear, her

lips brushing through my hair. "I know you. I've always known you," she proclaimed. And I believed her.

Sleepy sat up, scrubbed his face, lifted himself off the floor by his hair, apologized, shook Soto's hand, and thanked him. Then he recognized me for the first time. "*Orale, ese*. What's up, *hommie*?" Sleepy asked with tired eyes, shaking my hand while he continued to scrub his face. "The compulsive urges of the thoughtless grow like a creeper. They jump like a monkey from one life to another, looking for fruit in the forest," Sleepy said to me, reciting a line from the Dhammapada. "Ok...Ok...Later, *hommies*," then he stumbled out the door. I turned around to say goodbye to the girl/ woman but she was already gone.

"What the fuck happened to you that night? I haven't seen you since...How long?" Soto asked, giving me a bear hug. "You want a vodka or Scotch? That's what you drink, right?"

"Vodka."

"What's it been, fifteen, twenty years?"

"Something like that," I answered.

But we spoke a couple of times on the telephone and bumped into each other at a Black Flag reunion concert, but we hadn't spent any significant time together since we last hung out at the Rose Bowl with a bunch of punk friends twenty years ago.

Soto was a tall, lanky, tatted-up punk back then and we had just graduated from high school. Now he was a tall, buffed out, tatted-up, long-hair slinging dope and rod busting for the Iron Workers Union, Local 416. He'd been in and out of prison for assault, narcotics and drunk driving, and he was most likely still a snap case.

About six friends and I had been hanging around the Rose Bowl after 2:00 a.m. when Joey, the toughest and meanest punk we knew, (nevertheless, our friend), came up behind Soto and

innocently tapped him on the shoulder, greeting him, “Hey man, what’s up?” Soto turned around and punched Joey in the nose, splitting it wide open. Joey flew back and stumbled over a retaining wall. Soto, surprised by whom he’d just laid out, went over to Joey, cradling his bleeding face with both hands, pillowing it in a gentle and nurturing embrace, apologizing, “Dude. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t know it was you, man.” And just as we all stood suspended in Soto’s heartfelt sorrow for busting Joey’s nose, Soto continued, “Joey, Dude. I’m sorry. I didn’t know it was you. I didn’t know it was you...I’m so sorry...But...But...It’s too late now.” Then Soto proceeded to pound Joey’s face, over-and-over-and-over again, until Joey passed out. When Soto snapped out of his logical reaction he turned around and snatched a beer with his bloody hand.

One might ask, “Why was Soto’s reaction logical?”

Once Joey’s eyes stopped watering from having his nose busted, he would have beat the shit out of Soto. Soto had to act while he had the upper hand, even though he was the one at fault. At this point Soto had to show everyone how crazy he was so no one would jump him, siding with Joey. Last man standing and all that shit.

Hanging out with Soto was a coin toss. One never knew if he was going to give a guy a big hug and hand him a drink, or if Soto was going punch the guy in the face. I was glad that he was offering me a vodka, and I didn’t want to talk about the last night we hung out. So I told him I moved to the East Coast.

I asked him if he knew where I could find Lucy and Angie.

“You and Angie use to romp,” he reminded me. “She’s not the same girl she used to be.”

“I’m not the same guy I used to be.”

“The fuck you aren’t...”

Just as Soto was about to remind me of my troubled youth

Lucy and Angie walked in. They had just escaped from Prototype Rehab for women, where the speed freaks obsessively cleaned the place and drank strong coffee, while the heroin addicts lounged around reading books and discussed politics and drug statistics.

Morris and Anina were with Lucy and Angie. In the past Morris kept Lucy warm as they slept in an alley near Temple and Alvarado, in East Hollywood, while Anina and Angie prostituted themselves to support all four of their addictions. Morris was a large, tall black man, who always behaved and spoke like a gentleman. Lucy attempted prostitution, charging only forty-dollars per fuck. She had one taker: a spindly *vato* named Spider from 18th Street. After him she was only offered four-dollars by lowlife junkies desperate to find out if they could still screw. Her career as a whore lasted three days, so she settled for Morris' comforting arms. Anina and Angie were able to pull thirty-dollars for head and sixty-plus-dollars per fuck.

Morris and Anina were hoping to cop some Mexican Mud from Soto who wasn't interested in Talley Sticks or Fractional Reserve Lending. All he gave them was a dime-bag of Mexican Rose and a large can of Mannitol baby laxative, which they could trade for some pills with a dealer in down town L.A. Then they were on their way.

I had patiently sat feeling the hole in my stomach expanding, which was molested by a natural frustration in the soul. Lucy and Angie thanked Anina and Morris for giving them a ride from Pomona. Then Angie recognized me. We stared motionlessly at each other, missing all the years between us. I thought of Abraham Heschel writing in *Man Is Not Alone*, "It is incumbent on us to obtain the perception of life eternal in everyday deeds." The time Angie and I spent apart suspended our shared experiences, which were never temporal. They were like cracks in the floor of heaven, illuminating images of what

could be. We were each other's center and the world revolved around our tender yet desperate dreams for one another. These two girls were everlasting in me, and Angie would always be the girl who reminded me of the infinite possibilities.

Lucy and Soto stood quietly watching Angie and me silently reacquainting ourselves. Then Soto had enough, "He's still the same jackoff he was when we were kids."

Lucy hugged me as if she were holding herself together with my arms. The roles had reversed, because Lucy and Angie had kept me from going out of my mind when we were young. Many times they yanked me back over the railing of the Eaton Canyon Bridge, or slapped my father's snub-nose .357--with one bullet in it--out of my hand, or picked me up from a puddle of puke and blood and tossed me in a cold bath. I wasn't trying to kill myself I was just a drunken-drugged-out-adrenaline junkie, at least that's what I felt like.

Lucy and Angie got me out of the neighborhood and talked to me about art, books, travel and philosophy. When we were in high school the three of us use to take off to Arizona or northern California. The two of them use to read to me. I'd ask them the meaning of words and concepts. I had never read an entire book until I was seventeen: Hemingway's *Farewell To Arms*, which was the first book to invoke a physical emotion in me. Lucy and Angie talked about how a book could scare them or make them cry or laugh or reflect on themselves or discover a world they knew nothing about. I was too busy getting high and hadn't the faintest idea that the written word could incite such personal meaning. These two girls mothered me into a new life and now they were tore up. Their bodies were ravaged from all the dope they injected.

Lucy had abscesses all over her body from shooting speed and heroin. She was inflicted with Bells Palsy while kicking heroin in the Glendale Jail, but she hadn't noticed it until she

was released. She went to a Thrifty Drug Store and bought an ice cream. The first lick slid out of her mouth. She caught a bus, wondering what was going wrong with her face. The bus driver watched her, in his rearview mirror, having a difficult time with the ice-cream dripping out of the left side of her mouth and on her shirt. Two Armenian girls were laughing. Lucy looked at her reflection in the window of the bus. She couldn't believe she had lost her smile.

Angie had contracted HIV from hooking or slamming dope. She was never quite sure from which, but she suspected that she rigged it by sharing a needle with a crippled male prostitute, who died two years later from AIDS. But she still looked gorgeous.

Angie and I used to make love in the back seat of the Lucy's car as she drove around the Foothills. I always had a bag of coke or some weed, Angie always had money, and Lucy had a car. All three of us had an appetite for anything that wasn't in the neighborhood, trying to escape the sweat of our streets. We were inseparable for three years and then I left.

I went through a fanatical religious faze. It was my way of getting clean. Lucy was accepted to UCLA, where she majored in psychology but got strung out on speed, believing she was born into the Illuminati only she hadn't actualized her privileges yet. She thought the Illuminati would contact her when she had attained some secret knowledge, so she followed every white car on the freeway with a half ounce of meth tucked in her bra. She did this until, Aleida, her Mexican psychic gave her the whammy and set her straight. Angie decided to follow Marco Polo's Silk Route, only she never made it past West Hollywood, where she went from chipping to becoming a full blown junkie. All three of us went through a two year period where we lived in a cheating confusion, which we never resolved but found our way out of. Then Lucy and Angie found

each other again; whereas, I moved to Boston and then to New York, Mexico, Spain and Italy, and then to Oklahoma and Northern California. Now I was back in L.A.

The first time Lucy stuck a needle in her arm was at a Latvian dance convention in Long Beach. Angie slammed her first dose in the bathroom at the Whisky-A-Go-Go, during a Faster Pussycat show. I never put a needle in my arm, and Soto only sold the shit in between Union jobs. The four of us had a few drinks. Angie and I didn't say a word to each other. We just caught each other in between missing glimpses that said everything that was necessary for the time.

Lucy's car was in Soto's garage so I asked her and Angie for a ride.

As we drove to Pasadena I told them about Tino. Lucy was always the most inquisitive and wanted to know as much as she could about Tino. Angie was looking extremely tired. She held my hand as she tried to stay awake.

Tino had been a rich kid who was educated at Eton and went to Oxford to study linguistics and began studying copies of Sumerian clay cuneiform tablets. His parents owned a veranda outside of Barcelona where Tino spent his vacations. When he graduated from Oxford with a Master's in Linguistics he moved to Los Angeles where he landed a job rewriting scripts until he went from chipping to becoming a full blown addict. When his parents died he shot half his inheritance up his arm. One night after the Domino's Pizza boy left, delivering ribs and a six pack of Mountain Dew, he shot a heavy dose and passed out for two days. When he woke up he discovered that he had no feeling in his left arm. He rushed to the emergency, where the doctors explained that he had killed all the nerves in his arm and that it would have to be amputated. He asked if there was another solution. There was, but it was experimental and costly. Tino sunk the rest of his inheritance into saving the

arm that he used to mainline in. The doctors sent him to Chicago where bionics were implanted in his arm. Then they waited, hoping he would not contract any infections, which he did and was forced to amputate the arm anyway. The loss of his arm was a daily reminder that he had become a junkie who would never get as high as he did the first time.

When he returned to L.A. he started using the other arm to shoot coke in the morning and heroin throughout the day, until he nodded out too many times, so he'd shoot more coke and then slam a large dose of heroin to sleep. He did this for three years. Then he was arrested and sent to County Jail for six months. During this time his girlfriend od'd and Tino fell into a depression that he never recovered from, but he did cleanup for about six years.

A friend of ours, who worked in the movie industry, would use on his down time and got pretty strung-out. Tino tried to help him get clean, but Tino just started using with him. He's been at it hard, now, for seven years.

Lucy was excited by Tino's story. When we got to Tino's office her panties were wet, and she pulled them off to prove it.

Angie fell asleep in my arms as I read Wu Ch'Êng-Ên's *Monkey* to her. She felt free and independent, with no worries, as if she had been carved out of stone and brought to life by a warm, tender wind. She looked peacefully lost, waiting to leave this world; not anxious; just ready. When she woke, she asked me if I would shoot her. I resisted having never done anything like that before. She assured me it was easy and not as frightening as when we were children getting immunized. She sat close to me and whispered on my lips that she wanted it to be me. I understood perfectly what was about to happen. Lucy and I both knew what was going on. Tino no longer felt that he was alone. All four of us knew. But I was having a difficult time accepting it.

I walked outside and lit a cigarette. Lucy followed me and explained that Angie was ridiculously tired of being sick, and that both of them believed it wasn't a coincidence we had found each other that day, or that Tino had brought us together.

"You don't know what the fuck you're talking about. Three lonely junkies, that's all," I said lying to myself.

"That's right. But you're the loneliest person I have ever known. I know you're up for this." Lucy reached for my cigarette then took a drag.

"This is why I woke up this morning? This is the Reason I got out of bed today, to do this?"

"That's right, Reason with a capital R. You got it. I been taking care of her all these years and now you're here to do this," Lucy explained with a gentle, appreciating tone.

We smoked the rest of my cigarette together in silence. Then we went inside, where Angie and Tino were preparing their syringes with large doses of black tar heroin. Tino mixed his with cocaine.

I couldn't take my eyes off of Angie. Her slender frame, long legs, small breasts, beautiful brown hair, penetrating green eyes, elfish ears and smile reminded me of the time when I first felt the autumn winds. She took hold of my sleeve, tugging me towards her. Lucy bent over and hugged Angie. With tears in Lucy's eyes, she whispered her ever constant love for Angie. Then Lucy pulled away and followed Tino into the bathroom.

Angie and I sank into the center of the sofa. She kissed me between my eyes and slid her lips down to mine. We pulled ourselves deeper into each other. Our lips felt like the first time we kissed, when we were naïve, believing we would become who we'd always dreamt of, but we'd never developed the discipline to manifest those dreams; nevertheless, it was a peaceful moment with no longings or surprises.

Angie positioned her arm on my lap and tightened a lav-

ender tie around it. She showed me where to stick the needle. When her vein surfaced I stuck it sensitively. I pulled the plunger back a little bit watching her blood flow into the syringe. We sat in suspension, exchanging our lost years for one more innocent moment shared together. The ethereal hovered over us. We found ourselves in another kiss as I slowly released the brown mud that would never give me back the girl I once knew. I felt her final touch for one last time as she rushed through me. Then she disappeared.

I sat with her head in my lap for about fifteen minutes. I felt empty and quiet. There were no invasive thoughts...Nothing...Just a still and silent presence.

I heard Lucy washing up in the bathroom. I set Angie's head gently on the sofa and got up to snap a shot of Tino in his everlasting slumber with Lucy's wet panties stretched tight around his neck.

Then I sat back down next to Angie returning her head to my lap. Lucy sat next to me combing her fingers through Angie's hair. We didn't say a word for about an hour. Then she knelt beside Angie in a reverent manner and whispered on Angie's parted lips, "Angie, you're my favorite."

Lucy and I looked at each other as if asking, "What do we do now?" But the answer revealed itself before we had the chance to ask. We exchanged our lifeless dueling kisses for Angie's animating kiss. Then we left like a couple of feral alley cats, dragging courage behind us tied to our broken tails.