

"Fear and Loathing in Elko" is a short story by Hunter S. Thompson that appeared in Rolling Stone #622, January 1992. In this sad screed, our favorite gonzo journalist describes an alleged encounter with Justice Clarence Thomas, prior to his nomination and appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. Shortly before this story's publication, Thompson was tried and acquitted on charges of sexual harassment and assault. He referred to his arrest as a "lifestyle bust." Readers can draw their own conclusions regarding the moral of this tale.

A Wild and Ugly Night With Judge Clarence Thomas...Bad Crazyiness in Sheep Country...Sexual Harassment Then and Now...A Nasty Christmas Flashback and a Nation of Jailers

Fear and Loathing in Elko

Hunter S. Thompson

RS #622, January 23, 1992

[Part I] Memo From the National Affairs Desk: Sexual Harassment Then and Now..The Ghost of Long Dong Thomas...The Road Full of Forks

Dear Jann,

God damn, I wish you were here to enjoy this beautiful weather with me. It is autumn, as you know, and things are beginning to die. It is so wonderful to be out in the crisp fall air, with the leaves turning gold and the grass turning brown, and the warmth going out of the sunlight and big hot fires in the fireplace while Buddy rakes the lawn. We see a lot of bombs on TV because we watch it a lot more, now that the days get shorter and shorter, and darkness comes so soon, and all the flowers die from freezing.

Oh, God! You should have been with me yesterday when I finished my ham and eggs and knocked back some whiskey and picked up my Weatherby Mark V .300 Magnum and a ball of black Opium for dessert and went outside with a fierce kind of joy in my heart because I was Proud to be an American on a day like this. It felt like a goddamn Football Game, Jann -- it was like Paradise.... You remember that bliss you felt when we powered down to the farm and whipped Stanford? Well, it felt like That.

I digress. My fits of Joy are soiled by relentless flashbacks and ghosts too foul to name....Oh no, don't ask Why. You could have been president, Jann, but your road was full of forks, and I think of this when I see the forked horns of these wild animals who dash back and forth on the hillsides while rifles crack in the distance and fine swarthy young men with blood on their hands drive back and forth in the dusk and mournfully call our names....

O Ghost, O Lost, Lost and Gone, O Ghost, come back again.

Right. and so much for autumn. The trees are diseased and the Animals get in your way and the President is usually guilty and most days are too long, anyway....So never mind my poem. It was wrong from the start. I plagiarized it from an early work of Coleridge and then tried to put my own crude stamp on it, but I failed.

So what? I didn't want to talk about fucking autumn, anyway. I was just sitting here at dawn on a crisp Sunday morning, waiting for the football games to start and taking a goddamn very brief break from this blizzard of Character Actors and Personal Biographers and sickly Paparazzi that hovers around me these days (they are sleeping now, thank Christ -- some even in my own bed). I was sitting here all alone, thinking, for good or ill, about the Good Old Days.

We were Poor, Jann. But we were Happy. Because we knew Tricks. We were Smart. Not Crazy, like they said. (No. They never called us late for dinner, eh?)

Ho, ho. Laughs don't come cheap these days, do they? The only guy who seems to have any fun in public is Prince Cromwell, my shrewd and humorless neighbor -- the one who steals sheep and beats up women, like Mike Tyson.

Who knows why, Jann. Some people are too weird to figure.

You have come a long way from the Bloodthirsty, Beady-eyed news Hawk that you were in days of yore. Maybe you should try reading something besides those goddamn motorcycle magazines -- or one of these days you'll find hair growing in your palms.

Take my word for it. You can only spend so much time "on the throttle," as it were....Then the Forces of Evil will take over. Beware....

Ah, but that is a different question, for now. Who gives a fuck? We are, after all, Professionals....But our Problem is not. No. It is the Problem of Everyman. It is Everywhere. The Question is our Wa; the Answer is our Fate.... and the story I am about to tell you is horrible, Jann.

I came suddenly awake, weeping and jabbering and laughing like a loon at the ghost on my TV set....Judge Clarence Thomas....Yes, I knew him. But that was a long time ago. Many years, in fact, but I still remember it vividly....Indeed, it has haunted me like a Golem, day and night, for many years.

It seemed normal enough, at the time, just another weird rainy night out there on the high desert....What the Hell? We were younger, then. Me and the Judge. And all the others, for that matter....It was a Different Time. People were friendly. We trusted each other. Hell, you afford to get mixed up with wild strangers in those days -- without fearing for your life, or your eyes, or your organs, or all of your money or even getting locked up in prison forever. There was a sense of possibility. People were not so afraid, as they are now.

You could run around naked without getting shot. You could check into a motel in Winnemucca or Elko when you were lost in a midnight rainstorm -- and nobody called the police on you, just to check out your credit and your employment history and your medical records and how many parking tickets you owed in California.

There were Laws, but they were not feared. There were Rules, but they were not worshiped....like Laws and Rules and Cops and Informants are feared and worshiped today.

Like I said: It was a different time. And I know the Judge would

tell you the same thing, tonight, if he wanted to tell you the Truth, like I do.

The first time I actually met the Judge was a long time ago, for strange reasons, on a dark and rainy night in Elko, Nevada, when we both ended up in the same sleazy roadside Motel, for no good reason at all....Good God! What a night!

I almost forgot about it, until I saw him last week on TV....and then I saw it all over again. The horror! The horror! That night when the road washed out and we all got stuck out there -- somewhere near Elko in a place just off the highway, called Endicott's Motel -- and we almost went really Crazy.

Yours,
HST

P.S. And, speaking of crazy, take a look at this riff on the Judge and Sexual Harassment that I received yesterday from that brute who runs the Sports Desk. He must have been drunk when he wrote it -- but whiskey is no excuse for this kind of brainless, atavistic gibberish.

I want that screwhead fired! He was harmless once, but ever since Judge Thomas got confirmed for the High court, he has been mauling women shamelessly. Last week he pinned my secretary against a hot wall in the mainframe room and almost twisted her nipples off. Then he laughed and said it was legal now, and if I didn't like it, I could take him to court [see enclosed memo, below]. It was addressed to me, but I have a feeling we'll be seeing it soon, taped up on the wall of the Men's Room -- and probably the Women's Room too.

Special Advisory From the Sports Desk
To: HST
From: Raoul Duke, Ed.

I need your help, Doc. They're trying to bust me on Sex charges. The snake has come out of the bag, and soon they'll be after you. Your phone will be ringing all night with obscene calls from Radical Lesbian Separatists.

You know how I feel about Victims, Doc, and also how I worship the First Amendment -- along with the Fourth, of course....

And all of the others, including our God-given Right to praise the President when he pulls off a Great Victory and rips the nuts off the Enemy. It was wonderful, Doc. We beat them like shit-eating dogs. They came, they failed, and now we will gnaw on their skulls. When the going gets tough, the tough get going, eh? Right! Fuck those people! Death to the Weird! We will march on a road of bones! Sieg Heil!

(Whoops. Strike that.) What I meant to say was Hot Damn! We're back in the Saddle again! And I don't mean maybe....Right. You know me, Doc. I'm a gracious Loser -- but when I win, I must Kick Ass!

That is the Law of Nature: Life is a brainless struggle, and "the Meek" will jabber and die like brain-damaged rats in a maze, long before they will ever have time to even think about inheriting the

goddamn Earth -- much less the White House.

No. don't worry about that, Doc. The Nigger is on the run all over the World, and we want to keep him that way. (Or "her" or "it" or "them" if you what I'm saying....) They are not necessarily Black, Doc, and many are not of our Gender....

But so what? They are Niggers, and we're Not! Hell, yes! That's what it comes down to. They were Fools! It was like the Charge of the Light Brigade. They rode into the Valley of Death, and We stomped them....They were Wrong from the start, but they fooled a lot of people, for a while....

Thank God we got off that stinking Death Ship while we still had the chance, eh?....They screeched like Hyenas for a while, but then they ran like Rats. Shit on them. That's what I say. Those bitches got their tits caught in a wringer.

Okay. Congress is a sinkhole of Whores. We all know that. Shit. Sexual Harassment is what Congress is all about. It was the Way of Our Forefathers, and it is Right!

Hot damn: I feel good about Myself today, Doc. I feel innocent for a change.... and I guess you feel the Same Way, eh?

Jesus. They had us on the run there, for a few days. The Fat Lady was ready to sing, and I was starting to guilty about almost Everything.... Especially touching Women -- or even myself, for a while. It was Horrible. It got so I was afraid to ride the same elevator with a woman. It was too risky. What if she was one of these crazy New Age bitches that want to kick you in the nuts and then get you busted for "fondling" them?

What kind of life would it be if you went to jail or got ruined every time you tried to flirt with a pretty woman? Let's face it, Doc. We are all Rapists, one way or another. The trick is not to get Busted for it....Which is almost what happened, Doc. BUT IT DIDN'T No! We were NOT Guilty! They called us bullies and Mashers, but we were only falling in Love....

--Raoul Duke, Sports

[Part II] Fear and Loathing in Elko: Bad Craziiness in Sheep Country....Side Entrance on Queer Street....O Black, O Wild, O Darkness, Roll Over Me Tonight

It was just after midnight when I first saw the sheep. I was running about eighty-eight or ninety miles an hour in a drenching, blinding rain on U.S. 40 between Winnemucca and Elko with one light out. I was soaking wet from the water that was pouring in through a hole in the front roof of the car, and my fingers were like rotten icicles on the steering wheel.

It was a moonless night and I knew I was hydroplaning, which is dangerous.... My front tires were no longer in touch with the asphalt or anything else. My center of gravity was too high. There was no visibility on the road, none at all. I could have tossed a flat rock a

lot farther than I could see in front of me that night though the rain and the ground fog.

So what? I thought. I know this road -- a straight lonely run across nowhere, with not many dots on the map except ghost towns and truck stops with names like Beowawe and Lovelock and Deeth and Winnemucca....

Jesus! Who made this map? Only a lunatic could have come up with a list of places like this: Imlay, Valmy, Golconda, Nixon, Midas, Metropolis, Jiggs, Judasville -- all of them empty, with no gas stations, withering away in the desert like a string of old Pony Express stations. The Federal Government owns ninety percent of this land, and most of it is useless for anything except weapons testing and poison-gas experiments.

My plan was to keep moving. Never slow down. Keep the car aimed straight ahead through the rain like a cruise missile....I felt comfortable. There is a sense of calm and security that comes with driving a very fast car on an empty road at night....Fuck this thunderstorm, I thought. There is safety in speed. Nothing can touch me as long as I keep moving fast, and never mind the cops: They're all hunkered down in a truck stop or jacking off by themselves in a culvert behind some dynamite shack in the wilderness beyond the highway....Either way, they wanted no part of me, and I wanted no part of them. Only trouble could come of it. They were probably nice people, and so was I -- but we were not meant for each other. History had long since determined that. There is a huge body of evidence to support the notion that me and the police were put on this earth to do extremely different things and never to mingle professionally with each other, except at official functions, when we all wear ties and drink heavily and whoop it up like the natural, good-humored wild boys that we know in our hearts that we are..These occasions are rare, but they happen -- despite the forked tongue of fate that has put us forever on different paths....But what the hell? I can handle a wild birthday party with cops, now and then. Or some unexpected orgy at a gun show in Texas. Why not? Hell, I ran for Sheriff one time, and almost got elected. They understand this, and I get along fine with the smart ones.

But not tonight, I thought, I sped along in the darkness. Not at 100 miles an hour at midnight on a rain-slicked road in Nevada. Nobody needs to get involved in a high-speed chase on a filthy night like this. It would be dumb and extremely dangerous. Nobody driving a red 454 V-8 Chevrolet convertible was likely to pull over and surrender peacefully at the first sight of a cop car behind him. All kinds of weird shit might happen, from a gunfight with dope fiends to permanent injury or death....It was a good night to stay indoors and be warm, make a fresh pot of coffee and catch up on important paperwork. Lay low and ignore these loonies. Anybody behind the wheel of a car tonight was far too crazy to fuck with, anyway.

Which was probably true. There was nobody on the road except me and a few big-rig Peterbilts running west to Reno and Sacramento by dawn. I could hear them on my nine-band Super-Scan shortwave/CB/Police radio, which erupted now and then with outbursts of brainless speed gibberish about Big Money and Hot Crank and teenage cunts with huge tits.

They were dangerous Speed Freaks, driving twenty-ton trucks that might cut loose and jackknife at any moment, utterly out of control.

There is nothing more terrifying than suddenly meeting a jackknifed Peterbilt with no brakes coming at you sideways at sixty or seventy miles per hour on a steep mountain road at three o'clock in the morning. There is a total understanding, all at once, of how the captain of the Titanic must have felt when he first saw the Iceberg.

And not much different from the hideous feeling that gripped me when the beam of my Long-Reach Super-Halogen headlights picked up what appeared to be a massive rock slide across the highway -- right in front of me, blocking the road completely. Big white rocks and round boulders, looming up with no warning in a fog of rising steam or swamp gas....

The brakes were useless, the car wandering. The rear end was coming around. I jammed it down into Low, but it made no difference, so I straightened it out and braced for a serious impact, a crash that would probably kill me. This is It, I thought. This is how it happens -- slamming into a pile of rocks at 100 miles an hour, a sudden brutal death in a fast red car on a moonless night in a rainstorm somewhere on the sleazy outskirts of Elko. I felt vaguely embarrassed, in that long pure instant before I went into the rocks. I remembered Los Lobos and that I wanted to call Maria when I got to Elko....

My heart was full of joy as I took the first hit, which was oddly soft and painless. No real shock at all. Just a sickening thud, like running over a body, a corpse -- or, ye fucking gods, a crippled 200-pound sheep thrashing around in the road.

Yes. These huge white lumps were not boulders. They were sheep. Dead and dying sheep. More and more of them, impossible to miss at this speed, piled up on each other like bodies at the battle of Shiloh. It was like running over wet logs. Horrible, horrible....

And then I saw the man -- a leaping Human Figure in the glare of my bouncing headlight, waving his arms and yelling, trying to flag me down. I swerved to avoid hitting him, but he seemed not to see me, rushing straight into my headlights like a blind man....or a monster from Mars with no pulse, covered with blood and hysterical.

It looked like a small black gentleman in a London Fog raincoat, frantic to get my attention. It was so ugly that my brain refused to accept it....Don't worry, I thought. This is only an Acid flashback. Be calm. This is not really happening.

I was down to about thirty-five or thirty when I zoomed past the man in the raincoat and bashed the brains out of a struggling sheep, which helped to reduce my speed, as the car went airborne again, then bounced to a shuddering stop just before I hit the smoking, overturned hulk of what looked like a white Cadillac limousine, with people still inside. It was a nightmare. Some fool had crashed into a herd of sheep at high speed and rolled into the desert like an eggbeater.

We were able to laugh about it later, but it took a while to calm down. What the hell? It was only an accident. The Judge had murdered some strange animals.

So what? Only a racist maniac would run sheep on the highway in a thunderstorm at this hour of the night. "Fuck those people!" he snapped, as I took off toward Elko with him and his two female companions tucked safely into my car, which had suffered major cosmetic damage but nothing serious. "They'll never get away with this

Negligence!" he said. "We'll eat them alive in court. Take my word for it. We are about to become joint owners of a huge Nevada sheep ranch."

Wonderful, I thought. But meanwhile we were leaving the scene of a very conspicuous wreck that was sure to be noticed by morning, and the whole front of my car was gummed up with wool and sheep's blood. There was no way I could leave it parked on the street in Elko, where I'd planned to stop for the night (maybe two or three nights, for that matter) to visit with some old friends who were attending a kind of Appalachian Conference for sex-film distributors at the legendary Commercial Hotel....

Never mind that, I thought. Things have changed. I was suddenly a Victim of Tragedy -- injured and on the run, far out in the middle of sheep country -- 1000 miles from home with car full of obviously criminal hitchhikers who were spattered with blood and cursing angrily at each other as we zoomed through the blinding monsoon.

Jesus, I thought Who are these people?

Who indeed? They seemed not to notice me. The two women fighting in the back seat were hookers. No doubt about that. I had seen them in my headlights as they struggled in the wreckage of the Cadillac, which had killed about sixty sheep. They were desperate with Fear and Confusion, crawling wildly across the sheep....One was a tall black girl in a white minidress...and now she was screaming at the other one, a young blond white woman. They were both drunk. Sounds of struggle came from the back seat. "Get your hands off me, Bitch!" Then a voice cried out, "Help me, Judge! Help! She's killing me!"

What? I thought. Judge? Then she said it again, and a horrible chill went through me....Judge? No. That would be over the line. Unacceptable.

He lunged over the back seat and whacked their heads together. "Shut up!" he screamed. "Where are your fucking manners?"

He went over the seat again. He grabbed one of them by the hair. "God damn you," he screamed. "Don't embarrass this man. He saved our lives. We owe him respect -- not this god damned squalling around like whores."

A shudder ran through me, but I gripped the wheel and stared straight ahead, ignoring this sudden horrible freak show in my car. I lit a cigarette, but I was not calm. Sounds of sobbing and the ripping of cloth came from the back seat. The man they called Judge had straightened himself out and was now resting easily in the front seat, letting out long breaths of air....The silence was terrifying: I quickly turned up the music. It was Los Lobos again -- something about "One time One Night in America," a profoundly morbid tune about Death and Disappointment:

A lady dressed in white
With the man she loved
Standing along the side of their pickup truck
A shot rang out in the night
Just when everything seemed right

Right. A shot. A shot rang out in the night. Just another headline written down in America....Yes. There was a loaded .454 Magnum revolver in a clearly marked oak box on the front seat, about halfway

between me and the Judge. He could grab it in a split second and blow my head off.

"Good work, Boss," he said suddenly. " I owe you a big one, for this. I was done for, if you hadn't come along." He chuckled. "Sure as hell, Boss, sure as hell. I was Dead Meat -- killed a lot worse than those goddamn stupid sheep!"

Jesus! I thought. Get ready to hit the brake. This man is a Judge on the lam with two hookers. He has no choice but to kill me, and those two floozies in the back seat too. We were the only witnesses.... This eerie perspective made me uneasy....Fuck this, I thought. These people are going to get me locked up. I'd be better off just pulling over right here and killing all three of them. Bang, Bang, Bang! Terminate the scum.

"How far is town? the Judge asked.

I jumped, and the car veered again. "Town?" I said.

"What town?" My arms were rigid and my voice was strange and reedy.

He whacked me on the knee and laughed. "Calm down, Boss," he said. "I have everything under control. We're almost home." He pointed into the rain, where I was beginning to see the dim lights of what I knew to be Elko.

"Okay," he snapped. "Take a left, straight ahead." He pointed again and I slipped the car into low. There was a red and blue neon sign glowing about a half-mile ahead of us, barely visible in the storm. The only words I could make out were NO and VACANCY.

"Slow down!" the Judge screamed. "This is it! Turn! Goddamnit, turn!" His voice had the sound of a whip cracking. I recognized the tone and did as he said, curling into the mouth of the curve with all four wheels locked and the big engine snarling wildly in Compound Low and the blue flames coming out of the tailpipe....It was one of those long perfect moments in the human driving experience that makes everybody quiet. Where is P.J.? I thought. This would bring him to his knees.

We were sliding sideways very fast and utterly out of control and coming up on a white steel guardrail at seventy miles an hour in a thunderstorm on a deserted highway in the middle of the night.

Why not? On some nights Fate will pick you up like a chicken and slam you around on the walls until your body feels like a beanbag....BOOM! BLOOD! DEATH! So long, Bubba -- You knew it would End like this....

We stabilized and shot down the loop. The Judge seemed oddly calm as he pointed again. "This is it," he said. "This is my place. I keep a few suites here." He nodded eagerly. "We're finally safe, Boss. We can do anything we want in this place."

The sign at the gate said:

ENDICOTT'S MOTEL
DELUXE SUITES AND WATERBEDS
ADULTS ONLY/NO ANIMALS

Thank god, I thought. It was almost too good to be true. A place to dump these bastards. They were quiet now, but not for long. And I knew I couldn't handle it when these women woke up.

The Endicott was a string of cheap-looking bungalows, laid out in a horseshoe pattern around a rutted gravel driveway. There were cars parked in front of most of the units, but the slots in front of the brightly lit places at the darker end of the horseshoe were empty.

"Okay," said the Judge. "We'll drop the ladies down there at our suite, then I'll get you checked in." He nodded. "We both need some sleep, Boss -- or at least rest, if you know what I mean. Shit, it's been a long night."

I laughed, but it sounded like the bleating of a dead man. The adrenaline rush of the sheep crash was gone, and now I was sliding into pure Fatigue Hysteria. The Endicott "Office" was a darkened hut in the middle of the horseshoe. We parked in front of it and then the Judge began hammering on the wooden front door, but there was no immediate response...."Wake up, goddamnit! It's me -- the Judge! Open up! This is Life and Death! I need help!"

He stepped back and delivered a powerful kick at the door, which rattled the glass panels and shook the whole building. "I know you're in there," he screamed. "You can't hide! I'll kick your ass till your nose bleeds!"

There was still no sign of life, and I quickly abandoned all hope. Get out of here, I thought. This is wrong. I was still in the car, half in and half out...The Judge put another fine snap-kick at a point just over the doorknob and uttered a sharp scream in some language I didn't recognize. Then I heard the sound of breaking glass.

I leapt back into the car and started the engine. Get away! I thought. Never mind sleep. It's flee or die, now. People get killed for doing this kind of shit in Nevada. It was far over the line. Unacceptable behavior. This is why God made shotguns...

I saw lights come on in the Office. Then the door swung open and I saw the Judge leap quickly through the entrance and grapple briefly with a small bearded man in a bathrobe, who collapsed to the floor after the Judge gave him a few blows to the head...Then he called back to me. "Come on in, Boss," he yelled. "Meet Mister Henry."

I shut off the engine and staggered up the gravel path. I felt sick and woozy, and my legs were like rubber bands.

The Judge reached out to help me. I shook hands with Mr. Henry, who gave me a key and a form to fill out. "Bullshit," said the Judge. "This man is my guest. He can have anything he wants. Just put it on my bill."

"Of course," said Mr. Henry. "Your bill. Yes. I have it right here." He reached under his desk and came up with a nasty-looking bundle of adding-machine tapes and scrawled Cash/Payment memos...."You got here just in time," he said. "We were about to notify the Police."

"What?" said the Judge. "Are you nuts? I have a goddamn platinum American Express card! My credit is impeccable."

"Yes," said Mr. Henry. "We know that. We have total respect for you."

Your signature is better than gold bullion." The Judge smiled and whacked the flat of his hand on the counter. "You bet it is!" he snapped. "So get out of my goddamn face! You must be crazy to fuck with Me like this! You fool! Are you ready to go to court?"

"Please, Judge," he said. Don't do this to me. All I need is your card. Just let me run an imprint. That's all." He moaned and stared more or less at the Judge, but I could see that his eyes were not focused...."They're going to fire me," he whispered. "They want to put me in jail."

"Nonsense!" the Judge snapped. "I would never let that happen. You can always plead." He reached out and gently gripped Mr. Henry's wrist. "Believe me, Bro," he hissed. "You have nothing to worry about. You are cool. They will never lock you up! They will Never take you away! Not out of my courtroom!"

"Thank you," Mr. Henry replied. "But all I need is your card and your signature. That's the problem: I forgot to run it when you checked in."

"So what?" the Judge barked. "I'm good for it. How much do you need?"

"About \$22,000," said Mr. Henry. "Probably \$23,000 by now. You've had those suites for nineteen days with total room service."

"What?" the Judge yelled. "You thieving bastards! I'll have you crucified by American Express. You are finished in this business. You will never work again! Not anywhere in the world! Then he whipped Mr. Henry across the front of his face so fast that I barely saw it.

"Stop crying!" he said. "Get a grip on yourself! This is embarrassing!"

Then he slapped the man again. "Is that all you want?" he said. "Only a card? A stupid little card? A piece of plastic shit?"

Mr. Henry nodded. "Yes, Judge," he whispered. "That's all. Just a stupid little card."

The Judge laughed and reached into his raincoat, as if to jerk out a gun or at least a huge wallet. "You want a card, whoreface? Is that it? Is that all you want? You filthy little scumbag! Here it is!"

Mr. Henry cringed and whimpered. Then he reached out to accept the Card, the thing that would set him free...The Judge was still grasping around in the lining of his raincoat. "What the fuck?" he muttered. "This thing has too many pockets! I can feel it, but I can't find the slit!"

Mr. Henry seemed to believe him, and so did I, for a minute....Why not? He was a judge with a platinum credit card -- a very high roller. You don't find many Judges, these days, who can handle a full caseload in the morning and run wild like a goat in the afternoon. That is a very hard dollar, and very few can handle it....but the Judge was a Special Case.

Suddenly he screamed and fell sideways, ripping and clawing at the lining of his raincoat. "Oh, Jesus!" he wailed. "I've lost my wallet! It's gone. I left it out there in the Limo, when we hit the fucking

sheep."

"So what?" I said. "We don't need it for this. I have many plastic cards."

He smiled and seemed to relax. "How many?" he said. "We might need more than one."

I woke up in the bathtub -- who knows how much later -- to the sound of the hookers shrieking next door. The New York Times had fallen in and blackened the water. For many hours I tossed and turned like a crack baby in a cold hallway. I heard thumping Rhythm & Blues -- serious rock & roll, and I knew that something wild was going on in the Judge's suites. The smell of amyl nitrate came from under the door. It was no use. It was impossible to sleep through this orgy of ugliness. I was getting worried. I was already a marginally legal person, and now I was stuck with some crazy Judge who had my credit card and owed me \$23,000.

I had some whiskey in the car, so I went out into the rain to get some ice. I had to get out. As I walked past the other rooms, I looked in people's windows and feverishly tried to figure out how to get my credit card back. Then from behind me I heard the sound of a tow-truck winch. The Judge's white Cadillac was being dragged to the ground. The Judge was whooping it up with the tow-truck driver, slapping him on the back.

"What the hell? It was only property damage," he laughed.

"Hey, Judge," I called out. "I never got my card back."

"Don't worry," he said. "It's in my room -- come on."

I was right behind him when he opened the door to his room, and I caught a glimpse of a naked woman dancing. As soon as the door opened, the woman lunged for the Judge's throat. She pushed him back outside and slammed the door in his face.

"Forget that credit card -- we'll get some cash," the Judge said. "Let's go down to the Commercial Hotel. My friends are there and they have plenty of money."

We stopped for a six-pack on the way. The Judge went into a sleazy liquor store that turned out to be a front for kinky marital aids. I offered him money for the beer, but he grabbed my whole wallet.

Ten minutes later, the Judge came out with \$400 worth of booze and a bagful of Triple-X-Rated movies. "My buddies will like this stuff," he said. "And don't worry about the money, I told you I'm good for it. These guys carry serious cash."

The marquee above the front door of the Commercial Hotel said:

WELCOME: ADULT FILM PRESIDENTS
STUDEBAKER SOCIETY
FULL ACTION CASINO/KENO IN LOUNGE

"Park right her in front," said the Judge. "Don't worry. I'm well known in this place."

Me too, but I said nothing. I have been well known at the Commercial

for many years, from the time when I was doing a lot of driving back and forth between Denver and San Francisco -- usually for Business reasons, or for Art, and on this particular weekend I was there to meet quietly with a few old friends and business associates from the Board of Directors of the Adult Film Association of America. I had been, after all, the Night Manager of the famous O'Farrell Theatre, in San Francisco -- "the Carnegie Hall of Sex in America."

I was the Guest of Honor, in fact -- but I saw no point in confiding these things to the Judge, a total stranger with no Personal Identification, no money and a very aggressive lifestyle. We were on our way to the Commercial Hotel to borrow money from some of his friends in the Adult Film business.

What the hell? I thought. It's only Rock & Roll. And he was, after all, a judge of some kind....Or maybe not. For all I knew he was a criminal pimp with no fingerprints, or a wealthy black shepherd from Spain. But it hardly mattered. He was good company (if you had a taste for the edge work -- and I did, in those days. And so, I felt, did the Judge). He had a bent sense of fun, a quick mind and no Fear of anything.

The front door of the Commercial looked strangely busy at this hour of night in a bad rainstorm, so I veered off and drove slowly around the block in low gear.

"There's a side entrance on Queer Street," I said to the Judge, as we hammered into a flood of black water. He seemed agitated, which worried me a bit.

"Calm down," I said. "We don't want to make a scene in this place. All we want is money."

"Don't worry," he said. "I know these people. They are friends. Money is nothing. They will be happy to see me."

We entered the hotel through the Casino entrance. The Judge seemed calm and focused until we rounded the corner and came face to face with an eleven-foot polar bear standing on its hind legs, ready to pounce. The Judge turned to jelly at the sight of it. "I've had enough of this goddamn beast," he shouted. "It doesn't belong here. We should blow its head off."

I took him by the arm "Calm down, Judge," I told him. "That's White King. He's been dead for about thirty-three years."

The Judge had no use for animals. He composed himself and we swung into the lobby, approaching the desk from behind. I hung back--it was getting late and the lobby was full of suspicious-looking stragglers from the Adult Film crowd. Private cowboy cops wearing six-shooters in open holsters were standing around. Our entrance did not go unnoticed.

The Judge looked competent, but there was something menacing in the way he swaggered up to the desk clerk and whacked the marble countertop with both hands. The lobby was suddenly filled with tension, and I quickly moved away as the Judge began yelling and pointing at the ceiling.

"Don't give me that crap," he barked. "These people are my friends. They're expecting me. Just ring the goddamn room again." The desk clerk muttered something about his explicit instructions not to....

Suddenly the Judge reached across the desk for the house phone. "What's the number? I'll ring it myself" The clerk moved quickly. He shoved the phone out of the Judge's grasp and simultaneously drew his index finger across his throat. The Judge took one look at the muscle converging on him and changed his stance.

"I want to cash a check," he said calmly.

"A check?" the clerk said. "Sure thing, buster. I'll cash your goddamned check." He seized the Judge by his collar and laughed. "Let's get this Bozo out of her. And put him in jail."

I was moving toward the door, and suddenly the Judge was right behind me. "Let's go," he said. We sprinted for the car, but then the Judge stopped in his tracks. He turned and raised his fist in the direction of the hotel. "Fuck you!" he shouted. "I'm the Judge. I'll be back, and I'll bust every one of you bastards. The next time you see me coming, you'd better run."

We jumped into the car and zoomed away into the darkness. The Judge was acting manic. "Never mind those pimps," he said. "I'll have them all on a chain gang in forty-eight hours." He laughed and slapped me on the back. "Don't worry, Boss," he said. "I know where we're going." He squinted into the rain and opened a bottle of Royal Salute. "Straight ahead," he snapped. "Take a right at the next corner. We'll go see Leach. He owes me \$24,000."

I slowed down and reached for the whiskey. What the hell, I thought. Some days are weirder than others.

"Leach is my secret weapon," the Judge said, "but I have to watch him. He could be violent. The cops are always after him. He lives in a balance of terror. But he has a genius for gambling. We win eight out of ten every week." He nodded solemnly. "That is four of five, Doc. That is Big. Very big. That is eighty percent of everything." He shook his head sadly and reached for the whiskey. "It's a horrible habit. But I can't give it up. It's like having a money machine."

"That's wonderful," I said. "What are you bitching about?"

"I'm afraid, Doc. Leach is a monster, a criminal hermit who understands nothing in life except point spreads. He should be locked up and castrated."

"So what?" I said. "Where does he live? We are desperate. We have no cash and no plastic. This freak is our only hope."

The Judge slumped into himself, and neither one of us spoke for a minute.... "Well," he said finally. "Why not? I can handle almost anything for twenty-four big ones in a brown bag. What the fuck? Let's do it. If the bastard gets ugly, we'll kill him."

"Come on, Judge," I said. "Get a grip on yourself. This is only a gambling debt."

"Sure," he replied. "That's what they all say."

[Part III] Dead Meat in the Fast Lane: The Judge Runs Amok...Death of a Poet, Blood Clots in the Revenue Stream...The Man Who Loved Sex

Dolls

We pulled into a seedy trailer court behind the stockyards. Leach met us at the door with red eyes and trembling hands, wearing a soiled bathrobe and carrying a half-gallon of Wild Turkey.

"Thank God you're home," The Judge said. "I can't tell you what kind of horrible shit has happened to me tonight....But now the worm has turned. Now that we have cash, we will crush them all."

Leach just stared. Then he took a swig of Wild Turkey. "We are doomed," he muttered. "I was about to slit my wrists."

"Nonsense," the Judge said. "We won Big. I bet the same way you did. You gave me the numbers. You even predicted the Raiders would stomp Denver. Hell, it was obvious. The Raiders are unbeatable on Monday night."

Leach tensed, then he threw his head back and uttered a high-pitched quavering shriek. The Judge seized him. "Get a grip on yourself," he snapped. "What's wrong?"

"I went sideways on the bet," Leach sobbed. "I went to that goddamn sports bar up in Jackpot with some of the guys from the shop. We were all drinking Mescal and screaming, and I lost my head."

Leach was clearly a bad drinker and a junkie for mass hysteria. "I got drunk and bet on the Broncos," he moaned, "then I doubled up. We lost everything."

A terrible silence fell on the room. Leach was weeping helplessly. The Judge seized him by the sash of his greasy leather robe and started jerking him around by the stomach.

They ignored me and I tried to pretend it wasn't happening....It was too ugly. There was an ashtray on the table in front of the couch. As I reached for it, I noticed a legal pad of what appeared to be Leach's poems, scrawled with a red Magic Marker in some kind of primitive verse form. There was one that caught my eye. There was something particularly ugly about it. There was something repugnant in the harsh slant of the handwriting. It was about pigs.

I TOLD HIM
IT WAS WRONG
By F.X. Leach
Omaha 1968

A filthy young pig
got tired of his gig
and begged for a transfer
to Texas.
Police ran him down
on the Outskirts of town
and ripped off his Nuts
with a coathanger.
Everything after that was like
coming home in a cage on the
back of a train from
New Orleans on a Saturday
night
with no money and cancer and

a dead girlfriend.
In the end it was no use
He died on his knees in a barn
yard
with all the others watching.
Res Ipsa Loquitur

"They're going to kill me," Leach said. "They'll be here by midnight. I'm doomed." He uttered another low cry and reached for the Wild Turkey bottle, which had fallen over and spilled.

"Hang on," I said. "I'll get more."

On my way to the kitchen I was jolted by the sight of a naked woman slumped awkwardly in the corner with a desperate look on her face, as if she'd been shot. Her eyes bulged and her mouth was wide open and she appeared to be reaching out for me.

I leapt back and heard laughter behind me. My first thought was that Leach, unhinged by his gambling disaster, had finally gone over the line with his wife-beating habit and shot her in the mouth just before we knocked. She appeared to be crying out for help, but there was no voice.

I ran into the kitchen to look for a knife thinking, that if Leach had gone crazy enough to kill his wife, now he would have to kill me, too, since I was the only witness. Except the Judge, who locked himself in the bathroom.

Leach appeared in the doorway holding the naked woman by the neck and hurled her across the room at me....

Time stood still for an instant. The woman seemed to hover in the air, coming at me in the darkness like a body in slow motion. I went into a stance with the bread knife and braced for a fight to the death.

The thing hit me and bounced softly down to the floor. It was a rubber blow-up doll: one of those things with five orifices that young stockbrokers buy in adult bookstores after the singles bars close.

"Meet Jennifer," he said. "She's my punching bag." He picked it up by the hair and slammed it across the room.

"Ho, ho," he chuckled, "no more wife beating. I'm cured, thanks to Jennifer." He smiled sheepishly. "It's almost like a miracle. These dolls saved my marriage. They're a lot smarter than you think." He nodded gravely. "Sometimes I have to beat two at once. But it always calms me down, you know what I mean?"

Whoops, I thought. Welcome to the night train. "Oh, hell yes, I said quickly. "How do the neighbors handle it?"

"No problem," he said. "They love me."

Sure, I thought. I tried to imagine the horror of living in a muddy industrial slum full of tin-walled trailers and trying to protect your family against brain damage from knowing that every night when you look out your kitchen window there will be a man in a leather bathrobe flogging two naked women around the room with a quart bottle of Wild Turkey. Sometimes for two or three hours...It was horrible.

"Where is your wife?" I asked. "Is she still here?"

"Oh, yes," he said quickly. "She just went out for some cigarettes. She'll be back any minute." He nodded eagerly. "Oh, yes, she's very proud of me. We're almost reconciled. She really loves these dolls."

I smiled, but something about this story made me nervous. "How many do you have?" I asked him.

"Don't worry," he said. "I have all we need." He reached into a nearby broom closet and pulled out another one -- a half-inflated Chinese-looking woman with rings in her nipples and two electric cords attached to her head. "This is Ling-Ling," he said. "She screams when I hit her." He whacked the doll's head and it squawked stupidly.

Just then I heard car doors slamming outside the trailer, then loud knocking on the front door and a gruff voice shouting, "Open up! Police!"

Leach grabbed a .44 Magnum out of a shoulder holster inside his bathrobe and fired two shots through the front door. "You bitch," he screamed. "I should have killed you a long time ago."

He fired two more shots, laughing calmly. Then he turned to face me and put the barrel of the gun in his mouth. He hesitated for a moment, staring directly into my eyes. Then he pulled the trigger and blew off the back of his head.

The dead man seemed to lunge at me, slumping headfirst against my legs as he fell to the floor -- just as a volley of shotgun blasts came through the front door, followed by harsh shouts on a police bullhorn from outside. Then another volley of buckshot blasts that exploded the TV set and set the living room on fire, filling the trailer with dense brown smoke that I recognized instantly as the smell of Cyanide gas being released by the burning plastic couch.

Voices were screaming through the smoke, "Surrender! HANDS UP behind your goddamn head! DEAD MEAT!" Then more shooting. Another deafening fireball exploded out of the living room, I kicked the corpse off my feet and leapt for the back door, which I'd noticed earlier when I scanned the trailer for "alternative exits," as they say in the business -- in case one might become necessary. I was halfway out the door when I remembered the Judge. He was still locked in the bathroom, maybe helpless in some kind of accidental drug coma, unable to get to his feet as flames roared through the trailer....

Ye Fucking Gods! I thought. I can't let him burn.

Kick the door off its hinges. Yes. Whack! The door splintered and I saw him sitting calmly on the filthy aluminum toilet stool, pretending to read a newspaper and squinting vacantly at me as I crashed in and grabbed him by one arm.

"Fool!" I screamed. "Get up! Run! They'll murder us!"

He followed me through the smoke and burning debris holding his pants up with one hand....The Chinese sex doll called Ling-Ling hovered crazily in front of the door, her body swollen from heat and her hair on fire. I slapped her aside and bashed the door open, dragging the Judge outside with me. Another volley of shotgun blasts

and bullhorn yells erupted somewhere behind us. The Judge lost his footing and fell heavily into the mud behind the doomed Airstream.

"Oh, God!" he screamed. "who is it?"

"The Pigs," I said. "They've gone crazy. Leach is dead! They're trying to kill us. We have to get to the car!"

He stood up quickly. "Pigs?" he said. "Pigs? Trying to kill me?"

He seemed to stiffen, and the dumbness went out of his eyes. He raised both fists and screamed in the direction of the shooting. "You bastards! You scum! You will die for this. You stupid white-trash pigs!"

"Are they nuts?" he muttered. He jerked out of my grasp and reached angrily into his left armpit, then down to his belt and around behind his back like a gunfighter trying to slap leather....But there was no leather there. Not even a sleeve holster.

"Goddamnit!" he snarled. "Where's my goddamn weapon? Oh, Jesus! I left it in the car!" He dropped into a running crouch and sprinted into the darkness, around the corner of the flaming Airstream. "Let's go!" he hissed. "I'll kill these bastards! I'll blow their fucking heads off!"

Right, I thought, as we took off in a kind of low-speed desperate crawl through the mud and the noise and the gunfire, terrified neighbors screaming frantically to each other in the darkness. The red convertible was parked in the shadows, near the front of the trailer right next to the State Police car, with its chase lights blinking crazily and voices burping out of its radio.

The Pigs were nowhere to be seen. They had apparently rushed the place, guns blazing -- hoping to kill Leach before he got away. I jumped into the car and started the engine. The Judge came through the passenger door and reached for the loaded .454 Magnum....I watched in horror as he jerked it out of its holster and ran around to the front of the cop car and fired two shots into the grille.

"Fuck you!" he screamed. "Take this, you Scum! Eat shit and die!" He jumped back as the radiator exploded in a blast of steam and scalding water. Then he fired three more times through the windshield and into the squawking radio, which also exploded.

"Hot damn!" he said as he slid back into the front seat. "Now we have them trapped!" I jammed the car into reverse and lost control in the mud, hitting a structure of some kind and careening sideways at top speed until I got a grip on the thing and aimed it up the ramp to the highway....The Judge was trying desperately to reload the .454, yelling at me to slow down, so he could finish the bastards off! His eyes were wild and his voice was unnaturally savage.

I swerved hard left to Elko and hurled him sideways, but he quickly recovered his balance and somehow got off five more thundering shots in the general direction of the burning trailer behind us.

"Good work, Judge," I said. "They'll never catch us now." He smiled and drank deeply from our Whiskey Jug, which he had somehow picked up as we fled.... Then he passed it over to me, and I too drank deeply as I whipped the big V-8 into passing gear, and we went from forty-five

to ninety in four seconds and left the ugliness far behind us in the rain.

I glanced over at the Judge as he loaded five huge bullets into the Magnum. He was very calm and focused, showing no signs of the drug coma that had crippled him just moments before....I was impressed. The man was clearly a Warrior. I slapped him on the back and grinned. "Calm down, Judge," I said. "We're almost home."

I knew better, of course. I was 1000 miles from home, and we were almost certainly doomed. There was no hope of escaping the dragnet that would be out for us, once those poor fools discovered Leach in a puddle of burning blood with the top of his head blown off. The squad car was destroyed -- thanks to the shrewd instincts of the Judge -- but I knew it would not take them long to send out an all-points alarm. Soon there would be angry police road-blocks at every exit between Reno and Salt Lake City....

So what? I thought. There were many side roads, and we had a very fast car. All I had to do was get the Judge out of his killing frenzy and find a truck stop where we could buy a few cans of Flat Black spray paint. Then we could slither out of the state before dawn and find a place to hide.

But it would not be an easy run. In the quick space of four hours we had destroyed two automobiles and somehow participated in at least one killing -- in addition to all the other random, standard-brand crimes like speeding and arson and fraud and attempted murder of State Police officers while fleeing the scene of a homicide....

No. We had a Serious problem on our hands. We were trapped in the middle of Nevada like crazy rats, and the cops would shoot to Kill when they saw us. No doubt about that. We were Criminally Insane....I laughed and shifted up into Drive. The car stabilized at 115 or so....

The Judge was eager to get back to his women. He was still fiddling with the Magnum, spinning the cylinder nervously and looking at his watch. "Can't you go any faster?" he muttered. "How far is Elko?"

Too far, I thought, which was true. Elko was fifty miles away and there would be roadblocks. Impossible. They would trap us and probably butcher us.

Elko was out, but I was loath to break this news to the Judge. He had no stomach for bad news. He had a tendency to flip out and flog anything in sight when things weren't going his way.

It was wiser, I thought, to humor him. Soon he would go to sleep.

I slowed down and considered. Our options were limited. There would be roadblocks on every paved road out of Wells. It was a main crossroads, a gigantic full-on truck stop where you could get anything you wanted twenty-four hours a day, within reason of course. And what we needed was not in that category. We needed to disappear. That was one option.

We could go south on 93 to Ely, but that was about it. That would be like driving into a steel net. A flock of pigs would be waiting for us, and after that it would be Nevada State Prison. To the north on 93 was Jackpot, but we would never make that either. Running east into Utah was hopeless. We were trapped. They would run us down like dogs.

There were other options, but not all of them were mutual. The Judge had his priorities, but they were not mine. I understood that me and the Judge were coming up on a parting of the ways. This made me nervous. There were other options, of course, but they were all High Risk. I pulled over and studied the map again. the Judge appeared to be sleeping, but I couldn't be sure. He still had the Magnum in his lap.

The Judge was getting to be a problem. There was no way to get him out of the car without violence. He would not go willingly into the dark and stormy night. The only other way was to kill him, but that was out of the question as long as he had the gun. He was very quick in emergencies. I couldn't get the gun away from him, and I was not about to get into an argument with him about who should have the weapon. If I lost, he would shoot me in the spine and leave me in the road.

I was getting too nervous to continue without chemical assistance. I reached under the seat for my kit bag, which contained five or six Spansules of Black Acid. Wonderful, I thought. This is just what I need. I ate one and went back to pondering the map. There was a place called Deeth, just ahead, where a faintly marked side road appeared to wander uphill through the mountains and down along a jagged ridge into Jackpot from behind. Good, I thought, this is it. We could sneak into Jackpot by dawn.

Just then I felt a blow on the side of my head as the Judge came awake with a screech, flailing his arms around him like he was coming out of nightmare. "What's happening, goddamnit?" he said. "Where are we? They're after us." He was jabbering in a foreign language that quickly lapsed into English as he tried to aim the gun. "Oh, God," he screamed, "They're right on top of us. Get moving, goddamnit. I'll kill every bastard I see."

He was coming out of a nightmare. I grabbed him by the neck and put him in a headlock until he went limp. I pulled him back up in the seat and handed him a Spansule of acid. "Here, Judge, take this," I said. "It'll calm you down."

He swallowed the pill and said nothing as I turned onto the highway and stood heavily on the accelerator. We were up to 115 when a green exit sign that said DEETH NO SERVICES loomed suddenly out of the rain just in front of us. I swerved hard to the right and tried to hang on. But it was no use. I remember the sound of the Judge screaming as we lost control and went into a full 360-degree curl and then backwards at seventy-five or eighty through a fence and into a pasture.

For some reason the near-fatal accident had a calming effect on the Judge. Or maybe it was the acid. I didn't care one way or the other after I took the gun from his hand. He gave it up without a fight. He seemed to be more interested in reading the road signs and listening to the radio. I knew that if we could slip into jackpot the back way, I could get the car painted any color I wanted in thirty-three minutes and put the Judge on a plane. I knew a small private airstrip there, where nobody asks too many questions and they'll take a personal check.

At dawn we drove across the tarmac and pulled up to a seedy-looking office marked AIR JACKPOT EXPRESS CHARTER COMPANY. "This is it Judge," I said and slapped him on the back. "This is where you get off." He seemed resigned to his fate until the woman behind the front desk told

him there wouldn't be a flight to Elko until lunch time.

"Where is the pilot?" he demanded.

"I am the pilot," the woman said, "but I can't leave until Debby gets her to relieve me."

"Fuck this!" the Judge shouted. "Fuck lunch time. I have to leave now, you bitch."

The woman seemed truly frightened by his mood swing, and when the Judge leaned in and gave her a taste of the long knuckle, she collapsed and began weeping uncontrollably. "There's more where that came from," he told her. "Get up! I have to get out of here now."

He jerked her out from behind the desk and was dragging her toward the plane when I slipped out the back door. It was daylight now. The car was nearly out of gas, but that wasn't my primary concern. The police would be here in minutes, I thought. I'm doomed. But then, as I pulled onto the highway, I saw a sign that said, WE PAINT ALL NIGHT.

As I pulled into the parking lot, the Jackpot Express plane passed overhead. So long, Judge, I thought to myself. You're a brutal hustler and a Warrior and a great copilot, but you know how to get your way. You will go far in the world.

[Part IV] Epilogue: Christmas Dreams and Cruel Memories...Nation of Jailers...Stand Back! The Judge Will See You Now

That's about it for now, Jann. This story is too depressing to have to confront professionally in these morbid weeks before Christmas....I have only vague memories of what it's like there in New York, but sometimes I have flashbacks about how it was to glide in perfect speedy silence around the ice rink in front of NBC while junkies and federal informants in white beards and sleazy red jumpsuits worked the crowd mercilessly for nickels and dollars and dimes covered with Crack residue.

I remember one Christmas morning in Manhattan when we got into the Empire State Building and went up to the Executive Suite of some famous underwear company and shoved a 600-pound red, tufted-leather Imperial English couch out of a corner window on something like the eighty-fifth floor....The wind caught it, as I recall, and it sort of drifted around the corner onto Thirty-fourth Street, picking up speed on its way down, and hit the striped awning of a Korean market, you know, the kind that sells everything from kimchi to Christmas trees. The impact blasted watermelons and oranges and tomatoes all over the sidewalk. We could barely see the impact from where we were, but I remember a lot of activity on the street when we came out of the elevator.... It looked like a war zone. A few gawkers were standing around in a blizzard, muttering to each other and looking dazed. They thought it was an underground explosion -- maybe a subway or a gas main.

Just as we arrived on the scene, a speeding cab skidded on some watermelons and slammed into a Fifth Avenue bus and burst into flames. There was a lot of screaming and wailing of police sirens. Two cops began fighting with a gang of looters who had emerged like ghosts out of the snow and were running off with hams and turkeys and big jars of

caviar....Nobody seemed to think it was strange. What the hell? Shit happens. Welcome to the Big Apple. Keep alert. Never ride in open cars or walk too close to a tall building when it snowsThere were Christmas trees scattered all over the street and cars were stopping to grab them and speeding away. We stole one and took it to Missy's place on the Bowery, because we knew she didn't have one. But she wasn't home, so we put the tree out on the fire escape and set it on fire with kerosene.

That's how I remember New York, Jann. It was always a time of angst and failure and turmoil. Nobody ever seemed to have any money on Christmas. Even rich people were broke and jabbering frantically on their telephones about Santa Claus and suicide or joining a church with no rules....The snow was clean and pretty for the first twenty or thirty minutes around dawn, but after that it was churned into filthy mush by drunken cabbies and garbage compactors and shitting dogs.

Anybody who acted happy on Christmas was lying -- even the ones were getting paid \$500 an hour....The Jews were especially sulky, and who could blame them? The birthday of Baby Jesus is always a nervous time for people who know that ninety days later they will be accused of murdering him.

So what? We have our own problems, eh? Jesus! I don't know how you can ride all those motorcycles around in the snow, Jann. Shit, we can all handle the back wheel coming loose in a skid. But the front wheel is something else -- and that's what happens when it snows. WHACKO. One minute you feel as light and safe as a snowflake, and the next minute you're sliding sideways under the wheels of a Bekins van....Nasty traffic jams, horns honking, white limos full of naked Jesus freaks going up on the sidewalk in low gear to get around you and the mess you made on the street...Goddamn this scum. They are more and more in the way. And why aren't they home with their families on Xmas? Why do they need to come out here and die on the street like iron hamburgers?

I hate these bastards, Jann. And I suspect you feel the same....They might call us bigots, but at least we are Universal bigots. Right? Shit on those people. Everybody you see these days might have the power to get you locked up....Who knows why? They will have reasons straight out of some horrible Kafka story, but in the end it won't matter any more than a full moon behind clouds. Fuck them.

Christmas hasn't changed much in twenty-two years, Jann -- not even 2000 miles west and 8000 feet up in the Rockies. It is still a day that only amateurs can love. It is all well and good for children and acid freaks to still believe in Santa Claus -- but it is still a profoundly morbid day for us working professionals. It is unsettling to know that one out of every twenty people you meet on Xmas will be dead this time next year....Some people can accept this, and some can't. That is why God made whiskey, and also why Wild Turkey comes in \$300 shaped canisters during most of the Christmas season, and also why criminal shitheads all over New York City will hit you up for \$100 tips or they'll twist your windshield wipers into spaghetti and urinate on your door handles.

People all around me are going to pieces, Jann. My whole support system has crumbled like wet sugar cubes. That is why I try never to employ anyone over the age of twenty. Every Xmas after that is like another notch down on the ratchet, or maybe a few more teeth off the flywheel....I remember on Xmas in New York when I was trying to sell a

Mark VII Jaguar with so many teeth off the flywheel that the whole drivetrain would lock up and whine every time I tried to start the engine for a buyer....I had to hire gangs of street children to muscle the car back and forth until the throw-out gear on the starter was lined up very precisely to engage the few remaining teeth on the flywheel. On some days I would leave the car idling in a fireplug zone for three or four hours at a time and pay the greedy little bastards a dollar an hour to keep it running and wet-shined with fireplug water until a buyer came along.

We got to know each other pretty well after nine or ten weeks, and they were finally able to unload it on a rich artist who drove as far as the toll plaza at the far end of the George Washington Bridge, where the engine seized up and exploded like a steam bomb. "They had to tow it away with a firetruck," he said. "Even the leather seats were on fire. They laughed at me."

There is more and more Predatory bullshit in the air these days. Yesterday I got a call from somebody who said I owed money to Harris Wofford, my old friend from the Peace Corps. We were in Sierra Leone together.

He came out of nowhere like a heat-seeking missile and destroyed the U.S. Attorney General in Pennsylvania. It was Wonderful. Harris is a Senator now, and the White House creature is not. Thornburgh blew a forty-four point lead in three weeks, like Humpty Dumpty....WHOOOPS! Off the wall like a big Lizard egg. The White House had seen no need for a safety net.

It was a major disaster for the Bush brain trust and every GOP political pro in America, from the White House all the way down to City Hall in places like Denver and Tupelo. The whole Republican party was left stunned and shuddering like a hound dog passing a peach pit....At least that's what they said in Tupelo, where one of the local GOP chairmen flipped out and ran off to Biloxi with a fat young boy from one of the rich local families....then he tried to blame it on Harris Wofford when they arrested him in Mobile for aggravated Sodomy and kidnapping. He was ruined, and his Bail was only \$5000, but none of his friends would sign for it. They were mainly professional Republicans and bankers who had once been in the Savings and Loan business, along with Neil Bush the manqu, son of the President.

Neil had just walked on a serious Fraud bust in Colorado. But only by the skin of his teeth, after his father said he would have to abandon him to a terrible fate in the Federal Prison System if his son was really a crook. The evidence was overwhelming, but Neil had a giddy kind of talent negotiating -- like Colonel North and the Admiral, who also walked....It was shameless and many people bitched. But what the fuck do they expect from a Party of high-riding Darwinian rich boys who've been running around in the White House for twelve straight years? They can do whatever they want, and why not. "These are Good Boys," John Sununu once said of this staff. "They only shit in the pressroom."

Well...Sununu is gone now, and so is Dick Thornburgh, who is currently seeking night work in the bank business somewhere on the outskirts of Pittsburgh. It is an ugly story. He decided to go out on his own -- like Lucifer, who plunged into Hell -- and he got beaten like a redheaded stepchild by my old Peace Corps buddy Harris Wofford, who caught him from behind like a bull wolverine so fast that Thornburgh couldn't even get out of the way....He was mangled and

humiliated. It was the worst public disaster since Watergate.

The GOP was plunged into national fear. How could it happen? Dick Thornburgh had sat on the right hand of God. As AG, he had stepped out like some arrogant Knight from the Round Table and declared that his boys -- 4000 or so Justice Department prosecutors -- were no longer subject to the rules of the Federal Court System.

But he was wrong, And now Wofford is using Thornburgh's corpse as a landing pad for a run on the White House and hiring experts to collect bogus debts from old buddies like me. Hell, I like the idea of Harris being President. He always seemed honest and I knew he was smart, but I am leery of giving him money.

That is politics in the 1990s. Democratic presidential candidates have not been a satisfying investment recently. Camelot was thirty years ago, and we still don't know who killed Jack Kennedy. That lone bullet on the stretcher in Dallas sure as hell didn't pass through two human bodies, but it was the one that pierced the heart of the American Dream in our century, maybe forever.

Camelot is on Court TV now, limping into Rehab clinics and forced to deny low-rent Rape accusations in the same sweaty West Palm Beach courthouse where Roxanne Pulitzer went on trial for fucking a trumpet and lost.

It has been a long way down -- not just for the Kennedys and the Democrats, but for all the rest of us. Even the rich and the powerful, who are coming to understand that change can be quick in the Nineties and one of these days it will be them in the dock on TV, fighting desperately to stay out of prison.

Take my word for it. I have been there, and it gave me an eerie feeling.... Indeed. There are many cells in the mansion, and more are being added every day. We are becoming a nation of jailers.

And that's about it for now, Jann. Christmas is on us and it's all downhill from here on....At least until Groundhog Day, which is soon....So, until then, at least, take my advice as your family doctor, and don't do anything that might cause either one of us to have to appear before the Supreme Court of the United States. If you know what I'm saying....

Yes. He is Up There, Jann. The Judge. And he will be there for a long time, waiting to gnaw on our skulls....Right. put that in your leather pocket the next time you feel like jumping on your new motorcycle and screwing it all the way over thru traffic and passing cop cars at 140.

Remember F.X. Leach. He crossed the Judge, and he paid a terrible price....And so will you, if you don't slow down and quit harassing those girls in your office. The Judge is in charge now, and He won't tolerate it. Beware.

-To Be Continued-