

THREATENING THE ENVELOPE

I never really got back to my farm. Sure, I lived there 'til they caught me, but anywhere could've served as a place to hide then. My sensitivities were numbed by rage. Drugs and alcohol had painted such a distorted face on reality, there are no comparisons to judge by. It was colored by my mercenary daze from that war, flavored by the sheer excess of our times, and accentuated past probability with a potpourri of catalysts beyond any I'd tried before.

Not buying the version doled out in official circles that one drug led to another, I was still sure it was propaganda. I'd done them all and wasn't strung out on anything in particular. My only problem seemed a difficulty in getting back to where I'd started. I didn't have a clue where to start that long journey.

A fractured mosaic of my life revealed a clear retrogression, and validated the part drugs played, but I refused to believe it. Pieces appeared in fragments, then its speed picked up and became a blur. Alcohol served as the perfect medium for my rising anger at everything in general, cocaine and heroin punctuated the extreme ups and downs of my last weeks, and more of the same deranged manipulation of people, places, and things stand out, as I surged toward an ending.

I assumed all my generation were reaching this point in their own ways about the same time. I came full-speed to the "jumping off place" without an exit ramp or way back to my innocent beginnings. Far from the substances I was using, it was the simple fact I didn't believe life could work that held me hostage. From there, no help was available, no retreat possible, and all I could do was jump.

I blamed blackouts for stories I heard, and continued my research into these frightening states as if I was studying some curious, natural phenomenon. Denial gripped me, while a dare to beat the odds drove me on. I just had to control whatever was operating out there. I wanted to confront it face to face.

Near the end, glimpses I had of the beast within were more hideous than even I could handle. I chose not to believe what I saw, and looked away like the rest. Friends avoided me and lovers tried to call me back, while the police sought to neutralize my very presence. Beyond them all, I trotted with my weapons, sneering into the darkness...hunting visionary creatures with the string of ears around my neck, smells, and colors of a nightmare rubbed darkly on my skin again.

Traces were evident: shell casings on the trail, the six-hour fire-fight with J. D. and explosion at the fuel dock

from ricocheted tracers. There were broken bones, teeth, and minds...the bullet hole in Fordie's foot, which they said was my doing...busted blood vessels and a frozen bout with the junkie's scourge, "cotton fever," and more.

Tied off at the neck glaring into a mirror, I tried to fire some heroin into my jugular to come down from the coke, but missed. I tried my feet and burst some more veins. It was simply a matter of time before it took my life, but in an appropriate twist of fate, the police grabbed me just before the final act.

The girl was only a hostage. Nameless, she bore witness to my last futile cry at the demons who ruled my mind. I spun the revolver's chamber and put the barrel to my head while she shuddered at the ropes that bound her. Two clicks and it was over. I threw the pistol into the jungle and untied her, asking if she knew the way back from here. This only scared her more, and she fled in panic.

I hovered for a moment as a scalding anguish burned my soul, and then I pushed the plunger on the bell ringer's hot shot. The earth shook and a great vortex opened its yawning maw to take me in. No angels sang, no welcome waited. Instead of the peace I'd expected, the whole of existence burst into such a raging cacaphony that I ran through it, crashing into trees and falling over rock walls like a blind man on fire.

I broke into the open, sensed dark figures, and heard shotguns chambering rounds. Spitting in defiance, I gave them the finger with both hands. They say it's why I'm alive...for if they'd seen a weapon, or my hands had not been in the air, they would've gunned me down. The Strike Force had their phantom at last.