

All Apologies

By Kenn Hartmann

My dad doesn't knock, not repeatedly like rapping. He jabs door with inside heel of his moccasin, a quick bump with a bum knee or his preferred elixir for everything 'the forearm shiver.' Like who could that be? He asks 'why in hell's the door locked?' So nobody busts in. He fist clenches a jug of Dago Red as he enters & says 'Cloistered here like hiding.' Lisa sits up in the hideaway bed her breasts barely covered by thin faded sheet. She asks, 'can I smoke?' as she lights cigarette. Hell no, I say; she puffs a couple puffs & snuffs it in ashtray on sofa arm. I adjust floor fan to guide fumes. He asks 'why do you treat her that way?' I ask him what he wants. Just get to the point. He hands me a joint & says 'here, addle your brain - go smoke this with your mother.' Quite surreal, he's been vehemently anti-marijuana. I ask where the hell he got it. 'Lawndale.' He works as a steamfitter at Homan & Arthington; maybe he scored from a guard at Sears. It's a real fatty, not like those pinner the flashy punks at Cabrini Green roll. I fire it up. He points at the typewriter on the table, 'you know Kerouac's a fag.' I reply he's dead. My dad usually referred to queers as being 'light in the loafers,' folks like Danny Kaye or my English teacher. I always assumed it meant they liked to dance. Don't worry daddio, a high school cheerleader - the homecoming queen no less, introduced me to Beat poetry. She acquainted me with Howl, the seminal Beat book. She yearned to understand the symbolism of Moloch, the biblical deity invoked repeatedly by Ginsburg. While she read aloud I fondled her breasts, I mean, found beatitude in those beauties, those poetic refrains. A year or so later she called from college to tell me she tried my 'kind of high.' My dad asks, 'what's your bit in life? What's your belief?' I smoke the joint to a black tar brown ghetto roach & eat the remnant. He hands over jug of Dago Red. I don't have to ask where this came from: homemade by his high school buddy from Lane Tech. I hold bottle high & toast 'fuck beatniks & hippies dad; let's drink to your Italian vintner Mister Masciola.' I tell Lisa, get dressed, lets go ride. She gets out of bed naked & goes into the bathroom. My motorcycle's parked next to the hide-a-bed. I roll the bike to the front door. My dad says, 'I didn't mean to throw you to the wolves.' I am the wolf. I just don't run in a pack. 'So you're an animal?' he asks. No, it's your analogy. Why argue? I pace the room & take another good swig of Mister Masciola's wine, throw on my leather. I lean against bike seat, twirling a hat on one finger. My father says, 'what are you doing with my welding cap?' I'm wearing it; I want to be like you. He says, 'stick it in your ear; don't patronize me.' Lisa returns & asks, 'when we leaving baby?' He shakes his head, 'you got the world by the ass on a downhill drag, kid.' Maybe so but lock up when you split. Thanks.

A good passenger is unique & unusual – given to complete trust at every turn & no bitching. The Sporty growls & farts up Route 12 from Sweet Home through the quixotic enclave of Wauconda on Bangs Lake, the cool moonlit swamp breath of Volo Bog, a midnight splash party on Pistakee Lake. We roll to roll. We pull into Lake Geneva's east end – a ramshackle gin mill where local girls have names like Trish the Dish & Hot Bod Betty. They call Lisa 'the Flake from Crystal Lake.' 'Cruel sluts,' says Lisa. We ride to her dad's lakefront place but the door's locked so we make love on picnic table in back yard. I suggest we break in & look for liquor. She says, 'you're bad, the worst.' Why's that? 'The scars on your soul; you're mean to your father. I told my shrink you're into devil worship.' What? Why'd you say that? We break into garage & lie in cuddy cabin of her dad's boat & light a couple citronella candles. She points at scars on my body & demands the evil origins. I answer forthright. A banding strap sliced my arm while working on factory docks. The cops tackled me against a concrete wall in Tempe, Arizona. Football cleat gouges in prep scrimmage ass-over-teakettle play. Road rash. More road rash. A hot-stamp press burn. Plowed bike headfirst into parked car. No devil worship, Lisa, just dubious luck. In morning we split, the sun-battered landscape offers no clues. We argue over directions as if we've somewhere to go, somewhere to be, where twisting a throttle makes total sense. Somewhere there's no going back.

-Kenn Hartmann- www.chicagobikerbars.com



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