



Photo by Stephen Gregory

Ha Ho Fast Horse

By Kenn Hartmann

Ha Ho Fast Horse rolled to the Roll Inn entrance astride a raucous chopper that scattered the rabble from their personal tumult.

The riff raff poet reciting Bukowski to his minions scattered, the cockroach on the bent saxophone licking the nails of the Jazz Man's nimble fingers scattered, the lingering shadows of transients long gone scattered.

The Jazz Man remained seated on a bucket but his shadow had split.

Unlocking my bicycle from the chain link gangway between alley and street, I pedaled to investigate the synco-pated racket.

Ha Ho's chopper breathed at rest like a man gasping

hard and fast in the thick of it.

The riff raff poet said 'Uh oh, here comes the rez.'

Ha Ho wore no braids as the fashion but let the wind tangle and whip around his head like a wild stallion combed by cactus or barbed wire. He was a barrel-chested wrestler with a boxer's nose and he strolled in like he owned the joint.

'Been in bad weather,' said Ha Ho. 'Got scrambled by a twister near Tulsa, roused by Nebraska cops without relent, spent nights in dirt beds and ditches but now nothing but posh digs ahead. Give me your swankiest and by all means be quick.'

Above the quirky clerk's bullet proof window hung signs to prohibit guns, alcohol and grievous hooliganism that had been defaced with a phallic panorama of weapons of mass destruction garnished with flaming balls.

The Jazz Man licked his reed and whispered, 'Ha Ho's a quick hitter.'

'Here's a sawbuck,' Ha Ho said to me. 'Change my tire. Tools are in the saddlebag.'

'Okay then...I guess I will...just mosey out and change the tire.'

A cool wind circled across empty auditorium parking lots and into the street. With tools spread curbside and the bike on a cinder block, I undertook the task.

While crouching to get the rubber off the rim a pair of ruffians strode up.

'Hey man what'cha got for the head, Zed?'

Ha Ho grabbed a crowbar and cracked the guy who said it across the skull and went after the second ruffian who fled.

'Whoa, whoa, Ha Ho!' I said. 'He meant nothing.'

'Boy you have to think fast and act fast in this world.'

'For real,' I said. 'Cracking skulls over words can get tedious.'

'Hit him before he hit you,' said Ha Ho.

When Ha Ho rode his chopper on Franklin Avenue folks whooped and danced.

'Ha Ho!'

Idle pedestrians leaning against lampposts sprang to life with crazy salutes and vigorous waves.

'Ha Ho!'

He clutched high on his ape hangers and revved the throttle on a machine he called 'Rattle Bone.'

'Fueled by buffalo piss,' he said. 'Same piss the bridge dwellers drink under Cedar.'

I once rode bitch on the back of Ha Ho's Rattle Bone up Hennepin's downtown stretch of hustle bars and neon theaters surrounding Shinder's newsstand.

He clutched and revved and let out a blood-curdling 'Ha Ho' that emanated from the heart of a prairie wolf under a full moon.

Giddy suburbanites, restless tourists and bearded raconteurs scattered at crowded intersections as Rattle Bone vibrated, shook and cut a swath of the starry dynamo.

'Like riding in Geronimo's Cadillac,' he said.

Ha Ho frequented pool halls and stood his ground when a hustler pulled a pistol and pressed it against his boxer's nose.

'Go ahead and shoot,' said Ha Ho.

The hustler went ahead and shot. Ha Ho got killed while clutching a pool cue.

Later that night at the Roll Inn the quirky clerk knocked at my door.

'Long distance for you from Chicago,' he said.

'No one here knows I'm here,' I said. 'Who in Chicago could know?'

'Your mother.'

'No way,' I said. 'That's impossible.'

Mulling each step, I shuffled to the end of a dark corridor beneath a naked bulb illuminating a pay phone nailed to a graffiti stained wall. The graffiti appeared to be the quirky clerk's handiwork. I had my suspicions.

'Ma? How'd you get this number? Nobody knows this number, I don't know this number.'

'One of your friends called tonight, Aurelius Fast Horse.'

'No way,' I said. 'That's impossible.'

He asked for you and said, 'it's Aurelius Fast Horse. It's urgent' and then static.'

Ha Ho journeyed to a place beyond space, the faceless eternity lost and forgotten like yesterday's news.

Who could say? A bullet tangled in time, left the flesh and unconscious mind, unbound the spirit from a cage of bones, freed in static of a dial tone when Ha Ho made a last call with his back to the wall. You might hear his voice in the rustle of wind or feel his breath in the backfire of a cantankerous chopper. My mother caught a fragment of Ha Ho in the crackle of a telephone line.

There's no other explanation.

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