

**The Beatnik Bikers**

By Kenn Hartmann

Sitting half-naked on warm California bed sheets at midnight, I'm desperate to write a fiercely intelligible story that's easy to understand, yet doused in reckless danger like the blood soaked bourbon inebriating my veins. My desperation stems from the insane distractions surrounding this humble Belmont Shores bungalow on Ocean Boulevard across from Big John's Billiards and the dark Pacific Ocean on Long Beach, beginning with my roommate,



Stevie James, who angry and drunk paces from parlor to kitchen muttering loud complaints to a naked floor, bitching aimlessly at putty beige plaster walls, expressing his garbled frustrations to cheerless curtains, mumbling that I ditched him in a hopeless gamble at some pathetic Orange County redneck bar. Great stuff. Keep it coming Stevie, I'm writing every blessed word.

As I write, directly outside my screen window, my landlord in the corridor between buildings is muttering even louder complaints than Stevie about something at first I can't comprehend. I could tally the words but not reckon his shrill scream, "Better be no more beatnik biker parties, I swear!" It struck me as oddly interesting but meaningless out of context until he said, "the one what wears the sombrero is what." My eyes drifted instinctively to an old varnished bureau with the soiled straw sombrero prominently displayed atop. Uh oh. How did I miss that beatnik biker party? Or did I? My consternation deepened until my alibi began singing a lullaby of sorts, you-who-ing from across the alley.

"You-who, Kenny, you-who! I see your lights, what's going on?" I had never actually heard anyone "you-who" before but there it was. It's best to start a story at the beginning, but since we're already embroiled in the fable, let's sally forth. Trust me. I met Tiffany two hours earlier. "You-who?" Like a breathless owl, she cooed. In the empty corridor between buildings I banged on our bungalow door because Stevie had locked me out as payback for the redneck bar fiasco. After a few bangs with my fist and a dull kick with my knee, I hollered, "Stevie you drunk SOB! Open the f'n door." That's when Tiffany appeared with a flashlight on the balcony across the alley and said, "You-who? What's going on down there?" She was extremely inquisitive. And curiously, so was I. So I sashayed across the alley, kind of dancing in the moonlit beam, trying to look debonair in my soiled sombrero, my hibiscus Hawaiian shirt with no buttons, my trousers cutoff below the knees and my combat boots with no socks. Maybe not the most stylish attire but I was able to coax Tiffany out of her attire and commence to explore the female form. Hearing the current commotion brought her back outside. At this point, the landlord was blubbing, "Man-aze? Why man-aze? What in god's name man-aze?"

Reverse chronologically speaking, the beatnik biker party would deserve attention next, but I'll skip that for the moment and instead tell you about the redneck bar fiasco. It began weeks ago with Stevie's promise to introduce me to Shelby Dodge, a real killer. Oh yeah, tell me, what she like? "Oh, you'll see," he said cryptically. It was an understandable mistake assuming Shelby to be a woman because way back in elementary school, one of my chums had an Aunt Shelby who rustled her rotund buns through the kitchen pleasing the pubescent punks who hung around the napery poised to savor just such a flavor. Also, in high school I developed an infatuation with a rival football team's cheerleader named Shelby who possessed a prowess quite fascinating and it was only her ties to some sinister family business that made it impossible to progress beyond youthful dalliance.

Shelby Dodge was a killer, a real killer. He had killed people in the Korean War, unfortunately not all enemies. It was called friendly fire, but Shelby wasn't very friendly. You could call it collateral damage or murder. After his discharge he served some time behind bars and was now serving drinks and dealing drugs in this little redneck beer bar in Orange County. He had prison tendencies that Stevie found attractive. Stevie had set up the prank, which began to unravel the moment we swung through the cowboy-style doors. My sombrero may have blent well with western cowpokes, but the rest of my dress did not. Shelby immediately began needling me, refusing to serve me alcohol, demanding an I.D. to prove I was twenty-one. This was no dive bar, it was too new, too generic, too much preconceived ambiance that I began to detest, to loathe, to want to rip this fake joint apart just for kicks. Hell, it wasn't too long ago the buttons got ripped from my Hawaiian shirt in another barroom bash for a lesser hassle than this. If it had been a dive bar, nobody would have said a word and if they did, it would have been crude, lewd and whatever dude. Just as I prepared to leap over the chincy bar and serve myself, Shelby revealed the whole charade. He knew my name, knew I

was from Chicago and knew I carried a knife. Yeah so what? "I'm Shelby Dodge!" he said thrusting his hand out to shake mine. He later confessed to being nervous that I didn't stop smiling during his needling. We got real chummy and drank up whatever piss water was on tap. The selection of whiskey was either Jim Beam or Wild Turkey. I opted for the Bird. Stevie got hammered and acted gay around who sold him a bag of bennies and a bag of ludes. I had no interest in that, but Shelby shared some weed that I smoked in the can. Stevie drove maniacally back to Belmont Shores, ran to the door and locked me out until Karma introduced me to young Tiffany, playful Tiffany on her first night near the ocean, the shores, the beach, the billiards. I went as far as I could and told her I'd see her in the morning.

So back at the pad, after the playful interlude, I found the door ajar, the place in disarray, chairs tumbled over, magazines strewn on the floor. I figured Stevie had finally gone insane, drug addled and drunk, tore up the pad and passed out in a heap on his bedroom floor. I said, "hey you freaking lunatic! What gives?" Back in my room, having written diligently trying to bring you up to speed, I heard Tiffany's "you-who" so leaning against the screen I said, "Hey Tiffany, I'll be right up." The landlord snarled at me, viciously like a caged hyena, "You and your god-damn beatnik bikers better clean up your act! No more wild parties or you're out! O-U-T!" What party? What are you talking about?

Turns out Stevie had unlocked the door while I was across the alley unlocking the secrets of Tiffany. The ludes must have kicked in and kicked Stevie's ass because he passed out solid as cold brick. A couple bikers I had met at Big John's Billiards the previous night stopped by and found the door ajar. So they came in and had a fine ruckus, the cold brick didn't budge a lick, the perfect night for pranks gone awry. They walked off with Stevie's 35mm camera and stole the sole contents of the refrigerator, a jar of mayonnaise that got smashed in the corridor and to the vicious hyena seemed a most heinous act since he kept repeating, "man-aze, oh god, man-aze, why in hell man-aze?" The bikers roared off on their choppers and the hyena dutifully scribbled their plates in his notebook and gave the ciphers to Stevie, who was now awake and shaking in a bennie rush and didn't care a whit about biker shit other than to blame me for everything evermore. He made every effort for days and days to remind me about "you and your damn beatnik bikers" which fazed me not at all other than to use as title to this story.

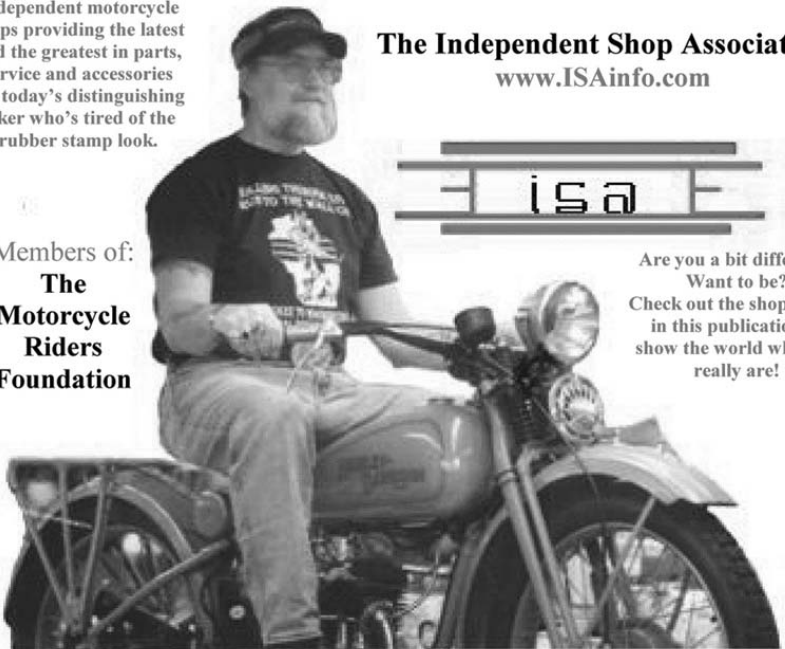
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