

Flirting With Disaster

By Kenn Hartmann

The cop was matter of fact, 'you're doing 30 over,' he said, 'what you got to say for yourself?' Slumped on my sickle I muttered, 'fuck damn shit.' Cops rarely appreciate vulgarity. 'Your license & registration.' I gave him my license & said, 'my registration's in my saddlebag.' As I dug through a bundle of FRP's, the cop asked, 'so you deliver newspapers too?' I write stories in Free Riders Press & I'm going to see the MMA fights at Poopy's in Savanna. There were two squads – SUVs with the cherries flashing. The second cop hung by the squad in case I tried any funny business. I offered him a paper & he told me to stay put. I sat on my sickle & figured this was it. 'Shit damn fuck.' I had hoped to catch a glimpse of the Mississippi river before sunset but darkness closed around me. At 30 over I was lucky he didn't tag me coming up the hill at 50 or 60 over. They'd have my ass sticking up in the air & my face planted in the ground. But I slowed over the crest. The two SUV's coming opposite flashed their cherries as I blew past. I glanced in the mirror & they pulled U-ies so I pulled over & leaned casually against my sickle & waited.

It was a humid Saturday & I had spent the day under the sun in an urban parking lot filled with throbbing motorcycles & rock & roll. Bikini clad Loop girls washed bikes & hotties from Jack Daniels offered samples. The Casa de Montecristo booth had fine cigars. Traffic on Harlem jammed halfway through Berwyn; trucks, busses & the tedious crawl of cagers impatiently gawked. Greasy smoke from brats on the grill provided an oily sunscreen. I worked my ass off, wet with sweat but felt good in my element the heart & soul of motorcycling in Sweet Home Chicago. There were bikeriders from all over the planet. 'So what's new & exciting in your world?' After work, I planned to attend the Mixed-Martial Arts fights at Poopy's that night. I bought a ringside ticket from Anthony Popkin, a service-tech at Illinois Harley. His brother Branden headlined the bill. I got off at 5:30pm - the fights scheduled for 8.

At 8pm I sat on my sickle on the side of the lonesome road. The cop returned from his car & handed over my license & registration & said, 'I suppose you wonder why I let you off with a verbal warning?' 'Not really,' I said. 'It's because you didn't run.' Run where? I barely knew where I was anyway. I had failed to make the turn in Woosung forty miles back & blasted straight down Ogle's South County Line. I rode too fast to see highway signs; I followed the setting sun. When the road turned south toward Sterling I knew I was screwed & had to backtrack to make-up time – your basic



philosophical faux pas in the eyes of the law. 'Besides,' I said, 'I'm not going to leave my bike & run into a cornfield – hide out in a barn with a farmer in a hockey mask wielding a chainsaw, 'Looky here Norbil, we got us a city boy! Got us some fresh meat!' no freaking way man.' He took a copy of FRP & said, 'well, you best drive the speed limit & watch out for deer.' 'I'd hate to get splattered.' 'I'd hate to do the paperwork.' He started to walk away but turned & said, 'this paper's from Stevens Point, you know the town?' Not really. 'My kid went to school there.' It's a good school. That much I know.

So as I sit here in Traffic Rehabilitation School contemplating destiny & writing these notes – yeah, he let me slide but another cop a few weeks earlier was a real tight-ass. To sum up the fight scene at Poopy's - aw hell, that's a whole different chapter. In fact the after hours party at Anthony's folks house is Chapter Three. See the 70's movie "Hard Times" to get a feel of MMA fights, especially when Chaney fights Street in the climactic warehouse brawl. For a feel of the whole fight scene recall Clint Eastwood movies "Any Which Way But Loose/Any Which Way You Can" for overall ambience. There's no movie to capture the after hours party – a bevy of barely-legal babes, a wild bunch of articulate young fighters discussing strategy, Anthony's dad tossing pallets onto a blazing bonfire back-dropped by an eight foot tall wall of corn. In the morning I sat alone cradling my throbbing head in the Iron Horse Social Club on Savanna's main drag & the cute bar maid with dreams of traveling to Ireland apologized the lights were off & there was no music. She swept the floor & picked up bottles from the previous night. I don't need entertainment; just give me a Bloody Mary for the ride home. It's going to be f'n long if I'm forced to obey the speed limit.

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