

40 YEARS AGO IN THAT HOTEL ROOM

off of Union Avenue, 3 a.m., Jane and I had been drinking cheap wine since noon and I walked barefoot across the rugs, picking up shards of broken glass (in the daylight you could see them under the skin, blue lumps working toward the heart) and I walked in my torn shorts, ugly balls hanging out, my twisted and torn undershirt spotted with cigarette holes of various sizes. I stopped before Jane who sat in her drunken chair.

then I screamed at her:

"I'M A GENIUS AND NOBODY KNOWS IT BUT ME!"

she shook her head, sneered and slurred through her lips:

"shit! you're a fucking asshole!"

I stalked across the floor, this time picking up a piece of glass much larger than usual, and I reached down and plucked it out: a lovely large speared chunk dripping with my blood, I flung it off into space, turned and glared at Jane:

"you don't know anything, you whore!"

"FUCK YOU!" she screamed.

then the phone rang and I picked it up and yelled: "I'M A GENIUS AND NOBODY KNOWS IT BUT ME!"

it was the desk clerk: "Mr. Chinaski, I've warned you again and again, you are keeping all our guests awake"

"GUESTS?" I laughed, "YOU MEAN THOSE FUCKING WINOS?"

then Jane was there and she grabbed the phone and yelled: "I'M A FUCKING GENIUS TOO AND I'M THE ONLY WHORE WHO KNOWS IT!"

and she hung up.

then I walked over and put the chain on the door.
then Jane and I pushed the sofa in front of the door
turned out the lights

and sat up in bed
waiting for them.
we were well aware of the
location of the drunk
tank: North Avenue
21 -- such a fancy sounding
address.

we each had a chair at the
side of the bed,
and each chair held ashtray,
cigarettes and
wine.

they came with much
sound:

"is this the right
door?"

"yeah," he said,
"413."

one of them beat with
the end of his night
stick:

"L.A. POLICE DEPARTMENT!
OPEN UP IN THERE!"

we did not
open up in there.

then they both beat with
their night sticks:

"OPEN UP! OPEN UP IN
THERE!"

now all the guests were
awake for sure.

"come on, open up," one of them
said more quietly, "we just want to
talk a bit, nothing more"

"nothing more," said the other
one, "we might even have a little drink
with you"

30-40 years ago
North Avenue 21 was a terrible place,
40 or 50 men slept on the same floor
and there was one toilet which nobody dared
excrete upon.

"we know that you're nice people, we just want to meet you ..."
one of them said.

"yeah," the other one said.

then we heard them
whispering.
we didn't hear them walk
away.
we were not sure that they
were gone.

"holy shit," Jane asked.
"do you think they're
gone?"

"shhhh ..."
I hissed.

we sat there in the dark
sipping at our
wine.
there was nothing to do
but watch two neon signs
through the window to the
east
one was near the library
and said
in red:
JESUS SAVES.
the other sign was more
interesting:
it was a large red bird
which flapped its wings
seven times
and then a sign lit up
below it advertising
advertising
SIGNAL GASOLINE.

it was as good a life
as we could
afford.