I swivel to my right and there on my bulletin board is tacked a photo of Céline.

I swivel to my left and there hung on the wall is a two by three foot color photo of a World War I Fokker triplane ...

I've come a long way from New Orleans, baby, and I've got a long way to go ...

tat tat tat tat ....

GOT CHA!!

TRANSFORMATION AND DISFIGURATION AT THE P.O.

there were always little tragedies we heard about on the job sitting on those stools eleven and one half hours a night every bit of outside information was greeted by us much like the inmates of a prison camp

every now and then a courier would come by and say "it's 3 to 2, end of the 3rd ..."

he never said 3 to 2 who because if you had been listening from the beginning you were able to decipher all that

one night I heard it from two fellows talking: "Harry checked out early when he walked into his house it was dark his wife and her lover were in bed they thought he was a burglar the lover had a gun and he shot Harry ...."
"where's Louie?"
I asked one night
I hadn't seen Louie
in a couple of weeks
Louie had two jobs
when he slept I didn't know

"Louie?
Louie fell asleep in bed one night
smoking a cigarette
the mattress caught fire
he burned to death ...."

there were many deaths
among the clerks
we all felt like
inmates of a prison
I also felt as if we were
front line troops
under continual attack and
bombardment
when there weren't deaths
there were breakdowns --
people who after years of
sticking letters
just couldn't do it anymore
or there were dismissals
for the slightest of reasons
it was death and transformation
and disfiguration:
people found
they couldn't walk anymore
or they suddenly
came up with speech defects
or they were shaken by tremors or
their eyes blinked too fast or
they came to work drugged or
drunk or both
it was terror and dismemberment
and the survivors
hunched on their stools wondering
who would be next
as the supervisors brutalized us
the supervisors
were in turn brutalized
by their superiors who
were in turn brutalized
by Washington, D.C.  
who always demanded  
more for less  
and the public brutalized  
Washington, D.C.  
and it was finally  
the little old lady  
pruning her garden roses  
who was the central cause  
of misery for everybody:  
Democracy at work  

one night I asked,  
"where's Hodges?"  

I don't know why but  
I always seemed to be  
the last to know anything  
perhaps because I was white  
and most of them were black  
even though  
they seemed to like me  

there was no answer  
about Hodges  
who was one of the meanest soups  
and white  
to top it all  

and I asked again  
and somebody said  
"he won't be around  
for a while ..."  

and then  
in hints and bits  
it was gotten to me:  
Hodges had been knifed  
in the parking lot  
on the way to his car  

and then  
it was inferred to me  
that they knew  
who did it  

"would it be anybody  
I know?"  
I smiled  

it got very silent  
Big George put his mail down  
stared at me  

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he stared at me for a long time
then he turned
started sticking his letters again
and I said
"I wonder who's winning
the old ball game?"

"4 to 2,"
somebody said
"end of the 4th ...."

Hodges never came back
and soon
I got out of there too.

RED MERCEDES

naturally, we are all caught in
downmoods, it's a matter of
chemical imbalance
and an existence
which, at times,
seems contrary to
any real chance at
happiness.

I was in this downmood
when this rich pig
along with his blank
inamorata
in his red Mercedes
cut
in front of me
at racetrack parking.

it clicked inside of me
in a flash:
I'm going to pull that fucker
out of his car and
kick his
ass!

I followed him
into Valet
parked behind him
and jumped from my
car
ran up to his
door

and yanked at
it.
it was
locked.
the
windows were
up.

I rapped on the window
on his
side
"open up! I'm gonna
bust your
ass!"

he just sat there
looking straight
ahead.
the woman did
likewise.
they wouldn't look
at me.
he was 20 years
younger
but I knew I could
take him
he was soft and
pampered.

I beat on the window
with my
fist: