



# Switchblades and Hotrods

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JON LEON parties his way to a pounding in Raleigh

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Illustration by MARK CUNNINGHAM

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Saturday Night. We took our old beat-up downtown organs to the Tangerine Slide where we jiggled with the old crabapple mothers and the good fast hard-line cokeheads. We took three snapshots of Mother Kratchet and ten booze-rounds for old man Griffith. We shook a leg and laid down the fives and tens after we rolled dice with Sir Jones of Kentucky.

Earlier that night I'd felt completely content. I had shared two bottles of Bordeaux with my lover while watching Woody Allen's *Celebrity*. We had had shrimp

scampi for dinner at a ritzy Italian restaurant. Still, I had a curious leaning toward rebellion. I needed a night outdoors: the cool air, street scenes, flirtation with the periphery of ordinary and safe entertainment.

My comrade, Penelope, phoned a friend of hers who works at the pizza joint uptown. He said there was a show and we could catch a ride. It was in a house across the tracks. The place was crummy, brimming with punks, and you had to take

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a dirt path to get up there. I carried with me two 40-ounces of Old English Malt Liquor and a penchant for good and rowdy fun.

First off I ran into the owner of the house. He greeted us at the front door holding a bottle of Aristocrat vodka. He said to me,

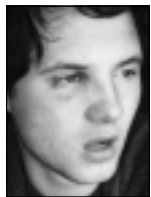
“My old man was a straight shooter; he took what he need and fired out over the plains. We are numbers; we are a bag o’ chil’ren with barbeque eyes. We eat mashed potato dinners over the hillside. Let’s take our numbers

to the Farmers Market. Granddaddy Dockside, yes.” In the South, in the sticks, on that primrose path, who passes for a gentleman? No one, as far as I can see. We passed the lush and headed inside. Straight away I took a shock. This wasn’t my usual shake on the town. Why the red, white, and blue-blooded farmboys singled me out I’ll never know.

As a cover I told everyone that I was documenting the affair for *Maximumrocknroll’s* “Scene Report.” I carried along with me a Vivitar camera, Sony mini-cassette recorder, and a kite-high blood-alcohol content. Half-cocked as it is, this town isn’t too glamorous. What with the hot-pant teenyboppers still into post-punk, the bearded indie rockers, and the Nike-clad metalheads. What a joke. But perhaps the joke was on me: an intellectual milling about the scene trying to pick up on some curious counterculture; meanwhile spying ideas for a story.

While watching a skinny girl with short, jet-black hair I began to brainstorm for plots:

*That woman of mine came down*



*Jon Leon arrived in Raleigh via Philadelphia and before that Atlanta. His poems have appeared in several microscopic lit and art journals, and his limited-edition pamphlets from Legget Press have been distributed as far away as Berlin and Australia. He travels frequently and hopes to express what he believes is an authentic American voice.*

*the stairs with a sultry glance at my backside. What I hadn’t bargained for was her hand on my crotch in under a second. I took her in my arms and laid her on the bed like it was an operating table. From there I swiftly turned her inside out, clearing up some ailments she’d needed fixing for some time. She left me cold and naked before the bureau, fumbling with my trousers ...*

No, too pulpy, I thought. I walked on; the band started playing. It was a fast, heavy, dissonant droning with some keyboards mixed in for a more macabre sound. I didn’t like it one bit. But everyone else seemed thrilled, bobbing and swilling their beer gleefully. What a waste of a night. I could’ve been at home putting my bookshelf in chronological order.

It was getting over midnight, the show was ending, I was nine sheets to the wind and gaining on ten, completely bored and eager for some action. With complacency I began to mingle.

The atmosphere seemed surly and that mood revealed itself to be contagious. I told some delinquent to come over and tell me what he thought of Rimbaud. He stumbled and fell over his words, I think trying to ask me if I also was a fan of the *Rambo* movies. I guess he’d never read the juvenile French poet. I told him that Jim Thompson was my favorite novelist and he took me for an idiot, but I didn’t let up. “I like it in my neighborhood when the garbage truck comes before I can have a chance to wake up and smell it,” he spouted. I had to find something else to do.

I went looking for Penelope when I heard my name whispered close behind on the porch. My senses clashed, I saw a switchblade, a leather jacket, two hot-rod stars. Someone yelled, “Communist.”

Now, my writing I never considered ultimately leftist. Sartre can hardly be thought a communist influence. I was merely a hu-

manistic poet concerned with the problem of the relation between individuals. Who here had heard of Jon Leon anyway? "What's with these dimwitted Bazooka Joes," I thought.

The guy with the fists shouted, "I got a tight ring of brass in my back pant's pocket. I'll show you what it's like in the hot seat if you don't get that aiming eye off my back, you son of a bitch. I'll let you have it in under a second if you don't go on with the prodding." Another voice: "Listen, Blake, he's not the man you want. Jonesy took the batch. I just gave him a loan for holding. He's probably off with the loot and my generosity in Bermuda by now."

Was he talking about my manuscript *Justice Alley*? Anyway, he was a glib cock and his girlfriend was standing by provoking me while some primitive greaser pummeled my face. I

guess I'd crossed the esoteric boundary line. The guy stuck his thumb, like a coward, right into my eye socket, nearly blinding me. I thought I'd never write again, never see the myriad images of life, the beautiful scenery — nothing like here. I stretched myself up tall and shot a glance into the girlfriend's eye. I bopped her in the nose with my beer bottle, cackled, and then spit in her crimson face.

Penelope started the car. I leaned back, rib cage all over the place in that leather seat, thinking, "How I see it, you need a swift punishing and hard-nosed scolding just in the nick of time, right before you fall out, come to your senses, pack your suitcase, and set things straight — ready to fall back again." •

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## **Rigsbee & Cotter, Attorneys at Law**

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