

*Portrait of a 21st Century Snuff Fighter*  
G. Wells Taylor

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**Dedicated to Jane Goodall**

*For introducing me to the other apes in the jungle.*

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**PART ONE:  
The Soldier**

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**1**

Where to begin? Cassette player in skull crushing hand is on. Flesh ripping teeth, blood drinking mouth and marrow tasting tongue are tuned to the same artistic pitch, working the gentle truce together now, labia peaceful in action—coexisting licking the numbers testing one, two, three...

“That Animan, oh yeah! He sure is a monster. Course, in my own special way, so am I.”

I pause for a scratch and twitch, thinking over many vicious ways that I could tell my story. Starting me the hero fighting in the ring or scrapping in the dustbins back in Ireland. But that wouldn't be true, and truth is the only thing that ever fought me to the final bell and won. Problem was I rarely remembered my childhood, it being a great boring collection of rubber teat sucking and the like, so many soiled diapers and cradle caps. It was boring to me: all the day in, day out tests for the body and mind. Oh yeah, I remember all those pasty birds in white coats giving me the IQ quizzes with ink blots and the pressure cuffs and the eyedropper squeezing and the like. It was no place for a young fellow, just a wee boy with nothing but a bouncy ball for protection. All alone, you might say, with a bunch of featherweight men and women in white, plastic hats and all glaring, staring and pairing—digging into the old cogger box yours truly calls his brain; but, I did all right, I guess.

I grew up calling the doctors and scientists, whitecoats; funny, I still do, when I see some little pigeon-breasted bird with pop bottle lenses and the like, I howl, “Hey, there

goes a fucking whitecoat!” I guess it’s hard to shake. They worked me round the clock, you might say. The boring bastards burning the midnight oil as I dreamed and dreamed—they ciphering like Freud with Jung itch and counting the pitter-pats of my heart and the electrical lightning strokes in my brain. Shit, the times I woke up coughing, spitting wires and duct tape.

I was brought up in a big cinderblock house in the Canadian Rockies. A really big house, just rectangles and long straight halls covered in hard creamy paint I could see my reflection in. There were fifty people there whose lives revolved around me. Little ol’ me, little wee ol’ me fifty pounds on my first birthday me.

Once I talked to a whitecoat shrink about the whole thing. He said I turned out violent because of unconscious resentment for those who deprived me of love. ‘Those’ in this case being the whitecoats interested in the fibrous and gaseous natures of me more than the parts that the gods might squabble over. That surprised me, because I always felt it was a conscious choice my taste for blood, and I never laid the blame for my violent nature on my past. I was violent because I was good at it. Damn good. You might say I came out swinging—from whatever pink, fuzzy and unnamed corner of the ring I entered.

I remember at the cinderblock house they used to put me through all sorts of physical training for pumping up the old body, piling on the muscle so to speak. The program I loved the most was boxing. I loved it. Course, once I took to that, I kind of gave up on the old headwork—in a serious way. I learned anyway, having an aptitude for cogging and setting notions in their proper time and place. And I mean, I really didn’t have time for schooling. Oh, they’d sit me down with a book, but all I could think about was the way it felt slugging my fists into something soft and warm, like a man’s belly, or that jarring kind of cement feel a jaw can have when you lay into it with a haymaker.

Even the times I did read, I kind of changed the story on my own, so I guess that’s headwork in a way, but it never felt like work. I’d imagine, old *Great Expectations* Pip like laying into Miss Havisham, just kind of punching her three ways of Sunday, just pulling her veil down and bang, bang, bang on the cheekbones for all the cockteasing, till she can’t remember if she was getting married or what; and Jagers the lawyer fellow with the smile and dirty hands, I could see our hero Pip knocking over his big happy teeth like tombstones. And Pip’s sister, well she needed to be put in line, as simple as that—bent over something and screaming.

*Moby Dick* was a favorite of mine because of all the spearing and the flesh rendering and the great boiling pots of blubber and the thick black meat smoke in the air—though he yawped our Melville did, sometimes making a sleepfest for the coggerbox with all the extra stuff flowing out of his pen. But I read that and imagined old Queequay diving in and going a real violent round with the white whale. Then, he kind of KO’s the big bastard by knocking his eyes out and punching through the backs of the bony sockets into the brain. Real bloody shot, you know—the crowds would be screaming. Oh yeah, I remember, then Queequay comes out of the water like a fisherman king, and that crippled bastard Ahab goes at him with a harpoon because he’s been cheated of his prize, and then doesn’t Queequay pick him up and sit him down hard on his ivory leg. Just, bang, in a kind of wrestler’s flying mare proctology thing. And me seeing and laughing at the look on old Ahab’s face as the ivory slides home. I knew that wasn’t the kind of thing a schoolboy should think about, but it got me reading.

So you might think yours truly was being a little short of sight by abandoning the mind for the body, especially after the great mechanization that took place at the final count for the twentieth: just digital machines and no one working like. You might say it was kind of stupid to go out into a world equipped with only a strong body and limited skills. You might think I'm a kind of a retard for giving up all that high and mighty headwork for a life using my body. Well, fuck you anyway. I'd like to hear you say that to my face.

An average man would probably splash his brains to the four winds at this point with a heavy handgun. Not me, though. I always had violence to fall back on. Now, I wasn't always hurting someone. It was the video movie library we had there, at the Cinderblock house that got me going. Grainy black Sonny Liston honest days fights on the tapes and Blu-rays and young Cassius Clay beating on Joe Frazier's head made me think of the punch and jab as a method of expressing my emotional subtext. I used to be content just banging around my coach a little bit, or punching the heavy bag until the sawdust poured. But there came a day that I drew first blood, and it was beautiful. Like your first lay, or one of those really rare magic sunrises when the air's all misty and the dew shines like diamonds on the leaves. It was beautiful, and I never looked back. The scene was this:

I was about sixteen, and sick and tired of the cinderblock house in the mountains, I mean, what am I going to do up there anyway? I used to headwork a joke that I would just settle down with a nice mountain goat for the fast and furious and raise a big-balled and bearded family of billy boys. Anyway, I asked them if I could go into the city for a movie or something. They showed me movies up there, but I always had a whitecoat with me, monitoring a wire in my dick, or something. Anyway, they say no—and that's enough for me. I wait for night and then I beat the shit out of the four big guys that were there to handle me, and the closest thing I had to equals, or friends for that matter. Anyway, something came over me, when they tried to push me back into my room because I just started swinging and kicking and breaking. I killed each and every one of them with my bare fists. I couldn't help it once I got started, it was like hitting putty, and when they screamed it only made me smile and hit them harder. And they screamed—oh they didn't like that at all.

Anyway, by sheer luck and violence, yours truly escaped even though they have all kinds of electric crap that could track me down or fry my ass: me running and headworking that they'd kill me now that I've whacked four of their whitecoat musclemen. I got away, quick-like by jumping into a big roaring river and splashing away like a salmon. There were times when I was lost in this monster frothy cloud that I thought I was done for, like my bill was paid; but, somehow I washed clear past the sharp and nasty rocks that wanted my flesh and blood. I went to a big city. It was some place with a real sissy name, something royal and you could just see the guy in pantyhose, but I was so pumped I barely remember it, and from there I went to the states, then, Mexico; and before you know it, there I was living in Argentina.

Why Argentina? Well, it wasn't from fright or any great hatched egg from the coggerbox. You see, when I was traveling through Mexico, which was somewhere I had planned to stay, I looked for a job that didn't require too much headwork. You see, in Mexico they still have lots of human machines who require less care and money to run than real machines, and they're cheaper to replace. The fuckers!

So, I'm roaming those dusty streets. It's a real nice night, and this little guy comes up. I guess I look like a fighter. I got a big square jaw, broad nose like a tuna can, and heavy low forehead. I keep my hair cut in a stiff brush and I make sure my big body is in tiptop shape, being an early bloomer with all the veins and muscles bulging. So this guy asks me if I like fights. "Señor," he called me, can you believe it? I kind of chuckled. I tell him of course I do, and he asks me to follow him. I get this little voice in my skull saying maybe he's a fag and he wants me, so I size him up and think if he is, he'll be a dead fag soon. We go, and end up at this real seedy looking hotel that smelled like rosehips and whores, me knowing this since at this point in my adventures I had become acquainted with both fragrances. He leads me into the basement of the place. One hundred pesos he whined at me, and I gave it to him, having got some money in a kind of dishonest fashion that I'd rather not tell you about.

In through this door we go, and there's a dark room full of seats, all pointed at a screen. He drops into a chair and waits for me. I figured it was going to be fuck flicks, plenty of drooling fun that I don't go in for much. I'm there and pumping up just about to clobber the living shit out of this Mexican when the movie starts. I had my wide back to it, but swung around when I heard a bell.

First thing I notice in the movie is this big cage maybe twenty-five feet tall. There's a couple of guys in it, both of them about the same size. One looks Chinese, and the other's a black brother of African ancestry. I let the little Mexican's collar drop and sat down beside him. I noticed the black guy has big steel knuckles on one fist and I see the Chinaman moving like a karate expert-type: slinking and underhanded. Well, they square off as I watch, and I begin to feel a little homesick. They always had popcorn at the cinderblock house.

The battle was fast and furious. It reminded me of Ultimate Fighting, a fun form of entertainment from the 20th Century that I'd bumped shoulders with on the way south—but this was better. This filled in all the blanks. The Chinaman kicked the shit out to the black guy. He had all his karate tricks to throw at him, and the black guy wasn't nearly violent enough. I always figured karate was a way of letting your body do what it wanted to do. We always screw it up by headworking our way around it—spoiling the mood for blood and sport and worrying about getting kicked in the nuts. Or other people do, I have no problem getting natural, and even as I watched the guy I felt my muscles begin to twitch and jump as I think how I would react, just boom, boom, boom—sayonara!

Soon, anyway, I hear one of the black guy's legs snap wet and sappy as a green tree branch, and one of his arms hangs crooked. So the crowd on the film goes wild when the Chinaman comes in for the knockout and then, while the crowds howling like dogs for his blood, doesn't the black guy get a lucky swing with his good arm and knock the Chinaman down. The crowd just shrieks at that point, as the black guy drags himself over and with many heavy smacks of his steel knuckles, the Chinaman's head is a red puddle. And I'm watching and I can't believe it. They went right for it, no holding back, killed him. I even think I got a bit of wood I was so excited.

The film ended quickly without credits or anything. I just remember the look on the black guy's face as he staggered to his feet and raised his arm in victory. I turned to the Mexican and asked him where the hell that fight took place, because I had this nagging suspicion that it would not wash with the black-skirted ministers of fate in the US of A. He tells me Argentina, and then damned if he doesn't give me an address and telephone

number. An Argentine phone number, that is. Anyway, I couldn't let an opportunity like that slip by.

I got the cash together quickly in a way that I will not yet divulge and traveled on down to Argentina in an airplane that had a wonky engine on its left wing that kept cutting in out like some old guy snoring. It got me really choppy inside when it started sawing logs as we went whizzing over some of those Andes Mountains. There's nothing walking or creeping on the planet that scares me, but I cogged that gravity would win in a toe to toe death match, especially him swinging at me with granite peaks and valleys.

Anyway, I get there, and call the number then arrange to meet this guy. This puny greased-back Argentinean that spoke good English, looks me over and says if I'd like, I could fight that very weekend. The prize is a thousand American dollars, he tells me. Great! I said, almost kind of laughing inside cause this guy was going to let me compete and he didn't even know if I was a good fighter or not. I guess he had nothing to lose.

I pause and look out the window of the penthouse, then snap off the little cassette recorder I have been yawping my life's story into. The clock on the wall shows me in no uncertain terms that I am out of time for the leisurely rosy ruminations of the way I was, and that I am due at the Metrodome. The limousine will be outside, I am sure, with some scotch-assed monkey shining up the hubcaps and sneaking quick drinks out of the bar in back. I can see his precious little face already, headworked into existence, on the temporal movie screen in my skull. He has dainty white hands, and lily petal cheeks. I growl incomprehensibly, but make my point with three sharp nasty smacks of fist against palm. I have to go to the Metrodome. I pitch the cassette recorder on the couch where the writer-type individual can do his thing with it.

## 2

Animan was about seven, seven and a half feet tall, and his body was made of great tangles of chromium tubing. It was kind of pretty the way the light glittered off him. Then I chuckle like cause all he needs is a fat guy blowing on one of his arms and he looks like a tuba. Anyway, he's—I call him a 'he' cause it feels better for me—I don't mean he had a little brass spigot between his legs or a faucet, but I'll feel better knocking the living shit out of him if I see him as a *him*. I mean, I still could go real violent on a woman, real angry boy stuff like you're not my mother, but that always leaves a sour taste in my mouth, and I prefer my violent moments with women in bed. Anyway, he's ugly when you look past the gleam, Animan, which might be another reason I call him a him. He's got this big steam iron head, just a big chunk of smooth iron with a pair of beady bloodshot eyes glaring out. I guess they were lights, but they had the look of real eyes the way the face was shaped. That's why the hair on yours truly's thick scalp prickled just a little bit.

Anyway Animan just stands there where he stopped after climbing onto the stage like his batteries had gone quits on him. I'm across from him on a wooden stool that's got my backside screaming for some kind action. I figure I'd like to scrap with him there and then, just to get my blood flowing again.

I had other problems though, and maybe that's why I don't walk over and start pounding. My brains were all awash around headwork since I saw that guy before the

show. He was one of the pressed suit daisies with skin like milk and nuts the size of buttonholes. He's got big lips and wide staring eyes, anyway. Doesn't he come up and say he knows me. I kind of go all chin-dropped and saggy, but manage to maintain my poise: all self-confident and carnivorous. He says he worked for Gemco and then he says some stuff about my past that only someone who knows me could know. I can't place his face, being one of any in a puddle of pasty mugs, but he seems to know me. I just about let him have it right there since I had the sudden feeling he was a United Nations man or something and that he was wanting to bust yours truly and throw away the key like. Anyway he says nothing more than congratulations on the films, says he's seen them, and I've proven a few of his theories. Again, I'm tempted to bust him up like a chair, but hold back. He kind of smiles then says it would be well worth my while to beat Animan, when it comes time to do all the violence and machine taking apart. He suddenly sounds like he doesn't know me, cause I can't imagine me letting anyone beat me. So he says he's looking forward to the fight, and he leaves the room. My brain must have been smoking like old wires because I should have lifted him out of his shoes, but I let him walk—while I cogged over that one.

That's an hour past say, and now I'm sitting, anyway, with my brain all frazzled by the headwork, and kind of putting together some big story like Mechano, and he's gone before any good questions come leaking out. So I'm sitting there with my head full, and I shake it kind of, so I can get a few real good focused glares at my opponent. The robot-thing just stands there staring. A couple of whitecoats go buzzing around him with tiny blinking gadgets in their little bee-wing hands. I get a kick when they look at me, and I give them a face like you wouldn't believe and I think they shit their pants. They turn all pale and sweaty anyway.

I look at Animan and he just stands there staring back, but I figure to call him a fuckface would be like doing the same thing to a can opener or a laptop computer and I cog that I'm above that, so I look into the crowd and start making goo-goo eyes at this tall blonde with mighty tits and a short skirt that's letting me see her sheer silk panties—kind of dark in the middle, you know, the way we like it: snip, snip, trim, trim, yum, yum. I mouth something else about fucking, then mug a little letting the bravado of a killer work for me. I give the Animan the finger, and kind of wink at the blonde. The Animan doesn't blink an eye. What an asshole.

Soon a guy comes up on stage. He's a seedy little Italian bastard with a nose like a fishhook that I know as the fight promoter: Juan Matisse. I try to stay clear of him since any snuff fights he arranges are usually like against my grandfather or something. The blood flows fast, but it isn't fierce. Easy money, but I'm past that point in my career. Where Matisse got the Animan, I don't know, but it sure doesn't conjure up any pretty picture, and it inspires no confidence in me. I think for a minute that this fight might be like me wrestling a refrigerator or something, but the idea sort of fades away like gas. There's something about Animan that looks legit.

Matisse smiles with his golden teeth all around at the press, and they respond by wasting gigabytes of memory cards on him. He tap-taps the mike then starts on with his banjo voice heavily accented.

“Gracias, Gracias,” he says though with more of an accent. “I am Juan Matisse. As you know after years of wrangling and months of deal making, I personally have

arranged to bring to you the match of the century. Animan, mountain of steel and technology versus Nuke, 13 Time World Champion Snuff Fighter.”

I growl at the little porkpie son of a bitch for my second billing. The hackles around my ears stands up. Dork! He goes on and on then, as much as I would have liked to end it with so many bone-crunching whacks.

“The kind builders of Animan, Gemco—a division of Specific Electric, have brought their tremendous creation to Santa Rosa for what is being billed the battle of the twenty-first century. It is hoped that Animan will lead a vanguard of advances in robotics and electronics. Specific Electric sees this rumble on the pampas as the final test for their creation. In just four nights this terrifying creation of the digital world will undergo its final option. Animan will battle Nuke, world champion snuff fighter. Santa Rosa will be the grounds for the world’s greatest battle, where man will combat technology. Is it possible for a mere machine to overcome its creators? Is it possible for a weak creature of flesh and blood to overpower five hundred pounds of circuits, steel and hydraulics? Is this the end for mankind?”

I get kind of pissed off at this point. I figure he’s going at my reputation a bit here, what with the lie about me being one of Animan’s creators, and the crack about weak flesh and blood. I stand up quick and smash my stool into little pieces. I throw what’s left of it at the press and make my way to the mike. Juan Matisse beat a hasty and lily-livered retreat.

“I’ll push that frying pan he calls a face into the last century!” I kind of get crowded now, all the press moving in like a bunch of oiled faggots. But I get kind of carried away. “I’ll make him wish he’d been made into hubcaps, or bathroom fixtures!”

Now, the crowd starts moving around and kind of oohing a lot about something, and not taking any more pictures or listening to me or anything. I see a couple of Matisse’s bodyguards giving me the cruel eye and the pouty lips and iron chins. I reach out and tear an ear off one of them. That bastard goes into his coat for a big heavy gun. I easily take the gun and bust his cheekbones with it. Well, the whole show goes wild at this point. I keep punching and punching and punching. Always it felt good, the hard fist cracks on the jaws and the warm putty punches in the bellies. I guess I’m a real showman at heart, because soon the cameras are on me again. I fold a bodyguard in two and pitch him onto the howling horde of media fuckers and they go back as a mass into a plate glass window. Its one of those big heavy convention center jobs so it goes bang and comes down in a bloodthirsty curtain.

Well, before you know it a platoon of soldiers comes in, and after about an hour of real violence and a half hour at the police station, I’m walking home to my penthouse having just paid my bail to the sergeant. There’s blood all over me at this point. My jacket’s been torn to smithereens and my ass is hanging out of my jeans. I feel a tender spot on my skull, my eyes jump wince-like, the skin around them wrinkling like prunes. Someone has knocked a patch of fur off with a table leg. I think I put him in a coma for his pains. As I’m walking and kind of reliving the whole violent episode in my head, I remember that when the fight was going strong, I started looking around for that Animan to see if I can spar a little. Seems he chickenshit disappeared just after the fight started which gives me a pleasing squirt in the guts because I figured he didn’t have the belly for the close work. Anyway, I walk into the lobby of my apartment building and ask the sleepy little gook bastard behind the counter for any mail. There was a postcard from

Warren McVicars, an Irish cop I met from New York City. He paid big money to meet me and have a little spar. I even broke his forearm for him. The postcard was from a whorehouse in Singapore, so I guessed he made good on his promise to go to the Vatican. He's my buddy now—like I need a buddy. Just then someone taps me light on the shoulder. I come around quick with a fist cocked being still full of the swinging hot blood. It's the blonde I saw at the press conference. Her tits are parked under my pecks as I give here eyes the once over. Nice and bright and blue, like morning sky through a dewdrop.

"I hope you don't mind, Mr. Nuke." She smiled with tall white cocksucking teeth. "I asked around and one of the promoters gave me your address." Then she gave me a little Bambi frown, looking at my wounded hide. "Oh, dear, you're hurt."

"Shit no, this is nothing, baby—er, what will I call you." I'm figuring from her eyes that she won't let me go on calling her 'baby.'

"Veronica," she said and smiled again. "Veronica Ramsey."

I just go quiet a minute listening to the pretty sound the name made inside my head. "Veronica..." I listen to it again. "That's pretty." I hear myself saying, like I'm Don Juan or Johnny Depp or some shit.

"Thank you, Mr. Nuke. Do you have a first name?" Her eyes batted long lashes at me.

"Nuke's fine." I smile now, starting to get a major nose full of this broad's hormones. "Nuke." I look down and notice she has a hand out like she wants me to shake it. I grab it, as gently as I can. She only winces a little.

"Pleased to meet you, Nuke."

"Pleased to meet you, Veroncia." I smile again, and really feel like action. "How about fucking, Veronica. Do you like it or what?"

Well, doesn't she just haul off and smack me. I almost decked her, being still somewhat full of heat from the battle, and now a little horny. She turns away and walks out of the hotel. I watch her round ass go. It's one of those ones that was big without being flabby—a dancer's ass, like liquid steel. I almost fetched her back and gave her a spanking, but my arrows of vengeance misfire and something inside tells me no. Maybe it was her name that kept me back. *Veronica*.

I was all lit up now though, so instead of going right to my room I decided to pop into a bar and pick up a whore or something. That slap had made me a little too angry for any more Noel Coward dialogue. I wanted to dip the wick and I wasn't going to be picky. So long as I could be very rough.

### 3

So my right fist goes crunch up under his ribs and out comes a great big woof of air like he's blowing out birthday candles. Then, I'm kind of enjoying that and I nearly miss his hatchet hand that happens to be whistling toward my bristly skull. As it was, I feel this slight shadow afterimage on my scalp, kind of like a memory you want to forget but can't. Like he almost got me there. A left from him, I block; like its thrown at me by a baby, it has no power, and then I shove him back with a real twist and pull on his hatchet hand. I feel a faraway chicken bone kind of crack. I think he broke a finger—maybe a wrist bone—hard to say. Anyway, he goes curling away like a spinning top and smashes

into the iron turnbuckle with a clang. I'm still scanning the roof out of the corner of an eye, since I saw the referee starting to drop there.

So, if you haven't seen one, the referees are these big iron robot type jobs, about eight feet tall with legs like spiders. They dangle over the ring on cables, and pretty much do nothing else—just big dangerous chandeliers, unless there's a clinch. They watch for that, fighters tangling it up—getting in close for a breather or some nasty flesh work. He started to drop the second we grappled there, and so you have to move fast. The referee's only job is to break up clinches, and none too gently. I've seen them do it. They move fast, and they can pull the arm off a man like a wing off a paper airplane. Anyway, I learned just watching what they could do. Close fighting is discouraged by the network bosses on account of the cameras being unable to pick up the action, and close up wrestling fights don't sell. They learned that a long time ago when Judo masters took over the old days Ultimate Fighting and turned it into a yawn and snore and chokeholds and who fucking cares. They changed the rules back then, before the referees were installed, and said you couldn't clinch for more than ten seconds—so that's the end of those popping weasel little wrestlers with their glass jaws and double-jointed spines—just bang, bang, bang and down they go.

And that's changed even more now because another incentive against the chin-to-chin, nipple to nipple scrapping is the backers will pay extra for real photogenic deathblows. And I've been known to pick up bonuses from time to time. They like the real crazy stuff, muscles pumped for action, head back screaming like an Indian. You see, in this game you just can't pay a man enough to take a fall.

So this mug comes off the cables doubled over, as fast as he can come with a couple of broken ribs. He's about six-six, weighs in at 250 in his scanties, and with his hatchet outreaches me by maybe a foot. I kind of see the spotlight gleam along the hatchet blade. He's got it back and really cocked for a stump splitter. His other mitt's out to mess up my defense. A normal man would die just about then, being indisposed with the hand and the hatchet and being all shaky in the knees from having perused this monster's bio—spent his teenage years in an American pen for killing his mommy and daddy with a kitchen knife—but not yours truly. I fake a charge at him, and then stop just out of his chopping range. I can do it faster than anybody in the ring today. I've got good eyes, and legs like steel pistons right? So he takes the bait and swings at the place I *should* be, and I watch a second then leap in and jam my shoulder up under his arm.

I catch him by the wrist and really put the squeeze on like I'm going to loosen the skin and peel it. I bend his elbow over my shoulder and pump it down with all my strength. It snaps loud and proud. A big red bolt of blood shoots out, cause I've pulled so hard the bones have snapped into slivers and cut through the muscle and skin—really wild stuff! He shrieks in my ear, which I hadn't accounted for, but can live with, and the crowd goes through the roof. He screeches a little more as I keep hold of the wrist and I kind of spin away from him like we're waltzing. The big bastard's tough though, because he gives me a hard punch in the mouth. I was off guard, and being the showman again. I'm suddenly dropping to a knee the same moment the hatchet's dropping out of his useless hand. I'm a little dazed—not really hurt, but dazed because I didn't expect the package—you let a 250 pound man punch you in the mouth when you don't expect it and we'll trade notes.

Small price to pay, but I kind of curse myself for letting it happen. He deserved to get that lick in, I give him that, but my instincts are on red alert now, having had a brush with overconfidence. I let my reflexes take over and I wrap my legs through his and drop to the mat. He goes down like a Sequoia. He's on the floor and spewing blood, and I'm looking right at his hatchet blade just lying there useless. I smile kind of devious-like, smelling victory, and never knowing when the cameras have a tight shot on me. I snap it up, smiling like a clown and look at my opponent. I've got him pinned in a scissor hold, like they used to in the flashy asshole days of wrestling—with guys in swimming trunks and go-go boots. I quick like a bunny give him the blade of the hatchet over the eyes. There's a loud wooden *thunk!* sound, and the crowd just about pees itself. I've done my job though and the blade only dropped a quarter inch—just enough to draw some blood. I pull it free and the blood jumps out. I let him go, but he's down and dazed and eyes full of blood and all. His face is one big bloody smear and it peers around like a sleepy old man's.

The crowd's chanting my name now, and I'm up with the hatchet over my head. I'm giving them the big chest and shoulder muscle routine, and I try to grin like a demon, and I let some blood drool out of my mouth like I've had a hard go of it and I'm going to enjoy letting some air into this guy's head. "Nuke! Nuke! Nuke!" The crowd keeps chanting, and I take it all in like a star and for a bit of show allow my left leg a bit of a shake, like I'm tired or something. They scream even more, because they'd hate to see me pass out now, before I've carved this boy up into fish sticks. I see my opponent; he's looking for his corner, crawling across the hard concrete pouring blood. The crowd's going into a real frenzy as I stalk over, yeah, I stalk over like a great big rabid wolf. For a second I'm embarrassed and angry because I see the bastard's crying like a baby—so I think to go right for it, no more glory. Just a quick hit—*kabang*—before he shits himself.

I look into the white-enamel eyes of the crowd. They smile like savages, and their mouths are so many evil round yawps into hell. I look down at him—this man, this crybaby, this mommy's boy—he's bleeding and sniveling at my feet. I'm hoping he doesn't beg or anything because that will get my blood pressure up and that usually makes me go wild and I lose all my artistic poise and purpose. I hear the big black mouths scream my name. I heft the hatchet and split his skull neat and true from front to back. His brains spill out on the floor like a big creamy wave or like old oatmeal, then the blood and all. I smile for us both then. Why not, he would have loved to do the same to me. Damn it, the feeling was great. I swing the hatchet around over my head causing a drooling curtain of blood all around.

I bow real low, and the band starts to play. I bow again, and climb out of the ring, feeling real excellent like I could dance all evening, or do sexy gymnastics with that special someone till the sun comes up and the lubricants run out.

#### 4

"Anyway, I pause for reflection, it being part of the last week of my ordinary life, before I go into the annals of what would be called civilized history. I've got to say that life as a snuff fighter is not what you would refer to as easy, or in terms that could be found in a thesaurus beside the word cakewalk. No. A fellow has to know what's going

on his own head before he tries it. Not to say there's a lot of headwork, because there isn't. But, I'm referring to the non-difficult type thinking that one would acquaint with moments of headwork were that individual in a job where that were required. It being not so much headwork, as soulwork. That's more like it. That's what I mean: soulwork. Forget that other part."

I pause here and look at this pasty little novelist type chap that would look at home in a whitecoat. He sits quietly like a good little bird. He's still sporting the shiner I gave him when I became upset about a crack he made directed at my syntax. True, he caught me off guard, because I was not all together sure at the time what my syntax was; but I figured he was not being paid to criticize yours truly. The only reason I'm talking to the scribe is because some book company paid four million dollars for the privilege. I'm tempted at times to just punch the shit out of this guy and run him through his scanner, stuff him into his computer and email him home. But, I have been good. Besides he wasn't really a bad guy, just too busy with the headwork for his own good. Fucking writer.

"I'm beginning to understand you, Mr. Nuke." His voice comes out like a sugar cube. "You have felt your career was a natural calling—a spiritual duty."

"Yeah!" I tell him, trying to sound confident. He knows shit about me, it's obvious, but I hate being shown up by these little birds full of headwork because I get mad and injure most of them. "Yeah, it is something that could be called natural to my instinctive nature. Or in other words, it is me, and I have to be it."

"It's almost a karmic thing, a divine calling..." He takes a noisy slurp from his whisky. That's because I snapped off his front tooth when trying to explain my feelings about my mother, or father for that matter, neither which I actually knew, but who I know had to be somewhere, but for some reason forgot to get in touch with yours truly for the past years of his life. I'm not really upset about it, I just don't like these tiny men with glasses and pens and paper, and the big questions and the probing stares digging for dangerous feelings about it.

"Yes," I say, seeing an opportunity to show off my own acquaintance with the headwork business. "A divine right, a notion of those kings in what would once be called the empire of Britain, which if you think about it is incorrect since the king in charge of an empire is an emperor by rights. You ask any Chinaman." This little tidbit I picked up from Premiere Dong, a Chinaman wrestler and former Asian porn star that I knew about a year before. We had a bit of a chat at a big fighter's meet and sure enough he starts yakking it up about the emperor of China, like I cared, but I must have done a little headwork about it because I managed to do the two and two with the facts. Mind you, he did go on and on about it, almost until my ears started to bleed. I just remembered that chat and kept it in mind when I was set to fight him about a month later. Premiere Dong died horribly.

Anyway, this writer looks at me again, and his eyes go all sheepdog and drippy. "Perhaps if we were to concentrate upon your early days. If we could focus on how you felt in the cinderblock house that you called home."

Okay, well, I almost warn him then not to start any chinwag about how I felt back then. At least I want to tell him to put on his football pads because I might try to kick a field goal with his private parts once I start pouring out the little angry bits of the start of my life's calling. I guess I just shrugged instead, and kind of chuckled thinking about the

way he looked last time he regained consciousness—stupid, like some chimpanzee with a gut full of moonshine. “Sure,” I say, and start talking.

## 5

There was this nurse there, Lois, who used to show me her pussy. I don’t know how she managed—there usually being a big digital gigabyte camera on or up my ass most of the whole time, but somehow she found a way to give me a peek. I guess you could say that Lois was my first love that being my first in the early romantic days when I still believed in love. I was six or seven at the time, and when I wasn’t boxing or reading and thinking about boxing, I was sleeping and dreaming about boxing or dreaming about reading about it—type of thing. Well, in she walked one night, clickety-clack on the high heels—different from the other gum-soled nightingales who whispered around the linoleum like Cinderella’s mice, but Lois walks over and up goes the skirt—boom-boom there it is. All lovely and brown and pink in the nightlight, the labia folded away like butterfly wings.

I took a real deep ponderous look at it, almost approaching headwork—since it was new to me at a lad my age, then reached out an inquisitive paw having been somewhat schooled in the art of hard knocking up by a feisty old janitor who pushed his smelly equipment cart up and down the halls of the cinderblock house.

“They like it hard and fast,” he used to say, and me being but a young fellow with little headwork in the noggin; well, I believed him. “If they don’t scream, you aren’t doing your job.” He’d glib over a spitball of tobacco—his teeth as yellow as pee. Anyway, out goes my mitt all stiff muscle fingers, and Lois slaps it. Now, I ball up a fist, and I’m about to go at her for this infraction when she says “*Look*, don’t touch.” Well, I guess I was still naive about love at the time and being big on the first experiences decided to compromise and do a close inspection with the eyeballs. I still get this monstrous desire to do like the janitor said, and take her down on the bed and lift the skirt and do the dirty deed—slithering in there like some vicious anaconda getting out of the rain and me weighing in already at about one-fifty, and what with having all the working equipment and so forth—but, I go softy and just look and take it all in.

It never went any further, even though I tried from time to time. But she was always quick with that tricky hard little hand, and being still a boy, I was open to influences like mommy-types of pain. So I gawked whenever she came in. Just took it in. Seems to me I could draw her pussy from memory, I stared at it so many times. So it went on for about two years, her coming late at night sometimes, and showing me the wonderland cat smiling toothlessly under her skirt. She’d stand there for about ten, fifteen minutes then drop her skirt hem back over her thighs and away she goes—clickety-clack.

Now, I’d be left there with this great throbbing dingedangle between my legs with no place to go, but to do a little five-finger discount at the sperm bank, basically caramelizing my bedding, comforter and all—things looking sometimes like I spilled a can of shellac. Sad but unconquered, yours truly stuck literally in a gooey toss and turn for the night. Then, one day she stopped coming around all together, and I didn’t see either of her smiles for a month. So I asked the janitor who was like a guru to me, and he said she ran off with the Director’s son. I only knew directors back then as the guys who

called “Roll’em!” just before the sea comes flashing in and kills the Romans or the gangsters go bang, bang, bang with their big black guns.

When I heard that Lois had spirited herself away, I imagined her in a movie one day, maybe one about her nights with a young fellow like myself, but I realized that I had a deep weepy feeling in me that I could not shake no matter how hard I hit the punching bag; so I started sparring with the coach, and the lovely *whuff* sounds he’d make took all thoughts of Lois and the tribulations of love from my head. Despite this, I managed to hold onto my romantic notions.

Then I fell in love with my war teacher. I always called her my war teacher, because the history she talked about was really just a record of what bunch of mean motherfuckers won that time. She always tried to confuse me with long talkabouts on the political this and that of it, but I saw that was like a bunch of meetings between fight promoters and managers. My favorite stuff was about the Romans because they knew all about what it was to be a man with a flare for violence. The Romans knocked down the old world and kicked until its brains were out. I had to hand it to them.

My favorite guy was Hannibal who was as tough as they come, and the only reason I liked him so much is that the odds favored the Romans in a head to head smack-down. And Hannibal ran them right to the bell, pissed as he was about all the raping they did to Africa. Anyway, I would always picture myself as this guy Hannibal, tougher than tough, roaring into battle on the thick gray back of an elephant with a long axe in each hand just smacking and whacking the Romans out of my way like stalks of garlic. I was fond of the Europeans too, because they were no strangers to the slash and spew and sever, especially in the early days when there were lots of angry guys claiming to be king. They seemed to keep kicking ass for the whole time they were around, but they got kind of dirty in the end with knife-in-the-back work and the odd bit of hemlock in the tea.

Oh, that reminds me of Socrates, who seemed like a real boring bit of headwork and the father of whitecoats until you read and read, and hoping on all hope you finally find a bit about him fighting in war and killing and stuff for Greece, which when I did find it, increased my respect for the man and his yawping enormously.

So, one day I tell this war teacher, Mrs. Sonadhi, she was East Indian or something prone to headscarves and silky hip-to-hip wraparounds, if she could tell me more about this guy Cromwell, a round-headed bastard that kicked the shit out of a king. She says sure, tomorrow, but I give her the long dogface and say I want to hear some more now please. She tells me she has to get a textbook from her office, and would it be okay if she showed it to me there, and I told her seeing it there would be just fine too. As we walked down the hall I just kept looking at her long dress thing, all kind of covered in flowers and shapes as it shimmered over the round and curvy parts of her without giving up any of the contours of the camel toe or swollen pouty vents. Her face is really pretty too, with big dark almond eyes—and I’m getting wood, like *bad*.

Into the office we go, and she says to have a seat. I shut the door and lock it and she says I don’t have to lock it, then looks really terrified sort of like something in my face is giving away the secret that’s raging between my legs. So anyway I jumped her quick with as much speed as I had in my big body—which has always been a lot. I tear a big chunk off her dress thing and stuff it in her mouth, cause I can tell she’s a little upset and so she won’t distract me with any talking about doing the right thing and dating first; and then I unwrap her body and bend it over the desk. She had a great frame, really wonderful tits

with super dark nipples and this bush between her legs that was black and a little scary—real haunted forest kind of thing. But I get over it quick and fuck her on the desk, her the whole time going *Ugh*, and *Uff*, being unable to make any of the screams that the janitor told me about, but giving clues that I was doing a good job of it just the same. So, I give it to her quick and hard, and soon I just pull up my pantaloons and leave her there kind of draped over her desk winded and crumpled like her dress.

I was locked in my room for the next five weeks, and I never saw my war teacher again even though I loved her. I guessed that she must have gone somewhere to have a baby or something as some of the books and movies foretold, and so I figured that this was the way of love, just thrusting feelings and nothing more.

If I were to writer-like put that interlude into a novel of my life, I would do so under the title: “Bereft from Birth.” Meaning that I am not stupid and can therefore, after the fact, understand the suffering of my war teacher, the understanding of which does not take away the incident, nor does it undermine the exhilarating feeling yours truly gets when cogging it up out of the wheels and chains that could be referred to as my brain and going over it again in all its sweaty, salty glory. Whew! I know that in the eternal scheme of the university reality that we all inhabit, this would be a good versus evil issue. I could bring all sorts of evidence to bear for my good nature or the fact that the intent of the act was anything but nasty, but I will not insult the judges with such a plea. A good reason does not undo it, and I am certain that everyone concerned has learned something from this unsavory little incident, yours truly being among the happy pupils.

Anyway, the headline could read: *Love Conquers Everything but Nuke*. I was never one of those petunia sniffing little dandy boys about love, penning the drooling bits of rosary for my sweetheart’s kiss. I have always taken the janitor’s good advice on the matter. Fuck them fast and hard, the message and lesson for me being: make sure they like it fast and hard first, and this being primary among my reasons for throwing a question of such directness in Veronica Ramsey’s lap.

Anyway, after all of that ugly love business, yours truly got down to more reasonable attempts of the wooing and kissing and lovebird stuff. I found that, once I got myself on the great outdoor side of life, I could with a few dollars, find the women who enjoyed my sometimes overburdening and often deleterious administrations. I was never the type to get too hung up about the close, confidant and advisor sort of relations because I can get extremely violent talking about what makes Nuke tick and that can have nasty side effects upon anyone else in the room—especially if that individual is of the fairer sex and wanting to hang onto her good looks and all. Not that a male would be any safer in the fat chewing department, having done my share of nose jobs on whitecoated fellows with notebooks and questions, but that would be ridiculous when applied to relationships because with a man-type individual based on gender alone, I would not have such whispered confidence. So, no one ever learns much about me, and I just find out about tensile strength and flexibility and friction burns. It fits much better in my hard-knocking life than the drooly bits of love leer and permanent erectile soul.

Furthermore, I am bored by ideas like love and pretty pansy-time, real-type joke-shows with someone out working the day long and thinking the cozy headwork about sweetie at home with the sniveling brats when in fact said sweetie has packed the kids off babysitter-like and is presently doing the love gobble on some happy postman’s unwomanhood. Then the poor savant comes home with the roses and the pretty dress in

beribboned package and finds his lovely bride playing the sodomist's doggy with jolly milkman. So and so poor worker boy then guns down everyone in the room and himself, not to mention a neighbor who's looking over the fence.

Love conquers all. But it doesn't conquer Nuke.

## 6

So I'm reading this in the evening, and the little writer fellow sits across from me on the edge of one of my comfy chairs ready to jackrabbit out of the room, really digging his toes into the carpet like. I yawp a primitive growl from time to time, crowning him with a tiara of sweaty pearls when he sees the bristles stand up on my head. I liked the book so far really, all the busy wordwork, though I couldn't help but add something headwork of my own like about me punching out old Lois for not letting me scratch and sniff, and all that, and for good measure since she did give old Nukie a smack. I'm thinking maybe I should rewrite that part with me looking more victorious and streetwise. Or maybe with a scene of me parading around with forearms soaked in her blood, and I mention this to my writer buddy.

He kind of drops down and hunkered in like a sprinter in the blocks and I can imagine him sprising out of the room, cause he knows this to be one of my loaded questions. I'm in a good mood though, and not too forceful just then, and I can take criticism like a hit with a hammer. I'm all iron and steel sort of thing since I seem so conscientious and brave and wise and bold in the book so far. But I decide to give him a scare anyway, so I snag his little Kentucky Fried arm between my first finger and bratwurst thumb and just roll his flesh a little, like I'm going to do the big crush.

"What do you think should I change it?" Even as I'm saying it, I've really forgotten the reason for change, and the exact changes as a matter of fact; but his face is priceless. He sits there doing his poker best to give me the idea I can take his arm off and he won't mind. And I'm just chuckling to myself, hoping he's brought a change of scanties.

"I think you can do what you want with your book, but I would suggest you leave it as close to the reality as possible. As I understand it, you want the world to know who you really are." He was sweating fifty caliber bullets. I could hear them rattle on the floor. "You want to clear the air..."

"I think you're right, Mr. Writer-type individual," I say this with much easy nonchalance and Ryan Seacrest grace. "Besides, there are plenty of crazy bits of me left to show...Is ne pas? The homme behind the hombre."

The writer guy gives me two dishpan eyes when I work the French lingo, and then he nods.

"Besides," I say, "I'm a little tired of all this headwork and mental violence, and I have a match in an hour or so. Why not open up the talkerbox a little later, *after* would be better, I can give you a punch by punch." I don't even wait for an answer, just troop off in my great powerful lumbering way to the bathroom where I powder and puff with all my super-science gorilla aversion odors and then slip into my metal crotch piece. I figure I've got about twenty minutes until my car will come for me, so I lean back in front of the mirror and stare blankly into my own eyes thinking about Lois.

What a bitch.

So I'm in my corner of the ring at the Metrodome—ring's not right really, since it's a square but nobody gives a shit. The Metrodome echoes all around it, a giant oval steel and cinderblock barn with seats for eighty thousand on a good night—and tonight's a good night. High on the wall on each of its narrow ends is a two-story paper-thin video screen for the close up viewing that the fans enjoy, and high overhead there are large flatscreens looking out flush with all four sides of the ring—it's a square okay, I'm not going to say it again. Anyway, I'm looking at these two guys in the far corner—my opponents. They bill themselves as the Daring Darling Duo. Two nasty little homicides with flat faces and very un-darling features let me tell you. I see then, as they parade like prissy peacock queens, that it is their manner that is supposed to be darling, not their looks which begin to degrade the moment they take off their sequined jackets and fly around in their little silver G-strings. They prance and mince like southpaw pansies, and I'm already thinking about taking them apart when the announcer climbs into this pulpit over the ring and pipes up:

“Ladies and Gentlemen of the world. Tonight, Santa Rosa Metrodome is pleased to present the brave challengers to the World Snuff Fighting Championship. In this corner, the Daring Darling Duo! Identical twins who have cut quite a mean streak on their way to this championship match against the one, the only...Nuke!” The announcer looks like a Mexican or one of the local Spanish Indian-types, but his English pours out like Earl Grey Tea. The official language of the satellite audience and most of what gets yawped on the Intermesh now—or translated into old Chinese—is standard English through and through. It didn't matter anyway, since the Gates and Google laid down the law years ago. Of course, English after all those years in cyberspace didn't look or sound much like the stuff that drooled out of Charles Dickens' inkjet—but it was English.

I kind of jump out of my corner swinging my fists in some rapid-fire combinations and do the odd bit of 'step on it and crush' leg movements. The crowd goes wild. I lean back against the turnbuckle and let go one of my blood curdling screams. As I do it, I tense up the six-pack and make it roll like an escalator. I look back at the Darling Twins. They have watched the whole posturing moment with open yawps. I smile at them and make skull-pulverizing motions with my hands. Their faces go blank. I begin to wonder what they have up their sleeves, even though they're shirtless and therefore sleeveless. The announcer yaks and yaks where he's perched over the ring.

“Nuke, the Magnificent, has graciously agreed to meet two opponents at once in an unprecedented show of championship daring. The purse for the match is ten million dollars so far, so all of you out there in the wide world on Satellite and Net, place your bets and share in the purse—the starting bell will sound in sixty seconds!” He says that part with a pretty smile for the whirring digitals with flashing lenses that flutter around the ring on wires and hover-blades. “The World Champion has graciously agreed to this match only three nights before his historic sold out engagement with the Animan.”

The announcer does a quirky half-bow in his pulpit and then the whole cherry-picking gimmick gets noodled away—slurping over ringside like spaghetti.

Now I see what has got the Darlings so cocky. They have been handed a pair of power-saws. Blue oily smoke razzes from each. I've got to chuckle since I know the major flaw of any man with a machine is he will trust the machine. The bell rings. Razz, razz, and razz they come running at me. One goes to the left, the other to my right. I figure they'll try to do the old 'get his attention and gut him' routine. Anyway, I kind of do a flip and roll forward, like one of those gymnasts would, and come up about thirty feet away from where I started. The ring's about forty feet square, so I know I could do this trick for hours and basically never see the boys. But would yours truly run from a fight? Fuck you I would! I just used the dodge to give me a second to plan.

Now my first impulse is to get in close with one of them, and put the maximum squeeze on his codpiece, do the old bust the seeds out of the grape routine—but I quick headwork back to an incident when I tried that and did a major sew and stitch gash on my hand from fine filament blades woven into the material of another fighter's groin—who soon after came to a grisly end. So, I abandon the plan and duck quick as one of the Darlings swings his razzing saw at me. I come up with a nice piece of pugnacity, popping him hard on the back of his right elbow. I see his saw sag, and his face go gray. He switches quick to the other hand, but not before I've spotted old Darling Two's reflection in his eye. I flash around fast, and then vault up and over that Darling's blade. He was charging in for a kidney chop. Anyway, I'm out of the way, and he's suddenly running his blade along the ropes awfully close to his brother's head, sparks flying. They tangle a minute, trying to get their feet and I sort of spot a little robot arm action from above. I headwork around the conclusion that the referee will see any clinch as a clinch that is to be broken, and this pops an even better idea into my head, than the one I had cogged around about maybe just getting in close with the boys and cutting them up with their own saws.

I figure it's times like that I've got an excellent grip on the headwork—or maybe it's the showman in me. Anyway, I see an opportunity for some great art and video feeds.

I see the boys are back on their feet, and they circle around a little. I see the Darling I popped, the elbow of whom is hanging to the side, a tiny bit of hesitation in his face. The other brother comes running at me, and I wait until the saw's almost chewing into me before I drop, and roll like a dervish under his legs. Down he goes. I take a moment to bite through his Achilles; then I snap to my feet and go at the other. He swings the saw at me like I'm a tree or something blowing towards him in a hurricane. I can see he's terrified, which I consider great. I come in fast and hard, take him by his wounded arm and pull it up over his collarbone, he screams bloody murder and drops the chain saw, which I headworking quickly snap up and gun razz, razz, razz. The other brother comes running, power-saw doing the angry bumblebee overhead. I smile seeing the plan coming to the right shape.

At the last second, I turn the saw on the brother in my grip. I rev the motor high and push it straight through him where his appendix would be. The other side would nail the aorta and then he'd bleed a lot, but die fast. I wanted artwork—gore not guts. Anyway, this Darling screams and thrashes around as I pull the chain saw out with bits of kidney attached—yum! Now out of the top of my eye, I see the referee coming down on its iron cable and I know I've got to move fast. I push the Darling in my arms toward the Darling approaching and throw the chain saw to the side.

The boys are brothers and my hunch pays off that they don't want to kill each other. The other brother turns his blade to the side to catch him and I make my move, stepping in fast and snapping the healthy one's wrist—knocking the chain saw away and down it goes. I lay in a number of combinations on the un-sawed brother, just boom, boom, boom like putty and his face kind of bursts like a balloon full of ketchup. I take his arm and in what I consider to be a work of genius, thrust it through the hole I made in his brother. Once through, I bust the arm at right angles mid forearm and again mid upper arm. Kind of make a question mark out of the fucking thing. It had to hurt. Both of these Darling brothers are screaming and crying out. The crowd goes wild, just thousands of wailing, screaming yawps.

I roll out of the way, just in the nick as we say, as this referee comes crashing down on them, the big dumb robot starts to break these guys out of a clinch the hard way. As luck would have it, the beastie grabs the Darling's broken arm and tries to pull him through, the wrong way. Anyway, there's this horrible tearing and ripping moment, with lots of broken ribs snapping like pickets in a fence, like so many fingers fracturing loud, and the brothers scream and scream and suddenly an arm comes off and then the Darling with the hole in him, is kind of torn from navel to backbone, and he drops spouting blood. I'm watching all this waiting for my moment to step in for the Coup deVille. The referee drops these two screeching, bleeding forms when they're separated and then climbs up its little wire.

Well, yours truly steps in and does some magnificent fist work on these boys. First I smashed the ribs and snapped the neck of the one-armed Darling, then I did a series of war crushes on the other severed one. Pretty easy kills at that point—they're dead in seconds, and there I am again, in my familiar place with this hard metal belt over my head pumping it and my legs up and down. There's blood everywhere, and my arms and muscles gleam scarlet like a demon's.

The announcer steps out, almost falling down in the slippery abattoir business, then comes over to me. He grabs my thick wrist in an 'ooh, icky' kind of way and holds it over my head.

"The winner and still champion. Ladies and Gentlemen, 13 Time World Champion Snuff Fighter, Nuke!"

Well, again there I am, all 'aw shucks' and doing my best to seem non-boasting in the self-esteem department. I see a number of women in the front row all coiled up and oily from the headwork 'I wish I was there' experience. One even drops her shirt and shows off a pair of lovely big and rounds. I take it all in, thinking for a minute it might be nice to take one or two of them fast and hard, but I abandon it, when I feel a strange and weepy pang for the brothers whose mangled bodies are being hauled away to be deposited in the flesh wagon waiting patiently beside the ring.

The second Darling, the one I had not skewered, had showed a strange look on his face when he watched me cut a hole in his brother. That look was odd, and I had not seen it before. I didn't care about them, like I wish they were alive, because they know the business and I won fair and square. But there was something in that look that took the fire of the win out of yours truly's heart, and put in its place a cold kind of wind—something numb and achy like a deep bruise. I shook it off quickly on my out of the Metrodome, but I decided to do none of the fast and hard with those lovelies. I just went home to bed.

## 8

I'm all kind of a tingle, full of the vodka and the late night and not yet completely undermined by age. Oh I've heard about that age thing, with the old white hair and the baggy bits of luggage under the eyes, and the yellow lacquered nails and Maserati sports cars instead of pussy and blowjobs and semen spraying around the place. I've heard about it. All the bits of gravity twirls that happen when you're on the one you love and you bend over and smile and all your face falls forward like a curtain, only its not lucky enough to be made out of a material that you can go down to the store and get changed. I've heard about the snipping snip type doctor, tuck it here and sew it there, but that's so much unreal stitch and tack that it sets yours truly's heart in stone. Oh, I've heard about it: the osteoporosis and the hardening liver, the crackling arteries and the eyes that no longer see the world in the same sharp clear, 'can you see that daddy' kind of way. I've heard about the time of life when your gut sticks out farther than your cock. Yes, I've heard about it. But it isn't here yet for yours truly, me being still full of the urgent violent needs of a dying creature, all hard and erectile before bed.

The blood is gone from under my nails, and the color has returned to my face. I lie in bed and sip a Greyhound, all secret clear vodka and the tangy grapefruit. Nuke is nonplussed and wonders why. Yours truly has lost his clarity, in the headwork department. Soon the sleepy stuff comes all wrapped in angel's wings and singing.

## 9

So the world hasn't changed much by morning, just piss-proud and grumpy in the bowels. My ears go all off and on like some little imp dingus from the unseen world pushes and pulls a cork in and out of them to piss yours truly off—so it's feeling like I'm going up and down on an elevator. I drive a big hard eye-scraping finger into the left, and fuck it in and out till my sinuses start to drain and my eyes jump. I snort and cough up bits of hard and glossy bitters from the smoky air that hovers over the ring during combat. I let this glob go plop into a sink of water I have poured.

The eyes looking back out of the mirror have a hard edge to them, like chips of steel, or the hard points of spears. I squint them up like an oldster and grumble and shuffle my legs a bit. My quads are tight and full of old vodka so I grab my feet a heel at a time and pull them up behind my back feeling the muscles stretch and slide like snakes. I look at my face again and then look down. In front of me on the marble counter is an envelope from my writer friend. I figure he has dropped off a manuscript at my penthouse in the hopes that yours truly would find some joy perusing it in the early morning hours—like an unexpected Easter Egg, it's there. I'm staring at it, and trying my best to cog up what it could be about. I have given him many hours of the yak and yak, and I cannot place it.

I curl up on the throne and tear open my epistle of good wishes. Inside is a ruffling handful of paper—the ink already fading. On the first one is the title: "Life with Coach." I then headwork out this little bit of news and I remember giving a bit of a nose bleeder to the writer during this one. I almost jam the paper into the toilet and shit on it, but decide instead to give it the once over while I do the Gouda gouge.

So, I'm this kid in it, about nine, nine and a half years of age. I've got these big pumped up muscles like chunks of roast beef only hard and active and they're like, like something urgent or hard like a club. Anyway I go to the gym everyday and I have this great talk and walk with Coach about exercise and keeping the gluts firm and the mind focused. I listen and listen to him and find it kind of nice in a way—soft like terrycloth. Now, I'm still hurting at this time twisted up inside over the exciting Lois and still unwedded with Mrs. Sonadhi, so I'm moving around the gym like an angry cat that swallowed a fish hook or something as unappetizing. I'm walking and taking swings and stuff at anything that doesn't get out of the way. But the coach, he knows me well enough having the odd time already gone “Uff!” over one of my ridge-backed hands. He keeps his distance and stays on his toes because he didn't get that old looking pretty!

“Well, Nuke,” he says, keeping his dark eyes on me. “You seem to be in a nasty mood today. What has disturbed you?”

I'm looking at his face and thinking that it is awfully red and that his nose is too big and needs a trimming or something. But, I guess he caught me at a reflective moment because I replied in rather headworking fashion, “Well, Coach. I am not what you would say happy, in a non-sad way. You could find a picture of me in a book titled: *Saddest-type Individuals in the Universe*. My picture would be on the cover, and I would not be smiling.”

“Oh,” says the coach who ducks fast out of the way of a fist I haymake at his forehead. He has crept in with concern and momentarily let his guard down. “That is too bad,” he says, some distance from me now. “Would you like to talk about it?”

I kind of think that I would rather hit and draw blood about it, but then still full of headwork I hear myself yakking all the sudden: “I am concerned sometimes,” I say, “about where it is that my parents have gone to—parents that I am sure I must have, since I listen somewhat in biology class, taking joy out of the words as much as the cutting up of the little rodents and house cats. It seems customary among people here on earth who have children—that they keep in touch with them from time to time, if not to do the whole jolly ho-ho at Christmas and the so forth and the happy birthday Sweetiekins my dear!” I have stopped in place now and feel adrenaline rushing angrily through my veins.

“Dear me,” says the coach, who if he ever spent time in front of the mirror could not feel that way for long. “I suppose that must be very difficult for you.” I would love to show him how difficult that would be for me in the form of a number of rabbit punches and maybe a nasty blood boil pinch on the scrotum; but, he has wisely hidden on the far side of a pommel horse thing that I sometimes climbed up on and let my arms twirl me around and around. I punch it a couple of times anyway, letting the adrenaline flow, and feel a little better for it.

He looks at me, and his battered old face seems to soften somewhat. You see, he was not like the whitecoats that I have dealt with before who were at that very second watching me and Coach do the dangerous one-on-one from behind a number of unbreakable mirrors on the walls—and through blue-toothed video cameras that were hidden around the place. The coach said he was a navy man, which meant he traveled in the old days on ships and got drunk a lot, and caught exotic diseases between the legs of distant women. He used to tell me stories of his days at sea, but some whitecoats must have told him to ‘zip the yap’ about it because he stopped and would not start again when I asked. Anyway, he is a big bastard with plenty of meat across a yard and a half of

shoulder bones. He's old though with streaks of the cloudy white in his stiff hair. It is short, and fashioned much like my own.

"Would you like to talk about it?" he says, and I give him a look that makes him stand back a little. He is certain in plain violence what I would like to do about it. But, still warmed somewhat to him and being unable to move fast enough to catch the slippery old seadog, I settle down on my haunches and yawp out my story of woe.

"I cannot remember my mother, Coach. And this would be considered rude in some areas of life, where other good sons always kept a certain closeness, if not a picture, a view of their womb so to speak." I then cited an example of a queer old English bird, Mr. Lawrence, who talked a long streak in a book about a son and his mother. That boy had been in constantly repetitious contact with his mommy, and even protected her from a big coal miner father from time to time since the old fucker enjoyed getting a few hard ales into him then going nasty and violent at his family. I tell the coach about this tale, taking great care to leave out my suspicion that the boy, the sick son, wanted to do the hard and fast, kind of juicy Lois thing with his mommy. That wasn't what I wanted and I did not want to distract Coach who I had learned could be distracted by the simplest of things.

"Well," says Coach, being sure to keep his distance and sort of eyeing me up like maybe this is just a trick to get him in close enough for a punch to chip a tooth or twist a nose. To be honest, I had headworked it as a possible moment for the hammer throw, but talking about that Lawrence boy had loosened me up a little and for a moment I didn't feel so much like breaking and twisting and snapping, as I did want to blather the words in and out.

"It is true, boy," he says in a simple kind of way. His voice is softer now like uncooked meat. "That a young fellow such as yourself should know of his mommy. In most cases, but in yours, well..." He stammered then, and I see his eyes go cloudy a minute. "Things are different for you, young man."

"And did you know your mother?" I ask, being not unable to form the question of gentility.

"Oh, yes." The coach smiled sweetly, and his eyes looked far away. "She was a beauty, she was. But a spitfire and hellion! *That* went with the red hair of course, and oh, boy she had a temper! Sweet young Irish lass that came over in a boat, just as a wee girl of five years, at the end of the second world war—way back when. She was too young though. Too young. And, she died young." I could see the coach's eyes go moist and unsettled, pink in the white, and glassy.

"That is a sad tale," I tell him. Sad because I always imagined my mother somewhere doing a nasty bit of business on foreign pirates or spies. She'd be some kind of extra-violent Mata Hari type woman with guns in her bra. Her friends the bloody James Bond and MI5 keeping her so busy she could not visit her young boy. Sad also, because I had clogged about the possibility that she was dead already, but I had imagined that scene to be supremely violent, with her doing a dangerous firefight against foreign communist terror-agents and strange men with bionic appendages.

She would go down, only after a bloody confrontation with entrails flying and the good side winning, even with her dying breath leaking out of a bullet wound in some faraway night in a warehouse among enemies, and on the breath the words: "Nukie—my son." I often pictured the scene late at night. Sometimes I would imagine her to look like Lois, minus all the under the skirt peek and giggle I've mentioned.

“Well, it’s sad. Yes, sometimes that’s all parents are—a sad story,” the coach says this with a half-witted smile. I suspect it is because he has said something wise and he is not used to the sensation.

“And your father?” I ask him, deciding to keep beating my way in. “He was a coach and a navy man?”

“No.” The coach’s face gets as hard and imposing as a coral reef without any of the beauty. “The bastard was a truck driver. He abandoned my mother and five kids. When my mother died, we had to spend the next years being shuttled around from foster home to foster home. If I ever see him again, I’ll kill him.”

That heats up my interest a lot, because I have felt the same way about my own pop, wherever he had rudely skulked off to. That was strange in a way because I knew, to be fair, I should want to kick the living shit out of my mother too, but for some reason I hated my father outright. I cogged that one in a speculative way, it being the responsibility of any father to do his utter most to fight his way into hell itself to get his kid.

I start to talk anyway. “And you always thought that like you were Watson, and he was Sherlock Holmes. He would come and get you out of there. Like he would do the hell or high water, and ride in with a bunch of renegade Apache Indians and destroy half of the world to see that his sonny boy was safe and sound...”

The coach just smiled again in a smirky kind of inside way. “Yeah, I guess you could say that.”

“I headworked that, the same,” I said, and the coach kind of frowns at my dialect. I always imagined my father to be some double agent or spy who must have raped my mother or something and she killed him or worse. I could not imagine any other way for dads to forget about their kids. And nobody inside the cinderblock walls would tell yours truly about his family history.

“Well, come on kid. It’s not that bad. You’ve got plenty of attention.” He sweeps his broad hand around the gym. I take it to include the rest of the cinderblock house.

“There’s all kinds of people here to pay you attention and care for you.”

“And I got you too, eh Coach. I got you to yak it with.” The coach gets mistier and stuff, and I see his big mouth twist a bit.

“That’s fine, boy. That’s fine...” he says this and reaches out a big hand to stroke my shoulder. I take the opportunity and step inside his reach to give him a one, two, three combination of left and right uppercuts that pretty much rubs the smile off his cheeks—and pushes his weepy tears back into his old eye sockets

“You’re getting soft, Coach.” I chuckle as I look down at him. He is lying on the floor drooling a bit of blood and shaking his head. I felt much better for it though and decide against celebrating by putting the boots to him. I can already hear my handlers running anyway—they’d have the Tasers and the nets.

So I look up from the manuscript. The pages are all crumpled where I’ve thrown them on the floor. I’ve got an itchy feeling in my shoulders and my fingers just keep curling up like claws. Part of me wants to tear the writer apart and another part wants to go back to bed and strangle my pectorals like murder. I opt instead to clean myself up with a shower then prowl out to the kitchen for a breakfast of twelve eggs, toast and hash browns from the robot-stove. I eat up, wondering where my day planner is, and catch a flashing light on my answering machine.

I push it softly, and out comes a voice. “Hello, Mr. Nuke. I’m Veroncia Ramsey, and I’d like to apologize for my behavior the other night.” She paused. Three hot breaths skipped across the wires on moist feet. “I’d like to talk to you, if I could. My number is...” And I listen to these numbers, sketching them out on the table in the stringy egg whites. I had thought about Veronica a lot since we had our last conversation. I smiled. The anticipation was already giving me wood.

## 10

So I walk out into the street. I’ve got my big detective tent-canvas overcoat on collar up, with the belt tied tight and the hat low. Over my eyes I’ve wedged a nasty little pair of black and white points-down triangular ultra-shaded pince-nez—the ones with the GPS display that flickers up at the twitch of an eyebrow. They don’t do much for the cover up—with cancerous ultraviolet sneaking in the way round, but they give me this terrifying killer cyborg look when married to my big six and a half foot frame and yard-wide shoulders.

I pull my hat down this time because I don’t want any of the press boys, the media gabbers, the blogmuckers, the pimperazzi and note scribblers for the daily ad-rags and spider-sites getting wise to me. No, I won’t have them on this trip out, looking for a shot up my skirt hoping for commando action—or snapping their digital phones into the back of a rolls while I do it hard and nasty with a lady fan. There’s no money in any of that, no way. And once they photograph your genitals, it’s all down hill from there. Unless, that’s your whole thing, your entire reason for fifteen minutes of fame: if you’re a pole-dancer or a cocksucker, and that’s your gig—humiliating yourself for dough and laughing all the way.

But, I gave up playing with these fence-talkers long ago—being it just got my blood boiling and brought up lots of whitecoat commentators ripping me on the video in a way they’d never do in person. I didn’t want to have to do the killer tomahawk on any of these weak-wristed scribe-types, since that usually made for the spurting red stuff and the messing and un-pressing of yours truly’s expensive suit—which I should point out because it cost so much, is of the finest video-skin from Sony all baggy around the legs and shoulders, so I don’t feel the tight and unfriendly when I move. And with a couple well-connected buttons on my cell I can display video on the fucking thing, nice real nice and an eye-catcher for the girls cause they like to look at themselves with me.

I’ve freshly shaved all my nooks and crannies, manscaped the ape out of myself in preparation for the fast and loose with my luncheon date. I did the deed with a fist full of atom-thin blades in the newest disposable, that guarantees to give you smooth, smooth, skin—with a minimum of scrotum nicks—and I’ve been liberal with my after shave, the Sunset over Santa Rosa, that has become my trademark, and which by the way I make over a million a year endorsing. I don’t mind the stuff too much if it is a touch medicinal. You can’t help but feel clean in it and I think it’s mostly hydrogen peroxide.

So I walk out to the sidewalk, and sure enough, a tiny man with a telephone camera appears, already a couple of gigs into a video for YouTube. He thinks he’s using all his stealth warfare tactics and is just popping up over the trashcans by a bus stand like for no reason and that’s normal; but I already spotted him a mile off creeping around, so I’m

ready. I've got an old silver dollar cocked into the meaty part of my right hand. Well up he comes, sudden, out of the corner of my eye, and yells, "Mr. Nuke!" Yours truly's reaction is priceless and fast, faster than any coffee yawping, smoke belching pot-bellied digital fotog, and I let him have the silver dollar. I just give it away zing through the air, faster than I can see, just a quick lightning stroke of silver and smack it goes right into his eye. There's his scream, and I see the poor bastard drop with a pale limp hand over his socket. Blood and stuff leaks out all around. He tries to get up and knocks over a trashcan—then he's rolling in the garbage, beautiful!

I'm feeling all full of excitement, and start to think about maybe going over and doing unspeakable things to make him into a corpse, I had used a whole silver dollar after all, but dropped the idea when I saw a crowd gathering, and noticed the flickering camera flashes. So I took a quick peek at my watch, which read eleven-thirty. My lawyers would hear about all this, and they'd tell me about it next year with little smirky smiles as I handed them their paychecks. Then all the fotog had to do was get me extradited to the U.S.A. to hear the charges—*fat chance!*

Still, it would have been fun doing an impromptu show on the sidewalk there, blood and guts flying, cameras and criminal charges be-damned, but I have decided in this case that pussy is the greater part of valor. Somewhat disappointed and low in spirits I hail a cab, and then climb in its green door.

"Hotel Minao," I say, with my best Mexican accent. Oh, the dollar is just a thing I have for antiques like that—since everything else is plastic or wireless—I cogged sometimes that the air around me was jazzing with electric dollars and lightning bolted text messages to banks. And the silver dollars are showy you have to admit. I like to use American money—it's the only way I'll be paid—and I'm never given any arguments about it. I just give them my 'spinal fluid sucking' face and they shut their yawps, and exchange their fucking pesos or their yen or their euros for money—real money. I don't use much of the folding or jingling stuff having instead the convenience of technology—I pay for mostly everything with my phone when I haven't smashed it to pieces because the traitorous thing can't get a signal.

This cabbie doesn't recognize me through his thick cloud of cigar smoke, and I think for a minute that he's being rude. Then, I see my fists clench up, and I headwork that I am just getting myself mad, so I turn my thoughts away from that and on to other more interesting things since I am going out to lunch with the beautiful Veronica Ramsey with the tits out to here, and she might not appreciate it if I showed up all ugly with blood and viscera stains. Few women do. I don't go out to lunch very often, seldom you might say because I am not trained in the minute fairy arts of the table dance and the napkin semaphore—although I can still do it—and to pass some time I did my best to cog out the last occasion I was dining out with friends. It was with my agent and manager, Morris Beckert.

Morris is a little German guy who I think is a former Nazi or is a neo-Nazi or something since he has a quirky little goosetep way of walking and a real loud voice with all the rolling 'r's'. First time I met him, I almost killed him because he came up all goosetep and straight-backed, and he started to talk away with this strong accent that irritated about the same as it was difficult to understand. Anyway, the last time I was out to lunch was with Morris Beckert, my agent. He has been a fight promoter since the Pueblo Commission okayed the snuff fight video sales the world over on Blu-ray and as

download, because it was freedom after all and there was a demand for it, which is only a capitalist response to the unknown. And anyway with the Intermesh and satellites it was impossible to track and everybody that killed each other in the ring signed a waiver so who the hell's getting hurt, right?

So Morris introduced himself one day, when things became fairly legal in some countries, and said he could make me a millionaire, and I said okay, since up to that time I had been kind of abused by the slippery type element that hangs out around fight halls. Of course, they only abused me once, right?

Anyway, that time I was thinking about, when we went out to lunch, Morris had wanted me to talk to this tiny chap with a long white beard and a pair of low-slung spectacles. He was a publisher, Morris said, and he wanted to do my story. I told him to fuck himself first, since I didn't immediately like the looks of him, but warmed up a little with the Rusty Nails he fed me. By the end of lunch, I had my arm around him, and he was a fairly decent old fellow, with my own best interests at heart. He snuggled right into my armpit like a bar of Speedstick and I squeezed him like a bear—minus the killing him and ripping him to pieces part. He tells me we'll be millionaires, and I told him I already was, so he says I'll be even richer, and that can't be bad. I just smiled and ordered us another drink.

So, that dinner ended kind of violently with me making an honest comment about this old lady's body being too old to be worth fucking. Her husband, some stuffed-shirt in a cummerbund who must have been blind or hopped up on testosterone injections gets all irate and says would I please apologize to the lady. Now, he obviously doesn't know yours truly, or he wouldn't be so quick to criticize, but I have had a number of drinks by then, and feel a little hazy and sweet. I'm also thinking that I'm with Morris, who is always telling me to go easy on the violence outside the ring—that I shouldn't give it away like a whore—and he's all ready making eyes kind of nervously at the publisher who seems to be nodding off to sleep.

I cog it out that this would be a bad time to pulverize the upset husband. I, Nuke, have a big heart, and can be like what you would call almost a saintly Samaritan in the social department so I nod to the old fellow, then turn to his wife, who really is getting on in years and by the shape of her nose was never anything to get worked up about. I smile sweetly at her face all wrinkled and upset like I had a bowl full of shit under her nose.

"I am sorry my dear lady, that I said you were too old to be worth fucking. It might be true, but yawping it in polite company could be considered rude..." Well this is all I get out, because the old guy hits me with a chair and I get mad and lose it and start putting people in hospital, especially the men, because they look really stupid with their bleeding yawps pouring into their starched shirts. But I do remember ripping up the odd skirt for the study of lacy panties and the odd pouting puss—I mean, you're there right? You're going to look. But I got locked up for a while that time, having gone a little far with the peeking under skirts and all—and the bypassing of some undergarments, but I was soon out on the streets again.

Now I think back on that tale and again feel my fists balling up, feeling still a little anger at the injustice and unhappy returns. I drop it and concentrate on nothing, which sometimes comes very easy to me.

The cab drops me off. I got my table and waited for three hours amongst the potted palms and the mincing waiters and angry maitre de, all culminating, of course, in the

inevitable drinking and the violent moment that yours truly knew would come sooner or later. Veronica Ramsey stood me up!

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