



Hunky and Cappy

A Short Story, Sort Of

By

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Hunky Badeker and Cappy Cornelius were stretched diagonally across the grassy creek bank below the Big Sur Village Pub, which establishment Hunky happens to own, on the central coast of California Christmas Eve of the recent year 2003, preparing to speculate on metaphysical questions and such to a depth normally unexplored by philosophers, publishers, or media pundits residing in New York, Chicago, Paris, Rome, Greece, Kabul, Moscow, Brussels, London, Dublin, Auckland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Beijing, Aberdeen, and other locales noteworthy due to their alleged level of internal reflectivity on matters vital to the affairs of the human race.

“Those sure appear to be serious boots you’re wearing, Cappy, “Hunky offered as

initial gambit of congenial conversation. Are they Wolverines?”

Cappy paused in the tasting of the grass stem he was chewing, and considered this pithy question. His classically trained literary mind churned.

“Well, no, Hunky, actually they are not. They are called Big Macs.”

“Huh!”

“Yep.”

“I thought that was a type of hamburger.”

“It’s that too, but it’s also a brand of climbing boot. And that’s what mine are.”

All six foot three of the moderately domesticated, former biker, Hunky, rolled from his left to his right elbow in the grass and pondered this fact. The mole under his left eye, hidden by his large sunglasses, darkened a shade, the irises of both eyeballs dilated a fraction, the bristles of his bushlike black eyebrows fluttered ever so slightly, a passing breeze whisked the foretop from his forehead to the side of his brow near the ear, which hank of hair he then brushed back in place with one hand, and an ensuing intensity of concentration materialized from the totality of his being not entirely unlike a Stephan Hawkin’s described galaxy emerging in the starry night of the universal void.

“What,” he finally asked with incisive precision, “is the key trait of a Big Mac boot?”

“It’s a thinker,” Cappy replied.

Hunky could not instantaneously conceive of anything germane to respond, and convinced that the intellectually appropriate attitude would be restraint, remained silent.

“Yep,” Cappy said when it was apparent Hunky did not intend to comment further at the moment, “I been living with these boots several years now, and I’m certain they’re

first class thinkers.”

“What do they think about?” asked Hunky, warming to the notion.

“Bout near everything, I believe.”

“Do they talk about what they’re thinking?”

“No; they aren’t talking boots. Just thinkers.”

“Then, how do you know what they’re thinking?”

“Dreams.”

“Would it unduly strain you to elucidate on this matter?”

“Hunky, as an old friend, it would please me no end to help satisfy your insatiable curiosity for the deeper meanings of life. As a matter of fact, how it happens is I hear their unspoken thoughts in my dreams. Just the other night, for instance, I dreamt I heard them thinking about politics.”

“What kinda politics?”

“Oh, just the ordinary backyard garden variety kind, you know, about people figuring out how to get control of things so they can be the ones calling all the shots instead of somebody else who might do it all different from what they would like.”

Hunky scratched the outer edge of skin near his left eye, and then that of his right eye, dropped his hand down to his chin, stroked it contemplatively, and cogitated a few moments.

“I would not want to endanger our deep seated and long established friendship,” he said, “but I have got to tell you that what you just told me has raised a potentially controversial subject in my mind.”

“Shoot, Hunky. What are friends for if not to test one another’s deepest

thoughts?”

“I appreciate that sentiment. What it is, this thought that’s come to me, is – let me say it this way: don’t it strike you as slightly odd you’d hear your boots conveying to you in dreams ideas about things like politics?”

“Naw. It strikes me rather that your questioning the fact before even listening to what they convey to me is a close minded attitude typical of the rightist times we live in, leading eventually to the exposure of ignorance on your part if you don’t learn how to open up your intellectual apparatus wider to new ideas. I mean, Goddammit, Hunky, who are you to question me on such an issue you don’t yet know anything about?”

“Don’t get all het up now, Cappy. It’s just a question.”

“Well, it’s a damned impertinent one, I think.”

“You just said a minute ago what are friends for if not to test one another’s deepest thoughts.”

“But I didn’t know you were going to attack me.”

“Attack you? Who in the hell attacked anybody? I just asked a question.”

“You sure could have phrased it more diplomatically.”

“And you sure could of took it more graciously.”

Cappy sat up at this point, and then stood up, walked down to the creek edge, looked at the water flowing for a bit, turned back, returned, sat back down beside Hunky, and seemed to battle with his insides a time. Finally, he spoke again.

“I reckon you have a point. I’m not saying you’re right. But you do have a point. Expecting it to sound sensible for my boots to communicate to me in dreams without my having explained at least part of what they communicate is somewhat of a stretch of

credibility on my part, I imagine.”

“Thanks for the consideration,” Hunky said.

“Not at all.”

“So, all that behind us,” Hunky ventured, “what do they convey about politics to you in your dreams?”

“Let me think on it a second. The other night, for instance, the left boot – in one of my dreams – woke me up mumbling about some dude named O’Reilly he’d seen on TV recently when I’d set him down beside his brother near the edge of the couch I was sitting on.”

“O’Reilly’s brother? You mean the brother of that diarrhea mouthed Irish-American pundit who snaps at everybody invited to his show like he has divine knowledge of everything in the known universe?”

“Wait, Hunky! You’re getting mixed up. I meant I’d set down the left boot beside its brother, the right boot, after taking them off to watch O’Reilly.”

“Oh. I was close then to your meaning, anyhow. I assumed from your last comment you’d seen the feller yourself pontificating on various and sundry matters.”

“I have done that too.”

“But in your dream your boot talked about him.”

“That is correct.”

And how does O’Reilly strike you?”

“That isn’t the issue, Hunky. Remember, we’re discussing the opinion of my left thinking boot and its observations about Mr. O’Reilly, not mine.”

“Must have misspoke myself.”

“Happens in the heat of conversation. Well, to get on with it: the boot was cussing, and it wasn’t until I woke up that I understood that the cuss words it was saying were words this O’Reilly fellow had designated on some recent show as having been said by a current Democratic presidential candidate, and his – O’Reilly’s, that is – opinion, which he articulated quite forcefully, was that no man running for the presidency who cussed should be seriously considered for that august position. When I was clearly awake and revisiting the dream, I remembered that the boot said some other fellow on the TV show, a professor of some kind, had sat back and listened to O’Reilly spouting off so piously, and when O’Reilly had finally shut up, which takes him sometime quite a while, had pointed out to him a fact of history relevant to O’Reilly’s point.”

When Cappy did not immediately explain the point in question, Hunky, yearning to obtain adequate facts to enable him to judge the validity of the concept of thinking boots, urged him on.

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“What was the cuss words?”

“What the cuss words were isn’t the point. The point is what the professor said.”

“Then what did the damned professor say?”

“The professor pointed out to O’Reilly that a substantial number of famous American patriots have been either avid or occasional cussers, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Teddy Roosevelt; and that his personal secretary had even reported that now and again Abraham Lincoln had been known to toss out a loose word or two, had actually used the word ‘damn’ in a public

debate to make a point about slavery to Mr. Douglas – all of which proved to the professor’s satisfaction that summarily chastising and discarding Democratic presidential candidates for using cuss words was a weak means of discrediting them in favor of allegedly more clean mouthed Republicans, and – furthermore – that Mr. O’Reilly would do well to study American history before mouthing off his singularly biased opinions.”

“Good for him!” Hunky declared.

This conjuncture of agreed upon viewpoints established, and Cappy’s wife, Bernadette, having arrived on the scene, the two wisely interrupted their discussion to see what effect the presence of a female would have on the peace of the day, both experienced with the opposite sex enough to know that such a disembarkation in their immediate personal environs by a woman having temporarily abandoned the security of her home could take the fine edge off the comfort of their talk.

Bernie’s defining trait was immense physical cuteness; augmented by dimples the size of small lemons on her cheeks. Her eyes twinkled like Fourth of July sparklers and nestled under a bush of raggedy curly hair the shade of white corn, before boiling. Her lips were full and pouty without benefit of injections, and when standing arms akimbo, stretched tall to her full five foot three stature, as she now was, presented a formidably intimidating adversary.

“Cappy, are you coming home for dinner tonight, or are you and Hunky thinking of hanging out at his bar again like you did last night until two this morning while I was home sniffing with the cold, and my rheumatism acting up again, as if you’d really care what happened to me or not in this world?”

Hunky and Cappy exchanged glances. Hunky demurred to Cappy, since it was his

issue, and wife, to be dealt with.

“Bernie, darling,” Cappy responded in his deepest *I-still-love-you* voice, how are you? It’s so good to see you again.”

“Don’t you try to divert me from my question, Dr. Cornelius. After twenty three years sharing your often empty bed, I am wise to your ways. Now you answer up. Are you planning on coming home tonight or not?”

Cappy caught on this was a serious moment for his spouse, and rose to the occasion.

“Darling, it being Christmas Eve, could I ever leave you alone as the annually recurring miracle is celebrated among our midst? As a matter of fact, I was just telling Hunky, right Hunky? that since I need to hurry into Pacific Grove to pick up your presents at Holman’s Department Store, I’d better get on with it.”

Cappy rose to his feet, and made as if to find his car.

“You just hold on there a minute, Cappy Cornelius. If you’re going to drive to Pacific Grove, I am going along with you, or my name is not Bernadette Peguine Padua Cornelius.”

Whenever Bernie used full names, Cappy knew she was serious. He turned to her and, drawing on his deepest reserves of empathetic understanding, appealed to the love he suspected still lurked in her heart for him.

“You got it, Babe. Come along. We’ll go together.”

“You sure?” she asked, incredulously.

“Bernie, would I spoof you? Let’s have one eggnog at Hunky’s though, before we

hit the road, to fortify our stomachs. It's about sixty miles round trip, and we can't make it if we're short on energy."

It being Christmas Eve, and eggnog being a fairly mild drink, even with a dollop of sour mash injected, Bernie acquiesced, and she, Cappy, and Hunky walked up the bank to Hunky's establishment and entered into the ambience starting to develop among the dozen or so locals who were tipping a few from the back pool room to the fireplace in the corner.

It was warm inside, smelled of pine cones and mud, it having rained the night before and everybody's boots having acquired the results from the forest floor. Two women lounged at the corner of the bar, energetically discussing the rights of females, and how to further secure them in a world still dominated by evil men. These were Belle Thomas and Alice Constance. Belle was about fifty-five, bleached [actually streaked], slightly chunky, but still attractive in her way; Alice, not what you'd call a beauty, but at thirty-five with a fine figure, long brown hair, and a gentle demeanor, supported by full, soft, moist lips, was an enticing package to any man.

Bernadette watched her man as he greeted the pair, then busied himself ordering their eggnog. Cappy was a lean sixty-five year old transplanted New England scholar whose short silver and black hair reminded her of salt and pepper scattered on hamburger meat. Not that she thought of Cappy's head like hamburger, but the texture of his cropped mane was almost as rough as fresh ground beef, and so – for her, a butcher's daughter with a fine arts degree from Monterey College – the comparison seemed sufficiently apt.

His lips were lean, but soft, pliant, and imaginative, she knew, when he felt so inclined to pleasure her. His eyes were brushed aluminum grey, his nose as aristocratic as

a Poodle's snout. He maneuvered through life with the humbly self assured air of a cynically enlightened Zen monk who, when bolstered by booze, was known occasionally to philander with the ladies.

"Here's to you, kid," he said, and Bernie and he toasted Christmas.

They didn't linger long. Cappy sensed that any hesitation on his part would meet with fervent negative reaction from his spouse, so – after a single eggnog – he suggested they get on their way. Cappy led Bernie outside, opened the door for her, closed it slowly so not to entrap the hem of her coat, and clambered into the driver's seat of his 1951 Ford. This model Ford had always fascinated Cappy, first when he was completing his Ph.D. at Harvard, and later when he'd picked up his postgraduate auto mechanics degree at a Dodge dealership in Bakersfield. He liked its simplicity. The flathead V-8, the three-speed gearbox, the straight clean boxlike lines.

They drove all the way to Pacific Grove silently listening to Christmas carols because the eggnog had set a mood upon them and neither wished to disrupt it by chancing a difference of opinion about some unimportant topic or the other. Bernie even slipped her hand onto Cappy's leg and left it there while he maneuvered the Ford through Monterey and Pacific Grove traffic. When they got to Holman's, the manager, Sally Crandle, personally retrieved Cappy's layaway boxes of wrapped presents and wished them both a Merry Christmas. Bernie, disoriented by Cappy's generosity, nodded a meek thank you, and kept her tongue. It all implied a pleasant holiday. Cappy decided to take the hilltop road past the hospital to bypass the highway between Monterey and Carmel, and connect directly to Highway One back to Big Sur.

Near the hospital Highway Patrolman Danny Terwilliger was hiding behind a clump of bushes. Although Cappy was not speeding, Danny recognized his car and, knowing Cappy's fondness for spirits and creative driving, figured that if he'd follow him, he'd likely catch him in a transgression of one driving law or another. Danny was bucking for Lieutenant and needed a few more ticket quota points to look good on next year's promotion list. He slipped his cruiser into low, and gently crept up onto the road. A couple of cars separated him from Cappy, and he was sure he'd arrived on the scene unnoticed by his prey.

"There's that damned Terwilliger again," Cappy said to Bernie, who turned in her seat and spied the patrol car a hundred yards back.

"He sure is a cantankerous soul," Bernie said.

"Son of a bitch is mean spirited."

"Drive carefully now, dear," Bernie said, squeezing Cappy's free hand.

"It won't make any difference. He's determined."

"Why don't you stop in Carmel, and let's drink a cup of coffee, just in case he's got an alcohol measurer with him?"

"Damn him! I'm not gonna give him the consideration. It's Christmas. Let fate take care of it."

Cappy crossed the river just south of Carmel and pushed the Ford up into the hills overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Behind him, Danny's predatory instincts told him he was onto a winning strategy. But Cappy drove very carefully, and as he reached the flats heading South to home, the mighty Pacific basking in the unlikely winter sun to his right,

he thought maybe Danny would give up and he and Bernie could get back among their friends at Hunky's for another eggnog without provocation.

He didn't count on Danny's mood, though. Christmas did not weigh heavy on the patrolman's mind. It irritated him Cappy was driving so sanely. It festered in his gut that maybe he'd been spotted in his dedication to duty and was being outsmarted. No, by God, he figured, he was not going to be cheated out of his kill. He lay back and persistently followed Cappy, who righteously continued to observe all local, state, and national laws to the best of his ability as he trekked homeward, Bernadette glowing warmly beside him and anticipating the awaiting presents concealed within the packages on the back seat.

After he'd passed under the arching trees that magically signaled he'd made it home unscathed by Danny's power lust, Cappy turned briskly off to the right and parked the Ford in front of Hunky's bar. He sat quietly a moment, then turned to Bernie, who was gently stroking his hand.

"Bernie, I know I'm not the best man in the world, but you're still a good woman, and as bad as I know you figure I am, I am still massively fond of you. It's Christmas, darling. Forgive me my weaknesses. I do the best I can, I promise. And I never want to hurt you, really, I just slip sometime and that's the way I am and I'm sorry. But I'll keep trying if you will."

"Cappy," she murmured, and leaned over and kissed him on the chin.

All of a sudden the red and blue lights of Danny's cruiser engulfed them and his voice pierced the crisp air and the pristine silence of the woods as he projected it with the amplified speaker of his vehicle.

"Stay where you are!" his voice thundered.

“I’ll be Goddamned, that cracker’s still here,” Cappy said, ignoring Danny’s order and climbing out his car. Bernie followed.

Danny marched over to Cappy and Bernie, and stood before them like all tyrants: emotionally insecure, but bullying, nonetheless.

“What the hell you think you’re going?” Danny barked.

“I’m looking at a fool, I think,” Cappy said.

“You calling me a fool?”

“I am considering it.”

“Look how you got that damned car of yours parked. Looks out a line to me.”

“Out a line? There aren’t any lines in Big Sur. Anyhow, this isn’t your jurisdiction. What do you want?”

“I want to know what you’re up to?”

“I’m up to getting an eggnog.”

The ruckus had made its way into the bar and, while Cappy and Danny had been verbally sparring, the inhabitants of Hunky’s popular pub had emptied themselves into the parking lot. The crowd of twenty happy folks silently surrounded the battlefield, waiting to see what happened. The sun had dropped below the waters of the Pacific, and the crackle of the creek where Hunky and Cappy had lain not more than three hours before filtered up to the gathering. Gradually Danny became aware he and Cappy were not alone. He turned back to his car when its flashing lights went black, and saw Hunky climbing out of it. Klay Dornweiler standing by the front of Danny’s cruiser, had lifted the hood, and was fiddling around inside with the motor.

“What the hell you doing there?” Danny cried, and reached impulsively for the nine millimeter automatic on his hip.

Klay turned to him, walked calmly up to his face, and grinned. He raised his hand, and showed Danny a hunk of electrical apparatus that looked like it might be a vital part of his car’s engine.

“What’s that?” Danny asked.

“A twist of fate if you don’t lighten up,” Klay said, and he flung the tangled wire thirty feet down the bank into the creek’s coldly flowing waters.

Danny pulled his gun.

“Don’t do that!” Hunky’s voice carried to Danny’s ears.

Danny turned to the sound, and looked into the business end of Hunky’s eyes.

“Now these folks here are having a Christmas celebration in my place, officer Terwilliger,” Hunky said, ”and you’re welcome inside, if you’d care to join us. They’re real peaceable people, but you know as well as I do I used to be a biker. I’m not so given to just standing by when someone pushes on me. I’d suggest you put your nine millimeter in its holster and we all go inside and celebrate the death and rebirth of Christ for awhile, just to carry on the traditions of our country, if nothing else.”

“By God, I’ll call for backup, you ignorant booze seller.”

“I don’t think so. That wire tangle Klay hitched into the creek turned your radio off too.”

Danny looked down at the creek, and the truth of Hunky’s explanation struck home. He was thirty miles from the nearest town, and Big Sur hadn’t a resident policemen or sheriff. It was dark, he was the stranger, and the nine-millimeter only held a

few rounds. Besides, he knew there was no justifying bloodshed in the situation. He'd simply overplayed his cards. He looked around him. Twenty men and women, give or take a few one way or another, surrounded him. Hunky kept his eyes on him and his hands in his pockets. The ten remaining men appeared calm, but didn't look like they'd take kindly to any further demonstrations of authoritarian rule.

"Danny Terwilliger," Hunky said, "I ain't sure what you think you stand for here with that pistol of yours in your hand. I don't know who you think you're protecting back there in Monterey where they pay your salary to you. I don't have the foggiest idea what you believe in. To be honest, I don't even pretend anymore to know what's going on in this county, let alone the whole misguided country."

Everyone stood listening with an earnest curiosity to Hunky's words. They'd never heard him say anything much but 'want another drink,' or 'what channel you want to watch?' before, but he sure seemed for the moment to have something on his mind.

"What are you saying to me?" Danny said.

"I'm saying you're out of place here, and it strikes me some honest talk is due to occur between us. You just followed Cappy thirty miles as an officer of the law to rag his ass. And now, to put it bluntly, you got your tit in a bit of a wringer."

Danny swallowed uneasily. Hunky continued.

"This ain't Monterey or San Francisco, or New York. It sure as hell ain't Washington, D.C. Up here, we're tired of what's going on nowadays in America. We don't particularly like you Danny. We don't like your attitude. We don't like how you think you got the right to tell us whether we're living right or not. We were all once taught that this country belonged to us. We think we're a group of people bound one to

the other by constitutionally legal contract to hold us all together. We don't figure we're some kind of semi work slaves required to kowtow to and kiss the ass of every millionaire corporate trollop who ambles down the pike. And for damned sure not the ass of his paid flunky.

Danny tensely considered the people calmly surrounding him, sipping their drinks. Then he turned back to Hunky's never wavering eyes. He reviewed the condition of his cruiser, disabled by Klay's handiwork, and, although he didn't completely understand, he understood one thing: his nine-millimeter wasn't much of a solution to the situation. He thought a minute, and then he put the pistol back in its holster. Something sunk in. Some fraction of the scene clicked in place within his brain. And he took the buckle of this belt holding the holster, and he undid it, and took off his belt and gun, and he walked behind his cruiser and opened the trunk, and tossed the gun in, and closed the trunk. Then he walked back to the group, unarmed.

"Maybe I ought to have a drink with you?" he asked, uncertainly.

Hunky smiled.

"Sure," he said, and led Danny into the bar. The others followed, an inaudible sigh accompanying them. Alice Constance, the aforementioned not really pretty woman, but still the most desirable unattached lady in attendance, stepped out of the group and approached Danny. She took his hand and guided him to a seat at the counter. After close consultation with her, Danny ordered two steam beers and a plate of nachos. Bernie and Cappy got a couple of hamburgers and two pale ales. Everyone else ordered whatever it was they wanted: chili, onion rings, French fries, peanuts, and a wide variety of liquid refreshments.

Hunky turned the TV on. As everyone started to relax, Fox news erupted. First O'Reilly, then Greta Van Susteren, interviewing a sleek blue pen-striped two star army general who obviously didn't buy his suits at the post PX.

Klay, a dedicated bachelor, turned to Cappy and said: "You know, she's not a bad looking woman. I like her lean cheeks and the crooked turn of her mouth when she talks, and I always figured she'd have small, perky breasts. There's something sexy about her, but she's hard. She's like Danny. She seems to have misplaced her sensitivity somewhere, seems she's lost any understanding about ordinary people, those who do all the grunt work, the guys who empty her trash and wash her onions for her before she buys them so clean at the supermarket. I'd like to sleep with her, though, if she picked up some gentleness. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yeh, I know what you mean," Cappy agreed.

Bernie, who'd overheard this exchange, reached over and patted Klay's cheek.

"She's not got the right balance between bawdiness and braininess for you Klay. Hell, she's got more testosterone than Governor Arnold."

"Damn, Bernie," Cappy said. "I wouldn't have put her down that flat myself."

"Must be the ale," Bernie said. "But, I like my women as emotionally well balanced as my men. I mean, *soft-smart* is better than *hard smart* for any woman wanting to plumb the heart of a good man."

Cappy slapped her on the butt, and said, "Honey draws better than vinegar, eh?"

Bernie slapped his butt right back, then she put her face up close to his and blew lightly into his mouth.

"Pooooooooof!"

Cappy rolled back on his heels and laughed.

Meanwhile, Alice had slipped her hand into Danny Terwilliger's pants pocket.

"Bernie, my faithful lady," Cappy said. "How'd you like to open your presents right now?"

"Oh!" Bernie exploded, ejecting Cappy into the parking lot to retrieve her gifts from the Ford. He returned, sheepishly handed them to her, and retired to the back pool room with Klay.

Belle Thomas escorted Bernie to the corner fireplace and watched as she unwrapped each present. When Bernie had finished, she was bawling her eyes out, and Belle was hugging her in support. Before her lay the complete works of Emily Dickinson, bound in wine red leather, a single hand painted ceramic rose book mark, and a pair of one eighth carrot diamond earrings perched each on the end of a platinum pendant.

Belle spoke.

"You two must love each other a lot."

"Yeh, I guess so, sometimes," Bernie said.

"You mean you guess sometimes you love each other, or sometimes you love each other, you guess?"

"Christ, Belle, how do I know?"

Bernie marched into the poolroom, flung her arms around Cappy's neck and kissed him. Then she stepped back, and gave him a full knuckled roundhouse slug on the chin that rocked him back on his heels again.

"Green peas, Bernie. Why'd you do that?"

"For being so Goddamned inconsistent."

Bernie turned on her heel and abandoned Cappy to feebly reconsidering exactly how the female mind operates. When by the end of the next pool game, he'd figured part of it out, he returned to her in the main room, and it seemed, for the time being at least, familial peace had been restored.

Belle and Klay, being the only two singles, started mixing it up together, and Hunky's broad hipped, broad shouldered woman, Flora, who worked the kitchen, came out and had a drink with her man. Danny, warmed up by Alice Constance's constancy slid over to Hunky finally and said he was having a good time.

"Yep?" Hunky asked.

"Yes. Really. Except...one thing. What is it all of you want? Everybody living here alone, in the woods? In this lonely place?"

"That's simple," Hunky said.

"Well?"

"I ain't sure you're ready for it, Danny."

"Try me."

"First, Big Sur ain't lonely. And second..."

Alice squeezed Danny's privates at this point, and he turned to her and grinned, silly, like a monkey on a string held by an accordion player.

Hunky noted this aside, and waited.

After a few seconds, Danny remembered he and Hunky were talking and he turned back to him.

"What were you saying?"

"You asked what we want."

“Yeh.”

“I said it’s simple.”

“I’m listening.”

“We’d kinda like our country back again.”

Danny looked down into his glass and watched the foam dissolve gradually like soap bubbles do in a wash basin after they’ve lifted off all the dirty scum. O’Reilly’s voice from the television, sounding like jack boots marching on dry gravel, snapped a rebuke to his visiting guest as his hand clicked off the man’s microphone in mid speech.

“We don’t allow any loose talk here, you understand?” he barked.

The man got up and walked off the TV set, leaving O’Reilly alone.

“Some people just can’t stand the heat,” O’Reilly blustered.

The TV snapped to a commercial for imported breakfast sausages.

“I think I’m beginning to see what you mean,” Danny said to Hunky.

“You think?”

“Some, anyhow. You know what’s needed?” Danny said. “A plan.”

“Well, that would certainly be a start,” Hunky conceded. “Have another beer?”

“Believe I will.”

Cappy and Bernie walked up behind Danny and Hunky.

“How are things going now?” Cappy asked.

“Getting there,” Hunky said. “Danny,” he continued, “Cappy here’s got a pair of pretty smart boots that might help you with your plan idea.”

“Boots? How’s that?”

“Ask Cappy. It’s his boots.”

Danny hung his arm around Cappy's shoulder, and they started discussing the phenomenon of thinking boots. Bernie and Belle repaired to the fireplace where they read Emily Dickinson's poems to one another and wept a lot. Everybody, continuing to explore - with all its failings, with all its pain and disappointments, with all its reluctant but obstinate beauty - the infinite mystery of human brotherhood, talked and drank together until three-thirty. Then, they all hugged one another and departed for home to exchange gifts with those they lusted after, loved, and, more often than not, worried about.