

1369 E. 56<sup>th</sup>

We were celebrating because Bernard had just gotten out of the W-3 ward at Michael Reese hospital. Bernard was a little weird. A lot of times he wouldn't make a whole lot of sense and when he started drinking or partying, his eyes would wander around in his head independent of each other.

Bernard's mom was nuts too and she couldn't deal with him at all. Every time Bernard would screw up and get caught she'd commit him to the W-3 ward until God told her to let him out. This last time what had happened was we had built this pipe bomb and set it off in the middle of the street on Halloween. It was made of three inch pipe and about a foot and a half long with pipe caps on both ends. It made a hell of a boom when it went off and that should have been the end of it, except one of the caps flew about a block down the street and hit a twelve-year-old girl who was on a porch trick-or-treating. It broke her arm. The police asked around and got some names and took a bunch of people down to the station for questioning including me and Bernard. Everybody denied everything except crazy Bernard who said he'd done the whole thing himself. So they charged him with it and released him to his mom but before they could get him into juvenile court his mom had him in W-3 ward.

But God had told his mom to let him out and now we were celebrating.

We were all in the park across the street from Bernard's building, a long, narrow park with big apartment buildings along one side. Bernard had a whole pocketful of reds he'd stolen from the hospital so we were all pretty high and having a good time, not really minding the cold, late November wind off Lake Michigan.

Everybody had an eye out for the cops. They knew we liked to party here, and there isn't anything that looks better on a Chicago cop's record than a lot of underage drinking busts. After

all, it's a pretty serious crime in a city like Chicago. And they don't have to worry about getting involved in anything dangerous where they might get hurt.

I looked over at Bernard. He was looking pretty fucked up, pointing up in the air with both of his index fingers.

“Gotta go upstairs an’ get some more reds, man,” he said, and he took off down the street.

I'm digging around in a bag looking for another beer when this girl named Wendy points behind me. I'm just in time to see Bernard's head explode on one of the concrete planters that has little trees growing out of them in front of his building. Somebody behind me said, “Fuck, Bernard just jumped off his own roof.”

A few days later I went to look at the spot where Bernard had landed. He had landed on this fancy textured concrete and the Fire Department had hosed it down but you could still see this reddish-brown stuff in the cracks. I took a few steps and I felt something sharp through the hole in the bottom of my Converse high-tops. I picked up my foot and saw a tooth. I scooped it up and put it in my pocket.

A few days later at school I was in metal shop and when nobody was paying attention I put that tooth in a vise and drilled a hole in it. I put it on a short piece of leather thong. I tied it around my neck short, short enough so that it couldn't come off over my head. When anybody asked what it was I said that it was a bear's tooth.

It was late summer and I left Seattle heading east. It was one of those warm, sunny days, and I was riding my bike with a partner of mine beside me. We were moving down the highway at about 70 mph, shirts off, feeling the wind. I felt something and looked down just in time to see

the broken end of that thong slip away. It was a real dry day and at speed my eyes behind my glasses started to tear real bad. I kept blinking but I couldn't get them to stop. Finally, I couldn't see, so I signaled my partner to pull over. We pulled onto the shoulder and shut down the bikes.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "I think I got something in my eye." I said, then I started to puke. When I got done, he said "you don't look so good."

"Yeah, I know," I said. "I think the sun is fucking with me, we better find a place to have something to drink." We took off looking for a bar. As I got my bike back on the road I said out loud, "Later, man," and the wind snatched my words and screamed back in my ears.