



CHARLES BUKOWSKI

Charles Bukowski
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for Barbet Schroeder

This is a work of fiction and any resemblance between the characters and persons living or dead is purely coincidental, etc.

1

A couple of days later Pinchot phoned. He said he wanted to go ahead with the screenplay. We should come down and see him?

So we got the directions and were in the Volks and heading for Marina del Rey. Strange territory.

Then we were down at the harbor, driving past the boats. Most of them were sailboats and people were fiddling about on deck. They were dressed in their special sailing clothes, caps, dark shades. Somehow, most of them had apparently escaped the daily grind of living. They had never been caught up in that grind and never would be. Such were the rewards of the Chosen in the land of the free. After a fashion, those people looked silly to me. And, of course, I wasn't even in their thoughts.

We turned right, down from the docks and went past streets laid out in alphabetical order, with fancy names. We found the street, turned left, found the number, pulled into the driveway. The sand came right up to us and the ocean was close enough to be seen and far enough away to be safe. The sand seemed cleaner than other sand and the water seemed bluer and the breeze seemed kinder.

“Look,” I said to Sarah, “we have just landed upon the outpost of death. My soul is puking.”

“Will you stop worrying about your soul?” Sarah responded.

No need to lock the Volks. I was the only one who could start it.

We were at the door. I knocked.

It opened to this tall slim delicate type, you smelled *artistry* all over him. You could see he had been born to Create, to Create grand things, totally unhindered, never bothered by such petty things as toothache, self-

doubt, lousy luck. He was one of those who looked like a genius. I looked like a dishwasher so these types always pissed me just a bit.

“We’re here to pick up the dirty laundry,” I said.

“Ignore him,” Sarah interspersed. “Pinchot suggested we come by.”

“Ewe,” said the gentleman, “do come in...”

We followed him and his little rabbit cheeks. He stopped then, at some special edge, he was charming, and he spoke over his left shoulder as if the entire world were listening to his delicate proclamation:

“I go get my VOD-KA now!”

He flashed off into the kitchen.

“Jon mentioned him the other night,” said Sarah. “He is Paul Renoir. He writes operas and is also working in a form known as the Opera-Movie. Very avant-garde.”

“He may be a great man but I don’t want him sucking at my ear lobes.”

“Oh, stop being so defensive! Everybody can’t be like you!”

“I know. That’s their problem.”

“Your greatest strength,” said Sarah, “is that you fear everything.”

“I wish I had said that.”

Paul walked back with his drink. It looked good. There was even a bit of lime in there and he stirred it with a little glass stick. A swizzle. Real class.

“Paul,” I asked, “is there anything else to drink in there?”

“Ewe, sorry,” he said, “please do help yourself!”

I charged into the kitchen right upon the heels of Sarah. There were bottles everywhere. While we were deciding, I cracked a beer.

“We better lay off the hard stuff,” suggested my good lady. “You know how you get when you’re drinking that.”

“Right. Let’s go with the wine.”

I found a corkscrew and got a bottle of fine-looking red.

We each had a good hit. Then we refilled our glasses and walked out. At one time I used to refer to Sarah and me as Zelda and Scott, but that bothered her because she didn't like the way Zelda had ended up. And I didn't like what Scott had typed. So, we had abandoned our sense of humor there.

Paul Renoir was at the large picture window checking out the Pacific.

"Jon is late," he said to the picture window and the ocean, "but he told me to tell you that he will be right along and to please stay."

"O.K., baby..."

Sarah and I sat down with our drinks. We faced the rabbit cheeks. He faced the sea. He appeared to be musing.

"Chinaski," he said, "I have read much of your work. It is wild shit. You are very good..."

"Thank you. But we know who is really the best. You're the best."

"Ewe," he said as he continued to face the sea, "it is very very nice of you to...realize that..."

The door opened and a young girl with long black hair walked in without knocking. Next thing we knew she was stretched out up on the back of the sofa, lengthwise, like a cat.

"I'm Popppy," she said, "with 4 p's."

I had a relapse: "We're Scott and Zelda."

"Cut the shit!" said Sarah.

I gave our proper names.

Paul turned from the sea.

"Popppy is one of the backers of your screenplay."

"I haven't written a word," I said.

"*You will...*"

"Would you, please?" I looked at Sarah and held up my empty glass.

Sarah was a good girl. She left with the glass. She knew that if I went in there I would start in on sundry bottles and then start in on my way to being nasty.

I would learn later that another name for Popppy was “The Princess from Brazil.” And for starters she had kicked in ten grand. Not much. But it paid for some of the rent and some of the drinks.

The Princess looked at me from her cat-like position on the back of the couch.

“I’ve read your stuff. You’re very funny.”

“Thank you.”

Then I looked over at Paul. “Hey, baby, did you hear that? I’m fanny!”

“You deserve,” he said, “a certain place...”

He flashed toward the kitchen again as Sarah passed him with our refills. She sat down next to me and I had a hit.

The thought then occurred to me that I could just bluff the screenplay and sit around Marina del Rey for months sucking up drinks. Before I could really savor that thought, the door burst open and there was Jon Pinchot.

“Ah, you came by!”

“Ewe,” I said.

“I think I have a backer! All you have to do is write it.”

“It might take a few months.”

“But, of course...”

Then Paul was back. He had a strange pink-looking drink for the Princess.

Pinchot flashed toward the kitchen for one of his own.

It was the first of many meetings which would simply dissolve into bouts of heavy drinking, especially on my part. I found it to be a needed build-up for my confidence as I was really only interested in the poem and the short story. Writing a screenplay seemed to me an ultimately stupid

thing to do. But better men than I had been trapped into such a ridiculous act.

Jon Pinchot came out with his drink, sat down.

It became a long night. We talked and talked, about what I was not sure. Finally both Sarah and I had drunk too much to be able to drive back. We were kindly offered a bedroom.

It was in that bedroom, in the dark, as we poured a last good red wine, Sarah asked me, “You going to write a screenplay?”

“Hell no,” I answered.

2

The next call from Jon Pinchot came 3 or 4 days later. He knew Danny Server, the young producer-director who had an entire movie studio down in Venice. Danny was going to lend us his screening room so we could see Pinchot's documentary, *The Laughing Beast*, about a black ruler who did it his way with bloody gusto. We were to meet first at Pinchot's for a few drinks. And so, it was back to Sailboat Lane again....

Jon answered the door and Sarah and I entered. Jon was not alone. A fellow stood there. He had a strange head of hair: it looked white and blond at the same time. The face was pink, going toward red. The eyes were a crazy round blue, very round, very blue. He had the look of a schoolboy about to play a horrible prank. That look, I would learn, never left him. He was likeable right off.

"This is François Racine," said Jon. "He acts in many of my films, and in others."

"And in the others, I get *paid*..." He bowed. "How do you do?"

Jon went for the drinks.

"Please pardon me," said François, "I will be finished in a moment."

On the table he had a little roulette wheel, electrically controlled, it was set off whirling with the push of a button. He had stacks of chips and a long sheet of paper full of calculations. There was also a betting board. He placed his chips, pushed the button, said, "It is my Lady with the Spinning Head. I am in love."

Jon came out with the drinks.

"When François is not actually gambling, he is usually practicing or at least thinking about it."

The wheel stopped and François raked in his reward.

"I have studied the permutations of the wheel and I have it," said François, "so no matter where it stops, I have guessed and I win."

“And his system works,” said Jon, “but when he gets to the casinos he does not always stay with his system.”

“I am often defeated by the Death Wish,” François explained.

“Hank gambles,” said Sarah. “He plays the horses. He’s there every day they run.”

François looked at me. “Ah, the horses! You win?”

“I like to think I do...”

“Ah, we go some day!”

“Sure.”

François went back to his little wheel and we sat with our drinks.

“He has won and lost hundreds of thousands,” Jon told us. “The only time he wants to be an actor is when he is dead broke.”

“Makes sense,” I said.

“By the way,” said Jon, “I have talked to the producer Harold Pheasant and he is very interested in the screenplay. He is ready to back it as a movie.”

“Harold Pheasant!” said Sarah. “I’ve heard of him. He’s one of the biggest producers in the business.”

“That’s right,” said Jon.

“But I haven’t *written* a screenplay,” I countered.

“No matter. He knows your writing. He’s ready.”

“It doesn’t seem plausible.”

“He often works that way and he makes nothing but money.”

Jon went for the bottle.

“Maybe you *ought* to write a screenplay,” Sarah suggested.

“Look what it did to F. Scott Fitzgerald.”

“You’re not Fitzgerald.”

“No, he gave up drinking. That killed him.”

François was still at his little roulette wheel. Jon came out with the bottle. “We’ll have one more and then we should go.”

“O.K.,” I said.

“Listen, François, are you coming along?” Jon asked. “Oh no, please pardon me, I must do more research here....”