Sketch

Volume 45, Number 3  1980  Article 12

Hot Dog

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Abstract

To begin with, I’m from a small town in Iowa, which is redundant, because every town in Iowa is small in comparison to almost anywhere, especially Los Angeles, where this story takes place. I’m driving down Fountain in Hollywood, with my wife Trixie. We just had dinner at Pink’s Hot Dog Stand on lower La Brea...
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by

Joseph M. Grant

English Senior

To begin with, I'm from a small town in Iowa, which is
redundant, because every town in Iowa is small in comparison
to almost anywhere, especially Los Angeles, where this story
takes place. I'm driving down Fountain in Hollywood, with my
wife Trixie. We just had dinner at Pink's Hot Dog Stand on
lower La Brea. You get these tremendous chili-dogs with
sauerkraut and onions for a dollar. One can fill you up and I
usually have two, but this particular evening I can't have a
second chili-dog. My stomach starts to feel odd. I sense
everything through my stomach before it happens. At any
rate, I don't quite feel like another, but I need something else,
so Trix and I head up La Brea and turn into the Mayfair
Market on the corner of Fountain and La Brea for a six-pack
of beer and a sack of Doritos. A six-pack is just about right for
a summer evening in Hollywood, and if anything will quiet my
stomach, they will.

I have six cents left so we head for our place on Bronson.
We live at Freddie's Taj Mahal which is in between Sunset and
Hollywood Boulevard and is straight down from the giant
HOLLYWOOD sign set up in the side of the Hollywood Hills.

We head down Fountain when off of a side street comes a
black man about twenty-four or twenty-five running too fast
and too hard for it to be any fun on this smoggy evening.
Anybody with any sense is drinking beers in front of an air-
conditioner. We watch him dodge between two cars, both
moving about twenty miles per hour, and then head down the
other side of the street just ahead of us. He is being followed,
about fifteen yards behind by another man, who looks like
someone you would see in Afro-Hair-Tonic commercials, with
unusually long, black, kinky hair with silver streaks, combed
straight back, with what looks to be a home-made dagger in
his fist that is at least a foot long.

Now, just because I'm from Iowa it doesn't mean that I'm
automatically naive. There are some worldly people in Iowa—
but I don't happen to be one of them. My first reaction to all of this is that the dagger is merely for appearances, visible persuasion of a sort.

His lead is increasing and it looks like he is going to get away as we pull up to the corner, when from across the street comes a third man carrying a tire iron. He intercepts the first man and waits, brandishing the iron in slow figure eights. The first guy is scared and waits before turning part way to face the dagger and still keep the tire iron in sight. While all of this is going on, Trix and I are sitting in our car, with the windows down, maybe six feet away watching this scene while car after car pulls up behind us. We're close enough to count the beads of sweat on any of the three, and yet they pay no attention to us.

“What kind of blood you think you fuckin’ with dude?” No answer is needed, the dagger and tire iron answer any questions.

The traffic is piling up, and people are honking their horns, and I can't drive on. I still don’t think they will use the weapons on this guy; that might kill him. Trix is way ahead of me though, “Come on Red! Go! Go! That guy is going to be killed—let's get out of here!” Trixie is from Illinois which would explain her keener perception.

Slowly I begin to edge out into the intersection, looking only at the three. I have no idea if there are any cars coming—don’t really care. The guy in the middle makes a break and runs past as the dagger takes a swipe, knocking him to the ground a few feet away. By this time, both of them are on him, swinging and stabbing. I’ve stopped dead in the intersection, staring while cars race past.

“Red, get going!” Trixie screams.

He flops around on the cement like a fish in a boat while they stab and club him. I pull out of the intersection and into the first drive and turn around. As I turn around I see him jump up and dart into the street and fall on the hood of a car as he is stabbed in the back. The people in the car honk their horn at him as if he can do any more than he is doing. The man with the tire iron clubs him once more on the side of the head and the two head off down the block to jump into a
waiting pimp car with blobs of chrome and fat white walls. They aren't even in a hurry to leave.

While this is going on the guy has stumbled to the sidewalk. A man waiting at a bus stop across the street yells at him to get to a hospital, telling him he could be hurt pretty bad. What a jerk, how is he going to get to the hospital when he can hardly stand up? During all of this Trix and I sit gaping.

I squeal around in the intersection and pull up to him, "GET IN, I'll take you to the hospital, get in!" He just stares at the two crackers for the longest time.

"Get in dude, they take you to the hospital man, get in!" The bus stop urging must have done the trick because he stumbling into Trixie's open door and slumps into the back seat. All the while this is happening, an old woman is standing next to the small pool of blood he has left, next to the mailbox where he has been holding himself up. She doesn't look much better than he does. She has a pair of old nylons on, rolled down to her ankles, and is wearing a crusted pair of pink fuzzy half slippers. She has no teeth and just stands there gumming and shaking her head as if this sort of thing happens every time she comes to mail a letter.

Well, I barely know how to get back to my apartment, let alone to a hospital, so I shout at the woman, "Hospital?" She waits a moment, drops her letter into the mailbox and mumbles, "Kaiser Hospital on Sunset, turn right." With that, I squeal in a circle and head toward Sunset.

Trix is shaking and so am I. I look in the mirror and see bumps beginning to swell all over his head and big chunks of skin missing from his chest with blue-purple tissue bulging out that he barely pushes back in.

"Everything's all right, man. Everything's all right." He doesn't need me to say this, but I do, for my own sake. I can see six stab wounds in the mirror, and I know there is at least one deep one in his back.

We blast onto Sunset through a red light, the horn held down, hoping not to get hit. I'm driving a friend's car and imagine how he will complain when he sees the blood all over the back seat. What an asshole. I realize this could be right out of the movies and laugh.
Trix is shouting at me, “We better ask someone how to get there, maybe we should call an ambulance.” I know he will be dead by the time an ambulance gets here, but I pull over for directions. Two fags are walking down the street arm in arm and Trix shouts at them as I slow down, “Where’s the hospital?” They see this guy bleeding all over the back seat and still can’t care less. They look at each other before shaking their heads.

“We’re looking for Kaiser Hospital, is it this way on Sunset?” I’m getting pissed. Finally they answer, “Oh, Kaiser.” Now the turds remember.

“That’s about ten miles away. You should just take him to the police station—they’ll know what to do with him.”

Their last remark pushes me over the edge. “Thanks, butt-fuckers!”

We pull down a side street and head for Cedars-Sinai Hospital, a private hospital I’m not sure will take him, but the only one I have the faintest idea of how to get to.

“Oh God, help me, oh God!” I can barely hear him as he rolls around on the back seat as I turn corners going thirty with my horn on through red lights.

“Where is Beverly, Trix? Dammit, you work down here.”

“I’m not sure, pull over and ask someone.”

“Wait, it has to be down here, we can hit it on Fairfax.”

“Ask someone, this isn’t the right way.”

“Yes it is! Don’t you work down here? Where the fuck is it? Is this the right way? Wait, yes, this is the way. Yes, this is it.” While I’m shouting and answering my own questions, the horn is blaring and Trix is waving her arms out the window yelling “Ask someone, asshole, ask someone.”

I keep checking the rearview mirror while keeping up a steady stream of “It’s all right, man, it’s all right.”

“Maybe we should go to the police station—but we don’t know where that is.” Trix talks to herself as she waves her arms out the window. Her breasts are bobbing up and down as she waves, probably distracting more than warning.

“Shit! He needs a doctor, not the police. What could they do? Is he all right? Keep checking to make sure he stays conscious.” I look back and wish he would push the stuff back in that keeps pushing out. I remember shooting a frog with my
bow and arrow when I was a kid and watching the same kind of stuff come out, but thinking about it wasn't helping anything.

"Oh God, oh God, don't let me die . . ."

"Don't let him die, Trix, don't let him die." What a ridiculous thing to say, what can she do about it? Trixie says nothing, just keeps waving out the window. Suddenly I realize, what if he does die? I'd probably be held liable. I could see getting sued for this guy dying in my car.

At last we run into Beverly, literally, as I scream out into the middle of the intersection before I can turn to miss an oncoming group of cars, sending him crashing across the seat. There's blood all over the seat now, both sides, and on the windows from where he was holding himself up.

"Oh God, help me, help me, help me. . ."

"Don't worry, I'm waving my arms," Trix says. I can't help laughing.

"Great, they'll be staring at you as they ram us, killing all three of us." I'm weaving all over the road, honking the horn, trying to get around traffic. No one moves. Asshole Californians are so used to this kind of driving that they don't even look up.

Finally I can see the hospital as I run across La Cienaga between two cars, barely missing both.

"It's o.k., it's o.k.," Trixie keeps saying to me as if I'm the one that's hurt.

"Where the hell is the emergency exit!" There are signs for every memorial wing dedicated to rich Jews, but no indication of where the emergency room is located. I wonder if they will even admit a Black to a Jewish hospital. I remember reading stories where ambulance drivers make heroic drives safely only to be sent to another hospital across town.

"Left, left, left! In there, follow the signs." I look for the signs she is talking about, but see none of them.

"Where? Nadler Memorial Wing, Levis Extension, I don't . . ." and then the entrance is right in front of me and I'm confronted by the familiar one-way spikes in the lot entrance. An effective deterrent.

"Which way are those spikes pointing Trix? Is this the right way?"
“I can’t tell. Forward I think.”
“Fuck it.” I drive forward, expecting to hear all four tires go flat. They don’t.
“Oh God, oh God.” I barely hear him as I pull up to the door, blocking three spaces and hoping an ambulance doesn’t come.
“Run in, I’ll watch him, honey, we’re here,” Trix says.
I run inside, pushing in front of a man in a wheelchair who is filling out an insurance form.
“Religion?” the attendant inside the booth doesn’t look up.
“I need an attendant, there’s a man hurt bad outside.”
“Are you working?” She doesn’t even hear me.
“He’s bleeding bad, someone has to help him.”
“I asked if you are presently employed, sir?”
“Hell yes! Now can someone help this guy?”
“You’ll have to wait your turn.” The man in the wheelchair is watching the scene, not caring what the attendant is asking. His friend next to him who was pushing the wheelchair grabs his arm as he pulls the wheelchair out from under him. “Here, take this.” Before I can, there is an attendant grabbing the chair and waiting for me. I can hear Trixie through the open door.
“It’s all right, here comes a stretcher.” I don’t know why she is promising the guy a stretcher, he has enough problems as it is. The attendant takes a look and says “This guy needs a stretcher.” Which surprisingly is already coming through the door.

As the attendants pull him from the car there is a steady stream of blood that is flowing down into the seat cushions. He’s screaming but it can hardly be heard as they lay him on his side. He has holes everywhere, with no safe place to lay him.

“Oh God, oh God . . .” That is all he has said the whole time. As they wheel him in I say, half aloud, “He should have been thinking about God when he was messing with those two in the first place.”

“What a Samaritan.” Trixie is standing next to me listening.

An attendant has come out with some towels to wipe the
blood up with while we stand, staring blankly as the aftershock starts to set in.

"Put these gloves on, man, to keep the blood off your hands."

"That's o.k., I work with glass, cut myself all the time." I can't believe the way I'm bragging to this guy. I'm shaken enough not to care what I say. He leaves us the towels and follows the stretcher in. While I scrub the blood up the best I can, I wonder what Bob will say about his car. He is such a puss about things like this. I'm sure he'll be mad that I let this guy bleed on his car's upholstery.

I stand around waiting for Trix to come back from the nurse's station. I have always wondered what I would do in a situation just like this. I've told myself that I'd help, but then when the time comes you just don't know what you'll do. But now I know and feel great. This guy will probably die, if he hasn't already, and all I can think of is how glad I am that I reacted the way I did. Trixie comes up in the middle of my congratulations and is waiting to go. Up until now I haven't really thought too much about Trix, all I could see was myself against a situation, yet she has been as much a part as I.

Trixie sits with her door half open and the guy's blood-stained hat in her lap. It's one of those golf hats you see on old, fat, bald guys trying to protect their heads until the nineteenth hole when they roll them up and stuff them in their back pockets.

"Trix, I'm proud of you, proud of both of us." She doesn't hear what I'm saying. I pick up the hat and put it on before attempting to make it back to Freddie's Taj Mahal.