Boots

Ann Lowry*
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by Ann Lowry

English and Speech, Sr.

HI, MAN what's happenin'? Haven't seen you for a long time—how did you know where I was workin'? Oh. . . how is the old lady? Guess I should go make the scene with her and my old man sometime. Haven't been over there for a couple weeks—don't have much to say to 'em any more, I guess. Yeah, I'm livin' on the north side now—share a pad with two guys up in Old Town. It's a gas, doin' our own cookin' and diggin' B. Dylan records all the time. You should come by soon.

Listen, why don't we get outta here for a while? Sure, it's OK. Sometimes I cut out for two, three hours an' Reggie—he's the big boss—don't even know the difference. He must figure I am down on the loadin' dock bringin' in some of his valuable file cabinets. We can just go down to the eighth floor; I have a setup in by the freight elevator. Just go down after lunch an' nobody can bug you, man.

Well, here it is—pretty mellow spot, huh? Yeah, all the boxes from the new shipment of chairs. I guess the executives in this joint gotta have new furniture every year. Not me, man—I don't dig that mahogany stuff. I'd rather be down here with this ol' chair. Wonder if I could get it outta here an' take it home without havin' Reggie bring The Bureau down on me. I might have to try that.

How long? Oh, I been in this joint since I got out in January. Came back from Hawaii—an' leavin' Hawaii for this town in winter is not good. The cold here is enough to do you in. Anyhow, I kinda dug bein' back; it's a lot farther from here to Vietnam, you know? Yeah, I just missed it—had 87 days left when they sent out all the guys with 90 days to serve. They had my clothes dyed green for the jungle an'
everything. It was almost a bad scene. Now I think about all these guys who go out an' enlist. They think they are all mellow, you know? Man, they are the dumb ones. While they are still wearin' their uniforms an' have a year to go, I am back here safe an' sound with no bullet holes. Those college guys, they are not all so smart as you would think.

Sure, it's OK here. The work is nothin' an' I got time to myself when I want. I just stay in touch with the guys in the stockroom to know when Reggie is gettin' salty about me bein' gone. They tell him I am down on the dock or on a outside trip to the bank or the airport, but he sometimes will not take that, you know? So when Reggie is about to come down on me real bad, Crazy Larry comes down an' sounds me about it. Then I go back up an' cause some scenes workin' in the stockroom 'till Reggie cools off. You would dig this Crazy Larry, man—he is really out of sight. This kid, he is the son of some executive on the thirteenth floor. He is workin' here 'till he goes back to high school this fall, I guess. Since he is low man in the stockroom, he has light check. An' you know, he puts on his coat an' tie to walk around the halls an' see if all the bulbs are workin'. It is a scene. The guys taught him to smoke last week; his old man would not dig it, I am sure. They make him do all the lousy jobs 'cause he is low man, but I stand up for him. He is a good kid. Those guys should not pick on Crazy Larry so much. He will turn out better than any of those punks, that is for sure.

Like I said, this job is a scene. This employment agency sent me over. I wore a suit an' tie—the whole bit, you know? So Reggie says OK, he will hire me the next day startin' as a stock boy. So I show up in my turtleneck, boots, an' shades—caused a big scene in the stockroom. The guys all started to call me Boots. I kinda dig it, you know? Anyhow, I quit wearin' turtlenecks in the spring, an' about that time Reggie told me I had to get my hair cut. Man, I about got salty with Reggie—I mean, I had not had it cut since Uncle Sam did it, an' I was just startin' to look like B. Dylan with red hair. But that was when I was still livin' with my old lady, an' she made me get it cut. Reggie should not let my hair bug him; I mean, just because he has no hair at all. He should happen to dig my buddy—you remember Hooker? He goes around in a black suit with turtleneck an' stovepipe hat.
even now in the summer. He can cause some scenes even on Rush Street, man. You should see him now—you would not know him from when we were in school. Grade eleven: that sure seems like a long time ago, don’t it?

Yeah, I suppose I should make it back up to the stockroom. There are prob’ly some certified letters to record. Man, what a drag—like I knew this job in a week, an’ now I have it so I can get all my work done in an hour a day. What do you mean, how come I stay? The pay is good, an’ the gig is simple. So what do you want, you know? Oh, yeah, I could be a cook somewhere. I did kinda dig that when I was in the army, I remember. But bein’ a cook—man, you gotta work all day on your feet an’ people are always buggin’ you. I would rather be here. Oh, maybe I will quit this scene pretty soon. When the airline strike is over, I may go up to O’Hare an’ sound somebody about a job. Those guys make good coin haulin’ crates, an’ they have a lot of time to mess around, too. That might be what I do when I do not dig this place anymore.

Say, you should come up an’ dig Crazy Larry an’ Monk before you cut out. Monk—she is the daughter of some department head on floor ten. She is a scene; always wearin’ sandals an’ readin’ books by some Sartre guy. She has this real long hair an’ a dress that looks like a monk’s robe with the big sleeves, you know? So I happen to call her Monk one day. I think she diggs it, ’cause now we all call her Monk. She is gonna go to that school out in California, the one with all the beards. She is a smart kid—she should do OK there. She gets so hung up on those books, you know? I would not want to dig a book by Sartre or some guy all day the way she does.

Funny, yesterday Monk was sittin’ there diggin’ her book: then she looked up an’ asked me what my life goal was. I mean, do you dig that? She says, “What is your goal in life, Boots?” So I ask her what she means, an’ she says she means why am I workin’ here an’ what do I plan to do after this. So I say I am workin’ here because it is good scratch an’ a simple job. She wants to know if I don’t want to be challenged—dig, me wanting to be challenged! So I say to her. “Monk, my goal in life is havin’ the scratch to buy food an’ a little brandy an’ a new B. Dylan album.” These big plans—where do they ever get you? You are only going to live so
long; you might as well do it the way you want, you know? I mean, why knock yourself out when you will be the same person no matter what?

Uh-oh . . . looks like big Reggie comin’ outta the stock-room. Well, I will go in the back way. Listen, come over some night. What is today, Tuesday? You can come by an’ dig Richard Kimball on the tube with us. That show is mellow, man. There is nobody I dig more than B. Dylan, except maybe the Fugitive.

The Wheel

*by George Christensen*

_English and Speech, Jr._

When the first call to line up for the feature race crackled over the loudspeaker, Don pulled on the helmet and climbed through the glassless window of the red '58 Ford. He fastened the harness rooted to the floor and roll bar around his shoulders and across his lap. He turned the key and the car awoke like a dragon, popping and spitting flame from its open manifolds. He waved away the caustic fumes floating back toward him and made a circle to us with his fingers as he pulled away from the pit and went to wait in his position for the big race of the evening.

Our stock car. Don had been the main support of the idea. We would have probably forgotten about it like a dozen other projects. He hadn’t brought up the idea but he’d kept it going until finally we decided to do it.

He hadn’t worked as hard as some of us when we worked on the car every night for two weeks but we forgave him. He supplied the morale and the beer, ran around doing the odd jobs, and found the red paint for us. He spent most of the time walking around the car making sure everything was going right.