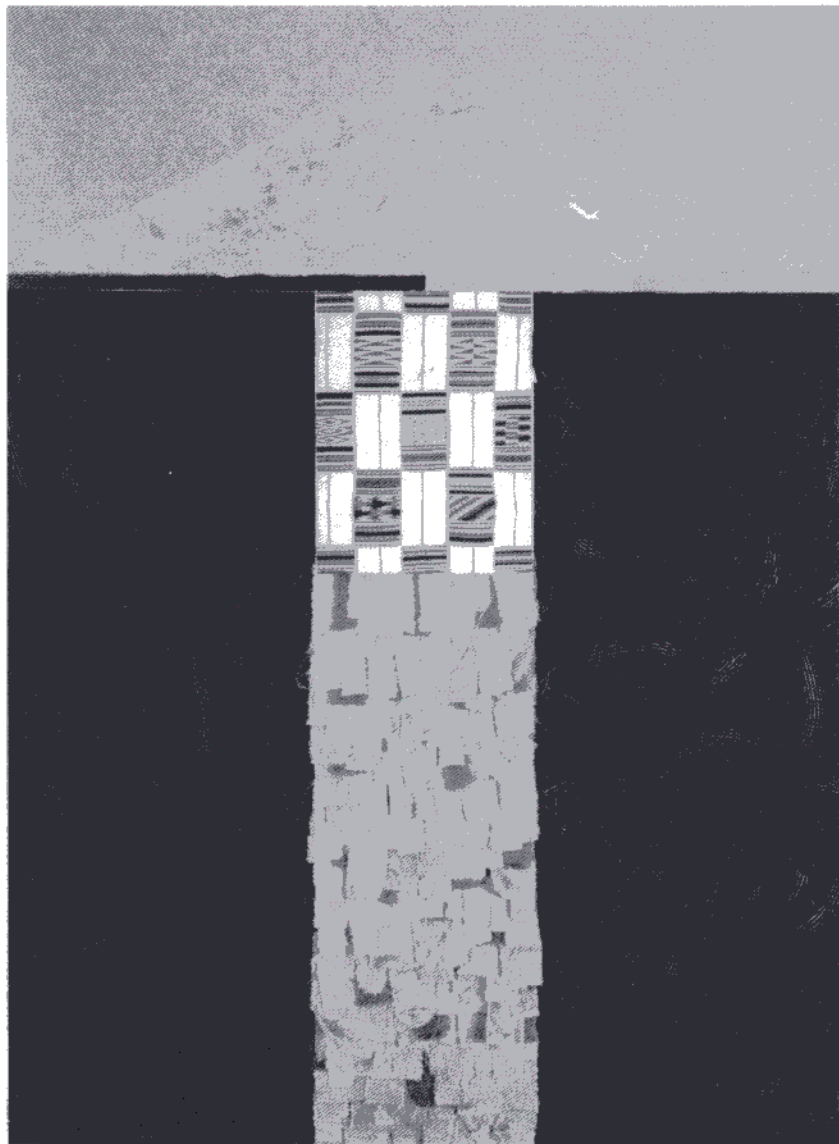


RIVER STYX

NUMBER 30



Roho Series #127

John Rozelle

CONTENTS

RIVER STYX 30

Interview

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. An Interview with Wole Soyinka 1

Poetry

Donald Finkel Here 27
It's Time 28
The Incomparable Oates 29
Martin Espada Federico's Ghost 31
Justo the Painter and the
Conquest of Lawrence 33
Steve Kronen An Incident at Andersonville –
from the Recollections of
Private Charles Hopkins 34
Rita Dove Alfonso Prepares to Go Over the Top 35
Uncle Millet 36
John Drury Interrupted Song 49
The Slopes 50
Marilyn Chin Until Suddenly, a Small Jet
Crosses Her Vision 51
Old Asian Hand 52
Allen C. Fischer Life Among the Gadflies 53
Rochelle Nameroff Second Love Poem 54
The Marriage Window 55
Carol J. Pierman After Church 59
Things As They Are 60
Natural Science 61
Marjorie Stelmach Here Be Dragons 62
Daniel Dahlquist The Armadillo 64
Whirlwind 66

Eric Pankey Ox 67
Gerald Early Stairway to the Stars 70
Howard Schwartz Mississippi John Hurt Buried
in the Pepper 71
The Fire in the Ferns 72
Max Martins Tempo 74
tr. James Bogan Mar-Ahu 76
Tu Fu Premier of Shu 78
tr. Chuan Y. Fu
and Nick Otten
Po Chu-yi Grasses 79
tr. Chuan Y. Fu
and Nick Otten

Fiction

Fred Viebahn Willie (Chapter One of "Slow Dust") 37

Essay

Rochelle Nameroff On Counting 56

Art

John Rozelle Roho Series #127 front cover
Grant Series #37 25
Sentinel I 26
Phill Niblock Photograph of Ellington back cover
Photographs of Ellington 68

Willie Fred Viebahn

They no longer bothered me – those looks which judged and condemned me: What’s a *bum* doing here? Amazing how many people wanted to feed their brains early in the morning – housewives checking *Vogue* and *Better Homes and Gardens*, dreaming of a big time elegance while their brats wrestled with Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch in the play area, athletic *senior citizens* with their sun-burnt noses in golf guides or books explaining how to nurture American Beauties in the Southwest desert soil.

But in the past days there was an edginess in the air; I smelled it as soon as I stumbled through the whooshing automatic door. A half hour after the library opened, nearly all the seats in the Reference section were taken, mostly by middle-aged men and a few ladies in business suits, sweating over pages and pages of legal procedures, their fingers nervously leafing through commentaries by Harvard professors.

I had no choice but to push my chair between them – these H & R blockheads searching for ways to *shelter* their thirty-thousand plus incomes from the Government. For an instant I contemplated taking a vacation from my beloved Encyclopaedia Britannica until April 14 – but how and where?

Of course nothing was forcing me to spend my morning hours in the city library, bent over bulky volumes smelling of the history of human failure. What were my alternatives, though? Sure, I enjoyed the afternoons with my buddies in Encanto Park, when we talked about the old life and honored truth still more than it deserved, despite all our sweet lies and melancholic bragging. And I loved the mild spring nights when we grew silent under the bushes, fetching the sign of the Zodiac into the vermouth haze of our sleep.

Sometimes the cops bothered us – so what? It’s a free country and a big city. Ever since Beltknuckle was murdered by the Hell Riders, TV and press watch over us – though even that doesn’t keep the neighborhood hoodlums from hiding behind trees and bawling obscenities.

“You trash yourself, *you scum!*” Juanita yelled back last night, when a few of those guys threatened us again. Lucky for us they’re so provincial; they can’t imagine how peaceful and vulnerable we really are. Even Gus, who used to show off his muscles as a mud wrestler, is really just a teddy bear, despite his wild mug. Last fall an escaped con

managed to worm his way into the confidence of our group; after a day or two he split holding a Swiss knife to Gus' throat, only to take the poor man's good-luck charm – on old silver dollar.

Yes, I enjoyed our slow life and didn't waste much time looking back. But I needed these morning hours in the library, this time spent devouring knowledge which was of no use to me.

A few more days, and the tax craze would be over. I'd be able to concentrate on the alphabetical order of things again instead of jumping in a muddle from volume to volume, distracted by all this murmuring and whispering and moaning. "Did you read the regulations xyz from 1953 – or was it 1958 – in its new version? Under certain circumstances you might be able to deduct your vacation as a business trip, if..."

A week ago I toyed with the idea of leaving the area for a while, maybe to catch a lift to San Diego; but weather is less predictable on the coast. Besides, Juanita flatly refused.

"Nobody is waiting for us down there," she said – as if we had ever been expected anywhere.

The tax payers moved as far away from me as possible. They tried not to look, but I heard them sniff. I had spent no more than three or four minutes between them when – in the middle of the headword *Etruria* with illustrations showing fascinating Etruscan wall paintings – someone whispered in my ear. It was Miss Lundquist standing behind me, her face red, her arms moving excitedly. Her mouth, a little too pale for my taste, was forming words which, if I read them right, asked me to follow her. Dazed, I stared into her gray eyes. I couldn't move. She started tugging at the t-shirt I had gotten at the Salvation Army two days ago.

"Please come with me, Mr. Windganger, it's very important!"

Did they finally dig up a reason to stop me from entering their municipal library? Did the City Council issue a new ordinance elaborating on the one at the door warning: "Shirt and Shoes Required?" (No mention of trousers!) Maybe the shoes and shirt had to be absolutely clean and without holes; perhaps only approved brands were admitted...

Sometimes when it was Miss Lundquist's turn to give advice at the information desk, she talked to me. She was always friendly. After Beltknuckle's death when I was pretty depressed, she even tried to cheer me up. About thirty years old – as old as my own child would be today – she was slim and quick and doubtlessly smart. Her round face with its stubby nose, framed by curly brown hair, did not fulfill the expectations aroused by her Scandinavian name.

Once before she had come to my table; she even sat down next to

me. She asked me if I'd ever been to the Bavarian city of Regensburg; her younger sister had been awarded a year-long scholarship to the university there. I had to admit that I didn't know Regensburg at all – aside from the fact that nearly forty-five years ago I'd spent one night in its train depot, locked up in a cattle car.

Karen Lundquist – white engraving on a black plastic sign pinned to the collar of her flowered jacket; I stared at it while I got up. Suddenly I felt old and clumsy, tired like many of the fellows in the park who were simply waiting for the end. Did I still have ambitions? Yes, yes, certainly: To defy the obstacles of a tramp's life, to cover my past with a blanket of new knowledge and fresh experiences, to savor the small joys – like Juanita. Juanita!

Karen Lundquist grabbed my arm; I was tempted to shake her off. I knew that grasp – it was the kind of clutch that followed orders, followed them even against convictions, under the spell of higher powers. Hadn't I been held and taken away like this dozens of times – expecting the worst?

Why, honey, were you so excited that you stumbled over your own feet? Did some big-time *Führer* announce his visit, did you want to show him your temple of culture grime-free from parasites like me loafing among the books?

She pulled me into her office. "Here," she said, "here, read this – read, read!" Her trembling hand smoothed out a newspaper that had been spread open between a coffee cup and book order forms, and the long red nail of her index finger tapped impatiently at the far left column.

Green words flickered idly on the computer terminal next to the desk. A similar machine, but larger, more awkward, had appeared in my secretary's office shortly before I quit my career at *Midwest Construction Company of Greater Cincinnati*. She had complained that she was too old to adjust to such a "devil's tool." More than a decade had passed since I stood overlooking the Ohio River from my stuffy skybound office. Nowadays the phosphor was glowing in computer monitors everywhere – even Bonnie Miller at the Salvation Army tinkled on such a thing.

"Today's New York Times!" Read it, Mr. Windganger!"

The header said *Friday, April 11*.

"Read it, please, read it!"

HE WHO WALKS THROUGH THEM – THE WIND, it said. In big bold capital letters: *HE WHO WALKS THROUGH THEM – THE WIND*. And on the next line, still bold but smaller: *A Very Personal Memorial For A Hero. By Max Ebstein*.

It wasn't necessary any more that Karen Lundquist asked me to sit

down; my legs gave way by themselves. The hissing of the air conditioner seemed to swell to a rumble. I held my glasses with both hands, at the temples, and read.

HE WHO WALKS THROUGH THEM – THE WIND

A Very Personal Memorial for a Hero

by Max Epstein

This is the story of memories that have grown more and more important to me – the story of forty-year-old memories I would like to share with you today.

Today forty years ago I was a frightened lieutenant in the Army Intelligence, pretending to be brave, advancing with our front lines into central Germany. It was April, 1945. The weather was bad, that European gray as I remembered it from my childhood in Oppeln (an Eastern German town which became Polish after 1945). We were aiming for a famous center of German cultural history and humanism – the city of Weimar.

On April 11 only a few miles parted us from Goethe's city. The concentration camp of Buchenwald was close by; according to the observations of our Air Force pilots tens of thousands of prisoners were still being held captive there by the SS.

But in the afternoon of that day we received sensational information: the prisoners were revolting! One of our strafers reported fighting around the watch towers; the rebels not only seemed to have a detailed plan, but they were armed.

Later we discovered that despite enormous difficulties the Illegal Camp Committee had indeed managed, over years, to smuggle ammunition, weapons, and weapon parts into the camp; all was hidden so cleverly that the SS never found a single bullet. Now, inspired by our approaching artillery and encouraged by the withdrawal of commanding SS-officers, they managed to overpower the demoralized guards (although these still had the superior arms) and to free themselves.

The next day we took Weimar – and received the shocking news that FDR had died. For me he had been Uncle Sam himself; he stood for an America that had saved my family and many of our friends from the evils of Europe and had given us a fresh chance. So I grieved; I wanted to be by myself, to have a few hours of mourning. But there was not time for grief as long as Hitler and Goebbels and Göring preached their mad dream of Endsieg over the radio, as long as ruthless generals and insane Nazi functionaries were directing their Volksgenossen to kill and be killed.

I and a few other men from my unit were ordered to question concentration camp inmates. We were interested in the composition of their camp, and we

needed detailed information about Nazi crimes, especially the ones committed by the SS men we had taken prisoners.

We concentrated our efforts on those people who had been detained by the Nazis for political reasons; they usually could offer the best and most reliable information. Although they were in terrible physical shape, they were eager to point out the atrocities committed against them and their murdered fellow inmates.

Well, most of us know – and those of us who fought in wars know it better and worse than anyone else – that the coils of horror quickly lose their grip if one does not constantly remind oneself that huge numbers of victims actually consist of individual human beings – people like you or I. What does it really mean to you when you read on the first page of this newspaper that thirty civilians were killed in some Central American village during clashes between guerillas and government troops? Even such a relatively small number – it would be possible to count each head – means little. If there were three hundred or three thousand or even thirty thousand victims – certainly your dismay might increase, you might even be pushed to the point of vocal protest – but would this protest grow louder inside you? In the face of the many dead people who are faceless to you, would there be a pain tearing you up inside with every breath? Would you be haunted by nightmares, would you be consciously sad and ashamed of the shamelessness of our human race?

On the other hand, the individual fate with its particular details is capable of penetrating our imaginations deeply; it agitates our fantasies. The lot of one man or woman or child might even touch us more intensely than that of other ones in similar situations if only we sense a special affinity. And that is what this story is about – I would like to tell you of someone whom I owe this experience and to whom I have been grateful for forty years. Although I have lost sight of him, although I have no idea what his fate after our meeting has been, for forty years he has lived on, in my head.

He was the first man I had to interrogate in Buchenwald. He trembled as he sat before my pompous oak desk, a desk which had served a Nazi commander just a couple of days earlier. He still wore the clumsy pyjamas-like uniform with its filthy brown-and-white stripes. I guessed him to be in his mid-twenties – my age. His haggard face was covered with festering pimples – a skin disease no one had bothered to treat. And out of this riddled face the bluest eyes I had ever seen stared at me without a flicker.

"Your name, please," I asked, in German. My German was not as rusty then; it was supported by my parents' fond adages and words to the wise; it was still fed from boyhood memories of wild games in the woods around Oppeln. After our emigration we had continued to speak German at home for the longest time – until we heard the first reports about the extermination camps. And after it became clear that my grandfather, a decorated World War I veteran of the German army, had been put to death in Theresienstadt, my mother even urged

my father for a while to stop writing in German.

"Windgänger," the man on the other side of the desk replied, his voice harsh. "My name is Wilhelm Windgänger."

"Herr Windgänger," I began. I was listening to myself as I spoke, as I kept speaking without hesitation, following the instructions I had received to the letter, the whole *spiel* we had been trained in: how the war was over and he was a free man again, that of course there would be some kind of restitution for victims of Nazi oppression like him, but first we had to put everything on record...

At the same time my thoughts drifted. Windgänger. I translated the name into English, and inside my head I played ball with this word: Windwalker! As it rumbled and danced and jumped I touched it, tapped it, followed it from playground to street to gutter to wide open houses of neighbors long dead, smoke over Auschwitz. And all of a sudden it hit me why this name, this word touched me so deeply: Von diesen Städten wird bleiben: der durch sie hindurchging, der Wind...

Before 1933 my father had served as the literary editor of the Oppelner Tageblatt. He liked to review books and especially loved to write about the latest slim volumes of his favorite post-expressionist poets. He had the gift of memorizing; he knew their best poems by heart, and he fell into the habit of reciting them to his family under every possible and impossible circumstance — at the dinner table or during an outing when he drove our small Hanomag car to the countryside for a picnic on sunny Sunday afternoons. Sometimes my mother would mimic him, and he laughed good-naturedly. I imitated the grimaces my older brother Leo made as he whispered: "I hate poetry!" (Leo became a prosaic furniture salesman, a Midwestern bigshot in the waterbed business.)

Bertolt Brecht was my father's favorite poet, and one poem in particular impressed him so much that for years he used to repeat those lines on every possible occasion. From these cities will remain: He who walked through them, the wind... Though I did not understand their meaning, these words excited me deeply — so deeply in fact, that I grew to mistrust all man-made buildings and began listening to the sounds of the wind — I tried to feel the wind consciously with my body, to seize it when it blew towards me on my way home from school in the fall, to battle it in spring thunderstorms, to turn my back on it in the winter when it tried to needle me with tiny icicles. But did it just walk through me, or did it sometimes bequeath a little bit of its origin and its destiny to me, a little bit of continuity, a small piece of eternity?

The last time I heard my father recite these Brecht lines we boarded the steamer that brought us to America. That was in Hamburg, in 1934. He never quoted them again, never; and though he continued to admire Brecht and write about him in the German exile papers and magazines all those years in New York, these lines never crossed his lips again. So it happened that time had

buried them deep in my subconscious, and the worst November storms in the canyons of Manhattan were not strong enough to call my childish images back.

But now on this April morning, in a shack at the Buchenwald terror camp, an emaciated young man called Windgänger sat opposite me, penetrating me with his blue eyes, and it hit me. Windwalker! Germany's cities razed to the ground, their people uprooted, millions murdered, more millions deeply disturbed, the guilty and the innocent like strays among the ruins — but here was a man who withstood the ravaging fire storms of inhumanity, a man who had not waved flags, a man who did not give in propaganda lies, a man who remained human. From these cities will remain: He who walked through them, the wind...

Certainly a narrow and very subjective interpretation which I had conjured, but in a strange way it reconciled my lost childhood in this hostile German homeland with my presence as foreign conqueror and liberator.

Wilhelm Windgänger was the first German I came in personal contact with those last days of the war who had voluntarily and knowingly fought the Nazis — had fought the thugs who had driven us from our home and murdered our beloved ones. Through him I was able to comprehend the incomprehensible. He was the missing link between my imagination and the unimaginable, a link which made the future more easily conceivable, despite this past.

Wilhelm Windgänger, a trained mason, had joined a Catholic anti-Hitler group long before the war. In 1938 he was caught while slipping issues of the Catholic Anti-Fascist Correspondence into Cologne mailboxes under cover of night. He was sentenced to prison and finally deported to Buchenwald, where he had to work in the quarry. There he drudged for four years, seven days a week, fourteen to sixteen hours a day. But he did not give in to his fate; in the face of futility he joined with other political inmates, mostly communists and social democrats, and plotted resistance. He was convinced that the Regime would eventually break its own neck and that morality would prevail. These groups of prisoners secretly manufactured cut-and-thrust weapons and even guns from primitive materials and with the most primitive tools. Imagine — hundreds of prisoners were involved in this secretive, dangerous work... yet there was never a single betrayal!

Then when the time came, when the roar of our tanks sounded close enough, Windgänger retrieved his revolver from its hiding place under the floor boards. It had taken one-and-a-half years to construct it, using old parts smuggled into the camp by inmates who slave-labored in a weapons factory outside the gates. Within five minutes he and his group managed to overtake a watch tower near the quarry; then they took charge of the captured machine guns, shooting two more towers out of action.

Windgänger gave me excellent descriptions of those SS-officers who had escaped. Some of them could be arrested later, were tried and convicted and, sad to say, more often than not pardoned after having served a mere fraction of

their time; others were never found. They either perished in the last chaos of their world conflagration or managed to disappear in a reconstructed German society which preferred to close its eyes when looking back – or not to look back at all.

During the two weeks I spent in Buchenwald many other men who had suffered for their conviction and their courage sat in front of my oak desk, describing fates that made me shudder and weep as soon as I had a minute alone at night. But Windgänger became more than one of these terrible fates to me. As much as one could, under the circumstances, and in such a short time, he became a friend. Occasionally we met for a beer and talked about the future.

“Come back to Germany,” Windgänger said. “This Volk is so kaputt that we have the best chances for a radically new beginning.”

He had trouble understanding that even my father, a forgiving man by nature, who had considered himself a German all his life, never wanted to step on German soil again – that I, driven out as a child and raised as an American, had even fewer strings left to this country, these people; that there was no attachment beside sadness and fury and – yes, why not admit it – a cruel vindictiveness.

A few days before Hitler’s suicide I was transferred to southern Germany. I gave Windgänger my parents’ Brooklyn address, but I never heard from him again. I do not know what happened to him. Maybe he didn’t survive the turmoil after the war; maybe now, forty years later, he is living a peaceful life as a grandfather in West Germany...

I never tried to find him; what else was there to share but what we had already shared in Buchenwald? Well, one thing for sure: I would have liked to tell him how often he served me as a model, a shining example for myself and in arguments with friends who had fallen into the trap of hating all Germans and everything German. Although I do not expect Willie Windgänger to ever see this article, I want to dedicate it to him as a memorial for him and his brave comrades – a memorial in our hearts and our heads and today, forty year later, a testimonial for a less brutal future.

I walked along Central Avenue, keeping in the shade of the highrisers. Secretaries hurried to coffee shops for lunch, and in front of the Hyatt Regency a group of Japanese businessmen was gathering.

Juanita would expect me back at the park in less than two hours, but I was not so sure I could mix with my buddies as if nothing had happened.

I had managed to convince Karen Lundquist not to tell anybody, at

least for now – not her colleagues, not her friends, and especially not the press or the television people. Of course she was eager to call the whole world – “in *your* best interest,” she said. “You’ll be a famous man, Mr. Windgänger. I bet the mayor will personally see to it that something will be done for you – some money at least, a roof over your head.” She pondered. “Maybe movie rights...imagine!”

How to tell a librarian gone haywire that I could have had stuff like that earlier, that there were times when I *had* stuff like that, that nowadays I preferred to be left alone?

Max Ebsstein! *New York Times!* Who except for Miss Lundquist was able to identify me as that “hero?” Maybe the red-haired journalist who had asked me a lot of questions about our “lifesytle” and what he called “behavioral patterns” after Beltknuckle was murdered? He tried to snoop around in my past, and I took him for a ride in my yellow submarine. He had seen some movie about an old Cherokee called Windwalker, and I told him that I was half Cherokee, too, my daddy being an American soldier in WWI and begetting me with a German girl in Alsace. The red-head turned this silly lie into my claim that I was a long lost son of that movie character, and then he became downright nasty – I quote; “The old white bum swears that this is the truth, and his flickering eyes try to focus on me in a fanatic way; I don’t dare ask him if he ever tried to get help at a mental hospital.” Ms. Lundquist was outraged and wanted to write a letter to the publisher, giving away the few facts of my true story I had told her, but I asked her not to bother. “I don’t want any more attention than that asshole has brought upon me already,” I said.

For a couple of days I thought about following a few other guys who had gone to Tempe, to the railroad bridge over the Salt River where it was easy to jump a slow-moving freight train to Tucson; but I love to cuddle up to Juanita at night, and I knew she wasn’t in for a change of territory. Anyway, the story of Beltknuckle’s murder itself made people pay little attention to the paraphernalia around it, and now those motherfucking Hell Riders were caught after less than a week, nobody cared anymore for the foolish fiction bums and bad journalists dream up.

I turned East on Van Buren. Soon I was out of the bank-and-business district and into my kind of people. The only difference to us *transients* in the park was that most of the down-and-out daddies down here had a roof over their heads – and if it was only a hut nestled between smelly factories, like the Blacks and Chicanos who’d been living here for a good while. Most of the Whites who’d come down from the North recently, out of work and out of luck, vegetated in lousy motel rooms, their rusty Chevies right in front of their cracked

doors.

I had skipped these steps down the social ladder years ago when it became clear to me that I would be neither able nor willing to return to the old suburban way of life. How privileged I was compared to these poor souls: I dropped myself voluntarily. Juanita reproached me whenever I dared to complain.

"You don't have no right to cry and moan," she said, "you jumped out of a warm nest — you didn't get kicked out on your ass."

Damn right — but I would have suffocated in that "warm nest" — suffocated from the stalemate of middle-class life. Not to talk about Jo-Ann's born again bigotry. In the end, as a matter-of-course, she was plastering stickers on my car which screamed "I love Jesus!," "Praise The Lord!," "God Is The Eternal Answer!" in all the colors of the rainbow.

I passed a bus stop. Was that fellow leaning against a street light leafing through the *New York Times*? Bullshit, it was only the *Phoenix Gazette*. You're a fart, Willie Windwalker — so help me Satan and his seven mangy cats! Fuck the past!

"Isn't it incredible, Mr. Windganger, isn't it absolutely *unbelievable*? Call Mr. Ebstein, go ahead, call him — use my phone!" The girl had been so excited she jumped all over the place... and probably drooled in her underpants.

"No, no, no," I had insisted, about to get as mean as I can get if she didn't stop pushing, "it's all long ago and gone. I'm not the same man."

What else could I hide behind? I was touched, mixed up — and a little ashamed, although I didn't know why.

Four young guys were hanging out on the corner next to the New Chance Thrift Shop, opposite a junk car lot. Long black braids framed their round brown faces; Pimas or Papagos who had fled the bleak reservations and were stuck here on their search for the rapacious Anglo life. They were sipping on bottle necks sticking out of brown paper bags and chewing on thin slices of pizza while staring into the continuous traffic. Their silence seemed relentless.

I stopped for a moment, wondering if I should afford myself the luxury of some pizza, too; I had three-forty left from my last welfare check. On the other hand — Juanita would be waiting with a sandwich in less than an hour.

"Hey, grandpa, got a few crumbs left over for you to chew on. Come on, man, can the tears. You Anglo bums are really too much!"

The biggest Pima put his hand on my shoulder. Aspen leaf, I could not help thinking, I'm aspen leaf, aspen leaf, aspen leaf...

"Come on, man, there's plenty!"

I chewed on the tough crust and cold cheese and took a long slug

from the camouflaged beer bottle. My tongue waged a hard fight with the cheese in the gaps between my teeth. All my life I hated the habit of using fingers to pick out threads of food — maybe because everybody used his fingernails at home in Erlenhagen, and there are few Erlenhagen habits I haven't grown to hate. I stuck to this behavioral *noblesse* through the dirt and sweat of my life as a bum — always and ever, no exceptions, please.

"Well, boys," I finally said, "I've lived through a lot of shit in my sixty-six years, and it makes me kind of touchy — for better or worse."

I got the three-forty out of the pockets of my checkered trousers (gray-and-reddish, compliments of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic welfare organization with a local embezzlement scandal around its neck) and gave them to the big guy. "Here, Tiny Tim, go and get some more booze!"

The three other guys laughed. "Hey, Jose," one of them said, "we've got us a real clown, man."

"Don't be silly, grandpa," Jose said to me, "I bet that's your last dough, right?"

"My business," I answered.

A black TransAm pulled up, and the pale passenger in the front seat cried out in a shrill voice: "Go back where you came from, you motherfuckers, or we'll kick your asses into the desert ourselves!" He pulled a gun and brandished it like an exhibitionist waving his dick as the car screeched off.

"Shee-it," I said. The four Indians nodded.

Jose returned with a twelve-pack, and we took off for a small park nearby. Students from the high school across the street stood in clumps, smoking joints; a few boys and girls lay in the grass, desperately diving into each other's jeans.

We drank in silence. Pimas are no gossip mongers. I tilted the bottle back; between the palm fronds overhead the airplanes descended into Sky Harbor every minute or so.

I had been too excited and nervous to remember Max Ebstein immediately — physically, that is. But now he slowly materialized out of forty years of oblivion: in his mid-twenties, *my* age alright, his grayish-green uniform coat unbuttoned, badges of rank and a medal for bravery on his chest, his fists encased in the leather gloves he would later give me as a farewell present... I owned them for a long time, took them with me when I emigrated to Canada — when did they disappear? I know Maria gave me new ones lined with lamb wool; that must have been Christmas '55, or '56...

In the beginning Max kept his eyes hidden behind dark pilot's glasses, but later he took the glasses off; his eyes were brown most of

the time but they turned kind of amber those few times the April sun came out.

“America!” Max sighed on our last evening; the next day he was to be transferred to Bavaria. “You’ve got to see it, Willie. And smell it, taste it – America!” His face was so fresh, so clean, so red-cheeked. “That’s freedom, that’s life, that’s self-determination! Imagine – you don’t even have to register with the authorities!”

“Something wrong, sir?” A strange voice. As I opened my eyes and lifted my head I was staring at a grinning Black cop. Oh Christ – I had fallen asleep under the palm tree! My new friends were gone, and I held a brown paper bag in my arms.

“Do you have a place to stay?” the cop asked. I nodded and got up. I saw his blond partner leaning against the patrol car across the street. The Black cop stopped grinning, sized me up with a worried look.

“You o.k., grandpa?”

Why the hell does everybody call me grandpa these days? I noticed that I was swaying.

“Don’t worry,” I answered. “It’s the blood. You know what I mean – the blood in my brain.”

“Do you want us to take you to a shelter? Salvation Army maybe? Get something to eat?”

“No, thanks,” I said. “I’m on my way home. My wife, you know...”

“O.k., then,” the cop said. “It’s your decision, grandpa. Keep out of trouble, will ya?” He turned around and sauntered back to his cruiser.

I peeked into the paper bag. The Pimas had left a full bottle of beer. Good boys! A shame they took off without me.

The high school kids had disappeared, too. Judging from the sun, it was approximately four o’clock. Juanita certainly hadn’t been able to stand it and had wolfed my sandwich on top of her own. I knew she’d be mad at me – she’d gotten too used to my goddamn reliability.