

A BEAUTIFUL WAY TO DIE

A Memoir of San Francisco in the mid-Seventies

by

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Fingering his way past a bushel of artichokes three for a solari, past crowds groaning their way along a nefarious multitude of subway turnstiles (*BART Will Get You There Better* read the signs still shuddering from the threat of earthquakes), Abel Brakeman laughed heartily at the sight of his own tears and collapsed into the feathery breasts of a dying nightingale.

"Would you have loved me in life as you do in death?" she sang sweetly thru the haze of bardo matrices barely separating the two newlyweds.

"I can't rightly say," replied Brakeman's last dream, "the present moment is almost too dicey for words. Even now, leaving aside those kinky intimations about Christ being a cocksucker, I am surely floundering in a slaughtered abyss of wild American turkeys."

Fuck the turkeys, Brakeman, what about the goddamn Indians?

"What's that?" he asks, queening it up as usual.

Forget it. We've got a story to get on with.

The nightingale of course understood. Not many would have.

Say what? You don't either? Well, I'm not really *bothered*, you know (swing of the shoulders, flip of the wrist) except by the way you say it. I *mean*, it sounds as though it should be *my* problem. So let me tell you I have enough on my hands trying to relate the despair of Abel Brakeman without getting caught up—to no genuine avail—in the unwillingness of distinguished guests (present parties not excepted) to relieve themselves of purely imaginary methodologies.

"*Whether or not it is clear to you...*" (remember that one?) there is nothing more truly asinine than the normal way of looking at things. Had I actually invented this language I would hardly be allowed to use it wisely. As it is I simply make chalk marks on someone else's blackboard. It is up to you, the true lovers of graffitical art, to find your own erasers. The day the New York educational system went bankrupt all of San Francisco became an enormous garage sale.

"Hey, mister, you buyink?" she hissed from under the Coney Island boardwalk.

"Oh yeah? So vat you selink dis time? *Kencer?*"

Two years later the sheriffs came along to clean up the mess. Would you have joined them? If so you better leave now. It is not your astute minds I am attempting to reach.

Meanwhile, back at the VD clinic...

"You must go, Abel," the nightingale finally said. "Other poor souls are out there waiting to be nursed back to illness. Try to make it on your own for awhile."

More's the pity, he might have thought. But how was he to know what that bird was letting him in for? The science of the mind being such a hard nut to crackerjack. As I should know—unless 39 whole earthyears have gone down the drain for nothing.

Please, madam, do save your questions until after class. Upon graduation, white taffeta gowns and all that sordid jazz, we will use a special scale of notes to instruct the recalcitrant. Instead of DO RE ME etc, we'll try a little CP BD SM...all the way up to enemas and water sports on your new Persian carpet. As long as it's made with pure vegetable dyes you will never notice the difference. Of course your own sadly neglected body will be included absolutely free of charge. Nothing down, the rest when we catch you.

My oh my, those niggers are such *saintly* smart-asses. Believe me, if I had it to do it again I'd be born black & beautiful, with short kinky hairs bristling around a pretty pink cunt. And, so I suspect, would that Brakeman character, too.

"Stay here, Abel," called several of his friends as he scrambled madly from one North Beach flophouse to the next.

For awhile he did, but it was really a hopeless endeavor. To begin with (even weirdos have their odd moments of old-fashioned linear fantasy) most of his old India buddies had slipped into ruts to which he could no longer relate. Some had got married, virtually all of them had jobs, and one or two even planned to vote: "*The country needs a change. Let Carter fuck you for the next four years.*" It was more than even an able brakeman could stand. So he trounced the accelerator pedal and crawled off to other parts.

That there were difficulties goes without saying. *How indeed* he pondered lonely whilst wandering morningward thru the tenderloin of lost love...*how indeed to explain that which, though you feel it, you honestly don't know?* In that respect there never was but one question and we are all quite astounded that even Shakespeare failed to get it right. He deciphered so much else with such cunning existential clarity.

To see or not to see. A paradox of the infinitely blind. Dogs without Buddha natures yelping across the sands of a Balinese beach. What, no meat on the bone? Serves the fuckers right, I say. It may not teach them anything but at least they are paying their dues.

To be or not to be *what?* I ask. Yesterday a yelping dog, tomorrow a wet canary. But right now, this very minute, I AM... (Hahahahahaha, sounds of Shadow laughter resounding off the bedroom walls.) Stick that one up your tuchis, OK? Chomp, chomp. Anyone for tiddlywinks?

"If all I need do is wait," read Abel's cable to the London underground (long before he got cheeky enough to go back there and start swindling the other Underground with Fare Fight tickets), "who the hell will put up bail when the crunch comes?"

The first reply came from the Gentle Ghost: *Have van, will travel*. Five days later a package arrived from BIT. It contained, not unexpectedly, several boxes of stale Ceres cookies and a French letter full of well-spent love. Abel smiled under the downy warmth of a borrowed sleeping bag. *Why* he wondered *are San Francisco summers so bloody chilly?* He shuddered...not from cold but perplexity.

Although there was nowhere to go and he knew it, still he found himself constantly trying to get there. The ultimate metaphysical dilemma, to be sure.

FOR TEN CENTS (screams an invisible sign hiding behind the doorway of an abandoned Haight-Ashbury junk shop) WE WILL DRY ALL YR CLOTHES WITHOUT WASHING THEM.

Within a month of his return to America del Norte, Abel was on the nerve-racking verge of giving up, not just metaphorically but in fact. Then he saw a classified ad in the *Berkeley Barbiturate*:

WANTED. ONE ABLE BRAKEMAN TO STOKE MY FIRES. ALL CULTURES RESPECTED INCLUDING GRECO-ROMAN. GOLDEN SHOWERS DESIRED BUT NOT OBLIGATORY. AM YOUNG ATTRACTIVE & ONCE MADE A LIVING BLOWING MIDGETS FIVE OF WHOM ARE NOW GIANTS W/ RINGLING BROS CIRCUS. FREE ROOM & BOARD THROWN IN FOR THE RIGHT MAN. PHONE 969-6969 AT MIDNIGHT ONLY.

"Hello, Felicia, this is your Abel Brakeman calling."

"What took you so long?" cooed the pert voice at the other end of the pacific telephone line.

I wonder who's tapping her now Abel mused. But his CIA file was already too long for him to care. Wasn't it in Singapore, not quite a decade ago, that Foul Fred first blew the whistle on him?

"All homosexuals to the guillotine," that sodden wretch had cried across a maze of steam boats, San Miguel beers and dollar-a-dozen pork satays.

His inhuman shrieks had frightened five queens half out of their wits and sent Jewish George scampering thru the *tea rooms* of Bugis Street without any panties on. The poor boy didn't stop until he reached Bangkok, but Fred was already there waiting for him. So too were the cops, Fred's favorite sidekicks.

"In my book," Fred once said with more than abject pride, "policeman is *not* spelt P-I-G!"

Last Abel heard George was living incognito in Hong Kong. He earns his daily *chow-fun* flogging ping-pong balls on those cluttered pavements in front of the Chung King Mansions. Once, at 3 a.m.—while the ladyboys from *The Playgirls Den* were parading their way over to the Professional Club—he even booked an order for a secondhand jumbo jet. The check bounced, of course.

"Felicia," asked Abel in the softest tones he could muster, "are you a saint?"

"I'm like Sally," she answered, "if you can't pay then I give it away."

"A good old girl indeed," Abel agreed. "I'll be over in a flash gordon."

"Don't you want the address first?" Felicia cried a split second after the last click had fallen.

Then, lips all atremble and eyes aglaze, she watched with subdued horror as the handset began to melt into a narrow ribbon of red & white day-glo smoke. Her overage gramophone, parked piggyback in the most scabrous corner of the room, provided the necessary blues: *Wah wah wa' wah-wah/Wah wah wa' waah wah wah*.

"Sing on, Big Momma," meowed Eskimo, the Manx pussycat, who only sometimes wondered what she would do with a tail should she ever get one.

The mystery resolved itself with Abel's sudden appearance in the midst of the uncommonly littered room. Standing sockless in a pair of hobnailed Abe Lincoln boots, he was stark naked under a pea jacket of the most profound pink Felicia had ever seen. So dumbfounded was Eskimo that she quickly recovered her non-existent tail.

"Felicia," Abel smiled with vague memories of ancestral appreciation, "I think this is really love."

"Not so fast, sweetnuts," the prostitute replied. "I'm only blessed, you know. Canonization is still aeons away."

"Never mind," retorted Brakeman knowingly, "I have connections at the Vatican. Between your push and my shove, the glorious Age of Magnavox will soon be upon us."

High fucking time, too...don'tcha think? Whoever reckons otherwise should go home to mummy. You're nothing but a logical pervert, y'hear?!

"Read this, Abel," intoned the devilishly beautiful Felicia.

She handed him a small thin volume bound in freshly-tanned angelskin. At first he merely nodded, his eyes remaining too intent on the creamy white bod his new lover was lasciviously revealing. Thankfully, although the rest of her was pure woman, she possessed a well-rounded pair of balls and an elegantly erect penis. Still staring, Abel salivated onto the tiny tome.

"Read," she commanded, coming up to him with cock in hand and giggling almost inaudibly while Eskimo, now perched on the girl's right shoulder, leaned over to tickle the pointed nipple of a succulent boob—smooth, rich in lustrous hormones and a size 36.

Abel read: *The cross-bearer, having understood that the most efficacious place to expire was on the fringe of a glacier, took the flexible decision to leave the farm, even though his last domino clearly indicated espionage. Likewise, a feature of this particular savant's ingenuity was the galactic osmosis which allowed him to feel dysentery with crimson hilarity.*

Abel had no need to peruse the manual further, that one passage being more than sufficient to arouse enlightenment. Tossing the book to the floor, he whipped off his jacket and boots, fell to his knobby knees and, in one great upwards leap, dove past Felicia's now-parted bum cheeks staring him in the face and into her entrails.

"What an asshole," yelled Eskimo's incredulous eyeballs.

Felicia, much to Abel's eternal delight, was full of luxurious shit. Melange spice to the initiated, the food of immortality.

"My, my," dreamed his softly eroding brain cells, "what a beautiful way to die."

At least once in a lifetime everyone ought to try it.

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