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The Raw-Jaw

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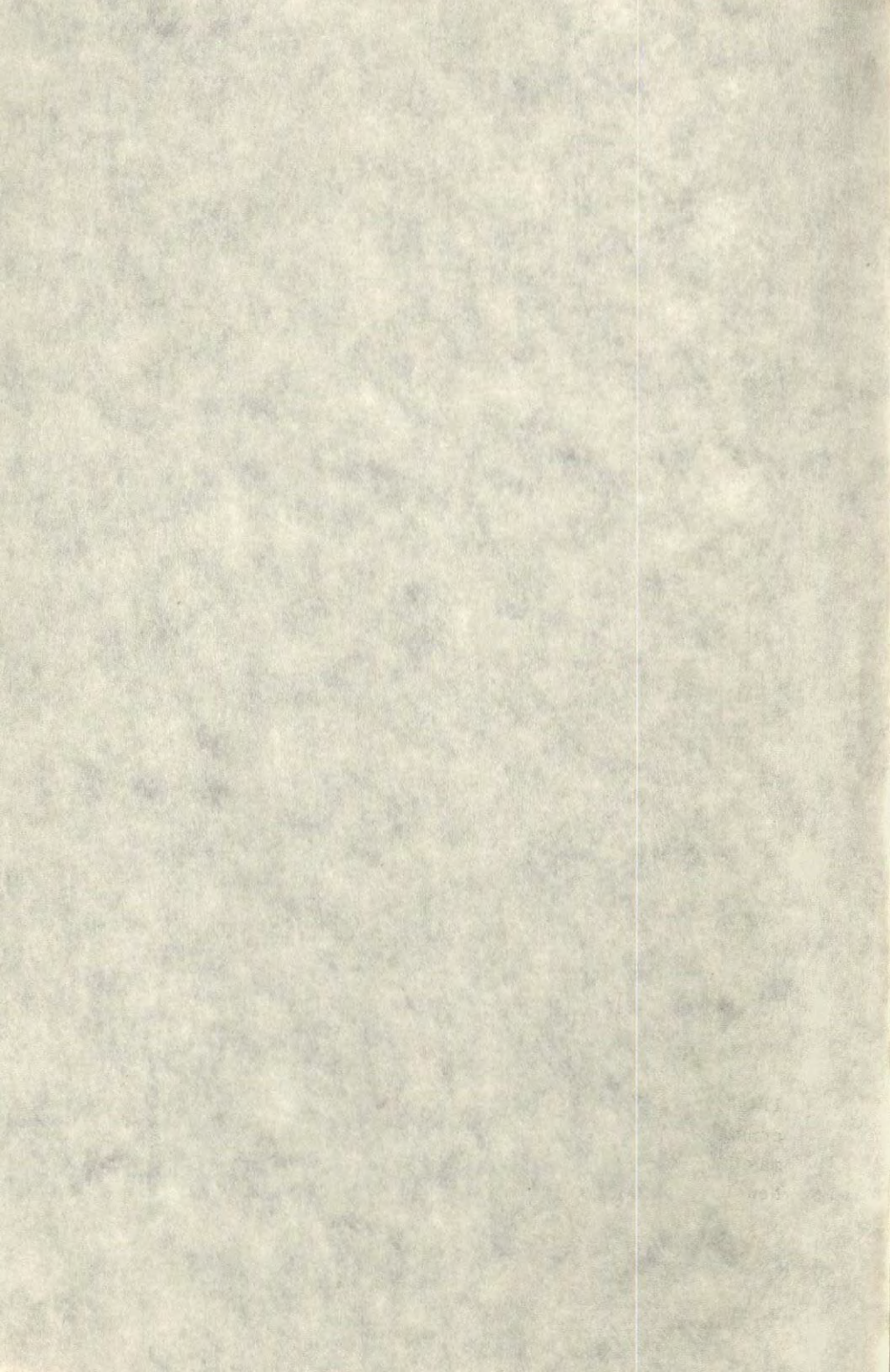
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**the
raw-jaw**



A Raw Jaw gathers no moss;
Its demise is everyone's loss.
Rare to the find
Since it's one of a kind,
Magnificence, minus the gloss.

K.F.

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graphics by j. jonas sanders

Special thanks to Big Bad Mike Shinault

If you would like to have your short stories and/or poetry considered for the next publication of the Raw Jaw contributions may be sent to S. Mackinnon, Box 977, Connecticut College, New London, Connecticut 06320.

And as I sink, you nestle me to rest;
The blanket, woolen plaid of fire and fall,
Reminds me of a picnic rug we shared
And lay upon to eat the fruits we gained
In summer & sweat: crisp cucumber and fresh-
Baked bread washed with the purple blood of sweet
And juicy berries that I scratched my legs
To find. They stained our lips and hands
Yet we ourselves remained unstained and touched
Each other with the warmth of summer sun.

-Li Bancala

"Come now," quod the duck in his own wet way,
"How can so bright a doorknob be so shy?"
From him shot laser beams at her brass eye,
Too bad they reflected a scattered ray,
"Leave me to myself or you I will slay,"
Cried the doorknob from her keyhole on high.
"Oh, if only gaudy spring were to pry,"
Quod duck, "your cold heart would become my prey."

Venerie fans be glad for even shot,
That quack would still pursue my new knob's hue.
I slammed the door and put him in a pot.
"No mercy," I said, "no duck so much hot,
May attack my knob, besides, when brand new,
Doors, canard, have keyholes that hurt alot."

-Scot Mackinnon

Sterling Meets the Knockout From the Cafe Vendome .

Part One: The Vendome

The grill hisses.

The fat spits.

The kitchen girl winces
as the juices of twenty onions
twists hooks into her blisters.

There are barrels of tomatoes
she must boil for gazpacho.

Green peppers, garlic, worcestorshire sauce.

The chef calls her "cunt"
when she isn't quick enough.

The waitresses' jibes
catch like fishbones
in her pride.

Part Two: Partnering

In a cellar walled with mirrors
where jungle music pounds
she is squatting on the floor,
tugging off her boots,
knocking them into a corner,
peeling her stockings down.

Her hair twists up
in a loose dark coil,
bells ring and gleam
at her throat.

Her skirt flows down
like Isadora's scarf.
It slides open to her
plum-skin blouse.

In the cellar dancers whirl
around red candles stuck in foil.
Colors reel around,
bouncing off the ceiling,
colliding with the mirrors,
sliding across the faces of
the reeling people.

Sterling is the king cat
with his supple mahogany back
and white tights.
He slides up to the dancing women
with a certain smile.

Then she strides out
flipping her skirt,
stretching her thighs
arching her neck and
slitting her eyes.
Sterling's buttocks flinch
in his white tights.

She feigns indifference
but her rolling shoulder has
an oblique eloquence.
He understands,
and narrows his circles.

She opens her palms to him
then swirls away as though
she hadn't really.
His hips insinuate claims.

His braided muscles are gleaming
when he wraps his arms around her.
Her hands slide down his sweat.

'Your neck is like Nefertiti's.
You are lovely and lewd,' he says.
And his mouth counts her vertebrae
as she bends her head.

Part Three: Aftermath

She has been flickering
on and off all night.

Morning whirls the curtains in
like dancers in white skirts.
Traffic begins its Congo
drumming and whistling.
She cautiously unwinds the sheets
that cling like mummy's swaddling.
She doesn't dare disturb Sterling,
whose skin looks ash-blue-black this early.

Sterling spirals slowly,
floating up from sleep.
Thick-throated mutters
'honey' at her
whoever she is.

She would like to scour herself with lysol.

In the kitchen
of the Vendome
she scours the counters down.

The dull aluminum
hurls her back at herself,
bloats her on the oven door,
stretches her gaunt
like an unscrubbed carrot
on the narrow freezer.

She gathers the
extinguished Cherries Jubilee
from last night's banquet.
The cornucopia centerpiece
rushes forth a crowd
of lush fruit.
Bruised flesh of plums,
battered peaches,
burst blue grapes
oozing
sweet dark.

-Moirra Griffin

The Ballad of Anne and Big Red (Part I)

Anne was ten when her face caved in
Big Red
 was ahead
 of everyone in his class
No one was above him
And everyone was beneath him
Also, no one was the same height.

They met over bean sprouts at Harris
And both were embarrassed
Because it was Friday
And everyone else had fish. →

Then Big Red said
"Being ahead
is more fun
Because I can reach the Sun."

Anne exclaimed
"Aren'T you pained?
For the Sun is hot."

But Big Red said
"No, it goes right to my head.
You can see it's red."
(It's true--I was there
That's what Big Red said.)

The Red of his head
Went right to her heart
And while eating their tarts
They knew they were no longer apart.

The moral of
The ballad of Anne and Big Red
Can be said:
DON'T EAT AT HARRIS.

-Marjorie Rotkin &
Anna Ziss

VERY SPECIAL BUSINESS

by Rutrell Martin

Calvin came out of the diner. He drew his navy-blue pea coat around him. He had been working behind the counter since nine. Ordinarily, he would go home, eat, wash-up, and go out on the town. But tonight, he had to take care of business.

It had started two weeks ago when he had met Buzz Martin downtown. Calvin hadn't seen him for over a year, ever since Buzz had been laid off from his postal service job. Buzz stood with his hands in the pockets of his new tanned overcoat looking into a store window.

"You don't need to be looking into no store windows when you know you ain't got no money to buy anything," Calvin said. Buzz knew Calvin's voice. He turned around. He had a big smile spread across his face.

"Cal, man, tell me something." They clasped hands. "It's been a long time, brother."

"Yeah, man. Where've you been hiding?"

"Aah, you know me, brother." When Buzz expressed himself, he put his whole body to work. His hands would make sweeping motions through the air. His body would rock in rhythm with the flow of his words. He would bob his curly head from side to side putting emphasis on certain words. Calvin never thought he was acting. His performance was natural, take it away and there would be no Buzz.

Calvin had known him since grade school. Back then he had been a smooth story teller. During high school he was no longer considered a story teller, instead, a bullshitter. The passing of the years had settled him down some.

"Yeah, I know you, man, but that still doesn't tell me what you've been up to," Calvin said. "All I know is that for the past year, you've probably been out in the streets hustling."

"Yeah, I've been hustling, all right." He smiled and

shook his head. "I've been in Hartford, learning business."

"What kind of business you talking 'bout?"

"Black business, brother." He paused for a while to let this sink in. "See, after I got laid off by the post office people I went to Hartford and got in with some brothers who have their shit together. These dudes were into black-owned businesses."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, no bullshit, man." He made his familiar sweeping motion. "Well, naturally you're going to be influenced by the people you hang out with. So, I decided to get a goal in my life, man, like those brothers."

Calvin laughed. "What are you trying to tell me, man? Don't try to lay no lecture on me."

Buzz pointed an index finger at Calvin. "Listen a minute. You know I've been interested in men's clothing for a long time."

"Yeah."

"Well, I got hooked up with these dudes and they helped me with this idea of starting my own store."

"Really, man?"

"In a few weeks, brother, my store will be opening here, downtown. I'll be selling coats like the one I have on."

Calvin could only listen in amazement to Buzz talk about his store and his new apartment in the better part of town. He was living with a girl and they were doing just fine.

Calvin was sorry that he didn't have anything new to tell Buzz. He told him about his job at the diner and how much he disliked it. Buzz gave him his address and phone number. He told Calvin that he might be able to do something for him. Calvin did not believe that he would.

A week later, Calvin had been at the shopping mall with his hanging partner, Tony Richards, when Buzz came out of a coffee shop with his girlfriend. They weren't surprised that she was white.

"Hey, Cal, Tony, tell me something, brothers," he said.

He had on a black fur coat, nice slacks, and newly polished shoes. "This is my girl I've been telling everyone about. Sue, this is Tony and Calvin."

They nodded their heads. She was a cute girl with a healthy complexion, long black hair, soft brown eyes, and thin lips. It was then that Buzz asked Calvin if he wanted to meet his friends in Hartford. "If you get in good with them, nice things can come your way. You have nothing to lose, man. Just get to know these people socially." He went on to explain that they were having a party the following Friday.

Calvin thought for a while. The clothes that Buzz wore convinced him that he should at least check the offer out.

"Can Tony come along?" he finally asked.

"Sure, Tony can come."

"I have nothing to lose," Calvin said. They made the necessary arrangements. Buzz would pick both of them up after Calvin finished work on Friday. Later Calvin asked Tony his impressions of Buzz. Tony said that he still seemed the same. "He has good taste in clothes but no taste in women." Tony preferred black women.

Calvin looked at his watch. It read a few minutes past five. It was cold and getting dark. Buzz would come for them around five-fifteen. He would take Calvin home to change and then they would head for Hartford.

Tony was standing across the street from the diner, in front of the laundromat. He was already dressed. He wore a dark brown leather jacket, a black turtleneck, black slacks, and black suede shoes. He lit a cigarette and coolly blew the smoke into the brisk air.

Calvin crossed the street watching Tony's movements. Tony's outfit went well with his smooth brown skin. He was a hit with the ladies; Calvin was not.

"Hey, Cal, man want to smoke a joint before Buzz picks us up?" Tony blew more smoke into the cold air.

"Naw, wait until we're on the road to Hartford."

"Let's step into the 'mat. It's cold out here."

The two young men stepped into the warmth of the laundromat. It was not crowded at all. A Spanish couple folded their clothes that had just come out of the dryer. The two cleaning ladies sat at the far end gossiping. Calvin and Tony seated themselves on the front window sill. They gazed out of the big dirty window at the passing traffic.

They were like many young black males. Tony and Calvin had both drifted through school. Their moments in the light did not come because of their academic achievements but their performances on the basketball court. They had graduated just on the border line between pass and fail. Many of their friends who graduated with them were either in the service, in jail, or working at some underpaying job with no skills. Calvin and his counter job, Tony and his warehouse job were very much part of this confused and abused generation. Buzz's success could be their break.

"What did you tell Betty?" Calvin asked.

"I just told here I would be going to Hartford. She's not my mother. She doesn't have to know everything I do."

"She's just crazy about you, that's all."

"Shit, man, she's crazy all right. She's trying to hook me into marrying her."

"You better look out, man."

"Don't worry, ain't no bitch going to do that to me any time soon." They both laughed.

Calvin glanced over at the diner. People were piling in, those same bloodshot-eyed men with their bloodshot-eyed women who came to eat in the morning. They had seemed dirty and sleazy to him at first and he had had to get used to serving them. He could see Zack Brown's head and stooping shoulders behind the counter. The first time he had introduced him to Tony, he had called him Igor the Hunchback.

Tony's question interrupted Calvin's thoughts. "Do you think we can get in with Buzz's friends?" he asked. His face

became serious.

"I sure hope so. I can't deal with the diner job too much longer."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Loading and unloading trucks every day from nine to five is no way to make bucks either." they were quiet -- both thinking about a better position, good pay, and more respect.

"Imagine having a store you can call your own," Calvin said. "People coming to you to buy things instead of you going to them."

Tony smiled. "That would be nice. Then we would be called Mr. Jones and Mr. Richards. We would have some respect. Who the hell is going to respect a truck loader and a waiter at some beat-up diner. Do those people in that diner respect you, man?"

Calvin glanced at the diner. He no longer could see Zack's head, too many bloodshot-eyed people. "They probably don't even think about it, they just come for the food. Don't matter who serves them."

"Then they don't respect you. If they did they would care."

Calvin looked at his watch. It was five-twenty. Tony watched Calvin.

"That clown's late," Tony said. "He's not going to show. He's playing us for suckers. If he does, I'm never going to let him live it down."

"He'll be here."

"He's always been a bullshitter." Tony's words stung Calvin. Buzz had better show. Calvin took Buzz's phone number out of his wallet.

"He's probably knocking up that white bitch. The jive-ass muthafucker." Tony got up and stretched his body. He lit another cigarette. He sat back down. He was restless.

Calvin left the laundromat and crossed the street. He headed for the phone booth next to the diner. He entered the booth, inserted his dime, and dialed Buzz's number. He

let the phone ring seven times before he slammed the receiver down. He thrust open the booth doors and crossed the street. He entered the laundromat.

"No answer," he said to Tony. Tony let out a sigh of disgust.

"Come on, Buzz, man, don't let me down," Calvin mumbled.

"What kind of car did you say the muthafucker's driving?" Tony asked. His tone was not very pleasant.

"A yellow Capri."

"It's probably not his anyway, probably that bitch's car." Calvin looked at his watch -- five-thirty. The two watched the Spanish couple leave through the side exit. They were silent. There was only the drone of the cleaning ladies' voices and the hum of the machines.

A black girl came through the side door with two pillow cases full of dirty clothes. She heaved the cases on to a table near the cleaning ladies. They looked up and smiled at the girl.

She went back out the side door and returned with a bottle of bleach and a box of washing powder. Tony and Calvin watched with interest. When she took off her coat she exposed a shapely figure. She wore a black sweater and tight blue jeans. Besides her cute face, Tony and Calvin found her breasts and the movement of her behind interesting.

"That's some nice snatch," Tony said.

"That's the truth," Calvin agreed. "I haven't seen her around before."

"Neither have I."

The girl came towards Tony and Calvin. She stopped at the change machine. She glanced at them and gave them a cute smile. They smiled back.

"How old would you say she is?" Calvin asked Tony as he moved closer to him.

"Eighteen or nineteen, nothing over that."

After she got her change she ran her fingers through her long thick hair. She strolled back to her laundry. Tony and

Calvin stared after her tight pants.

"That's some nice snatch," Tony said again. "I'll be back," he said to Calvin. He got up from the sill and straightened his clothes. He sauntered over to the girl. Calvin watched him go to work. He sat back down on the sill.

The front door opened and a tall lanky young black man with a basket full of soiled clothes came into the laundromat. He set the basket to his right, in front of the nearest washing machine. His name was Ronald Cassey. He looked awkward but on the basketball court he was smooth and sweet. He turned toward Calvin.

"What's happening, Cassey?" Calvin said. Cassey pushed his dungaree hat farther back on his head. He stepped toward Calvin.

"Don't ask that question unless you really want to know," he said.

Calvin laughed nervously. "Of course I really want to know."

"Yeah, too many brothers say that but never want to take the time to listen." Cassey stared at Calvin for a moment. He glanced at Tony who was helping the girl load a washing machine. He turned his attention back on Calvin.

"I'm going to run this down to you briefly because time has become precious to me, brother. Too many niggers out in the streets just bullshitting and I have no time for foolishness." He stood up straight and slid his hands into his pants pockets. "Lately, I've been seeing one of my cousins who's a Muslim. Each time I see him he has something to tell me. He lays down a heavy rap. I'm thinking of becoming a Muslim. It's just a thought." He took his hands out of his pockets and folded them.

"One thing is certain," he continued, "come January I'll be taking a few courses at the community college. And that's it in a nutshell, brother. What about you? Still sweating away at that diner across the street?"

"Yeah, still am."

"Still living at home with your parents?"

"Yeah, man." Cassey unfolded his arms. He seemed disgusted.

"How old are you, Cal?"

"I'll be twenty-four in two weeks."

"See what I mean, man, foolishness. You got to get yourself together -- get more independent. Your parents ain't going to always be here."

He rattled the change in his pocket. He turned back and attended to his laundry. When he finished, he asked Calvin, "Are you going to be here long?"

"No, I'm waiting for Buzz Martin."

"Oh, yeah. What's he up to these days?"

"He's opening up a clothing store downtown."

"Oh, yeah. That could work out nice if he's sincere. He never seemed to be to me."

"I think he is," Calvin said.

"Well, we'll see. I'm going to get something to eat. I'll be back soon. Hey, listen," he said as he opened the door, "I want to talk with you some more. I'll get in touch with you."

"Sure, man, check you later."

"Yeah, later."

Calvin watched him leave. He sat and stared at his huge black hands. He made two fists and squeezed his fingers hard against his palms. He stopped. He stared at the crowded diner. Many minutes seemed to pass. He stared until he realized that he was not focusing on the diner. He was staring at his reflection on the dirty window. He examined his face closely. He lifted a huge black hand and slowly stroked his chin. He needed a shave. The girl laughed. It disturbed him. He swiftly stole a glance at the girl and Tony. Tony was leaning closer to her. Calvin looked at his watch -- it read six o'clock. He quietly slipped out the front door.

A Splashing Oasis

once I had three friends, three friends
with whom I'd traveled far
one offered me his sympathy
one offered me his chair
the third offered a humble lap,
which I took

upon my friend I slumbered
I saw puffy velvet clouds
which melted into mountain springs
the fields were grassy green
there were grapevines in the fields,
which bore spherical grapes
the vines, so laden lush with fruit
bent double, stretched, and twisted
as the fruit killed them

-Gerald Dunham

Old Wounds

Your face was drawn, and mine, you said, was pale.
I drifted for the cot where I might rest
And yet I think that I was dazzled by
The sharp white brightness of the sheets in a place
Where all the other forms seemed soft and blurred.
I staggered once and felt your close support.
A grasp that warmed the coldness of my thighs,
And as I moved away I saw the bright
Red splotch of blood slow-spreading on your soft
And patched blue pants. I longed to touch the spot,
To smear it on your cheeks, in token of
A brave new warrior; of a fight that we had won.

-Li Bancala

The Man in the Moon

Alas! Alak!
The moon is not made of green cheese,
But mold.
I know because the man in the moon
Told me so,
And he wouldn't lie --
He matriculated.

-Marjorie Rotkin &
Anna Ziss



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