

Charles Bukowski

Joe

he was German, he came from Germany one day to interview me in my Hollywood dive, he put \$2,000 in cash on the table and then a rock of pure H.

I had whiskey and beer on the table and we started in on everything and after a while I asked,

"what do you want to know?"

"just forget it, I'll make something up."

"o.k., make me a wild man, tough as nails."

"aren't you?"

"wish I were, you know, if you lined up all the guys who beat me up they'd go halfway around the block."

what I found out: Joe was the tough guy, truly tough, naturally so, built like a block

he tossed off the whiskey and beers, got into the H., and after some hours

he was still totally and stolidly unfazed

he didn't talk much, he just sat there.

then my girlfriend came by and was very impressed with Joe and I got a bit jealous although Joe wasn't making any plays.

"there was this black prostitute at my hotel and she was quite beautiful," he said, "and I made love to her and I couldn't believe she would make love to an ugly guy like me."

"oh, Joe," said my girlfriend, "you're not ugly."

"no, Joe," I said, "I'm ugly.
and Joe, you don't make love to a prostitute."

Joe didn't answer; he was in and out for 3 or 4 days and it was always about the same—he just sat in his chair, not talking much.

"that Joe," said my girlfriend, "he's some guy."

"oh, for Christ's sake," I answered.

I don't think I was very nice to Joe; it's hard for a man who pretends he's tough to meet a man who really is, just naturally.

well, finally it was time to put Joe on the plane back to Germany and we drove him to the airport.
the plane was late and we sat at a table drinking beer.

Joe just sat there, not saying anything; come to think of it, I didn't either; the fucker was on my nerves.

"pardon me," I said, "I have to find a restroom."

I left Joe and my girlfriend there at the table, found a bar a little bit down and had a scotch and water.

when I got back it was loading time.

you never saw anything like trying to get on that German airplane: there were no lines, just a wall of bodies pressed together trying to move in some general direction.

there was almost no movement.

and this was a *German* airplane?

Italian or Ethiopian, I could understand.

"listen," said Joe, "you needn't wait with me."

"it's all right, Joe," I said.

we finally got Joe near the entrance to the plane; Joe shook my hand: "luck with your novel." "luck with yours," I said; my

girlfriend hugged Joe a farewell, then he was gone.

we fought back through the crowd.
my girlfriend was crying.

"what the hell you crying for?"

"Joe's gone," she said, "Joe's gone . . ."

"yeah . . ."

we got out of the airport
and finally
back at my dive
I proceeded to hang on a good one . . .

well, I am a slow thinker
and as some years went on
I realized that I hadn't treated Joe exactly
first class.

and so
when I wrote my friend Carl
in Germany
I would ask about
Joe.

"how's old Iron Guts doing?"

Joe and Carl were close friends and
my conscience was eating at me like a motherfucker.

"tell old Machine Gun Kelly to keep the typer hot."

"tell the Cement Man I said hello."

and Carl wrote me back bits about Joe: he was living in a condemned building, typing away; but he had special papers to live in his room; other people lived in the building too, building fires and generally screwing up and the place was often raided but when they broke Joe's door down he just showed them his papers and went on typing.

there were bits of good news: articles and stories published, and something about a movie—Joe was running hot, red hot.

“tell the Human Tank that I think of him, often.”

and so,
a month or so ago, Carl wrote me.
it started out with a mountain climbing trip with his son Mike, then he dropped that and dropped in something about

Joe:

Joe was celebrating his 43rd birthday, he was walking along around 3 a.m. when he was hit by a truck doing 60 mph.

don't think he felt much, he had just told me he had written 20,000 words on his novel and wanted me to read it.

don't think Joe would want us to mourn too much, just go about what we were doing. . .

the tough guy was gone; there was no way I could take back the treatment I had given him.

sometimes there's just one chance and when you waste that, that's it.

I wish you could read this, Joe: about a tough guy and another guy who just thought he was tough.