

# Me And Bukowski

A series from FreeThought

featuring

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## The Finish Line



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I came bouncing into Hank's living room. I found him sitting in his favorite, overstuffed, gold and brown striped chair, looking like a broken man. "What the hell happened to you?" I asked. He was slumped in his chair with his head down, he slowly looked up at me with those sad, blue eyes, and said, "This is it, Red, I can't do this anymore." Assuming the booze had finally taken its toll, my mind jumped to the worst case scenario "What is it, Hank? Did you get some horrible news from your doctor? How much longer do you have?" I asked. "No Cups, he mumbled, it's you and me. You're tearing me apart with your disappearing acts." I was relieved but impatient. "Oh geez, is that all? Get serious, man, you've been watching too many soap operas." I grabbed his wrists and pulled him out of that ugly chair. "We need to get out of here and breathe some fresh air. You're losing it, baby. Let's go to the track. Come on! It's a beautiful day. Let's go make some money, honey!"

The redheaded magic worked again and the next thing I knew we were off to the Santa Anita Racetrack, laughing and singing to the radio the entire way (I was singing, he was laughing). All traces of Hank's funk had disappeared. It was a glorious fall day in Los Angeles, crisp and cool. A perfect day for the races.

When we arrived at the gate, Hank bought a program for each of us. We found two seats in the clubhouse and like a pro, Hank took out his pencil and spread his newspaper and program in front of him. I went upstairs to get a couple of beers. When I returned, I asked him what horse he liked in the first race. This was the second time I had ever been to the races. He looked at

me with a condescending, yet endearing smile, as if to say, 'You silly little girl, what difference would it make to you? You know nothing about this stuff' Short of patting me on the head he answered, "I like Green Beans". Then, with a chuckle, added, "What about you?" I studied the program as if I knew what I was doing and said, "I think I'm going to bet on Harvey Wallbanger." With that, I shot up out of my seat and ran to the betting cage. Hank liked to wait until the very last minute before he placed his bet. He wanted to take a look at the horses as they came out to position themselves at the gate. I'm not sure why, but I guess he thought it made a difference.

Back in our seats, the race began. "And away they go!" The broadcaster bellowed, "It's Momma's Boy out in front with Certifiably Mad right behind, Green Beans is on the outside in third while Red Garter is coming up from behind in fourth... It's I'm Your Baby Tonight, Sterling Gold, Harvey Wallbanger, and Unfortunate Son coming up from the rear on the inside. Now they're coming to the stretch and it's Red Garter, Green Beans, and Sterling Gold out in front, neck and neck; Momma's Boy, I'm Your Baby Tonight, Harvey Wallbanger, and Certifiably Mad coming up from behind with Unfortunate Son five lengths behind in last place. Now, they're heading for the finish line and it's Red Garter, Sterling Gold, and Green Beans in first, second, and third place with Harvey Wallbanger coming up from behind on the outside, his master is asking him to fly and he's answering yes, yes, yes! Oh my, it looks like a stunning upset as Harvey Wallbanger is now neck and neck with Red Garter as they vie for the winning position! And the winner is Harvey Wallbanger by a nose with Red Garter in second, Green Beans rounding off in third place!"

I was jumping up and down, screaming obnoxiously, waving the winning ticket in my right hand. "Jeezus Christ! How did you manage that, Red?" "I won, I won, I won!" I yelled and threw my arms around Hank. He sat there like 6 a.m. Sunday morning, trying to stifle a grin. "Ok, Ok, baby, settle down. Beginners luck. That's all", he said in his cool, trademark drawl. "Yeah, we'll see," I said. He shook his head and looked at me with that, what a piece of work you are face, I'd seen many times before. I turned to him and gave him a big kiss. "It's ok, Hanky", I said. "At least your horse showed."

If there is such a thing as beginners luck, I had it. With each race, Hank became increasingly more frustrated. I have never been what you would call a gracious winner. I'm very competitive and was not concerned about his delicate male ego. I was winning more races than I lost and certainly more than the Great Bukowski. He was starting to think I really had something here.

By the last race his irritation with me turned to surrender. I was beginning to get some respect from the genius horseman. "Okay, Red, what's your secret?" he asked, as though I was some sort of witch with special handicapping powers. "Promise not to laugh?" I asked. "I promise", he answered. "Ok", I said very seriously, "Here's my strategy. I look at the odds, then at the jockey, and then I look at the colors the jockey is wearing. If I like the colors and the odds aren't too high and the jockey is kind of famous, I bet on that one." He looked at me and began to smile. His grin turned to howling laughter. With his eyes rolled up and head back, he was laughing so hard his entire body began shaking. He kept his mouth slightly closed, as though he was self conscious about his

teeth, causing him to snort. To see him, you would have thought that my system was the funniest thing he had ever heard. He actually had tears in his eyes! As his laughter subsided, he gave me a hug and said, "Oh god, Red, you are too, too much! All right, baby, I'm going to let you pick the winner in the last race. Which one do you like?" I carefully looked over the program and decided on a horse named Creamed Chicken to win. "Okay, baby, this is it. I'm going to put \$30.00 on Creamed Chicken to win!" We both made our bet and returned to our seats. I was a little nervous because \$30.00 was a lot of money for Hank to bet on a horse. He was a compulsive gambler, but a very conservative one. Knowing that, I was a bit anxious and almost jumped out of my skin when I heard the announcer yell, "And awaaay they go!"

Okay, I'll spare you the suspense and cut to the chase. You guessed it, Creamed Chicken came in last! Surprisingly, Hank was pretty good about it. I suppose my saving grace was the fact that between the two of us we had an excellent day at the track. We both came out well ahead. As we drove home on the 210 freeway, we kept an eye on the Sierra Madre Mountains, certain we would catch a glimpse of a gray horse wearing pretty pink and purple colors, trying to find the finish line.

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This Chap Book is limited to 100 numbered and 26 lettered copies signed by the author. This copy being lettered

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Number 3 in a series

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