

STILL SEARCHING FOR THE BIG CITY BEATS

Excerpt from Chapter Two

It's time.

Time to move from critique to action. Time not to wiggle a toe in the water, but to stretch out gloriously and swallow–dive into the maelstrom. No safety net, no parachute; caution was an encumbrance that we had long since flung over the side; excess baggage that we had voluntarily jettisoned way back at the beginning of our journey. It was time. We had paid our fare and the roller–coaster ride had already begun. No turning back. Feel the fear – feel the rush. First gig time. Like first sex. Love it or hate it, it only happens once. Our pants were down, our dicks erect. Virgin poets, ready for deflowering. Be gentle. Hell, be brutal, don't hold back, make us sore, lick every orifice and come over our faces. We are not victims. Sure we're scared but the smell in the air is not fear, it is the smell of desire. We wanna satisfy, we wanna see the audience orgasm. We believe we have the staying power, *we will make them come!*

I climb aboard the stage. Looking down, I gaze not upon hardcore lust. This audience looks like it's never had a hard-on – they look slack, limp – their only desire seems to be for their next cup of cocoa. But I'm here; **we're here!** And we mean business! Black suits, black turtlenecks, black shoes; a cross between sombre businessmen and Baader Meinhof. Word terrorists on a mission. The mission had begun. We operate as one; not slick, not machine–like, but each fully functioning as a complementary catalyst for the other.

It all happened so fast. We paced the stage, like caged tigers, dangerous prisoners. Words strafed the night. Gesticulating hands, gyrating bodies, heads bobbing, eyes darting. No awkward silences or uncomfortable fidgets. Professionalism oozed from every pore. Metaphorically the warm blood and salty sweat dripped onto the boards. Our souls overspilled with emotion. Our poems breathed life into the room. Words ricocheted around the walls. Titles? “War of the Words”, “Are You Tough Enough”, “Sex”, “Violence”, “Mortality” all spring to mind. Our only props being our very existence and each other, oh yes, and a gun, which I had strapped in a shoulder holster under my jacket, which at a given moment I pulled out and pointed at the audience, who, hereto entranced, were transfixed in my sights, blank horror on their faces, as the shock and ultimate realisation of staring their executioners face–on. I knew it was fake (the gun that is), but the audience, who we had already stunned were mesmerised and entangled in the frenzied moment – they were willing victims; ready to believe; ready (if necessary) to die.

Like some psychopath about to flip into the ultimate blood bath, I moved to the front of the stage. I assumed the stance; a slight squat, legs akimbo, gun–hand clamped firmly in the other. Gene screamed my name. I shook my head slightly, as if to make the voices go away. Then I straightened up, and calmly turned the muzzle round, and

placed the barrel in my mouth. The G rushed over and grabbed the revolver, pushed me to one side, and began a poem about going mental in the city called "Is it Me?" We didn't let up; not for an instant. We were watching awed amazement in the faces of our audience. Their quizzical expressions begged the questions: What is this? Who are these guys? Is the gun loaded? Are they loaded? Where do they come from? What are they on?

Nothing like us had ever happened to this place for years. Looks of puzzlement, anguish, anxiety, then... smiles. Like a release of pent-up emotion. Catharsis. A realisation that this was special, a happening in their neighbourhood. What they didn't know was that we'd rehearsed like a military platoon, we were battle hardened, no stage fright, we were ready. It was a pushover, a collision, but definitely no accident.

Once in an extraordinary while, you are a witness to something amazing happening in history, right before your eyes. All you can do is watch, and maybe in the future declare, "Yes, I was there!" But it's like some secret pact, or belonging to a clandestine order, only others who were witnesses themselves can really empathise. It's something you hold in your heart. Gene and I shared many such moments. We first crossed paths as two young punks in a Sex Pistols gig in Caerphilly 1976. There were more people outside protesting, than there were audience. It was frightening, it was thrilling, it was history in the making... **We were there.** I hope The Troubadour's audience felt like me and G did on that cold and hostile night in hicksville South Wales. I hope sometime in the future they'll meet someone else who mentions the Troubadour gig, and they can feel that warm glow as they say, "Yes, I was there."

It's true, you can't tell anyone anything they don't want to hear. I'm sure the poetry fraternity had had endless debates as their cappuccinos turned cold, reiterating the same old arguments as to why the scene was stale, stagnant. They knew it was an atrophied corpse. The undertaker had already embalmed the body and measured-up for a coffin. Then BANG! We arrived, out of nowhere, the emergency rescue. Scalpel, forceps, morphine. Masks at the ready. More oxygen, more oxygen. Pump it, pump it! Give this stiff a shot of adrenaline. WHAM! Slapping the pallid cheek, giving it the kiss of life, tongues down its throat, fingers down its pants, to feel the first twitch of the rising hard-on. For one night at least, the dead rose, jumped and jived. Like zombies in Michael Jackson's "Thriller", the cancerous cadaver was doing the Moonwalk, the terminally ill patient of poetry had not only picked up its blanket to walk, it was fucking breakdancing; spinning on its head. Just for once the hanged-man ate a hearty breakfast, dangled at the end of death, experiencing the most amazing ejaculation, and lived to tell the tale. The condemned convict happily left the cell on death row, to settle into the hot seat, and smiled while 12,000 volts coursed through every nerve end. Just for tonight poetry was fantastically, electrically alive.

End of set.