

AL NEIL / Laughter on 3rd Street

Many years ago I read that D.T. Suzuki, the Zen Buddhist scholar, was asked what it was like to attain enlightenment.

“Same as before,” he replied, “only you are about 2 inches off the ground.”

I’ve never forgotten that answer but I have always found that attempts to take that ineffable stride into non-form work best the closer one is to the ground in the first place. Another way to put it is that the laughter accompanying the first arrow of light hunches you down, bows your leg, claps one hand, snatches lies out of your head, all of which is pretty hard to take in the standing position. So when I left the Big O, our great North Vancouver Community beer hall, on all fours the other night to hitchhike to my home on the beach further up Burrard Inlet, it seemed only natural, since no cars were in sight, to embrace the yellow line in the centre of the road in the half-lotus position. Not only no cars but no people were in sight. And as I have written elsewhere, I spend much of my time, especially when alone, laughing. This I was doing.

Okay, let me tell you that the North Vancouver Detachment of the RCMP has arrested me for drunkenness a few times and usually treat it as a big joke, putting me in the tank for the night. But not this time. Two pigs swooped up off the Big O parking lot, swarmed out of their car, shoving, punching, buzzing around me, shaking me out of the laughter. I went wherever their arms and my feet took me, namely, into their car, into a cruel enlightening dance of some Bardo dream.

UPON HEARING THIS STORY KNOW THAT THERE ARE REBIRTHS WHENEVER YOU
APPEAR A FOOL.

Well, we soon arrived at the place where these men have learned to separate wrong from right. Remember now, my “crime” was to have laughed and then entered the laughter, in what I mistakenly took to be the safest and most strongly charged space available to me at the time, namely, the yellow line centring straight down the middle of 3rd Street. Of course I magnified their fear and violence at this point, having been brought back to the station and now being merely high, by going into the traditional rap I use when cornered by the Man,

something like: "When this earth be free and atomic rain is no longer falling into the mouths of birds and children, you and the stupid evil men of wealth and power you protect will have to answer as to why so many of you continue to insanely tamper with the food of God, why you kill the sky and sully the slender of all earthly things."

But look, here I am, my back against stone in the lap of violence. Their next move was of course to test me. Against this wall. So there quickly formed up a phalanx, one sergeant, short-haired 40-year old pervert directly in front of me; to each side of him a shirt-sleeved 20-year old just out of Regina training; and v-ing out another 3 feet on either side of them, 2 fully armed and clothed gorillas (the ones who had brought me here).

THE BEAUTY OF MY GARDEN IS INVISIBLE TO THEM AND THEIRS TO ME.

At this point a lapse. Perhaps the sergeant asked me a question and I lipiped him. Fuck, wouldn't you? Then inexplicably, incredibly, the sergeant cries out, "Get him. Hit him." And then, believe it, "Tear his pants off." At which point they snatched at my pants (they had by then taken my belt and possessions of course), and succeeded in tearing the zipper and buttons.

"Tear off his shorts," and they shredded them, now exposing my head (bare of my magic rosehip necklace), now part of my groin snatching at my cock and balls.

I USE NO MAGIC TO EXTEND MY LIFE.

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In great fear I seem to have said, "Look, you have 5 pairs of hands, 10 heavy leather boots, 2 sets of key chains and at least 5 guns. I'm half naked against this stone wall with my pants all ripped. Would you like to come outside with me one at a time?"

One more flurry of pushing, shoving, grabbing, right across the room through an opening and into the cell.

I immediately climbed on the bunk at the back of the cell, faced the door and took up the lotus position. After a few minutes of deep breathing I looked out thru the screen on the bars. Screen? The two cells opposite me had only bars. The third, next to mine, I couldn't see. What I figured was this: mine was the only cell from which one could see the front desk-counter in the outer room

where new prisoners were processed. And of course if they pulled the same shit on anyone else as they had on me, the person in the cell I was in would be a witness to at least some of the action. The screen cut one's vision down to the minimum which would allow the guard on duty to peer into the dark gloom of the cell. There was no light in the room itself containing the four cells, only the little which filtered thru the opening. In the cell directly opposite was a young dude who I immediately pinned as some kind of informer by the questions he asked me and I tended to ignore him. You'll read references to this dumb practise in stories of mine. It relates to earlier busts in my junk days when I had serious information to hide. I kept it up in these inane drunk busts to give myself a little pride or self-esteem which was nevertheless non-existent. In the cell next to the gabby guy I could see all but the head of a man lying flat out on his back with one leg raised. He stayed in that position the whole night. The other cell, as I mentioned, I couldn't see at all.

For the next 4 or 5 hours at 10 or 15 minute intervals they would open a cell door further down the corridor, rattle their key chains against the bars and then slam the cell door violently shut, at the same time uttering grunting, guttural mouthings, the three sounds gathering, first in their space, into one conglomerate of heavy ugly-energy timbre, and then reverberating toward me and for 2 or 3 minutes playing itself out up and down the corridor.

What could I do? Only one thing. I was still in the half lotus as I was to be for most of the eight hours. Each time they did their number I did mine which was to mix my highest energy mantra-chanting into their bad energy mix, wrapping my sound around the ugly timbre as it came by the door, and as their ball of death-sound decreased in intensity my life-chant went up, having the effect of cancelling theirs out. It was a stand-off this way all night long and they got tired of the game I guess toward dawn.

Still in the half-lotus I was nodding out a little when the key chain rattled in my cell door.

"Okay, follow me."

Out to the front desk once more.

"Fill in this form stating you have received your possessions and you are free to go."

I glance at the form. It has only a few entries including the following list:

1 pair of glasses
1 necklace
1 leather belt with silver buckle
\$2.85
1 brown imitation-leather wallet

I began reading from the top down, very slowly, my arms resting on the counter, the paper in my hands. The first line stated my name. That seemed correct. But while I was pondering it I looked up behind the counter and noticed a large clock. It read 6:31 am. Oh Oh. Fuck, what are they releasing me for at this time of the morning? There are no windows that I can see. Is it still dark out at 6:30? I couldn't remember, but if so, I figured they wanted me to sign the form, release me, and then take me somewhere and really do a job on me.

Remember now, the same 5 pigs are still with me, all 5 of them now leaning over my shoulders, not saying a word.

I look up. It is 6:35. Three minutes or so have gone by and I have only read my name on their form.

The next line. Born 03 26 24.

I stop at the first 2 digits, 03. Fuck, I wasn't born in 1903. I'm getting on but I aint that on. It was the third month the 2 digits referred to, and while I was waiting for this insight to hit me so I could move on to the next 2 digits, I started thinking, if I charge these 5 pricks with assault, what should I charge them with? As I worked away on this koan the answer to the 03 riddle hit me. And I didn't yet know if it was still dark outside. My mind in its exhaustion had obviously fallen into old Aristotelian patterns of lineality.

It is now 6:37 am.

In six and a half minutes I had read my name and 2 digits of my birthdate, and raised my eyes 3 times to the clock. The 5 gunmen are getting nervous.

I began laughing.

I was immediately spun around by the sergeant with great force.

"Hit him hard. Tear his pants off."

Yes, incredibly, they did the whole routine again and I'm back in the cell.

Okay, in another 2 hours, around 8:30, I was aroused from a slight nod by a pleasant young constable. The sun streamed in from somewhere. He was all alone except for a young woman now seated behind the counter at a typewriter.

He stood beside me and counted off the items belonging to me, handing them over.

“That’s a nice necklace, what is it made of?”

“Rosehips.”

“Ah, Vitamin C.”

I signed the form and turned to go.

“Button up your fly before you go.”

“I can’t, your buddies on the night shift ripped it off.”

Moments later I was on Lonsdale heading down towards the waters of the inner harbour. At the Sally Ann Old Store I purchased a good pair of corduroy pants and a good shirt for 25 cents each. In the Moodyville Cafe at 2nd and Lonsdale I ordered what turned out to be a wonderful breakfast of ham and eggs from a lovely lady and retired to the washroom to wash up and put on my new purchases, throwing the now dirty, torn clothes into the trash can.

After the leisurely breakfast (\$1.50 including smiles, 2 cups of coffee and a free *Province* newspaper) I walked out into the now warm sun, slowly sauntered across Lonsdale, along 2nd and into the Big O, ordered 2 glasses of beer and began thinking about day 2 at the Munich Olympics.

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