

Wealth of Politically Polished Stones

Contributed by Richard McNally

THE THEORY OF ECSTATIC LOSS by Richard McNally

E-MAIL BONUS MATERIAL:

"A few mornings ago I gave him a comforter I kept in my closet for the occasional friend who might stay over on the living room couch. I shook his hand and introduced myself, then handed him the bag with the comforter in it. His face brightened and he uttered a small surprised laugh . . ." ~ Tsipi Keller, Retelling

TERRY

It was you, Charley. You and Mickey. Like the night the two of you's come in the dressing room and says, "Kid, this ain't your night. We're going for the price on Wilson." It ain't my night? I'd of taken Wilson apart that night! I was ready. Remember the early rounds throwing them combinations? So what happens? This bum Wilson he gets the title shot. Outdoors in the ball park! And what do I get? A couple of bucks and a one-way ticket to Palookaville. It was you, Charley. You was my brother. You should have looked out for me instead of making me take them dives for the short end money.

CHARLEY

I always had a bet down for you. You saw some money.

TERRY

See! You don't understand! I could've been a contender. I could've had class and been somebody. Real class. Instead of a bum. It was you Charley.

--B. Schulberg

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<http://www.bushdoctor.com.blogspot.com> transcript became available a number of years later. The bottom half was rippled and discolored, as if it had been dipped in something, and on page five there was a small patch of palest green that turned out to be a dried-out semi-transparent bit of lettuce. It begins mid-sentence: ". . . do for a living?" "I've had any number of jobs." "How did you find them?" "I found them worthless and fatiguing." "Tell me one." "Beautician." "You were a beautician?" "Yes." "Tell me about it." "I would shampoo, cut, and tint." "Good for you." "And I would make recommendations about dandruff control because almost everyone has dandruff, particularly in the winter." "Is that right?" "It is." "What else did you do, as a beautician?" "I cleaned and filed and polished fingernails and toenails, though I found toenails disgusting to work on and made a point of not mentioning the availability of this service. But if a customer specifically asked for it, I'd do it." "Did you ever attack or hurt a customer?" "Yes." "What else did you do?" "As a beautician?" "Yes." "I gave facials to tone and cleanse the skin of clients' cheeks, chin, forehead, nose, upper lips, and what have you, and I would treat minor skin disorders and apply make-up and give full body massages and prescribe diets and occasionally removed unwanted body hair." "Did you ever perform major surgery such as a triple, quadruple, or quintuple coronary bypass, or the removal of a tumor from a customer's brain?" "Yes." "In the beauty salon?" "Yes." "Is that how you got that stain on your trousers?" "I don't remember." "How was your demeanor to your customers?" "I was clean, patient, tactful and pleasant. And no matter how ugly a customer was I would always be able to find at least one feature that looked presentable and would call attention to it and praise it." "Were you licensed by the state or states in which you practiced?" "Yes." "Did you hate the work and find it disgusting?" "Yes." "Were you self-employed or working for wages?" "Wage slave." "Did you hope to open your own shop one day?" "Yes." "Did you succeed in doing so?" "No." "Are you aware that relatively little capital is required to open a beauty salon?" "Yes." "What were you going to call your salon?" "Chameau." "But basically you hated the work?" "That is correct." "Did you ever have any trouble with the owner of the establishment?" "Yes." "Can you tell me about it?" "He would beat me with a rubber hose." "What was your reaction?" "My reaction was to submit." "Did you report him to the authorities?" "No." "Was this job worth more to you than a fart from a dead donkey?" "No." "What other sort of jobs have you had?" "Bacteriologist." "Is that right?" "Mn-hmn." "What did you do?" "I would manipulate bacteria." "Is that right?" "Yes. I would extract bacteria from diseased humans and inject it into laboratory animals to see if they came down with the same diseases as the humans." "And what was the point of this procedure?" "Figure it out, Einstein." "What else did you do?" "In the bacteriology lab?" "Yes." "I would pick up bacteria with the tip of a long sterilized platinum needle and put them on a culture medium and then peer through a microscope to study their size, shape, and movement, for though bacteria are horrible and disgusting, we have to learn to live with them." "But aren't some of them helpful?" "Some, but that doesn't change the fact that many are deadly and disgusting." "What other activities would you carry out in your capacity as a renowned bacteriologist?" "As a renowned, internationally known bacteriologist, I would determine whether a given sample of bacteria was gram-positive or gram-negative by adding a touch of gentian-violet dye. If the sample became stained, I knew it was gram-positive, and if it didn't, negative." "Were you bored by this work?" "Yes." "Did it sometimes make you wish you had never been born?" "Yes." (Vide Drij T.B.O. Spooza's Why People Are Usually Bad: "There are more things beyond our control than under it.") "Did you do any research in immunology, preparing vaccines and serums that

could be injected into the veins of human beings to produce immunity to various diseases?" "Yes." "Are you feeling worried?" "Not at the moment." "Did you ever destroy things in the laboratory." "Yes." "Did you ever for instance fly into a rage over some minor problem and, shouting obscenities, grab the shelf of a cabinet filled with expensive glass instruments and shove it over and then kick the broken pieces at your coworkers?" "Yes." "What sort of dyes are used to stain bacteria?" "Aniline." "How does the process work?" "A small quantity of a fluid containing bacteria is spread on a glass slide and allowed to dry. Then the slide is dipped in a series of dyes depending on the species the bacteria is thought to be." "For what purpose?" "To identify it." "Did you have any trouble with your superiors on this job?" "Yes." "What was the nature of the trouble?" "They beat me with rubber hoses." "For what purpose?" "They didn't say." "What do you surmise the purpose was?" "They wanted me to know my place." "What was your place?" "At the bottom." "Where did they hit you?" "All over." "What was your reaction?" "Submission." "Did you regard being beaten over the entire surface of your body, to the point that you were covered with welts and black-and-blue marks, as part of your job?" "Yes." "Did these beatings interfere with your ability to carry out your responsibilities?" "Yes." "Do you regard human beings as ash cans in the absence of which screenwriters would have nowhere to throw their garbage?" "Yes." "Do you believe we were born to be titillated?" "Seems unavoidable." "Are you aware of any scientific works that explore the psychology of battered bacteriologists and the complex reasons they submit like animals to being abused in the laboratory?" "There's Gisl Lobo's I Wish You Well in All Your Pathetic Bacteriological Endeavors as well as her Witness Sickest Speaking: The Untold Story of Bacteriological Bludgeoning." "Did these works help you to cope with the trauma of frequent on-the-job beatings?" "Slightly." "How would a bacteriologist aid a doctor in diagnosing a case of, let's say . . . pneumonia?" "He would inject sputum from a person suspected of having the illness into a laboratory animal such as a striped butterfly-rat to see if it exhibited, within a reasonable period of time, the same symptoms as the ailing human." "Did you sometimes feel tired on the job?" "Yes." "How often?" "All the time." "To what did you attribute these feelings of overwhelming and unbearable exhaustion?" "To the brutal indifference of my superiors to the quality of my work." "Are you saying they beat you whether you did well or ill?" "Yes." "What did you do before you became a bacteriologist?" "I was a laborer in a foundry." "What were your job responsibilities?" "I assisted in the production of galvanized iron and steel." "Did you feel you were being taken advantage of by your employers?" "Yes." "What did you do about it?" "Bitched under my breath." "And you took no further action?" "That is correct." "What specifically did you do in the foundry?" "Dipped various articles of trade in a tub of molten zinc—pails, pipes, nails, wire, things of that nature." "And the purpose?" "A zinc coating helps prevent rust." "Was there any possibility for career advancement on this job?" "I hoped to be promoted to the electrogalvanizing department in due course of time." "For the money?" "Not so much for the money as for an improvement in working conditions. In electrogalvanizing you dunk your pail or pipe in a room-temperature solution, not a tub of fucking molten zinc at fifty fucking thousand degrees Fahrenheit. In electrogalvanizing they zap an electric current through the tub and the zinc in the solution clings to your pail or what have you and bingo, it's zinc-plated, and you avoid being cooked like a motherfucking french fry in the process." "So you got the promotion?" "No." "Did you have any trouble with your immediate supervisor?" "He beat me with a rubber hose." "Did he ever pull his arm back to its full extension and then snap it forward and smack you directly in the face?" "Yes." "Was your lip ever split?" "Yes." "Did you ever lose any teeth?" "No." "What did the foundry look like?" "Nothing." "What were your hobbies at the time?" "Some bullshit, I don't know." "Can you be more specific?" "I designed evening gowns and formal wear." "Is that right?" "It helped take my mind off the job. You have no idea how hot that tub of molten zinc was." "Have you been burned so many times your soul looks like a charred matchstick?" "Yes." "Are few tasks more difficult than attempting consistently to avoid the company of everyone on the face of the earth?" "Yes, but it's no snap to swallow six empty vodka nips either." "Does the fact that you can't think nothingness give you any hint as to what you will experience when you die?" "When I die I shall probably remark that I was better off than some guy who was fed into a stump grinder when he was five." "What was your immediate supervisor's name?" "In the foundry?" "Yes." "Gregory, I mean Godfrey." "Were you at any time proud of working in the foundry?" "No." "Did you regard your job as a turd pile?" "That is correct." "What other jobs have you had?" "I was a government official." "You don't say. Where did you serve?" "In a foreign country, which will remain unnamed." "What were your responsibilities?" "As Assistant Secretary for Cinderblock Housing and Unwed Fathers in the Department for Ongoing Operations, I tried to encourage the owners of construction companies to build affordable housing for the poor without the benefit of subsidies from the state." "Did you succeed?" "No." "What did your immediate supervisor do?" "One day in the bathroom he bent over to pick a bobby pin up off the floor and accidentally stuck his head in a toilet." "Was this a country in which virtually every town had a pit for cockfighting?" "Yes, I mean I'm not going to get into that." "Did you attend cockfights and place wagers?" "I have no idea what you're talking about." "Did you?" "Negative. It was too disgusting." "As a government official were you attempting to make the world a better place?" "Yes." "Do you feel you succeeded?" "No." "Do you regard the world today as a shit pile?" "I'm not going to get into that." "Do you feel that if you had served as a government official for a longer period of time, say for your entire life, your chances of success would have been better?" "No." "So you were essentially a tongue worker." "That is correct. My job was to wag my tongue, both up and down and from side to side, in an effort to improve housing conditions for the poor and give unwed fathers an opportunity to start over." "It's unusual for a citizen of the United States to hold office in a foreign government. I take it you served in an appointed post?" "No, I was elected." "Hmnm. Tell me this—what's your favorite novel?" "N.O. Ting's Worm or Rat?" "Tell me about the native food." "There was a soup I liked." "Called?" "I don't remember the name. It was quite thick. I believe it was made from potatoes." "Like vichyssoise?" "No, not like vichyssoise." "Did you develop any personal friendships during this period?" "I became semi-friendly with the governor of one of the coastal provinces." "Did he have a name?" "Puz Magisto." "Is he the same Puz Magisto who wrote R&C Charades and the Career Civil Servant?" "That is correct." "What's your opinion of that work?" "Slightly pathetic." "Did your governmental service reinforce your self-esteem?" "No." "What was your overall impression of the

position of Assistant Secretary for . . . whatever?" "Turd pile." "Did you sit on any committees?" "I was chair of the Chamber of Deputies Select Committee on Trade and Industry." "What were your responsibilities in that post?" "To keep a close eye on the operations of the sawmills, breweries, cotton mills, shipyards and hat factories with the objective of stimulating increased production and improved working conditions." "Did you succeed?" "No." "What was the average temperature on a year-round basis?" "What do I look like, a freaking thermometer?" "Just answer the question Mr. Wicklow." "Seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit." "Were you involved in any business ventures on the side, in order to supplement your income?" "Through a friend I traded in chichone bark, alligator hides and occasionally gold." "Was this illicit black market trading profitable?" "No." "You suffered losses?" "After six months in country I was forced to declare personal bankruptcy." "What's your next favorite novel?" "Ting's He Crumbled." "Did you invent any items of commerce during this period abroad?" "Sure—ever heard of the hand-held fan?" "What was the most difficult aspect of your position as an elected government official?" "Being beaten by the president." "The president beat you?" "The man delighted in bludgeoning me." "What was your reaction?" "Submission." "What did he beat you with?" "A rubber fire hydrant his brother had given him as a gag." "Did he make you get down on your knees and urinate on it like a dog before he bludgeoned you?" "That is correct." "Was this a full-size fire hydrant?" "Full-size." "If you had to characterize the president as either a sociopath or a charlatan, which would it be?" "I'm not going to get into that." "But the truth is you regard him as a dickhead, right?" "No comment." "Did he do anything else to harm you?" "Sometimes he would whip me with a bra dipped in molten chocolate." "What was your reaction?" "Submission." "Do you need a shower?" "Now?" "Yes." "Actually I do." "Is it true that at the moment of erotic gratification our being snaps in two like an anvil splitting down the middle under a hammer blow administered by God Almighty?" "Yes." "Do you ever find yourself wishing someone would pick you up and carry you about so you didn't have to walk?" "Yes." "Would you prefer it if someone did your thinking for you as well?" "I doubt I'd notice any difference." "Does loneliness wound us because it forces us to confront the fundamental insufficiency of our being to ourselves?" "Doesn't wound me." "Are you aware that people who have few or no friends mutilate their psyche by dividing it in two in order to create an imaginary friend?" "Spare me the pop psychology." "Have you read Oble Ipperhawl's Bullshit Unlimited?" "Yes." "How often did the president of the nation where you served as Secretary of Toilet Paper beat you?" "Two or three times a week." "Before work or after?" "Both." "Are you aware that of all fair weather friends, the most treacherous is the novel?" "Yes." "Do you subscribe to the view that there are few impediments to clear thinking more pernicious than team spirit, especially in a crisis?" "Circus?" "What?" "In a circus?" "No, no, in a crisis." "Oh. Team spirit?" "Yes." "Team spirit is what drives a person to her greatest achievements and her most baroque atrocities." "Are you aware that one of humanity's bad habits is its tendency to destroy itself?" "Yes." "Have you worked at any other jobs?" "Yes I have." "You certainly have a varied background, don't you?" "Compared to someone who died at birth, I suppose I do." "Why do you suppose this is the case?" "I don't know." "It's most unfair, isn't it, that you have had the opportunity to work at a wide variety of jobs, and most people have only had a couple, or a few, or have not even been conceived in a female womb and therefore don't exist?" "What?" "What did you do after your term of office as a government official expired?" "I got a job as a metallurgist." "Is that right? What did you do?" "Separated metals from their ores in a foundry." "Not the same foundry in which you—" "No." "Was this a job that deformed and mutilated your psyche?" "Affirmative." "How are metals separated from their ores?" "By smelting." "How does that work?" "The ore is loaded into a blast furnace with—" "And a blast furnace is . . . ?" "A large oven-like vessel lined with bricks." "Aha." "So you load in the ore mixed with appropriate quantities of limestone and coke and—" "And coke is ...?" "Jesus Christ you are one dumb fuck. Coke is a solid fuel derived from coal." "Okay, you load the furnace with ore and coke, and then what?" "The coke is ignited and subjected to a blasting stream of air that causes it to burn at an extremely high temperature. This melts the ore as if it were ice cream. By-product carbon monoxide from the burning coke causes the oxygen in the molten ore, which is regarded as an impurity, to bubble up to the surface. Other impurities bond chemically to the limestone and also rise to the surface. This slag is sucked off by workers using long galvanized drinking straws and spit into a metal trough which feeds directly into the nearest Fox News offices. Though other impurities remain, to be removed by a subsequent purifying treatment, all the recoverable metal has now been separated from the ore." "So that's smelting in a nutshell." "No, in a blast furnace." "Did your position as a respected metallurgist enhance your self-esteem?" "No." "Did you have any trouble with your immediate supervisor?" "Yes." "Do you want to tell me about it?" "He beat me." "With a rubber hose?" "Yes." "In the face?" "Yes." "Did you submit without protest?" "Determined to build a career as a successful metallurgist, I saw no alternative." "That should do it." "Hoping to hear from you sincerely, R.McN.

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