

all my enemies
are dead



2003

THERE IT WAS ON PAGE SEVEN, the obituary: *Timothy Sullivan. Computer genius. 77. Cancer. Services private. Burial, Sacramento.*

“Oh God!” cried Walter Gripp. “Jesus, that does it, it’s all over.”

“What’s all over?” I said.

“No use living. Read that.” Walter shook the obituary.

“So?” I said.

“All of my enemies are dead.”

“Hallelujah!” I laughed. “You’ve waited for that son of a bitch—”

“—bastard.”

"Bastard, yes, for him to kick the bucket for a long time. Rejoice."

"Rejoice, hell. Now I got no reason, no reason to live."

"How's that again?"

"You don't understand. Tim Sullivan was a true son of a bitch. I hated him with all my blood, guts, and being."

"So?"

"You're not listening, I can tell. With him gone, the light has gone out." Walter's face grew pale.

"What light, dammit?!"

"The fire, dammit, in my chest, my heart, my ganglion. It lived off him. He kept me going. I went to sleep nights happy with hatred. I woke up mornings glad to breakfast on my need, my need to kill him all over again between lunch and dinner. But now he's spoiled it, blew out the flame."

"He did *that* to you? His last act was to provoke you with his death?"

"You might say that."

"I just did!"

"Now, let's get to bed and relapse my need."

"Don't be a sap, sit up and drink your gin. Now what are you doing?"

"As you see, pulling back the sheet. This may be my last lie-in."

"Get away from there, this is stupid."

"Death is stupid, an insult, dumb trick to die on me."

"So he did it on purpose?"

"I wouldn't put it past him. Just my kind of nasty. Call the mortuary, read me a menu of headstones, plain rock, no angels. Where are you going?"

"Outside. I need air."

"I may be gone by the time you're back!"

"Wait while I talk to someone sane!"

"Who's that?"

"Me!"

I went out and stood in the sun.

This can't be happening, I thought.

Oh no? I retorted. Go look.

Not yet. What'll we do?

Don't ask me, said my other self. If he dies, we die. No more work, no moola. Let's talk something else. Is that his address book?

That's it.

Flip through, there's got to be someone still alive and kicking.

Okay. I flipped. There go the A's, the B's and C's! Dead! Check the D's, E's, F's and G's!

Dead!

I slammed the book shut, like the door of a tomb.

He was right: his friends, his enemies—it's a book of the dead.

That's colorful, write it down.

Colorful, Jesus! *Think* of something!

Hold on. How do I feel about him right now? That's it! Gangway! We're going back!

I opened the door and stuck my head in.

"Still dying?"

"What does it look like?"

"A stubborn ass."

I came in the door, walked in, and towered over him.

"Better close up?" said Walter.

"Not stubborn. Mean. Hold on while I gather my spit."

"I'm holding," said Walter. "Hurry up, I'm almost gone."

"Would that were true. Now listen up!"

"Don't stand so close, I can feel your breath."

"This is not mouth-to-mouth, just a reality check: now hear this!"

Walter blinked. "Is that my old chum, old pal?" A shadow crossed his face.

"No. Not old chum, old pal."

Walter beamed. "Sure, that's you, old buddy!"

"Since you're almost dead, it's time for a confession."

"I should be the one to confess."

"Me first!"

Walter closed his eyes and waited.

"Shoot," he said.

"Recall that missing cash back in '69, when you thought Sam Willis carried it to Mexico?"

"Yeah, Sam, sure."

"No. Me."

"How's that?"

"Me," I said. "I did it. Sam ran off with some babe. I snatched **the** moola and blamed him! Me!"

"That's not so bad," said Walter. "I forgive you."

"Hold on, there's more."

"I'm holding." Walter laughed, quietly.

"About that senior prom in high school, 1958."

"A wet-blanket night. I got Dica-Ann Frisbie. I needed Mary-Jane Caruso."

"You woulda had her. I told Mary-Jane all about your womanizing, listed your scores!"

"You did *that*!?" Walter opened his eyes wide. "So she wound up at **the** prom with you."

"That's it."

Walter fixed me with a brief stare, then looked away. "Well, hell, that's old water under an older bridge. You done?"

"Not quite."

"Jesus God! This is getting interesting. Spill it." Walter punched his pillow and reared up on one elbow.

"Then there was Henrietta Jordan."

"My God, Henrietta. What a beaut. That was a great summer."

"I ended that summer."

"You *what*?!"

"She dropped you, yes? Said her mother was dying, had to spend time with Mom."

"Then you ran off with Henrietta too?"

"That's it. Next item: remember when I got you to sell Ironworks, Inc., at a loss? Next week I bought on **the** way up."

"That's not so bad." Walter swallowed.

I went on. "Item: In Barcelona, '69, I pleaded migraine, went to bed early, took Christina Lopez with!"

"I often wondered about her."

"You're raising your voice."

"Am I?"

"Now, your wife! Played Gotcha with her."

"Gotcha?"

"Gotcha once, twice, forty times Gotcha!"

"Wait!"

Walter reared up, clutching his blanket.

"Grab your ears! While you were in Panama, Abbey and I had a wildcat fun-feast!"

"I would have heard."

"Since when do husbands hear? Remember her wine tour in Provence?"

"Right."

"Wrong. She was in Paris drinking champagne from my golf shoes!"

"Golf shoes!?"

"Paris was our nineteenth green! World championships! Then Morocco!"

"She never went!"

"Was there, did that! Rome! Guess who was her tour guide!? Tokyo! Stockholm!"

"Her parents were Swedish!"

"I gave her the Nobel Prize. Brussels, Moscow, Shanghai, Boston, Cairo, Oslo, Denver, Dayton!"

"Stop, oh God, stop! Stop!"

I stopped and, like in old movies, stepped to the window and had a cigarette.

I could hear Walter crying. I turned and saw that he had swung his legs out, letting the tears drip off his nose to the floor.

"You son of a bitch!" he gasped.

"Right."

"Bastard!"

"Indeed."

"Monster!"

"Yes?"

"Best friend! I'll kill you!"

"Catch me first!"

"Then wake and kill you again!"

"What're you doing?"

"Getting outta bed, dammit! Come here!"

"Naw." I opened the door and looked out. "Bye."

"I'll kill you if it takes years!"

"Hey! Listen to him—years!"

"If it takes forever!"

"Forever! That's rich! Toodle-oo!"

"Freeze, dammit!"

Walter lurched up.

"Son of a bitch!"

"Right!"

"Bastard!"

"Hallelujah! Happy New Year!"

"What!?"

"Prosit! Skoal! What was I once?"

"Friend?"

"Yeah, *friend*!"

I laughed a physician-doctor-medicine man laugh.

"Bitch!" screamed Walter.

"Me, yeah, *me*!"

I jumped out **the** door and smiled.

"Me!"

The door slammed.