



---

### The White Knights

Author(s): William T. Vollmann and Ken Miller

Source: *Conjunctions*, No. 12 (1988), pp. 172-222

Published by: Conjunctions

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24514904>

Accessed: 27-05-2020 11:04 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<https://about.jstor.org/terms>



*Conjunctions* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to  
*Conjunctions*

# The White Knights

## William T. Vollmann

*Photographs by Ken Miller*

Though you suffered disgrace  
and sorrow grieved me,  
though I was outlawed and you dishonored,  
joyful revenge will now proclaim us happy.

Wagner, *Die Walküre* (1856), I.3

### ELLIS STREET

GREY SKULLS AND GREY SHIRTS, blue eyes and blue shirts; and a cigarette in every hand. The skinheads yelled and fought beneath the midnight stillness of the kitchen ceiling.

"Boy, what're we gonna do tonight?"

"I dunno, it's only ten-thirty."

"When I first met you, Dickie, and you got drunk, you used to get so obstreperous, man."

"I got loud and rude!"

"Then you would push me and I'd push you back. The next morning I knew I'd jumped on you. I was like anti-subconscious, man."

"That's right. That was when we had our skinhead harem. We had a squat in the city. It was wall to wall pussy."

"I don't want to hear it," said Dickie's bootwoman, Dan-L.

"WALL TO WALL PUSSY!" the skinheads yelled. "WALL TO WALL PUSSY!"

Dan-L left, slamming the kitchen door.

"Well, we can talk about the harem some other time," Dickie said. "Anyhow, you got so drunk and mad, you kicked me in the balls. Then Warren got mad and kicked me, too. But I fought you and Warren."

"And got your ass kicked!" Dagger roared. "Just kidding."

"We used to fight all the time, you goddamned bully."

"Hey, dude, don't call me no fucking bully," Dagger said. "I got fucked with by bullies when I was growing up, man."

"Suck my dick, Massah!"

"Stick it up me, Massah!"

"I remember it all," said Dickie wisely. "If you gotta fight somebody, you gotta fight 'em. Never back down."

"You gotta have principles, though," said Dagger. "You can't just fight like a nigger. For instance, I believe every man should have respect for a man's house. I won't whip your ass inside your house. I'll always give you a choice; you can come out and get whipped, or you can stay inside and I'll tear the place up. I remember when I was scrapping with my foster father, he said, 'Step outside.' He fought me outside, treated me like a man. When I whipped his ass, he went in and got his gun and chased me off the place. And I *respect* him for it, man."

Anthony, whom they'd been calling the Wop all night, because that was funny, was polishing his boots, black boots with red laces. He was stropping them one at a time between his thighs.

"Well, you do all the fighting, but I don't have no record, Dagger," said Dickie. "I always said I was the smarter."

"Hey," said Dagger, "I may not be the smartest, but I know when to back up and when to jump 'em."

"Yessir," said Dickie dreamily. "I was the original organizer."

"You were the organizer, uh?" cried Dagger, injured. "I was the organizer, man! In your day everyone wore fucking Mohawk haircuts!"

This was a stunning rejoinder, bringing only silence. Dagger pressed his advantage. "Anyhow, we didn't have no leaders," he said. "We was sayin' skinhead things long before you came along. We was sayin', 'We got to take care of all the Cholos and niggers.'"

"Aw," said Dickie. "People been saying that for two hundred years."

The generic beers were piled up in towers on the table, with George Thoroughgood tapes beside the player, and an ashtray for every man. The skinheads stroked their black shiny boots and bluejeans. Their shaven heads made them seem particularly thoughtful, with all the profundity of skulls. Dagger picked at the checks in his shirt, and Dickie relaxed, attended by his girl in her camouflage cap, her bangs down to her eyes, this girl who was in love with him. Even when she slammed out she could not stay away.

#### THE LAST BALD EAGLE

When Dickie put his arm around her, and she around him, they both looked at the world unflinchingly, but without her Dickie



found things to concentrate on, like the cassette player, like fights, like lighting his bong, while Dan-L sat in the corner by the window, staring into heaven with clasped hands. Dickie sat crooning inwardly to the cassette player with his eyes closed, the clean shadow of his head and neck doubling in outline a soldier's helmet upon the kitchen door. Other shadows connected him to the tape player, the two round eyes of its speakers rolling dolefully, like those of an old dog; and Dickie tilted his head back farther, rigidifying the black helmet that he dreamed so freely in; and the shadow of his sleeve flared like one of those venomous elbow-spines sported by insects; and it was impossible to understand what he was thinking, his soul resting in a lone grave beneath the leafless tree of some Civil War battlefield, or wandering through the dugouts of Verdun, stepping from timber to slimy timber with the smell of mud all around him, and looking in the pockets of his dead comrades for extra cartridges, holding his breath when he reached into the swirling little pools of chlorine gas where the others had fallen, leaving him alone to await and admit the attack; for it is a lonely thing to be a skinhead, so lonely that only other doomed soldiers can imagine it. Let us get killed, then, in order to see the new mobilizations of

Dickie's soul, helmeted by his skin-padded skull (padding out, hard side in) to protect him from Japanese attack in the Solomon Islands in '43 as he waded through the blood-warm water on his knees and flung himself behind the palms with his assault rifle blazing the way and cocked KER-snap!, Dickie (who was an Order of the Arrow Eagle Scout) being in action at last, soon to be killed in action, meanwhile sole survivor of his platoon, which lay in sodden, bloated khaki-covered pieces on the beach beside shattered wood and bamboo, the corpses' eyes transformed into mouths of pink rolled tissue—and then it's WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP! at Wesel and at Bremen and at Hannover, the eternal present tense of a German conflict, American shells turning blocks of apartments into grey plains stamped almost evenly by close-clustered craters; and the First Battalion strides down narrow, high-walled streets in Bensheim, blowing away the last pale, sweating Krauts hiding in doorways—but whose side could Dickie be on? He's American; he's a Nazi; and as the close-shaved, cropped-headed boys from Tennessee and Virginia march past splintered trees, splintered houses, sometimes Dickie is with them and sometimes he must be against this force that struck down the ole Reich whose emblems skinheads bear in their flesh—how many swastika tattoos have I lost count of?\* (Of course the inmates of Buchenwald were the ultimate skinheads:—stubble-crowned, tattooed, naked and angular.)—At least both parties agreed on hating the Soviet Union.

#### THE BUTCHER BOYS

"I'll tell you a story," Dickie said. "This is an early skinhead story. Long time ago, I don't know how many years ago it was, we had this house out by the river in West Virginia, a big house, and we were living together for about six months (we was even living with this nigger fella then, a guy with hair abnormally long, down to his butt), when these people started coming to town. I met this first skinhead; his name was Butch; he was driving a Chevy truck. Right away we made this rule that anybody that came in had to shave his head.

---

\*The question, "What is German? What is American?" is still not solved among the skins, *Pfeffer* going through the High Consonant Shift to become *pepper*, *Rasse* becoming *race*, and *Nazi* becoming *Republican*, hardly to the detriment of skinhead self-esteem.

"We needed food, so we started the Butcher Boys; that was what we called ourselves. We went out killing all kinds of animals. We hung the meat on a line, and the way we got it was, we had this deaf pit bull named Blockhead, who barked funny on account of he couldn't hear himself, and he had a big square head and white spots on his shoulders; the girls used to draw circles in black magic marker around his eyes, so he'd look like Petey of the Little Rascals. Once that dog nearly got us arrested. We were in a McDonald's waiting for somebody to get off work, and Blockhead started barking real funny, like this, *Oooooh, oooooh, oooooh*; and somebody called the cops and said, 'Those skinheads are abusing their dog,' and the cops showed up and started giving us shit until some nigger woman went by, and of course Blockhead barked at that, and the cops said, 'Holy shit, you're right, he does bark that way natural,' so they let us go.

"Bein' the Butcher Boys and all, we'd send Blockhead into a chicken coop; he'd go in one end and the chickens would come squawking out the other, and we'd go *bam, bam* with a board—*haw!*—take us home a mess of chickens! We killed lotsa pigs, too, but most of what we killed was billy-goat. Those billy-goats were tough, which was why we usually sold the meat instead of eating it ourselves. We got like ten or eleven goats one night. They were in a pen. We just walked in there with our knives, *pop, pop!* (That was how I got this scar on my hand, gutting a goat.) We'd wrap the meat and sell it at this shopping center; all kinds of niggers bought it. They didn't know what they were buying.

"Now, this is how I got the bestiality charges: There was two of us, and we went and got this sheep. So, we went across this fence, and this sheep had two little lambs—really sad, heh, heh! So, anyway, here's this fucking sheep with bells on it, so I go *blap, blap!* with a sledgehammer, then again for health, and we put it in the pickup and started driving home. I remember that we picked up this hitchhiker, and we were horsing around with her and she started freaking out. All the sudden we hear this noise in the back—that sheep was only knocked out! We started going for it with a two-pronged spade, and Blockhead and the other dogs were ripping at its neck, and guts and blood was spurting all over the truck, and that hitcher goes, 'Oh, my God, let me go!' so we let her go, and went home with the sheep and did the usual, right, 'cause we was the Butcher Boys.

"The next day, we see on page one of the paper that somebody's goddamned sheep got stolen. It was somebody's fucking *pet!* That was why it had the bells on it. It was in the papers, Snowy the

Dancing Sheep; can you fucking believe it?—They had a five-thousand-dollar reward on it for two weeks.—Well, right then, just about the time we finished serving up Snowy, the girls took Blockhead with them to the shopping center to sell goat meat to the niggers, and he didn't come back. The girls said he ran off. People said, 'So, where's the dog?' We joked and said, 'Well, we ate it. Then we had a good time fucking the sheep!'—Just kidding, but this new cop heard about it, and it was like bestiality and thirty counts of rustling."

"So what'd you do with all the bones?" said the Wop. "Feed 'em to Blockhead?"

"Hell, no," grinned Dickie. "We had a *big* barbecue pit."

"Hey, dude," said Dagger, tapping his middle finger on the table. "Flip the tape."

"We didn't listen to 'Dixie Fry,'" said Dickie.

"Fuck you, man, I don't give a *fuck!*" yelled Dagger.

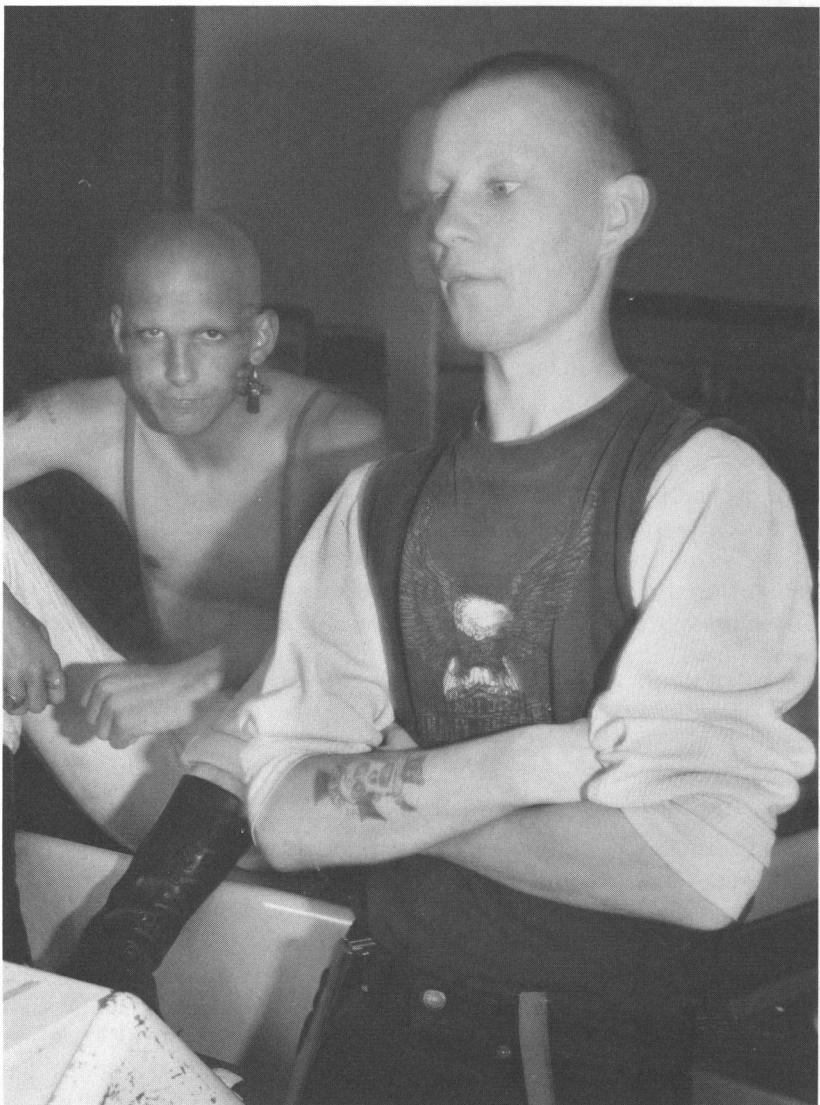
"I flipped it over," Dickie said.

"You're a *fucking* liar, man!"

The skinheads got into an argument over what to play, knocking each other around with their tattooed muscular construction arms bursting with veins, glaring, showing teeth, yelling, "*Suck my dick!*" until they drowned out the music, the police sirens outside, the terrible life of the Tenderloin streets.

#### MARK DAGGER

Dagger's head had two narrow bars of shadow in which his eyes were set. Whereas on Chuckles's shoulder was tattooed a sneering skull resting on a basket of spidery skeleton-fingers poised over a heap of little white skulls above the words EXTREME HATE upon a skull in a bullet-pierced Nazi helmet, like one of those aboriginal myths about how the world rests on the back of a giant tortoise that balances itself upon another tortoise that seesaws upon still another blackish-green shell as the creature splays its wrinkled legs out and voids its turgid white reptile-piss on the ten million tortoises below it, except that instead of tortoises it was all skulls, and surmounting this totem pole of defiance was Chuckles's head, a smooth intelligent head that was usually smiling faintly; whereas, in short, Chuckles had a lot of tattoos on his arm, Dagger wore only one blotchy green skull on a bicep and below that his identifying message, THE FUCKUPS, with a backwards "C" and an upside-down



question mark. The skull had very intelligent eyeholes, though, and a chittering uneasy smile as if it were ready to come rolling out of a graveyard to bite you. "You know those zombies, with no eyelids and no lips?" said Dagger. "I'm gonna get one tattoo full of tombstones, and a hand reaching out of a grave, grabbin' for a dagger; it'll be one of

them zombie hands, and the dagger will be right over it, and above that it's gonna say DAGGER." —Dagger was heavily built with big arms and big legs and a wide chest, and his face was a skinhead block, a stolid casting on a barrel neck, seamed only by a scar above his youngish dinosaur brow where he'd been knocked out in a fight by a two-by-four because one night at the club this little kid was bothering Dagger and Dagger knocked the kid's head down and the kid fell and started crying, and all these people started to shit with Dagger then so he threw his beer on them and *bahh-whamm!* some dude came up with a two-by-four and cracked his head. Dagger was dead out for awhile. "That was a good hit you put on me," he said sarcastically to the dude. "I never hit a motherfucker with a two-by-four; I only hit with my fist." —The dude didn't say anything.— "You shake my hand," Dagger said, "or I'm your enemy for life." The dude said, "Get away, man." Dagger said, "Okay, that's cool." The dude jumped bail to move to Texas the next week. And he was *smart* to do it, too, because if he'd shaken Dagger's hand Dagger's plan would've been to climb onto him and drag him out back and beat the shit out of him.

Dagger's eyelids drooped when he was at rest; his bullet-head hung forward. He had a way of holding his cigarette between two fingers, his thumb cocked behind it as if resting on a trigger-hammer, but he also liked to just let his cigarette hang out of his mouth and drop ashes on his dirty T-shirt, with another cigarette waiting on yellow alert behind his ear. He had the naked muscles of skinhead youth. He could sit straight and still, but when he walked down the street he stepped toes-out in his boots, cocking his head and looking at people, and people in the know or sometimes out of it didn't give Dagger any shit because he'd just gotten out of San Bruno. The reason he'd been stuck there in the first place was that he'd been on this TV talk show "People Are Talking," explaining how much better skinheads were than punks, and a month later he was up on Skinhead Hill where it was sunny and you could play football or frisbee with the other Skinz or whomever happened by, enjoying the good weather and keeping an eye on Haight Street at the same time, because Skinhead Hill was what the hairheads called Buena Vista Park, a long narrow block of trees and grass that sloped up Central toward Sutro Tower, and at the bottom of it was Haight Street, with golden cement stairs in a golden cement wall, and you could run up the hill having war games and yelling and lobbing bottles in the bushes and getting drunk and as if you were a dragon-kite swooping in the clean San

*William T. Vollmann*

Francisco sky, far beyond the world, your string dipped in glue and glass to saw every other kite outta the sky, just a Skin among Skinz; when all the sudden this punk rock chick came up to Dagger and started talking *shit* about him, and Dagger wasn't gonna let this insignificant cunt bug him with her punky stink; she was all fucked up on wine and stuff, so he told her to chill out, and she said, "Mark Dagger's a fucking pussy!", and Dagger told her, "Hey, bitch, you'd better stop or you'll get hurt," and she swung at him, and Dagger blocked it, and then she kicked him in the balls, so he kicked her in the jaw. He only kicked her once. He broke one side of her jaw and two of her wisdom teeth. —Even though *she'd* started it, *he* got convicted of assault. The trial took place in the courthouse on Bryant Street, Dagger sneering at the other so-called toughs who failed inside when placed at the bar and pissed in their pants and croaked diffidently, "I was not aware that the car above me was double-parked," or, "In both cases I was never outta the vehicle for more than two minutes, and I didn't have anyplace else to park, Your Honor," but then it came *Dagger's turn*...and they led him in handcuffed, and he was wearing an orange jumpsuit, and the back of his head was shaved bone-clean so that all the spectators sitting behind him in the courtroom saw the monster-skull tattooed there, and the monster-skull glared at them, and Dagger just stood there during the trial and nodded as the indictments were read, and he turned around slowly and bowed to the other skinheads, and the judge said, "Mark J----, you are a menace to society; I'm going to throw the book at you; I'm going to give you the stiffest sentence I'm allowed to give," and at that, Dagger turned around one more time and bowed to the skinheads again, and the skinheads rose to their feet and filed to the door and then they clicked their heels and saluted and said, "*SIEG HEIL!*" —Dagger was in San Bruno for a year.

Several of this pureblood statesman's letters survive. They are written on the stationery of the exiled, namely lined yellow paper. Here is one of them:

well well what's up yea I got your pictures and  
Man there cool as fuck thanks alot well I only got  
108 days and a wakeup and Ill be back on the Haight  
raisen hell but this time I have to move carefull well  
Ime not much of a writer but Ill try if you have any  
more pictures please please send them the ones with  
the Hitler signs arnt that cool to send but fuck it

send em anyway fuck these niggers my buisness is  
my buissness write? I get alone pretty good in here  
and nobodys fucked with me but Im ready if they do  
Ill killem Ha Ha. well I can't think of anything to  
say except send me some pictures of so wimen out  
there ok. be cool write back.

friends

### MARK DAGGER

He was up on the fifth floor for three-and-a-half months. He got jumped by eight niggers. They tried to take his tray. Dagger said, "You don't disrespect me." He started kicking the first guy's black ass. He grabbed him and took him down. He whacked his head on the bottom of a table and split his skull wide open. Those niggers broke two of Dagger's ribs, but the other guy went to the hospital, not Dagger! After that, he got moved down to 2N with Yama. Yama had just come in then for assault, so they got to do some time together. Dagger did his best to help Yama, because he'd be out soon himself but Yama had a stretch ahead of him, so Dagger gave Yama the *Playboys*, the *Shes* and all the rest, though he kept the *Hustlers* for himself. That was all that he and Yama could do to keep sane in there, looking at photos of nice pink girls with closed eyes and open mouths who squatted in a corner with their boots on and pulled their underwear down and spread their pussy-lips apart with their red-nailed hands, or got down on all fours on the sofa, wearing nothing but black lace stockings, and wagged their asses in your face so you could see their twats sticking out under their butt-cheeks. — Each prisoner was allowed to have up to three visitors per visitation day in the absence of bad conduct. You and your visitors had to keep both hands on the interview table at all times. You'd get your bootwoman to visit wearing a miniskirt and crotchless panties so afterward you could go into the shower and beat off until your thumb was calloused.

### DAN-L

Dan-L went to the refrigerator and got beers for everyone.  
"That Dan-L, she's really nice."  
"She's the best person," Dickie said. "She's the best in the whole

world. She does everybody favors. It's funny. It *is* funny. Me and her were born beside each other. Our birthdays are only a week apart."

As for Dan-L herself, who always sat so modestly at the table, whose large dark eyes stared at her beer can as if they were embarrassed to be in her oval face, Dan-L with her parted brown hair, Dan-L with her jeans jacket, you could tell she really loved Dickie and would stick with him just the way that when Yama went to jail once his black hound Rebel took one of his dirty socks in his mouth and would not let go of it all day, just crouched in the corner, whimpering. And Dickie would stick with her, too, and had stuck with her, his arm always around her as she walked down the streets beside him in her black jacket that said SHIT HOWDY, which she still wore coming home from work at the cafe where she was about to be made into a manager but she was going to tell them to chill out if they didn't raise her to five dollars an hour; and when she got home she sat down in the kitchen and waited for Dickie and took off her jacket and let her cat pounce on it, and Dan-L remembered how Dickie had helped her when she and the other Shit Howdy Girls got into this terrible fight in New York, back in the days when they were all hanging out getting drunk on the streets and spare changing together and running down alleys where the buildings leaned together marrying each other's corroded fire escapes and in every direction, around every corner, were other buildings rising brick after grimy brick, their windows smashed, their windows barred; and the Shit Howdy Girls pounded their boots in the black slush, and when sleet came down to sting them they went to the liquor store and got the cheapest beers they could and hung out drinking at somebody's house and talked about the meaning of being Shit Howdy Girls. The Shit Howdy Girls were Dan-L, Sadie, Switch and Roxy (they wanted to make Betty Bones a Shit Howdy Girl, but Dan-L said no way, she's not dedicated enough). Dan-L was more or less living at home then. Her Mom was pretty cool. All three times Dan-L broke her camera her Mom took it to the store and told them the camera had been broken when she bought it, so Dan-L got another one free. Her Mom was the greatest Mom in the world. But Dan-L got into fights with her sister, like the time Dan-L was out and Dickie and some of his friends came over and Dan-L's sister had to entertain them, and Dan-L's sister got mad and called Dan-L a slut and threw beer in her face, so Dan-L had to beat her ass. It was certainly her own fault since Dan-L had always told her she was gonna hit her but she just didn't believe it. —The reason the camera had gotten broken

that first time was because Dan-L was over at Dutch's and Dutch kept this nasty white-face slobbery pit bull named Judas,\* a monster with a white-bleached head, almost salt-bleached, with bones sticking out of fat and muscle and tough rumpled skin, and Judas stared at Dan-L out of his dirty black glazed eyes, and there were dirty black hairs all down his chest and forelegs as he lay on Dutch's dirty rugs ready to bite her; and Dutch sometimes made Judas bite a rawhide rope and then Dutch cranked the rope into the air so that Judas was hanging on by his teeth; and this understandably soured Judas, so that he bit Dan-L's leg and she dropped her camera. It took about half an hour for Dutch to get Judas to open up his jaws so Dan-L could take her leg out. The second time her camera got broken was the fight, one of the most bloodiest fights of her life (though by no means the most violent, she explained; Dan-L liked to make distinctions), when she and Sadie and Switch and Dickie were in a bar and this guy Thor was busting Dan-L's chops just saying all this shit, and Dan-L said, "Switch, should I pour my beer over his head?", and Switch said go ahead and Dan-L did, and Thor knocked it out of the way and it hit this black dude, and the nigger said fuck you and Switch said don't yell at my friend and the nigger punched Switch so Dan-L punched him in the face and kicked him in the nuts, so he smashed a mug over Dan-L's head—that was the first bloody thing—and then he pushed Switch and she fell over the broken mug and got cut and that was the second bloody thing, and Dan-L said to Dickie to come on and do something. Dickie had thought until then that the girls were handling it, but when Dan-L called him he just climbed over the shoulders of the crowd to help her, climbing whether they liked it or not, with so much strength showing in his pink face; and the nigger's friends tried to stop Dickie but Dickie just kept coming, walking on their shoulders and on their heads, which was something that Dan-L would never forget all her life; and some poor guy with glasses got in the way and Dickie smashed his glasses into his eyes without really meaning to (that was the third bloody thing); and finally Dickie reached the nigger and chopped him in the head! (That was the fourth bloody thing.) The nigger was escorted out, and they all took off before the police came. Around then the American Front was started in San Francisco by Chuckles, Albert, Blue and Johnny Beast. Dan-L didn't sit there and go I'm part of the American Front and

---

\*I don't know why every dog in every skinhead story was a pit bull.

shit, but she sure said right on.

Dan-L liked New York better because she could get drunker there; there was just something about New York with its cement parks and grey skies and brickfronts and mesh fences and drunks sitting down on the sidewalk pissing that made her able to drink more; she was sick of San Francisco. She and Dickie wanted to go back East for good ("Southeast!" yelled Dickie, drinking a beer), because too many dull crummy things happened here, like the time she was with the other Skinz at the Vats and there was supposed to be a show, but there wasn't, so they went to the Safeway nearby and kept ripping off booze and got thoroughly drunk, and they went to the Walgreen's at Sixth and Mission and tried to shoplift, and plainclothes people were watching so Dan-L didn't take anything but the others did. When they went out, the plainclothes people came running after them down the street and got the others, and Dan-L wasn't about to leave them so she ran back to the Walgreen's and went in and there was this guy standing at the door with his arms folded, and he said you can't go in there and Dan-L pushed by him just the same and saw the Skinz were tied up in the back, and they arrested her with the others but didn't tie her up because when they checked her I.D. they saw that she was a college girl, so the cops just escorted her by the elbow while the others had to wear cuffs; and they told Dan-L to appear in court to get the charges dropped, but she couldn't go to court right then because she had to go back to New York for awhile, so they probably had a bench warrant on her.

#### MOTHERS OF SKINHEADS

Dan-L loved her Mom. Most of the other Skinz did, too (Boot-woman Marisa being an exception).

"I was adopted when I was three," Dagger said. "For a long time I blamed my real parents for breaking up and giving me away, but just recently I found out my Dad was a fag. Can you believe it? It makes me want to puke. So now I love my Mom even more for breaking up with him. Someday I swear I'm gonna go back down there with a .44 and find that fag bastard and blow his head off, *blam!*"

"You gotta think what's good for you," Dickie said.

"I almost forgot my Mom," Dagger said, "I went to a lot of psychiatrists, and they *made* me remember; maybe I remembered those things in *dreams*, man, but I didn't know what they meant."

"Yeah," said Dickie, "it's that kind that gets you." He sometimes had needle dreams.

"Hey, this is a bad scene," said Dagger, jerking open the refrigerator door to look for more beer. "I ain't seen my Mom in eighteen years."

When Dickie and his Mom had a fight she said, "I shoulda aborted you! You shoulda been a goddamned abortion! You're too much like your goddamned father."

Anthony was still polishing his boots.

### THE NEW BOY

When he finished polishing, he started over. "I want these boots to be like *mirrors!*" he cried. "I'm gonna polish 'em up real good. People are gonna see their reflection right before I kick them in the face. It's gonna be the last thing they ever see!"

Nobody paid any attention.

Anthony was eighteen. He'd met up with the Skinz on Haight Street. *Shit*, he still hasn't met cooler people!—Hardly had it begun to force itself upon him that he was a skinhead when he looked the part. His skull, newly naked, looked upon the world with a haughty pride in belonging, in defending, in showing itself in its trueness of whiteness, like a splendid moon which had at last broken free of a thicket of kinky nigger-hair nettles and now rose high into the night. Then he got his tattoos. Once that was accomplished, everything began to happen for Anthony just as he had dreamed it would, like the time that he and skinhead Albert from Germany were staying at this girl's house, and Anthony had her down on hands and knees sucking his cock, and Albert stuck a cold cucumber from the fridge up her ass. How she did scream! Later Anthony stuck the cuke in the microwave and warmed it up and rolled her on her belly so she couldn't see and fucked her with the cucumber, and when she saw it she freaked and grabbed it and broke it so a piece stuck in her cunt. Another time he and Albert fucked a girl with a carrot rubbed with vaseline, and she was loving it, and then they ran around shoving the carrot in people's faces going, "SMELL THIS!" —Of course life was not always so romantic as that, since being a skinhead Anthony had to always guard himself against the assaults of the world, an example being the time that Anthony was in the drunk tank and this fag came after him when he was pissing and Anthony grabbed his shoulder and slammed his head on the steel partition and cut a

triangular gash from his cheek all the way up to his eye. It made him feel good to think about as he sat in Dickie's kitchen now, repolishing his boots. The whitish-yellow walls gleamed in the night like a bone cavern.

#### DAGGER AND SPIKE

Dagger's pregnant bootwoman, Spike, came in from the living room looking tired. She felt cranky because the doctor had told her not to smoke or drink much, which was hard for her because she needed to be Dagger's bootwoman in full, the way she'd been before when she'd done half of every hit of every drug that Dagger took. — She and Dagger now got into a fight over who should carry the photo album back to the bookshelf. "You tell me to put it back, I'm just gonna throw it on the floor!" Spike yelled.

"Hey," said Dagger. "Why did you stick in those pictures of me with the black eye? I don't like those pictures."

"You can just fucking put it away yourself!" Spike screamed.

"Awright," chuckled Dickie. "You tell 'im."

"Stay the fuck out of my business!" yelled Dagger.

Dickie went for him with the scissors. They scuffled in their black Nazi-eagle T-shirts, punching the air and yelling, "I'm losing my faith in mankind!"

"No comments from the peanut gallery!" Dagger said. "You give me some comments, someone's likely to get stabbed. And not by me! Spike takes that stuff real serious."

"I'm not gonna stab her; I'm gonna stab you," said Dickie.

"Oh, forget it," said Dagger. "I've known Spike one year and a half, two years and a half before you ever *thought* of meeting her."

"Come on, Dagger, I remember your anniversary."

"You do? Remember Tequila Ed?"

"Sure I remember Tequila Ed."

"Oh," said Dagger, suddenly aged and beaten. "All the good old boys have left San Francisco. Only ones left are me, Dickie, and a couple others. Yama's in jail, Blue and Chuckles split; I tell you, you can jerk off all you like."

#### THE OLD DAYS

They used to go into bars and pick fights, punch people in the face

when they didn't like the way they looked (being Nazis, they were conscious that appearance is everything). At least that was what some people said about them. But the Skinz said they didn't start anything. It was the others who started things, who talked rude to them and then didn't get out of the way. One time Lorelei and Blue were walking down Market Street and this nigger poked Lorelei in the ass with a stick and followed the two of them on the bus. Blue was hooded, like a viper. When he and Lorelei got off the bus, the nigger got off behind them, so Blue hit the nigger in the face a few times and said, "Now you'll remember the skinheads." — They sat on Skinhead Hill, crooning to each other and yelling; they muscled in on women walking down Haight Street with their boyfriends, and if the boyfriends didn't walk away pretty fast they got it in the face. It is not my aim to describe these old times of violent freedom, for this record was made in the decline of their movement, when most of the bars had bounced them out for good, and they sat around in their middle twenties muttering about how it used to be.

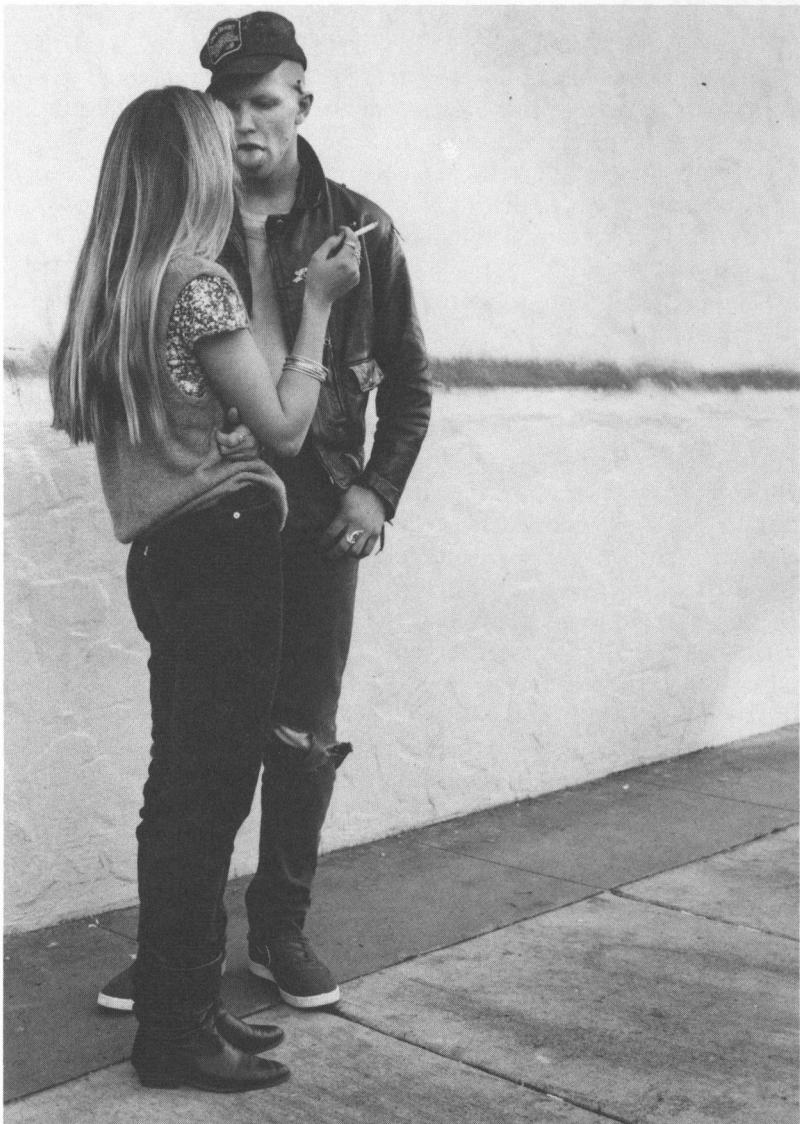
At that time, it seemed to me, death was their watchword, death being not a threat, not a reward, but simply a placement. They had no thought for any future day in which they might be gypsies and sing on stairs, their faces soot-darkened for security.

#### HAIGHT STREET

Dickie lived, as indicated, in the Tenderloin, where poor men walk at night, where the windows of parking garages glow yellow and black where stones have smashed them, where whores greet you licking big ice cream cones at midnight as you come out of the 188 Club after a shot and a round of liars' dice, and other whores ease up to your car if you honk and roll down the window, and it doesn't matter that somebody shot out the streetlights or something because those orange whore-eyes *shine* and make you HARD; but most of the other Skinz (and by "Skinz" I am referring in particular to the gang known as the S.F. Nazi Skinz) enjoyed the delights of violence and idleness on Haight Street, which wakes up at 8:30 in the morning when the sad clerks who think themselves artists go off to work, and the patrol cars coast slowly through Golden Gate Park like Soviet tanks mopping up after the Hungarian uprising (the bums who sleep in the Park have now been arrested or gotten away); and then Haight Street dreams again beneath the blue morning,

clouds securing Cole Street and Shrader Street from the wind; and the dreams of Haight Street are like dreams of driving through Nebraska or Arizona, which roll by all day on a cross-country drive without anything accomplished; and the sidewalk is held by sleepy panhandlers and bewildered tramps with big backpacks ("So this is Haight Street; now what do I do?"), and just west of the Holy Smoke Barbeque hangs the American flag from the terrace of the skinhead flat, as wrinkled as a fugitive's clothes; and then again between 10:30 and 11:00 the street wakes up again, comes into its real life, the thrift stores and secondhand bookstores and liquor stores and clothing stores and ice cream stores opening; and the cafes leach full of people reading newspapers and sipping espresso and smoking, and people walk along the sidewalks, and Brandi the whore goes yawning to her corner by the liquor store to beg change ("You know what we call nigger bitches?" says Yama, "We call 'em mud dogs!"), and the first skinhead comes out grey-skulled in a grey jumpsuit, and other Skinz groan on the moldy carpet of the skinhead flat, that is to say Hunter and Dee and Nova's flat, and they scratch carpet-fuzz off their shirts and roll dead beer cans away from their eyeballs, wondering whether to take valium and sleep till dark or whether to watch TV or whether they might as well saunter out into the sunlight, as another two or three now do, the first hornets from the nest, already looking hard, looking angry, on the jump for some ass to beat. Later they'll be walking Yama's dog Rebel. For so long now we've seen them loitering in the sun, eyeing the last hippie girls surviving in storefront niches, watching other girls go clopping resolutely by in high heels while the skinheads roar, "She's just another skinhead slut! Roll 'er on 'er ass and stick it up 'er butt!", and the girls clop on a little faster, pretending that they didn't hear, their dwindling asses moving their New Wave trousers out of sight.

Whether it is a happy life or a sad one the Skinz live is of course unknowable to anyone watching them stride by, turning their bulging skulls greedily upon their bulging necks, trying to be pitiless, exclusive; not listening much to one another; but we can consider the question. The lone ones lean up against the restaurant windows, hunching their heads in like turtles at the same time they swivel their gaze in what might be anxiety or might be automatic street wisdom. They spend too much time waiting, but on the whole they are arguably happy, having their fights to look forward to. What more, after all, could anyone yearn for in his guts than the chance to hurt somebody else, jawkicking a soul to screaming subhumanness



in order to reiterate that *I live?* — “Politics,” I once heard a conservative say, “is the exercise of power. Power is the ability to inflict pain.” By this criterion the skinheads are among our most spontaneous politicians. Let us assume, then, that being spontaneous they are light of heart.

### AFTERNOON AT THE COMMAND POST

Up in the skinhead house, behind red curtains, a man kept looking out the street window, as if he were on sentry duty. He drank beer and wore camouflage trousers.

"Hey, get off the sidewalk!" he yelled. "You heard me! Get off or I'll give you some beer to drink!" He poured a Bud out the window.

The other Skinz crowded to look.—"Lookit that nigger," said Dee. "He's so scungy."

"They all look that way," said Nazi Dick solemnly, and at that they all laughed.

### POWELL STREET, EMERYVILLE

If you are white then I suppose it was your great-great-great-grandfather who started it with his runs for the Triangle Trade, assaulting the walled towns of Negroes by land and by sea, utilizing fire with all diligence for this end; and thereby obtained prisoners, for which he got good prices; and so on to the plantations, the lynchings and all the rest of it, until a jumbo crop of hatred had been painstakingly sown; but by now the wrong lies on both sides, as the tale of how Bootwoman Marisa lost her front tooth will show; so there are times when we hate them as much as they hate us; and it is hard to know or care where in this circle the S.F. Nazi Skinz came in; the Skinz did not care, and out by the Emeryville Marina no one in the workforce cared about anything but beauty, of which there was a productive yield given the way that the purple translucent plastic paper trays glittered in the sun. You could look through them sideways and see through their ribs, through the grilles at the back and out the window across the smog to the windows of other buildings where the bank clerks and software jerks learned the lessons of life from their Tandem mainframes: TAL ERROR 70: ONLY ITEMS SUBORDINATE TO A STRUCTURE MAY BE QUALIFIED. (I wonder if our country was better when Indians lived on it by themselves, fishing, hunting, and weaving blue blankets, or whether it was just as dreary, wastes of bog and forests then corresponding to wastes of buildings now.) Every firm was in convenient reach of the Denny's ("Always Open"), and from the Denny's it was an easy walk to the tunnel under the freeway overpass, a dark cold tunnel through which big trucks went by so loud that your bones hurt. The exhaust

smelled like old waffles. This tunnel was the bus stop for the 57M or 57C, and there were sometimes black boys coming up to surround you if you were white and grinning at you and telling you to hand over your money, "or else I'll do you a favor you might not appreciate!" because they would be quite happy to hurt you for being white, just as the skinheads would be happy to hurt them for being black.\*

AFTERNOON AT THE COMMAND POST (CONTINUED)

"I got stuck in jail again last Tuesday," said Ice to Dickie in the back room.

"Oh yeah? What for?"

"Assaulting an officer and drinking in public. Or maybe it was the other way around."

"Fuck," said Dickie. "They caught up with me, too. Two hundred and fifty dollars bail that I won't see for who knows how many months, plus twenty-five dollars court cost. Bitch said I had a gun and was gonna kill her boyfriend. All I said to him was, 'Buzz off or I'll kill ya.'"

"And did you have a gun?" said Ice.

"Hell, no. They took my leather jacket, too. Said it was a dangerous weapon." He chuckled. "And it was. See, I got this license plate and cut it in half, then I wrapped it around the sleeve of my jacket so there was this razor edge. Ripped up a couple tin cans and did the same thing. That jacket weighed twenty or thirty pounds. All I had to do was sweep out my arm and I could just gut any old fish, fuff!"

So the Skinz hacked their way through the buttery blue idleness of the afternoon, progressing toward the evening, when wicked things come alive.

A little after three, Dee's husband Hunter came back from work with other skinhead men. — "You're not a man unless you bust your ass," Dagger liked to say. "I don't call it working, sitting in an office eight hours a day with soft hands." The skinheads were doomed to carry lumber and cement around in open pits, never trusted enough

---

\* "We're a very racial people," Dee explained to me once. "We're not prejudiced; we're racial. There's a difference. We have *pride* in being white. I have *pride* in having a family. I've adopted a lot of kids, like Nova, but I wouldn't bring a black kid into the family because it wouldn't fit in. It would get verbally abused."



for the class jobs of hanging sheetrock in warm middle-income bedrooms, never getting to use the bathtub tap to fill their buckets, never swishing that bathtub-issue water into the mudding tray, adding the Fix-All just right to make grey-white dough, spreading it good in the mudding tray, the first layer going smooth over the bare ceiling boards so that they still textured the mud like ribs in flesh. No, for the skinheads work was a stretch of curses in grey fogged-in excavations, office workers leaning over the street railings to spit and comment interestedly while the Skinz sank in mud up to the knees of their jeans, hauling dusty white sacks of cement on their shoulders, having nothing but their strength to glory in, never getting to peek through the back windows on the job or prancing up the fire escape, snapping the downstairs women's lacy lingerie on the line, or opening up spankin' new sacks of Durabond. They worked in the building pits when they got work, those skinheads, and rain dribbled inside their leather jackets; then they came home, their faces, arms and jeans whitened by cement dust. They sat scowling and talking about how much they hated the job. Their supervisors were always assholes. One super lived on the site so they could never get away from him. —“It was all I could do not to put a shovel through his melon,” Hunter said.—A man scratched his skull for awhile, swishing his beer. “My dream,” he said, “is to build a cabinet

in my room and get me a badass gun collection, one for every skinhead. And one day, we'll all just go to the window and open up."—Dickie laughed, "Naw, leave the door *wide* open, and wait till somebody comes in, and *then* open up and *waste* him."

At the window, the skinhead in the camo trousers never took his eyes off the street.

### A SUNSET

Outside, the afternoon dwindled in the strange way that it does in Haight Street, the sun baking the almost illegible graffiti on the cracked wall of the deserted technical high school: AMERICAN FRONT—FOR A STRONG AMERICA; then, as the afternoon died, the far sidewalks and buildings turned gold in the slanted sunlight, the pavement underfoot already blue-grey and shadowed. The flat roofs of the Victorian houses brightened to beauty beneath the sky, which pretended to be as luminous as it had been at noon, but wasn't anymore. As clouds came in from the Bay, the first pair of evening police came walking down Stanyan to the head of the Haight, their uniforms already almost twilight-black. Hornets quickened in the night-hive. Skinheads sat in front of their house, scuffing their toes on the sidewalk, smoking, eating bagels, looking grimly from side to side. The first bookstores and antique boutiques were being locked, the steel shutters drawn. New Skinz came walking by very fast, nodding to nobody, wearing ski caps, looking daggers at the new generation of black-dressed Death Ladies whose faces were white and cruel as porcelain; perhaps it was they, whoever they were, who wrote in the doorways FUCK SF SKINZ THERE A BUNCH OF FAGS, or maybe they were responsible for the poem on the front wall of the anarchist bookstore:

i've got a bullet in my head,  
where there once was a brain, now there's lead,  
but that's ok, fine with me,  
since that's all it takes to be a NAZI

and more and more Skinz now came swarming into the street, staring hard-eyed at all the aliens on the streets whose hair grew thick and bushy on their heads like coonskin caps. A few Skinz went down with Dickie to his place in the Tenderloin, the T.L. Yama

called it, down the paved valleys of streets where red car-lights between twin lines of yellow lights lured them deeper into project housing with curtains drawn and past silhouettes sitting in the dark on park benches; then the Chinese restaurants came into view, the yellow-lit tunnels of hotel garages, the Peacock Club, the massage parlors, the old men in decaying footgear taking little wooden-legged steps across the street; and in Dickie and Dan-L's place Dan-L sat waiting in the kitchen with its 1984 posters, wandering into her bedroom, looking at her clothes neatly filed in boxes, her black pirate flag, the forty-eight-star American flag from the Marin county fleamarket, the hooded skull done in pastels by Spike on speed, the drawing of the skinhead saying I HATE THE WORLD (also done by Spike, I think); and Dan-L yawned and went back to her dirty kitchen table with a bottle of Windex on it, sitting around alone, playing with her cat Rambo, munching on Burger King takeout, her breath fogging up the cold black kitchen window, and the refrigerator humming in pulses, like a heart. Her lower eyelids were made up in black, as if she'd rubbed them with charcoal. She was dead tired; she worked counters and her boss wouldn't leave her be; tonight he'd called her up yelling because she'd paid the VCR repairman without his permission, and Dan-L said sorry to him because she couldn't afford to lose the job. She went back to the window, seeing the homosexuals peeking at her from the upstairs window. She hated and feared them because she'd heard a lot of stories; she saw their heads outlined through the yellowness, and when they caught her looking at them they ducked back behind their window plant. She wished that Dickie and Dagger were here, that it was summer and afternoon and Dickie would tell again all about how he met Dagger with Mick the Prick that day on Haight Street when they were tweaking, and Dagger would get a grin and yell "*Suck my dick, Massah!*" and Dan-L would laugh in her soft hoarse way and they'd go up and laze around on the roof the way they used to do, having rock fights; once Dan-L clocked Dagger on the forehead with a big rock and he freaked out, started throwing rocks at everybody so hard they had to run; but now Dagger and Spike had gone up north for legal-fiscal reasons and nothing was happening; the phone rang; it was Yama; he needed someone to meet him when he got out of jail tomorrow; and Dan-L said okay and promised herself to give him a lecture about using speed; and she ate up the last of her cold Burger King, yawning there in the Tenderloin a few blocks east of the War Memorial Opera House where rich people had gone to observe

Verdi's Falstaff sing out, "Aiee! Aiee! Aiee! Aiee!" whenever Mistress Page and Mistress Quickly and the other torturers spanked him with ferns and sang, "Piccatta! Piccatta! Piccatta! Piccatta!", while meanwhile the rich people's cars were being towed by mistake, so that the rich people folded their gold opera glasses shut with a snap and stormed off to the police station on Ellis to demand their rights and called the Channel Eleven News on the phone and scolded the meek night officers some more and made the officers give them rides to the tow company, and the officers did their best to jolly the rich people, saying joshing things like, "Well, at least you get the nice new patrol car, ladies and gentlemen; you see, the other one is used for *criminals* and the back is full of *fleas!*" (this being the patrol car that Dagger and the other Skinz were used to); but the rich people were not mollified and informed each other that this was an OUT-RAGE, and they condemned the officers for being symbols of a hateful bureaucracy, not that it was their fault of course; and that Mayor Feinstein was going to hear of this; and they formed exalted on-the-spot charities and mutual defense leagues to pay the towing costs, and they exchanged business cards to keep in touch for the protest hearing, standing on a parking lot in the Potrero in their black suits and black gowns, with triple strings of pearls dangling down to the matrons' fluid-filled artificial bosoms; and at the end of it the oldest, crossest, sternest lady (who had called Channel Eleven three times already, saying "We have thirty-five VERY INDIG-NANT citizens here and we need your help!") tapped on the driver's window of each departing automobile; and when the driver rolled the window down, *vreeEEE*, recognizing a fellow member of his or her class, the old lady said, "How did you pay? VISA? Mastercard? Good. Stop payment in the morning." —Meanwhile Dickie finally came in with his friends.

#### AFTER DINNER

"What're we gonna eat, Dan-L?" he said.

"I already ate," she said. "Didn't think you were coming home, so I said fuck it."

"Hey, Bootwoman," teased the Skinz, "when are you gonna shave your head?"

"I've got like this feeling inside," she told them. "I'm a boot-woman, and I don't need to shave any part of my head to show it."



"You know," says grey-haired metaphysical Joe, who just blew in from Massachusetts, not a skinhead or nothing, just a would-be sheetrocker and friend of a friend dreaming about a bottle of Thunderbird, which they call a short dog (and to better fill you in I had better tell you that he was almost deaf, like the Butcher Boys' dog, but genuinely was metaphysical, had once been Brother Joe at a monastery back east but he was a *deaf* Brother Joe as you understand by now and worked and prayed and meditated happily inside his cloud of sacred deafness until a new Abbot came to the monastery, at which point Brother Joe's tribulations began, for since he was under a vow of silence he could not explain to the new Abbot that he was deaf, and the Abbot didn't know much about Brother Joe because Brother Joe kept to himself and worked chopping wood and repairing stone walls in the forest, and when the Abbot greeted him Brother Joe never heard and therefore never answered; so the Abbot, concluding that Brother Joe was anti-social, decreed that he had to become a hermit, and Brother Joe wouldn't do that, so he was expelled), "You know," said metaphysical Joe, not having caught too much of the tabletalk or really hearing what the Skinz were all about, because he had his own cross to bear, but gathering that Dan-L was saying

something about shaving or not shaving her head, "You know," goes old Joe, "I tried to get rid of my dandruff once by shaving my head."

"Did it work?"

"No."

Joe's attempt at a contribution having sunk into the conversation like a stone into deep water, the skinheads went about their own business.

"You didn't ask me how my foot is," said Dan-L. "I got another acid treatment."

The stale cigarette butts lay very still in the ashtray. Dickie loaded a bowl of hash. "This high makes me feel so nice, kicked back," he said. "When I'm on pot I get paranoid, walking down the street thinking people are looking at me funny."

Dan-L played with the tablecloth, lifting up corners of it. Underneath, the entire table top was covered with black-markered slogans like WHITE POWER and KILL.

"Getting to be hunting season," Dickie said. "Boy, it's been three years. Last time I was out with your father, Dan-L. Remember when we went down to his land in Alabama and he threw tin cans off a cliff and we shot them with his .357 magnum? That was cool."

"The land wasn't much, though," said Dan-L. "And the people were stupid."

"You calling people from The South hicks?" Warren the mover said, leaning forward very slowly.

"No," said Dan-L. "I was talking about my own people."

"Shake it, girl," Warren said. "Just shake it."

Nobody said anything.

"Down south the mountains are so beautiful, man," Warren said. "Out in Chattanooga you can see nine states, ten states with the nekkid eye."

"Knoxville's the place," said Dickie. "Lots of nice places, though. I remember one time when we were in Orchard Hill, one of the last great white neighborhoods. Then some niggers topped our car. So Chuckles's grandfather got a shotgun and said, 'Hey, King Coons! Get the fuck out of Our Neighborhood!' He liked to sit on the porch and rock with his shotgun."

"That's Chuckles's grandfather, all right," Warren said. "My grandfather died couldn't read nor write. But you couldn't forge his X, boy; he knew his X."

Just outside, in the dead glow of Ellis Street, Anthony saw a punk panhandling. The punk's Mohawk made Anthony feel sick. Nothing

*William T. Vollmann*

was worse than a punk, except for maybe a punk and a nigger. He told the punk to head out, beat it for Powell Street where the punks congregated (the way that chewing gum, for instance, congregates in stale hardened lumps under desks and tables), or beat it anywhere else but just get the fuck out of Anthony's sight. The punk whipped out a zapper gun and fired, *phhhh-bzzzt!* but it didn't work like it was supposed to, just burned Anthony's chest, so that Anthony, rather than falling down screaming and crying onto the hard cold sidewalk as the punk had hoped, shook off the pain as a dog shakes off water, and beat the punk's ass *righteously!* The cops came running. But when they saw it was just a punk, and the punk had started it anyway, they grinned to Anthony's bootwoman, "Your boyfriend got lucky this time. He got a freebie." (According to the F.B.I., one violent crime occurs every thirty-one seconds.) And Anthony ran down the sidewalk laughing, his boots shining, the night worth living through again, and people jumped out of his way.

While other losers, the lame, the blind spinning down the street in firestorms of hallucinations, made their way through life over the stepping stones of others' pity, the skinheads derived power from their isolation and magnified themselves to themselves until the things they could do seemed to them all there was to do. This was but the rhetoric of unavoidable decay, their taut bodies knowing their own decrease, knowing the wane of the city, and desperately the Skinz wrote SF SKINZ in the Sunset, in the Haight, at Church and Duboce, in North Beach; and that was nice but it didn't do any good. Their politics excluded, they were hardly different from the trapped commuters on the Muni, who, dressed in their business best, stared down at their own tapping feet, or read, or rested their chins in their hands, waiting, waiting, waiting.

#### LEFT-WING UTOPIANISM: AN INFANTILE DISORDER

Back on Frederick Street, Chuckles stamped roaring down the sidewalk, looking for a fight. He saw a black man leaning against a wall. Chuckles slam-butted the nearest NO PARKING sign, yelling, "I'm gonna toughen up my head; I'm gonna use my head for a weapon!"\* —Whereas some toughs skipped side by side and leaned

---

\* Chuckles's favorite song was "If I Could Talk To The Animals."

weightlessly against lit storefronts, watching one of their number do little ironical ballets for them, the Skinz just strode down the sidewalk, swiveling their domes to give both sides of the street equal views of their contemptuous eyes, dying to leave us soon for their own Promised Land. Three Skinz (say the anarchists) went to the anarchist bookstore and kicked in the front window. They hated that place because it was left wing. Whenever they had a free minute, which was often, they went over there and painted swastikas on the door. The anarchists tried to classify them in the reflexive pseudo-biological way of all ideologues, writing: "*The males have shaved heads, high boots, rolled up or tucked in jeans, often with bleach marks, suspenders, and T-shirts or bare chest, often with a black leather jacket...*" —the reiterated "often with" further betraying the anarchists' melancholy lust for typology, as if things would be O.K. if they could just definitely establish the Skinz as a product of late capitalism, the way Franz Neumann had done for the Adolf regime in his treatise *Behemoth* (1941); then the Skinz would stop tormenting them, beating them up, sending them letters like the one they got that fall, with the eagle on it, scowling, the eagle's claws out ready to seize and slice, its wings stubby and wide, like those of an Air Force bomber, and on its chest the "A"-inscribed circle of the American Front; and the letter said (and the eagle screamed):

ATTENTION!

PUNKS, COMMUNISTS, ANARCHISTS, HIPPIES,  
AND HOMOSEXUALS:

YOU ARE ENEMIES OF AMERICA AND THE AMERICAN WAY  
OF LIFE. WE THE SKINHEADS WILL NOT TOLERATE YOUR  
SPREADING OF UNWANTED DISEASES BOTH MENTAL AND  
PHYSICAL.

WE ARE JAILED BECAUSE WE USE EVERY METHOD AT OUR  
DISPOSAL TO PROTECT THE DECENT PEOPLE OF THIS COUN-  
TRY FROM YOUR UNAMERICAN, SUBVERSIVE, LEFT WING  
MIND POISON.

WE ARE THE GUARDIANS OF FREEDOM AND LIBERTY FOR  
ALL GOOD AMERICANS. SO BEWARE ENEMYS OF THE FLAG.

YOUR DAYS ARE  
NUMBERED.

© AMERICAN FRONT 1985

Upon receipt of this missive the anarchists were seriously kropotkined, like medieval German churchgoers finding Luther's theses on the door, but the Skinz themselves just drank up their beers and forgot about it. Dan-L said that \_\_\_\_\_ did it and what was the big deal. "He was going around on the street laughing about it and boasting about it for days," she said. "But I don't know that much about it. I heard about it and I didn't give a shit." As for Dickie, he just looked solemn. "*And the South will rise again,*" he proclaimed, "*Stars, Bars and Skinz!*"

### KEEPING IT ON

"You know," said Dagger, finishing off his third beer, "that little kid you brought today, he's setting up that guy, Brock, he's been stealing. We're gonna lure him up at the show and kick his ass."

"What about the owner?" Dickie said.

"The owner don't care, man. He's just a fucking nigger. He just cares about money."

"You gonna beat up the kid?"

"Hell, no," said Dagger, "He's a skinhead kid. Someday he'll grow up and make a fine skinhead, a leader, maybe. The person to do that is someone who's raised up in it and knows our law by heart. We started it. It's up to our kids to keep it on."

"I'm gonna play that song again," said Dickie.

"Flip the damned tape!" Dagger commanded.

Their big hands started pounding at the cassette player, at each other, grip-wrestling in midair.

"Don't fuck with me, man!"

Dickie leaped up and grabbed at Dagger's neck. Dagger snarled and bit. He sank his teeth into Dickie's cheek.—"But you can also take a motherfucker by the ears," Dickie said thoughtfully, "and you can just rip their *ears* off."—"Yeah," said Dagger, "but I bite hunks of skin off, and facial skin, *that ain't* never gonna heal. Hey, you remember, Dickie, when I used to hate your guts and want to kick your ass?"

"You never could!"

"I could rip that lardass nose right off you."

"Now we get along, so what's the *diff?*"

WHAT BRANDI THOUGHT

The skinheads hated Brandi because she was black. "She's a walking stinkbag," said Bootwoman Marisa, "she's a sleazebag. I wish that bitch was rotting under the ground instead of on top of it." Brandi was a slender smallish dark-eyed whore who looked you in the eye when she found you on the street and promised you everything and made you believe in the freedom of her nogood ways and her hair felt like cotton candy and she hugged you and kissed you with the housefronts watching behind so that you thought you were the only one she loved, and she always tried to get money from you because she always needed it. She needed it so much that if you opened your wallet to give her something she'd stand on tiptoe to watch, and say, "There's another dime in there. Let me see if there's a penny in there." —If you gave her money once, she never forgot you. She'd pick you out on the sidewalk and be suddenly in front of you and she'd put her hand on her hip and smile at you with her pretty fuzzy hair done up, and she'd try to get more money out of you, but if she couldn't then you were still her friend. When she stood in her doorway looking at you she was all business, hooking her thumb in her jeans and leaning, like an urchin who might run away or hit you. She spare changed until late at night, sometimes holding her little son by the hand, and the boy, who barely came up to her waist, held his palm out and stared up at you like some sad curious little frog; then when it got dark Brandi took him home and came back more lively and tried to sell nonexistent drugs and once the night was firmly established she started selling herself. There was a dress that she wore with three buttons down the front, and you could tell how late it was or how high she was by how low the buttons were undone. She might look straight at you, so earnest and loving, or she might grin at you with her teeth showing and her eyes wary and old. At two or three in the morning she'd be asking men coming out of bars if they wanted to make a little bit of *love*; or if she were desperate she'd begin flagging down the cars.

"What do you think of those skinheads, Brandi?" I said.

"I don' like 'em," she said.

When I left she stood up tall and kissed me. "I see you," she said.

I once had a dream that Brandi was running because someone was after her, and she held two little black children by the hand as she ran, and she was afraid, and she ran down narrow cement stairs that took her deeper and deeper inside a concrete wall, and the children

kept up as best as they could but sometimes Brandi had to slow up for them and they held tight to her hands and rested their heads against her waist and while they rested she looked behind her, and then she pulled the children farther down the damp stairs; and finally she came to a door, and water was dripping from the keyhole, and the door was bulging outwards; and I realized that Brandi must be directly under some large reservoir, and I tried to tell her not to open the door, but she couldn't hear me, and she turned the door-knob, and tons of green water poured in and crushed her and the two children.

#### MARISA'S FRONT TOOTH

Bootwoman Marisa, hater of Brandi, her sixteenth birthday more recently behind her than her conviction for assault with a deadly weapon, got a ride to North Beach to have her fourth tattoo done, waiting coolly in Bronson's living room where meanwhile a pleasant time was had by others watching videos of Mark Pauline piercing dead dogs' heads with remote-controlled drills, burning dead cats with a flamethrower, firing cardboard missiles full of gunpowder, throwing switches to make dead rabbits walk backwards. — "This is weird!" Marisa said, meaning the opposite, sitting on the couch with her felt hat beaked over her forehead, her thick black lines of eyebrows poised above a dinosaur romance. She had a very pretty oval head—I say head, not face, because hairlessness makes the boundary between head and face vanish so that there is only head, the cheeks and temples curving with inevitable naturalness around to the ears and back to the grey stubble (something other than hair) growing out from the bone. It was a finely colored head that Marisa had, clean and marbled like the freckled stone stairs fronting San Francisco houses. The lighting in Bronson's living room caused a delicate shadow to deepen the tone of the right side, bisecting her perfect nose, which must have been crafted of special pink mollusk ceramic, like her lips. She leaned back in Bronson's couch, knees up, blinking her dark eyes and rubbing her dirty black sneakers on the cushions. There was a bunch of safety pins stuck in her earlobes. Her black leather jacket, stuck full of badass buttons and a Hitler iron cross, glittered with galaxies of zippers. — "Man, I hate your dog," she said. "If she bugs me again I'm gonna kick her jaw off." — Her boyfriend was a Nazi skin in Chicago called James who blew up cars



by dropping pingpong balls full of Drano into the gas tank.—Six D-cell batteries in the same place will accomplish the same object, Marisa explained, although in that case the car-bomber had to be patient for the two weeks that it took for the casings to dissolve.—She bought acid in sheets and mailed them to James, who sold them at a considerable profit in Chicago, where skinheads were cool,

where skinheads were organized, said Marisa, where it was all for one and one for all. He did not share these profits with her.

The tatt was going to be a dragon, on the right upper thigh. Marisa really needed it, just as Yama needed to get more tats on his arms (he was gonna get a Joker with an evil-ass face, like a red and black Checkered Demon). Marisa undid her suspenders and slipped her trousers off, grinning. Although she still had her shirt on, her naked thighs and her naked head made her as naked as a hairhead wearing no clothes at all; and this equivalence made her more ordinary, especially since most of her other tats, such as the red, white and blue boot on her upper arm, were hidden by her shirt; and so, most of her Aryan props gone, she was just another naked girl. No one takes special account of Nazis when they are naked.\* Marisa sensed this and became tentatively, submissively young. — “My legs are so fat,” she said. — Beginning to outline the dragon on her thigh (he was not ready for his needles yet), Bronson bent over her in his studio of rainbow skulls, while she half-sat, half-lay on the tattooing couch, which was actually an old trunk with a sleeping bag folded on top. Marisa stared into the yellow oval of brightness around the filament of the light bulb, Bronson’s music going *“Ooooooh, bunga-bunga bunga-bunga,”* and Bronson pen-sketched, holding in his other hand a fat phallus of deodorant which he applied now and then to keep the ink from rubbing off. Marisa, leaning back on her elbows, looked down at him and lay back, her head overhanging the couch, gazing now at a solar corona on canvas on the ceiling; and she played with the loose strap of her underpants. She had plump pink thighs. — “I can’t stand pain,” she said, but she wore a Nazi shirt. — “Oh, God,” she said, “it’s gonna be such a beautiful dragon; I’ve been waiting for this for such a long time now that I know I really need it on my body.” Her pubic curls were the reddish brown of dead roses. — This sixteen-year-old looked hardly like a bootwoman at all now as she lay there, all her prized difference receding to her mouth. This mouth, a hallmark of her narcissism, pouted downward, toward herself, so that one couldn’t readily tell whether she was sullen or just self-absorbed. — Bronson, who had green barbed arrows tattooed into the back of his neck, like lizard vertebrae, now began seriously to work. At the rattle of the tattoo gun, Marisa’s eyelashes

---

\* Could a sorting algorithm be devised to differentiate naked nuns from naked Nazis? (But this is only a wise-ass question, having no place in this definite treatise on naked brains.)

suddenly fluttered, the shadows beneath them somehow darker now, bluer than they had been. I will pass over her cries, and the sweat that burst out on that smooth, round skull, like that of a fury muskrat; while Bronson drilled slowly under her skin, wiping up her blood with a wad of tissue, and the sticky flesh of her thighs clung to the swab as it moved. From behind, Bronson's ear was red and distinct against her white flesh. Her thigh was as pale and soft as a flounder. The needle went in. Sometimes Bronson set the gun down to yawn and scratch at the callus on the middle joint of his second finger, known to those in his trade as the Eye of the Octopus. Marisa recovered herself better with each pause, as the needle lengthened the irrevocable lines already pierced into her thigh; biting her lip bravely at these required mutilations, she smiled wider and wider, smiled wet-lipped until the dragon was outlined on her thigh in ink and blood. Now she was even more essentially and unarguably a bootwoman. — "Are you done?" she said, "are you done? I want to see! If anybody comes up, maim, kill, destroy!", as she buckled her dirty jeans. She put her leather skinhead jacket back on, regaining more and more of herself with each button. When she'd first bought it, she'd broken it in by getting fucked on it. In the righthand pocket was her street knife. "Oh, kill, maim, and destroy!" she screamed, making fists in the air. "I want to sucker-punch somebody!"

She worked as a cook at Bouncer's down in China Basin, making breakfasts from six to ten, lunches from six to three, Bouncer's being a tall yellow building from before the earthquake of 1906, in sight of the water, warehouses on every hand; and inside the half-boarded-up door was Bouncer's Bar where it was always dark, and left of that the Bouncer's Cafe area, illuminated by incandescent bulbs on the high yellow ceiling (one burned out), and there were square plastic-wood tables with yellow chairs, and behind those was the faded yellow countertop, and Marisa worked between that and the faded yellow backboard planks that went up to the ceiling. There was a little dark hatchway where the countertop joined the wall, so that Marisa could slide plates of food directly into the bar, which also opened at six. Whenever I came to visit her she was so happy to see me, hugging me, rubbing her stubbly head against me like a puppy. Trustingly she pulled down her pants to show off Bronson's new work on her tattoo whenever I asked. She was my friend. Once I brought one of my pistols holstered under my coat, and when I brought her hand to it she stared at me and she squeezed it through my coat to be sure of it and her face lit up and she said, "Ooh, dude!", and old Darleen, who

worked beside her frying up bacon and egg sandwiches and came from a ranch and wanted to have her own roadhouse in Oregon, teased Marisa and said, "That's right, dude!", and Marisa laughed and said, "Fuck, fuck, fuck! Now I have to have a nice day whether I want to or not, since you came to see me," and told how she was going to dress as a beatnik for Halloween, with hair and everything; and Darleen was gonna be a cowgirl; and there was a sign at the counter saying SEX IS THE ANSWER—NOW WHAT WAS THE QUESTION?, and Marisa seemed happy. (Poor Marisa! —In the Chatanuga Cafe up on Haight Street, a wavy-combed redhead out on a date smoothed her dress and said, "Marisa used to be really nice. We used to be great friends, and then —" "Then she got tough," her boyfriend supplied. —"Yeah, she shaved her head," the redhead said. "Then she lost all her friends.")

"I'd like an egg sandwich to travel," said an old hoss.

Marisa cooked it up. "Eggs with legs!" she screamed through the hatch.

Marisa worked slicing mushrooms and frying up the cutest little pork chops. "I do everything myself!" she cried, dancing to the radio. All the customers watched Marisa's earnest bald head at the corner of the range. She had a way of biting her lower lip as she worked that made her look as if she were trying not to cry.

"Hey, 'Risa, these hush puppies are hard through and through."

"Fuck you! Tells me it's raw! It's potatoes; what do you want?"

You could see her bent over the range, her snowy head, her green eyes looking up and around as she ladled oil on the potatoes. For four dollars or less she fixed the best breakfast around. And the customers sat scratching their greasy shirts and reading the paper and laboring over their food. As the months passed, Marisa came to rest her hand on her hip while she worked over the range, in the time-honored fashion of cooks everywhere. The blackboard said: MARISA'S FOOD FOR SALE. And whenever I asked her she took me to the back room, smiling a little nervously with her tongue between her teeth; and then she pulled down her pants and knelt, one hand on her naked hip, to show off her proud dragon. Sometimes the regulars came around to the doorway to peek. "Another dollar for the Dragon Lady!" they cried, putting a buck in her tips jar.

"How's James?"

"James is fine," she said smiling, and you could tell she loved him because she looked so happy just being able to say the word James. "He really liked that little knife you gave me. In fact," she said

proudly, "when I showed it to him he took it and wouldn't give it back." — "I guess that's a compliment," I said. — "Oh, yes," she said. "I was really really glad he liked it."

"What's your mother doing, Marisa?"

"My mother? Just being a Jew."

I will never forget the time I brought Marisa a white rose, and she grinned and said wow and hugged it and me, and as she was holding it, blushing and wondering what to do with it, a black woman approached the counter and said to Marisa, "Oh, somebody gave you a rose!"; and Marisa froze up and said nothing for a long time, and finally looked the black woman up and down a couple of times and said, "Yes, it's a *white* rose."

When the health inspector came to Bouncer's and didn't like her tiles, she punched him in the mouth. The inspector turned off the gas range. "You're closed."

Marisa was known sufficiently well that if you went and stood at a bus stop round about 10:00 in the morning you might see a blonde with dark rings under her eyes drinking beer in a paper bag, and she wore a black leather jacket; and if you asked her what time it was she'd laugh and say, "Oh, God, I don't even know what *year* it is," and there'd be a silence and she'd say, "Just kidding," and she'd say, "I think it's 8:30 or 9:00; you see, I just got out of Juvenile Hall; today's my eighteenth birthday," and you'd go (if you were nice), "Congratulations," and she'd go, "Now I'm out, I gotta stay out," and you'd say, "Yep, that's right," and there'd be another silence, and you'd go, "Maybe you know a friend of mine, a skinhead girl named Marisa," and she'd go, "You mean the one that's not quite a skinhead, with the stubble on her head? Sure, I know her," and at that the world would become a brighter place. Yes, she knew Marisa in Juvenile Hall, Marisa who was locked into her room every night, which was all concrete and echoey; and early in the morning the loudspeaker echoed: "*Wake up!*", and Marisa had to get up then and go wash and eat breakfast; and then for three hours she and the other girls sat doing nothing in the court-appointed "school," and then they had lunch; and in the afternoon they sat around and then after dinner the ones who'd been good were allowed to watch TV, and the ones who'd been bad had to do nothing; and then they all went back to their separate concrete rooms to get locked up again. They weren't ever allowed to go outside, but if nobody had fucked up, Juvie showed Walt Disney movies on the VCR on Friday night. They showed "*Bambi*" over and over.\*

One of the reasons that Marisa hated blacks was that she'd been in Juvie in Detroit (how old would she have been then—thirteen, fourteen? Probably eleven, because she still had some of her baby teeth); the only white girl in Juvie, and they had to put her in isolation because all the other girls kept beating her up for being white, seven or eight black girls at a time (one on one Marisa could have handled them); and you must be informed of the final scene, when one of the girls got a pair of pliers from a guard (the guards were black); and in the cool wet unwholesome echoey darkness the black girls gathered around Marisa screaming and hitting her, and the black girl with the pliers banged Marisa's head down and got her mouth open and the black girls held Marisa down while she screamed and tried to punch them and the girl with the pliers pulled one of Marisa's front teeth out.—But when I first heard this story I misinterpreted one detail:

"So the girls held you down?"

"No, the guards did."\*\*\*

#### A COLD SUNDAY

Dee was a thin bootwoman with big teeth. She had a tall, egglike head and angular eyebrows. Her head was shaved to grey stubble. She had a way of smiling which bent her lower lip down and exposed her teeth, making her seem candid. Her right arm was tattooed. So was her back. When she took off her shirt to show it off you could see a horrid monster whose head was all eyes bulging out like pustules, except where its mouth was (it had long teeth); and below its lips writhed an array of tentacles lost in each other. On her left shoulder was her brother's name and the letters R.I.P. (He had died in an accident.) Her bowed head, the stubble cropped in a zigzag at the back of her neck, furnished her with an intentness appropriate to her boots.

---

\* "Were the other girls nice?" — "Nice!" said Marisa in astonishment. "They were in Juvie! We were locked up!"

\*\*\* "There will be some," wrote Major W. E. Fairbairn in his commando manual *Get Tough!* (D. Appleton-Century, 1943), "who will be shocked by the methods advocated here. To them I say 'In war you cannot afford the luxury of squeamishness. Either you kill or capture, or you will be captured and killed. We've got to be tough to win, and we've got to be ruthless—tougher and more ruthless than our enemies.' This is undoubtedly what Marisa's dentists thought."

"I have a gun," she said almost shyly the first time I met her. "I'll show you. It's only my first one." She fumbled under the bed and finally dragged out something wrapped in a dusty garbage bag. It was a crude long-barreled .410 pistol without sights, almost resembling a musket. "I'm gonna kill some coons with it," she laughed. "Just kidding." —The gun had never been cleaned. It didn't look safe to fire.

In a skinhead face, as I have said, the eyes become of prime importance. She had strong, calm eyes. Dee herself was strong and calm, intelligent and practical. She was always cleaning up, "keeping the house together" she called it, feeding other Skinz who came and stayed and stayed, unlike my roommate's discarded girlfriends who would sometimes come here because they had no place else to go, as in the case of Parisian Mathilde, whose uncle brought her here with a pair of suitcases, saying, "She'll be staying only a week," and Mathilde with her melancholy timidity interjected, "And it's a very short week!" —No, the Skinz were nothing like that, for many of them had no way to pay rent; Yama, for instance, slept for a long time in his car out by Kezar until it got towed. Late at night you could walk down Lincoln Street along the border of the Park, and there were always cars and vans and buses parked there, their windows blackout-curtained by plastic, by stacked up boxes, by junky possessions, and sometimes you might see a light flash briefly inside one of those carcasses, like a firefly inside the mouth of a dead horse; but when decomposer bacteria such as towtrucks finally disposed of the charnel there was no place for the fireflies to flit unless they had someone like Dee to help them. She let them stay and kept cleaning up, making what had been the living room into the bedroom again, the bed up against the window. Even Yama's dog Rebel got fed while Yama was in jail.

When Dee first came out from West Virginia she thought the S.F. Skinz were a bunch of assholes, because Blue, Chuckles, Johnny Beast and Dagger were younger then, wilder, more punk-rock, and the punk rockers were going nowhere new. The Skinz hadn't split off from the punk rockers yet. But now they were family. Dee shaved her head because that was very clean.

"Awright," goes yellow-toothed Tully, shaking out the sofa cushions, "so we found that little ole plastic spider Marisa lost and was bitching about. And here's Hunter's extra weights."

Dee was cleaning out the closet. "Nova," she called to her daughter. "You want a little purse?"

"No, thank you," said Nova moodily. "But is there anything in it?"

"Just my old health card. It's expired."

Nova didn't answer. She was a big blonde whose mother had died, and whose father wouldn't have anything to do with her once she got a Mohawk. For awhile she lived in a squat in San Francisco. Finally Dee took her in. (Marisa would have liked to be taken in there, too.)

The Skinz all stood around kicking the floor. One of them had hair. — "Oh, I'm a skin, see?" said blond Cam. And he rolled up his sleeve to show a tattoo of a skin being crucified.

"Why did you let your hair grow, then?"

"Well, I had to. That's all. I'm a non-traditional skin."

"Hey, crucial!" said Hunter. "My old V-necked green rugby attire." He worked with cement, as you may remember, setting up rebar, digging and pouring.

"Well, you wanna go play football?" said a new guy, standing there holding a pair of Hunter's moldy old boots from the closet. Hunter had given them to him.

"No," Hunter said.

"Then we can go looking for that guy with the green beret again," the new guy said.

"I'll bet he took off," Dee said.

"That sonofabitch," the new guy said.

"He said he'd cut up my dog and feed it to me," Hunter said.

Dee kept throwing things out of the closet. She was the only person working. "You know," she said over her shoulder, "I was thinking about putting our firewood in the fireplace to make it look like it was really burning in there."

"That's hilarious," Hunter said.

"This one person I know," said Cam, "if you can believe it, she cut cardboard up and made it look like flames. Cardboard on top of wood in an empty fireplace."

"That's fuckin' hilarious," Hunter said.

"It's real cold in here," Dee said. "I've been cold all day."

At night in November it got so cold that you could see your breath, and the Skinz holed up in bars watching the Niners game. — "Fuckin' go for it!" they yelled. "Well, they took three last time, they took three this time, that's six. Forty fuckin' yards and they can't fuckin' make it; I feel like putting a foot up their fuckin' ass." — "Hey, don't sit there!" they yelled at the others. "Your hair's in the way." — And the tramps leaned forward wide-eyed at every pass, grinning cautiously in order not to get thrown back out for not

buying beer. —“That motherfucker!” yelled the Skinz. “He didn’t even get hurt!”—Some Dumbo laughed *Eee-heh-heh-heh-heh!*

Only Brandi was out with her son, trying to raise some money for dinner or drugs.—“C’mon, I gotta feed him,” she said. “Spare some change, twennyfive, fifty cents?”

“No.”

“Aw, look, you can do it,” goes a white lady. “I have four children, and I still gave her a dollar.”

“That’s right,” said Brandi eagerly. “Thank you very much, Ma’am.”

“How about all the money you already owe me?”

“I see you later,” she said brightly, moving away.

“Hey, you got any change?” went the tramps, leaning up against the streetwalls, and if you said no they dismissed you and went back to their talk: “Oh, he’s got a connection, all right; I mean, *mango!*”; and if you give them money then they take it and do the same thing; but if you say to them, “No, I’m broke, do you have any change for me?” then they get all worried and say, “Just eight cents, I tell you, I can’t give you anything,” and THEN they dismiss you and go back to their talk:—“Yeah, well, if he’s got mango how come his snort is *lousy like piss?*”—“Because he don’t get everything he wants like them skinheads, that’s why!”

And two Skinz went by, wearing grey canvas jackets, with American flags on the back. On the wall by the anarchist bookstore was written THE POWER & THE GLORY: U.S. SKINZ. The skinheads sat smoking and shaking their heads when the Niners lost a play. “We’re gonna get you, motherfucker,” they said. They could not believe that nothing was ever going to happen.

A police car sat parked at the curb. The cop walked nervously around it a few times, trying all the door handles and shining his flashlight in the window-cracks. As the night went on, the guitar-playing vagabonds packed up and left their doorway, bereft. A man came running by, his breath puffing like smoke signals, but he stopped short when he saw the police car, and strolled affectedly for half a block. Then he began to run again.

And the cop came back and laboriously double-unlocked his car. Then he locked it again. Skinheads went by in camouflage pants, jerking their heads back, puffing cigarettes between their lips. One of them came back, very dignified, with his bootwoman at his side. They ignored the police car, whereas the woman who walked by next turned to give it a fake salute. At the number seven stop, old people

*William T. Vollmann*

got on the late-night bus, shaking their heads slowly; the young strong ones shot their arms up against the ceiling rails in a Sieg Heil parade.

And in the November nights, the December nights, with the cold deep enough to make the insides of your ears hurt, the flags still flew high on Haight Street, the American flag whipping unconsoled beside Nova's Irish banner.

#### PREPARATIONS FOR DEATH IN IRELAND

Nova was an ice cream scooper at Bud's. She'd met Dee when Dee was a panhandling punk. Nova had panhandled with her, lived with her at the Golden Eagle on Broadway. In the afternoons, when the skinheads started coming back from work, rubbing their tired eyebrows, Nova sat in her room and listened to records. She didn't like going out because it was so boring.

"I have nothing to do with their sayings or nothings," said Nova sullenly. "They're just like my family. They're for American causes. I'm more for different causes, like I'm gonna join the I.R.A. But I don't care what causes my family are living in. Everybody's got like their own ways of thinking and expressions."

Strangles came in and sat there listening. He was a skinhead from way back who had his own band, Rich Kids on L.S.D. He worried about Nova sometimes.

"I relate to what's happening about America," said Nova. "It's too damn free. There are weird people running around. Niggers going after clean white girls and stuff. The way I see it, I'd like to go over to Ireland and be like a drummer girl. I'll live there and die there, that's all."

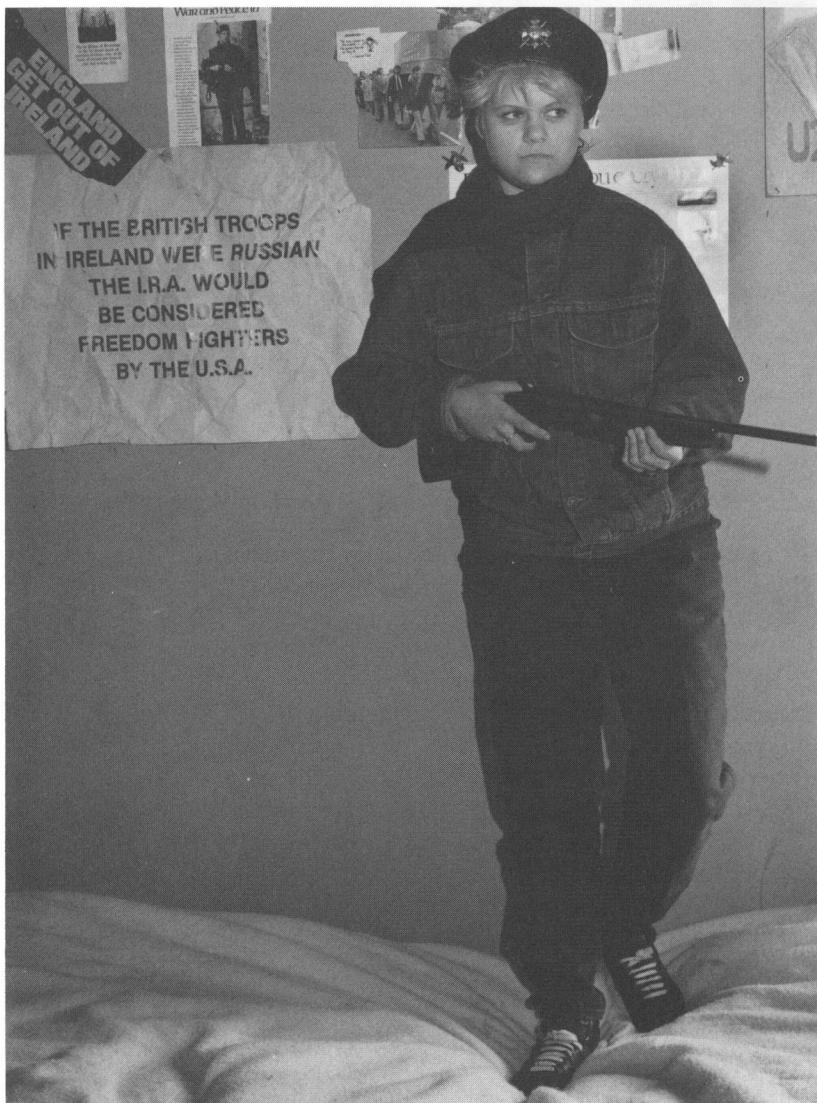
Strangles nodded. "I used to be politically stressed out, like you," he said. "You can take like years off your life."

"Maybe so," Nova said. "But I just don't wanna live here. I just don't wanna be here."

#### KING YAMA

"Rebel, you be cool," said Yama to his dog. He had a scary face.  
"What's this American Front thing anyway?"

"It's just a little thing we have going," Yama said. "We work for our



money, or try to, at least. I'm looking for a job right now. We're just proud young Republicans who like our President, who'd be happy to die for our country."

Yama moved quickly, smoothly.

"*You are an ugly bastard, don't you know that, Yama?*"

"Yeahp."

Yama had a scar on his nose. "The night I got this," he said, "I was panhandling from a nigger. I said, 'You got some green?', he said, 'Fuck you,' and I saw the blood coming down inside my brain and I said, 'You're gonna die now, nigger,' and his eyes went BLING! and he went running into Cala Foods, and this Cala Foods nigger came running up and said, 'I'm gonna fuck you up!', and I hit him three times but he didn't go down. He had a box-cutter with a triangular blade, and he slashed me right like *this!*"

"Well, hell, man," said Anthony, "that's why I wanna hit up south. I wanna go where there's lots of white people."

Yama didn't say anything. He had a way of suddenly glaring at you, as if you were walking along a deserted dangerous road at night and suddenly headlights came around a corner you couldn't even see and then flicked off and then a car ran you over in the dark.

"Yeah," said Anthony, "I made some money off some dudes who're looking for Blue. I said, yah, he's in Canada."

"You writin' this down?" said Yama. "Say Blue and Chuckles are in Canada. Say Blue and Chuckles are dead. Tell 'em that Blue and Chuckles died last summer, you got that? Chuckles died in the summer of 'eighty-five. He got stabbed in the summer of 'eighty-four. Yeah, he got stabbed.:"

Yama and Anthony sat at the kitchen table drinking Bud and looking at pictures of themselves. "There's Vern," Anthony said. "Vern from L.A. He's a dick. We went down, and he wouldn't even let us stay with him. Not a very skinhead thing to do."

"Fuck 'im," said Yama carelessly.

"Yeah, carve him."

Yama didn't say anything.

"There's Rebel when he was a puppy," said Anthony.

"Yeah," said Yama, "I had that picture when I was in jail."

"Boy," said Anthony, "I miss Dagger and Spike."

Yama didn't say anything.

"They're gonna have a kid, get married and stuff," Anthony sighed. "I hope it's a boy, 'cause otherwise it'll be a fuckin' ugly girl. Either way it'll grow up and respect America, man."

"A friend of mine just got out of jail," interrupted Yama, apparently addressing his knees. He preferred the company of his knees to that of many people. "Name of Cowboy. I hate that dude. He's a faggot. He was in San Bruno, too. The last time I saw him, he was in the faggot tier, the Polk Street tier, they call it, the he-shes. Every

time I saw him after I found out he's a faggot, I booted him, I fucked him up."

"All right," said Anthony respectfully. "And whatever happened to Butch?"

"He's doin' time in a brig on an aircraft carrier," Yama said.

"That's like the worst," Anthony said. "You get no window, man."

"Hey, Reb, c'mon," said Yama. "Don't kiss me. Just lookit me, dude."

The two Skinz concentrated on Rebel, playing with his ears, frowning and grinning at the dog. — "Rebel, you want some Bud?" they said. — Rebel raised his ears and looked at them wide-eyed. — "I'm tryin' to train Rebel to growl at niggers," Yama said. "At the bus stop today, I saw some, I took Reb by the ears, I said, 'Watch 'em!', he started growlin."

"Rebel's the best," said Anthony.

"This is my son right now," Yama said, pointing a forefinger at the big black dog. "The only person in the world right now."

"Rebel'll lock onto people when he's scared," said Anthony. "I fight the best when I'm scared. When I see some big bastard coming at me I just start to whale at him!"

Yama didn't say anything.

"Rebel's part Lab and part pit bull," said Anthony to the world in general.

Yama didn't say anything.

Anthony started polishing his boots. He had his arm all the way inside his left boot so that it looked like a black leather gauntlet. "I'm gonna polish 'em up real good and then when I kick someone in the face he'll see his own reflection," he explained, not for the first time. "It'll be the last thing they ever see!"

"Awright," said Yama. "America rules."

Encouraged, Anthony started to tell a story about Albert and some Skinz in Germany but Yama said, "You know Albert's story. You don't want no one to know what it is."

"What're you doin', lettin' your eyebrows grow out?" said Anthony quickly.

"Yeah," said Yama, "for winter. Girls love it, too."

"Right on. Girls love anything."

"I got a date on Lincoln Memorial, right by Lincoln's right leg, on July 4th. You don't know how many girls I've fucked by the reflecting pool."

"All right!" said Anthony. "Right on, Yama!" — But a month later

Anthony had crossed the Skinz. — “I gave him three chances,” said Dickie peaceably, leaning back on the double bed, “and he struck out. If he comes around this house I’ll kill him.” — “He’s just a *shit!*” yelled Dan-L. “He *fucked* with everyone! Tried to steal Rebel, too, after all that Dee did for him! He’s growing his hair now, I’ll tell you. I’d like to *beat his ass!*” — “Yep, she knows,” said Dickie with a wink at his Budweiser. On the wall a sticker read: DON’T BLAME ME—I VOTED FOR HITLER.

But as of yet this rupture had not occurred, Anthony was still skull-shaved, and Yama crushed his empty beer can in one hand, while the two skinheads sat smoking and watching Rebel fight another dog. I am wall-eyed. Yama, noticing this, turned to me and said, “Are you blind in one eye?” — “Just about,” I said. “I only see out of one eye at a time.” — “Oh, yeah?” he said with real gentleness. “Would you rather I didn’t talk about it?”\*

Yama grew up on a ranch near Santa Fe. Every night his Dad would put marbles in the freezer, and then roll them into his bed at 6:30 in the morning to wake him up. No matter where you rolled in bed, those marbles followed you to get you up. He was born left-handed. His Mom died when he was three, and his Dad came and took him to New Mexico and made him eat with his right hand. Even when Yama was a little kid, his Dad would say, “When you’re mad, you just let me know and we’ll take it out back.” Later Yama was a punk in New York. He inherited \$33,000.00, so he bought three cars and plenty of cocaine. Before he knew it, he started shooting up. One day he came into a long dark hall in a burned-out shell on the lower East Side. At the end of the hall was a curtain and three candles. It was five bucks for a C and ten bucks for a D. You set your money in front of the curtain and a nigger’s hand reached out and took it and gave you your drugs. Yama came up to the curtain to buy a D. There wasn’t a sound in the gutted hallway. Suddenly someone rushed up behind him and knocked him with a piece of rebar. Yama had a .22 in his trench coat. He squeezed the trigger twice, right into the kneecap, and ran into Tomkins Square and had a pizza. He ditched the gun. Later he got a hundred-dollar shotgun from another skinhead.

When Yama’s girlfriend told him she’d miscarried, he was sitting

---

\*In truth I often worry about my vision, and last night I dreamed that my blue eyes ran like bloodshot mercury-droplets across my forehead, and finally touched, joined, flowed together into a watery Cyclops eye.

with her in his car. He punched the car roof. Later he said he'd missed her chin by *that* much! He knew she'd miscarried on purpose 'cause she thought the kid was somebody's else's. He knew it was on purpose 'cause women could do that stuff whenever they wanted; after all, *he could come* whenever he wanted to come.

Yama was accepted for admission at San Bruno because on Halloween night he saw this pretty girl in a haltertop get hit by some guy, so Yama came running up and walloped the guy, because you don't hit women in America. The dude's friends came running out, but a guy ran up in front and said, "Hey, you don't fuck around with skinheads!" At that time Yama was going out with this girl Tania from Berlin, and he decided to drop her, so the night before he gave her the news, he and a couple other Skinz three-holed her. The next day, he told her she was fired. Then Tania snitched on him. The police were on top of him like stink on shit. In jail Yama made a gun out of a toilet paper tube. He packed it full of foil and wet toilet paper to close off one end. Then he ground up a bunch of match heads for gunpowder and sifted it into the tube. For shot he used broken aspirin. That gun could do some damage. Mainly he passed his sentence working out and reading, but he also learned from a little Chinaman how to kill people with his bare hands. Before you learn to kill somebody with your bare hands, you gotta go through all this other shit, but Yama went through it, all clean-cropped and dignified.

#### THE WHITE HOUSE

"Each tier is a country," Yama said. "2N, 2S, 3N, 3S. Like, 2N was the tier to be on. We'd have outside clearance, so we got rum and weed in there. You know them big three-liter Seven-Up bottles. They brought those in full of white rum. Being a trusty, you have the privilege of a private shower, and the TV's on twenty-four hours a day. A Cuban nigger had my job, and I took his job, don't matter how. There's lots of land out there; they have a farm crew. I fucked up the farm truck when I was stoned. But that was cool. Now, Dagger and I were in there together. We were cooks. We could sell a hundred packets of sugar for a dollar twenty. Or hamburgers, you'd steal one and fry it up and sneak it in your coat and take it to one of the upstairs tiers and sell it for a buck. I had my neighbors, a white neighbor here, a white neighbor there; I was in a white neigh-

borhood. That was the White House, we'd call it. In the morning I'd go, *Rring, rring, rring*, like I was on the phone, and somebody would say, What do you want, and I'd say, C'mon over and party!, and he'd go, O.K., click!

"Every tier, it says, MAJOR RULES, MINOR RULES. Major rules are like a page and a half; minor rules are shorter. Minor rules are like don't change the channel on the TV. You fight over that. Two people died over that when I was there. One guy got stabbed, another guy—this five-six nigger—got thrown off a table. The niggers'd put on a nigger TV show and the white boys and Mexicans'd go back and play cards. I used to come back between the niggers and watch TV. The niggers'd go, 'Skinhead, you got heart! We like you! The other white boys go back; you stay with us.' I'd say, 'You leave me alone, I'll leave you alone.' They *respected* me."

#### BACK TO THE PALACE

Yama didn't stay out of confinement very long. All his friends agreed that he was losing it. There was something the matter with him, but no one could tell what it was. Dickie and Dan-L tried to be his friends as long as they could. They could feel themselves losing touch with him, as if he were dead and his eyeballs were slowly filming over. One day Yama did a strange thing which I will not write about that got him put in the psycho cells for a long time. He may or may not be getting shock treatments. Visiting days are Wednesdays and Saturdays.

#### THE OLD LOOK AND THE NEW LOOK

From where I sat watching the Skinz from behind the blinds of an ice cream parlor, they strode by, scraping their coats and chains against the glass, not seeing me, I thought, their heads high, shoulders swinging like powerful shark-flippers; while other jobless sat scowling into their little cups of espresso, legs crossed under the white tables. Bootwomen went by, skulls sometimes turbaned in towels or in soft cloths, as if to protect those most sensitive bones from the world, the way that Muslim women veiled their faces. — The Skinz turned around suddenly and came back, staring into the glassfronts window by window until they found the spy; one of

them, the most unfriendly, having a lush blond skull-carpet instead of the usual grey; and he kicked the window meaningfully with his boot. — They leaned up against the grilles of liquor stores at night, making faces and glowering so hard that they wrinkled up the chains and snakes tattooed around their ears. They looked as if they were about to spit burning shit out of their mouths. Maybe Dickie had looked like that when he won the dogfood-eating contest. The other contestants hadn't been able to finish their first can, but Dickie was halfway through his second before he turned green and puked all over the video audience, spraying bile between his teeth to burn and stink on those screaming faces... The Skinz leaned up against fences, kicking the sidewalk with their boot-toes. — "I'll slap her face," a new one said, "and she can just do anything she fucking wants; we're not friends, I'm just *using* her." — Round about eleven o'clock the drifters started sitting on their backpacks in the doorways between Clayton and Belvedere, not panhandling anymore; and inside the ice cream parlor, where it was warm, only the reflections of Christmas tinsel and streetlights could be seen, unless one of the Park People came up against the windowpane to look in. Buses caught the light. — The skinheads lounged in the painted alleys yelling, showing themselves to all as demonic concentration camp traitors. Just as afterimages remain to closed eyes at the end of Halloween night—the transvestites, tigers, bears, vampires, military detachments, half-naked women in fishnets all compressing like coal in the eyes' darkness into half a dozen black-swaddled figures with gold plumes, advancing in silence—so the skinheads left behind them the picture of a single warrior in profile, a man with spiky scalp-grass pricking up proud on his skull, and a sullen all-seeing eye. That was the skinhead look.

There was a new look, too, a black-jacketed, black-bandanna'd, thin-legged look that might supplant the skinhead look someday; or maybe the bearded tramps would be fashionably imitated by folks who used shampoo and moustache wax; all that was certain was that the skinheads WOULD be supplanted someday; and no one would give a damn.

#### ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

And up by the anarchist bookstore, Ken the street photographer (who took these pictures, so you might as well know a little about

him) was still trying to get rid of his housemates Dahlia and Denise, who were getting on his nerves, so he ate everything they put in the refrigerator and he jumped up and down outside their room early in the morning, yelling, and he taunted the house dog with chains and iron bars until she barked *rrrrRRRAGGH! rrrRAUGHH!* so that the whole flat shook, and Ken threw the girls' mail against the door so that the dog snapped at it; and for weeks the girls laughed uncomfortably, pretending that Ken was joking, so Ken had to get a little more direct, like picking his teeth and rubbing his crotch when they talked to him, letting drool go down his chin, and when they said good morning he'd yell, "What the fuck do you mean, good morning? What's so good about it? Did I say it was a good morning?", and then the girls started ignoring Ken, and when they brought their friends home Ken would say, "What's your name? You're pretty! Can I take pictures of you NAKED? Will you fuck me right now on the floor?", and Denise would say, "Just leave him alone; he's obnoxious," and still Denise and Dahlia stayed, so Ken told Denise she made him want to puke, and every day he asked her if she'd found a place yet, and finally she got the message and started billing Ken when he ate her food, and going around all the time muttering, "*I want out!*", and one day they were both gone, were Dahlia and Denise, so quickly that Dahlia's father didn't even know they'd left, and so he called for Dahlia and Ken said, "Dahlia? Dahlia who?", and Dahlia's father goes, "Dahlia Ackerby," and Ken goes, "Oh, *that* Dahlia. This is her husband. Who the fuck are you?" — "WHAT!" goes Dahlia's father, and Ken goes, "Just kidding," and he could tell it was a long distance call so he dropped the phone for about ten minutes and had a beer and then came back and said, "Mr. Ackerby, you still there?" — "I'm still here," said Dahlia's father grimly, and at that Ken put down the phone for about fifteen minutes and had two more beers and then got Dahlia's number from the refrigerator door and read it off to her father and when her father said thank you Ken said, "You BET, pal!" and hung up, and then he and I went into the storeroom where one of Dahlia's suitcases was and we picked out some of Dahlia's nice clean pink underwear and sniffed it and threw it to the house dog and the house dog snapped at it and shook it so that it fluttered across her chops and the dog decided that Dahlia's underwear must be alive and made up her mind to kill the thing, whatever it was, so she snarled and bit and tore so many holes in Dahlia's underwear that Dahlia would have had to be an octopus to wear them; and the dog tore them some more until they were one long rag whose contours

made lots of side trips, and Ken and I laughed and laughed and Ken was revenged for his sufferings.

On the front of Ken's house the skinheads drew a tombstone with the words:

R.I.P.  
S.F. Skinz  
1981-1985

### Some of The Best Men Alive or Dead

and right by the door they wrote: S.F. SKINZ THEY WERE HERE  
THEY FUCKED YOUR WIMMIN THEY DRANK YOUR BEER.

### THREE FUTURES

We are lucky that the skinheads are not capable (as I dreamed last night) of hosting hundred-dollar-a-plate luncheons for their cause, every skin, every bootwoman in business tweed, clinking glasses with their dupes, old farts and young, remarking on the parsley garnish, taking long private walks with bankers until they have the capital to stand smoking one winter's night at the border, *Maschinengewehr* happy and warm under a blanket of gun grease, and the Skinz stand waiting to cross the ice of the Rubicon at dawn. I am grateful that they spend their energies spray-painting schematic skulls-and-bones on the back of Polytechnic High, writing RAGE and STORM TROOPS OF DEATH OR DIE and S.F. SKINZ BLOOD PURE. As to the future, either some one could arm and pay them (there are neo-Nazi camps in Germany and Austria, where boys practice being clean and orderly, with firearms training and mock executions to complete their education; there is a National Front in the U.K.; there is a Nazi printing company in Lincoln, Nebraska); or else they might get tired of being skinheads; or maybe the South of Market gang will carry out the threat which it has written by the freeway ramp: S.F. SKINZ WILL DIE SCREAMING. — There are plenty of people with that point of view: — when I was waiting for my bus tonight in Oakland, over at San Pablo and Yerba Buena, men were standing by the Bank Club Cafe drinking out of paper sacks, and I asked one of the blacks what he thought of the skinheads, and he said, "You want to see a knife that talks?", and I said sure, and he

*William T. Vollmann*

pulled out a knife and told it to say something, and it went SNICKK! and its blade switched out almost all the way to my chin.

#### WHAT THE SKINHEADS THOUGHT

"Dude, I want to talk to you about your story," screamed Bootwoman Marisa very rapidly, "because it fucking sucks!" — "Well," said Bootwoman Dan-L, "my first reaction wasn't too positive. You need a lot of work with your grammar. You have a lot of run-on sentences." — "She knows," said Dickie, lighting up his bong. "She went to college." — As for Ice, he buttonholed Ken in private. "I don't really know this guy," he said. "But he seems too poetic. I can talk to you; you're levelheaded. I've read parts of this story, and I think it should be cut, maybe to about a page." Dagger, Spike, Dee, Hunter, Nova and of course Yama had left town.

August 1985 – February 1986