# 2



### money little dow n a

## by doug milam

Because it's not the singer, it's the song, for only what's written can hold out long.

little money down. Speak too soon with sudden authority in a stab at power.... In my head the dark blue sky is only made stronger by swimming. I'm paddling in inkward waters and something, perhaps a mere hint, a premonitory urge, is writing itself around my legs. The water is temperate but I feel it shot from the splash of keeping afloat.

How I got here should be more than one's surmise. Night is coming down as shades on the setting sun, and all I know of purpose at this moment is that I must climb up the deck ladder and enter the backlit cabin.

In the span of a solo I'm standing now on the wet wood, pitted from years of winded salt and sun and buckled with a swash of gasoline, kerosene, whatever is refined enough for propellers to ax through ocean. The sounds of my footing are dimmed by waves and slick dread, yes, dread now at the sight of an arm curved to a point and going down, down...

I'm struck dumb by the thought of real estate and mundane reason mixing with pleasure, and this tropical outing has, I see it now, brought an innocent deal into the making. The pitch: a small amount of time and a personalized tour of the farm of your dreams, a stretch of rolling blue guaranteed with a little money down splashed around the throat.

Voices overhead and voices underhand, my cup runneth over warmly as arteries...as veins blue-black with the bruise of fruition, recalling a mine hot for gold.

**those turbans,**" Odi began. "Why do they wear diapers?" He waited for the requisite I don't know, why?

Our pause, he leaned into the shade. "Cause they got shit for brains."

I forced a chuckle as my brown brother laughed outright.

Odi was on a roll, now. "Why do they have the towel-head up here," pointing to a thinning head, "a dot here," between his nar"Those turbans, they just wave 'em through. Who knows what they've got stuffed up there?"

So this was shop talk.

Odi wasn't done walking to his truck, that ambulatory excitement picking up. He turned into the sun, an encore. "What's the difference between an East Indian woman and a hockey player?"

"What?" my coworker offered.

"A hockey player showers after three periods."

My eyes rose to the sun, though my estimation of Odi-beyond white, he's transparent-sunk like lead shot into a lake. And I asked within if this temp job could be permanent. Did Virgil guide Dante through shit like this? Was Dante ever a temp for a Christian-run quarry?

"See ya, Odi," my coworker said, knowing that Odi needed to go back to his north border town, his dry-cleaning business, his crabby old customers and his underpaid blondonly college girls just getting acquainted with finger-pointing and spots that don't come clean.

I was back in the warehouse after Odi left, sizing up some boxes, when my brown coworker wheeled the dolly past and said, "Someone's a little racist."

"Yeah," I muttered.

I looked down at my newly-calloused hands. I wondered if they would now better form a fist or two-to give, somehow, more credence to the blows hooking in my right mind, where the aesthetic lies.

As it was a half day, after lunch I walked home along the gravel shoulder of an industrial road. The company was moving shipping down to California, thinking it would save money, flow-charting that corridor migrant workers were just worthy as pennies above the wages of sin.

Here I was working with people who were getting the mining shaft, where the body turns a black that is not beautiful,

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**Dig this:** that gal standing behind you in the bus line might well be picking your pocket. Herein find Doug Milam's "A Little Money Down," a brilliantly discursive narrative portrait of the joy and depravity of the criminal mind. Milam's an old Chicago hand, frequent contributor to these pages (see the2ndhand.com for more of his work), and lives and writes in Bellingham, WA. We cannot recommend more highly his Still the Confusion chapbook of stories, available via his site: futuristick.org.

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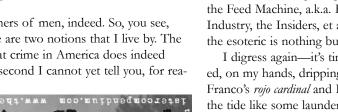
WRITERS: send prose submissions (2,500 words or less Web, 5,000 print) to THE2NDHAND, c/o Todd Dills, 1827 1st Ave. N #301, Birmingham AL 35203 (todd@the2ndhand.com) or to Jeb Gleason-Allured at jeb@the2ndhand.com. THE2NDHAND is editors Todd Dills, Jeb Gleason-Allured and C.T. Ballentine, resident artist Rob Funderburk, FAQ editor Mickey Hess, and the elusively pragmatic janitor R. Beady. Lit apes unite.

where the air is barely given over to mercy for canaries who are a fat cat's play.

Another coworker, Octavio, had moved up from San Jose, where he could no longer afford the \$1,200 two-job, two-bedroom apartment for himself and his two young daughters. He worked with us two days before the company asked the temp agency to recall him. His English was fine enough to work with, I thought, but rumor had it otherwise. I passed him on the way home; he was driving exactly the speed limit.

And there was Phil, prouder than most, escaping to Alaska to work on a fishing boat. He couldn't manage the upkeep of his aging car and was going to sell it for scrap before taking the ferry up the Inside Passage, "from where I'll hitch to Homer and hope for the best." I asked him if he'd been hired yet. "Nope. But I've got to do something. Don't even fish. Anyway, this week's worth'll keep me fit." He slapped his huge belly and then rubbed it like a magic lamp. Wishes and spirits, hard about the bow, gold and liquor and the stern meeting of finality: this could be it, a monument to last rites, a last meal before being taught how to fish for a lifetime.

e fishers of men, indeed. So, you see, Dethere are two notions that I live by The first is that crime in America does indeed pay. The second I cannot yet tell you, for rea-



sons of delicacy unbecoming a criminal (unless you believe none have taste and for that I can assure you a mind's swift death). But I digress into some bit of "acquired madness" here on this tropical isle sipping my gin and juice, laid back, with my mind on my money and my money on sampling the goods. Avec straw? you may ask, or licked fingertip gingerly placed into some blanco powder? Nothing free-traded, nothing gained/nothing stolen, nothing...

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no.

I have the luxury to tell you that I was once a safe cracker of the get-high-tech variety, so clean and anonymous that the only reason for my capture lies in a matter of some complexity, requiring jargon which would surely fail to explain to the fettered how I once became one of you: bound, chained, scared of making leaps beyond the rules for living.

A hint will tell you that I was a kind of mitnick, whom the media labeled ever so ignorantly a "hacker," when that honorable term merely implies one who mantles and dismantles for the sake of curiosity, investigation. He writes a book about his reformation from catholic principles, cuts a deal with the Feed Machine, a.k.a. Hollywood, the Industry, the Insiders, et al, whose idea of the esoteric is nothing but superficial.

I digress again-it's time, nothing expected, on my hands, dripping down, Francisco Franco's rojo cardinal and I get lost in turning the tide like some laundering come to mind. In this veneered mental paradise I am supposed to convert iron to gold, bars to bullion-at least that's what the contract is for. It's a hit to top off the charts for the one whose Second Marketing we await.

rowing eyes, "and no teeth?" He rubbed his upper lip, his forefinger stiff as a salute.

Our pause again.

"This is the pull-start," at the head, a few strands of grey matter, "this is the pushstart," going myopic, "and this is the kickstart," indicating the root of his canal that carries his horseload-he whinnied gleefully, shuffling in his leather loafers and argyles, the khakis and madras long out of India, dry-cleaned and shopped out of sweat.

I shook my head and exhaled in embarrassment as my brown coworker laughed upward, head rising with the tide, checking my reaction.

We had been talking real estate, development, stagnation, minimum wage. Sixtyeight percent of the schoolkids are on assisted lunches. The border ain't what it used to be. Odi wanted to know why more profiling wasn't being done.



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Columbia 🖉 COLLEGE CHICAGO So I am to endure unto death do us part two the second course of eye of the needle through which Camelot can pass as a locus swarm of civil fights angling for the crops cut with a line drawn in the sand. Tap it, well well well what have we here, gasoline? Yea out of the mouths of bombs on TV comes the video you cannot veto, no matter how vacuous it's brashly devoid of signifying nothing.

I've put the shell to my ear. The way the tale is to be told: it's the ocean ... missing the blood. the salt...missing the vein.

the crash of the needle and I'm

out

Waking up, not for the first time, with sand in my stomach like having swallowed stones to make up for a meal long missing, and it's mutual, this, this wretched feeling, for surely the earth hates my guts as

much. I can no longer afford to be cavalier, I tell myself, no longer can afford la cabana coca and can certainly no longer afford a Coke and a smile. But redemption for my supposed crimes is a book deal and of course out of that, a movie, or a movie pilot, I'm not quite sure how it works. I know at least a movie target is better than a sitting duck.

But I'm getting too cocky, aren't I. An ungrateful cur...on the contrary, ever so very grateful for the System and the Manwho knew it could work like this!

Out of sight, it's said, out of my mind, but I'm always aware of Him and how He betrayed me! At least this is salvation, on second notion, for I know He died for His own sins, not for mine.

Cut. U-Cut. U-Take. U-Piss. The trees wait at a lamb's crossing to be hacked into ornaments. I'm barred by internal conditioning: I don't belong in the woods. We don't. That is, a trail has to be laid before we can wander in. Some sign has to be posted. Permanent markers. The black felt of tip, tip, tip. My toes a gratuity, the balancing act of a hint of evolution. "Salmon restoration habitat" is but another transliteration of "keep out," a favor done, for surely the animals forgive. The decorum we must feel: the sins of the fathers.

Rushing out by bike to catch the \$7.16/hour train, a charity hooked on time for the unprogrammed indigent. I have no trade. There is no exchange where heaven matters. My balls are bursting with thorns; rage is my month of May. The gallows pole is a stout nail driven into Mother from which Her children are hung.

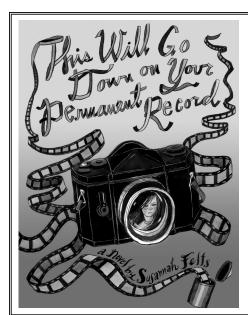
The counter is played with decrees I have to sign. I am to bow before the faceless and the legalese. I am to denounce that I am. I stand the world opposite of Moses. I borrow the guise of the willing. I am reduced to hunting and gathering the crumbs of pity. A service industry churning to butter the milk of dust gone rancid.

A man, having filled out forms for which the ether is ashamed. Yes, a man now, cushioned by the bottom line. My word is no matter. There's a science to this, a statistic. I've been numbered for camp concentration, and this time I wear it inside, a tattoo on the spleen, vacuumed from Hoover's bordello. My security is guaranteed to be social, gift of the gab, bar-coded tender. My word is nothing in the encyclotron of sublight particulars built for second-splitting speed.

I am to be proved to be drug-free. There is a science to this, a ballistic. In an arc before I can finish my soul is to be weighed by a chain reaction. Did I exorcise the demons? Theatro-hydro-cannibals. Backstage I am stripped of all belongings. Humiliation, humiliation. An arc in a last supper cup like an acetylene torch to be passed. Stones of the guilty. St. Peter-in-Chains.

- "Did you go?"
- "No, I came."

A blank-check stare, cashed, ashen. This is the screen that lets the smoke through. I disappear with a cough of oxytocin, the horof love, so-called. My bladder is not so perverse. It wants out. But I can't go back; it's verboten for me to flush. I shudder, close my eyes up in blinds to nod nigh ocean...



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Give me a break. Give me a break. Break off a piece of that. What would you do for a Klondike bar of gold? Breakfast of champions. Silly rabbit, tricks are for kids. They're grrreat! Have you had your break today? Smile. We love to see you smile. Yo quiero.

Kills bugs dead. Because you're worth it. It floats! The happiest place on Earth. Doctors recommend Phillip Morris. You've come a long way, baby. Fly the friendly skies. We love to fly and it shows. Drivers wanted. Like a rock. The ultimate driving machine,

Sometimes you feel like a nut; sometimes you don't. It brings good things to life.

An army of one. Be all you can be. Only you can prevent forest fires. Take a bite out of crime. This is your brain. This is your brain on TM. Any questions?

Yes, he has a few. One of them is why not local? He's starting to realize that he's not always right. At 30 that sounds "late," perhaps, but what he means is that he's starting to realize that he is never right. It's always the others who are right: the girlfriends, the parents, the employers, the counselors...including the used-bookstore owners who play alt.country, or whatever he calls it, all the time, and all the while he is depressed as all hell, or all get-out, as they say around here. He takes a day to check out, no fun intended, the southern branch of the local library. He wants some exotic-sounding CD or book on linguistics or something, for fuck's sake, to take his mind off his unemployment, this seasonally affected disorder marked by completely grey ceilings past which he can't seem anymore. He can no longer imagine what was once azure, or turquoise, or remotely...he can no longer come up with a description, having been so low for so long. He's a local author who has spied the one used bookstore on previous trips near the southern branch, the woodglass structure over there on 12th Street. He wants to know if they'll stock his title, being a local store, not a chain, although not having been there before he doesn't know much about the

"The dragon's body was like a snake's, but with fins spiking off its back. It had several arches, little bridges you could crawl beneath and tuck yourself under. Tile mosaics formed its skin: zebra and lion, mermaid astronaut, sun and moon. In its gaping mouth was a water fountain that hadn't worked since, I don't know, 1973. / Other than the dragon, there wasn' much to the park-brown grass, one somber steel jungle gym, those old swings with their rusted chains and black rubber seat that got too hot in the sun, some splintery benches, and a picnic table where homeless guys sometimes crashed at night. Or used to, I heard, until the older kids started coming and running them off. Strength in numbers, I guess. / My ex-boyfriend Josh refused to come up here with me. I said I was curious, and anyway, it was so close—a ten-minute walk from the house. He said it was full of burnouts and freaks. I said so what. / These conversations never went anywhere. We never went anywhere. Other stuff happened....

-from This Will Go Down on Your Permanent Record, a novel by Susannah Felts (Featherproof Books, 2008), longtime contibutor to THE2NDHAND and, full disclosure, THE2NDHAND editor Todd Dills's wife. This is her first novel. Watch for the book's release parties in Birmingham Feb 28 and Chicago March 30. See the2ndhand.com for more on the events, and to order the book visit featherproof.com.

bookstore, who runs it, if the owner mans the register like a man.

He parks in front and looks over the crated dollar books outside. Nothing of much interest. Upgrading to Windows 95, no. Danielle Steele, hell no.

He goes to open the door and notices a small poster of text affixed to a side window, headlined WHY LOCAL? The print's too fine from this angle but he surmises that it recommends buying local meats, timber, music, books. Sure, books. Why not books?

He's impressed with the massive shelving, this floor-to-ceiling arrangement of spines.

He looks over some paperback titles. Eh, Hesse, got that. DeLillo, not now.

He thinks this is probably a good time. He's a bit nervous, after all.

That must be the owner over there, the old man holding a stack, behind the register.

He walks over, taps the counter, clears his throat.

"I was wondering, would you stock a local author-"

The owner turns an ear to make sure he's hearing this right.

"----one not with a big house, uh, self-published."

The owner knows where this is going, so he keeps his head turned. "Our focus is on used books."

"Oh right, common knowledge." He taps the counter again. "This is my first time here," and then he walks away. He peruses the aisles, going from Kerouac to Miller and back to Krleza, Burroughs. The growth of a grudge... Armistead Maupin holds no interest for him. Virginia Woolf... I can't handle that now, it's not suicide I'm after.

He makes his way to poetry and lit. crit. Ah, \$7.95 for this yellowed stuff, no thanks. Pricey shit, I know the type, he thinks: too cheap to buy new and too much of a cocksucker to be decent.

He descends the middle stairwell to the lower floor. Jesus, more fucking Son Volt? At this volume?

He's thinking Snow Crash by Neal Stephenson, maybe, but all he sees among the unalphabetized blocks of paperbacks are Dale Brown and Jonathan Kellerman novels.

He passes these and gazes around for something with bite, even blood. But Stephen King, too Hollywood. Onto other names he's never heard of. Christ, who can find anything here? Little organization, no labels, what a lazy ass.

Step one, annunciation. "You want to know what my favorite text is?! Well I'll tell vou!"

"I, I don't know what happened. The lights are out" comes the textbook reply.

Step two, recitation. "It's like this! Buddy, she's not for sale / neither by eyes / nor by drinks / nor by your jewels / your so-called tales'!"

"I think the circuit broke. Will you stop please?"

Step three, supplication. "And I will lower my voice to request of you Key Points for Management Trainees and Aspirants, a Prolegomena."

"That doesn't sound familiar, sorry." He steps on four and his eyes gather light from above. "Unhandled, non-mandated enthusiasm from lower orders, i.e., staff below you in the pay scale, can be troublesome in that it often forces a guilt complex upon you, that you should be doing more work than is guaranteed by your position."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Step five, explication. "Exhibit confraternity with fellow club members by dropping in during afternoon/evening hours, especially when line workers are busy and your visible relaxation can be readily observed and envied."

Step six, exhortation. "When one of the lower orders approaches your desk with a suggestion for improving efficiency, glower at them to instill immediate doubt and a modicum of fear, then brush off their concerns with mention that for the coming weekend IT is on call to serve the machines." The light increases. "Fomenting unrest in China to counter that country's growing economic clout should be kept in the back of your mind for now, unless you want a position at Langley, or at Rand." A window now, and the floor is reached. He turns an aisle and sees the owner waiting on the phone. The owner holds up a finger in salute to one minute of waiting, just one, and points to the front door's pane of ashen-drop glass where twilight bleeds.

He approaches the register of calculation and nods, bringing out from behind him the .22 automatic he's needed for years.

He draws a line of sight to where power comes from and fires a shout into the owner's shoulder, knocking him bloody well back into a sliding shelf.

Gather a storm and call in the rainbows, there're shells for us to 'ear. "See the sounds like the ocean so pacific wherever we are." The surf is blue and black in the remanded night where bruises never cease and the froth they think the waves never come back in size of their own surge whence entrenched in cold cold reasons.

nd sirens wail. ATTENTION!! "NO **A**EXPERIENCE NECESSARY" LIKE TO SLAM MOUNTAIN DEW? DO YOU LIKE DORITOS? NEED EXCITEMENT IN

Hardbacks, hmm. More of the same shit. I bet he doesn't have any Chomsky. Probably sneers at Chomsky, the asshole.

He eventually finds poly-sci. Arendt, totalitarianism, interesting. Well-preserved, but I'm not paying eight bucks.

No Chomsky. Figures.

He heads back to sci-fi, feeling hunger pangs like a knife to the gut. Days of Bitter Strength by David Wingrove. Cool cover. Book VII, it says. Naturally Book I is nowhere to be found.

He makes his way over to crime. A switch, he finds a switch.

Trips the circuit breaker. Hand in the small of his back, checks the grip.

Ah, yes...crime.

Delicious, methodical crime.

"It's darker than coal tar in here!" he yells to floor above, pointing at his heart unseen. He fumbles to the stairs with memory lit with pain.

"Because they are often uprooted, weeds such as Lila in Accounting don't mind being fired, right?!"

The owner groans with such pain as he has never heard, and calls upon Christ his Lord and Savior.

He fires another shout—""Buddy she's not for sale'!"-into the owner's sacred heart-----he shouts again into the spine of the man now destroyed-"nor by drinks"!"-he raises a shout to what must be plastered heaven, a bottle of amber on the high corner sill-""nor by your jewels'!"-and it splashes around the throat in perfect crested fall-"your jewels for sales," he murmurs, "your so-called tales."

Later on, with the world closing in to darkness, he tires a stroll, recalling thoughts that Gossip is the virus with happy hosts, that If the lunch is free so is the advice, that Being married is like grade school: there's much to learn and you can't wait for recess.

Next up: Chicago's Lauren Pretnar, May '08