

Yadda, Yadda, Yaddo

by Dan Burt

I arrived at Yaddo, the prestigious artists' retreat, in the summer of 1941. With America's "day that will live in infamy" several months away, my own day of infamy began the second morning of my residency. That was when I saw her frolicking about the grounds, her gorgeously gawky six-foot body clothed in dungarees and a man's white shirt, her brown pageboy hair swaying about as she clumsily tackled Katherine Anne Porter to the dewy grass. So this was Lula Carson McCullers, the delectable wunderkind whose first novel, published when she was twenty-three, had been a critical and financial success. I decided I must have her and she must have me. I introduced myself to her later that night as we sat down to dinner at the mansion. My sweet Lula scampered to a vacant seat beside Katherine while I gently shoved Newt Arvin to the floor to procure the chair next to my beloved.

I tried to engage the lovely Lula in some small talk, but she was so shy and demure she could not bring herself to even look at me for fear of falling deeply and hopelessly in love. She sat staring at Katherine, hiding from me the love and admiration in her gaze. Oh, but I see, Carson, my sweet Lula C. I see.

Suddenly my precious Lula turned her soft, doe-eyed glare to me after Katherine slapped Lula's face around in my direction. The contempt in Lula's eyes only masked the awe and arousal she felt for me. Finally, my lover spoke. "What are you doing here?"

At last we began a sensual dialogue; we were two literary lovers discussing the craft with an undercurrent of sexual tension.

I told my sweet Lula about the writing project I was developing: an American alternative to the fortune cookie. I told her about the homilies I wrote for the cookies, prescient platitudes so profound and deep with wisdom as to inspire epiphanies with each succinct adage. Creatively inspired adages such as:

- Never take the finer things of life for granted; take them for yourself and don't get caught.

- Not only do railroad conductors learn by on-the-job “training,” so do butchers.
- The next time you see a small Boston terrier dressed as a clown, vigorously pedaling a blue tricycle, remember to ask yourself, “What the hell?”

The only problem was developing a technique for incasing the truisms in the cookie. I wanted to use the American chocolate chip cookie, but I did not know how to bake a hollow cookie with the bromide inside. Placing the homily in the cookie dough and baking didn't work. I had tried typing the truisms on miniature flags and planting them in the cookies, but most of the cookies crumbled. I had then experimented with biscuits, but whoever heard of a fortune biscuit? The miniature flags caused another problem: the prescient platitudes were visible. Where was the mystery and anticipation in that?

I had then returned to the chocolate chip cookie, stapling the adages face down on the back of each tasty morsel. The stapling technique had fared better (especially using small staples and a gentle touch), but I still had work to do to perfect my craft. Later, after my stay at Yaddo, I would experiment with edible glues, but have the unfortunate experience of gluing my tongue to the roof of my mouth, a situation not remedied for several months. Then there would be the misguided experimentation with suppositories.

But on this magical night, my dear Lula listened to me with rapt interest and half-closed eyes, yawning constantly to balance the pressure inside her dainty ears. Though I asked my true love what she was creating, she was mischievously reticent and a tad intimidated to expound on her work, knowing that she was conversing with a literary equal.

In an effort to lighten the sexually intense atmosphere that surrounded us like a swarm of excited electric eels, I decided to try a bit of humor. If the heart is a lonely hunter, I asked my lovely Lula, what is the spleen? She laughed quietly and good-naturedly bashed me on the head with her metal thermos of sherry tea.

I awoke nineteen hours later, nude, in bed with Christopher Isherwood and W. H. Auden. My head ached as Chris gently caressed my blood-matted hair and offered a friendly ear for my laments. She's a feisty one, Chris said. I agreed. I decided not to resist Lula's attraction for me any longer, especially after Chris told me that Carson had referred to me adoringly as "that impotent pervert." Oh, the games lovers play! But I'll only be an impotent pervert for you, Carson, my sweet. I thought about my love Lula while Chris continued to caress and stroke other parts of my yearning body until I passed out from the excruciating pain in my skull.

After I recovered through the care and caresses of Chris and Wystan Hugh, Carson and I continued to play the games of lovers, games only played by lovers of a budding love. I would impishly sneak up behind her and whisper, "Lula, Lula, Lula." She would seductively scrunch up her shoulders to her ears, welcoming my overtures of endearing love. Then, without turning around, she would playfully dash off with amazing speed, tempting me to give chase. After running and hunting for my nimble little squirrel for a couple of hours (or more), I would drag myself back to my room to recover from exhaustion and pursue my work.

The rest of my time at Yaddo was spent practicing and developing my art and my craft. My sweet Carson and I would sometimes rendezvous, always by accident. In those rare moments of chance meetings, my Lula would see me approaching and gingerly hurdle the shrubbery and take off to the woods. Oh, but I know that game well, my love. I'll save my energy for the inevitable consummation, I would sing out to the rapidly retreating erotic figure that was my Lula.

Sadly, it was not meant to be. Our art and craft demanded unwavering dedication and thus brought an end to Lula's dream of our literary romance. Sometimes I wonder if the sacrifice was too substantial for the considerable literary renown I enjoy today.

