

The Great San Francisco Poetry Wars, 14

by Jerry Ratch

That night we went out to shoot some pool at the pool hall over on Durant Avenue, which was above a bar called Kip's. Rotten Bobby walked in with his own damn pool cue, which came broken down in two pieces. He carried it in a narrow felt-lined carrying case with his initials embroidered on the side, not his old initials, but his new ones: *R.B.* written in a fancy script. This guy meant business. This monogram was fairly new since he had only recently adopted the name Rotten Bobby. He was obviously proud of his new adopted name, as if he were a convert to a religion like the Hari Krishnas or something. Though no one saw him singing and dancing up Telegraph Avenue, like the actual Hari Krishnas had taken to doing lately, proselytizing, handing out pamphlets, trying to brain-wash young girls like Creamcheese into coming back to their temple, shedding their street clothes for that yellow and maroon garb they wore, and leaving their money and credit cards and inheritance behind, and dancing out in a long chain of mystical believers celebrating the spirit of singing and dancing as they proceeded up the street toward the campus at Berkeley. The Hari Krishna temple was situated on Stuart Street, conveniently just off Telegraph. You could practically piss downwind and hit the gates to the campus from there. Von Rotten, unlike this loosely organized gang, made sure he himself controlled who was going to be let into his own circle of believers, because poetry was a serious business, not to be trifled with by the likes of some non-bible thumping gang of puffery, into ecstasy and laughter. Hmph!

When Rotten Bobby pulled out his pool cue and began tightening the two pieces of the stick together, he suddenly developed a certain beady-eyed look, the look of, well, a pool-shark!

There's no other way to describe that look. It had its own atmosphere. And he began walking around all sides of the pool table, running the pool cue through a loop formed by his fingers, sizing things up from every imaginable angle. And at present there were only two balls on the table, the white cue ball, and the orange one with the number 5 on it. All of a sudden he leaned over and with a loud pop, shot the 5-ball against a cushion, and the ball hopped back and sank out of sight into the side pocket nearest him. Greg and I looked at each other. Warren Jeffries was there too, and Creamcheese, and Kent tagging along behind her with his tongue hanging out like the lapping little puppy-dog he was. When Rotten Bobby handed the pool cue to Creamcheese, putting the blue 2-ball up for her to shoot at, she stroked the cue once or twice and her nipple popped right out of her loose top. She looked down at it and seemed to shrug. Rotten Bobby walked around behind her and put his arms around her from behind, in order to instruct her how to stroke the pool cue. We could see him nudging her exposed nipple with the back of his wrist, for God's sake. And I have to admit I immediately grew lonesome for lovely Penny, the Helen of our poetry world, and could only think about those lovely nipples of hers during the rest of the beer-sotted evening, how they wobbled when she moved.

By the time we left that pool hall, wavering drunkenly down the sidewalk, I went right past Greg's hotel on Telegraph Avenue. I was heading back toward my old room at Penny's house. I grew determined to tell her I was in love and couldn't live without her anymore. As I walked south along Telegraph Avenue, it began to sprinkle huge warm raindrops on my face. Or I was crying softly to myself. Honestly, I could not tell anymore. I only knew that my heart was not in my life as I was presently living it. I needed the breasts of my Helen in my mouth forever, or I was going to die. Die! Ah, the life of a poet! I couldn't go on living like this. Why should I go on living like this? Why? Whatever!

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It didn't help that I was now writing volumes of patently Foul Language Poetry either. I was getting downright bored with the stuff, to tell you the truth. I got so I could do it in my sleep. I wrote slim little volumes of thin little verse by shaving down the edges of Ezra Pound's Cantos. It was so easy, it made me sick. I went to the doctor one day and ended up writing three poems based on the label of a pill bottle. I could write tomes off a public telephone book. And graffiti, I mean c'mon, they were practically giving this stuff away out there. It was like I had people writing for me now! I was like an executive poet, just taking down words out there from all of existence. It was endless. I wrote stuff on my lunch breaks. I wrote stuff while eating meals. I never stopped to question why, or what this stuff was. I just cranked it out like a word junkie all hopped up on the Foul Language Movement.

How would my pretty little upright Penny react to all this? Well, I'm afraid I already knew in my heart. She would not like it. She would accuse me of having sold out to the worst bunch of poetry thugs that ever fell to earth, or were pulled up to earth from whatever spider hole they crawled out of. But I had to see her, no matter what she said or thought. I had to prevent Von Rotten from having sex with the love of my life, and from abusing her, and from keeping her enslaved. Unless she liked that sort of thing, who knows? Some people can get into some pretty kinky stuff, and even seem to enjoy it. But I would find out more about that when the time came.

So I went up the creaking stairs at Marie's house to my old room, right next to Penny's. *Wait!* I thought. *What happened to Teddy? Poor Teddy? Why isn't he barking his ass off? Oh, crap, poor Marie. Teddy was all she had left!* I let myself in, because I knew Steve wasn't back yet from carousing at Greg's flophouse hotel room. They would be partying till late. I put my ear up against the wall, Penny's wall, and they were in there. I could hear that constant whiny mosquito voice of Von Rotten. He was lecturing her about something, of course. Wasn't he always lecturing somebody about

something? Yes, of course, because he already knew everything about everything there was to know, so how could he help himself? Tell me!

Suddenly I got a real fright. *Von Rotten ate Teddy!*

Almost as quickly I thought, *No! Get serious!*

Well, I reasoned again, I know he's been to Thailand. Von Rotten ate the damned dog!

Poor Marie. Poor Teddy!

Then I thought — I swore! — I could see right through the wall. Probably the booze, or a little toke I'd taken off a joint being passed around at the pool hall earlier. I envisioned Von Rotten twisting Penny's arm back behind her. He had her bent over a table. I could see those tits pooled upon the table as they rubbed back and forth with their rocking motion. Von Rotten was inside her, and I could see it all clearly in my mind. Then the scene vanished just as quickly, vaporized before my eyes, and was gone, and all I heard was his high whining mosquito voice complaining and lecturing as it was bound to do on into the vast future of the rotten underbelly of this new conventionalism they called Foul Language poetry. And I was having flash-forwards, instead of flashbacks. I was seeing the future, and it wasn't a pretty sight. I had to go in there and pull my Penny out from under the dead weight of the future. And then the best thing of all happened. I heard Penny's door slam shut and the creaking on the stairs of someone heading down. I waited to see if Marie's dog would start barking. Yes, there it was! Thank God for Teddy! Teddy was alive after all, and what's more he knew who he should be barking at. Then the front door slammed shut and there was silence.

I had to know if Penny was left in her room, and I opened my door and stepped out into the hall. The light was on in her room. I could see it spreading out from under her door. I gripped my stomach with both hands, feeling suddenly sick. But I raised my hand and knocked on her door.

I heard that faint, familiar breathy voice.

"Von, go away. I told you the absolute truth. I'm in love with somebody else. Nothing's going to change that fact."

My heart leapt into my mouth. I knocked ever so slightly again.

"Go away, Von. I'm in love with him and there's nothing you can do about it."

"Penny? It's me, Philip. Let me in."

"Philip? Go away. He'll kill you."

"Penny, please, let me in. I love you, Penny. I don't care if he kills me. I can't live without you anymore. Please?"

And that was when the door knob began to twist slowly. Then the door swung open. And there she stood, stark naked, with those lovely nipples that would be my un-doing. Our Helen of the poetry world, whom I had come to lust after, and adore. I stood dripping with my own sweat, and our love-making hadn't even begun yet. She was so pretty that I felt new-born in front of her. I felt foolish for ever having touched another woman. She was like life to me, life in the biggest sense. She would bear my children if I had to die to get there. I could see the milk of the future gathering in her nipples, and all I wanted to do was pull the infinite noodle out of her center when she came. In my ears I could already hear her moaning. And I could hear myself renouncing all the Foul Language gibberish I'd ever written. I would go back to the pure essence of my own writing, my own poetry. The Puppet X of my being. And Puppet Y, and Puppet Z, if need be. With Penny I could accomplish anything and everything life held in store for us. I had a clear view of the future, and it was bright. It held the brightness of a thousand suns.

But as I held out my arms to embrace her, she raised the palm of her hand and said, "Not so fast, Buster. There's something you should know...I'm... I'm pregnant."

"*Whoa!*" I said, before I knew what I was saying. And my face must have said everything. My stupid face, my damned stupid face! What on earth was wrong with me?

"*Whoa?* All you can say is *Whoa?*"

"Well, you took me by surprise." My heart was racing inside my shirt. "I mean, how did that happen?"

"How did it happen? Are you even aware where your cock has been?"

"No, Penny, I mean, I thought you were taking pills or something."

"Aren't you even the least bit thrilled I'm carrying your baby?"

"What?" I gasped. "How, I mean, well, you mean this is mine?"

"What did you think?"

"Well, I can't be absolutely sure. How about Von Rotten?"

"Are you fucking kidding me? Von Rotten likes boys, not girls. He just keeps me around for cover, more or less, because he doesn't want his minions getting, you know, *confused*."

"Confused? That's a joke. They already *are confused*."

"Philip, you're going to be a father, a real father."

"Holy cow! That's, that's ... that's great, I guess."

"How does that make you feel?" Penny moved close to me and felt the crotch of my pants, and something immediately shot up inside.

"Trapped," I said, "a little."

"Is that all you've got?"

"And, kind of warm, too. Weird. I've never made anyone pregnant, as far as I know."

"That's good," Penny said. She stroked my thigh. I looked down at those wonderful nipples which I could envision filling already with mother's milk. "Because I don't want any competing rug rats trailing us around. Do you think you're ready for this? I know I am. I'm absolutely 100% head-over-heels in love *and* in lust with you. I can't wait to pin you down. Take off your clothes, Philip. Right *neow!*" she yowled, like a cat.

Jesus! I thought. Then I had another thought: *This is so cool!*

Then I thought: *But Jesus. It's so final, staid. I wanted to travel some more. Get out on the road again. Go to someplace like Iowa City. Yes, Iowa City! Why not Iowa City? Suddenly I really had to get to Iowa City.*

"But I wanted to go to Iowa City," I said.

"What the hell is in Iowa City?" asked Penny. She thought I was bluffing, I think.

"The center of the poetry world, in America."

"What? Are you kidding me. The center of that world is right here." But when she said the words Right Here, she grabbed my hand and placed it between her legs, and man, was she slippery and hot there! Moist! She dragged me across the room to her bed and pulled me down right on top of her and I could see her breasts flatten out under my weight. With one skilled maneuver, she had unbuckled my pants and had my cock out waving in the air, then she wiggled around under me and I slid into that delirious open wetness of hers that I so loved and longed for. And again, I came inside her like a fire hose putting out a field that was on fire. Our wings spread out over the vast field of love, and I was falling in again. Falling. And I rose on the other shore of a river I had no knowledge of, with my wet and glistening wings folded behind me, as though I had come out of a chrysalis, shining, and in love.

But I can't begin to tell you how much trouble I was in. If you were not writing poetry in our era, there is no way for me to explain the way things were then, or still are to this day, for that matter. These people were like the Mafia of the Known World of Poetry (pronounced "kwip," or by our own crowd, sometimes "kwap," when we were feeling more jocular, and perhaps drunk.) They were not going to take this lying down. Von Rotten would see to it. He was going to make my life completely miserable. Almost as miserable as being totally and completely head-over-heels in love with my little Helen. I would come to hear the voices of the Sirens screaming in my ears, though I was lashed tightly to the upright mast of love by my Penny and her wine-dark nipples.

And now, our little glowing bumping heartbeat of a baby
inside her belly. Ah, me! I was so screwed!

