

Regrets du Noir

by Larry Strattner

"I should have read different books, ones with more substance. Maybe had a few different friends. People who read more, who talked more about ideas and not so much about people, or things." He wore his sulky expression. It irritated her no end.

"You're a little late now, don't you think?" Her voice went up half an octave. "Serious reading is ancient history for you. You're like old bathroom grout, shrunken, dried out, cracked. You'll need someone to scrub you down, fill in the lines in your face, prescribe a drug. Something to blunt your seventy years of snarkiness."

"Whaddya mean, snarkiness? I'm only careful about giving credence to assholes."

"True, and now you are become one. The only credence you have half-a-handle on is those Clearwater Revival guys, and to boot, only their Greatest Hits. You're culturally bankrupt."

"Not as bankrupt as Otis Bleipunkt. I searched him on the internet the other day and came up with a mug shot from an Atlanta police file. He had some kind of shit all over him too, I might add."

"I only dated him for a couple of months. You always bring him up when I don't get right on board to sail on one of your misspent life cruises."

"I'm only saying. I think I'd write better material, better books, if I had a better class of friends."

"Back up here, back up. First you are without any real friends. They're drinking buddies and worse. None of those guys give two hoots what happens to you. Some good bucks are in your pocket from mining their moral failings and writing about them. Do you think they don't know what you do? Don't you think they realize it's them being described in your stories? Might they occasionally entertain an urge to get even?"

"Crap. Getting even would mean getting past their urge for another drink or some meth or whatever. Besides, the majority of them can't read worth a shit. They're not looking at any books. My

last name wouldn't ring a bell for them. They're living in a cardboard box, or in jail, or under a bridge. It looked like Otis was living in a sewage treatment plant. From just his picture, I could smell him."

"Always Otis. How about your slime ball buddy, Biggie, the bouncer? You and he were a pair. Your whole book, "Biggie Bigend" was a verbatim recording of his degenerate life. I can't imagine living with those women, the filth, and the depravity. He'll never get out of Southport after shooting all those people."

"Based on any people I saw him with, they deserved shooting."

"Exactly why I keep telling you to be who you are - cracked grouting, moldy corners, writing in the same old vein, snarky, angry, too much hindsight, admit it's all you. You want to be Teilhard de Chardin? You're getting started way too late. Plus, you probably wouldn't pass the Discernment Test for the Priesthood. There's a better chance you'll be tomorrow's Peking Man if I bury you in the cellar. Plus, any money for being a philosopher comes after you're dead."

"Yeah. Well, I can sink into a deep depression about whoever I'm not if I want to. I'll have to reexamine Biggie Bigend. I'll bet he's into some radical deviation inside Southport. I can see the sequel. I'll engineer a break-out and he'll carjack some wheels down on the freeway. The carjackees will all be members of the same quilting club. Not believing their luck they will overpower and ravish Biggie by the side of the road, each on her own personally designed quilt, to avoid grass stains. Whatdaya think?"

"I think that's a little more upbeat. You seem to be in a better mood. And Biggie might even read that story, or find someone to read it to him during his second stretch. Let me get you a glass of JTS Brown to celebrate."

