

An Admirer Visits Paul Bowles

by Sean Lovelace

Eighty-five, bedridden, I sit and listen to her inquiries.

“Like, what are you writing now, Mr. Bowles?”

“Nothing. I don't write. I haven't written for years.”

“What? What do you mean?”

She laughs. Laughs, you see.

I'll tell you:

I've always walked more quickly than others. In Europe, South America, Africa, the subcontinent of Asia, certainly in the states, where most everyone is enormous. Wherever, whenever, I bluster by, weaving, stutter-stepping and then surging forward, a gust of vim and vigor—leaves, litter, life's confetti spiraling into the air—and me shaking my head: How can they move so slowly? Live so slowly? So provincial, narrow-minded, self-delusional, half-alive. Perhaps I am judgmental; a trifle harsh, you say, without sufficient evidence, but how you exist per day is how you exist per life. Look at them: so slowly, slowly, are they asleep? Drugged? Drowned? Trapped in some thick *madjoun* of the soul? Or simply dead?

Who can say?

But my gods, something is pursuing, something dark and breathing, a Saharan wind...

I say run!

When I was a young man I felt boredom on my shoulders like a rumpled cloak of lead. I dropped out of college and flipped a coin, a 1929 half-dollar, and decided if heads, suicide. If tails, a life of perpetual travel.

I've seen things.

A three hundred meter high sand dune, a girl tumbling down its face. The flux, reflux of drums. A bird in a spider's web. A skewered

goat fetus, an open fire, flesh quivering. Pills crushed, a yellow mist. A ship capsizing, the slow roll, barnacles like cancer. A hawk perched on the Tower of London, in its talons a white pigeon. Leaves changing. Gertrude Stein pouring Kiwi fruit liqueur and saying, "No is always if and if is always yes and always yes is always no." An eighteen thousand year old cave drawing of a man hurling a spear. A lamb crying, actual tears, seconds before its slaughter. Bombs thumping, cumulus clouds. Balcony edges, the seduction. A father murdering his daughter because she was seen talking to a certain man—talking, mind you. The yolk sucked from turtle eggs. My reflection fixed in a guillotine's blade. Aaron Copeland shouting over a trumpet solo, "Play it loud! Play it American! Play it like two lovers tumbling down the stairs!" A nine-year-old prostitute. Poisoned champagne. Sand in my molars. A snake eating a snake eating an egg. In a public square, a woman decapitated for the crime of masturbation. Icicles, dripping. An entire river in flames. A tourist stabbing a waiter over an overcooked pheasant. The gold-plated skeleton of a whale. Carson McCullers, telling me, "Death, it's going around." A bookshelf constructed of chimpanzee femurs. A knife thrower accidentally killing his assistant, his sister, during a performance. An ocean of jade. A man excising his own appendix. Allen Ginsberg saying no to kif, waving it away, declaring, "I'm for the stiff drink, the vapor high, where you sit and just think, where consciousness becomes common sense." A burglar wedged in a chimney and dying of starvation. A half-eaten pear. A soccer goalie torn to pieces by a rioting crowd. Tennessee Williams swallowing codeine with gin, chasing it with coffee, a handful of Benzedrine, saying, "Don't mind me; I've built this buzz many a time." An oasis, a goldfish pond, a gallows in the center, a man swaying. Mountain flowers. A wind rattling loose windows. A camel bludgeoned to death with a piano stool. Jackson Pollock, intoxicated, slumped against a New York City fire hydrant, pointing directly at my forehead, saying with conviction, "You know, I'm just happy to be here."

And she laughs.

Sitting cross-legged, pen and notebook in hand, wearing a tight yellow T-shirt that reads TOO DRUNK TO FUCK, tight jeans, one of my books folded into her back pocket, certain phrases underlined, twisting her hair with a pinky finger—she says, “But to give up writing? Why would you?”

I look at the carpet, at the faded, step-worn design, and tell her. I say, “I just don't *understand* human beings.”

And so she laughs.

