

# Chapter 10

## BEG, BORROW, STEAL OR SELL

COWBOY NEVER ASKED how long I planned to stay. Neither did he kick me out. As fall slipped by, a yellow house on Jarvis Street became the place I set out from each morning and returned to every night.

“You got four choices,” Cowboy said of getting by. “Beg, borrow, steal or sell. It’s either that or go to work. Borrowing’s a bitch and begging’s not my style.” A rare grin split his face. “An’ I guess you could say anything’s a job if it’s what you gotta do.”

I went for begging.

Unlike other indigents, who daylong claimed a doorway or staked out a patch of sidewalk, I let the hour determine where to hit up passers-by. Mornings, the commuters streaming out of Union Station could be panned like gold, though most times all I netted was a grinchy silt of dimes and quarters. At noon MuchMusic types on Queen Street might dislodge a loonie from among their credit cards. Later on, malls that funnelled shoppers in one end and out the other disgorged regulated flows of chumps.

In the evening hockey fans, rowdy if the Leafs had won, were happy to fork out.

It *was* a job, if job means daily misery in order to survive. Too soon, the smell of harbour ice replaced the spice of autumn. Snow came early in December—not the fluffy flakes of Christmas cards,

but grainy stuff that wouldn't melt or freeze. The bottoms of my jeans turned white with slush. The skin around my ankles reddened into scales. Sores sprang up around my mouth from gnawing at cracked lips.

And ever-present were The Looks, the three Toronto seemed to know: Contempt, Mistrust and Fear.

Some days weren't so bad. *It was the best of times...*—except there really was no best, just a hiccough in the worst. Sundays, I could scarcely cadge enough to buy a Happy Meal. So much for Christian charity. Thursdays—why, I never knew—I might have coins to spare on luxuries: a tube of Crest, a scarf, new shoelaces. And time *was* money, or perhaps the other way around. A stranger's sudden whim to generosity could cut the hours holding out my hand in half.

But at least I didn't have to make the rent. Raymond, upstairs, let Cowboy have his rooms for free.

"He gets huffy sometimes," Cowboy warned. "Decides he has to rent the basement out. Makes me skedaddle when he does. I don't mind. Keeps me on my toes. Plus it never lasts. A month or two—three, tops—and the basement's free again."

We shared his bed like travelling companions when the motel's double rooms are full, but otherwise made no attempt to merge our lives.

Night was Cowboy's time. He slept past noon and bunked down in the morning. I rose early, and my days were spent away. Any time our paths crossed Cowboy's native comfort in his own society kept conversation small. A sketched salute was all the greeting or farewell I got when coming in or going out.

But we did talk sometimes, easily. Cowboy wasn't shy. His world was clear. He never spoke of doubts, or fears, or wishes. He rarely asked a question if the answer didn't help with a decision. Spades were spades. A thing was true or it was not. Cowboy never qualified his frankness.

"I love the street," he said. "It has a pull. It makes me feel strong. Standing on the sidewalk, watching headlights come around

the corner, waiting for the one that slows, the window rolling down ... A real outlaw high.”

He didn't dwell on Max, Bandanna and Fuck You!

“Punks come and go,” was all he said. “You won't run into them again. Even if you do, your money's gone. They'll get what they deserve. Move on. Vengeance is a killer.”

He took it on himself to guide me round the fringes in Toronto: the Super Save on Bloor Street where past-due produce was available for free; the poultry guy who gave away the parts of chickens no one wants; missions where an extra scarf or pair of gloves cost nothing; food banks where a plea of hunger was enough to melt the hearts of volunteers who didn't want bureaucracy to interfere with charity.

And stores where stealing stuff was easy.

It felt familiar, somehow, strolling in and chatting up the clerk while Cowboy pilfered from the shelves. He showed me different ways of slipping stolen items into purchased ones, how to block a camera, and all the little tricks that make a cashier look away.

“God helps those who help themselves,” he'd say, a box of Trojanz underneath his hat, a can of tuna in a folded weekly, underwear inside his shirt. “So help yourself. Just don't get greedy.”

Mostly, though, he left me on my own. Which was nice. It gave me time. Lots and lots of time. So much so that time began to lose its shape and meaning.

Does time even have a shape?

Those early morning hours, when it was winter still, and dark, Cowboy slipping into bed would often waken me. Was time, then, the black monolith of drowsing there beside him?

The night before, it would have worn a different aspect, narrowing to pain in one direction, opening on beauty in the other, like a cornucopia. From the wide end I could step out into magic, since my recollections of Mt. Hope—what nothing stopped me from remembering—were nearly photographic. I could scout around the foster home, pick Queen Anne's Lace beside the lane, spend hours in the twilight barn with engine blocks and jerry cans, wander to the

pond out back and wade in till I sank.

Provided I traversed the path of least resistance—backward to the open end—I could summon much. But turn around and move the other way, toward the missing years, and a hum of electricity set in, a prickling intimation of a wall of pain I never wanted to confront again.

A monolith. A cornucopia.

Time had other shapes. Or rather time encompassed other forms. The small, quicksilver node of *me*. And future nodes, round and bright with promise. In between, filaments like silver nerves. I could cast a strand from *me* to *future*, hook a chosen moment, then reel myself toward it, anchored there as if the future were immutable. Yet-to-be became as fixed as memory, compensation for the memories I couldn't touch, the time-road that I couldn't travel.

The trick of mind was useful. It got me through my days.

"Endure, enjoy," Cowboy liked to say, "that's all the choice you've got in life."

*Enjoy.*

I liked waking in the morning, padding to the empty room and running through the Sun Salute. It didn't matter now I didn't know who'd shown it to me. The limbering of muscles and the loosening of vertebrae would make me hard. I'd shower in the rusty stall and jerk off on the wooden slats.

Drying off and putting on my slush-stained jeans, I'd circumvent what lay ahead by fixing on the day's next pleasure: coffee and a doughnut, once I'd begged the change. Latching onto that—living/seeing it before it happened—I could brave the walk to Union Station for an hour in the cold approaching strangers.

*Endure.*

I wasn't really there. The lake-wind and the freezing stares of angry wage-slaves wouldn't last forever. They were ghost-time to be gotten through, already gone because I'd cast a part of me to breakfast—sure to come, already fact.

And so it went throughout the day. I'd see a future in my head and anchor it. My next meal. Fifteen minutes in a heated con-

course. Two hours at the library—even on those days Toronto’s meagre charity dried up. Cheap Chinese food, or the sometimes promise of a hamburger at Fran’s. The warmth of Cowboy’s rooms. Bed. Sleep.

Each pleasure had a shape and place in the geometry of thought and time. Predicting it I made it real, moving disconnected through the harsh times in between.

But another trick of mind was working, too, one so subtle that I hardly noticed it, perhaps because it was the very thing that lulled—or lured—me to the subway entrance, crowded sidewalk, busy mall.

Holding out my hand for change, I had a chance to study people—waves and waves of them—each encounter like a brief affair. From their boots and scarves, their size and gait, their posture, hair and vanities; from the way they looked at me or turned away; from the colour of their cheeks and how much steam their breathing made; from their voices if they spoke, or the hardened muscles in their jaws, I could read them—*know* them—maybe better than they did themselves.

This lawyer’s wife has left him and he hates the world. *Don’t go up to him.*

Another jilted husband, only this one feels connected to the suffering around him. *Can you spare some change?*

That woman in her forties, staring with a look that says both mother-love and lust. *Don’t call her ma’am and she’ll pull out her wallet.*

That bearded guy—he gives cigarettes to bums instead of money. *Too bad I don’t smoke.*

You can’t get blood from stones—and Toronto was a quarry—but I was good at spotting softer stuff that, pricked, would always bleed.

Like Cowboy, I’d begun to love the street.



TS Eliot, whom I wasn’t to discover for a while, didn’t know

Toronto. The cruelest month is February. Snow or not, there's no escaping bleak midwinter. Cloudy days, the temperature rises, so the moisture off the lake cuts through your clothes. Sunny days, it drops so low the hairs inside your nose turn crisp.

Cowboy hit the jackpot: two weeks in New Orleans as some rich guy's boy-toy, all expenses paid. The day of his departure, Raymond slipped on ice and took a tumble. His back out of commission for the next ten days, he took to knocking on the basement door and shouting *Yoo-hoo—anybody home?* as a prelude to some chore like spreading salt or carting out recycling bins of empty liquor bottles.

Initially he watched me from the front door, shivering, but finally decided to invite me in.

"The etchings, darling. Come and see the etchings." He turned and hooked the air behind him with his finger. "Shoes off first."

I left my sneakers in the vestibule and followed. Halfway down a narrow hall he stopped and, with a flourish, slid a French door open.

The space beyond was something from a garish dream, like twenty rooms crammed into one. Burlap covered one wall; small blue tiles another. A third was hung with velvet drapes. The fourth was papered in vermilion with a pattern of gold grapes. Silver clouds hung weightless in the ceiling. Tiny lightbulbs twinkled in a chandelier that looked like teacup porcelain.

The floor had seashells all around the edge. A stringless grand piano housed a dusty fern. Where the keyboard should have been, a hamster ran inside a cage. Guppies nosed the edges of a square glass vase with scummy-looking water. Pedestals in dark wood, light wood, bamboo, brass and marble held a hundred little boxes, each one different from its neighbour. Some were stone, others metal, others shell. A few were carved but most were smooth.

Dismembered bits of furniture, like bombing victims, filled whatever space remained: legs from chairs and tables, cabinets without their doors, drawers without a home.

"You like?" Raymond asked.

I didn't know what to say.

"Are you going to stand there with your mouth open or are you coming in? Mind you, the mouth breathing thing is terribly appealing."

"You live here?" I asked.

"No, darling. I live upstairs. This is where I work."

"Doing what?"

"Making fantasies. Come." He picked his way toward the burlap-covered wall. "Here, feel this."

The wall was smooth as satin. I peered closely and discovered every fibre, floor to ceiling, had been painted on. I could even see the brush strokes used to make the jute look twisted.

"You put this on here?"

"I did. Check out the tiled wall."

Even knowing what to expect, I couldn't quite believe the little cobalt squares weren't real. I traced the grout around them with my fingers. Perfectly flat. Silky, even.

"The drapes are a bit *de trop*, I admit. Did they fool you?"

They still did.

"And the wallpaper's just plain tacky. But wouldn't you know? It's what everyone wants. I'll redo it someday. What do you think? Flocked? Moiré?"

I ran a fingernail over what appeared to be a not quite perfect join. Even that wasn't real.

"You do this for a living?"

"*Mirabile dictu*, yes. That's Latin, sweetie. 'Wonderful to relate.' Believe it or not. The churches in Quebec and the Rosedale wifey-poops still put bread and butter on a craftsman's plate."

"Everything here is fake?"

"*Faux*, dahling. *Faux*."

"That's French for fake, right?"

"Ooo—aren't you the clever little snake. Yes. Here, look at this."

He handed me a box of polished, deeply-veined green stone. It weighed almost nothing. I removed the lid. The underside was just plain wood. Inside it sat a little disk of polished stone, green and

veined but subtler than the box.

“Faux malachite and real malachite. Now really, which would you rather see beside the make-up mirror? The plain-jane real thing? I think not. Mother Nature’s such a dowdy little hack sometimes. Malachite should scream at you from twenty paces. Fantasy, darling. Broad strokes. Bigger than life. It’s what you *want* to see that counts.”

I handed back the box. He passed me several more, with comments. *Porphyry, abalone, alabaster, tortoiseshell...*

“I paid twenty for the chandelier. In Canadian Tire money, no less. Now it looks like Meissen porcelain. You wouldn’t believe how many of those I’ve had to do. Pretension reigns in the salons of the rich. Or the not quite rich enough. Thank God. I’d be homeless otherwise.

“Now, do you want a coffee or something? The kitchen’s upstairs.”

The staircase was mosaic, the banister white marble. A sound I’d dimly been aware of in the show room grew: a woman screeching in a way that set my teeth on edge like nails on a blackboard.

“*La Divina*,” Raymond said, shutting off a boom-box in the kitchen. “I just adore her. Oh, but poor thing, I can see it in your face. You don’t know who I mean. Maria Callas. The Great One. Don’t they teach you anything in the school of hard knocks these days?”

The kitchen looked plain enough, with a gas range, Melamine counters and a table set with floral placemats. He hadn’t wiped them off and there were crumbs. I swept at them surreptitiously as I sat down. They didn’t budge. Both the crumbs and placemats had been painted on.

Raymond opened a tin of Folger’s and dumped coffee into an electric percolator. The chrome appliance could have been the offspring of teapot and a rocket ship. It burred commentary while he chattered on about his famous clients, none of whom I knew, and homes in places that I’d never heard of.

When it stopped he poured two mugs and set out cream and



sugar.

“Now, David,” he said, sitting at the table, fixing me with an expectant look, “tell me about you.”

I couldn’t think of anything to say.

“Cat got your tongue?” he asked, but not unkindly. “Should I have put the cream out in a saucer?”

*An unhappy man... as faux as all his boxes... broad strokes on the outside... inside just as empty...*

What did he want? What did he hope to hear? I watched him silently and let an image form.

“I don’t know who I am,” I said.

“My dear, at your age no one ever does.”

“No, I mean it. I’m not sure who I am or where I come from. I think I know, but there are pieces missing.”

It was just the thing to say, even if not strictly true. I had no doubt of who I was. But the confusion, the uncertainty, made him feel trusted and looked up to. He could play the wise and sympathetic ear. Inside my head a piece of him clicked into place.

He sat back and crossed his legs.

“Do tell me it’s not drugs.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, that’s a relief. Drug tragedies are so banal. You’re not banal, are you?”

I could see him thinking *You do know what banal is, don’t you?*

“No, of course not,” he answered for himself. “Anyone can see that. Look at you. Those eyes. Wherever did you get them?” He smacked himself on the wrist. “Oh, dear. *Quelle question*. You’ll think I asked you up to fuck.”

“Well,” I smiled, knowing that he’d like it, “you did say something about etchings.”

“*Touché*, darling. *Touché*. There’s more between those lovely ears than anyone might think. And you are beautiful, you know. If you doubt my motives, there’s the proof. I never tell a boy I want to bed he’s beautiful. It’s *too* demeaning. I can’t bear to think I’d ever sound that desperate. Besides, I can’t bring myself to come between

true love.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Darling, don’t go dumb on me. You and Pete. Unless...” He put his hand to his mouth. “Oh, Lord, tell me it isn’t true. You and he still haven’t...?”

I shook my head.

“Child, you don’t know what you’re missing. You’re not straight or something, are you?”

“No, it’s not that. It’s just... I mean... he’s just letting me stay. For a while, I guess. I don’t have a place of my own.”

“Tell me what I don’t know. Where were you before?”

“Out of doors. On the street.”

“And before that?”

“I’m not sure.”

“A cuckoo. A changeling. Moses in the reeds.” He threw up his hands. “Do you at least know where you come from?”

“A place called Mt. Hope. I think.”

“You think?”

I nodded. “Pretty sure.”

“Is that where you know Pete from?”

A phantom breeze raised gooseflesh on my neck. The kitchen went all bright and shimmery.

“Pete comes from Mt. Hope?”

“So he says.”

“Mt. Hope, south of Hamilton?”

Raymond snorted.

“South? You could say that. Very south. West Virginia, in fact. ‘Near the Big Sandy River,’ wherever that is. Sounds like *Duelling Banjos* territory to me.”

The room went back to normal.

“That’s not the place.”

He heard my disappointment.

“No, I guess not.” He studied me with genuine concern. “Have you seen anyone about these ‘missing pieces’ of yours?”

“I don’t have any money.”

“Silly me. Of course you don’t. But have you tried to go . . . back home? To Mt. Hope or wherever it is?”

“I’m scared to.”

“Did you run away?”

“I can’t remember.”

He sipped his coffee. He wanted to ask more, but something held him back.

“How do you know Cowboy?” I asked to fill the silence. “Pete, I mean.”

“Cowboy? That’s original.”

“He lets me call him that.”

“I’ll bet he does. Here’s the story. Pete was on the hustlers’ block one night when I was shopping—and I don’t mean for Spaghetios. I’m a sucker for the tall, lean type who look as if their legs belong around a bucking bronco. I guess that’s what you get for being taken to the Calgary Stampede at an impressionable age. Anyway, we got to talking—ha-ha—you can imagine how *that* went, and the rest of it is history. A twenty-dollar blow job in Queen’s Park and now I’m hooked.”

“Do you and he still—”

“—get it on? Fuck? Make the beast with two backs? Do the dirty? Yes, darling. It’s called trade. I get laid; he gets his rooms. You didn’t know?”

“I didn’t ask.”

“And he wouldn’t volunteer. Perhaps that’s why I like him. I can make believe he’s decorous and proper while he’s fingering my backside. No, that’s not fair. I have a soft spot for him, God knows why. Do you suppose it *is* because he’s sweet and decent? Oh, dear—what am I saying? Oscar was right. Sentimentality is the cynic’s bank holiday. It might be time to throw him out again. But there’s you, now, isn’t there? What will you do? What *do* you do? To get by, I mean. I thought you were like Pete, but anyone can see I got that wrong. Your virginity is painful.”

“I used to have some money. I beg from people now.”

“Well, dear, you won’t be doing that forever.”

“I know.”

“Have you given any thought to what you will do? No, don’t answer that. Of course you haven’t. I can see it in your face. Ah, the sweet uncertainty of youth. What I wouldn’t give.” He gazed imploringly to heaven. “But enough of that. It’s time for mother’s milk. I work better when I’m hammered. You’ll have to run along.”

He pulled a Gordon’s bottle from a cupboard underneath the sink as I polished off my coffee. Mug of gin in hand downstairs, he waited while I tied my shoes, then held the door.

“David—?” He touched my shoulder. “I hope you’re not offended. I’m a terrible old queen. I can’t help myself. Sometimes it feels as if the only fun I get these days is trashing all the things that used to matter. But, you know, if things ever get really desperate or you need to talk . . .”

“You’re just upstairs.”

He made big lips and kissed the air.

“Sweet thing. Now fuck off.”



I struck it rich the day Cowboy returned. Forty bucks in just three hours. I spent the afternoon and evening in the library, then gorged myself at Fran’s: ham steak with pineapple rings, mashed potatoes, peas, a Caesar salad and two wedges of cherry pie with ice cream on the side. *À la mode* they called it on the menu.

There was a puddle at the bottom of the stairs when I got back to Jarvis Street. Cowboy’s duffel bag was open on the bed, spilling shirts and dungarees. The bathroom mirror was dripping, and his towel was still wet.

The hustlers’ block, where Raymond said the two of them had first met up, began at Bay and Grenville, north of College Street, not far from Fran’s. I figured Cowboy might appreciate my finding him to say hello, and after all the food I’d had, a stroll back wouldn’t do me any harm.

I walked over via College Street and turned up Bay. A Caddy

dealership, incongruous in old stone quarters, lit the Grenville corner with fluorescent showroom light. A gangling blond, easily two metres tall, slouched against the wall. His face was pocked with acne scars. He watched me pass with feigned indifference.

Further on, a car cruised by, pinning me with headlights.

Grenville is a dinky street, just two blocks long. It starts at Yonge and crosses Bay. Shortly afterwards it makes a dogleg around Women's College Hospital, changes names to Surrey Place, and finishes at Grosvenor. After dark it's quiet as the grave, even with The Strip nearby.

Across from Women's College, two shadows with their faces cloaked in hoodies stood like sentinels beside a streetlamp. Like the blond, they too affected not to check me out. A leather jacket squeaked inside the shelter of the hospital's side door. Its owner queried softly, *What's up, man?*

Ahead, at Grosvenor, a Malibu pulled over. A passenger got out and tipped his hat. Cowboy, wearing sheepskin that I hadn't seen before.

He watched the car drive off, then, spotting me, he jogged across the street.

"Hey, David. What's happening?"

He didn't seem the least surprised to see me there.

"I saw you were back. How was New Orleans?"

"Full of fags. 'Bout what you'd expect."

"Have a good time?"

"Drank a lot of chicory. Ate beignets and po'boys. Saw the inside of more drag bars than I care to see again."

"Not much fun?"

"The music was all right. Got this new jacket out of it."

"Glad you're back?"

"Could do without the cold, but yeah. The guy that took me was getting on my nerves. Been like this while I was gone?"

"Worse, mostly."

He jammed his hands inside his pockets.

"Not sorry I missed it, then."

Headlights turned the corner at the hospital and stopped. A hoodie ambled over.

“Slow night,” Cowboy said.

“Not many customers?”

“Not many selling, neither.” He nodded back to where the Malibu had let him out. “Him back there? Normally I wouldn’t do him, but I didn’t have much choice. I got this jacket and some warm time in Louisiana, not much else. We call him the Old Spice guy. Here, smell this.”

He lifted up a corner of his collar. The fleece smelled like the perfume counter at The Bay.

Down the street, the hoodie got inside the car. Cowboy touched his hat as it slid by.

“That’s Scott. His brother Daryl’s the other one down there. He won’t stick around now Scott’s gone. They come as a pair. Most times they don’t sell. Just broker things. Claim their Daddy’s rich. Could be. They’ve got this big black Lincoln. Cruise around here in it sometimes.”

A white Caprice on Grosvenor made a left. Cowboy turned to face it. It slowed but carried on, then slowed again near Daryl.

“Rental car,” Cowboy said. “He’ll come around again, ’less there’s somebody he likes on Grenville.”

“I saw a guy near Bay Street.”

“Tall, blond, bad skin?”

“Yeah, that’s him.”

“Stretch. I don’t know his real name. Nobody does. He doesn’t talk to anybody. Rumour is he undercuts. Maybe he’ll get lucky.”

Across the street from Daryl, the guy who’d whispered *What’s up, man?* stepped forward from his doorway. He stood a moment, looking left and right, then wandered up toward us. I felt a flash of eyes, a quick once over, then indifference. His leather jacket had a raw, rank smell like grease and sweat combined.

“Hey, Cowboy—what’s up?”

“Not much.”

They spoke as if I weren’t there.

“Any action?”

“Old Spice guy. I haven’t been here all that long.”

“Scott got picked up.”

“Yeah, I saw.”

Another car crept by, a blue Cierra. It signalled right at Grosvenor but stayed put.

“You mind?” Cowboy said.

He started for the car, which immediately bolted round the corner.

Cowboy came back and shrugged.

“Must have wanted you,” he said to leather-jacket.

“Nah, he’s been around a few times.”

“Nervous Nelly?”

“Or a looker. I’m gonna go see. Catch you later.”

He snugged his jacket and walked off.

The temperature was somewhere around minus ten—not bitter cold, just enough to make your nostrils drip. Cowboy started pacing. I kept in step beside him.

“Raymond says you come from a place called Mt. Hope.”

“You been talking to Raymond?”

“He hurt his back. I did some stuff for him.”

He nodded. “He’s an okay guy.”

“I know.”

“Chew your ear off?”

“Yeah.”

Blinding high beams swept around the dogleg. Cowboy angled closer to the curb. The car, a Honda, drove by fast to let us know the driver wasn’t there to shop. It made a left at Grosvenor and beetled toward Queen’s Park.

“He said it’s in West Virginia.”

“That’s right. Fayette County.”

“Where I grew up’s called Mt. Hope, too.”

“The one near Hamilton? They got an airport?”

“That’s the one.”

“Mt. Hope, huh? Looks like we almost got a little thing in com-

mon.”

“Why’d you leave?”

He thought it over. “Needed to be somewhere else.”

“Why here?”

“Seemed like far enough.”

“Ever think of going back?”

“You’d have to drag me there. You staying out a while? I’m going for a spin around the block. Wanna come?”

“Okay. Sure.”

No one passed us heading along Grosvenor. The few cars out on Bay Street signalled turns at empty intersections. When we reached the Grenville corner, Cowboy nodded to the tall blond, Stretch, who dipped his head and looked away. Daryl had quit his post across from Women’s College Hospital. No sign of the leather jacket Cowboy hadn’t introduced me to.

We sniffled for a while in the cold. Three sedans rolled by. Cowboy recognized them all. *That guy’s the organist at some fancy church. That one never tips. That’s George, the taxi driver. Real fat. Good for a free ride when he’s on duty if you jerk him off.*

“Do you know everyone out here?”

“Toronto’s not that big.”

“How long have you been doing this?”

“A while. Longer’n most.”

“Is it really all that great?”

“Keep coming back, don’t I?”

A green Corolla sidled past, made a right, then came around the block again. It stopped ten metres short of us. I could see the driver’s glasses through the windshield. They looked like little moons. Cowboy sauntered down and touched his hat. The door swung open. I figured it was time to go.

I was turning onto Grosvenor when I heard the door and Cowboy’s boot heels clicking on the pavement.

“Didn’t work out?”

He looked away as if I’d asked him something tough. He’d caught up quickly and his breath was coming out in melon-coloured



wisps beneath the sodium vapour streetlights.

“You busy?”

“No,” I answered. “Why?”

He raised his hat and scratched his head.

“Want to make a buck?”