

Monroe: Introducing Sophia, In Seven Boxes and a Bucket

I tried to keep running, but I was out of breath. My knees were buckling. I Turned and saw that our pursuers had caught Lenny, which was surprising. Lenny is smaller and faster than I am, though he is astonishingly clumsy. He probably tripped on his own feet. I couldn't run any further anyway, so I turned and hunched over with my hands on my knees, watching our tormentors approach.

One of the lesser hoods punched Lenny in the stomach. He collapsed on the ground and curled up like an armadillo.

The biggest jock came up to me, flanked by two of his pals. He shoved me hard in the shoulder. His name was Sean Kelly, known to be a pretty tough guy.

“Put up your dukes, fat boy”, he said, and he slapped me hard across the face.

I stared at him, winded and helpless. My cheeks stung where he slapped me. I kept my hands down, praying he'd just leave me alone. I know what I looked like, a big, retarded, flabby clown.

“C'mon you fat pig, I heard you've been picking on little kids. Let's see you pick on me.”

A completely ridiculous assertion. Sean Kelly had no idea who I was. He and his merry band chased Lenny and I for the crime of taking a shortcut through the park. I've never picked on anyone in my life—it wouldn't occur to me. He was just working up a justification for kicking the crap out of me. I'm big, but I'm not tough, and I've never really fought anyone. He slapped me again. It stung, but I thought “This isn't bad, I can live with this.”

Then without another word he swung his fist hard into my nose and upper lip. I didn't really feel immediate pain. Just a red, blinding, burning feeling centered way back in my throat, and a ripping sensation where my teeth cut into my lip. I could taste blood. I was scared—scared that he'd keep hitting me in the face. But I was also enraged. Bugfuck enraged. Screaming, insane, piss-your-pants berserk, but scared enough to still be wary. I wanted to hit him, to obliterate his grinning, stupid face, but knew if I tried he'd just dance around and beat me to a pulp. I leaned forward at the waist and put my hands up to my face, watching Sean through my fingers.

He pulled back a fist to hit me again and I lurched at him. I grabbed him around the neck with both hands and butted him in the face with my forehead, twice, with all the fatboy strength I could muster. It hurt like hell, but it was a good pain. While he was stunned I kept one hand behind his head and pounded his face with the flat of my fist, like I was pounding on a table. The third or fourth time I pounded him he suddenly

sagged and fell. I dropped to my knees on his chest, driving 260 pounds of fat into his ribs and beat his face with both hands, alternating right, left, right...

His friends finally rallied and yanked me off onto the dirt, while I screamed, made animal noises and cried with years of bottled rage. My face was covered with saliva and snot, but Sean's was covered in blood and his nose would never be straight again. Actually it never really looked like a nose again. I didn't just break it, I mashed the remnants to pulp. Turns out I also broke four of his ribs and bruised his lungs. Scared the crap out of everyone--me included.

As I got to my feet one of Sean's buddies came at me swinging wildly, hitting me on the neck and shoulders. I swung clumsily back at him with everything I had. He must have been as crappy a fighter as I was, because he stepped right into my fist which connected squarely in his face and took him off his feet. I closed my eyes when I hit him, but I opened them in time to see the dust fly up around him when he hit the ground.

He didn't get up.

I was sobbing when Lenny put his arm around my shoulder and said "Come on Monroe, let's get you home."

So we left. No one tried to stop us.

Home was half of an old three-story wooden duplex on a back street in Brookline with the Morris family living on one side, us on the other, and four story brick apartment buildings full of ancient retirees and immigrant families on all sides. The kids in surrounding towns like Allston and Brighton called Brookline "jewville", and a lot of our neighbors were indeed, Jewish. For me that was just great--Jewish kids rarely beat you up without reason. Even the Jewish jocks are more likely to insult you or make fun of you than punch you or shove your books out of your hands.

And then there was the food. My Mom cooked straightforward lower-middle class WASP food. Vegetables cooked to a mushy grey. Potatoes in various forms--mashed, baked, boiled, and au gratin which just meant sliced potatoes with onion and milk. Spam with mustard sauce. What Mom called "Hungarian goulash" but I'm pretty sure a Hungarian would call macaroni, hamburger and tomato sauce.

The dinners and lunches I had at friends houses were strange and wonderful, with intense flavors. Brisket. Knishes. Latke. Pastrami sandwiches with bulky rolls and half-sour pickles. Borscht, cabbage rolls, potato pancakes with applesauce and sour cream. Reubens, chopped liver, strawberry cheesecake. I drank my first cup of adult coffee at Mrs. Fischlers house because Nathan's mom thought cheesecake without coffee was an atrocity. I agreed then, I agree now.

I love my neighborhood and try not to stray too far out of it. The tough kids that surrounded all four sides and who hung out at the park made certain of that. I was more likely to get on a streetcar and go to downtown Boston than to walk a block outside

Brookline. I was always a big kid, but I hit a serious growth spurt at 12, and once I grew huge some of the harassment ended, though most kids knew that even though I was big, I was soft, clumsy, and chicken. They liked the idea of shoving a big guy around. At least they did until I turned Sean Kelly's nose into something resembling a veal shank. After that I got pretty much left alone, though I was careful not to push my rep as a berserker. I knew if I did someone would step up and beat the crap out of me, and I'd be back to being chased whenever I wandered out of Brookline.

Lenny was at least as much of a nerd as I, though no one called strange, bookish kids "nerds" in 1963. There really wasn't a concise word for fat kids with few friends and no social skills who spent all their time doing science projects and jacking off in their bachelor pad room. But if there had been, it would apply to both Lenny and me.

Oh, by the way, my name is Monroe. Monroe Sanborne. I know, pretty fucked name. My family is good at that. I have an older sister named Angel. From the time she was about zero years old she's been working hard to demonstrate what a stupendously bad choice that name was. For a while we had a cat named Sinister because my Dad decided it was left-handed, and dog named Dexter because that just went so darned well with a cat named Sinister. I firmly believe the dog ran away because he got tired of us yelling "Dexter" at him. The cat didn't give a shit what we called him as long as we fed him.

A few weeks after my epic battle with Sean Kelly I was working in my laboratory when Lenny Rosenthal changed my life.

My laboratory was a room on the third floor of the Sanborne household, one of two rooms the family considered the attic. I cleaned out the junk and claimed one room as my bedroom and the other as a laboratory. Yes, it still had the funky smell of an attic, but I was working on that.

"Harold's brother is selling his motorcycle" said Lenny.

"What motorcycle, and why would I care?" I said.

"The one he crashed and broke his leg on. He crashed it last year, and when he tried to fix it he kept taking it apart, and now it's in seven boxes and a bucket so no one will buy it. You could buy it, and put it together, and then we'd have a motorcycle. Girls love guys with motorcycles. Get the bike and we'll get chicks."

I followed that logic train with ease--it was standard Lenny.

"That's crazy, I don't know how to ride a motorcycle, and girls love good looking guys that have motorcycles, not just any guys with motorcycles. I've never seen Harold's brother with any girls other than Maryann Smith and everyone says she'd go with pretty much anyone. Beside, I'm saving my money for an oscilloscope, and my Dad and Mom would never let me buy a motorcycle." I said.

"Are you kidding! Your Dad would get a boner if you told him you wanted a motorcycle. At least he'd think you weren't queer. He'd talk your Mom into it."

Actually it was too late for the "thank God he's not queer" ploy. My father had pretty much given up his concerns about my sexual preferences after he found my stash of Playboy and Penthouse magazines with some of the best pages stuck together like wrinkled, multi-ply cardboard. His reaction was typical for him "I'm not going to take these, but find a better place to hide them and don't let your mother find them."

He said that kind of stuff a lot. As if my mother would explode into violent action if she were exposed to my misdeeds. She always seemed pretty passive to me, mostly concerned about what the neighbors would think. But I digress.

The "not queer" ploy was out, but I knew he certainly would like to see me doing something manly. At 16 I was 6'2" and 260 pounds--mostly fat. Fat enough that I had to put baby powder on the inside of my thighs or I'd get a rash from my legs rubbing together.

I didn't play sports of any kind. I don't know if it would have made a difference, but no one realized I couldn't see more than ten feet until I was 13, when finally a visit to the optometrist gifted me with a set of coke bottle glasses.

Before the glasses, baseballs suddenly appeared ten feet away traveling at high speed out of the blurred world. If I was lucky I could slap it away to keep from being injured by the ball--catching it was out of the question. And the outfield, where I was routinely relegated, had all kinds of interesting things in the grass, which I was generally studying intently when a ball bounced by. An agonizingly long period of fat boy running, followed by fumbling to recover the slippery ball, and finally a weak throw aimed at no particular person generally doomed me to the bench. Then from the bench to home, and home to my room and my laboratory, where I felt comfortable and in charge.

I made up for the isolation of my room and my lab with a very active sex life—in my head. No simple straightforward fantasies. Mine were full blown with backstories for all the players and even a few props. When I rummaged through the attic junk I found some cool stuff, along with a lot of mouse turds. In a musty box full of yellowed receipts was a fancy-looking travel kit. Plastic boxes with silver-plated metal covers. Brushes with silver-plated backs. Comb, nail clippers, odd little smooth tools with fake tortoiseshell handles and a nail file. Two glass bottles with silver caps. Silver-plated toothbrush box. No idea who owned it or why they had it. When the mood struck me I'd take it out, fill the bottles with stuff like mouthwash and shampoo, brush my hair with the silver-backed brush, clip my nails, fiddle with my cuticles with the weird little tools and file the edges like I saw my sister do.

I'd imagine myself in an ornate hotel in the heart of Paris, preparing for a dinner date with a beautiful French woman which of course would culminate back in the hotel room, with wild, passionate love-making. I had a vivid mental picture of my date: Brunette, startling grey-blue eyes, and those tiny wrinkles that French women get

around their lips even when they're young. I've heard they come from speaking French. My dinner date looked a lot like Anouk Aimée with shorter hair, which probably had a lot to do with Lenny and I watching foreign films at the art theatre where his cousin worked.

Why would Lenny and I watch foreign films? Titties. Art films frequently have naked boobies, especially if they're French or Italian. A little flash of titty and we'd have masturbatory ammunition for weeks. Full on nipples with a little body movement to make the whole assembly jiggle was more than enough reward for an hour of tedious contemplation of ordinary-seeming relationships. Lenny and I are all about titties. Well, Lenny is a little more obsessed than I am, though I had spontaneous hard-ons for weeks after seeing Jane Russell in "The Outlaws".

My lab is next door to my bedroom. Most 15 year old kids don't get to claim two rooms in a somewhat cramped Boston duplex, but the rooms were reachable only by a pull-down ladder, and were tucked under the eaves so most of the ceiling was steeply pitched and low. And besides, the rest of the Sanborne household considered that any explosion caused by the strange alien life-form planted in their family might thrust upwards and just take the roof off instead of killing them all, so the space in the attic was a wise investment in survival.

I think their fears are unjustified, though I have blown a window out, so I don't have a strong debating position. Turns out that doing hydrolysis of water using alternating current is not a great idea. You wind up with a hydrogen mixed in with the oxygen and oxygen with the hydrogen. The resulting explosion took out the only window in the lab, slammed the door open so hard it pushed the doorknob through the wall, and left me with a ringing in my ears that returns every so often.

I worked on my room a lot, one of my unfocused obsessions. I had this general idea what a bachelor pad should look like from the Playboy magazines I smuggled upstairs to my lair. I swiped posters advertising rock concerts and folk singers from bulletin boards and phone poles. I rescued a monster oak office chair from a neighbors trash. The leather was torn on the seat cushion and one caster was missing, but I patched it up and found a caster that nearly matched the other three. The slight mismatch enabled a gentle rocking that I found very useful for concentration. I love that chair.

The whole bachelor pad notion is supposed to make girls interested in me, which is why I considered it part of the focus problem I can't seem to solve. I see it in my other geeky friends--a certain fuzzy, confused look whenever they aren't obsessing about something idiotic.

For example, if you ask Nathan Fischler about anything other than microbiology--like maybe girls, or world politics, or hygiene--he gets this look that's partway between incomprehension and constipation. Mouth slightly open, head tilted back, shoulders slumped, hands wagging in ineffectual circles, and slight reddening that might originate with bowel blockage.

I know the feeling. My geek friends and I flow along without aim, and when we aim, we aim at weird stuff. We don't make stuff happen: Stuff happens to us.

Most times I feel like I'm shoving myself through a sticky fog. No real idea of where I'm going or how to get there. I say I want to be a physicist, but I don't think it's a real ambition--it's something I picked up from my friends. I don't really understand what that would mean and what my life would be like if I really became a physicist. I don't see a path. Instead of a plan I have random flings with ideas. I'll get obsessed with something like bacteriology, and read a half-dozen books on the subject. Then I tire of it, and in a few months the details are missing. No plan to pursue the interest. No idea of what to do with the knowledge. Time wasted. More fog.

My bachelor pad is a baser variation on the theme. I have this notion that if I have this cool room I'll get girls. But I know I'm obsessing about the details and skipping the fundamentals, and it's bullshit. Like buying weights would get me in shape. Doing what I *can* do, the part that doesn't scare the piss out of me, instead of what I *need* to do--which is actually talk to a girl who isn't related to me without staring at the floor or saying stupid stuff.

So instead I spent weeks with color samples taped up, trying to decide what color to paint the back wall.

I don't see this fog around people who aren't geeks like me. They talk about what they want to be or do without the body language that says "I have no idea what I'm talking about". They get good grades in high school so they can go the college they want, get the right degree, marry the right girl, get the right job. How do they do that?

I can't seem to foresee my next shit, and these people know where the bedrooms should be in house they want to have when they're a dentist or a lawyer. And in the meantime I get sidetracked by the obvious distance flaws I see reading a science fiction book about Mars and spend two weeks reading everything I can find on planetary astronomy. More fuel for the fog. Fuck.

My lab wasn't some kid fantasy. There were lots of things that could kill you crammed into that room and my family knew it, or at least assumed it. I had lots of electronics equipment, mostly bought cheaply at Eli Hefron's surplus electronics in Cambridge--audio and RF signal generators, a multimeter, power supplies, a military surplus radar test oscilloscope that I converted to general use. I also had an incubator for growing bacteria that I made from an old picnic cooler and an aquarium heater. I had two microscopes, a homemade microtome, and improvised equipment for mounting, staining and preparing microscope slides.

Bought the stuff myself. I've been working various jobs since I was eleven, and for long periods actually held more than one job. I don't mind working, I can do most jobs on autopilot, which gives me time to think. I can cook breakfast or lunch for fifteen people simultaneously, collect payment, clear the counter and wash the dishes and never stop working on the problem of controlling the excitation voltage of the particle

accelerator I'm trying to build. And when I'm not thinking it puts me in touch with places and people I'd never experience otherwise. For example, how many people get to inventory the contents of the basement storeroom at Cole's drugstore--an Aladdin's cave of bottles, drug components, and rubber goods. I loved that basement.

I had an extensive collection of microscope slides with categorized samples of all kinds of things. I can tell dog hair from cat hair, and could even tell the breed of seven different dogs in the neighborhood that would let me get close enough for a sample. And since I wanted the complete follicle that was pretty much a one-time thing--except for the Smith's old shepherd, who would have let me snatch him bald as long as I gave him one of mom's meatballs.

I knew the soils from numerous places in my neighborhood. If the cops had ever wanted to know if a soil sample came from Mrs. Noonan's flower bed I could have told them. I fantasized raising my head portentously from my microscope and saying "There's crushed brick fragments and grey sand. Completely unique in the neighborhood. Must have been brought in as soil amendments--definitely Mrs. Noonan's". But oddly, that never came up.

I was serious about science, and hungry to learn, though my school grades didn't reflect it. Lots of D's and F's. Remember that bit about not being able to see until I was 13? They stick the tall guys at the back of the class. That was me in the last seat, last row since the time I was eight. I had no idea that other kids could see the blackboard until it magically jumped into crystal clarity when viewed through my amazing new glasses.

I loved schoolbooks. They'd give them to us the first day of class, and I'd take them home and read them. And then the teachers would inch slowly through the stuff I'd already read, waving their arms around at the invisible blackboard. By the time I could see what the teacher was doing all the way at the front of the room I didn't care much. To say I didn't pay attention in class was a gross understatement. I was on another planet. Teachers considered me mildly retarded. I was kept back in the seventh grade, and I can't say that repeating a grade did much to relieve the boredom. Finally they gave me an IQ test, and then they started yelling at me for not living up to my potential.

I learned to read when I was about four. My sister Angel taught me. She was already reading books with actual stories, not the Dick and Jane crap. So she'd read me the stories and point at the words as she read them. I loved that, I'd do about anything she asked if she'd read to me and point at the words.

After a few months of that I realized I could read for myself. There wasn't any transition, I just could suddenly read, and so that's all I did. I read pretty much everything in our house, including the encyclopedia, a big set of books called "The Books Of Knowledge", and anything else that was laying around. My family thought it was "cute" that I was pretending to read, until my Dad asked me what I was reading. According to family legend it was some Norse mythology in the Book Of Knowledge and I rattled off a complex discourse on Thor and Odin or some such. Sounds about right. I

read cereal boxes, magazines, newspapers, and then one day my mom took me to the library and got me a library card. The librarian kept shooing me out of the young adult section, but she finally gave up and ignored me, so I made my way through the branch library, consuming everything.

Teachers discovered I wasn't retarded during pass two through the seventh grade. Mr. Paulito, the paunchy assistant principal told me to have a seat. Then he stood and loomed close over me, and stroked his chin pensively to demonstrate his intellectual depth and give the majesty of the moment a chance to sink in. He leaned forward, giving me the benefit of deferred dentistry and a fondness for salami. "Mr. Sanborne you have the highest IQ I've seen in five years of administering these tests. What are you doing with your God-given gifts? I'll tell you. You're squandering them."

I confess I didn't consider his criticism to be any more informed than his dental hygiene. I just gave him my standard clueless look and waited for him to stop berating me. I was surprised to have done well, I got distracted while I was thinking about some of the answers and didn't want to start over. A question that was really about prime numbers started me wondering how many Fibonacci numbers were not prime, and then I thought it must be obvious there was no relationship, but then I thought obvious things still required proof, which got me thinking about the validity of any proof based on assumptions about an incomplete mathematical foundation, and so I answered "C".

I was pretty certain all the other kids were smarter than me. In fact my first conclusion was that smarter kids would be even more distracted by the questions, and so I did well because I wasn't as smart as they were. It took me a while to figure out that they probably weren't, but they were a lot more socially adjusted.

Back to Harold's brother's motorcycle and the moment my life changed.

My skepticism about the motorcycle was bullshit, I didn't want Lenny to know how much I wanted it because Lenny, being Lenny, would go uncontrollably bugfuck and drive me insane. Lenny is a master manipulator of male humans. He pretty much can't even talk to females, but if he doesn't lose focus and let his mouth run he can make guys do stuff. I was present when purely by persuasion he got two bullies that were preparing to pants him to beat the crap out of each other. I didn't want Lenny's powers focused on me.

But as soon as he mentioned the motorcycle my scalp tightened. I dreamed of motorcycles. I had four copies of Cycle Magazine and two of Bob Braverman's Cycle Guide that I paged through so much the bindings were coming apart. I pictured myself riding majestically along the New England coast, always with some jazzy song playing in the background--something like Brubeck's Take Five. I wanted a motorcycle a lot more than I wanted a better oscilloscope. The musty-looking but functional Tektronix 518D scope I had my eye on at Gordon Scott's used electronics and appliance repair store was \$125, and I thought I could get Gordon to go down to \$100--it's not like people were lining up to buy it. But it certainly wasn't a motorcycle. It certainly wasn't going to set me free.

I let Lenny talk me into going over to Harold's house to look at the bike. We went on our bicycles since Harold lived deep in Brighton, several miles from my house. Lenny's bike was a new Schwinn Stingray, a bicycle I lusted after though my huge frame looked stupid on it. My bike was predictably lame--a girls bike I inherited from a female cousin. My dad had a friend weld a piece of water pipe onto it to make it look like a boy's bike, and we painted it with rattlecan paint in red with a white stripe. But it looked like a girl's bike with a water pipe welded onto it.

Turns out that Harold's brother is named Bernie, and Bernie was skeptical of my ability to do anything with the bike, and even more skeptical of my ability to buy it. Staring at seven forlorn grocery boxes full of parts, a bare frame, and one old bucket full of bolts, nuts and small parts I felt pretty skeptical myself. This was a long, long way from being a motorcycle.

"What are you asking for it" I said.

"Well I paid \$350 for it..." he said.

"Yeah, I know, but it wasn't crashed and it wasn't in seven boxes and a bucket", I said, "is it all there? How do I know you haven't lost stuff."

"I numbered every piece with masking tape and wrote the numbers in this parts manual. It's all there". He said.

My Dad told me once that the first guy to name a figure loses the negotiation. You always go down from there. But when Bernie said "Two hundred" my heart sank. I could offer a hundred, but he'd say one-fifty, and I wouldn't have that much before school started. It was out of my range. I felt the deal sliding off into impossibility with a mixture of loss and a tiny dash of relief that I wouldn't be taking on a project that seemed so hopeless.

Lenny said "You're out of your fricken' mind, we'll give you twenty five bucks for it. Nobody is going to buy it, you're lucky we want to haul it off".

My first thought was when did this become "we", and my second was that judging from his red face, Bernie was going to just kick our asses right here in the basement. Instead he said something stunning. "I won't go lower than \$100". Lenny gave a nasty laugh and said \$35. My stomach was in knots, and I almost blurted out "fifty" but Bernie beat me to it.

Lenny turned to me and said "what do you think?" I gave him a blank look so Lenny said "you got a title?" and Bernie said "Sure, but you have to pay \$7.00 to transfer it". Lenny said "Okay, we'll pay you \$45 and we'll pay for the title transfer."

And that's how I became the owner of a 650cc 1958 BSA A10 in seven boxes and a bucket. And how I developed absolute faith in Lenny's abilities as a negotiator. As we rode back to my house with the title signed over to me, Lenny battered me with

questions. But I was pretty stunned. I had the machine of my dreams, an escape from my geeky life. I wouldn't spend my nights working in my lab in my underwear, cursing when drops of hot solder spattered on my fat, white, naked thighs. Instead I'd be cruising downtown Boston, looking cool, on a powerful beast of a motorcycle that I rode with absolute mastery.

But first I had to convince my Mom.

Lenny's constant questions cut through the reverie. "Can you really put this thing back together? Do you have the tools and stuff? Will your Dad let you build it in the basement?"

"Probably" I said.

Monroe: Meet the Sanbornes

Convincing my folks to let me undertake this project turned out to be easier than I thought. My Dad was initially angry that I had bought my BSA without asking him, but he was impressed at the low price, and visibly puffed up a little when I mentioned his advice about negotiation. I didn't bother to add how I had frozen at the stick, and that Lenny did the brilliant negotiation.

My Mom completely freaked out and started telling me horror stories about people who had been killed when their motorcycles went off the road. Generally it seemed something called a "soft shoulder" pulled them all to their doom. I thought "no problem, avoid soft shoulders", but remarkably, I didn't say that.

Dad pulled her aside and talked softly with her for a while, and she calmed down a bit. I'm pretty certain he told her that I would never get the thing back into one piece, which played right into my mother's strange perception of me.

My Mom has always had this odd notion that I was incapable of completing anything. I have no idea where that came from. My Dad shared it to a lesser degree. I think she had me confused with my older sister Angel. When I wanted to take piano lessons she said "You won't stick with it. We paid for lessons for Angel for three years, and then she quit." So I bought guitar with my Christmas and Birthday money at age eight and spent two hours a day, every day, for the next eight years teaching myself to play.

It was a familiar litany, and I never understood it. The official family myth was that "those kids don't finish anything they start" even though I spent the entire year every year working on whatever science project I selected. Ever since the seventh grade (pass number two) I started researching next year's project the week after the state science fair ended, and once I chose a topic I work relentlessly to create the most ambitious expression of the topic I could imagine. Sure it was Geek heaven, but it took commitment. I've always been obsessive, methodical, and determined once I focus on something pointless and non-threatening. But as far as family myth goes I'm a flake like my sister.

Who also is absolutely not a flake, but that's another story.

Part of the reason for the misunderstanding, other than the mysterious permanence of family myths, was that I rarely saw my mom. I spent most of my time in my room and lab, and she avoided both my room and lab as if the plague was loose there, which was really not outside the realm of possibilities. After an unpleasant incident with anesthetized mice and one hefty shock from an electrostatic generator I never saw her on the third floor. Pretty handy. It dramatically reduced the potential for embarrassment when I was getting busy with a Playmate of the Month.

Silvio: Modern Motorcycle Mechanics

While my family was adapting to the notion of me playing unsuccessfully with motorcycle parts before abandoning the project, Lenny was on a quest of his own. “Probably” wasn’t the response he was looking for. Lenny wanted a competed motorcycle. Ideally it would be his, but he had a serious aversion to low-level employment and contrary to the example of his Schwinn Stingray, his parents insisted that every penny that came his way go into his college fund, so a motorcycle of his own was extremely unlikely. But Lenny knew if I owned one, it would be available to him at almost any time. He could trust me to be fully obsessed with some other project. He understood I would be relentless about getting the motorcycle to work, but once I completed it he was certain I’d go on to other things. Lenny had watched me operate since kindergarten, and Lenny was very good at understanding people.

For Lenny the issue was not whether or not would I finish the job, but how soon. Lenny decided I needed reference material and inspiration, and he knew where he might get it. Lenny’s dad had an employee who had motorcycles. To Lenny, a motorcycle was a motorcycle, and this guy might have a manual or something that would help. So he dropped by his father’s commercial bakery to talk to Silvio Anatole, the motorcycle guy.

You might wonder why Lenny’s dad wouldn’t make Lenny work in the bakery. In fact, Lenny’s dad hated running the bakery his father left him and wasn’t all that committed to having his kids involved with it. But cheap labor is seductive, and having your kid work to sock away money for college pays double benefits, so Lenny was compelled to work there at the beginning of one summer, creating a trail of disaster that his father and the bakers would never forget. Now Lenny could enter the bakery with absolutely no fear that someone would hand him a broom or mop, in fact if he picked one up, someone would surely take it from him.

Whether that was pure Lenny clumsiness or an intentional act was never clear to me. As I said, Lenny was VERY good at manipulating people.

Silvio looked the part of a motorcycle guy--even in a baker’s cap and apron. Immaculate white T shirt with a pack of Marlboros rolled in the right sleeve, classic dark Italian looks, and a lot of show muscle on his 5’6” frame. Silvio’s road bike was a 1962 Harley Davidson XLCH, a sportster. Which of course had little in common with a British bike other than the number of wheels. But Silvio listened to Lenny’s story with amused interest. “Ah, a box job. Let’s see, how many of those have I ever seen come back to life? Oh yeah, it’s NONE.”

Lenny’s disappointed look made Silvio laugh, and he said “Hey, there’s always a first time. And I actually have exactly what you need. I bought a book a couple months

ago to work on my scrambles bike, but then I got sort of a sponsor who does the work, so I don't need it. I'll sell it to you for half price".

So that's how I became acquainted with the 1953 edition of Modern Motorcycle Mechanics, a hefty book that I devoured in a day and night of concentrated reading and note-taking. J.B. Nicholson, who wrote the book, had a gift for explaining how to do complicated things with minimal tools, which is a good thing as far as I was concerned.

I had set up my "shop" in a back corner of the basement. I covered the dirt floor with cardboard from a refrigerator box, installed an old table raised on cinderblocks to bench height, wired a couple of bare bulbs to the main cellar light, and I was in business. Lenny and I carted the bits to my shop by loading as much as we could in my old radio flyer wagon, reinforced with wooden sides. We walked the five miles each way. It took three trips, and the last one was a doozy since we didn't want to make a fourth run.

I got out the parts book that Bernie had supplied and inventoried every part. He lied of course. There were parts missing, but not a lot, and they didn't seem critical or likely to be expensive. As I inventoried the parts I washed them in kerosene, oiled them lightly, wrapped the bearings and bigger parts in waxed paper I stole from my mom, and put them into boxes by subassembly. I wondered why Bernie thought it was necessary to take apart the transmission. He didn't take apart the crankcase, but he also didn't protect it from dirt or junk falling into it as J.B. Nicholson had recommended. I made a note that I'd probably have to take it apart.

I now had eleven boxes and one bucket of parts and a plan to split the crankcase to make more parts. It felt like I was going backwards, and everything looked pretty complex. The exploded diagram of the transmission in the parts book made my stomach hurt. I identified each and every part, but getting them all to fit, mesh, turn and work looked like a job for a watchmaker. J.B. Nicholson warned that getting a transmission into two gears at once would make the shafts fly apart, bursting the case and spraying parts everywhere. I had a pretty good idea of what that would look like. I needed some advice, and the Yellow Pages told me I might find it in Albion.

Monroe: Sir Gunk of Albion

Once the parts were cleaned, boxed, and inventoried I put rags on top of the boxes and took a bus to the BSA dealer in Somerville, Albion Cycles, to see if I could buy the missing parts, get some free advice and maybe a shop manual. When I walked in I asked to talk to a mechanic, but the guy behind the counter said “no customers allowed in the shop, and those guys are paid flat rate. They don’t talk to anyone who isn’t paying them.”

I nodded as if I knew what flat rate meant. So I started telling the counter guy my situation.

“Whoa”, he said, “I know the bike you mean, you bought that box job from that guy Bernie, right?”

I said “yeah, that’s the bike, a 1958 BSA A10”.

“Yeah”, said the parts guy. “he tried to sell it back to us for parts, but there’s no telling what kind of shape those parts are in. You bought a lot of trouble kid. That guy wasn’t taking care of that bike when it was together. He’s an idiot. He crashed it because he seized the engine, and my guess is he ran it out of oil or overheated it. What do the pistons look like?”

I didn’t really know. I noticed they felt a little rough when I washed them, but they were the first pistons I ever saw. I didn’t know that Bernie had seized the bike and he hadn’t volunteered that information, but it made it a little more understandable that he’d taken the bike apart. I understood from my reading what “seized” meant--it meant the engine or transmission had locked up because a bearing had gone bad or the pistons had overheated and melted onto the cylinder bores. But I had no idea what that looked like--Modern Motorcycle Mechanics had a fair number of pictures and line drawings, but I couldn’t remember anything that showed what a seizure might look like.

I told the counter guy I wasn’t sure, but what would I have to do if they were seized?

“Well you might need new pistons and rings, and if you do, of course you’ll need to bore the cylinders. You should use all new gaskets, and certainly you need a new head gasket. People try to reuse them and that can lead to trouble. There’s a possibility that the crank was damaged since that moron Bernie probably ran the thing out of oil. If that’s so, then the crank needs to be ground and fitted for new rod bearings.”

When I asked how much all that would cost, the counter guy said it might be as much as \$150. I felt cold all over and my stomach churned.

“That’s three times more than I paid for the bike!”

“Well now you know why it was so cheap. You did good on the price though. If nothing else you can probably sell the parts off. I might have gone that high--he was asking \$150 when I talked to him, and I didn’t feel like dickering. In fact, if you want to get rid of it, I’ll give you your fifty bucks back.”

That made me feel a little better. At least I had an out, even though I didn’t want the money, I wanted a bike. I looked around the shop--it was full of beautiful bikes I could never afford, some of them were more than a thousand bucks. I turned to the counter guy and said “any chance of getting a job here, could I talk to the owner?”

The counter guy said “I’m the owner, and that depends on what you can do”. By his doubtful look I could tell he didn’t think I could do much.

“I’m a hard worker, and I can learn to do anything. I know a lot about electronics and electricity. I don’t give up easy, and I’m methodical”. That was about all I could think of.

“You got a job now?” he said.

“Yes, I work at a drugstore lunch counter as a short-order cook. I come in at 6:00 AM to clean up the store and stock the shelves with anything that’s come in the previous day, then I prep the lunch counter and cook breakfast and early lunch. I finish at noon, I can be here by 1:00 PM.”

“What do you know about motorcycles. I sure don’t need a cook. What does being a short order cook qualify you for?” he said.

“You ever done that? Keep all the orders going at once, wash dishes, take orders, cook everything just right, collect the money, clear away the dishes quick to keep the seat turns going. Make the customers happy and deal with complaints and the wise guys. I learned to do it in a week. At the end of my second week the drugstore owner said I was the best cook he’s ever had. I never did that before either. You can ask him.”

“As far as motorcycles go, all I’ve done so far is inventory all the parts on the bike I bought, wash them in kerosene and number them all with the codes from the parts book. I found the parts that are missing and here’s my list, with the part numbers. Oh, and I read Modern Motorcycle Mechanics, by J.B. Nicholson. And I’m working through it again taking notes on the stuff I think is important for building my bike.”

I could tell by the look on his face that I’d made an impression, but I shut up and let him stew.

“Hmmm, that’s probably more than most of the bozos I have working in the back have read in their whole lives,” the counter guy said. “You know what a gunk is? It’s the

guy that cleans bikes and parts for the mechanics in the back. When they need an engine pulled or a dirty job done, you do it. You get minimum wage plus a tip from the mechanics each week. The more you do for them, the bigger your tip is. If you learn enough, when someone leaves you might be in line for their job.”

“Do I need tools? I don’t have many, and Modern Motorcycle Mechanics said I’d need Whitworth wenchers and sockets. I don’t have any of those.” I said.

“Nah, mostly you’ll be cleaning parts and bikes, if you need tools for a job a mechanic wants you to do, they let you use theirs. Just be sure you wipe everything clean afterwards and put them back where they were. I’ll introduce you to the guys. You’re in luck, the last gunk got canned a few weeks ago, the guys are tired of cleaning their own stuff. By the way, I’m Paul, but you can call me Boss or Your Highness. One simple rule--the job is open because I caught the last gunk stealing spark plugs for his bike. Steal anything, a screw, a washer, a gasket and I kick your ass and fire you. That applies to everything--you want to take a stripped bolt you ask for it first. Got that?”

“Sure”. And that’s how I became the gunk of Albion Cycles.

Silvio: Business Challenges

Silvio lived well for an apprentice baker. Much too well. Besides his Harley CH he had a 1963 Triumph TT special that he raced at half mile flat tracks and TT races. He had a string of girlfriends, an apartment to himself, and plenty of spending loot. His friends thought he was connected, and he was, at least in a family way. His mother's brother, uncle Gino Capano, known to everyone as Gino Capo, was a high level bagman in Boston. He sat on his porch in suburban Arlington, and received a regular flow of visitors. Numbers guys, bookies, and pimps bringing the bucks in, and bosses, politicians and cops taking bucks out. Sort of like a fat banker, only he smoked Parodi cigars instead of Cubans, and sipped Sambuca and Amaretto instead of scotch.

But uncle Gino didn't like Silvio--uncle Gino wasn't interested in taking Silvio under his wing. When Silvio was ten his uncle Gino said to his mother "Andrea, why is your kid such a weasel? Who's bringing this kid up?" His uncle's assessment had never changed.

So none of Silvio's money came from mob business. Silvio sold dope to hippies. There had been a sudden shift in the marijuana business, from musicians and blacks to relatively affluent white hippies and college professors. And Silvio stumbled into a position to take advantage. He did a few classes at junior college, mostly so he could boff some college chicks. Some of the kids in the class took in his gangster look and assumed he could sell them dope. The first time he was asked he just said no, The second time he thought there might be something worth pursuing. The third time he said yes, and found some dope to resell. Once the market found him, he found a couple of sources and started to retail. The margin was OK, but he could smell more money further up the chain, and he could see that the guys he was dealing with were small time.

With a little work he found his way higher, and discovered that no one in the marijuana business was protected. The mob wasn't involved in the dope that went to the black and Hispanic community, and everyone up the distribution chain to Mexico was freelance. The heroin side had hard guys, but marijuana was run by lightweights with no backup.

He found the direct importer that covered most of New England, a skinny, acne-scarred half-Mexican with the unlikely name of Franklin Harris. Silvio followed him for a few days until he discovered where he kept his bulk stash--a rented storage unit in an old warehouse in New Bedford. He caught him in his apartment, tortured him a little until he gave up his contact names in Mexico, then shot him in the head with his 22 caliber Colt Woodsman and buried him in the marsh outside New Bedford. With a straight line to Mexico and Franklin's stash the business got a lot more profitable. About the time things were looking good and he was considering quitting the bakery his uncle's friend Sam came calling--dropped by his apartment about 7:00 PM one night. Sam was about

the size of Silvio's apartment door. He'd known Silvio most of his life, and he didn't like him either. But this was business.

"Your uncle told me to talk to you about your dope business. He said it's okay if I hurt you some to get your attention, but not to break anything. So, do we talk or do I start trying not to break stuff while I kick the shit out of you."

"If my uncle is mad, why didn't he just say so?"

"I'm here to say so. Your uncle doesn't like you dealing shit that can hurt his business. He has obligations. People find out what you're up to, they figure it's him."

"So is he saying I have to quit or is he saying I need to pay him. Whatever he says, I'll do it, but tell him this business is just laying there for someone to take up--someone is going to do it. I'm not dealing with the niggers or the spics. I'm not selling hard stuff. I'm selling grass to hippies and college kids. It's not huge money, but it's good money and it will get better. What does he want me to do?"

"Where's your phone".

Sam mumbled on the phone for a while, then turned, the phone receiver nearly disappearing in one giant fist. "He says five hundred dollar fine for doing this without permission, then 30 percent of the profit from now on, and be ready to have your books checked any time. You pay on the tenth of the month, starting this month."

"Okay, I don't have \$500 right now, I've got \$150 here in the house and I'll get the rest in three days. Does this mean he's got my back".

"It means what your uncle says it means. Gimme the \$150 and we need \$500 more in three days--the \$150 is your rent for the \$500. Don't be late on any of this stuff Silvio. This could work out for you, or it could go bad. You could have walked out of this business but you put yourself in it. Don't fuck around, don't do the stupid shit you always do."

Sam tossed the apartment to see if there was money stashed anywhere, took the one-fifty, took Silvio's clock radio, and left without a word.

Silvio sat down to think, His business had just become more complicated, but it was also possible he could call on his uncle's muscle if things got tough. That meant he could expand his territory a little to cover the added costs of paying Gino. It also meant things could roll up really fast if Gino reported up the chain and his boss decided Marijuana was bad for business, so he needed some way to keep the money coming even if he couldn't deal directly. Silvio thought his uncle wouldn't talk about this business--he'd keep this quiet and just collect the money. It was outside the usual business--a little sideline--his uncle could get away with that. But Silvio needed a fallback plan, just in case.

Step one for Sylvio was to get the business growing a bit, and that meant he should move up the timeframe for an idea he'd been considering for some time. Especially since he needed an indirect way to run the business. He needed a gang of his own to run the business.

Gino: Psychos Are Us

Sam walked in to the office in Gino Capano's nice home in Arlington. He dropped \$150 on the desk and said, "You sure you want to do this Gino, there's something about that little shit that I don't like. I never have. There's something rotten about him."

"I know what it is, Sam, the fucking kid is a psycho, just like my sister, Andrea. She always acted like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, and she'd never admit it, but I know for a fact she killed our dog because he chewed up one of her fucking dolls. Two days later the dog is dead. Vet said it was broken glass in his food. My folks never said anything to me, but that was the last pet we had in the house. They knew as well as I did. I knew to never turn my back on her. She be all smiles, but she'd have something stewing in her head, some minor shit I'd done to her, and she'd wait a year for the right moment to fuck me over. She dropped a big flowerpot full of dirt on me once from the second floor window. She probably waited an hour for me to walk out the door. Missed my head by an inch and broke my collarbone. The fucking kid is the same way. Sneaky little shit."

"So why are we fucking with him, why not just put him out of that business and call it good," said Sam.

"We're better off with him doing shit in front of us rather than behind our backs. I don't trust him, so we watch him. But if he starts doing something crazy we just put him down and he disappears. I got no problem with that. The world will be a better place, as long as it doesn't get back to Andrea."

Paul: Duke of Albion

Paul walked through the showroom and into the shop of Albion Cycles and watched his new gunk working. The kid was huge, fat, uncoordinated, clumsy, and the smartest person he'd ever had working for him. In three short weeks he had changed the way the shop worked, and the mechanics didn't even realize what he'd done to them. In essence the mechanics worked for Monroe Sanborne.

First of all, he did every shit job anyone gave him, and he did it well if not all that fast. But when there was nothing to do, he didn't hide or goof off like the other gunks had. He found stuff to do. He took over the work order system, and separated the work orders for all the bikes waiting for parts from the new work orders. He worked with Paul to figure out when the parts would be coming in, and he rescheduled those bikes for work on the day the parts arrived.

Then he took every incoming work order, calculated the total flat rate hours for each job, and asked the mechanics to tell him who preferred to work on which type of job. He prioritized the jobs, equalized the hours, and distributed the work. He did all this while he also cleaned every incoming bike, pulled engines, split chains, changed the oil for bikes that were going to be tuned up. He'd put the right spark plugs, the right amount of oil, and any special parts with the work order, and push the freshly cleaned bike over to the mechanics area.

When Monroe was not there, the shop ran in its old, inefficient manner. The mechanics began complaining when Monroe wasn't there. Fred, the smartest and most experienced of the mechanics said to Paul "That kid's different. He's been here three weeks and everyone in the shop is tipping him twice what we used to tip your schmuck nephew".

Paul grinned and said "yeah, he'll probably have your job in a few months".

Fred said "It's not my job that he's doing better than I ever did, it's yours."

When Monroe showed up at 1:00 there were no customers in the showroom, so Paul wandered back to the shop to talk with him. "How's your box job coming" he asked.

"Pretty slowly", Monroe answered. "I've got the frame painted, my Dad got me some black enamel from work. I put on the triple crown and mounted the front forks. Your tip about putting grease in the icebox to make it hard, and then gluing all those little ball bearings to the races worked perfectly. Bernie didn't take the forks apart, so I just changed the fork oil and made sure they were straight by turning the shafts in the triple clamp and measuring at the axle, like it says in the book. I put the swing arm on, greased the bushings and made sure it pivots smoothly and it doesn't have any shake. I mounted the shocks, and I've got the wheels on, hooked up the brakes. The tires look

ok. It all seems right, so I have a rolling chassis. But I haven't done anything with the engine except look at the pistons--they've been seized for sure, so I'm going to need new pistons and rings, and a bore job. I haven't taken the bottom end apart yet, I'm not sure I can afford to get the crank ground yet or bore the cylinders and buy pistons and rings, so I'm waiting until I can. Besides the money I haven't had much time. Between working here and the drugstore and working on my science project I barely have time to sleep".

"What are you making at that drugstore? Minimum wage?" Said Paul

"Yeah, well minimum wage plus tips, though the tips aren't much. People eating at a lunch counter think a dime is pretty rich. Most of them don't leave anything, even when I do everything perfectly."

"You always do everything perfectly?"

I could feel a blush run up from my collar toward my forehead. "Not really. A couple of days ago a guy asked for a burger with everything--what we call a California burger, with lettuce, tomato, cheese, onion, mustard, dill pickle and relish. When I was cooking the burger it was spattering on the grill, so I covered it with a pan lid. I served the guy his burger and coke, he paid and left. Gave me a fifteen cent tip. Then when the crowd thinned down I noticed the pan lid was still on the grill, and the burger was shriveled up under it. I served the guy a meatless burger."

"Ha, a vegetarian burger. That's a good one. So look, why don't you quit the drugstore and go full time here. I'll give you a raise--a buck thirty five an hour, and the tips from the mechanics. I can use you out front on Saturdays too, we get busy in the parts department and sometimes folks kick tires in the showroom and leave before I can try to sell them something. With the extra time I can teach you a few things. Like how to use the boring bar and the Sunnen hone. The mechanics would like that--boring cylinders is a fussy job and they screw it up too often, sometimes so badly I have to tell customers their cylinders were too far gone to bore and they have to buy replacement cylinders."

Paul added "I've got a bunch of junk cylinders you can learn with, and when you think you're good enough we can use your engine for practice. If you bring your transmission you can learn to set up a gearbox. What do ya say?"

I was surprised and thrilled, but worried too. "Mr. Fernly, the druggist, gave me the job for the summer. He told me that high school kids always quit on him halfway through the summer so he doesn't like to hire them. I promised him that absolutely, no question, I'd stick it out. I can't go back on my word."

"Geez kid, I'm offering you more money and a chance to get your bike further along on my dime. You want the time or not?"

“I want it, but I can’t break a promise just because I want to. I’ll talk to Mr. Fernly and see what he says”.

Paul was irritated, but finally said “OK, I guess it’s pretty stand up of you to not just drop the guy when you get a better offer. I’ll give him a call myself.”

I walked into the machine shop area and looked around. The area was partly enclosed by a head-high plywood wall covered with girlie pictures and Rigid Tool calendars. I liked the wonderful smell of motor oil, solvent, and camphor from the preservative oil that Paul used on his precision tools. I’d already read the manuals for the boring bars and hone system, so I understood the theory. After reading up on the procedure I adjusted the play in the boring bar after one of the mechanics complained about the bit chattering. That was one of the incidents that made Paul consider me as more of an asset. He told me none of the mechanics had taken the time to read the manuals.

I also pointed out that their practice of using a hydraulic jack to hold the cylinders in place was specifically prohibited in the manual. Not only could the jack lose pressure and allow the cylinder to move off-center during the boring process, but it could apply too much pressure and distort the cylinders. The mechanics ignored me, but Paul found the screw jacks that came with the bar, and took away the hydraulic jack. Right away there were fewer problems with the boring bars.

I had some free time during lunch, so I went through the procedure for aligning the boring bar to a cylinder, and I calculated how much I’d need to bore the cylinder, just familiarizing himself with the operation.

Paul came back out from his office.

“You’re off the hook with Fernly. Nice old guy. Said he won’t hold you back if you have a better offer. He’s got someone that can move right into your slot. The afternoon guy has been asking for more hours. So you start tomorrow at 8:00. Bring your engine, you can bring the transmission later.”

Monroe: Get On The Bus, Gus

The rest of the day went by in a blur. It looked more and more like I was really going to have a motorcycle. On the bus headed home I had a big grin. A really pretty girl sat down across from me--an amazing, complete stunner--and I realized suddenly that she thought I was smiling at her. She smiled back, which made me blush and turn away. When I peeked back at her she was reading a book, so I looked her over. She was absolutely, totally awesome. She had light brown skin that looked smooth, flawless, and seemed to glow. I know how trite that sounds, but she really did. I generally like blondes, its the pictures of blondes in Playboy and Penthouse that wind up as sperm cardboard, but her dark hair cascaded down over her shoulders in big curls and it looked heavy and rich. She had startling big blue-grey eyes, like my French fantasy girl. In fact she looked a lot like my French fantasy girl, only there were no little wrinkles around her lips. Or perhaps my French fantasy girl had morphed into this very real, very beautiful girl across from me.

I was sure she was wearing makeup, but it didn't show. Most of the girls I saw on the bus looked like their faces were drawn on. Her blue angora sweater was nicely filled and she wore a tight, short skirt that showed off her smooth, muscular thighs. Fortunately I was carrying a handful of manuals that I could slide into my lap to cover a quickly growing hard on.

She looked up and caught me staring, and gave me kind of an amused and knowing smile. My blush turned red hot, I felt my scalp tighten and my ears burned, so I looked down again. When she stood up in the crowded bus before her stop she stood right in front of my knees, with her incredible ass vividly outlined by the thin skirt--right in front of my eyes.

I could plainly see the hems of her panties. Her scent was some kind of spicy, light perfume, ivory soap, and the unmistakable scent of Jergins lotion on her hands. I was well aware of the erotic potential of Jergins, and combined with the warmth of her body inches away the eroticism of her perfectly innocent scent overloaded my senses. I could feel the blood pounding in my temples. I immediately understood how people could have stroke during sex--I had a buzzy feeling behind my eyes that seemed like I might be close to fainting myself. The bus lurched and she stepped on my foot. She looked down at me, smiled again and mouthed "sorry".

Sorry? She could have kneed me in the groin and I would have liked it. Loved it. I watched her walk down the aisle of the bus--an astonishing walk. A tiny sway to her hips--not suggestive, just entrancing. I studied how her hip moved forward just before her leg moved forward in a step. It was amazing, like ballet. Other women might walk like that, but I had never noticed it before, it seemed completely unique. Her legs were firm and exquisitely shaped, and the short skirt showed her mid thigh, which was so supple, smooth and beautifully curved that it looked like living marble. When she got to

the exit stairs, the woman in front of her stepped back a little as the person in front of her stalled on the steps. She arched her back a little, leaning away from the woman with her upper body. When she did her bottom leapt into high relief, part of an astonishingly beautiful curve that started at the nape of her neck and ended at her feet. The buzzing sound reached a fizzing crescendo and I thought "here's where I stroke out before I turn 17".

I memorized the stop, checked my Timex, and watched her walk away from the bus. If I caught the same bus every day there was a chance I'd see her again. Maybe in ten years or so I'd work up the nerve to say hello. In the meantime I knew I'd have a date with her that night, in the quiet of my room. Just me, my highly active imagination, and lots of Jergins.

From Claudia's Diary

I saw a boy on the bus today, he looked at me and smiled, but then he got very shy and looked away. He's big, and sort of fat, but really cute. I bet he'll be handsome in a few years. I pretended to read so he could look at me, and he did. Looked me all over, though he spent a lot of time looking at my breasts and I could see him get hard. I thought about touching my breasts just to tease him, but I didn't do it. He covered his hard on with some books he was holding! What a shame. I had this horrid fantasy of sitting next to him and putting my hand in his lap. Ha!

When I got up to leave I decided to bump into his leg just for fun, but the bus lurched and I stepped on his foot. I said "sorry" and he looked up at me with a pathetic stunned expression. It made me hot all the way to the office, thinking about how innocent he seemed. I could do anything I wanted to him. I have such crazy fantasies. It's too bad most boys are such jerks.

Still, seeing him made me realize that there are lots of opportunities for me to find a guy I'll enjoy being with. I do not need to settle. I'm going to dump Bob, he's a lying jerk and I'm tired of his whining demands.

Silvio: The Hard Cats

Gangs all have a basic structure. There are complications and variations depending on size, ages of the members, sophistication of the leaders and the nature of the activities (criminal and otherwise) but the basics are generally present. There's an inner circle, general members and outliers. There's a leader, a council, enforcers, and administrators. And there's the grunts and wannabes. Silvio understood the structure and operation of gangs and the reasons for each element. He grew up in a gang-controlled world. While his parents were not involved in the mob, lots of his relatives were.

Motorcycle gangs look simpler than the mob, but they work similarly. For Silvio to build a group that could do what he wanted—sell dope to hippies and college kids—he didn't need any complexity, he just needed willing participants that would do what he wanted and keep their mouths shut. He didn't really want a gang, he wanted a front. He'd been lightly recruited by the Warlocks and knew a few guys in the Emeralds, but Silvio didn't want to start as an underling, that was for saps. He wasn't looking for people to tell him what to do—and that's what being in an organized gang meant—besides, he already had his uncle for that.

To keep his members quiet there needed to be a code, and the members had to look cool to recruit new members. He scoured a book his father owned about WWII bomber and fighter squadrons and their insignia and settled on the 393 Bomber Squadron--the squadron that dropped nukes on the Japanese. Their logo is a roaring tiger with a mushroom cloud. He didn't want the cloud, but he appropriated the tiger for his logo and settled on a name at the same time: Hard Cats -- Boston. He traced the logo and lettered the name in an arc across the top. And across the bottom the motto: Scio nullum esse, a Latin phrase which roughly translates as "I know nothing", a reference to a code of silence that Silvio planned to instill as the foundation of his club. He took his design to an embroidery shop in downtown Boston and ordered twenty embroidered patches in a size big enough to cover the back of a jean jacket.

He was on his way.

Monroe: The Erotic Pleasures Of Carburetor Polishing

The bike was taking shape. My father asked what its name was, because everything in the Sanborne family had a name—usually a lousy one—though I had to admit that Dad's current car, a 1963 Pontiac Catalina named Rocinante was pretty well named. I just didn't want to be Sancho Panza. The previous station wagon was Emily. My bicycle was named Caesar, and I certainly hadn't chosen such a stupid name. My dad chose the name, after a horse in a book he liked, and he referred to it that way solely and frequently--like "how's Caesar holding up?" Since I was usually thinking of other things when Dad talked to me, I often struggled to understand what he meant. I never used the name myself. I knew that if I didn't come up with a name for my motorcycle quickly Dad would pester me with suggestions or simply name it and that would be that.

In my imagination the girl on the bus was named Sophia, and so Sophia it was. "Sophia, my motorcycle is named Sophia."

It was a wonderful inspiration. When dad asked how things were going with Sophia I'd say "Oh, I bored her cylinders yesterday, and polished her carbs." I looked forward to the day I could say "Oh, I rode Sophia all day yesterday, and right now I'm going to go lubricate her." Several times I got a stiffy talking about my bike that had nothing to do with my passion for motorcycles.

In the week since I'd gone full time at the shop I had practiced enough on junk cylinders to bore my BSA's barrels and fit a set of used first-oversize pistons that Paul sold me cheaply. After boring the cylinder to the exact size of the piston I used the Sunnen hone and some freshly squared stones to grind the clearance to the exact minimum, within half a thousandth of an inch. No taper that I could measure, all the way, top to bottom. Paul was impressed. He probably wouldn't have been so impressed if he realized how much time it took. The flat rate manual says boring a cylinder should take .75 hours, but my way took 1.5. I'd have to speed things up a bit. I think I could eventually do a high-quality boring job in less than an hour, it's just a matter of being efficient. I don't think it makes sense to cut corners.

I gapped the rings and set the fully-prepped cylinder assembly aside. I disassembled the crankcase and found the crankshaft looked fine, which was a relief since grinding the crank was outside machine shop work that would cost money. Paul talked me into replacing the plain bearings in the rods with new ones. "Look, it's a couple of bucks. Sure, your bearings mike out OK, but those little dark flecks are grit embedded in the bearing metal. There's a chance of scoring your crankshaft--why do that? Make it as perfect as you can on the inside."

So new rod bearings it was. Paul had three sets of standard size, so he had me lightly oil all of them and then test them with plastigage to find the set that gave the best fit. My engine was going to be sweet. I cleaned out the sludge trap inside the crank, and then balanced the crank using static balancing weights. Fortunately it was heavy on the web side, so I drilled out the balancing holes a little more until the balance was perfect. Paul said our shop was probably the only one on the East Coast that had a crank balancing setup. I diplomatically didn't point out that J.B. Nichol森 said that good machine shop could do dynamic balancing.

The main bearings were fine, and the cases were reasonably true to the centerline of the crank bearings. I lapped the case joints on a thick sheet of glass with valve grinding compound smeared on it until they were evenly flat. Then I shimmed the crank to eliminate lateral movement. I reassembled the engine, by the book. The finished engine looked amazing sitting on the engine box. It looked huge and powerful. Purposeful.

Bernard had scraped up the side covers when he dumped the bike. I filed the scrapes out, sanded the file marks away with progressively finer sandpaper, and then spent an uncomfortable evening in the cellar polishing them out with polishing mops attached to dad's old bench grinder. The mop sometimes caught the edge of the covers, and even with its weak motor it ripped the covers from my hands several times and flung them across the bench, scaring the heck out of me. I'd carefully ease the mop towards an edge then WHAM, the mop would grab the edge and yank the piece away, often giving me a whack with the cover before flinging it into the pegboard at the back of the bench.

I had three grades of polish in wax sticks. The way you polish aluminum is to charge the mop--a bunch of muslin-fabric discs that are sewn together--with the polish stick by pressing it against the spinning mop. Then you press the part against the mop and apply enough pressure to generate some heat but not slow the motor. The polish looks dark and scuzzy at first, but the part begins to take on a shine. I had three mops, one for the coarse polish, one for medium, and one for finish. I did all the parts with coarse first, then changed mops and did medium, working my way through to fine.

After three brutal hours I emerged from the cellar with beautifully polished aluminum covers, a remarkable collection of cuts and bruises on my arms, a very black face from the polishing rouge spinning off the mop face. I had an itchy, fuzzy feeling from head to toe from the waxy lint off the wheel. I turned the water in the bathtub black, and left a ring I was too tired to clean up even though I knew mom would hit the ceiling when she saw it.

At least that would be tomorrow.

I climbed the steep stairs to my bedroom, propped the covers along the top of my desk where the light from my radio could shine on them, and slid under the covers, asleep and dreaming of freedom, long rides, wind in my hair, and Sophia—both of them.

Monroe: Fat Boy Morphing

Unnoticed by Monroe, or his family, the heavy lifting and constant physical work both at the shop and at home was having a remarkable effect. He was turning some fat to muscle. The transformation had actually started several years ago when he moved to the third floor. The old house had high ceilings, so every time he went from the ground floor to his room he climbed two long flights of very steep stairs, lifting his 260 pounds with every step, and often carrying heavy equipment, books, or furniture up and down the stairs. His thighs had quietly become massive and he was far stronger than he looked.

Now the baby fat in his upper body was dissolving under the constant physical work at Albion and in his cellar. His arms and shoulders were bulking up and becoming firm. His face was narrowing and becoming less moonlike. There was still plenty of fat geek overlaying the new frame, but he looked a lot better than he realized.

Monroe had never paid much attention to his body, he wasn't particularly embarrassed about being a fat geek with thick glasses. In his little world at worst it made no difference, and at best it was the way fellow geeks identified each other. Fat + Soft + Out of breath + Glasses = Geek. But the world he was tentatively entering had different values. Monroe's powerful legs and broadening shoulders cast an interesting counterpoint to his thick glasses and geeky clothes. Like a Clark Kent disguise, which everyone but the people in Metropolis could see right through.

Monroe: Angel and the Geocentric Universe

I was surprised to find Angel sitting at the kitchen table with a pile of her textbooks. Angel has an apartment off Commonwealth Ave near Boston University where she goes to school. She's rarely at our house. "To what do we owe this pleasure" I said.

"Fumigation. The cockroaches were taking over, so the landlord is having the whole apartment tented and fumigated. I'm here for two days".

"Wow, you must have run out of alternatives. No boyfriends to bunk with?"

"None that I want to spend two days with. What's it to you, brother?"

"Oh, hey, I'm glad to see you, I was just thinking how nice it must be to be away on your own. Seems like it would be hard to come back. What are you studying?"

"Greek classics. Hey, don't make a face, it's pretty fascinating stuff. These were very smart people. It's the cradle of civilization, and the source of all the science you love so much."

"How can you say that, they got so much stuff wrong, The earth as the center of the universe, and the heavens as 27 transparent celestial spheres that spin around a flat earth. A sun the size of a chariot? They thought the universe was only a few thousand miles across. They couldn't have been more wrong. What can you learn from people who didn't do experiments to see if they were right or wrong. That's not science, it's just dreaming stuff up."

"Well, you should start off by understanding that their observations are consistent with the conclusions. They did do experiments, and they observed. They were skeptics about all the theories they came up with--that's the root of the scientific method. There's no reason to think the earth is spinning based on observation. If you drop a ball it doesn't curve as it falls. There's no rotation-driven gales running across the planet.

"They didn't have Isaac Newton, so they didn't understand momentum, so they decided the earth must be stationary. But they could see the stars, planets and sun moving, so the celestial spheres must move. And by the way, they didn't all think that. Aristarchus of Samos had it pretty right. He thought the Earth rotated around the sun, and that the earth spun on a tilted axis. He also thought the sun was much larger than the moon and much further away. He got the numbers wrong, but the idea was right. "

"Huh. So where did all this flat earth stuff come from, and celestial spheres."

“The flat earth nonsense comes from Christian zealots, who killed off the last academics at the beginning of the dark ages. They destroyed the Museum of Alexandria, stripped, tortured, killed, quartered and burned the last Geometer, Hypatia. They said the planets moved because angels pushed them across the sky, and that was that. Science was heresy, just like the idiot fundamentalist Christians believe today.

“After the fall, the Arabs took up Greek concepts of mathematics and science, but they thought the universe was mechanical and the crystal spheres and epicycles were real. The Greeks knew the earth is a sphere. And if you think the earth is stationary, and the stars move, then they have to be close, because they move completely around the world every day. So unless they are moving very fast, like faster than the speed of light, then they have to be pretty close. The Greek scholars didn’t necessarily believe in four, or 12 or 27 spheres, they considered it a thought exercise. A way to describe the complicated movements they observed. It’s hard to explain retrograde motion of the planets without a lot of fiddling. But that doesn’t mean they believed their mechanism was real, any more than Schrodinger believed his cat was dead in a box. So have a little respect brother, or at least know what you’re talking about before you dismiss stuff.”

“Yikes, I guess so. I know better than to argue with you. I guess seeing you sitting here in the house, voluntarily under the scrutiny of mom and dad put me off my game. Okay, I give, I need to read the classics. Hey, when you finish studying, let’s take a walk around the neighborhood. I’ll tell you about my new job and buy you a coke at Cole’s.”

“Cool, lets’ go now, I’m tired of reading about these dumb Greeks and their stupid ideas.”

Monroe: Oh Sophia, Honey Is That You?

Standing on the crowded bus to Somerville the next morning I found myself face-to-face with Sophia, the object of many dreams, both waking and sleeping. It wasn't exactly an accidental proximity. I was standing in the middle of the bus when she got on, and I worked myself a little closer so I could look at her. She was wearing the same skirt, but a different sweater, this one ivory colored with some complicated knitting around the neck and shoulders, and little pearls stitched into the pattern. The random shuffling of people getting off and on had suddenly propelled her and I much closer together than I anticipated. She was suddenly inches away, and I was thrilled and utterly terrified. She was absorbed in a paperback book. I dipped my head to see the title and she caught the movement and looked up at me with her big crazy blue eyes. I felt like I fell into an elevator shaft. My brain turned to oatmeal.

"Hi, are you a Steinbeck fan?" she asked.

Amazingly, Sophia had asked probably the only kind of question I could actually answer without wetting my pants. Well, she could have asked a question about physics, bacteriology, electronics, or motorcycles, but that was unlikely.

"Um, gee, I guess, sort of. I read a couple of his books. East of Eden, Cannery Row, Tortilla Flats, the Grapes of Wrath... So, yeah, I like the way he describes places and the way he writes dialog."

"Wow, are you a lit major or something?"

"Uh, no, I just like reading. How about you?"

"Oh, I'm not in college yet, and I think I'm going to study business, not liberal arts, but I like reading too. I've seen you before on this bus, you work in Somerville?"

"Yes, I work for Albion Cycles, the motorcycle shop. How about you?"

"Oh, I work in an insurance office. I think it's a good place to start since I want to learn all about business. I'm a file clerk, but I'm also learning how to do the accounting when I have free time. Whoops, this is my stop. Maybe next time I see you we can talk about books."

"That would be amazing... ...I mean wonderful... ...I mean, that would be really fun. My name is Monroe..."

"Very nice to meet you Monroe" She looked directly into his eyes for what seemed like a very long time. Then she smiled and said "My name is Claudia" and she was gone.

Claudia. She pronounced it like Cloud-ia. Monroe practiced under his breath. "Cloud-ia, Cloud-ia, my name is Cloud-ia".

He had actually talked to Sophia, no, Claudia, not just looked at her, or said hi, he had talked to her. About books. And she wanted to talk to him again. It was practically a date.

Monroe went three stops past the shop, in a daze. He had to walk back half a mile, and as he walked he whispered "Cloud-ia, her name is Cloud-ia".

From Claudia's Diary

I saw the boy on the bus again today, his name is Monroe. I had this crazy urge to just grab him and kiss him. I have no idea why he's so appealing to me, he's kind of fat and he dresses poorly. His haircut is atrocious--it looks like he did it himself with one of those haircut kits they sell on TV. I have this idea in my head that he's very innocent, I wonder what he'd think if he knew what I like to do to him. People think I'm such a nice girl, but I have such crazy thoughts.

I saw him get on and look at me, and then he moved to get closer. Just seeing that made me feel very bold so when the people on the bus shuffled at the Central Square stop I stepped forward, pretending to be focused on my book and got right into his face--so close I could taste his breath. Lavioris. It freaked him out. He looked at the book I was reading, which was "Of Mice and Men" so I decided to break the ice and ask if he was a Steinbeck fan. To my surprise he has actually read Steinbeck.

I may have actually located an intelligent man who isn't a snooty corduroy jacket jerkoff--at last. Maybe I sensed that and it's why I'm attracted. We talked a little, traded names. I was demure and sweet. I resisted the urge to jump on him. I got off the bus and walked to the office. The feeling of my legs rubbing together made me jumpy. "Oh, la, I feel I might swoon" says Scarlet.

I am totally. Completely. Absolutely crazy.

Monroe: Chicks Dig Bikes

“Holy shit, Monroe, the bike looks fantastic. You’ve got the engine in, the wheels are on, lets’ start it up.”

“We can’t, I haven’t finished the gearbox. You might notice that there isn’t a kickstarted yet. The kick starter turns the engine through the gearbox, the primary drive and the clutch. I have to shim the transmission and get the shifting throw adjusted just right, then put it in and assemble the primary drive and clutch. Then do the wiring, check out the carbs, set the timing, and then we can probably start it. I’ve checked out the magneto, its working perfectly. But I need to buy a new drive chain and both the main and countershaft sprockets, I don’t think Bernie ever lubed the chain and it stretched so badly that it hooked the sprockets.”

“What are all these gears on the side for?”

“Well some of them turn the cam. It has to turn at one-half engine speed since this is a four stroke. You know what a cam is for, right”.

“Sure, I’ve heard all about them. Full race, hot cam, all that stuff, they make the bike fast. I didn’t know we had one, does that make this a race bike”?

“As usual, you’re faking that you know something. The cam opens and closes the valves. In a four stroke the engine goes through two revolutions for each power stroke. There’s an intake valve a few inches from the carburetor. The intake valve opens and the piston goes down, creating a vacuum. Air rushes through the carb and picks up fuel from the jetting system and it fills the cylinder above the piston. Then the piston starts up and the intake valve closes. The flywheel gives the piston enough energy to continue to rise and compress the air and gas mixture. About when the piston gets to the top of the stroke the spark plug fires and makes the gas and air burn, which increases the pressure a lot. The pressure pushes the piston down creating power. About when it reaches the bottom the exhaust valve opens which is just a few inches from the exhaust pipe. The burned gasses start coming out, and then the piston comes up and pushes it all out and it starts all over again. Got it?”

“Sure, I know all that. But what about a full race cam?”

“Well, all this stuff happens with momentum, so there’s some power to be had at higher RPM from opening the valves earlier than you’d think and closing them later. Full Race is just a bullshit name for a high-duration cam that takes advantage of the inertia of the gasses to make more horsepower at high RPM, it makes the engine run rough at lower rpm when the valves are open for too long, but in a race motor no one cares, so you live with the roughness to get more power.”

“So, are we gonna have a hot cam?”

“Nope, though from what I’ve read, the cam in this bike is more radical than a car would have.”

“Monroe the mechanic, you sound like an expert. What about the tank, it’s got a dent and it’s kind of scratched up. We should paint it, there’s some spray cans in our basement left over from when my dad painted our lawn furniture. It’s light green, but it would look better than this scratched up mess.”

“Actually, one of the mechanics at the shop is a good painter, he painted a couple of the bikes at the shop. He offered to paint the tank, the oil tank and side cover for me. I’ve just got to pay for the materials and detail his truck for him. I’m going to do kind of a reddish orange. I’m bringing all the parts into the shop on Monday. He says it will take two weeks, and by then I should have everything else ready. It will look great”.

Lenny threw a leg over the bike, sat on the frame and imagined himself riding it. “Cool, hey, why don’t we do it custom while we’re at it, like some of those bikes in the magazines. You could take off all the badges and stuff, chop the fenders, put on some ape hanger bars. It would be way cool.”

“Well, I want to do it pure stock to begin with. That’s what I started out to do, and I want to finish that. If we want to do some custom work later we can do it, but I want to do it straight stock first, in fact I’m going to put lower, narrower bars on it, the kind they use in England. We have a whole bunch of them at the shop, Americans don’t want them. Paul said I could have a set for free. One of the mechanics is from Birmingham, and he says no one in Europe would ride a bike with the wide bars we use. He says you can’t really control the bike with wide bars”.

“I don’t know, Silvio seems to do fine with his ape hangers on his bike, and he gets girls like he’s a babe magnet.”

“Silvio rides a Harley, which the guys in the shop say handles so bad that ape hangers don’t hurt anything. And Silvio looks like an Italian James Dean. I don’t want to bust your bubble Lenny, but I still don’t buy this thing about girls and motorcycles”.

“Are you shitting me? Look at the magazines. The chicks are hanging out waiting for bike guys to give them a ride. Chicks dig bikes. It’s obvious.”

