

Sing a Mean Tune, Kid

That kid was a punk; always in and out of jail or the audy home: drugs; disturbing the peace; curfew; disorderly conduct; assault and battery. He had a rap sheet a mile long, and he was only fifteen or sixteen. I suppose it comes from his upbringing: his old lady was a dooper and a whore. Of course, she was one of my snitches in the neighborhood, and every once in awhile, I'd grab a piece of ass when I was hard-up or the old lady was on the rag. Anyway, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, like they say; the kid didn't have a good home-life, that's for sure. It's no wonder he turned-out like he did; I'm amazed that he didn't O.D. sooner.

I suppose the first time we picked the kid up for a violation was at Jimmie "the mib" Colangelo's hot-dog stand. The kid started working there and was doin' alright, I guess, but we got a call one Friday night from Jimmie. Normally, we wouldn't pay too much attention to Jimmie's calls, he was such a prick; but he really sounded shook-up.

I walked in and sees this kid jerkin' and squirmin' on the floor, like some stuck fish, or some snake or somethin'. Jimmie's not too bright, so he thinks the kid is screwin' around or somethin', but I know he's havin' a seizure. So we call an ambulance, and all the while, we're trying to keep the kid from swallowin' his tongue, or hurtin' himself. When we get to the hospital, we come to find out that the kid's hopped-up on heroin, and convulsin'. Don't that beat all; here we thought the kid was a epileptic or somethin'; we shouldve just let the little fuck die, and saved us some more trouble.

A few days later, after the kid's been released from the hospital, I stop by at Jimmie's; seems he had some trouble with the mob about his juke boxes. I stopped by to pay a friendly visit, and collect my month's protection money, when I see the kid workin' behind the counter.

"Hey kid, too bad you didn't die, you little fuck. I don't like dopers, so stay off the stuff or I'll bust your ass."

And the kid just yes-sirs me, like nothin' happened. And the "mib" is sitting down on one of the stools next to the counter, grinnin' that shit-eatin' grin of his, like he thinks the whole thing is funny. If I didn't need that month's protection money, I'd have kicked both their asses real good. Besides, Jimmie was banging the kid's old lady too,

and she was holdin' out on me. That fuck Jimmie would bang anything that moved—he had no self respect. A couple months later, he moved in with that retard's mother, the one that lived over the Grand Movie Theater. Jimmie thought it was cute to torment that retard kid. Done it one time too many, and the fuckin' retard killed him. Serves the dumb fuck right. But that's a story for another time.

So anyway, I eats my dog and fries, gives Jimmie some shit and leaves. I don't think nothin' of the kid, what's his name—Holzrichter, or something like that, until a few weeks later; we get a call that there's a fight goin' on. It seems this kid got pissed at some guy – he said the guy was beatin' on his mother—and goes after him with a baseball bat. Now, this guy that Holzrichter went after was the ward alderman. What would the alderman want to do with that kid's old lady? Maybe he was tryin' to get a blow-job off her, but what's that to the kid?

Well, we got the call, and me and my partner drove past the Grand Movie Theater, and there's the kid whalin' on the alderman with his fists, and the bat, screamin' his head off about how he was gonna kill him for fuckin' with his mother. I tell you, the kid was stupid – who the hell wasn't fuckin' his mother—she'd turn tricks any time she needed a fix.

Well, we roughed-up the little fuck, brought him to the station, and then to court the next day. He got sent to Montefiore, and spent two or three months there. We thought that he'd learn his lesson, but things only got worse. He found a buyer there, and soon he was trippin' out all the time; he didn't have to cop any of his mother's stash after that.

After he got out of the audy home, he started hanging around the Grand Movie Theater, you know with the ushers and candy girls and that bum David Orpheo. Pretty soon, old Dante's got him placing bets with Perry and Steve at Maywood Park. Everythings goin' smooth until Holzrichter needs a fix and steals about five hundred bucks—give or take—from Dante's vig. Holy shit; I thought the kid was gonna get whacked.

But Dante's a funny kinda guy. Instead of wastin' him, he makes him work off his debt. No more runnin' bets to the track—the kid's gotta work at the show as a usher. He actually does a pretty good job of it, until one day, when Dante's not around, we get a call that there's a disturbance at the show. Me and my partner walk in, and we find

Holzrichter banging some little whore in one of the seats in the front row. Nailed him for public indecency, and he ends up back at Montefiore. We let the little whore go; cause Holzrichter's mom ain't puttin' out after her sugar-daddy the alderman, got the shit kicked out of him by the kid.

So Holzrichter stays at Montefiore a few more months, and gets out again, and sure as shit, he heads back to his old neighborhood. Only this time he come back, it looks like the kid has aged about twenty years, and instead of his usual dumb-shit, dooper look, now he looks like a hard ass. And he ain't smokin' pot and doin' the occasional shot of H; he's on the juice all the time now.

Pretty soon, there's a ton of burglaries in the neighborhood; mostly stuff that's easy to fence like TVs or radios, or bikes. Every once in awhile a piece of jewelry goes missing, but nothin' too distinguishin' so it can be fenced easy. Well, it don't take no genius to figure out who's behind the robberies: even a fuckin' moron like Jimmie the "mib" could figure this out; rest his ass-humpin' soul.

So, we lean on Holzrichter; watch where he's goin'; tryin' to put the heat on his dealer; tryin' to figure out where he's fencin' the goods. In the mean-time, the little shit ain't goin' to school anymore, so we bring him in on truancy, just to let him know that we're watchin' him.

But I'll give the little fuck credit when it's due him; he can cover his ass real good when he wants to. We can't find his dealer; we can't find the fence: all we got is our dicks in our hands, and an idea that Holzrichter's doin' the burglaries.

We coulda been tailing that piece of shit for forever, but we caught a lucky break. One day when I'm getting' my knob polished by that little tramp from the show, the one we caught with Holzrichter, I notice that she's wearin' a pretty decent necklace; one that there's no way in hell that she coulda paid for. So after she's done, I ask her about the necklace, and she gives me some cock and bull story about how it was an inheritance or somethin'. Right away, I knew we had Holzrichter.

So we bust the little bitch and turn her into a snitch. We agree that if we don't send her away, she helps us to find Holzrichter's dealer and fence; in return, she gets to make some money on the side, and me and my partner get a piece of ass once in awhile. Everything's good.

Well, we track down the dealer and bust the fuck; seems he's been selling pot, ludes, and speed to kids at the eighth grade and high school, so getting' him off the street was good for the neighborhood. We found the fence, but that was a little bit trickier to fix. See, the fence worked for Dante, so we couldn't bust him; but we convinced him not to take any goods from Holzrichter. Pretty soon, Holzrichter was real fucked—he couldn't get high, and he couldn't get cash – a bad combination for him. All we had to do was wait, and the little prick would screw up—it had to happen, and when it did – bam, we'd be there to bust him. This time, with two priors and a felony for burglary, they'd send him to the big house, no audy home.

So we wait, and wait some more. But nothin' happens: no more burglaries, no more dealers walkin' around the neighborhood. Not quite what we were hopin' for, but not bad, neither. And then we come to find out that the little fuck scores some real good H from some Puerto Rican from Humboldt Park—what the fuck was he doin' around here—and ODs on the shit.

Of all the fucked-up luck. It still pisses me off when I think about it; we could've had the little shit, and he up and dies. Go figure. Like I said earlier, the apple don't fall far from the tree; but it's a miracle he didn't die sooner.

I saw his old lady yesterday when I came around to fill out the police report. She wasn't doin' too good what with her son dyin' and all. So, I gave her some comfort, like anyone woulda done; I forgot what a good lay she was when she was clean and sober.

After I got her story, I drove down to St. Williams to talk to the priest about the funeral arrangements. Seems like the kid had been friends with the pastor for awhile. The old guy kinda seemed upset that the kid died; nothin' against the priests, but they can be real fuckin' stupid about some things. Anyway, I talked to him for awhile, drove down to the station, and made out my report.

I'm done for the day now; I think me and Bill, that's my partner, are goin' down to the Grand Tavern to shoot some pool, have a few beers, and stare at the girls for awhile. Maybe afterwards, we'll look up that little tramp from the movie theater and grab a piece of ass.

One thing bothers me about Holzrichter; it's how he was raised. His old lady really done a number on that kid; set a bad example, probably even got him high for the first time. Now me; I'm not like

that. When Joey Jr. grows up, he's gonna be a cop, just like me. I'm gonna show him the ropes; teach him who he can trust; how to spot a snitch; know when to be on the take, and for how much. That's what an old man's supposed to do for his kid; that's how your supposed to raise your kids; with respect, and by settin' a good example. . . .

. . . I've known Michael for maybe seven or eight years. When he first started attending St. Williams grade-school, he was a bright little boy who had an ear for music. He was well-behaved and attentive, and very smart. I remember that his appearance was sometimes slovenly, and that his personal hygiene could have been better. He didn't often have lunch or snacks, so the teachers would often share their lunch with him.

He excelled in music, I think I've already mentioned that; he was also good at English and Social Sciences, but struggled with mathematics. I distinctly remember that he enjoyed religious studies; he seemed to know many Bible verses by heart, and he was anxious to make his First Holy Communion and Sacrament of Confession. He was very proud when he received a perfect score on the examination prior to receiving his Communion.

His mother or father never attended parent-teacher conferences. That was the first clue I'd had that something was amiss in his household. I later found out that Michael's father had abruptly departed, leaving Michael and his mother to make their way through life unassisted and unprepared for life's vagaries. I sent notes to Michael's mother, but never received responses in return. Finally, one day, I walked over to their apartment across the street from the Grand Movie Theater. Michael was not home, but I found his mother sprawled out on the floor of their living room in a semi-conscious state. I attempted to revive her, but was unable to elicit more than a few barely articulate mumblings from her, including what I presume was a proposition of sex for money.

When I returned to the Church, I immediately prayed for her forgiveness, as well as my own, in case I was tempted by carnal desires. I was so upset by this incident that I did not attempt to contact his mother for quite some time. Finally, I resolved to talk to her on Michael's behalf.

Mrs. Holzrichter, Susan was her first name, came to school one day a few weeks after I'd stopped by her apartment. Apparently, she'd forgotten that I'd stopped by the apartment, and seemed somewhat

disinterested in Michael's school work. She seemed agitated or fidgety, and when she talked to me, her eyes darted back and forth, and at one point she stopped talking in mid-sentence, as if she'd lost her train of thought.

I reviewed Michael's progress at school, suggested that she encourage him with his homework and studies, and encouraged her to provide Michael with music lessons. She responded in a vague, ambiguous manner, lit up a cigarette, and stared vacantly at me for the remainder of our discussion. When she left, I had the impression that she wouldn't follow-up on anything we'd discussed. Since then, I've seen her one or two additional times, but each time, she didn't appear to recognize me.

Failing to make a favorable impression on Michael's mother, I resolved to provide guidance and assistance to him by myself. I arranged for him to take piano lessons with one of the teachers after school. At first, he responded enthusiastically, but gradually, his interest waned. I also encouraged him to participate in several after-school community activities, but his attendance at these events eventually decreased, and he stopped altogether.

At about the same time as his extra-curricular activities at school began to slow down, his behavior seemed to alter. His attendance at school became sporadic and his grades began to suffer. His teachers began noting disciplinary problems with him, and he began to exhibit a violent temper. Shortly thereafter, he was a regular visitor to the principal's office, and eventually to my office in the Rectory.

Soon, the police began visiting the Rectory, either to locate Michael or to inform me of his various indiscretions. One officer, a Sergeant Lombardo, was an extremely offensive individual who seemed to dislike Michael intensely. It seemed to me that this policeman was more dangerous and vile than the criminals he was trying to apprehend, and that his dislike of Michael was unchristian, at the very least.

After much prayer, I decided that the best way to help Michael was to secure him a part-time job. I hoped that by engaging in worthwhile activities, he would be less inclined to associate with people who were engaged in criminal activities. I talked to a friend of mine, Dante Ribisi, a good, God-fearing man, about securing a job for Michael at the Grand Movie Theater. Several months earlier, I talked to Dante about the movies that they were showing at the theater, which were of

a pornographic nature. He agreed to provide a series of weekend events catering to children, at the show, and expressed his displeasure at the necessity of airing such pornographic trash during the week. In fact, he told me that the owner of the show, a Jewish man, was responsible for airing these horrible films; and that he, Dante, was sure it was owing to the owners' lack of faith in Christ that led to these films being shown. I heartily concur in this opinion.

After having secured a position for Michael at the Theater, I reasoned that his problems would clear-up, and continued to tend to the other members of my flock. Nevertheless, I continued to offer prayers for Michael so that he would not relapse into sin.

It was with great sadness that I learned that Michael had been remanded to Montefiore, and that his predilection for criminal activities continued unabated. Sergeant Lombardo made several additional visits to apprise me of Michael's various misdemeanors, or to enquire of his where-about. The Sergeant's demeanor was not improved in any of these subsequent visits.

Sergeant Lombardo's last visit was a few days ago, when he informed me that Michael had died of a drug overdose. I was shocked and saddened by this revelation. I was not aware of the fact that Michael had been taking drugs, and I doubted in my heart-of-hearts that drugs were available in our neighborhood. While we are not affluent, the people in the parish are hard-working and decent: drugs and alcohol are not staples of their existence.

Mrs. Holzrichter stopped by the church to ask that I speak kindly of Michael at the funeral service. She had the same vague, half-conscious air that I'd observed in her before. If anything, she seemed more nervous than in our previous meeting, and her arms were streaked red in certain places, and were scabbed in others. I told her that I would speak kindly of him in my funeral sermon, and said that I would include her in my prayers. She laughed slightly when I said this, and muttered that she was beyond hope. I assured her that the Lord would help any of those that asked, and she murmured that the Lord didn't seem to help Michael.

Several weeks have passed since Michael left us. I continue to pray for his soul, and the souls of the faithfully departed. I only hope that my prayers on behalf of Mrs. Holzrichter are answered. The life of the parish priest is spent in praying for the welfare of his flock. This is our

duty, and our work, and our efforts have resulted in the stability, decency, and hope for our flock. . .

. . . My name is Susan Holzrichter. I'm writing this journal hoping that somehow, someone—anyone—will find it and learn from my mistakes. I am a user, a snitch, and according to some people, a whore. I'm not particularly proud of any of these titles, but except for the part about being a whore, I guess that they're all true. I didn't start out by being a druggie or a snitch; it just sort of happened, gradually. I didn't start out being a mother, either, and that just sort of happened, as well.

Being a mother at age seventeen doesn't leave much time for preparation or understanding. Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to make excuses, but I wasn't ready for raising a kid or being someone's wife, which explains why I did such a shitty job with Mikey. That's what I regret most in my life, treating that kid so badly, and watching as he screwed up his life, like I did mine. But I guess the thing that really bothers me is that I let it happen to him, because I was too lazy, or too selfish to do anything about it.

I grew up in the neighborhood, just like everybody else around here, hoping to do well; and maybe move out to a better place. My father and mother were regular people, nothing special. My dad was a blue-collar laborer, my mother a housewife. I didn't have a bad childhood or anything, and they loved me and wanted the best for me. I wasn't bad at school, or particularly good, just an average kid. Maybe that's why people like Father Murphy at St. Williams don't remember me; I didn't stand out or make much of an impression. I was just your average, everyday kid; like hundred of others who lived around Grand and Harlem.

I went through grade school uneventfully, and continued that pattern through my first two years of High School at Steinmetz. In sophomore year I guess I bloomed, because most of the guys started paying attention to me; I wasn't used to that. A few of my girlfriends started acting differently towards me, sort of stand-offish. Soon, more and more of the guys from school would wander over to my house at night, and my mom and dad had their hands full keeping them away from the house.

That's about the time that I met Joey; he used to hang around the school or at one of the hot dog stands not far from Steinmetz. He was good-looking, acted tough, and was pretty full of himself. He had a car; I think it was a Mustang, and used to drive up and down the side-

streets showing off and ogling the girls. Of course, all of my friends thought he was cute, and wanted to ride in his Mustang. I was no exception, and before long, I found myself in the Mustang in the parking lot of the Grand Movie Theater.

I was pretty foolish back then, and believed the entire line of shit that Joey gave me; how I was the most beautiful girl he'd even seen; how we'd get married some day; how we'd have a big house and nice things. It didn't take long before he'd gotten in my pants, and about nine months later, Joey skipped town.

My mom and dad were horrified when they found out I was pregnant; they worried that the neighbors would think less of us, and that I'd never be able to raise Mikey without a decent education. Well, they were right on both counts; I never finished high school, and the neighbors never treated any of us the same.

We eventually moved a few blocks away, but the rumors never stopped, and the name "whore" seemed to follow me around. I made a stupid mistake; I'll be the first to admit it, but I wasn't a whore, at least not yet.

Once Mikey came, I got a job at the local A & P a few blocks away from the house. I worked eight or nine hours a day as a cashier. It wasn't hard work, but there was no future in being a cashier at A & P. My mom watched Mikey while I worked, and things went along okay until my dad lost his job at the Texaco Gas Station. When gas prices started rising, the owner of the station figured he didn't need two repair men, and that he could get away with employing just one man for \$5.00 an hour. My dad was making \$7.50, so the owner saved himself quite a bit of money.

My dad seemed to be adjusting well to losing his job; he figured he'd get another one within a short time. But as the weeks dragged into months, he became more and more withdrawn, and then he started getting mean. In the meantime, we started selling things to make ends meet. After awhile, we had nothing left to sell, and I was the only one bringing in any money.

My dad started doing odd jobs around the neighborhood when he could, but it wasn't steady work. Some weeks he'd make some money, other weeks he wouldn't. Then my mom and dad started arguing, and pretty soon they were both upset with me. After awhile, they were both blaming me for their troubles: if I didn't have Mikey,

things would have been better; we would have had more things, more money, and a better life. I tried to tell them that Mikey had nothing to do with it, and that neither I nor he could be blamed for our present problems.

It seemed like every day was worse than the day before, and I dreaded coming home from work. The manager at the A & P noticed that I wasn't as cheerful as I used to be, and asked me what was wrong. I told him what was going on at home, and he seemed to sympathize with me. He'd just been through a divorce, which was pretty unusual at the time, and he was sort of lonely. We'd go over to the coffee shop down the street from the A & P after our shift was over, and we'd talk for an hour or two, and then I'd head home. After a few months, he asked me to move in with him; I was reluctant to move in because of Mikey, but things weren't getting better at home, so I agreed to move in with him.

At first, things went okay with Tom, and he even seemed to like Mikey. My mom still watched the baby when I worked, and I paid her what I could for her help. She seemed to have a mixed reaction to my moving in with Tom. Part of her seemed to be relieved that I'd moved out on my own; part of her seemed to be afraid for me, like Tom would turn out to be some sort of bad person. Like I said, divorce was sort of unusual in those days.

You might have noticed that I started the last entry by saying that at first things were okay with Tom. He was a nice guy, maybe a little square or boring, and he treated Mikey and I well; I have no complaints about that. Really, I have no complaints about Tom at all; it's just that I was eighteen and he was, I don't know, maybe thirty. It was boring living with him; but compared to what I've seen since, boring wasn't so bad.

Well, I was bored, working at the A & P, going home to Mikey, making dinner or talking to Tom, and things seemed to drag on for forever. Then, one day Joey walked into the A & P, and despite knowing better, my heart skipped a beat. I'm sure that he knew I was working there, and just stopped by to see if I'd changed much. Unfortunately for me, things hadn't changed at all; as soon as I saw him, I was hoping that he'd ask me to go to the drive-in in his Mustang. And sure enough, a few days later, I made an excuse to skip out on Tom and Mikey, and join Joey in his Mustang.

Every week or so, I made another excuse to get out of the house and meet Joey somewhere; it really didn't matter where. It was kind of exciting, going out with Joey; it felt sort of like I was doing something mysterious and glamorous. I'm not sure how Tom found out; maybe someone saw us and told him; maybe he looked at the phone bills and noticed that I called a certain number one too many times; maybe he noticed that I was a little different to him on the now rare occasion when we made love? I'm not really sure how he found out, but when he did, Mikey and I found ourselves on the street looking for someplace to stay.

At first, I stayed with some of my girlfriends, but when it didn't look like I'd be getting a place of my own, their parents asked us to leave. Of course, Joey wanted no part of us; he was just after one thing, and didn't want to know anything about Mikey. My mom and dad were still having their own problems, so we couldn't move back there. We drifted around from place to place, staying a few days here, a few days there; it was a rotten life.

It was about this time that I started using drugs. When you don't think anything will get better, when you have nowhere to turn, when it looks like things will stay rotten forever, losing yourself for a few hours at a time looks pretty good. Straight people just don't get it. They think drugs are like selling your soul to the devil; maybe that's what it is, but if you have nowhere else to turn, no hope, then a few hours of escape can seem like heaven.

That's how it starts out; feeling like heaven. But heaven is not meant for mortals, and soon the need to get that fix, to escape takes over everything else. It takes away your resolve, it steals your dignity, and you're forced to do things that you wouldn't have dreamt of to get the next fix. And so, I turned to prostitution to pay for my habit. It's not that I wanted to be a prostitute, I just couldn't figure out a way to pay for the drugs and find someplace for Mikey and I to live. Being a cashier at the A & P isn't going to pay for much in the way of an apartment or food, much less support a drug habit.

I got an apartment overlooking the Grand Movie Theater, right next to the marquee. It was cheaper than any of the other apartments at the theater, because the damn lights on the marquee were usually on until one o'clock in the morning, and they blinked on and off incessantly. The only time I thought that the lights were cool was when I was tripping on mesc; the rest of the time, they just sucked.

Well, I got the apartment, and could just about afford to pay for the place, food, and my mom for babysitting Mikey, but I was having a tough time, and my fixes were few and far between, which caused me to be pretty snippy most of the time. One day, while I was sitting in the apartment after Mikey had gone to bed, feeling sorry for myself and sitting in my one chair crying, I got a knock at the door. I dried my eyes and opened the door. Mr. Ribisi, the manager of the theater and the building, was standing at the door. I guess I was surprised to see him, but remembered my manners, and asked him to come in.

He said that I seemed a little snippy lately, and sort of depressed, and asked if I was all right. I told him that I was fine, but that it was difficult raising a kid by myself. He said he figured that's what was bothering me, and then asked how Jay was doing. At first, I pretended not to hear him, but he asked again. I didn't know what to say; Jay was my supplier, so I didn't want to acknowledge him to Mr. Ribisi. He must have sensed my reluctance, because he told me that he knew Jay. In fact, he told me that Jay was just a small time punk who was recruited to sell dope to the local kids.

I guess I must have looked real stupid, because Mr. Ribisi laughed, and asked if he could sit down. I only had one chair, so when he sat down, I sat on the radiator which was placed in front of the window overlooking that marquee. Mr. Ribisi then told me how I could make some extra money and get a regular supply of any kind of drugs I wanted. He didn't really say what I had to do to get the money, and he rambled on for a bit and then stopped.

I told him that it sounded interesting, but I really didn't understand what I had to do to get the extra money. So he stood up, walked over to the radiator, and unzipped his pants. I guess I understood.

After that, I started doing drugs pretty heavily; the shame that I felt for what I was doing, together with everything else, just made the drug-induced dreams seem much better than my everyday reality. I guess things went on like this for a number of years; I had guys over for a few hours every day, and then got high when they left. Mikey was around most of the time, but I didn't pay much attention to him. I didn't pay much attention to anything, really; I just wanted to forget everything that was around me.

After Mr. Ribisi "visited" me, I began to get other "visitors;" mostly guys who knew Mr. Ribisi, or claimed to know him. They were a little rough around the edges, and I'd heard rumors that Mr. Ribisi was

involved in organized crime, so I thought that maybe these guys were in the mafia or something. What surprised me though, was when the cops started coming over. They didn't even try to disguise the fact that they were cops, and they seemed to know most of Mr. Ribisi's friends. Hell, they even supplied me with the best drugs I'd ever scored; I guess they got them from the people they busted. Every once in awhile, they'd ask me about some of the "visitors;" that's how I got to be known as a snitch. I could have found out more from those cops than they could find out from me, that's for sure. They even started the rumor that I turned Mikey on to drugs, the son-of-a-bitches.

I just want to make something clear: I didn't start Mikey on drugs, like so many people say. But I didn't really know what he was doing, and to tell the truth, I'm not sure if I would have stopped him if I'd have known. That's the worst part of what I was doing: I just didn't give a shit about anything. I just wanted to get high and forget about my shitty life. You know, if someone asked me about the worst part of being a druggie, I'd tell that that it's the part about not caring. I didn't care about anything or anyone. I felt abandoned and alone, and I saw my life, shitty as it was, slipping away day by day; an endless round of sex, drugs and indifference. And it's that indifference that really affected Mikey; he had no one to love him, no one to care for him.

He grew up by himself; he had to figure out the world on his own, with no help, no guidance. That's my big sin, not the sex or the drugs: leaving my baby to grow up by himself because I was so goddamn self-absorbed to help him. If there's justice in this world, or after, my sins will come back to haunt me; but the one that I'll have to pay for is hurting Mikey. I know that now; I've been clean since he died, and the pain is the worst I've ever felt in my life.

Like I said in the beginning of this journal, I'm not making excuses, just trying to tell the truth. I spent the first thirty years of my life looking for the easy way out, and making excuses for myself. I'm not doing that anymore. But Christ, there's really no hope for me, no chance for salvation. And I have to sit here every day knowing that because of me my child felt hopeless, alone, and doomed. And I have to live with that. I've thought about suicide; that would be the easy way out. And I swore after Mikey died that I wouldn't take the easy way out anymore. So I sit here and watch the damned light on the marquee blink on and off all damned night. And on Thursdays, some cute little kid, a few years older than Mikey, comes to change the signs

on the theater, and he sings Jim Morrison songs while he's changing the sign, and I think of Mikey.

And sometimes I open the window and talk to the kid, and he asks me why I'm crying, and I tell him that he reminds me of someone that I once knew. And he dries my tears, and sings me another song, and I pray to God that I can make it to another Thursday to see that kid, and I pray for salvation, but salvation never comes. . .

. . . Mike and I started out as friends. I was going to St. Williams grade school when I first met him; I don't think he went to school, at least he never mentioned if he went to school. I guess he was about fourteen or fifteen; I was twelve. We used to hang around with our friends on the street corner near the show, or in a clubhouse that Mike and some of the other guys had in the parking lot of the Grand Movie Theater. We'd do some dubs or drink some beer in the clubhouse; no one knew it existed because it was really a storage room for the theater. Mike and the guys asked the old bum, David Orpheo, for a key, and he gave them one; boy that old guy was a dip-shit.

So we hung around and got wasted; once in awhile, Mike or one of the other ushers would sneak us into the Grand Movie Theater to watch a movie or make out. Mike was really shy when it came to fooling around; I actually had to show him how to do a lot of things, even though he was older than me. I guess that's why I liked him so much; most of the other guys that I knew were always trying to force themselves on girls; Mike wasn't like that.

Most people think that Mike was a bust-out and that he was violent; but I knew better. He was one of the most gentle, respectful people that I've ever known; he just acted tough so that people wouldn't take advantage of him. I think he was always afraid of being hurt or not liked; he probably acted that way because of his parents. He really didn't know his father very well, and his mother didn't care about him; Mike pretty much grew up on his own, which is why he was shy around people.

Things would have been okay with Mike and I if that cop, Lombardo, would have just left us alone. He used to drive around the neighborhood in his car, looking for an excuse to harass someone, and Mike was one of his favorite targets. Lombardo would drive up and insult Mike or his mother, or ask Mike to fetch him some coffee or cigarettes, and if Mike didn't do exactly what Lombardo wanted, then there'd be trouble.

Once Lombardo figured out that Mike and I were going steady, he started making comments about me too, and one time he even grabbed my ass, which really got Mike pissed. He told Lombardo that he'd beat the shit out of him if he ever touched me again. A few days later, and Lombardo busted Mike for "allegedly" stealing some stuff from a house in the neighborhood. Lombardo even planted some stolen goods in the club house in back of the theater and then busted Mike for stealing them. Mike went to Montefiore for a few months for that "crime."

While Mike was away, Lombardo kept harassing me, and asking me to rat-out my friends. I told him to fuck-off, and he slapped me around pretty good. I stayed away from the show for the next couple of months, and went straight home after school so that I wouldn't have to see that crooked cop again.

Mike got out of the audy home, and we went back to the old routine of hanging out on the corner, or at the club-house or in the Grand Movie Theater, although Mr. Ribisi didn't seem as friendly as he did before Mike got busted.

Sometimes, I'd worry about him. Other people thought that he was funny or hyper, some kind of daredevil. But I knew better. Inside, Mike was just a scared, lonely kid who was looking for something; something he couldn't find. The only time I ever saw him completely happy was when he was playing his drums, or practicing with the other guys in their neighborhood band. When he was playing, his face took on some kind of glow, I can't really describe it; sort of like he was somewhere else where he didn't have to think about his shitty life, and his strung-out mom, or the time he spent in the audy home. He looked almost angelic at those times, and once in awhile, when he didn't think I was looking, I noticed him wiping away tears from his eyes as he smiled his shit-eatin' smile that made him look like Elvis Presley. And I knew that he was happy when he played, and I was happy; and all his dooper friends, and that little shit Mr. Ribisi, and that fuckin' crooked cop didn't exist for that short time when he played his drums.

And then he got that bad heroin from that pusher from Humboldt Park, and everything changed. I was with him at the end. He was convulsing and throwing-up and I got scared. I called an ambulance; but by the time they came, it was too late. I guess I waited too long

to call them; I was scared. And now he's gone, and the music went away. . . .

. . . I hear the music in my head; it's beautiful, one of the only beautiful things I've ever known. I hear it, and it has to come out. If I don't play my drums, my head feels like it'll explode. Someday, I hope that I can play the music the way I hear it; my God, it's so beautiful.

When the music comes, everything else goes away: all the pain, the loneliness, the shitty things that happen every day. I once heard that the angels sing to God all the time in heaven; maybe that's what heaven is; music that makes you forget all the shitty things that happen in your life.

I wish I could forget all the bad stuff, and just hear the music. It doesn't work like that though; at least, not here on Grand Avenue. There's not much heaven here, only shit every day. There's Ribisi, he runs the numbers for the mob; there's that prick Lombardo, who's on the take and pretends to be a cop; there's my old lady who's constantly stoned and turning tricks; my friends who only want to get high or drunk; the only person who really cares about me is my girlfriend Jeannie.

I'm sure if you asked any one of them, other than Jeannie, what they thought of me, they'd tell you that I was a loser or a dooper, because that's what they see. They'd tell you that I was in and out of the audy home; that I was a thief; that I ditched school and screwed-off. The truth is, they'd be close to being right. I did all those things; I can't deny it. But none of them asked me why I did what I did. And to tell the truth, I'm not sure how I'd answer that question if someone asked me.

Maybe I was looking for someone who cared about me, and not how they could use me. Maybe I was looking for answers to my questions; like what the hell was I supposed to do with my life. Maybe I was afraid and didn't know how to act, and because I was scared I just tried to act tough. Maybe I wanted the hurt to go away for awhile, and drugs and liquor tend to numb you so that you don't remember everything clearly. Maybe I just didn't give a shit, because I was tired of all the crap that I'd been dealt.

Yeah, they'd tell you the truth about me: what is truth? Someone asked that question once, and a man died because he didn't answer the question in the way people expected.

Here's the truth: I scored some good H from some dude near Humboldt Park, and it's starting to work, and I think I know how the Lotus-Eaters felt. And now it's time to say my prayers before I go to sleep. . .our daily bread. . .forgive our trespasses. . .lead us not. . . deliver us.

The music plays on in my head; the drums are slowing, and I can hear the same words echoing on forever . . . when all the broken-hearted people living in the world agree, there will be an answer. . .