

SKIP EISIMINGER

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JIMBO DICKENS: LACE MAKER

From a chair placed on a table in the one carpeted seminar room Mr. Dickens proffered an invitation. After lecturing on the lie on Picasso's art and fiction that tells the truth counterclockwise on the refusal of the artist to tolerate the sober facts and "the creative potential of making shit up" he asked his "nest of singing birds" who'd lingered at his feet to the house for a drink. His statement to a reporter for the *New York Times* "I'm absolutely on the wagon" didn't matter. "Hell" he said "I'm drivin' the damn wagon." Skip had a paper to write on Hemingway's "great white bwanas" but the hook was set. This was Jimbo from Georgia confidant of President Jimbo Red Warren and Bob Lowell "heirs to Browning" he said before bearhugging them onto the stage. This was the sidereal navigator the zodiac man Hollywood's honey waved from class by the astrologer's apprentice to take calls from the stars. This was the critic who put that "magnificent phony" Hemingway in his place this the Bronze-Star yarn spinner in whose gulfs God resides the "perpetual convalescent" of WWII and Korea the free-lancing crusader against kitsch tournament archer blowgun assassin of snakes high hurdler college halfback Coca-Cola's point man on "It's the Real Thing" novelist whose work was being torched on the Great Plains and the "Juiceman" a poet of delicate delicious but decided force.

As Mr. Dickens hauled beer from the fruit bin of the refrigerator and poured himself a dark dollop of sourmash whiskey ("truth serum" he called it) Skip met Roxanne the wife ("Glad to meet you" she lied) who already had a drink. When all his "birds" had perched in the den Jimbo ("I insist on Jimbo in my own house") rose and started a cued-up concert tape "made a few years ago when I was a Writer in Residence in California" his residence being a redwood forest on a perpendicular coast. "There I am!" Jimbo said stabbing a sausage-sized finger at the tape deck whenever this Segovian virtuoso bubbled to the ensemble's surface. "Music's a lot like poetry" he said fiddling with his Phi Beta Kappa key and draining his second drink as the tape quit. "It's the rests the unheard whispers the silences that make it significant not the notes or chords." Certainly Roxanne's silences as she tottered forth and back in her terry-cloth mules were significant

in the twelve-tone system Mr. and Mrs. Dickens had acquired a taste for.  
 Browsing on his way back from the toilet Skip counted six Smith-Coronas  
 poised to wring out poems at varying degrees of dampness.  
 Scattered among a clutter of antlers French novels bamboo rods  
 and a pair of dumbbells was a photograph of Jimbo fifty pounds lighter  
 smiling beside a P-61 Black Widow in the shade of some palms.

Ten years later Skip put Jimbo up for an honorary doctorate  
 at the school where the disciple taught poetry. Late in the reception  
 the night before graduation Skip toasted the maestro as “the American  
 Segovia  
 the Wallace Stevens of Madison Avenue the high priest of literary machismo  
 the William Tell of the carbon-fiber bow and the Red Baron of the Army Air  
 Corps.”  
 Flying solely on instruments Dr. Dickens tugged up his relaxed-fit jeans  
 and scratched a hairless calf as his spatula-esque tongue  
 cruised the inside of his cheeks flicking pearls of saliva  
 in the bowl of wax fruit. “Here’s the only man honest enough”  
 Skip said well waxed himself “to enlist me in the Victor Mature School of  
 Poetry  
 brave enough to fly through flak bursts search lights  
 and a swarm of Jap Zeros on ‘100 or so night bombing missions’  
 mad enough to say in the bull’s eye of the Bible Belt  
 he’d rather be a troglodyte than a Four Square Baptist  
 determined enough to diet on consommé and gin  
 and proud enough to think death is nothing without him.”  
 Then Jimbo read four lyric poems including “Fornication:  
 For Roxanne” and fondled the dean’s wife.

Another decade passed before the first posthumous biography of Jimbo  
 written by his daughter revealed gaps in the poet’s split line and superego.  
 What had been scuttlebutt became twenty-dollar gold pieces:  
 he was not a fighter-bomber pilot he was a bombardier  
 on 41 not “100 or so” sorties his books never blazed under a Montana moon  
 and he was not a crackerjack guitarist just a cracker.  
 In fact he admitted to lying just to see if he could do it. He could.

Laying his book on his chest and rubbing his eyes  
 Skip had no stomach to read more. He turned to a trope  
 the “Juiceman” had bled white “a poem is lace  
 whose voids set a patterned snare for the reader.”  
 Tangled at last in transparent cords Jimbo had learned to tat a dandy web  
 without any thread at all.

Still only half of his lies were untrue.