

**(Down And Dirty )**

(HVWC read long version Fall '08)

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~~6/1/16~~  
~~2/3/16~~ 1:05 PM

**Touchdown (4:40)**

It's after dark and I am stretching New York State's law forbidding teenage drivers with only a learner's permit from driving unsupervised, except to school and back. I have convinced my parents that going to the town library, for after-dark homework research, qualifies for the exemption. This rare solo-driving event, of course, can best be accomplished with my pals along for the ride. I collect three buddies and we pass the library and drive to the High School parking lot to practice the fine art of burning rubber and peeling out. This mindless game involves extremely sudden acceleration of the car spinning the tires against the pavement with a screech, making smoke while leaving rubber tracks on the road. After three gear-jamming peel-outs I smell burning metal in addition to the tire rubber and stop the demonstration. My friends are hungry for more adventure and, I fall victim to the pack mentality and swing the big V-8 Pontiac onto the green grass of the school's football field. There's much whooping and yelping as I race forty yards over the freshly chalked yard lines to the end zone.

The following morning, stories of this adventure are racing through the school halls. I enjoy twenty minutes of dubious fame before being called to the Dean's office where I plead guilty and am sentenced to after-school detention. My punishment duty is to repair the field by literally crawling the length of the damaged grass in the car's tracks and, by hand, restore all the bent blades back to the upright position. Word of this news-making creative punishment races through the halls and I bask in another short period of ill-gotten celebrity.

After the school day ends, detention begins under the supervision of a groundskeeper who checks his watch, marks his clipboard and leaves for the day. I would feel ridiculous doing this activity if it weren't for the audience of about twenty cheering and catcalling students.

The grass is cool and damp as I crawl on my knees, supporting my upper body by resting the left hand, flat in the grass, while making wide sweeping gestures against the damaged blades with my right hand. It feels like I'm ruffling a large green flattop crew cut. After thirty minutes, my supporting arm aches. I place my head on the grass for support and use both hands to make windshield wiper motions. I sweep through the grass, head to the ground, then hop both knees forward and plop my head down and sweep again. Repeating this routine, I inch-worm my

way down the field in the gathering darkness.

My audience trails off, leaving only my friend, Don, who has offered to drive me home. Sitting alone, shivering in the cold, Don shouts, "C'mon Gladstone, speed it up. I'm freezin' here!" I yell back, "I'm going for a touchdown!" and speed up the routine. I'm only two yards from the end zone when after a knee-hop, I plop my head onto the ground and a terribly foul odor erupts into my nostrils. My head has flattened a fresh pile of ripe dog poop. I jerk my head up and instinctively feel my hair to examine the damage. This is a big mistake and now I have spread the problem.

I race home, with Don who begs me to please not touch *anything* inside his father's car. I charge into my house and race into the upstairs shower. I turn on the hot water and cover myself with lather. I rub furiously as if trying to keep from being eaten alive by the dog poop. Standing in the steamy hot water, I begin to reflect on these events. I smile at the idea of nature's justice. As creative as the school's punishment is, the grass is having the last laugh.

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## **Lavender Fields**

I am hired to photograph the Sarah Lawrence College yearbook. I have planned a cover picture that will show a student, Maggie the yearbook editor, painting the name of the college in the night sky using a flashlight while the shutter remains open. I'm borrowing this idea from the famous LIFE Magazine photographer, Gjon Mili, who has made an amazing portrait of Pablo Picasso while he paints with a flashlight in the dark. I'm sure I can do this too.

Because a series of flashes will be used during the nighttime exposure while Maggie is writing in the air with her flashlight, very careful planning is necessary in the daylight to mark the exact positions of the camera and two flashes, and path to follow as she walks in the dark during the long exposure. Her sky-writing will be across the great lawn outside the main college building. It will not be possible to see exactly where everything should be placed after dark so Maggie and her dorm mates, Susie and Celia, help me stage a test version of the photo to carefully find the best positions for the tripod, lights and Maggie's skywriting path. We will not be able to see what the picture looks like as we are shooting it. It will be too dark but the camera's open shutter will be gathering the available light and flashes will punctuate her word-painting walk. Only after the film is developed, will we see if it has worked. I'm confident it will.

We finish in the late afternoon daylight and decide to all go to town for dinner and return after dark to make the picture. Before leaving, we realize that because this lawn is a main traffic area, we will have to take down the lights and equipment and reset it all again in total darkness. It will be impossible to see where everything is supposed to go.

Suzie runs into the dorm and brings us her box of lavender talcum powder, which we open and shake in the grass to mark our lines on the lawn. Smug in the knowledge that we have creatively met the challenge, we take all the equipment and drive to a local restaurant.

After dinner, we return in the dark to find that a brief shower and heavy winds have eliminated our markings. There are no lines or "x" marks remaining. I'm crestfallen and bewildered. How can we do this now? I catch a whiff of lavender and realize that although the powder is gone, the smell still lingers in the grass. I shout "everybody down on your knees and sniff for the lines." The four of us start crawling frantically on the lawn, shouting words of progress. "Here's one of the flash spots!" "I think I'm smelling Maggie's walking line...yes, it's along here!" We have found every spot but the camera's tripod mark. I scamper on all fours, smelling the ground frantically but can't find this most critical position. I'm determined to not let a great idea simply be washed away so I focus on my breathing and begin sniffing large volumes of night air.

Then I catch a faint wisp of lavender and lurch towards it, dragging my nose through the grass. Focused on victory, I'm startled to realize that the bridge of my nose has just collided with a fresh doggie poop. It is a confusing moment. I'm whooping with success at finding the tripod location while gagging from the obnoxious smear on the bridge of my nose. I yell for someone to bring the tripod and use an old handkerchief to clean up my act. We shoot the picture in between bouts of convulsive laughter. It's hard to focus with tears in my eyes.

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### **Funky Blues (4:30)**

In 1960 my jazz drummer pal, Dave Bailey, asks me to photograph him for the cover of his new record album for Epic Records titled "One Foot In The Gutter." This is a real break for me since an album cover for Epic, a division of Columbia Records, means that as a young photographer, I'm inching toward the big time.

My idea is to photograph Dave, sitting alone on a curb, next to a fire hydrant on a city street to help sell the funky blues quality of the Sextet's music.

Dave and I meet in the morning on Minetta Street, in New York's Greenwich Village, where it's quiet enough for us to work in the middle of the narrow street without obstructing traffic.

We find a perfect spot for Dave to sit on a curb leaning against a grungy fire hydrant in front of a flaking yellow-painted brick wall. We're lucky because there's no traffic on this street. We know we must work fast before the police discover us and move us away. Dave sits on the curb and I take the camera into the middle of the narrow street and look back into the viewfinder. I see the perfect shot and will need to use the tripod in order to keep the camera from shaking. Since the lens must be at pavement level, I mount the camera so that instead of rising up from the tripod's three legs, it hangs down between them, allowing for the lens to be right on the street. Everything is upside down which makes working the controls extremely difficult. In order to look into the viewfinder I need to almost stand on my head, pressing my skull against the pavement while squinting up into the ground glass. It's awkward but the picture looks well framed and that's all that counts. Dave keeps an eye out for traffic while I start adjusting the final position of the tripod. I am pressing my head on the pavement, and with both hands, nudging the tripod to the left with a series of squint-then-push, motions. During this back-aching piece of gymnastics, my eye never leaves the viewfinder. I finally find the perfect composition and begin shooting pictures quickly. My neck is hurting but I want this to look good. At the end of the roll of film, a Police car cruises down the street. As the officer cranks down his window, we grab the equipment, wave with smiles, and walk quickly away.

We are exhilarated with the thought that we have just made a great album cover and decide to treat ourselves to a fancy lunch at the nearby Minetta Tavern. The Maitre d' shows us to a table where we begin studying the extensive menu. The savory smells of garlic, sauces, grilled meats and fresh baked bread fill the air. I'm scanning the list of affordable pasta dishes when I smell something strangely out of place and remark, "Dave, you must have stepped in something. It smells awful. Check your shoes." Dave looks down at both his soles and shrugs. "It's not me. Check yours." As the waiter arrives, I bend over and look at the soles of my loafers and say, "It's not mine. I don't know where it's coming from." Dave and I exchange smiles and turn our attention to the waiter. He speaks to me and says, "Before I tell you today's specials, I think you should know that something appears to be stuck to the top of your head." Backing away, he points with his pencil and, with a look of disgust says, "Would you like me to bring you a cloth to clean that up?"

After a quick cleanup and a very difficult straight-faced ordering session, the waiter leaves and Dave and I settle into munching breadsticks and trying not to laugh. We're appropriately composed until Dave remarks, "I bet that waiter is now telling the rest of the staff that he's waiting on his first real shithead."

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