

R L R

Ruby Lynn
~~Lynn Ruby~~

REYNER
~~Rayner~~ AGREEMENT made this 30th day of November, 1983 by and between ~~Lynn Ruby~~
~~Rayner~~ (hereinafter referred to as subject) and Martin Torgoff (hereinafter referred to as Author)

1. The parties hereto agree to collaborate in the production of a biography of ~~Ruby Lynn Rayner~~ and to devote their best talents, efforts and abilities in accordance with their mutual understanding of the nature and direction of the Work they wish to produce. Without limiting the foregoing in any way whatsoever, the parties agree that in general, the information, story and editing thereof shall be the responsibility of the subject and writing and line by line editing thereof shall be the responsibility of the author.

Further it is the intent of the parties to have a proposal for the Work ready for submission by the agent hereunder no later than February 1, 1984.

2. The copyright in the Work shall be secured and held as follows:

~~Ruby Lynn Rayner~~ and Martin Torgoff. The copyright shall be maintained in this fashion for the original and any renewal terms of copyright which is now or may hereafter be embodied in any copyright law throughout the world, and this joint ownership of the copyright shall remain so in perpetuity.

3. The parties agree that insofar as the work produced by the parties is concerned, all decisions in connection with the preparation of the Work and the use, sale, turning to account and exploitation of any and all rights in this Work shall be made by mutual agreement by and between the parties.

4. Each of the parties hereby warrants and agrees that the material written or contributed hereunder will be his own original creation except for material

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in the public domain. That it will not violate the right of privacy of or libel any person, firm or corporation, nor will said material infringe any copyright or common law rights of any person, firm or corporation, and that each of the parties will hold the other, his successors, licensees and assigns harmless from and against any and all judgments, damages, costs and expenses, including attorney's fees, resulting from any breach by that person of the foregoing warranties. If any claim is presented or suit filed against either of the parties, the party against whom it is presented or filed will promptly notify the other.

5. All monies, proceeds and other considerations which may become payable to the parties with respect to the sale, license or other disposition of any and all rights in and to the Work now existing or which may hereafter come to existence shall be shared equally between the parties: that is Fifty percent (50%) to ~~Lynn~~ ^{Ruby} ~~Ruby~~ ^{Lynn} ~~Rayner~~ and Fifty percent (50%) to Martin Torgoff.

Any monies, reimbursement of expenses, or other consideration which may be paid to either party in connection with the promotion of the said Work and which requires his or her physical appearance therefore shall be considered reimbursement for the time required of said party, and shall not be apportioned between the parties hereto but shall be retained solely by the party performing said services.

6. The term of this Agreement shall be co-existent with the duration of any and all periods of Copyright which may exist for the Work.
7. The authorship credit on the Work shall be as follows: RUBY by Martin Torgoff
8. The parties hereby irrevocably employ and designate Gelles-Cole Literary Enterprises

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sole and exclusive agent in connection with the Work. All payments due or to become due to the parties in connection with the sale, lease or license of this Work shall be made to and in the name of said agent, who is hereby authorized to give receipt for same in the parties' behalf. For services heretofore and to be rendered to the parties by said agent, the parties agree to pay and hereby authorize said agent to receive and retain commission in full the following percentages of all proceeds received or earned for the Work:

(a) In the United States and Canada Fifteen (15%) percent

(b) In all foreign countries Twenty (20%)

(c) For dramatic rights Twenty (20%)

9. All funds received by said agency shall be disbursed by it promptly after receipt thereof, and in the following manner:

(a) Payment to said agent of all commissions and expenses due hereunder

(b) Said agent will promptly convert into U.S. dollars the payment from foreign countries and shall within ten (10) business days thereafter remit to Author and Subject the proceeds thereof, deducting only the percentage due to the Agent thereon based on the full gross consideration credited to Author and Subject therefor, the bank charges for the conversion, and any other sums that may be owed to the Agent under this Agreement.

(c) The foregoing commission shall vest in the agent and shall be due with respect to all the gross sums of money or other consideration including but not limited to salaries, earnings, royalties, bonuses, shares of profit, proceeds of sale, or license fees earned or received from or in connection with any contracts for the sale or other disposition of the Work.

(d) After any check in payment for any disposition of the Work has cleared the Agent's bank, the agent will remit within ten (10) business days, to the

Subject and Author at such addresses as they shall previously have given the agent in writing, such monies, less Agent's commission. Any Agreements Subject and/or Author execute with respect to the Work shall provide that Agent's commission shall be paid to her directly by the entity with which Author/Subject enter into an Agreement. If monies are paid to the Author and or Subject directly he/she shall hold Agent's commission thereon in trust for her and make payment to her within ten (10) business days after clearance of the check paid to Author/Subject thereto. Author/Subject shall reimburse the Agent (for which Agent is hereby authorized to reimburse herself from monies due Author/Subject, or which they shall pay directly to her when billed if no such monies are due from Author/Subject to Agent) for any and all expenses incurred on behalf of the work such as telegraph, cable, long distance telephone, foreign postage, special messenger service, and any other charges reasonably incurred that are not part of usual, customary and ordinary office service. However, the Agent shall not incur any large or extraordinary expenses on behalf of Author/Subject without their prior approval.

(e) And further all funds received by said Agent shall thereafter be disbursed in accordance with Paragraph 3 hereinabove.

In the event of any dispute between the parties, the Agent shall withhold the said amount in dispute until the matter has been settled between the parties or until directed as to how to disburse said sums by a court of competent jurisdiction.

10. The parties hereto agree that in the event any publicity or promotional appearances are to be made in connection with the Work created hereunder, including but not limited to jacket photos, publicity interviews or appearances, promotional material of any kind whatsoever, etc., the matter of whether one or both parties

are to appear and be named or referred to in any way whatsoever shall be decided by the publisher of the Work created and sold hereunder and the decision of such publisher shall be final. The parties hereto each grant to the other the perpetual nonexclusive right to use and to license others to use their names, likenesses, biographies and photos for this purpose.

11. The parties hereto agree that this collaboration is not exclusive and that each party hereto has the unrestricted right to engage in the production of literary works either for himself individually, for others, or in collaboration with others, and neither party shall have any obligation to the other in this regard. The parties further agree that each shall devote only as much time and attention to the collaboration hereunder as may be required in his sole judgment and to meet the February 1 1984 deadline provided herein and any subsequent deadlines that are mutually agreed upon, it being their intent and fully understood between them that neither party will be spending full or even a major portion of his or her time on the Work which they collaborate on, and that each may in his sole discretion work on other projects and/or with other collaborators.

12. In the event that either party wishes to withdraw from or terminate this collaboration, the following requisites apply:

(a) All tapes and notes made in the preparation of this Work are the sole property of the Subject.

(b) If the Author has completed a concept from which a publishing contract is obtained, but does not chose to proceed with the collaboration through the

completion of the manuscript, he shall receive Five (5%) percent of all monies, proceeds and other considerations which may become payable either directly or indirectly from the sale of the Work as a publishing property.

13. This Agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the parties all prior understandings being merged herein. All questions with respect to the making, construction, interpretation and enforcement of this Agreement shall be determined in accordance with the laws of the State of New York. This Agreement may not be changed or modified except in writing, and signed by the parties.

In WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have set their hands as of the date first above written.

Ruby Lynn Reyner
~~Lynn Ruby Reyner~~
 Ruby Lynn Reyner

Martin Torgoff _____

CHAPTER I - Kitty, Look Behind You

On I was as close to death as I'll ever be. A lot of people say that's all behind me now. Hey, I'm doing all right. I've got another TV show lined up. Well, maybe it's lined up. But that's all right. Things are getting better and if it's not this show, there'll be others. I know I was good; I know I'm better now -- in a lot of ways-- so while nothing is always pink and rosy at least nothing is as pitch black as it was either.

I'm alive. Maybe more alive than I was for most of my life; maybe even more alive than before I started putting the junk into my body; before I started shooting up.

You know, you can look back to a time of innocence and remember drinking Coke and cocoa and not even imagining that one day you'll be putting a variation of the stuff into your body and what happens is a complete reversal of the way things are or should be. It's the American way to drink Coke; it's the good little girl who dutifully drinks her cocoa. And it's the bad -- no, make that -- the still innocent but confused big girl who shoots up with the stuff.

Yes. Innocent. You see, you don't really believe cocaine is going to do to you what you hear -- or even see --

has been done to others. Like people who don't buckle their seat belts, I guess, you always figure -- nothing bad is going to happen to me. You also think you're that exceptionally strong human being who can get the best out of the junk and leave it when it no longer supplies what you think you need without your having to pay too high a price for it. I mean, you think you don't have to make a human sacrifice for yourself to keep on eating the foods of the gods.

There are two beginnings to this story -- One took place in the hospital where I was born; the other where I was reborn. Maybe it's the last place that I should start with first.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

NOTE: AT THIS POINT,
WE WOULD BEGIN WITH THE LAST
"SHOOTING" SESSION -- WHERE IT
WAS, WHAT WAS HAPPENING, ETC. --
THAT LED UP TO RUBY'S COLLAPSE
AND THE DIAGNOSIS OF HER ~~HEAT~~
PROBLEM AND OTHER AILMENTS.

WE WOULD THEN GO INTO THE ACTUAL
SURGICAL PROCEDURE AND THE LONG
PERIOD OF COMA AND RECOVERY AND
THE DECISION TO KICK THE HABITS AND
COME CLEAN.

3/ Essentially, the book would follow a straight storyline with occasional references to Ruby's pre-showbusiness life; how she grew up in a straight, upper-middle-class professional family, etc., her education, etc.

The book would also pick up on personal relationships; those that survived the traumatic periods and those that didn't --- and why not.

There would also have to be a large portion of the book devoted to the less wholesome types who feed and feed upon people such as Ruby; where legally possible, names would be named; the "scenes," soc-allced, would have to be dscribed; how the shows are put on; what is done beforehand and during and after. How the dependency for drugs begins; the change of perception of reality.

The book would also give Ruby a chance to repeat her own writings -- Kitty, Don't Look Back -- for example, and how a poem like this reflects her own life; she can no look back in safety as opposed to when she was Kitty fighting to escape her menacing pursuer.

MISS RUBY'S RUBBER ROOM, OR
JANE DOE IS A REDHEAD NAMED RUBY

From the cold, gloomy streets of Warsaw, the camera of her febrile subconscious dissolves to Czarist Russia, to a flat in Saint Petersburg on the eve of the storming of the Winter Palace. Russian bears pirouette nimbly across the flour and a passionate young poet exclaims, "The show must go on -- even if the Romanov dynasty is about to fall!"

"This dream is a real corker," Ruby would say if she could only wake up and talk. "Who's directing? Fellini? Paul Morrissey?"

In Peru, from a dizzying summit in the Andes, she leads a revolt of peasant women to rid the nation of the evil oppressors. The government security forces are hideous demonmen who counter-attack and slaughter her sisters-in-arms until the mountain passes are littered with thousands of their bullet-ridden corpses -- hey, wait a second, this dream is turning out to be a bum trip; - if she could only wake up! -- but the pull of the dream is too strong. Each time she tries to claw her way back to consciousness, she gets dragged away like a swimmer caught helplessly in a fatal undertow. For weeks she drifts fitfully, locked within a phantasmagoria of changing characters and locations more surreal than any underground film she's ever seen, wilder

than anything she's ever done onstage at La Mama with the Playhouse of the Ridiculous. At the end of each vignette she is always alone, cold, starving, fearing for her life, an outcast...

God! Isn't that Warren Beatty over there? -- and, and -- that's Jack Nicholson sitting with him at the bar! She is cruising on a ship, through a fiord of pristine arctic beauty. A man keeps following her around the boat. He is older, a doctor of some kind, sinister. Ruby is only a little girl -- eleven or twelve -- but he entices her into performing sexual acts with him. "Touch this, little Ruby," he tells her, holding his enormous phallus and placing it in her palm. She knows it's the wrong thing to do but grasps it anyway. "That's right," he coos in her ear. "It's all right -- I'm your stepfather. "You can trust me." She finds herself on deck, naked from the waist down, panic-stricken. Seated in deck chairs, wrapped in tartan warmers, the passengers smile and applaud as he forces her over the ship's railing and takes her violently, repeatedly from behind. In the following days, from the boiler room to the bridge, he tricks her into coming near and taking off her clothes, then possesses her as he pleases; each time he wants something different, kinky, until one day he holds up a long syringe filled with

what looks like a dark, fecal matter and says, "I'm here to take blood, Ruby." Her throat is suddenly caked dry with fear -- it isn't simply her bodily orifices this man is after -- he's trying to kill her by injection! She struggles out of his arms and tries to fight her way awake once again but instead finds herself fleeing madly through a lush African jungle, clutching an infant in her arms. The child is her only son, the scion of an African prince -- the heir to the throne. Her faceless pursuers want to murder this child because Ruby is a Jewess with flaming red hair. Now this! Down jungle trails she hurtles and sprints, evading capture until she reaches a highway and hitches a ride in a lorry heading to the coast. A succession of ships and trains bring her, finally, to Kyoto, where she disguises herself as a Japanese woman -- they'll never find her here among the pagodas, in the quietude of a Zen garden, where the only sounds are the chanting of the monks and the soothing tintinabulation of the wind chimes outside her window. She feels safety and security for the first time in the dream when she peers into a mirror and is horrified to realize that she has managed to disguise everything but her hair, which falls wildly about her shoulders like a crimson beacon of identification. She searches the room frantically for a wig but it's too late; she hears the heart rending shriek and runs into the garden.

The monks have taken hold of him and, chanting in perfect unisons, they cut his throat before her eyes. They start to mutilate him...The image is too much for her, she knows that she must either die -- is she already dead and gone to hell? -- or wake, and opens her eyes.

Quick footsteps and hushed voices. Her vision, a complete blur at first, begins to focus slowly. Oh, Christ, she's really done it now, gone and fucked herself up somehow, maybe overdosed on some bad dope and now they've probably figured out that she's a junkie and she'll get nailed to the wall. Hey: this is the Intensive Care Unit. A doctor, surrounded by a group of medical students, is smiling kindly down at her, making her feel like a fish in a tank. Hey. She tries to sit up but cannot move her right side and feels a shattering pain in her chest -- it feels like a construction worker has taken a jackhammer to her chest and worked out on her sternum for a few days. Hey! Rising in her chest in concentric waves, the pain is so intense that her breaths start coming in rushes and she begins gasping for air when she becomes aware of the ghastly profusion of tubes running in and out of her nostrils and veins, of the respirator tube

feeding her air. Hey, this is a worse goddamned nightmare than the dream! She convulses in terror, flailing wildly, foaming at the mouth -- a nurse shoves a needle in her arm and her body is soon filled with the familiar rosy numbness of a strong narcotic -- ah, bless the Lord above who brings forth the poppy from the earth. Still drifting in and out of the garish netherworld of her dreams, Ruby refuses to accept the reality of her environment until she sees the wire running out of her chest to the pacemaker. She cranes her vision painfully downward to examine the wire more closely and is startled by the neat row of surgical staples implanted in her chest. Hey! Hey! What the fuck goes on here! What are these, she wants to ask about the staples, the latest in punk body fashion? But she cannot speak; the words only come out as pitiful grants and twisted syllables.

"Don't try to speak yet," the doctor cautions.

Her mother is standing above her, ~~g~~netly stroking her forehead, crying. "You've been in a coma for weeks," Big Ruby tells her. "We thought we were going to lose you..."

At the time, of course, Ruby does not fully realize how lucky she is to be alive, but the steady stream of specialists

to her bedside in the days to come underscores the severity of her condition. The internist, neurologist, cardiologist, blood specialist, and numerous physical therapists all stare at her wide-eyed. What Are You Doing Still Alive? their expressions say. Indeed, it's a question she will be forced to ask herself many times in the months ahead, but for the time being Ruby has her hands full just getting words to sound right. Nobody volunteers any information about her health.

Before long, however, the internist returns with his group of medical students. Standing in a semi-circle around her, with the panorama of monitor screens blipping out information ^{about} her heartbeat, they discuss her condition clinically, as if she isn't there. Being the daughter of a doctor, Ruby listens hard, hoping to hear any familiar anatomical references but understanding nothing. Noticing her bewilderment, the internist finally approaches her. "Do you know what's happened to you?"

Ruby hesitates. "Tuberculosis," she guesses in a choked, frightened stammer.

An awkward silence follows. Some of the med students

look at each other and shake their heads; others quickly turn their faces away from her, averting her questioning gaze. She hears one of them in the back whisper, "Jesus, she's more gone than we thought..."

"No," the doctor says. "Tuberculosis happens to be one of the few things you don't have. Now listen carefully and I'll explain it to you."

Ruby closes her eyes and, for lack of anything else to hold onto, grabs the bedsheets tightly with her good left hand. When the doctor finishes telling her about the bacterial endocarditis, about the stroke, the coma, the meningitis, the fact that her right side is partially paralyzed; when she learns that one of the valves in her heart has collapsed and has been replaced by a transplant from a pig, not to mention the myriad complications caused by these factors, she understands that if there is anyplace place left within her, any part of her shattered, drug-ravaged life where strength and fortitude still exist, she'd better find it quickly.

"The heart of a pig?" she asks uneasily, the tears streaming down her cheeks in two heavy rivulets.

"Yes," the doctor replies. "Pig transplants are commonplace these days. Why?"

"Well," she sighs heavily, never one to throw away a line, "I'm afraid that's not kosher, doctor."

&

It happened, appropriately, on New Year's Eve, perhaps the single most difficult night of the year for the truly lonely souls of New York, when the solitude and lovelessness and failure of a life can seem most crushing. However, in the case of Ruby Lynn Reyner, 31, actress, aspiring rock star, comedienne, poet, dreamer, one-time darling of the New York underground and Queen of the Lower East Side, the question of a bullet through the brain or slashed wrists in the bathtub was never the conscious, irresistible ~~possibility~~ or compulsion it becomes for the other casualties of that festive evening. Nevertheless, when they carted her into the emergency room of Saint Vincent's on New Year's Day of 1982, comatose, hanging onto her life by the thinnest of threads, the authorities listed her as a Jane Doe and assumed that one more strange, subterranean Greenwich Village lifeform was about to bite the dust.

The plain fact of the matter was that she had nothing better to do that night than to get off. Her parents were away for the holidays and her brother was supposed to come by her apartment but never showed. Alone in her 14th Street apartment, sitting on her bed in tee shirt and panties, she could never have realized, as she busily cooked up the mixture of heroin and cocaine with the deadpan detachment of a short order cook preparing an order of sausage and eggs, that she was about to find herself clinching with the angel of death. She was ~~more~~^{only} conscious of seeking relief from the debilitating effects of a bad fever that had been worsening for days.

"God, I feel like shit," she told her friend Sam when he called.

Sam was an admirer from the days when Ruby and her rock band, the Rednecks, used to blow out Max's Kansas City, along with other acts with quaint names like Teenage Jesus and the Jerks. He was pudgy, balging, sweet, and (like most of her friends) fawningly gay, and when he showed up backstage at Max's and knocked at her dressing room door to declare his undying admiration, Ruby was flying on so much coke that she could barely unclench her jaws enough to say thank you.

"Oh, you poor, sick puppy," Sam commiserated when Ruby recited her litany of complaints to him: the fever, the pain in her leg, how she couldn't keep anything down. "You should go to the doctor."

"My father sent me some antibiotics that I've been taking," she said.

"You're not planning on going out tonight, I hope," Sam said with paternal concern.

"I'm waiting for my brother," Ruby told him. "I hope nothing's happened to him. Every loon in the Village comes crawling out of the rafters tonight..."

"Oh, don't worry. He's probably shackled up somewhere."

"He'd better not be, the little fuck!"

"So get back in bed, he'll show up."

"Yeah," she agreed, her mind wandering to the set of works laying on her dresser. "I'm just gonna take it easy... and get some rest. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Shooting dope is a paradoxical proposition, even for a well-versed habitué like Ruby. While going through the personalized rituals of preparing and injecting the drugs, the user often experiences a self-intimacy that takes the very problems we seek to numb and escape and makes them seem overwhelmingly large-- like jacking up the volume of an amplifier to a deafening roar until, with the onset of total oblivion, the noise becomes nothing but a faint murmur in the distance. What roared in Ruby's mind as she mixed the magical granules was the nonspecific feeling of a depression so severe that it began with her first waking

start actually copping. See, the thing about Ruby and Robert was that they were a tandem in everything they did-- and that included heroin. As bizarre as it may sound, junk can be a very romantic thing when you're hooked on it with the man you adore. Robert had become something of a dealer to the artistic elite of New York; Ruby only had to penetrate his ample supplies for coke or smack or anything she wanted--she never had to subject herself to the indignities and dangers of actually having to go out and buy the stuff. Then Robert was gone from her life-- forever--and she found herself sniffing around the alleyways and burned outt tenements ^{buildings} of the Lower East Side, around Avenues A and B, ferreting out dope like any other pathetic, bedraggled street junkie. Each trip down there ^{had} become a terrifying, purgatorial odyssey, ~~a descent into hell~~; each time she would return to her apartment vowing never to go back, to clean up her act and go straight, but then she'd get strung out ~~and bummer~~. Harlem had to be better...yes, Harlem. She'd made that one trip uptown--the trip that would haunt her for the rest of her life.

It was a decrepit apartment building on West 115th Street. Ruby didn't actually know anybody there, but it was one of those places that operated almost like a supermarket for the street trade, you know, like a Drug-O-Rama: walk right in and as long as you ain't the man, suckuh, we got everythaing you gah-too have! Ruby knew somebody vaguely who knew somebody who'd copped there and she figured that if she dropped a name or two of some monumental drug abusers she

moments as a throbbing pang of emptiness in the pit of her stomach and, throughout the course of the day, gradually worked its way up to her head, where it lodged and bleated incessantly, sickeningly, until she had to do something about it. ^{Ruby's} Since the departure of her lover, Robert, ~~her~~ life had been a solitary transit through an increasingly cold and barren landscape. Her friends had become strictly segregated into the straights and the druggies. The druggies didn't want to hear about problems like her moribund career, which, ~~over the course of a decade, had~~ taken her from the critical acclaim and cult status of ~~La Mama~~ (in 1974, Ruby was awarded a Drama Desk Award as Best Actress for her work in John Votaw's "La Bohemia") to the footlights of a Broadway stage and then deposited her in some Bowery dumpster--they only wanted to sit in dark rooms in the middle of the day and get silently wasted. And her straight friends, well, to them she couldn't even admit her problems much less discuss them (and even if she gave voice to them, she was certain that they would never be able to understand how, at that moment in her life, junk had become the sole anodyne to the pain in her life). And so, in having nobody to really talk to, Ruby had stopped talking to herself as well.

What she had been forced to admit to herself was that is she was going to keep getting dope, if she was going to keep herself zonked in her little cocoon, she'd have to

would be in and out in a snap. Dressed sensibly (that's right, Ruby, no spandex pants, no leather skirts with fishnet stockings and red high heels) in sneakers and a pair of old, oily jeans so as not to call attention to herself (never easy for wild carrottops like our girl), she cabbed up there hoping to score a loudy dime--nothing heavy, just a ten dollar bag for her head--^{she} and considered asking the cab to wait for her but then realized that a waiting vehicle curbside could upset some of the sales ^{Nothing to upset or delay the sup. house.} personnel upstairs. Dark, grimy, litter-filled stairway reeking of cat urine, yeah, this must be the place; she rapped on the door. The hallway was filled with the thundering cacophany of at least ten heavy bolts being ^{suddenly} released and the door flung open to reveal the most massive, truculent black man she'd ever laid eyes on. Take the head of Issac Hayes and put it on Mr. T's body and you'll get the picture.. Looking into his rheumy, narrowing eyes as they scrutinized her from head to toe, Ruby was certain of at least one thing: this man had killed people. She had the sudden urge to turn and go running down the stairs but instead stood there, knees trembling, trying to present her most pugnacious demeanor. That's right, Ruby, stand up straight or he'll smell your fear. Get tough, baby.

"Whatch'you want, girl?"

The voice was a basso profundo, like the voice speaking to Moses through the burning bush: Behold, I am dee Lawd thy Gawd...

"A dime bag," she squeaked.

"Yeah, un huh." His arms were the size of tree trunks, his face the color of obsidian. "Yeah, well, this place is closed," he pronounced.

The words fell on her ears like sledgehammers-- she needed a hit. "oh, that's too bad," she said, turning to go.

"Whassa matter, you wanna get high?"

"Uh..."

"Tell you what," he said. "Come on up to the roof. I'll get you off."

Ruby looked at him, saying nothing. Her hesitation appeared to annoy him and he dismissed her with a wave of his ham-sized hand. Washing over her in a palpable wave of nausea, the thought of going away with nothing, not even a high, seemed insupportable. "Okay, okay," she said, all too eagerly.

"Uh huh," he shrugged his shoulders. "Right. Wait here."

She wondered if she should take the opportunity to bolt. ~~She~~ Hell, I'll just go up to the roof and make some pleasant small talk with the asshole ^{she figured,} and before I know it I'll be heading back downtown in a cab feeling no pain. These situations always entail an element

of risk; sure, it was a gamble, but she felt lucky. He returned in a black leather jacket, his shaved skull covered by a black fedora. "Well, come on, mama."

She climbed the stairs in front of him, pushing the roof door open and walking out to an expanse of tarpaper and soot. To the west, the sun was setting across the river over the New Jersey bluffs, streaking purple, bright orange, and magenta across the horizon, burnishing the dingy rooftops with a brilliant golden hue that glinted and shimmered off the windows and fire escapes. How beautiful, she was thinking, how incredible that even the most desolate rooftops have their own magic, when the door slammed loudly behind her. Her heart sank and she wheeled around. He was standing there, calmly locking the door. Oh, Ruby, a voice inside her cried. How wrong can you be? She ^{quickly} looked around; there was no place to run.

"Down on your knees, bitch."

He held a straight-edged razor in his right hand and grabbed her around the throat with his left.

"Get down!"

"Please," she ^twimpered. "Please don't hurt me."

He held the razor to her throat and forced her down, onto her knees. "Now gimme your money."

She reached into her pocket and removed the forty dollars and handed him the money, her hands quivering violently. Several horrible seconds passed during which

he did nothing but leer ^{damn}at her. It occurred to her during that instant that he might very well cut her throat just for the hell of it when he reached down to his zipper, pulled it down, and pulled out his dick--a long, daunting thing that dangled ^{only} inches away from her face. "Now blow me."

"Please," she begged piteously, the tears welling in her eyes.

"I said blow me, goddammit!"

He pressed the razor to her throat, right along the jugular vein. If she pulled away suddenly she might escape the blade but he'd easily catch her and throw her off the roof--she pictured herself as a heap of bloody bones in the alleyway--no, attempted escape would accomplish nothing but a lurid headline in the morning edition of the New York Post. Resistance was equally futile; there was no choice, she realized, but to go through with it. Get your head right, Ruby. Fellatio is a small price to pay for survival. If I leave this roof alive, ^{he was thinking,} unscathed by the blade, it would be a victory--no, it would be a fucking miracle. Think only of survival and play the scene through; don't let things like revulsion and humiliation and violation enter the picture. ^WWhat did she think about as she did it, as she knelt there suppliant and brought the play to its gagging climax? Well, she surmised that what was going on must have seemed a strange spectacle to any random onlookers ^{Linda}

in neighboring windows who she prayed might have the common sense and decency to intervene or at least call the cops. And this: What kind of place is this for a nice Jewish girl from Rockville Center to be on a beautiful fall afternoon...something like this shouldn't be happening, shouldn't be happening to somebody who'd once been a little girl who played with dolls like any other little girl oh God help me.

When it was all over and he had shot his load into her mouth, leaving her reeling and gasping, he groaned with pleasure. Ruby had assumed that the better the performance, the quicker ^{her} the agony would be over; she had been cognizant of the fact that he had been enjoying himself. "Yeah, you one sexy bitch," he said. "Now I'm gonna have to fuck you. Yeah."

"No!" The thought of it was too much to bear. "You can't!"

He laughed at her. "Whatch'you mean, I can't?"

"Because-" she spluttered, her mind groping, racing. "Because I've got the clap, that's why!"

He glowered at her suspiciously. By the look in his eyes she could tell that it was working--she'd pulled the right one out of the hat. Yeah, that's right, I'm nothing but some skinny-legged junkie from downtown! My mouth ^{maybe} is clean but my cunt is the slimepot of the western world!

"Shee-it," he muttered, clearly disappointed at his bad fortune. "Get up!" he thundered, suddenly disgusted by her. "Get the fuck outta here--and don't look back. If you look back one time..you dead!"

Ruby was scrambling down the steps so fast that she lost her footing and took the entire last flight on her hind quarters-- she didn't feel a thing. As soon as she hit the street, she started running blindly, her heart pounding furiously, untill she found the nearest subway station and fled down the steps.

Somehow she scraped together enough change for a token and soon found herself on an IRT train, being^g shuttled downtown, trying desperately not to cry. It was, however, a losing battle; the floodgates opened with her very first tears and she began sobbing convulsively, .

The other riders on the train sat and stared at her helpless , with that peculiar mixture of voyeuristic interest, concern, and impassive detachment that New York subway riders display when greeted with unavoi**d**bale spectacles of human drama and tragedy. What's happened to her? Why is she crying like that? Oh, well, better not to get involved: It's just one more story of a life in the Naked City, one more life reduced to ashes...

Riding that subway downtown, Ruby could never have known that she had reached rock bottom, the absolute nadir of her life. In the overwhelming anguish of the moment, it naturally seemed to her that her torment would not only last, but worsen. After all she had been through, the fact still remained: she needed a hit. What deepened^e her desperation was how utterly alone she felt, how isolated in the world. She couldn't go to the police and seek justice or retribution, for the fact of drugs

put her outside the law, making her subject to the law of the streets. But the most unconscionable part of the experience was that ~~she~~^{she} had nobody to tell about it--no friend she could truly confide in, no man waiting for her at home, no chest to cry into--this was the worst part of it. The thought of going home to an empty apartment desolated her beyond words; she buried her face in her hands and continued weeping, trying to hide from the prying eyes on the train. Then she felt a gentle touch on her shoulders and opened her eyes to a pair of wizen^{being proffered by a}ed, shaking, gnarled hands ~~proffering~~ a dirty handkerchief. "There, there, darling," the old man said. "Are you alright? Has somebody hurt you?"

Oh, if only she could have told him how eternally grateful she was for his compassion; if only she could have communicated her experience to him. Instead, she nodded her head and started crying harder. So he sat down next to her and put his arm around her shoulders and she grabbed onto him so tightly that he stiffened and recoiled a little but sat there with her anyway, this broken down knight who probably lived in one of the dilapidated transient hotels on the Upper West Side. They must have seemed a strange pair of lovers sitting there together in the corner of the car, the old man with the white stubble on his chin and the ~~old~~ greatcoat redolent of beer and stale tobacco, Ruby with her wild, fire-red locks matted against her pale, mascara-streaked face.; Yet lovers they were nonetheless, as surely as any two people who have ever loved. When he got up to go at Times Square and he patted her hands ^{tenderly,} Ruby stood to watch him as the doors closed on his face and They waved good-bye wordlessly ^{and} as the train pulled out of the station.

As Ruby became ill in the days following Christmas, these events recurred in her mind as a parable of loss and redemption. Something was wrong with her, something had to give somewhere, but her propensity to ignore the symptoms of her problems and disregard the pain once again triumphed over her ability to see things as they really were. After a solid dozen years of unremitting drug abuse, her body was falling apart, but she refused to acknowledge it. Within several days she was delirious with fever, too sick to emerge from her apartment. It was as if every cell in her body was in turmoil, finally rebelling against the poison and rot. Little by little, she felt herself succumbing to the sweet, purgative lure of death. Her way of dealing with the situation was, naturally, to stick a needle in her body. After all, it was New Year's Eve.

She stood at her window for a time, watching couples scurrying back and forth across 14th Street, arm-in-arm, on their way to a million different parties, when the simple wisdom of the hit took hold of her. Yes, do me, Lord. For Auld Lang Syne.

Sitting on her bed, with her work in her right hand, she glimpsed herself in the mirror. Ruby had always been fashionably lean, but the illness had attenuated her face, making it look cadaverously thin; the dark circles under her eyes made them look like deep, hollow sockets framed by the rubiate tresses around her face. To think that Francesco Scavullo had once photographed her for Vogue and had raved about her wonderful "protean qualities" on film, how her face simply "ate up the camera". Oh, well...

Now, where to hit up--always an interesting question for those whose veins have collapsed and all but disappeared due to

the protracted shooting of drugs. She ran her fingers delicately, sensuously over her thighs and down her long, sinuous calves, caressing her feet. Then she took the needle and with a delectation which can only be described as sexual, she jammed the point into her ankle...pushing, teasing, there, she was coming, coming in great hot pink flashes of pleasure so obscene and sublime that they shook her to the very marrow of her bones, spreading out over the complete length of her body, covering her like a blanket. She lay back on her bed and felt herself falling, tumbling into a swirling, unfathomable darkness where everything seemed to go away but the prayer for help that emanated from her soul.

#

And now, with our heroine lying unconscious on her bed, let us step for a moment, if only to take stock of this unhappy situation and meditate briefly on what we shall call, (overlooking the glibness of the pun in such dire circumstances) the difference between heroin and heroine.

Inasmuch as it can be said that each and every hit in a junkie's life is a perfect metaphor for the exact state of that life in a particular place and time, Ruby's New Year's Eve speedball can also be seen as a perfect prism of her life--the reflection of the deep-rooted problems dragging her under, the personification of the pain she sought to palliate with each push of the needle.

Having established this fact, let it be understood from the outset: Ruby Reyner was no simple junkie, the same way that people like Elvis Presley and Janis Joplin and Lenny Bruce weren't simply junkies. The herculean quantity and variety of drugs they hooked down and shot into their bodies transcended mere automatic responses to their personal problems (no matter how profound and insurmountable)

to become statements of socio-cultural significance--mirrors of the style, substance, and socio-pathology of their times. Thus, because these individuals achieved the status of genuine icons in the world of pop culture from which they sprang, they were not merely "dead junkies" when they perished, but rather casualties of mythopoeic proportions--Victims of An Age--stunning symbols of tragedy and self-destruction to an entire generation of young Americans whose most enduring and fascinating heroes are embodied in an ever-expanding pantheon of dead personalities, from James Dean to John Belushi. Perhaps the ethos of these individuals is best summarized in lines from rock songs like the Who's "Hope I die before I get old" or Neil Young's "It's better to burn out than fade away"--reflections of the creed of freedom, hellbent hedonism, nihilism, rebellion, and runaway romanticism which has shaped and defined the post-war baby-boom generation, finding its values and expressions in the culture ^{of} jazz, rock and roll, and drugs. Beatniks, hipsters, surfers, hippies, punks--the influences were always disparate, like tributaries to a surging river; the important point here is that, as the demographic bulge of the post-war generation came of age, the values of this countercultural vanguard inexorably found their way into the mainstream. ^{Insert} But, back to Ruby...

Had the speedball succeeded in killing Ruby as surely as a speedball had put an end to John Belushi on that fateful morning at the Chateau Marmont, her passing would have gone unnoticed by the nation at large. Within the context of her life, Ruby was only a minor celebrity, the same way that people like Viva and Edie Sedgwick and Jackie Curtis were minor celebrities. Within the milieu of the small circle of artists, intellectuals and hangers-on who had comprised what for fifteen years had passed for the "avante-garde" or "underground" in New York--

(Insert A as indicated)

The crux of this connection, put simply, is this: For the dead James Dean, there were thousands of teenagers who died on the highways of America trying to be like him; for the dead Janis Joplin, there were hundreds of pock-marked, chesty young ladies who sang the blues and died swilling Southern Comfort and shooting heroin.

fashion,
the nexus of the worlds of music, theater, underground film, and
visual arts--the "scene" that revolved around people like Andy
Warhol--her passing would have been marked, maybe even mourned.
Since adolescence, she had been drawn like a moth to the bright
lights of fame and stardom, only to remain maddeningly on its
periphery. Yes, she had truly tasted the sweet jazz of her
talent, she had experienced the incandescent rush of getting on
a stage and creating magic; but the heavy goods of stardom, alas,
had eluded her--and for those imbued with the notion of "making
it," minor increments of stardom are perhaps more heartbreaking,
more poignant and unendurable than anything else, worse than never
having gotten anywhere at all. Her struggles had been every bit as
valid and, to this writer, heroic, as the dead pop legends of
her generation who lived on the edge and died hard, yet there
would have been no obituaries had she ceased to exist that night.
Here's the plain, sad truth of the matter: She would have been
nothing but a dead junkie.

Let's call Ruby lucky, to use a shopworn but wonderfully
applicable cliché--lucky that Sam happened to have a spare set of
keys to her apartment, lucky that she'd been too out of her head
to remember to lock the chain on her door. Call it prescience,
call it simple deduction or divine intervention; he sensed something
wrong the following day and when he phoned and nobody answered,
the dreadful feeling grew. Sam knew that Ruby was too sick to
go anywhere. At first, the doorman wouldn't let him upstairs, but when
Sam informed him that his friend was upstairs, too sick to respond,
perhaps even dying--"And you wouldn't want her death to be on
your conscience, would you?"--the skeptical fellow finally
complied. He ran upstairs and pounded on her door. "Ruby?
Ruby?!"

There she was, sprawled on her bed, with her big white cat patrolling worriedly around her head. Trembling, Sam picked up the phone and dialed 911 for emergency. By the time the police and paramedics arrived, he had hidden away her dope and syringe. Sam later remembered that Ruby reminded him of a naughty but contrite little girl as they carried her away on the stretcher. She had a strange, relieved, beatific grin on her face, as if aware that the cavalry had arrived just in the nick of time.