



## A MONKEY TO RIDE THE DOG

SEAN CARSWELL

**“There I was, two or three different kinds of fucked up.”**

# THE BIRTH OF DRINKS FOR THE LITTLE GUY

The banging on my door started around four a.m. I was out cold, sleeping the sleep of a derelict. I'm not sure exactly how fucked up I'd been when I went to bed. Definitely drunk. I'd probably gotten high. Surely I had. It was a Saturday night, after all. I worked the Saturday night shift in downtown Atlanta. Sometime after the rush and before cashing out and finishing my side work, I'd snuck out to the dumpster with one of the line cooks and smoked a joint. If not then, we probably would've burned one on the way to the next bar. Depending on whether or not any of my friends or coworkers had been to the dentist lately, or just managed to finagle a prescription, I'd probably taken a painkiller or two somewhere along the line. Not that I had any real pain to kill. But there I was at four a.m., two or three different kinds of fucked up, with someone pounding on my door.

I did not immediately wake up. I did, however, apparently, yell something in my sleep, because when the guy who'd been banging on the door finally kicked the door in, he was screaming about me screaming something. I wasn't sure what was going on. I didn't fully wake up until the door had been kicked in. That did wake me. At the time, I lived in a studio apartment. The foot of my bed was a foot away from the front door. When the door gave, I woke up and jumped up and put my fists up. And there we stood, face to face: me in my boxers and him fully clothed. Both of us wild-eyed, both a little surprised. Though I don't know why he should've been so surprised. He'd obviously kicked in my door on purpose.

“Where's Ron?” the guy yelled.

“You got the wrong place,” I yelled. We were five feet away from one another.

“Fuck you. I heard him in here. Where the fuck is he?”

“There's no Ron here.”

“Ron?” he called out, as if I had a Ron in the closet or something. Light from the hallway cut into my pad. If the guy cared to look around, he could've seen everything: a boom box; a handful of CDs in the cardboard box that a Rolling Rock case had come in; a plain white desk intended for illustrating but used for writing; a Smith Corona word processor; a pile of serrated paper used for printing multiple pages in the old dot matrix

printers; a pile of disks for the Smith Corona word processor; an office chair; a loveseat rescued from a curb in a part of town where furniture should not be rescued from curbs; a bunch of trash bags in the tiny kitchen; a significant shoe box by my bed; and not much else but me in my boxers. My dirty clothes were probably on the floor. I probably had a little bong somewhere around there, too.

Ron, of course did not answer. There was no Ron.

“I'm not fucking around,” the guy said. He paused for me to say something, but I'd said what I had to say. I kept my fists up and ran through my options. As long as he stood where he was, I'd stand where I was. If he backed out of the apartment, I'd let him. If he takes one more step, I thought, I'm gonna jump him. Go for his eyes. Try to jam your thumbs into his eyes.

The way I saw it, this was no time to fight. This guy, though smaller than me, could've been anything and anyone. He could've been armed. He could've been a black belt in karate. He could've been the baddest motherfucker in town. He could've been a weak little man who kicked in the wrong door. I had no way of knowing. All I knew about him was that he'd had the guts to kick in someone's door at four a.m. and now he seemed to be reconsidering that move.

He kept yelling out questions, but I didn't answer. I kept telling myself, *Go for his eyes.*

When I think about it now, I get nervous all over again. Or, I shouldn't say all over again because I wasn't nervous when I stood there in my boxers, fists up, two or three types of ill-advised drugs pumping through my veins. At that point, I was more determined than nervous. Now, I get nervous thinking about it. It doesn't seem that long ago. It was a long time ago. This guy kicked in my door almost exactly thirteen years ago. Thirteen years is a good bit of time. It's the entire lifespan of a current eighth grader. But, in my mind, it seems like it just happened a year or two ago. And what makes me nervous is knowing why I was determined to gouge this dude's eyes out.

About twelve hours earlier, I'd finished writing the first draft of my first novel. Nearly every morning for the past five months, regardless of how hungover or tired

or busy I was, I typed away on this novel. I kept writing through a painful breakup and a bout of food poisoning. The only mornings I didn't write were the ones when I worked the day shift, but I always came home from the day shift reasonably sober and set to typing. That little studio was ancient and had ancient wiring. I could run two electrical items at a time, provided that one of those items was the boom box. I had to choose, though, between the air conditioner and the word processor. If I tried to run both at the same time, I'd blow a fuse. Those old fuses were expensive. There was no sense in blowing them, anyway. It wasn't like you could get in an hour of air-conditioning and typing before the fuse blew. It blew right away. I spent that whole summer with my windows open to the alley, hardly any outside air blowing in and the outside air hot as hell, anyway, writing my long, long story about carpenters in Florida, most of whom were based on me and/or my friends, most of what they did based on what me and/or my friends did or should've done or would've liked to have done. And now it was written, but in a very fragile way. The novel only existed on eleven Smith Corona word processor disks. Each disc had enough memory to store about twelve pages, single-spaced. I hadn't yet printed it out because it took forever on those old word processors. About seven minutes per page, and you had to feed each page individually. I'd have to sweat through twenty or so hours of printing, which was a lot less fun than sweating through hundreds of hours of writing it. Still, all I could think when that guy kicked in my door was, *he wants the novel. Gouge his eyes out before he gets it.*

That's what makes me nervous. In retrospect, I had a lot more to lose that night. I had a lot of cash in that apartment because I was a waiter and made all my money in cash and this was the end of the month, which meant I had money for rent and all my bills piled up in a shoe box right by my bed. The cover to the shoe box was open and the piles of cash were in plain sight. Beyond that, I had my life and my well-being to think about. None of that mattered to me. I only thought about protecting that crazy novel and gouging that guy's eyes out.

He must've recognized this, somehow. I must've been a sight: two or three

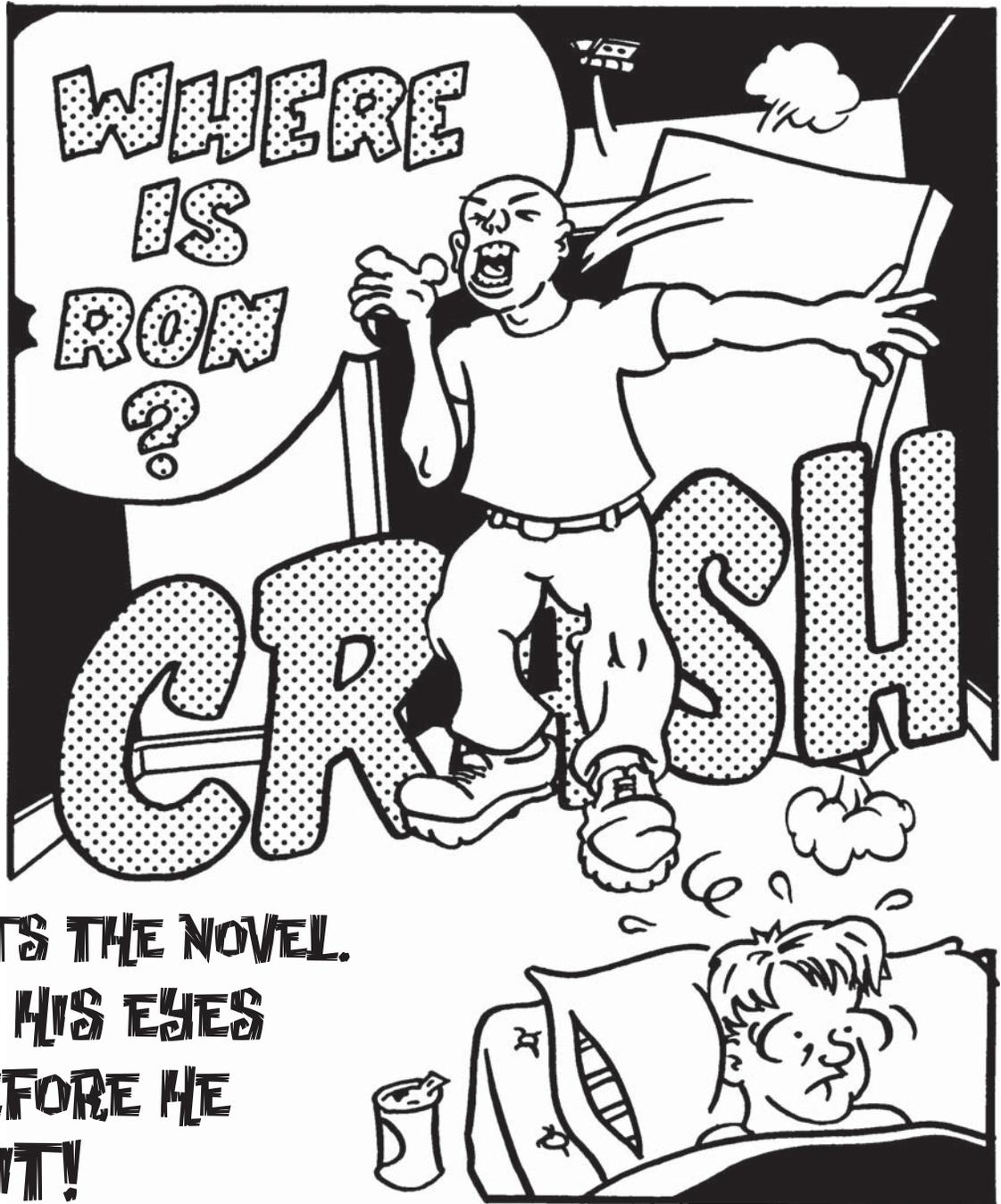


Illustration by Brad Beshaw

**HE WANTS THE NOVEL.  
GOUGE HIS EYES  
OUT BEFORE HE  
GETS IT!**

different kinds of fucked up, wild hair going everywhere, eyes so bloodshot they were nearly bleeding, fists up, and not saying another word. Just ready to fight.

And, clearly, there was no Ron. The guy said, "I think I have the wrong apartment."

I gave a very slight nod.

"I'm sorry, man. I'm really sorry," he said. He took a step back, out of my doorway. I started moving after him. He turned, ran down the hall and down the stairs and out the front door. I chased him as far as the top of the stairs.

I couldn't exactly lock my door after that. I dragged my mattress in front of it so that, if anyone tried to get inside, they'd

have to push both me and my bed out of the way. I passed out again within a minute or two. There must've been a painkiller or two somewhere in my blood.

The landlord sent a handyman out the next day to fix my door. The handyman showed up a few hours before I had to leave for work that night. By that point, I'd rigged up the ream of serrated computer paper so that it would continually feed into the word processor. It worked pretty well. My manuscript was printing it out all in one piece. All I had to do was change disks every eighty-four minutes and set the next twelve pages to printing. While the handyman jury-

rigged my door frame, I walked down the hall and knocked on my neighbor's door. My neighbor's name, of course, was Ron. I told him what happened. He said to me, "It's not me. That guy must be looking for a different Ron."

"Whatever," I said. Of course, I knew he was full of shit, but what did I care? He'd been warned. I doubted anyone would be kicking in my door again.

And, most important to me, anyway; that crazy novel remained unharmed.

—Sean Carswell