




HarperCollins e-books



Post Office

Charles Bukowski

POST OFFICE

A NOVEL BY

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

 HarperCollins e-books

This is presented as a work of fiction
and dedicated to nobody

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About the Author

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About the Publisher

It began as a mistake.

It was Christmas season and I learned from the drunk up the hill, who did the trick every Christmas, that they would hire damned near anybody, and so I went and the next thing I knew I had this leather sack on my back and was hiking around at my leisure. What a job, I thought. Soft! They only gave you a block or two and if you managed to finish, the regular carrier would give you another block to carry, or maybe you'd go back in and the soup would give you another, but you just took your time and shoved those Xmas cards in the slots.

I think it was my second day as a Christmas temp that this big woman came out and walked around with me as I delivered letters. What I mean by big was that her ass was big and her tits were big and that she was big in all the right places. She seemed a bit crazy but I kept looking at her body and I didn't care.

She talked and talked and talked. Then it came out. Her husband was an officer on an island far away and she got lonely, you know, and lived in this little house in back all by herself.

"What little house?" I asked.

She wrote the address on a piece of paper.

"I'm lonely too," I said, "I'll come by and we'll talk tonight."

I was shacked but the shackjob was gone half the time, off somewhere, and I was lonely all right. I was lonely for that big ass standing beside me.

"All right," she said, "see you tonight."

She was a good one all right, she was a good lay but like all lays after the third or fourth night I began to lose interest and didn't go back.

But I couldn't help thinking, god, all these mailmen do is drop in their letters and get laid. This is the job for me, oh yes yes yes.

So I took the exam, passed it, took the physical, passed it, and there I was—a substitute mail carrier. It began easy. I was sent to West Avon Station and it was just like Christmas except I didn't get laid. Every day I expected to get laid but I didn't. But the soup was easy and I strolled around doing a block here and there. I didn't even have a uniform, just a cap, wore my regular clothes. The way my shackjob Betty and I drank there was hardly money for clothes.

Then I was transferred to Oakford Station.

The soup was a bullneck named Jonstone. Help was needed there and I understood why. Jonstone liked to wear dark-red shirts—that meant danger and blood. There were seven subs—Tom Moto, Nick Pelligrini, Herman Stratford, Rosey Anderson, Bobby Hansen, Harold Wiley and me, Henry Chinaski. Reporting time was 5 a.m. and I was the only drunk there. I always drank until past midnight, and there we'd sit, at 5 a.m., waiting to get on the clock, waiting for some regular to call in sick. The regulars usually called in sick when it rained or during a heatwave or the day after a holiday when the mail load was doubled.

There were 40 or 50 different routes, maybe more, each case was different, you were never able to learn any of them, you had to get your mail up and ready before 8 a.m. for the truck dispatches, and Jonstone would take no excuses. The subs routed their magazines on the corners, went without lunch, and died in the streets. Jonstone would have us start casing the routes 30 minutes late—spinning in his chair in his red shirt—"Chinaski take route 539. We'd start a half hour short but were still expected to get the mail up and out and be back on time. And once or twice a week, already beaten, fagged and fucked we had to make the night pickups, and the schedule on the board was impossible—the truck wouldn't go that fast. You had to skip four or five boxes on the first run and the next time around they were stacked with mail and you stank, you ran with sweat jamming it into the sacks. I got laid all right. Jonstone saw to that.

The subs themselves made Jonstone possible by obeying his impossible orders. I couldn't see how a man of such obvious cruelty could be allowed to have his position. The regular didn't care, the union man was worthless, so I filled out a thirty page report on one of my days off, mailed one copy to Jonstone and took the other down to the Federal Building. The clerk told me to wait. I waited and waited and waited. I waited an hour and thirty minutes then was taken in to see a little grey-haired man with eyes like cigarette ash. He didn't even ask me to sit down. He began screaming at me as I entered the door.

"You're a wise son of a bitch, aren't you?"

"I'd rather you didn't curse me, sir!"

"Wise son of a bitch, you're one of those sons of bitches with a vocabulary and you like to lay it around!"

He waved my papers at me. And screamed: "MR. JONSTONE IS A FINE MAN!"

"Don't be silly. He's an obvious sadist," I said.

"How long have you been in the Post Office?"

"Three weeks."

"MR. JONSTONE HAS BEEN WITH THE POST OFFICE FOR 30 YEARS!"

"What does *that* have to do with it?"

"I said, MR. JONSTONE IS A FINE MAN!"

I believe the poor fellow actually wanted to kill me. He and Jonstone must have slept together.

"All right," I said, "Jonstone is a fine man. Forget the whole fucking thing." Then I walked out and took the next day off. Without pay, of course.

When Jonstone saw me the next 5 a.m. he spun in his swivel and his face and his shirt were the same color. But he said nothing. I didn't care. I had been up to 2 a.m. drinking and screwing with Betty. I leaned back and closed my eyes.

At 7 a.m. Jonstone swiveled again. All the other subs had been assigned jobs or been sent to other stations that needed help.

"That's all, Chinaski. Nothing for you today."

He watched my face. Hell, I didn't care. All I wanted to do was to go to bed and get some sleep.

"O.K., Stone," I said. Among the carriers he was known as "The Stone," but I was the only one who addressed him that way.

I walked out, the old car started and soon I was back in bed with Betty.

"Oh, Hank! How nice!"

"Damn right, baby!" I pushed up against her warm tail and was asleep in 45 seconds.

But the next morning it was the same thing:

“That’s all, Chinaski. Nothing for you today.”

It went on for a week. I sat there each morning from 5 a.m. to 7 a.m. and didn’t get paid. My name was even taken off the night collection run.

Then Bobby Hansen, one of the older subs—in length of service—told me, “He did that to me once. He tried to starve me.”

“I don’t care. I’m not kissing his ass. I’ll quit or starve, anything.”

“You don’t have to. Report to Prell Station each night. Tell the soup you aren’t getting any work and you can sit in as a special delivery sub.”

“I can do that? No rules against it?”

“I got a paycheck every two weeks.”

“Thanks, Bobby.”

I forget the beginning time. Six or 7 p.m. Something like that.

All you did was sit with a handful of letters, take a streetmap and figure your run. It was easy. All the drivers took much more time than was needed to figure their runs and I played right along with them. I left when everybody left and came back when everybody came back.

Then you made another run. There was time to sit around in coffee shops, read newspapers, feel decent. You even had time for lunch. Whenever I wanted a day off, I took one. On one of the routes there was this big young gal who got a special every night. She was a manufacturer of sexy dresses and nightgowns and *wore* them. You'd run up her steep stairway about 11 p.m., ring the bell and give her the special. She'd let out a bit of a gasp like, "OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOhhhhhhhhhHHHH!" and she'd stand close, very, and she wouldn't let you leave while she read it, and then she'd say, "OOOOOoooh, goodnight, thank YOU!"

"Yes, ma'am," you'd say, trotting off with a dick like a bull's.

But it was not to last. It came in the mail after about a week and a half of freedom.

"Dear Mr. Chinaski:

You are to report to Oakford Station immediately. Refusal to do so will result in possible disciplinary action or dismissal.

A. E. Jonstone, Supt., Oakford Station."

I was back on the cross again.

“Chinaski! Take route 539!”

The toughest in the station. Apartment houses with boxes that had scrubbed-out names or no names at all, under tiny lightbulbs in dark halls. Old ladies standing in halls, up and down the streets, asking the same question as if they were one person with one voice:

“Mailman, you got any mail for me?”

And you felt like screaming, “Lady, how the *hell* do I know who *you* are or I am or anybody is?”

The sweat dripping, the hangover, the impossibility of the schedule, and Jonstone back there in his red shirt, knowing it, enjoying it, pretending he was doing it to keep costs down. But everybody knew why he was doing it. Oh, what a fine man he was!

The people. The people. And the dogs.

Let me tell you about the dogs. It was one of those 100 degree days and I was running along, sweating, sick, delirious, hungover. I stopped at a small apartment house with the boxes downstairs along the front pavement. I popped it open with my key. There wasn't a sound. Then I felt something jamming its way into my crotch. It moved way up there. I looked around and there was a German Shepherd, full-grown, with his nose halfway up my ass. With one snap of his jaws he could rip off my balls. I decided that those people were not going to get their mail that day, and maybe never get any mail again. Man, I mean he worked the nose in there. SNUFF! SNUFF! SNUFF!

I put the mail back into the leather pouch, and then very slowly, very, I took a half step forward. The nose followed. I took another half step with the other foot. The nose followed. Then I took a slow, very slow full step. Then another. Then stood still. The nose was out. And he just stood there looking at me. Maybe he'd never smelled anything like it and didn't quite know what to do.

I walked quietly away.

There was another German Shepherd. It was hot summer and he came BOUNDING out of back yard and then LEAPED through the air. His teeth snapped, just missing my jugular vein.

“OH JESUS!” I hollered, “OH JESUS CHRIST! MURDER! MURDER! HELP! MURDER!”

The beast turned and leaped again. I socked his head good in mid-air with the mail sack, letters and magazines flying out. He was ready to leap again when two guys, the owner came out and grabbed him. Then, as he watched and growled, I reached down and picked up the letters and magazines that I would have to re-route on the front porch of the next house.

“You sons of bitches are crazy,” I told the two guys, “that dog’s a killer. Get rid of him or keep him off the street!”

I would have fought them both but there was that dog growling and lunging between them. I went over to the next porch and re-routed my mail on hands and knees.

As usual, I didn’t have time for lunch, but I was still 40 minutes late getting in.

The Stone looked at his watch. “You’re 40 minutes late.”

“You never arrived,” I told him.

“That’s a write-up.”

“Sure it is, Stone.”

He already had the proper form in the typer and was at it. As I sat casing up the mail and doing the go-backs he walked up and threw the form in front of me. I was tired of reading his write-ups and knew from my trip downtown that any protest was useless. Without looking I threw it into the wastebasket.

Every route had its traps and only the regular carriers knew of them. Each day it was another god damned thing, and you were always ready for a rape, murder, dogs, or insanity of some sort. The regulars wouldn't tell you their little secrets. That was the only advantage they had—except knowing their case by heart. It was gung ho for a new man, especially one who drank all night, went to bed at 2 a.m., rose at 4:30 a.m. after screwing and singing all night long, and, almost, getting away with it.

One day I was out on the street and the route was going well, though it was a new one, and I thought, Jesus Christ, maybe for the first time in two years I'll be able to eat lunch.

I had a terrible hangover, but still all went well until I came to this handful of mail addressed to a church. The address had no street number, just the name of the church, and the boulevard it faced. I walked, hungover, up the steps. I couldn't find a mailbox in the dark and no people in there. Some candles burning. Little bowls to dip your fingers in. And the empty pulpit looking at me, and all the statues, pale red and blue and yellow, the transoms shut, a stinking hot morning.

Oh Jesus Christ, I thought. And walked out.

I went around to the side of the church and found a stairway going down. I went in through an open door. Do you know what I saw? A row of toilets. And showers. But it was dark. All the lights were out. How in hell can they expect a man to find a mailbox in the dark? Then I saw the light switch. I threw the thing and the lights in the church went on, inside and out. I walked into the next room and there were priests' robes spread out on a table. There was a bottle of wine.

For Christ's sake, I thought, who in hell but me would ever get caught in a scene like this?

I picked up the bottle of wine, had a good drag, left the letters on the robes, and walked back to the showers and toilets. I turned off the lights and took a shit in the dark and smoked a cigarette. I thought about taking a shower but I could see the headlines: MAILMAN CAUGHT DRINKING THE BLOOD OF GOD AND TAKING A SHOWER, NAKED, IN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

So, finally, I didn't have time for lunch and when I got in Jonstone wrote me up for being 23 minutes off schedule.

I found out later that mail for the church was delivered to the parish house around the corner. But now, of course, I'll know where to shit and shower when I'm down and out.

The rainy season began. Most of the money went for drink so my shoes had holes in the soles and my raincoat was torn and old. In any steady downpour I got quite wet, and I meant wet—down to soaked and soggy shorts and stockings. The regular carriers called in sick, the regular carriers called in sick from stations all over the city, so there was work every day at Oakford Station at all the stations. Even the subs were calling in sick. I didn't call in sick because I was too tired to think properly. This particular morning I was sent to Wently Station. It was one of those five-day storms where the rain comes down in one continuous wall of water and the whole city gives up, everything gives up, the sewers can't swallow the water fast enough, the water comes up over the curbs, and in some sections, up on the lawn and into the houses.

I was sent off to Wently Station.

"They said they need a good man," the Stone called after me as I stepped out into a sheet of water.

The door closed. If the old car started, and it did, I was off to Wently. But it didn't matter—if the car didn't run, they threw you on a bus. My feet were already wet.

The Wently soup stood me in front of this case. It was already stuffed and I began stuffing more mail in with the help of another sub. I'd never seen such a case! It was a rotten joke of some sort. I counted 12 tie-outs on the case. That case must have covered half the city. I had yet to learn that the route was all steep hills. Whoever had conceived it was a madman.

We got it up and out and just as I was about to leave the soup walked over and said, "I can't give you any help on this."

"That's all right," I said.

All right, hell. It wasn't until later that I found out he was Jonstone's best buddy.

The route started at the station. The first of 12 swings. I stepped into a sheet of water and worked my way downhill. It was the poor part of town—small houses and Courts with mailboxes full of spiders, mailboxes hanging by one nail, old women inside rolling cigarettes and chewing tobacco and humming to their canaries and watching you, an idiot lost in the rain.

When your shorts get wet they slip down, down down they slip, down around the cheeks and down your ass, a wet rim of a thing held up by the crotch of your pants. The rain ran the ink off some of the letters; a cigarette wouldn't stay lit. You had to keep reaching into the pouch for matches and magazines. It was the first swing and I was already tired. My shoes were caked with mud and I felt like boots. Every now and then I'd hit a slippery spot and almost go down.

A door opened and an old woman asked the question heard a hundred times a day:

"Where's the *regular* man, today?"

"Lady, PLEASE, how would I know? How in the hell would I know? I'm here and here I am in someplace else!"

"Oh, you *are* a gooney fellow!"

“A gooney fellow?”

“Yes.”

I laughed and put a fat water-soaked letter in her hand, then went on to the next. Maybe uphill will be better, I thought.

Another Old Nelly, meaning to be nice, asked me, “Wouldn’t you like to come in and have a cup of tea and dry off?”

“Lady, don’t you realize we don’t even have time to pull up our shorts?”

“Pull up your shorts?”

“YES, PULL UP OUR SHORTS!” I screamed at her and walked off into the wall of water.

I finished the first swing. It took about an hour. Eleven more swings, that’s eleven more hours. Impossible, I thought. They must have hung the roughest one on me first.

Uphill was worse because you had to pull your own weight.

Noon came and went. Without lunch. I was on the fourth or fifth swing. Even on a dry day the route would have been impossible. This way it was so impossible you couldn’t even think about it.

Finally I was so wet I thought I was drowning. I found a front porch that only leaked a little and stood there and managed to light a cigarette. I had about three quiet puffs when I heard a little old lady’s voice behind me:

“Mailman! Mailman!”

“Yes, ma’am?” I asked.

“YOUR MAIL IS GETTING WET!”

I looked down at my pouch and sure enough, I had left the leather flap open. A drop or two had fallen in from a hole in the porch roof.

I walked off. That does it, I thought, only an idiot would go through what I am going through. I am going to find a telephone and tell them to come get their mail and jam the job. Jonstone wins.

The moment I decided to quit, I felt much better. Through the rain I saw a building at the bottom of the hill that looked like it might have a telephone in it. I was halfway up the hill. When I got down I saw it was a small cafe. There was a heater going. Well, shit, I thought, might as well get dry. I took off my raincoat and my cap, threw the mailpouch on the floor and ordered a cup of coffee.

It was very black coffee. Remade from old coffeegrinds. The worst coffee I had ever tasted, but it was hot. I drank three cups and sat there an hour, until I was completely dry. Then I looked out: it had stopped raining! I went out and walked up the hill and began delivering mail again. I took my time and finished the route. On the 12th swing I was walking in twilight. By the time I returned to the station it was night.

The carrier’s entrance was locked.

I beat on the tin door.

A little warm clerk appeared and opened the door.

“What the hell took you so long?” he screamed at me.

I walked over to the case and threw down the wet pouch full of go-backs, miscased mail and pickup mail. Then I took off my key and flipped it against the case. You were supposed to sign in and out for your key. I didn't bother. He was standing there.

I looked at him.

“Kid, if you say one more word to me, if you so much as sneeze, so help me God, I am going to kill you!”

The kid didn't say anything. I punched out.

The next morning I kept waiting for Jonstone to turn and say something. He acted as if nothing had happened. The rain stopped and all the regulars were no longer sick. The Store sent three subs home without pay, one of them me. I almost loved him then.

I went on in and got up against Betty's warm ass.

But then it began raining again. The Stone had me out on a thing called Sunday Collection and if you're thinking of church, forget it. You picked up a truck at West Garage and clipboard. The clipboard told you what streets, what time you were to be there, and how to get to the next pickup box. Like 2:32 p.m., Beecher and Avalon, L3 R2 (which meant left three blocks, right two) 2:35 p.m., and you wondered how you could pick up one box, then drive five blocks in three minutes and be finished cleaning out another box. Sometimes it took you over three minutes to clean out a Sunday box. And the boards weren't accurate. Sometimes they counted an alley as a street and sometimes they counted a street as an alley. You never knew where you were.

It was one of those continuous rains, not hard, but it *never* stopped. The territory I was driving was new to me but at least it was light enough to read the clipboard. But as it got darker it was harder to read (by the dashboard light) or locate the pickup boxes. Also the water was rising in the streets, and several times I had stepped into water up to my ankles.

Then the dashboard light went out. I couldn't read the clipboard. I had no idea where I was. Without the clipboard I was like a man lost in the desert. But the luck wasn't all bad yet. I had two boxes of matches and before I made for each new pickup box, I would light a match, memorize the directions and drive on. For once, I had outwitted Adversity, the Jonstone up there in the sky, looking down, watching me.

Then I took a corner, leaped out to unload the box and when I got back the clipboard was GONE!

Jonstone in the Sky, have Mercy! I was lost in the dark and the rain. *Was* I some kind of idiot, actually? Did I make things happen to myself? It was possible. It was possible that I was subnormal, that I was lucky just to be alive.

The clipboard had been wired to the dashboard. I figured it must have flown out of the truck on the last sharp turn. I got out of the truck with my pants rolled up around my knees and started wading through a foot of water. It was dark. I'd never find the god damned thing. I walked along, lighting matches—but nothing, nothing. It had floated away. As I reached the corner I had sense enough to notice which way the current was moving and follow it. I saw an object floating along, lit a match, and there it WAS! The clipboard. *Impossible!* I could have kissed the thing. I waded back to the truck, got in, rolled my pantlegs down and really *wired* that board to the dash. Of course, I was way behind schedule by then but at least I'd found their dirty clipboard. I wasn't lost in the backstreets of Nowhere. I wouldn't have to ring a doorbell and ask somebody the way back to the post office garage.

I could hear some fucker snarling from his warm frontroom:

“Well, well. You're a post office employee, *aren't* you? Don't you know the way back to your own garage?”

So I drove along, lighting matches, leaping into whirlpools of water and emptying collection boxes. I was tired and wet and hungover, but I was usually that way and I waded through the weariness like I did the water. I kept thinking of a hot bath, Betty's fine legs, and

—something to keep me going—a picture of myself in an easy chair, drink in hand, the dog walking up, me patting his head.

But that was a long way off. The stops on the clipboard seemed endless and when I reached the bottom it said, “Over” and I flipped the board and sure enough, there on the backside was *another* list of stops.

With the last match I made the last stop, deposited my mail at the station indicated, and there was a *load*, and then drove back toward the West Garage. It was in the west end of town and in the west the land was very flat, the drainage system couldn’t handle the water and anytime it rained any length of time at all, they had what was called a “flood.” The description was accurate.

Driving on in, the water rose higher and higher. I noticed stalled and abandoned cars all around. Too bad. All I wanted was to get in that chair with that glass of scotch in my hand and watch Betty’s ass wobble around the room. Then at a signal I met Tom Moto, one of the other Jonstone subs.

“Which way you going in?” Moto asked.

“The shortest distance between two points, I was taught, is a straight line,” I answered him.

“You better not,” he told me. “I know that area. It’s an ocean through there.”

“Bullshit,” I said, “all it takes is a little guts. Got a match?”

I lit up and left him at the signal. Betty, baby, I’m coming! Yeah.

The water got higher and higher but mail trucks are built high off the ground. I took the shortcut through the residential neighborhood, full speed, and water flew up all around me. It continued to rain, hard. There weren’t any cars around. I was the only moving object.

Betty baby. Yeah.

Some guy standing on his front porch laughed at me and yelled, “THE MAIL MUST GET THROUGH!”

I cursed him and gave him the finger.

I noticed that the water was rising above the floorboards, whirling around my shoes, but I kept driving. Only three blocks to go!

Then the truck stopped.

Oh. Oh. Shit.

I sat there and tried to kick it over. It started once, then stalled. Then it wouldn’t respond. I sat there looking at the water. It must have been two feet deep. What was I supposed to do? Sit there until they sent a rescue squad?

What did the Postal Manual say? Where *was* it? I had never known anybody who had seen one. Balls.

I locked the truck, put the ignition keys in my pocket and stepped into the water—nearly up to my waist—and began wading toward West Garage. It was still raining. Suddenly the water rose another three or four inches. I had been walking across a lawn and had stepped off the curbing. The truck was parked on somebody’s front lawn.

For a moment I thought that swimming might be faster, then I thought, no, that would look

ridiculous. I made it to the garage and walked up to the dispatcher. There I was, wet as w
could get and he looked at me.

I threw him the truck keys and the ignition keys.

Then I wrote on a piece of paper: 3435 Mountview Place.

“Your truck’s at this address. Go get it.”

“You mean you left it out there?”

“I mean I left it out there.”

I walked over, punched out, then stripped to my shorts and stood in front of a heater.
hung my clothes over the heater. Then I looked across the room and there by another heat
stood Tom Moto in *his* shorts.

We both laughed.

“It’s hell, isn’t it?” he asked.

“Unbelievable.”

“Do you think The Stone planned it?”

“Hell yes! He even made it rain!”

“Did you get stalled out there?”

“Sure,” I said.

“I did too.”

“Listen, baby,” I said, “my car is 12 years old. You’ve got a new one. I’m sure I’m stalled
out there. How about a push to get me started?”

“O.K.”

We got dressed and went out. Moto had bought a new model car about three weeks before
I waited for his engine to start. Not a sound. Oh Christ, I thought.

The rain was up to the floorboards.

Moto got out.

“No good. It’s dead.”

I tried mine without any hope. There was some action from the battery, some spark
though feeble. I pumped the gas, hit it again. It started up. I really let it roar. VICTORY!
warmed it good. Then I backed up and began to push Moto’s new car. I pushed him for
mile. The thing wouldn’t even fart. I pushed him into a garage, left him there, and picking th
highland and the drier streets, made it back to Betty’s ass.

The Stone's favorite carrier was Matthew Battles. Battles never came in with a wrinkle shirt on. In fact, everything he wore was new, looked new. The shoes, the shirts, the pants, the cap. His shoes really shined and none of his clothing appeared to have ever been laundered even once. Once a shirt or a pair of pants became the least bit soiled he threw them away.

The Stone often said to us as Matthew walked by:

"Now, *there* goes a carrier!"

And The Stone meant it. His eyes damn near shimmered with love.

And Matthew would stand at his case, erect and clean, scrubbed and well-slept, shoes gleaming victoriously, and he would fan those letters into the case with joy. "You're a real carrier, Matthew!"

"Thank you, Mr. Jonstone!"

One 5 a.m. I walked in and sat down to wait behind The Stone. He looked a bit slumped under that red shirt.

Moto was next to me. He told me: "They picked up Matthew yesterday."

"Picked him up?"

"Yeah, for stealing from the mails. He'd been opening letters for the Nekalayla Temple and taking money out. After 15 years on the job."

"How'd they get him, how'd they find out?"

"The old ladies. The old ladies had been sending in letters to Nekalayla filled with money and they weren't getting any thank-you notes or response. Nekalayla told the P.O. and the P.O. put the Eye on Matthew. They found him opening letters down at the soak-box, taking money out."

"No shit?"

"No shit. They caught him in cold daylight." I leaned back.

Nekalayla had built this large temple and painted it a sickening green, I guess it reminded him of money, and he had an office staff of 30 or 40 people who did nothing but open envelopes, take out checks and money, record the amount, the sender, date received and so on. Others were busy mailing out books and pamphlets written by Nekalayla, and his photo was on the wall, a large one of N. in priestly robes and beard, and a painting of N., very large too, looked over the office, watching.

Nekalayla claimed he had once been walking through the desert when he met Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ told him everything. They sat on a rock together and J.C. laid it on him. Now he was passing the secrets on to those who could afford it. He also held a service every Sunday. His help, who were also his followers, rang in and out on timeclocks.

Imagine Matthew Battles trying to outwit Nekalayla who had met Christ in the desert!

“Has anybody said anything to The Stone?” I asked. “Are you *kidding*?”

We sat an hour or so. A sub was assigned to Matthew’s case. The other subs were given other jobs. I sat alone behind The Stone. Then I got up and walked to his desk.

“Mr. Jonstone?”

“Yes, Chinaski?”

“Where’s Matthew today? Sick?”

The Stone’s head dropped. He looked at the paper in his hand and pretended to continue reading it. I walked back and sat down.

At 7 a.m. The Stone turned:

“There’s nothing for you today, Chinaski.”

I stood up and walked to the doorway. I stood in the doorway. “Good morning, Mr. Jonstone. Have a good day.”

He didn’t answer. I walked down to the liquor store and bought a half pint of Grand Da for my breakfast.

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