

JESUS-JACKSON USED AUTOS: OLD JACKSON AND UNCLE JESUS, PROPRIETORS

(extract)

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I came to the conclusion one afternoon, after a solid three hours of halfhearted writing at my desk, that I didn't drink enough. In fact I was convinced quite suddenly, that for a guy who wrote about drinking pretty frequently, I hadn't done much hellraising in my life on account of having had a few too many. And by hellraising I meant the kind of cutting up that led to page-worthy experiences. What kind of struggling, intoxicated, romantic writer's life was I living, anyhow? They say you should write about what you know, and here I was, ignorant as shit about hardcore drunkenness. I felt like a real hypocrite.

It wasn't that I didn't like alcohol. I liked it fine. I loved it sometimes. I wasn't much on wine. I'd always found it too sweet. But I liked beer and liquor, just not all the time and to the point where it made me stupid or sick, which is how I found many drinking writers to be, some struggling with full-blown alcoholism and some just too dumb to keep themselves out of trouble. That fine line between interesting times and trouble was a thin one for the regularly imbibing literati, I guess. I was convinced I needed more on-the-job training.

I was working on a scene set during a family picnic where the grand patriarch, a notorious moonshiner from years past who'd given up the wicked drink, announces to the family he's just been diagnosed with brain cancer; he pours himself a big shot of shine, toasts everyone, downs it, and keeps on until the sun is well down, planning to shoot himself before sunrise.

I thought, here I am, birthing this poor imagined fella into the world, full of victories and troubles, and I'm doing it sober. Was that fair? Was it fair to Old Jackson, the reformed shine runner stricken with the brain cancer? I quit where I was on the page and got up and went to the fridge. We only had two Bud Lights and a can of Red Stripe. Not a drop of hard liquor. A pretty sorry showing. I stood there and downed a Bud Light. These were my wife's. She wouldn't care. She'd be bringing more home later. I always thought they tasted like beer-thinned water. Then I drank the Red Stripe. It had taste and a higher alcohol content. There I was, standing in the kitchen like an asshole, drinking random beers to get a little day buzz going. Nice. I was on my way to identifying with that poor fella, Old Jackson.

I could have gone back to my writing, I could have drunk another beer. I could have taken a nap. Watched a movie. But it was a nice mild spring day. I decided to walk to the nearest bar, down at the pier. Everything was down at the pier. It was less than half a mile out of the neighborhood and on the main drag. I didn't want to drive. I took my notebook and pen.