

Chapter XVII

A Very Bad Wizard

—in the days of old, a land there was called the Middle West; and in that land, a state there was called Nilnisi; and in that state, a city there was called Demortuis; and on the outskirts of that city a green pleasance there was, of rolling hills and meadows and orchards and creekgully: and that was Bander's Natch.

From Bander's Natch did the Kubla Khans of Demortuis decree that a suburb rise, a stately bedroom community of houses built in the Tudor and Georgian styles: and that was Cornwall. Treelined were its curving avenues and spacious its landscaped lawns; harmonious and troublefree they fashioned it, for pipe-puffing Dads in elbowpatched cardigans and pearl-necklaced Moms in starched apronstrings. Here they lived the commutably good life—not *rich*, perhaps, but certainly of the upper-midmost class, and always aspiring to achieve the *élite*.

Public-spirited were they, players of golfgame and bridgerubber at the Unicorn Country Club; takers of pride in Cornwall's being such a Nice Place to raise their children, and in those children's being such wellscrubbed variations on the Bud-and-Kitten theme. Innumerable were the glasses of freshpoured milk and plates of freshbaked cookies awaiting their *Hi Mom I'm HOE wum* return from school (always through the kitchen door, never through the front).

For Cornwall was their hearth and HOEwum, their stylishly plush cocoon: the Great

American Dream made flesh in Good Old Heartland U.S.A., where God was ever in His Heaven and Old Glory up Its Pole.

To the immediate east of this Wondersuburb lay another community, one of humbler bedrooms. Less rolling were its hills, less verdant its landscape; on rigidly rectangular lots were its bungalows built, fronted by patches of seedy lawn: and that was Chesterfield. Here the Dads went to bowling alleys clad in Ban-Lon and chinos, the Moms in curlers and Capri pants. Myriad were the Copenhagen snuff tins kicked by their Junior-and-Sis offspring (sometimes along the sidewalk, sometimes into the gutter) en route HOEwum to feast on Fizzies and pork rinds.

Now between Cornwall and Chesterfield, like a moat or hedge, ran fabled South 48th Street. Due west of this borderline, beyond heraldic arches, clomb the immaculate Cornish entryway known as Penzance Boulevard; but east of 48th this same thoroughfare narrowed and sagged into Chesterfield as plebeian Pawnee Road.

Two doors down from the corner of 48th and Pawnee, there amongst the chuckholes and Chevy pickups and transitorized rockabilly, could be found a bungalow wondrous to behold. Crammed it was with unChesterfieldian bric-a-brac: African masks and Chinese screens, a Russian samovar and a Persian narghile, jolly green Buddhas on pedestals and little carven owls on *étagères*. A grand (if shopworn) piano filled half the living room; the other half was taken up by a perpetual house party.

Presiding at the piano was a composite of the jolly Buddha and carven owl. Shortish was he and corpulent too, but sporting the natty wardrobe and elegant manners of a true chevalier. A lover of fine wines, of choice victuals, of high stakes and long odds and hundred-to-one shots, he was equally convivial as guest or host. Lavishly would he entertain in either capacity and largely would he spend, far more than he could spare—for he was only a collateral Derente, a cadet offshoot known to his cousins as “Lucky Pierre.”

(Sardonic, all the Derentes were; cutlery kings, after all.)

Nonetheless they marveled at how lucky Pierre proved to be, time and again, at charming the pants off ladies. Yet he stayed e'er faithful (in his heart) to the one he had espoused: Antoinette, who hailed from Louisiana and remained very Suth'n in her attitude,

never saying “I” when she could utter “Ah.” Taller than her husband, quite as generously fleshed and even more sociable, she dabbled in the local art scene (though frequently heard to sigh about how New Orleans beat Demortuis all hollow) and doted on extravagant divertissements. Half the house on Pawnee she filled with *objets* and the other half with those who painted, sculpted, and crafted them, alongside actors and dancers and Lucky Pierre’s fellow musicians. Seldom did the merriment lapse at that wondrous bungalow, and seldom would the revelers take their leave—even if the gas or electricity were shut off, for intervals dependent on how well Lucky Pierre could live up to his name at the poker table, pool hall, or racetrack.

Then at the age of thirty Antoinette found herself carrying an unexpected child-to-be. So trumpetingly thunderingly was its presence felt that it earned the working title of Elephant (or El’phun, in its mother’s patois). And like a maddened rogue did it balk at facing the wide bright world, holding out—or in—for seventeen days past its due date and then through seventeen hours of laborious delivery, till Antoinette informed Lucky Pierre that if he wanted a second child, he could dadblame rent him a dadgum uterus and have it his own *sacre bleu!* self.

Thus, from the very outset, was their son destined to be a one-and-only.

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From Elephant he quickly came to be known as Heffalump, and so by degrees as “Lumpy.” Thus-and-so: a lump of fresh clay was he, thrown on the cosmic potter’s wheel. Who would mold him into a goodly vessel, staunch and strong?

At an extremely precocious age he realized (*sacre bleu*) that he could handle this fabrication all by himself.

Your self-made vessel, adroitly molded, could be put on like a suit of clothes and carried roundabout with you, wheresoever you might be taken. And what with playing Little Ricky to your parents’s Desilu twosome, there were a lot of wheresoevers to drop by or end up at, in and out of Demortuis.

“Got to tickle some ivories!” Lucky Pierre would say. “Come along, my boy! You’re never too young to learn how to bust a few chops.” And off they would go, to one of

Lumpy's homes away from home: Ensanglanté's on the West Side, where the onion soup and dinner crêpes approached Antoinette's exacting standards; or Todd's Steakhouse on Lincoln Avenue, where Amos the headwaiter never failed to ask if the young gentleman would care for "a pot o' mocha java?"; or the Blue Rib Bone down on Rookery Row, where Lumpy might be rocked to sleep during live performances by Cannonball Adderley or Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson.

From time to time his vessel was toted off to Lake Severn to visit one or the other of the family enclaves: Le Tranchant (domain of old Jacques IV, "Uncle Quarty") or Le Bord du Rasoir (stomping grounds of Jacques V—"Uncle Sanka"—and his son Jazzbo). The original Jacques Derente, born to a long line of Calvinistic axe-grinders, had emigrated from Lyonnais to the Middle West back when most folk there ate with clasp-knives, and the only forks to be found were in the roads. By peddling overpriced flatware to outbound Forty-Niners, Jacques I had founded a business that bonanzafied a couple generations later when stainless steel was introduced. So now there were Derente™ knives and scissors and razor blades in coast-to-coast kitchen drawers and sewing rooms and medicine cabinets; and immense payloads of freshcut income trundling down the road to Lake Severn...

...though not so much, simoleonwise, to cadet offshoots in Chesterfield.

All the more reason to lose no time in molding your own vessel, and with the materials at hand.

In the beginning there were Hanna-Barbera characters scrawled in thick soft pencil on cheap coarse paper: Yogi and Boo-Boo and Quick Draw McGraw, Flintstone and Jetson flotsam and jetsam. The casts of *Peanuts* and *Pogo* and *Popeye* too, copied out of the funny pages or off the TV screen.

("So where's Scooby-Doo?" Skeeter Kitefly would one day ask, leafing through Lumpy's initial portfolio. "After my time," he would tell her. "I lost interest in Saturday morning cartoons around about *The Secret Squirrel Show*." "How can I ever respect you again?" Skeeter would sigh.)

Climbing the Crayola ladder from infantile 8 to routine 16 to the more sophisticated 24, to that unforgettable Christmas-stockings yield of the magnificent 48—after which the 64

seemed anticlimactic, built-in sharpener or no. Fit only for overindulged children, of whom there were many across South 48th Street; as glimpsed through bungalow windows, while still a small lump, then at closer hand from kindergarten on. (Though this required an annual transfer into the Bander's Natch School District: a rite of passage that got ensnarled in stickier red tape with each succeeding year.)

Tempera, watercolor, agreeably messy charcoal sticks. Deeper talents being tapped, a series of private lessons arranged by Antoinette—nothing so fancy as that sounded, of course. The tutor was a starveling artist with a Jon Gnagy goatee, who always managed to arrive just as dinner was being served. But from him Lumpy learned the basics of perspective and proportion, and rudimentary caricature.

Visual caricature, that is; verbal came naturally.

(“Not French for nothing,” as Lucky Pierre liked to say.)

Being a rather fattish boy and having a Cyrano-nose from earliest childhood, Lumpy soon came to rely on the sarcastic riposte. Yes, Valvert, I *do* know how to play kickball, I helped invent the game—your version's pretty lame compared to how they play it in Peru. Oh, I've got a big nose, hunh? and do I want to *make* something of it? S'not a problem, my friend—(*phonk*)—here ya go: plenty more where that came from—

Didn't endear him to the juvenile louts of Cornwall.

Nor yet to its little Orange Girls, though Peyton took notice of them pretty damn pronto. (Not big-nosed for nothing, either.)

Having been a rather fattish boy his own *sacre bleu* self, Lucky Pierre put Lumpy to lifting weights, shadowboxing, and other exercises of the setting-up variety. In this he was seconded by Lumpy's third cousin and surrogate elder brother, Jazzbo the Suave (alias Jacques VI).

The Derentes engaged in a lot of Kennedyesque touch football at Lake Severn, and Jazzbo recruited Lumpy to hold the line for Le Bord du Rasoir. Height he inherited from Antoinette's Louisiana forebears; bulk from both parents and their high-caloric bill of fare. Swiftly did Lumpy grow, broad and stout and somewhat clumsy but entirely tenacious: ever steadfast on the line of scrimmage, stonewalling the abhorred team from Le Tranchant. Thus

was a new layer added to his vessel; yet seldom was his mind on gaining yards or blocking kicks or running interference, but on how this would be a surefire means of impressing little Orange Girls.

“A grape, a glass of water, half a macaroon... and your hand to kiss.”

Thrust home! Touché! Ho Cyrano!

The hand, for too long, was Lumpy’s own, and occupied elsewhere.

Partly with pen and ink, in pictorial depiction of Orange Girls in imagined undress. Nothing so nasty as that sounded, of course; this was Art. And puberty had only just struck. And in those days *Playboy*, his chief reference book, still airbrushed away everything of a clinical nature.

At any rate these premature pin-uppies brought him his first repute as an artist. His first loutish camaraderie, first income from commissions, first and next several brushes with official censorship. All of which stood him in valuable stead when he started ninth grade at Cornwall High School—

—and got snapped up as a scrub guard on the JV squad by brusque Coach Tucker, who each fall informed new freshmen that Cornwall’s mascot was the Blue Streak, so in no way would he tolerate any *Yellow Streaks* profaning his gym with their vile ochre presence!

Now two years earlier this homily had been delivered to four boys who promptly formed a *Yellow Streak* fellowship and amateur rock band. To them it seemed obvious that in every house on Penzance Boulevard, every person sat down three times a day to dine and sup and break their fast anew upon a big brimming bowl of Shredded Bullshit.

This past spring the *Yellow Streaks* had distributed canary-colored attacks on the shootings at Kent State (“OF COURSE YOU KNOW THIS MEANS *WAR!!!*”). Over the intervening summer they had nurtured these broadsheets into a multipaged underground newspaper called *Streaky Bacon*. And with a copy of this in hand did Lumpy approach them to volunteer his journalistic services.

A grandly tendered offer, disdained at first by the revolutionaries—Danny Bananas MacBean, Armageddon Bedlington, Joe Mitchell the Mellow *Yellow Streak* (who had connections) and Snortin’ T. N. Tweedle (who utilized them); together with La Belle Debbie

of legend imperishable. (Ah! like honey upon whole-wheat toast was the color of her eyes and her hair!) Not only was Lumpy a pedestrian ninth-grader, but also a pigskin jock-in-the-making and therefore suspect of narkish proclivities.

On the spot, armed only with a Bic ballpoint, he dashed off a series of satirical efforts: Spiro Agnew sampling demonweed, David and Julie Eisenhower in the Two Virgins album cover pose, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix arriving at Rock'n'Roll Heaven in trick-or-treat costumes.

This last, redrawn in Indian ink, was accepted for the next issue of *Streaky Bacon*, as were several of Lumpy's pin-uppermosts. Which sparked outrage among the Sister Hoods, Cornwall High's burgeoning feminist movement, who wore crimson hooded ponchos and delved into what they hoped was the occult. When a subsequent "Set Your Chickens Free!" issue appeared, the Sister Hoods fell upon every available copy and plastered them with patches stating THIS EXPLOITS WOMEN!

The Yellow Streaks, adding "CHICKENS TOO," peddled the blemished *Bacons* at half-price.

Their cartoonist provocateur had been signing his artwork "Peyote Lump"; but now, in recognition of his inflammatory aptitude, the Streaks bestowed upon him a great and powerful honorific:

Outlandish Wizard of Schnoz.

(Because *because* because because BECAUUUUSE...)

(Ho Cyrano-nose!)

So when Coach Tucker ordered the honoree to desist forthwith from this sedition, or else give up any hope of someday becoming a *varsity* scrub, Lumpy felt entitled to throw out his Right Guard. If they weren't going to play co-ed football—touch *or* tackle—he saw no point in seeing the season through. Oh, I've got a bad attitude, hunh? S'not a problem, Coach: handing in my helmet, hanging up my cleats, I'm off to be a Wizard—(*phonk*)—and follow the Yellow Streak Road!

Storied times then followed, and storied deeds done by dark and light and grey areas in-between.

O the outbursts, the upflares, the pitched battles with Armageddon Bedlington (would-be Weatherman) who favored militant stridency over idle satire! O the euphoria, the hilarity, being immersed in the spirit of infinite festival, absorbed by freedom and beauty and grape-boycott! O how La Belle Debbie caused the swearing of oaths, bringing about an improbable Last Alliance of Yellow Streaks and Sister Hoods to achieve that most glorious of revolutionary happenings: the Day of the Banana Peels at Cornwall High School!

Truly this was the stuff of balladry and folklore.

For the Wizard of Schnoz, that storied epoch culminated in a summer road trip via Jazzbo's new LeMans Sport convertible, *cherchez-ing les femmes du Moyen-Ouest*—or “chasing country twattail,” as Jazzbo phrased it. And O the jubilation of that chase, that hunt and seek and yoicks! tallyho! inside a borrowed sleeping bag outside Rapid City, South Dakota, with Miss I-Don't-Feel-Pregnant, whose apostasy would have caused the nuns to drop their teeth. (What *had* her name been? Molly Maloney? Katie O'Keeffe? Something redundant, anyway.)

No matter. Next morning, Whatsername went wheresoever. And goddam Jazzbo, leaving his Carly Simon lookalike in her Jeep Wagoneer waterbed, got behind the wheel of the LeMans and leaned on its horn. And the Wizard of Schnoz had to resume his lumpish old vessel as kid cousin riding shotgun, very much in the driver's suave shadow.

So much for culmination.

Jazzbo would go on to Dartmouth and the Wharton School of Finance, losing his Jazzboness over time and becoming “Jacques VI” instead. But Lumpy just lumbered back to Chesterfield, to Lucky Pierre and Antoinette and their uninterrupted bungalow party. Also to Cornwall High School, from which most of the Yellow Streaks had graduated—taking, it would seem, the very much interrupted legends of Bander's Natch away with them.

In their absence the remnants of the Last Alliance tried to persevere, to carry on, even serving up an occasional fresh rasher of *Streaky Bacon*. But the entire fabric of awareness seemed to be unraveling before them: the war abruptly over, POWs brought home, military

draft blowing no more! And then the energy of America, once so abundant, grew steadily more scarce; even as Richard Nixon, once so impenetrable, staged a slow-motion downfall upon the tape-recorded sword he had forged for himself.

So too did the Wizard of Schnoz feel: like a hot-air balloon taking a gradual leak. He had gone north-by-northwest with a lapsed Catholic damsel at the foot of Mount Rushmore, with four stonefaced Presidents looking on—and STILL the little Orange Girls of Cornwall didn't act impressed! They found him too gauche, too oafish, lacking even JV scrub cachet; and too snide, too sarcastic, which on the teen machismo scale ranked right up with sensitivity and enjoyment of Broadway showtunes.

Neither of which did anything to slake a constant burning lust to strip the clothes off every woman in school, in town, and the wide bright world beyond. Nary a resource had Lumpy to rely on but Franco-American wit; and fueled by frustration he honed his gibes till they took on a caustic cutlass edge, to pin down and needle away at his female classmates.

Thus was another coating added to his vessel. And these means achieved him some ends among lonely Rapunzel-types, who would let down their hair (to a certain extent, yes) when baited by rapsallions seeking to clamber up that Certain Extent—

—only to be let down, in turn, by damnable lumpishness.

Popping the buttons off a Rapunzel's blouse ("This is brand-new!" she would wail) or wrenching the hooks right out of her bra ("I just *bought* this! I don't BELIEVE you!!")

The incredible pitfalls of getting to second base. Cornwalletries almost always dressed expensively, and Lumpy had to shell out a hell of a lot—without any reciprocation worth mentioning—to make amends after each infrequent date.

(But I'm a WIZARD, dammit!)

*After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of a more ungainly make;
"They sneer at me for leaning all awry:
What! did the Hand then of the Potter shake?"*

Shake, rattle and roll.

Resigning himself to a senior year of Cyranohood, he astounded the school by

making a spit-in-their-eye run for the presidency of the Cornwall Student Council. And by offering the assembled electorate an upfront bribe of thirty dollars for the job. And by wagering his feeble (but well-meaning) opponent Larry Hayes that the loser should get his head shaved—thereby guaranteeing Hayes’s victory.

Though only at the polls. Who now can say what was the Wizard’s true motivation? Shaving his head before a large crowd of paying spectators, he gained a powerful resemblance to Telly Savalas, whose series *Kojak* happened to premiere that month. And with the new cueball came a staggering leap in his personal seductability.

Clustering round they came.

Clustery-round they were.

Orange Girls squeamish no more, resistant no more, eagerly offering their sweet macaroony selves by the by-God cookie-jarful.

(Stick a feather in your WHO LOVES YA BABY cap!)

So “swath” was not the word for what he proceeded to cut. Lumberin’ Lumpy had transformed into Lex Lothario, and there was a heapin’ helpin’ of lost time to make up for. Let the Valverts drag their dates to burger joints; the Wizard of Schnoz knew how to demonstrate *panache*—

“Ensanglanté’s? Really? Oh wow! But that’s so expensive!”

“I wouldn’t subject you to anything *cheap*, my precious.” (O no, Gollum.)

Lesser macaroons he took to Todd’s Steakhouse—“Table for two, Amos, and a pot o’ mocha java”—while the occasional hard-to-get player got smuggled into the Blue Rib Bone on Rookery Row. And Lucky Pierre, if on ivory-tickling duty that night, would strike up “Let’s Get It On” or “I’m Gonna Love You Just a Little More Baby.”

Afterward, more often than not, they did and he would.

His old Lumpy reputation came in handy here, as the cookies hastened to unbutton and unhook themselves and so spare their pricey upper garments. (Which didn’t prevent the Wizard from busting the zipper on a skirt, say, or reducing pantyhose to a set of split ends.)

(Apache dance time!)

Peeling and squeezing Orange Girls meant no more time for peeling bananas and squeezing out *Streaky Bacons*. Instead he spent his last semester at Cornwall High editing its sanctioned school newspaper, the *Flash*; and learned a bit about orthodox journalism when he wasn't hosting staff bacchanals. (Why waste your nose on a grindstone when it complements your chromedome?)

Watergate was all the rage in those days, but no impeachment did the Wizard seek—not with all these macaroonies clustering round, thank you Jesus. Not even feeble Larry Hayes did he target, other than to rub it in editorially (*Flash* after *Flash*) about the ultimate results of their election wager. Finally Larry lost his well-meaning marbles one bright cold April day: stripping to the toe, taking to his heels, and cavorting through the halls of Cornwall High School as the bare-assed Last of the Yellow Streaks.

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Thus it came to an end, that age of the world in frumious Bander's Natch.

Cornwall and Chesterfield would endure, and South 48th Street would go on cleaving them asunder. Penzance Boulevard would continue its immaculate ascent beyond heraldic arches, granting access to those privileged enough to live on (or make deliveries to) Tintagel and Boscastle, Camelford and St. Ives. But never again would Cornwall see the like of the Glorious Revolution, celebrating the most cornucopious Joy and Peace and Hope; for the contents of that incandescent hourglass have been scattered and mingled with less illustrious sands.

Or so reflected the Wizard of Schnoz, unable to sleep one dank dark August night, shortly before he too headed off to higher education elsewhere. Rising before dawn, he scaled Penzance Hill and wandered its darkling empty pavements.

In-a-Gadda-da-Vida they cometh, but out from the Presence they goeth, to dwell and snore in the Land of Nod: thus had ever been the *sic transit* cycle. Forward from ashes, backward to dust; rounding about upon itself, biting its own tail as might a mad dog or a Worm Ouroboros.

The Wizard found his feet taking him down to Tulgey Park, to a duckpond there ringed with willow trees. On this quacksome strand had the Yellow Streaks held many a

rally, passed many a demonic calumet from hand to hand. (Ah! to take it direct from La Belle Debbie's honey-dulcet lips! and then to overindulge in Texas tea, courtesy of Joe Mitchell's mellow connections!)

Storied times.

Storied deeds.

Outlandish...

He picked up and flung pondwards a single stone that vanished from sight, or what would have been sight had it not been 5 AM. One stone thrown and others to follow, chosen at random and hurled unseen, with only a SHPLOOP to testify they ever existed at all. Larger stones he chose now, harder did he fling them; bigger SHPLOOPS he achieved, with ripples now visible in the dawn's early light. Circles heading out to bounce off faraway shores and come back home again, cometh and goeth, around and around—

—till along came a wind blowing wrinklewaves across the duckpond: waves that overwhelmed the ripples, and wiped away the circles, and smoothed out the surface of the water.