

Laura Kalpakian

THE LONESOME HIGHWAY

Conversations Between Jack Kerouac and
Walt Whitman in the Afterlife

Ah, Death. Yes.

Jack rolled over and stretched his Shape. No body any longer, just a Shape. He looked up at the overhead canopy. Low and over to his right tongues of light like flames licked at a page dripping green ink, bizarre as well as beautiful. The equivalent, no doubt of dawn, except that dawn implied dusk, which further implied a sequence of time, which was missing here. As he rose, bits of mist clung to him like dry ice in a detergent factory. He dusted them off and looked around. This Terrain was woodsy: the Shapes of trees and branches, of moss and dirt and grit lay all around him. But no odors. That was the worst thing about this death business, no odors. It was a mouthwash manufacturer's paradise, he reflected, grinning wryly at the pun. He had once been Sal Paradise, his own hero. But there was no need of mouthwash here. No breath, no garlic, no odors and no paradise. The Terrain was like a vast movie sound stage, where actors clumped about in a so-called wilderness, with none of the sharp, stinging scents of the forest, or the dry, acrid odors of the desert. It was all rather like watching television. You might see a meal consumed as the blue light flickered over your face, see the shape and contour of it; you might even see the colors of the food. But you couldn't smell it, couldn't touch it. You couldn't eat it. It wasn't real.

He surveyed the Terrain more closely. There was no telling what this change of Terrain might mean. Perhaps he had elevated himself to some new plateau. He had just explored a Terrain that was murky, swampy. This one at least looked fresh and somewhat inviting.

He hoped he would meet someone soon. The worst Terrains were solitary. Time to move on, even in death there was a kind of unseen progress. He smiled ruefully to think of the books he had once written, all about lonesome travelers. The soul was the only really lonesome traveler. He stood and began pushing through the Shapes of the trees and underbrush. He recognized the manzanita, the sumac, the sycamore, by their shapes and colors; he thought rather longingly of their fragrances, but could not remember or reconstruct. He moved without direction, but with the certainty that he would never be lost. The brush began to thin and straggle and he came upon a path that grew into a fitful trail, expanding into a smooth way and thence to a road. Gravel crunched under his feet and the woods still stood nearby green and moist, compared to the shaggy brown coat of a road that spread out before him. He began to walk: it was a comfort to move in space, however lost and irretrievable Time might be.

The road turned and dipped and presently he picked out a man's Shape in the distance. He was sitting by a fire and looked to be about forty-five years old. There was no telling, of course, how old he was when he died because they (They!) allowed you to assume the Shape of whatever period in your life you wished. Most chose the time when they were the happiest. Jack was no exception. He chose the Shape of the body he had known around 1947, when he had been about 25, a light build, with dark, unruly hair. This other, older Shape he perceived, was dressed in traveling clothes: odd-looking raincoat, stout shoes, a loose, flowing shirt, durable trousers. The shirt was open at the neck revealing gray hairs which straggled up toward the Shape's thick, muscular neck. He lay on his side in the grass with his head propped up in his hand. When he saw Jack coming, he rose slowly to his feet and ambled to meet him. He walked with a deliberate, rolling gait.

"Are you the new person drawn toward me?" he called out in a rich voice.

As the Shape approached him, Jack could see that hidden in the full salt-and-pepper beard was a wide, expansive mouth, smiling, and above that, bright blue eyes which surveyed Jack with kindness and enthusiasm.

"I am," he replied, adopting the man's formality. Jack knew it had to be an American face. The flat, level gaze roused some memory.

"Do you think I am trusty and faithful? Do you see no further than this facade, this smooth and tolerant manner of me? Do you suppose yourself advancing on real ground toward a real, heroic man?"

Jack shrugged. Reality was in the eye of the beholder. And heroism. What a question. Jack's memory jarred and an old college textbook photograph rolled loose.

"Have you no thought, O dreamer, that it may all be an illusion?"

Jack knew now; no mistaking a line like that. "I have never thought it might be anything else," he said.

"Come, join me by the fire."

Jack refused the hand that the Shape of Whitman offered, but he accompanied him nonetheless to the fire.

"Tell me who you might be," inquired Whitman as they sat down.

"You mean who I might have been, don't you?" replied Jack, "or who I was."

"Tell me whatever you want."

"I was an American writer who lived too long and died too young."

The Shape ignored both the sarcasm and the paradox. "An American writer!" he cried enthusiastically, "a poet?"

Jack was thoughtful for a moment and then responded positively.

The older Shape doubled a meaty fist and struck his chest with it. Jack thought that surely such a chest should issue a resounding thud, but only an echo rolled back.

"I, too, was an American writer. A Poet. The American Poet. The Amatory Poet. I am he who aches with amorous love," he concluded sonorously, and regarded Jack more closely. "Do you know me?"

Jack nodded and thought of his prunish English teacher spouting Whitman in the grim classroom of a high school, sprung out of eczematous industrial suburbs. But this sour vision evaporated under the warm beam of Whitman's enthusiasm; he was enormously pleased that Jack knew him. "I laid my stores in advance. I considered long and seriously of you before you were born. Of all American poets, only I had a real love for posterity, for you! Others only cared to rest at a comfortable hearth, embrace an ample wife, beget a brood of children. But me, no! I made my home on the open road and sang not only for those around me, but for those that would come after me. You! I loved you! Did you love those who came after you?" inquired the American poet.

"I don't give a shit about them."

"No, did you? Did you when you lived? What kind of books did you write?"

"Travel books," responded Jack sardonically.

"Ah." The older Shape drew back and sat erect. "Guides to the heart, to the soul, those kind of travel books, no doubt."

"Well, I didn't work for Rand McNally if that's what you mean."

"Who?"

"I wrote for my generation, that's all."

"Why stop with them? Why not chant the praises of the whole? Of the cities and the prairies and the workmen and the women and the wanderers!"

"I celebrated my generation." He gave as much of a snort as was possible for a Shape. "I gave them an image. Just what everyone in America needs, an image, nothing real, only the appearance."

Whitman looked intrigued. "When were you born and when did you die?"

"1922. I died in 1969."

"Why, you were young yet," Whitman said consolingly.

"Young? I wish to God I'd died in 1959. I could have been another James Dean. A regular cult hero."

"Is he also an American writer?"

"No, he was an actor. I expect I'll meet him one time, too, in some Terrain that's slick with celluloid

and axle grease. That doesn't make any sense to you, does it? It's enough to say that when you have praised and celebrated everything that's restless, youthful, and unfettered, and when people believe what you tell them about themselves, then they can't bear to see you get middle-aged. Then they know it's happening to them, too. They hate it. They hate you, too. If I had lived to be a ripe old grandpa, they might have forgotten me. But I celebrated my generation and they betrayed me."

"Betrayed!" The American Poet's voice surged on, "I, too, feared betrayal, but gave the seed of my hope to posterity. I knew that the gibes, the attacks, the slanders against me would not triumph. That I should be vindicated. Posterity shall never betray me. I wrote to one a century hence. To you yet unborn! Did you ever consider that I, the American Poet would be your comrade here, on the open road?" He looked off, down the road for a moment and then continued. "I knew--better than anyone--that the soul of America was strewn and diffuse on the Road. The cities have tried to belie this, but they could not. I saw that they were mere shelters, temporary at best, harboring goods and people only momentarily, in between sojourns, even if that sojourn were only that one we take between birth and death. Transitory and ephemeral, American cities. For all their splendor and wealth, their giant buildings, for all their means of detention, the great heart of American would not be so closeted. Restless, resilient and ever-resistant to stasis. On the move! Did you," he said, re-directing his attention to his listener, "ever think you would be with me now? Two travelers on the open road!"

Jesus, thought Jack. He means it as a real question. "If you're asking me if I thought I would be glad to be dead and sitting here in this Terrain with you, what the hell kind of question is that?"

"The Universe itself is a road, upon which travel all the souls," he said quietly, nibbling on a leaf of grass. "If you find me on this road now, in this Terrain, I imagine that you sought me somewhere else when you were alive."

Jack laughed in spite of himself. "Yeah? Well, I had a friend who sought you in the goddamned supermarket. Wrote a poem about it. You would have loved that. The great A and P in the sky."

The American Poet's face flickered with interest. "Who was your friend?"

"Who is. He's still alive. You'll probably meet him sometime in a Terrain that looks like a supermarket. You'll be lost between the ketchup and the cornflakes and he'll come and rescue you."

"It gratifies me that your friend would write a poem about me," said Whitman, bemused and inattentive. "I wished to be more than simply known in my time. I wished to be remembered."

"For what?"

"A lover! A friend! A singer! I loved my world; I celebrated it. But I wrote for you, and for your friend in the supermarket, my American progeny! For those who seek me still on the Open Road, and for those who find me here, like you. I have found you for that reason: to call you my brother! my son! What was your name? I should like to know how to call you."

Sonofabitch, thought Jack. "I used to be lots of people," he said picking the Shape of his teeth with a twig, "I was Sal Paradise. I was Ray Smith. Hell, I could have been the Pied Piper for a while, but when I died I was Jack Kerouac, and I had hemorrhoids and I drank too much."

The eyes of the American Poet narrowed and he gazed at Jack who poked at the fire with his twig, sending up long curls of blue, odorless smoke. "You have not been long dead, have you?"

Jack started. "Why?"

"Your bitterness betrays a want of wisdom."

"Wisdom? What are you trying to tell me? The longer I roam around eternity the wiser I will become? The less bitter? Where the hell do you think we are, Whitman? By the shores of Gitchy-Goomie? Are you wise? You sound just as insipid, just as bombastic now as you did a hundred years ago. Shove your wisdom, Whitman." Jack concentrated on the fire. Why couldn't this be like the other Shapes he had met? Why couldn't they discuss women, the curve of a thigh that would follow them through eternity. Why not the meals they had eaten, the jobs they had had, the towns, the smiles, the lands they had known? The cars they had loved? Anything but this.

Whitman was silent momentarily. "If we may measure the days of the earth by the clock, what then shall we use to fathom eternity? A centrifugal force in the Universe will draw you closer to Wisdom, but you will never reach it. You will be drawn further from the bitterness you left in the world. Further too, from the joy you knew there. You did know joy, Jack. If you had not known joy, your bitterness would not be so sharp. If you had not tasted what was sweet, you would not know what was bitter. It's all of one thread. I suspected it on earth and I know it now."

The fire was dying. Neither Shape moved to revive it. They were quiet.

"What were some of your books?" asked Whitman.

The question had a crisp, professional curl to it. Much to Jack's happiness, the philosophical discussion of wisdom yielded to questions of the craft. Still, he was angry and uncomfortable. "What do you care? You'll never read them. If you're so goddamned wise, maybe I ought to ask you the questions."

"Ask."

"I don't have to. I know what kind of books you wrote."

"Did you read them?" Whitman's voice was thick with curiosity.

"Some of them."

"Did you know me?"

Jack looked quizzically at the full face, framed by the beard.

"Did you know America?" asked Whitman, more persistently.

"Yes."

"Then," he crowed triumphantly, "you must have known me!"

Jack turned sour. "No. Your America is gone, turned under by the proverbial plow and covered by a well-chiseled stone." Jack held up his left hand and blocked out imaginary letters: "Here lies the Union of Science and Democracy and their offspring, Progress. Rest in Peace."

Whitman's face blanched. His jaw muscles tightened. "Rest in Peace?" he said incredulously. "I have never

wished anything to rest in peace. Nothing does. I have ever exhorted men to movement, to action, to growth, to process and to progress. Anything static is dead. America is not dead. It is only through rhythm, flux, and change that humans and nature can come into harmony. This is especially true for Americans. They will always be crossing Brooklyn Ferry," he proclaimed, "and I will always be with them."

"Well, you're wrong there, too, Walt. There is no Brooklyn Ferry, ceaselessly crossing. There is now a strong, static bridge, from which people jump to their deaths about fifty times a year."

"A bridge?"

"Yeah. And all your precious fluid metaphors, Walt, oh make no mistake, I've read you all right. All your precious change and fluid metaphors, yeah, well, Walt, they've all congealed like cold bacon grease in Red Bank, New Jersey. I've done a little pilgrim progressing through your wonderful America. I've been through the Slough of Despond and it looks like Riverside, California."

"California? California?" Whitman's voice rang in the soundless Terrain. "The flashing and golden patent of California. The sudden and gorgeous drama. The sunny and ample lands. The wool and the wheat, the frape and the diggins of yellow gold!"

"The only thing flashing and golden now are the neon lights on Hollywood Boulevard." Jack's rhetoric gathered momentum with his urge to inflict hurt. He watched the American Poet's shoulders sag. "There's no sunny and there's no ample. All your full-breasted women and strong-limbed men live in stucco dreams and feast on frozen carrion."

"I fear you are not a good democrat," said Walt quietly.

"Democrat? Every used car salesman celebrates democracy. Every cap-toothed harlot-starlet hawks democracy."

"I hawk nothing," said the Elder Shape. "I celebrate the people, the land, the soul and the body. We float and are fluid concomitantly. Nothing is separate; all are fashioned of one fabric and each expresses something of the whole. And I tell you Jack, that I am not wrong. You are wrong. My America will never Rest in Peace," he gained courage with words. "I am prophet as well as poet. What do you know? You celebrate your generation. A meager accomplishment. I celebrated the earth!"

Jack winced and sneered at the same time.

"At best you were a singer," continued Whitman. "To be a singer is fine, but only the Poet begets and administers to immortality. The poet moves through all worlds with insight and power. I am The Poet! Harken and believe, Jack, that as ye linger here, so shall ye grow wiser. You will learn much, but without the pain you endured on earth. And as you learn, you will come to know that I am right about America too. You are no traveler, Jack. You never saw America--the builders, the sowers, the reapers, the fishers, the scholars! You never saw America."

"You never did either, Whitman. I know that you never stepped foot out of the New York Public Library. All of your fine metaphors came out of books and not off the road at all. For all your singing and chanting and praising, you never left Brooklyn."

"I never spoke of any place or anything I didn't know."

"Bullshit."

"I knew them. Better than you'd ever know them. I knew their spirit with my spirit. And their splendor I knew. And their glory and their promise."

"Well, I traveled your wonderful America when the promise had slugs and the splendor had maggots. Listen-- you say you celebrated the body? It betrayed you in the end, didn't it?"

The older Shape was silent. Divested of his body now, he could still remember his last humiliating twenty years on earth; when his bold imagination and buoyant soul had been trapped inside his rotting carcass. "Souls are immortal, not bodies. I believed that there could not be a soul without a body and that whilst there was a body, that health was important."

"But didn't your body betray you in the end?" Jack was insistent.

"Everybody's body betrays them in the end."

"The people and the land, they betrayed you in the end, too, didn't they? Didn't they?"

"They did not. You would not have recognized me here if they had."

Jack clenched his hands into the shapes of fists. "You never knew any real people. You never wrote about any real people, only representations--faceless marchers on some great democratic road. How convenient for you to keep it that way. No wife. No children. No friends to betray you, no adulating public to turn on you. You didn't know a soul except that old literary nursemaid of yours...what's his name..."

"Traubel, Horace Traubel."

"Him."

"You are wrong. I had friends. I had lovers. I have wept with unrequited love. You forget that I am he who aches with amorous love."

"I forget nothing. You were nothing but a fat brood hen of a poet nesting on America. The goose that laid the rotten egg." Jack gave a great guffaw, much impressed with his own wit. Since he had only a Shape, a hollow, tinny quality edged his laugh. "Ha, ha, ha." cried Jack. "You old goose. Goose the noun and goose the verb."

"This discussion cannot be resolved in mirth," said Whitman slowly. "It is time to explain myself. Let us stand up." Jack rose. Whitman stepped from the grassy clearing on to the road, and Jack walked with him, still gloating over his joke. They left the fire smoldering. One grows careless in eternity.

"I am afoot with my vision. You will understand me better if we walk. Look." Whitman showed Jack his meaty fist, doubled up. "The unity of my hand expresses itself in a fist. But it expresses itself in my five fingers as well." One by one he spread them out for Jack. "I cannot separate the fingers from the fist. And in the same way, it is that the unity of America will be expressed in the diffuseness of the road. For only on the road are men truly equal. We must all move in time whilst we are on earth, whether we wish to or not. But Americans are most in harmony when they are moving in space as well as time."

Walt seemed so pleased with his explanation. Jack let it ride momentarily till finally he said without passion or rancor, "Your America is gone nonetheless. It's been corroded and destroyed."

"Ah, no, Jack. Perhaps you are right about the externals, the extrinsics. I have no wish to quarrel with you about that. I have no wish even to hear about it."

"That's because you know I'm right. You're afraid of the truth."

"No, I am the American Poet. My perception is the truest one. Americans still move in space and time. And still an un-resolved restlessness haunts and lingers and will not be crushed. A spirit, abroad in the land, responds to the cry, 'Allons!' It is not dead."

"You fool. There is nowhere to go."

"You found places to go. You were on the road. You felt the allure. You answered the call. Let the wounded spirit seek the balm of the open air and it will *find* a place to go. It will find a companion too. Just as you and I have found each other! Allons into the Terrain! My comrade! My brother!"

"But all that was a long time ago," Jack moaned. "The road died before I did."

"You must have quit looking, Jack. Your restless spirit betrayed itself; it was not betrayed by your generation as you say. It betrayed itself. Or you betrayed it." Whitman shrugged as they continued walking. "I do not believe there is no place left to go."

Sorrow and loss and knowledge he had no wish to cultivate dogged Jack's steps, just as they had dogged his life. "You're full of shit," he said, "you don't know shit. You don't know me." He stopped walking and turned to Walt. "Hey man, I don't have to listen to

this shit. I don't have to listen to old hamhocks Whitman telling me how wrong I am for the whole god-damned swath of eternity. If you lived when I lived, you'd have jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge and I'd have been glad to see you go."

"I cannot walk the road for you, but I should like to walk it with you," Whitman replied, unperturbed.

"Get out." Jack walked to the side of the road and sat resolutely in the dust.

"Not I, not anyone else can travel that road for you. You must travel it by yourself."

"Oh Lord. Take me. Come get me, God and carry me off to hell. Roast me like a marshmallow if you want, but don't leave me here in eternity with Walt Whitman, not when he thinks he's Spade Cooley!" Jack's voice became nasal and twangy as he sang, "'Yew gotoo walk that lonesome highway. Ye gotoo walk it fer yerself.' Just bug off Walt and I will."

"Come my son. I have walked with you on many roads. I bequeathed myself to the dirt, to grow from the grass I loved. If you want me, look for me under your boot soles. I was there with you on all the roads of America. I was part of the discontent and part of the fulfillment. You are my son because you are an artist and a wanderer, because you could not be one without being the other. My body may never have roamed as far as yours, but my spirit was implanted in each road you took. If you truly wish it, I shall go, but I shall stop somewhere and wait for you--in this Terrain or the next. You will want to find me again."

Jack closed his eyes and pursed his lips tightly. He thought back to his old companions, the old warm comrades. What would it be like to meet their empty

Shapes? They were so full of life, the frenzied, frantic life they all led and pursued at the same moment, their joys tarnished with unremitting loneliness, their loneliness tinged with joy. He recalled the Shrouded Traveler who had so haunted his wanderings, his books, his drugged nights and his straight days. The Shrouded Traveler had always lived beside him, walked beside him, concomitantly palpable and invisible, causing Jack unease, but never outright fear. He had always believed that Death was the Shrouded Traveler, and congratulated himself for his bravery. Now his old certainty fled. He opened his eyes and stared into the full bearded face of the shaggy Shape. Death was probably more insidious. Death did not announce himself with a shroud and Death had no need of travel. Maybe old Whitman was right, perhaps he had been there all along; perhaps it had been him, shrouded, shod and always ready to move on. "If you'll give me a hand up," said Jack, "I guess I'll walk with you. I guess I always have." The American Poet took his hand and he leaped to his feet.

Gradually as they walked, the canopy overhead began to darken and turn the color of a spreading bruise. Their highway curved slightly and in the peculiar, dimming light, they could just barely perceive a great metal hulk in the distance. As they drew cautiously closer, its outline grew clearer. Walt peered at it quizzically, but Jack knew. He shrieked, he whooped, he raced to its mechanical, inscrutable side.

"Look! Just look at this. Just-look-at-this! Sono-fabitching Hallelujah and goddamn! Will you look at this?"

"It's not the Gold Fleece, you know," Walt said damply, abashed in the face of ecstasy he did not generate. "What is it?"

"What is it? It's a Dodge, man. A 1947 Dodge!"

Jack caressed its glowing body, murmuring, then exclaiming, swearing in tender tones. The Dodge was a rainbowy, ill-painted purple that glowed both pink and blue in the eerie light. Jack's fingertips left no smudges on the chrome. "I've never seen a car in the Terrain before. I didn't think I'd ever see another car, let alone a '47 Dodge. And look at this, Walt, this one is in perfect Shape!" He laughed uproariously at his pun.

"What manner of thing is this?" demanded the American Poet.

"Don't ask. Just get in. I promise you, you'll love it." Jack opened the door and leaped in behind the wheel. The American Poet cautiously approached the passenger's side. Jack leaned over and threw the door open for him. Whitman sat his great Shape down in the scratchy gray upholstery. As Jack ran his hands over the cold wheel and the soft, moth-gray ceiling, his face beamed with the luster of untrammelled joy. He turned the lights off and on, played with the pedals, pushed and pulled on the many knobs, regarded the gauges with the adoration of a lover. "Do you recognize the smell, Walt?" he whispered, as though he feared disturbing the quiescent force that had granted him this moment of olfactory ecstasy.

"Smell? There is a smell, isn't there? There is! How very strange. In all my time in the Terrain, I've never before had a smell."

Jack swiveled his head around, craning his neck as far as he could, pursuing the wonderful smell with his gratified nose. "Ah--it's the smell of a hundred cigarettes smoked through Eastern Colorado, the towns you pull through noiselessly in the middle of the night, just waiting for the lights of Denver. It's the smell of the coffee, strong and black and bitter, that you

spill as you lurch away from truck stops in Louisiana, Missouri, outside Bakersfield. It's the smell of riding through three states in the East without ever opening the window because it's so damn cold in February. It smells like all the little towns you pass through that you've passed and watched them and that you'll remember and they've become part of your life forever. Ah Walt--it's the smell of shiny pools of oil that form and frost over in wayside gas stations. It's the smell of everybody with their boots off and their mouths open, singing or snoring. It's the smell of spilled beer and long glorious hauls through towns with names like broken music. Smell! Damn! It's the smell of a warm engine!"

A smile separated Walt's chin from the whole upper portion of his face. He threw his head back and laughed aloud. "I do recognize it," he shouted, "I do! It's the smell of the Open Road!"

The vehicle gave a choke and a sputter. Then it was silent. "It's trying to start. Hot buttered damn!" cried Jack, his hands hovering near the steering wheel fluttered like anxious birds. "C'mon baby. Start," he coaxed, "start," he crooned. The car gave another cough. Walt watched the lights and dials in amazement and held tightly to the doorhandle when the machine at last began to lunge forward. Jack grabbed the wheel, thrust his foot down on the clutch and threw it into reverse. A spray of gravel shot out behind the tires. Then, into first and forward; second, tearing along the road as it opened before them like the pictures in a child's storybook. Up into third and "Heaven at last," cried Jack, "and hell be damned! Hang on Walt, 'cause if we can't move in Time anymore, we are going to do some hard-assed moving in Space! Whoopee!"

Walt loosed his hold on the door. There was no reason to fear for his person, after all, and no reason to fear for his Shape either.

"Look in that glove compartment right in front of you Walt and see if there's a map to this Terrain."

"Allons!" cried Whitman.

The speedometer did not work, but Jack floored it all the same; he doubled clutched and spun out; he drove with and without his hands; he did 360 degree turns. He offered to let Walt drive. Walt declined. Walt was grateful enough for the old thrill of motion underneath him, the scrunch of wheels. The Dodge beat the hell out of any wagon he had ever been in. And the smell! Oh yes, he exulted, taking a deep, satiating breath. You did not need to know cars to know that smell. That smell he would have known anywhere.

"All we need now is a couple of hitchhikers, some beer and some women," he punched Walt goodnaturedly in the ribs, "and it will be just like old times." He told Walt some of his best hitchhiking stories and explained the Dodge's intricate machinations. The lighted dials shone on their faces and sparkled in their eyes. The 1947 Dodge, Jack explained was superior to all other cars. The 1947 Dodge was the starting gun at the gate--the end of the dreary rationed-out War and the beginning of a rich prosperity that allowed Jack and his friends to skim along its thick creamy top at the same time they reviled the skimmed milk lives below. There never was another car like the 1947 Dodge. There never would be.

"Yew gotoo walk that lonesome highway," Jack sang, "'yew gotoo walk it--' C'mon Walt. You always said you were a singer, a chanter, so sing."

Whitman looked down at his hands. "To tell the truth," he said after a bit, "I was speaking metaphorically as it were. I was uh, well, actually I can't sing a note. Couldn't carry a tune if my life depended on it, which of course, it doesn't, being as we are where we are."

"Ha! The Solitary Singer who can't sing! Well I'll tell you what, you try and I won't tell a soul. So to speak. I'll sing with you and what we lack in harmony, we'll make up in spirit--so to speak." They sang together and their voices filled the Dodge and no longer seemed so hollow or disembodied. "'you gotoo walk that lonesome highway. You gotoo walk it for yourself. No, nobody else can walk it for you. You gotoo walk it for yourself!'"

Jack jammed on the brakes and the car skidded backwards, almost throwing Walt's shape through the windshield. When the dust and grit cleared away, they saw a hunched Shape by the side of the open road. He was a small Shape with narrow shoulders, reddish hair and he had his thumb out.

"Hot horny damn!" cried Jack. "If this guy has a few beers I'll drive this Dodge all the way back to 1947 or hell--whichever comes first."

Walt unrolled his window. The Shape peered in.

"Can we give you a lift?" called Jack.

"Yes, thank you. I'd be very much obliged." The voice was brittle and had a British accent. He climbed into the backseat.

Both Walt and Jack turned for a better look at him. The Shape's face was narrow and a little pointed, not altogether unattractive, except that the eyes were so deepset as to be fathomless.

"This motorcar actually smells," said the new arrival. "I say, this is a novel experience."

"You bet!" Jack started the Dodge forward again, humming the "Lonesome Highway."

"What's your name?" Walt called to the backseat where the passenger sat in the gathering darkness.

"Lawrence," he replied, "David Herbert Lawrence. What's yours?"



Chris Entwisle