Short

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home drunk like Whitey had, waking up the next morning alongside the road, next to a woman he hadn't remembered ever being introduced to. Evan was beginning to feel fortunate to still be alive at 36. It seemed to him that only the young people were dying anymore

As he'd listened for some words of wisdom in the minister's fumblings, Evan had thought about Monk Simon, an old friend who had left town with a broken heart, going to Hollywood with dreams of playing private detectives in the movies. But recent legend had it that Monk killed himself in a boarding house just months ago. For years Evan had pictured Monk lounging around swimming pools, sipping wine from hand-blown glass, wearing silver rimmed sunglasses and his hair slicked back as he leaned against time called as he leaned against vine-coiled columns. But now he could only picture Monk as Whitey had looked in the casket — a sunken face, his eyes forced shut, his lips manipulated to express content. Before the funeral Evan had stared at Whitey's face as he stared at the faces of dead men on the movie screen, watching for the actors to

To redirect his thoughts, Evan swept his shaking fingers through the pages of the hymnbook, watchthe pages of the hymnbook, watching the black dots connect and create soundless music. And the music made him think of the woman he'd been finding some comfort with lately — the waitress at the poolhall who seemed to wear her peads and frustrations. wear her needs and frustrations like perfume. As he had riffled through the hymnbook, he'd made himself see her, hear the mellows of her voice, and his stomach had eased

Everyone stepped out onto the lawn the service was over, preparing to

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move on to the cemetery. Evan took off his jacket and tried to loosen his tie, but only pulled the knot tighter and further from his neck. Though the sun had gotten hotter, the breezes were still cool and they blow his sweet scaled and they blew his sweat-soaked shirt on and off his back, sending chills across his skin.

He decided to go on home where he could change into a pair of baggy, thinning trousers and a vacation shirt, like those Harry Truman wore, shirts with large, unfamiliar flowers or brightly feathered, stiltlegged birds. Evan had one with many small palm trees and vari-ously positioned monkeys, and whenever he wore it and he would speak to people, he'd notice how their eyes would drop to the de-sign and would bounce from monkey to monkey, as though they were reading a comic strip.

After he crossed the road he

noticed Fay Jean Cooper coming toward him, her youngest grand-son at her side. She smiled briefly at him, breathing heavily and sweating, as though about to smother beneath her fat. Every year, the day it started getting warmer, Fay Jean would look about to col-lapse and Evan would wonder if she'd live to see another Septem-

'How was that funeral?" she asked, wiping sweat away with a ratted pink handkerchief. Her hands were as dark and creased

and as tough-looking as leather gloves. "The family doing all right?" "I guess," Evan said, glancing back toward the church. "I mean, I don't know, they just kind of

"Well, anyway," Fay Jean said.
"If you're going on home, would you mind walking a ways with Louie? You don't have to take him all the way to the house, he'll know the way from your place." Fay Jean lived about a quarter mile from Evan. "I have a few more errands to run." Evan nodded and Fay Jean turned away. "Well, all right," she said. Fay Jean rarely

Whitey McKeelen back there, he died a boy, just a boy, he never did nothing in his life. Never even was married, doesn't have a child with his name, no one to grow up with and ask questions about him.

said goodbye, just 'all right.'
Evan and Louie sauntered down
the road lined with houses, then storefronts, then trees. Louie carried on a conversation of his own, occasionally breaking out into song, off-key, sometimes making up the words or even the tune. He sang about the rocks in the road, about squishing bugs, about a stick of cinnamon gum he had in his pocket. Evan wasn't really listening, but the singing, the tune, made him think of the morose-eyed woman again — the waitress who drank again — the waitress who drank tomato in her beer and who chewed at sticks of black licorice. Evan stopped a second to light a cigarette. Louie stopped too, midsong, and looked up at him.

"Why do you smoke them cigarettes?" he asked Evan when they resumed walking. "They don't taste good, do they? Do they taste good?"

Evan sighed and shrugged his choulders.

shoulders

shoulders.

Louie found a small, greasestained paper sack along the road.
he picked it up and held it open,
then clutched the top of it closed
with both hands. "You stay in there,
you nasty wind," he said, holding
the bag up in front of his face.
"You been bothering me all day.
You just stay in there."

"You ever been to a funeral

"You ever been to a funeral before?" Evan suddenly asked, not looking down at Louie.

What do you mean, Maybe?" Well, I don't know what one Louie said. "What a funeral

"Well . . . when you die . . . do you know what it means to die?"

"My grandpa died. Before I was

"When you're dead," Evan explained, squinting, rubbing his forehead, "they go to church for you and pray over you and sing over you, then they take you off to the cemetery and they bury you. So what do you think about all that?" Louie shrugged his shoulders. "What do you think?" Evan asked again, somewhat angrily like a man will sometimes do, demanding answers from a boy that he "When you're dead," Evan ing answers from a boy that he himself wouldn't be willing, or prepared, to give. "Whitey McKeelen back there, he died a boy, just a boy, he never did nothing in his life. Never even was married, doesn't have a child with his name, no one to grow up and ask questions about him. What do

"I don't know," Louie said.
"Now . . . you're how old?"
"Seven."

you think about that?'

"Seven," Evan said, sighing.
"Well, what would you think if
you were walking down the road tomorrow, just catching wind in that bag like you are now, and all of a sudden you just keel over dead, what would you think of that? You wouldn't like that, would

"No, I guess not," Louie said. He looked up at Evan with a squint. You expecting to die, or some-

"You expecting to die, or something?"

"No," Evan answered immediately, with a laugh. "I was just talking about . . . just asking . . . shit, never mind." He laughed again. "Never mind." He reached down and patted at Louie's back, then gripped his shoulder. "Guess you don't know everything yet, do you? You don't got it all figured out."

Louis slowly crumpled up the

Louis slowly crumpled up the paper bag and sneered. "I know I ain't never going to smoke ciga-rettes 'cause smoke tastes like dirt."

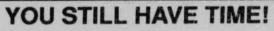
Evan slowly nodded and let go of Louie's shoulder. He patted him on the back again, sighed, then brushed ashes from his jacket.

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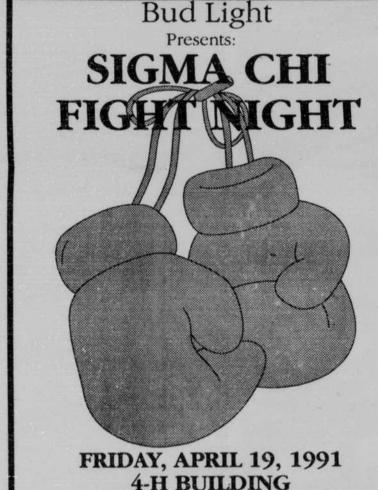
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