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JUERGEN TELLER takes KRISTEN McMENAMY inside CASA CARLO MOLLINO

GHOSTS WAR ROMANCE TATTOOS

SCOTT CAMPBELL, Great American Folk Artist

Never Again

AZZEDINE ALAÏA on Love, Women, Animals

GLOBAL EMPATHY
with KEVIN KELLY and
OLAFUR ELIASSON

LeeLee SOBIESKI, Dr. Hubert BURDA, Walther KÖNIG, LANVIN, SALEM, AL-JAZEERA



In late 2010, Scott Campbell travelled to Afghanistan

SCOTT CAMPBELL (b. 1977) is a tattoo artist. He is also a visual artist, recently catapulted from a suburban American cultural underground into a glossy, art- and fashion-world mainstream. In this way he embodies of the creative model of the decade – a practice of cross-over in which a craft such as tattooing can be interbred with luxury industry operations like Louis Vuitton bag design. It is a system in which social hierarchies are navigable with an unprecedented fluidity. An artist can move not only up and down vertically on the ladder of commerce, but also laterally between disciplines and media. This is Campbell's time, distilled in 40 pages.

THE TATTOO AND THE WORD

Text VICTORIA CAMBLIN

Scott Campbell had never been north of Oklahoma until he went to San Francisco in his early twenties. When he got there he started working as a copy editor for Lawrence Ferlinghetti at City Lights Books (“he would humor me,” Campbell says of their connection), a literary landmark where Neal Cassidy, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs used to convene in the 1950s. City Lights remains something of a Beat mecca today; it also happens to be just down the street from the tattoo parlor that, until recently, belonged to Lyle Tuttle. Tuttle (b. 1931) was ostensibly the first “celebrity” tattoo artist, meaning that he has tattooed a lot of famous people – Janis Joplin, Cher (on her ass), Peter Fonda, one or more of the guys from Kiss – and in doing so has become famous himself. He has witnessed more than one tattoo renaissance, the first coinciding with women’s liberation and the doubling of potential clients that came with that, and the second coming from increased African American interest in the art. Tuttle eventually appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine and, in 1971, on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* – “The printed word,” he has said, “has done more for [the tattoo] industry than anything.” Campbell might be seen as an inheritor to that legacy. He is a Wunderkind of what seems to be the tattoo renaissance to end all tattoo renaissances, tattoo gun in hand, poised to ink the flesh of cultural icons from Heath Ledger to Sting to Courtney Love to Marc Jacobs and back again – via a Mexican prison or an American military base in Afghanistan. But if Campbell once walked a path paved by Tuttle, he has since forged beyond it. His work has not only taken part in elevating the art of tattooing to acceptable, even commendable art-form status – that is, outside the limits of what he has called “the small world of blue-collar tattooing” – it has seduced the existing spheres and media of art and fashion, and furthermore, it has marked them.

Burroughs once said, “There is no line between the ‘real world’ and the ‘world of myth and symbol’.” We can look at the tattoo as a paradigm to relate to precisely that notion. As Campbell sees it, the worthwhile piece is the one that overflows from one’s internal life with an irresistible urgency not only to externalize or memorialize a feeling upon the skin, but to in some part *become* it. The act of tattooing turns the personal myth into a physical part of its originator, a part of the formal “reality” of his or her being – but without fully defining or colonizing it. Therein lies part of the tattoo’s magic, its “juju,” as Campbell often calls it – it bends the laws of what is known, what is imagined, and what is felt. It is a multiplication of human possibility in which organs are externalized on the surface of the skin like a Medieval

medical chart delineating the locations of various “humors” – yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm – through illustrations that are then again etched back into the flesh beneath them.

In addition to that “line”-effacing quality, the tattoo has a nebulous relationship to time. It is unique as a medium in that it is an active, simultaneous engagement of the past, the present and the future – at once commemorative and on you and an assertion of agency in the face of a time to come. That latter aspect might be the least obvious of the three, but the notion that a tattoo can determine the future is centuries old. Medical astrologer and occultist to Queen Elizabeth I, Simon Forman tattooed himself with cosmological symbols at calculated astrological moments in the year 1609 – a time when tattoos were considered to both conjure and cure – in an attempt to alter his destiny. Campbell likewise describes getting his first tattoo, which depicts a skull, as a moment of “control,” an aggressive taking-by-the-horns – or putting to death – of what in a parallel dimension could have become just another suburban American destiny. The tattoo’s ghoulish ability to transcend the spatial and the chronological has also infiltrated Scott’s work as a visual artist. In one piece from 2009 a granite tombstone reads, “Wish you were here.” This is what one says

to a cenotaph, not the other way around; it is a displaced commemoration, a cry from the underworld, a warning, perhaps a threat.

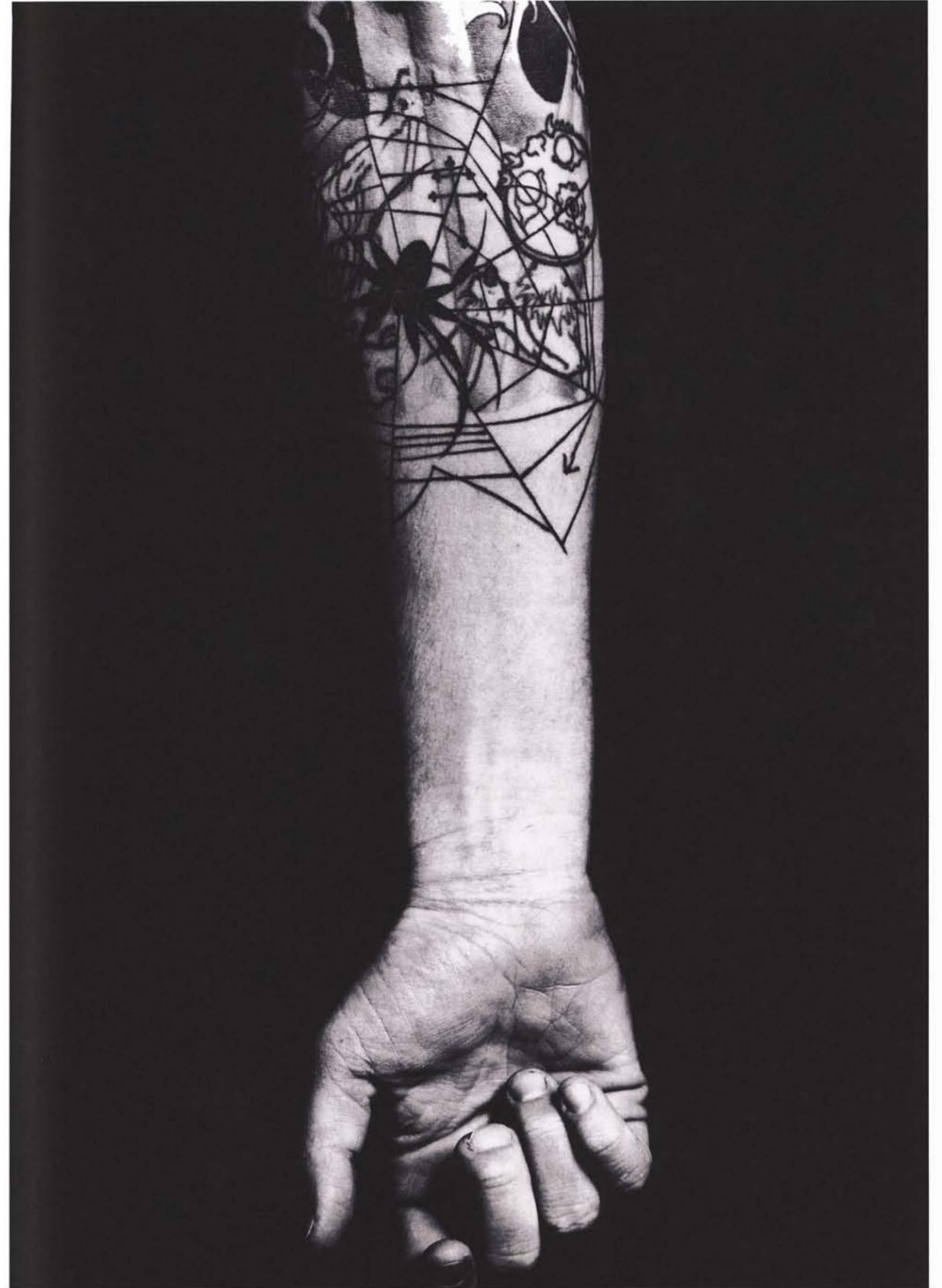
With what seems to be the exception of the front-most part of his forearms, Campbell is covered in tattoos. Tuttle, of course, has a more or less full body suit, something he found delighted the locals when he traveled to Samoa for a tattoo. “Every Samoan I’d met – man, woman, or child,” he said, “– was enthralled with tattooing.” He was “treated like royalty” there, given a chief’s name and honored with a *kava* ceremony, although he admitted he didn’t quite know why. Tuttle’s position – of being seemingly contented to “not know” – reflects the anti-rational impulse that drives people to tattooing, or perhaps to artistic expression in general, regardless of medium. The early 20th century artist and poet Francis Picabia, when asked why he wrote, replied, “I don’t really know, and I hope I never know.” Whether or not Campbell “knows” why, he is on a first-name basis not only with a star-studded client base, but with the United States Treasury, Hell’s Angels, and the executives at LVMH; when he tattoos in Los Angeles he travels with luggage custom-made for his equipment and uses the Chateau Marmont as an ersatz studio. Campbell has become a celebrity folk artist through a medium that has a history tied to the pre-colonial, the mystical, and the criminal – a medium that can convey a more living autobiography than the pen itself.

In 1981, the writer, ethnographer, and memoirist Michel Leiris, then eighty years old, wrote that he dreamt of having his entire body tattooed with the text he had in mind, musing that his dealings with the blank page were only a poor alternative to those concepts being inked onto his flesh proper. * To tattoo or to be tattooed is to write, to be written. The two mediums share a fundamental intimacy and violence; their executor bears and martyrs himself. As Picabia wrote elsewhere, “Every artist has the head of a crucified man,” a notion that perhaps only the tattoo can literalize. It does so, in fact, in the tattoo parlor described by Sylvia Plath in *Fifteen Dollar Eagle*: “If you’ve got a back to spare, there is Christ on the cross, a thief at either end and angels overhead to right and left holding up a scroll with ‘Mt Calvary’ on it in old English script, close as yellow can get to gold.”



*Photographer Nan Goldin iterates that desire in a letter she has written to Scott, for publication in this dossier: “I want you to write my autobiography onto my body. You’re the one.”

“Boys
get
skulls,
girls
get
butterflies.”



Portrait CHAD PITMAN

Campbell's own forearm. He is on his second or third layer of tattoos in some places now

You recently went to Afghanistan to tattoo American soldiers.

I just went, yes, about a month ago; I flew into Bagram Airforce Base. This TV network wanted to do a show where three different directors were asked to profile three different artists. The artists were the Starn twins, Tom Sachs and myself. I was working with the director Casey Neistat. Casey and I sat down and looked at the template for the other videos, and they were pretty straightforward: an interview with the artist cutting back and forth between images of their work and process. We decided we had to do something completely unexpected. We had to figure out what the polar opposite of what they were expecting was, and then run in that direction as hard as we could. I had been to a few different prisons to tattoo prisoners, and I explained to Casey how I really love the gravity of that kind of situation. Prison tattoos have such a sense of weight and severity to them. They are executed with such a visceral sense of need that is brought about when people are put in such exceptional environments. What's important enough to them, in that moment, to want to have it tattooed? That's a big part of relating to someone in that situation. So we thought, what if we were to go tattoo soldiers on the front line and hear their stories? I was skeptical as to how we could logistically make that happen, but we hustled a bit, and eight days after the idea came about, we were getting off a plane in Afghanistan with full body armor and some tattoo gear. I didn't want it to be political at all, because nothing is more irritating than hearing someone talk about politics who knows nothing about politics – and I don't know enough about the situation over there to get on camera and start commenting on the state of things. But it is such an intense and intriguing environment. I was going to observe the emotional situation, that's it.

What was your setup like over there?

So we went over for two weeks and ended up hooking up with these guys, the "PJs" – parajumpers. They're essentially really bad-ass paramedics. They ride alongside all the Seals teams and Special Forces on their missions. They hold back, and as soon as people start getting shot up, they go in and get them out. They pull out our guys or theirs, any life that might be saved, they're on it. In a way they get around the moral dilemma of the war itself: they have the luxury of always being the good guys; they're there to save lives. I spent two weeks hanging out in their barracks, flying around in helicopters and tattooing them.

What kinds of tattoos did you give them? What were they finding meaningful enough to get tattooed out there, away from their families and girlfriends?

Well, I met them the day after they had gotten caught in one of the worst fire-fights they'd ever seen. They were pretty

When you say the word "tattoo," the first thing they think is "permanent." But actually tattooing is definitely the most ephemeral. The moment you walk out the door, it could get hit by a bus, or get sunburned or scarred. Skin has a life of its own, which is what makes tattooing so magical. There is no resale value. There is no archival aspiration. It's for the moment and in the moment.

shook up, and once I realized the intensity of what they went through, I felt like a bit of a schmuck even approaching them. But one of the guys thought it would be good for morale for the crew to blow off some steam and get tattoos. The first guy I sat down with had stitches in his head from where they had pulled a bullet out the night before. He had the bullet in his hand and was like, "Check it out!" So a lot of them got tattoos commemorating that event, symbolizing whatever they had been through the day before. A lot of them were camaraderie tattoos with other guys. Or coordinates of where or when something happened. There was also a lot of family stuff – wives' names, kids' names – things that strengthen that connection in absence. It was amazing, and much more emotional for me than I even expected. I didn't go over there to wave the flag, so to speak. Actually, I don't know why the fuck we were over there. I got on a plane to go meet people who are running around in the desert getting shot at, and shooting people, without really understanding what the whole war was about in the first place. It felt like a college campus, but with guns. Maybe it was irresponsible of me to go there without doing my homework first, but like I said before, what I was interested in wasn't the politics behind it all, but what matters to people in those situations. Those guys wake up every morning to the very real possibility of not making it through the day. If you give someone under those circumstances the opportunity to get tattooed right then and there, what's interesting is what they choose to commemorate.

Did you tattoo any scores?

As in kill counts? Nobody was that dark with it. I was happy to have fallen in with the PJs.

Speaking of rescuing, your parlor's name is –

"Saved." A lot of people ask me if I'm born again, or whether it's a religious reference. But really the name refers to

our being saved from "real" jobs, from having to interact with the world in a conventional way. It is about the idea of being saved as in, having built a creative oasis or sanctuary.

But there is a lot of religious iconography in work you do.

I went to Catholic school and half my family is Southern Baptist, so my interest in Christian imagery has a lot to do with my own nostalgia – there's a lot of iconography and mysticism there that still has an impact on me. But tattoo history has always been laden with religious iconography. Regardless of whether or not I still go to church on Sunday mornings, I really love beautiful, powerful depictions of the classic good vs. evil dichotomy.

Your religious iconography feels particularly Latin American, though.

Well I think theirs is the most dramatic interpretation of Catholicism. Take the Mexican crucifix – Jesus is harrowed and emaciated, with blood streaming from his wounds. It's so much richer visually than what you see in the States. I was thinking about that a lot when I was in Mexico – trying to figure out why the imagery is different down there. I imagined what it was like when the first Spanish missionaries came to Mexico, preaching Catholicism. The converts were supposed to be in awe of the suffering of Christ, to be impacted by how much this guy, thousands of years prior had suffered for their salvation. But this was a community of indigenous people that wouldn't hesitate to volunteer themselves for decapitation if it honors a god. It was a brutal society, in a brutal environment. If you're going to try to sell a martyr to people of that mindset, you better make him look like he's been through tougher times than they have.

Do you have strong convictions about America?

I'm an American through and through, and I love most things Americana. I'm

certainly proud of where I'm from. I was anxious to get out of there as a kid, but now, living in New York City, I can appreciate the romance of the South. There's less ambition in the South. Tomorrow and the next day aren't taken as seriously as they are up here. There's more an emphasis on now, and they do "right now" as hard as they can. It's beautiful. That said, I'm not sure I'll ever live on that bayou again. It's a really special place and there are definitely times when my soul craves it, but I'm in love with New York in all its mania. My whole life I've had a sort of anxiousness, a restlessness. When I was a kid they called it ADD, but I felt it as more of an intense curiosity, and a need to test my effect on the world around me. Call it what you will, but it ended up getting me in trouble or thrown in jail most places I've lived. Then I found New York, and New York appreciates that energy. It lifts you up, and rewards you for it. Hell, you can base a career on it.

You have actually been thrown in jail?

Oh man, I wish I had a really romantic outlaw story I could give you. I've been to jail a couple times, but never for more than a week, and just for dumb kid mischiefousness. If you ignore your dog for too long, he'll shit on the rug, because getting yelled at is better than being ignored. When you're a restless kid in suburbia, when you're lacking real stimulus, you start pushing against the things around you. Getting chased around the town by cops is better than feeling irrelevant.

What would you say are the five strongest American icons?

Stars and stripes, eagles, Budweiser, Yosemite Sam, Bugs Bunny ... Damn, there are so many, it'll take me an hour to narrow it down to just five. Maybe I'm just afraid of commitment.

Strange you say that, because getting a tattoo is something of a commitment.

Eh, I just went all-in. It's easier when you have a lot of tattoos. If you only have one, then that tattoo on its own carries a lot of responsibility. I just went for everything. Any time I feel inspired, I'll try to find an empty nook or cranny. I'm on my second or third layer in some places at this point.

People have actually said about you that you have a keen comprehension of love and loss. How is it even possible to have a keen comprehension of such things? Is it an understanding of coping?

I don't think "coping" is the right word. I don't think you cope with inspiration, be it positive or negative. And whatever the driving force, whatever the feeling, when it boils it up to the point where you feel the need to carve it into your skin, that's when you get a tattoo. Anytime anyone's feeling something so much that they can't stand not having it really in them – the T-shirt, the bumper sticker, that's not going to fucking work. I want to be that idea. That's also when good tattoos are made. When emotions surpass rationale. There's no romance in hesitation. Boyfriends or girlfriends names? Fuck yeah, do it! If you love them right now, then love them right now, as hard as you can.

Tattoo artists are such tough guys. We're all nerds.

Really?

Every tattoo artist got beat up at least once on the playground. We used to joke around in the shop I worked at in San Francisco that tattoos are like dork armor.

Have you ever tattooed someone you were in love with?

I generally don't like tattooing people I'm romantically involved with. I've been pressured into it a couple times, but it gives me much anxiety, and each time I swore I would never do it again.

If I came in and wasn't sure what to get tattooed, would you be able to help?

Sure. Every now and then I'll get someone that says, "Just do whatever you want" – but you can't do that. If they come to me with no ideas, I'll have them write down twenty words, stream of consciousness. And usually once they do that, you realize they have very specific ideas and desires.

Getting a tattoo is a form of being honest with yourself?

Yeah, whether you like it or not. In a way, one's tattoos take away the luxury of denial. "This is who I am. I fell in love with that girl one time. This one is from when my mother died; this one when my brother died. This one, that time I got drunk with Wes. I did this and I did that. I may look like the bathroom walls of Max Fish, but it's where I've been." You get a sense of one's chronology – some are old and faded, some are fresh and new. Some are candid by design, others are accidentally revealing.

What was your first tattoo?

I was fifteen and I talked this waiter into lending me his ID because he looked like me. The place was called Dragon Mike's and Tiger John's Tattoos, in Houston, Texas. I walked in and looked around and said, "I got 20 dollars, what can I get?" He looked me up and down and said, "You get can this butterfly or you can get this skull." There wasn't a lot to think about: boys get skulls, girls get butterflies. I got the skull.

Skulls are still a real motif in your work, though; they are a part of that whole Misfits-meets-Mexican Catholic aesthetic.

I mean, skulls are fucking everywhere these days, and I used to use them with restraint for fear that they were too cliché. But I think skulls will always have relevance, for as long as mortality has relevance. I draw skulls in my sleep. I carved them into my desk when I was 12, and I'm still carving them into my

desk. The overuse of skulls doesn't undermine what I make, but in a way maybe strengthens it, because the emphasis is then shifted to the context and the skull is just an exercise in exploring different mediums and environments. Take Jasper Johns' targets – the symbol doesn't carry the power of the painting; the symbol becomes a sort of mantra. You hardly notice it after a while. And once you forget that it's a target, you get lost in the textures and colors and context.

Is it also like a talisman?

It's like an old friend. Skulls were a symbol with which to push against the standard of cookie-cutter suburban America. I grew up drawing them on backpacks and Trapper Keepers. Anything that could rock the boat fascinated me – any T-shirt I could wear that would piss off my dad was my favorite T-shirt. Getting into tattooing was an extension of that, of being the fuck-up.

So getting that first tattoo was an act of grabbing your destiny by the horns.

I think control is a big part of getting tattooed, and you can feel that both when giving and getting them. When you break up with a boyfriend or a girlfriend, when someone really close to you dies – memorial tattoos are really powerful – getting a tattoo does more than just commemorate that person or experience. You are affected, emotionally, mentally and physically, by forces that are out of your control, and that's a tough thing to stomach. Getting a tattoo is a very immediate and very literal way to make a decision for yourself that will effect who you are for the rest of your life – and reinforce the notion that you're in control of it. It helps people process what's going on in their lives in a physical and tactile way.

Pain is just one aspect of the process, no? In a tattoo parlor there is something going on for all your senses. There is that noise of the gun, the latex gloves, the ink – it's super-stimulating.

There is a bit of a ritual in getting tattooed, mixing the pigments and laying out the needles and machines, shaving and sterilizing of the area of skin. I suppose it's all a part of the experience, and serves to communicate the gravity of the decisions being made there. For my side of the exchange, it's second nature. When you've done something so many times, your hands go through the process with their own memory. I'm usually just thinking about the rendering.

How do you feel about the fact that your work immediately belongs to someone else?

It's a unique dynamic to be in as an artist. I notice as I'm working in more conservative circles that when you say the word "tattoo," the first thing they think is "permanent." But actually, in the scope of media I've worked with up to now, tattooing is definitely the most ephemeral. The moment you walk out the door, it could get hit by a bus, or get sunburned or scarred. Skin has a life of its own, which is what makes tattooing so magical. There is no resale value. There is no archival aspiration. It's for the moment and in the moment. The tattoo addresses whatever emotional situation that person is in at that time. It's a folk art in that way. It's not for anything but right now, the action in doing it, and whatever you get out of it. And I think because of that it's held on to this certain spontaneity or vitality, or whatever you want to call it, that juju – that specialness that has no agenda.

Is there a part of the body that thrills you more than others?

Placement is mostly just a technical issue. The stomach and ribs are really hard to tattoo, because breathing affects it. Other than that, it depends on how much attention you want the tattoo to get. Putting a tattoo somewhere hidden is obviously more for the wearer than an audience. Putting a tattoo right on the forearm is assertive and proclamatory ...



Campbell photographed in New York in 2011. He is in love with that city

And ankles and wrists are less confident?

It's just more discreet. There are things that people want to keep to themselves.

What about particularly sexy parts?

I think tattoos have a sensuality to them regardless of placement – content is sexy. They can communicate a certain comfort in your own skin. They say, "This isn't that precious. I'm more passionate about ideas than I am about keeping my body pristine. I'm not fragile."

What do you think of this guy who has the skull tattooed on his face, like a permanent mask? Or the reptile guy? I saw him once, in the Dublin airport. He was alone at the pub's bar. It was obvious no one wanted to sit next to him.

Most of those guys are just exploiting shock value without really having any passion behind it. It's like yelling really loud but not having anything to say, pushing buttons and trying to make people flinch just because they can. It's not really that interesting to me.

What are your thoughts on plastic surgery? Micropigmentation?

It gives me the willies, but, to each his own. Obviously I can't take a smug, hypocritical stance about keeping your body wholesome, because I've written all over mine.

You don't have any piercings?

No – never been my thing.

So there's a difference between image and hardware.

Obviously there's some meaning to a piercing. It addresses the same idea of making a decision that effects who you are, physically. It's just that for me, tattoos are more exciting because they have a broader vocabulary, whereas piercing just communicates the self-destructive. It bugs me a bit that people usually associate the two things going together.

What about the client who, instead of wanting to control a situation or command a therapeutic experience, wants to be violent to themselves? I mean, it's all about capturing an impulse, but is there a morality behind that.

There have definitely been tattoos that felt self-destructive that I decided not to do. There was one girl who was twenty years old and came into the street shop

I was working at wanting ABANDON ALL HOPE, YE WHO ENTER HERE from Dante's *Inferno* tattooed on the bottom of her stomach. I didn't want that on my conscience. I try to keep it positive.

What do you think of gang tattoos? Or better yet, in the age of "soft" tattoos, what's a "hard" tattoo?

The MS13 – the Mara Salvatrucha – get some of the toughest tattoos. [Scott shows us a well-known image of a member of the Mara Salvatrucha, with a 13 etched across his face]. Any time anyone is that committed to an idea, it's intimidating. This guy has committed to it so much that he's given up his entire identity. No one knows his name. He's just the man with the fucking 13 on his face. Seeing that immediate assertion of whatever that idea is has an impact.

You are a true romantic, then.

I'm a hopeless romantic. Whether that's something I'm "guilty" of or whether that's a virtue, I don't know.

Are there tattoo artists that aren't romantics?

The guy who did my first tattoo didn't give a fuck. You walk down St. Mark's Place and there are guys giving tattoos in the back of sunglasses stores who don't give a shit about romance. It's a good way for scumbags to make a living, so there's going to be a lot of scumbags making a living off it. And there have been days when the tattoos I was doing that day were less than inspiring, but as a lifestyle, it's always had this really amazing sense of criminal romanticism. I started when I was twenty or twenty-one, living this completely off-the-grid lifestyle. I did whatever I wanted. I could go to Spain for nine months, Tokyo for six, Paris, Singapore – all literally with a suitcase and a couple tattoo machines in it. I would send my portfolio to a shop, they would set up some appointments, I would make some cash, learn a little bit

of the language, then go somewhere else. I spent the first half of my twenties living out of my suitcase, reinventing myself in each new town.

Would you ever hang up the tattoo gun, pursue another kind of life?

I'll tattoo until my hands or eyes give out on me. As for other career aspirations, I never even had the audacity to believe that things would unfold as they have. I'm just grateful that I can continue to make things that excite me ... and continue to put off having to go out and get a "real job."

Has this job gotten you a lot of ass?

Yes. Also maybe growing out of puberty – who's to say which came first?

Is there a difference between giving a tattoo to a woman and giving one to a man?

It's the same.

But isn't there a sexual feeling underlying the act of tattooing?

It's certainly much more emotional than physical. The client already trusts you with their physical being, and in yielding in that way, often trusts you with their emotions a bit more than they normally would. Sometimes it's amazing, and sometimes it sucks. Imagine you had to have an intimate emotional connection with three to five people a day that were randomly selected off the street. Sometimes you come across really great folks that you really learn something from, and then sometimes you come across worthless human beings. There have been times, fortunately not too many, when I poured my heart and soul into a design, and within the first few lines, I realize that the person getting it is an asshole and doesn't even deserve the time of day.

Do you feel like a whore?

You really do develop an intimate relationship with your clients. Sometimes

it's amazing, but sometimes you get stuck with your hands all over someone and find yourself wishing you were a plumber or electrician – anything but a tattooer. Obviously when it gets to that point, you try to focus on the work and not get emotionally involved. Don't get me wrong, there have been people who have come in wanting something as cliché as a Tasmanian Devil on their ass, and I've ended up having the best time with them. I try not to judge, and pay attention to why they're getting tattooed. Aesthetics are one thing, but if the tattoo doesn't address what he or she wants to communicate, it's just fucking candy coating.

The tattoo itself is a fetishized thing, too, and it has been for centuries in the West – John Smith liked the tattooed Pocahontas, right? Now there is an industry that is made out of that – alt-porn that is all about tattooed girls, "tramp stamps"...

But to say, "Tattoos are sexy," as a comprehensive statement is boring; then you're just addressing an aesthetic attraction. A tattoo's worth depends on the magic behind it. When someone feels ideas with so much force that just saying them or writing them isn't enough, and they need to physically become those ideas, that is sexy.

Can you speak a bit about your work with Heath Leger?

When I first met Heath, I didn't know who he was. He was just this really impatient Australian guy. Fucking annoying, but really sweet. Even once we became friends, he would show up to my house at seven in the morning with tattoo ideas that couldn't wait. I mean, what can you say about Heath? He was amazing.

The first time, I was in the middle of tattooing someone else, and he came in and was like, "I really wanna get tattooed, I wanna get this bird on my arm." And I told him, "Cool, lets do it. Next

Thursday, 4pm." Then he said, "Um, I was kind of hoping maybe we could do something now." So I explained, "Well, I'm in the middle of this, I'm kind of booked up. I've got next Thursday available, take it or leave it, pal." "Alright," he said, "Give me Thursday. Put me down for Thursday, we'll do that." He shows up the following Thursday with this fucked-up bird tattoo on his arm that he had gotten on St. Mark's because he couldn't wait. "Can you fix this?" So he came to his original appointment but it was to fix the one he already got. I fixed it up, and he liked it and laughed. We started hanging out after that. He was sober at the time. He had just split up with Michele and was kind of on the straight and narrow, and I don't drink that much, so we would hang out at the Beatrice all the time, drink bottles of San Pellegrino and chase girls. It was fun. And then came all the rest of the drama.

How would you qualify what tattooing has now become?

It's become very public, and very commercial. There are four reality shows about tattoos. But all in all, more exposure brings better understanding, and that can never be a bad thing. I can't be selfish and just keep it to myself, and I can't hate on people for being attracted to it, because it's something I've been in love with for years. When I first got tattooed – skull, or butterfly? – you either had tattoos or you didn't have tattoos. And that has changed, there's no line in the sand anymore. Everyone has them. The industry has developed a lot because of that, and that I really like. It's nice not getting searched every time I go through customs. Still, because of that folk art aspect, because of the purely analogue nature of it, it remains special. It can never be mass-produced. Every experience is one-on-one, for each individual.

You're not working in an overly commercial context, though, or even only

in a celebrity or fashion ghetto – you've tattooed in Afghanistan, you've tattooed prisoners in the Mexican prison Santa Marta.

Prison tattoo culture is especially fascinating – just the specificity of the different systems and the designation of meaning. There's an incredible depth there. And tattooing in jail is different because in jail you're in a smaller community. Prison tattoos have a juju and magic just because of the nature of the environment. It's incredibly small, and it does everything possible to dehumanize its inhabitants. They give them all orange suits. They give them all a number. They do everything they can to inhibit individuality, and tattoos become this last-ditch effort to make sense of that, to differentiate yourself from the guy next to you. It has a weight to it that you don't see on the outside. It has an importance that's much more visceral, even desperate – they need it in order to have some sense of humanity in that environment.

So it's ownership of self, but also ownership of people like you, a belonging to a community?

Which is the role fashion plays on the outside: you relate to people by how you put yourself forward. But when tattoos are the only form of expression you have – whether for inclusion or exclusion – they are that much more meaningful.

When someone feels ideas with so much force that just saying them or writing them isn't enough, and they need to physically become those ideas, that is sexy.

Speaking of Mexico, you notoriously burned your artwork in front of the Vice gallery in Mexico City. It was almost as though you returned to your previous medium – the body – in a performative gesture, in an action. You took the work out of the gallery, literally and figuratively, and did something physical, and that puts you in a lineage with Acconci, with Actionism – you could even do it again in ten years in a museum.

I wish I had thought it through enough to have lit the match with such a composed and deliberate mission statement at hand, but the reality of it is that I didn't think at all. I burned it down to defend it. It was a knee-jerk reaction, a parental protective instinct that screamed out louder than rationale. I was unhappy with the way the gallery was presenting the work. I tried to address my concerns to the owner, and my concerns were dismissed as the excessive particularities of an unchecked ego. The show had already sold out, and he cited the dollar amount that I stood to make off the sales, as though to tell me to shut up and be grateful. I had to leave for New York the next day, and I couldn't stand to leave the works alone in a context that went against my reasons for creating them. There was a gas station across the street from the gallery, and I was certain that was a sign that the universe agreed with me. I filled up a can of gasoline, set it outside the door of the gallery, and then went inside and started dragging the pieces out to the sidewalk. I doused the pile, tossed a match, and instantly felt relieved. It's important to not be controlled by the objects I make, to not hesitate to burn it all down and start over at the slightest hint of insincerity, in order to keep things evolving.

Like the proverbial renewal-by-forest-fire.

The magic is in the idea and the execution. What hangs on the wall is just an artifact of an action.





Never Again
Again

This is a letter to
Scott Campbell
from his friend,
the photographer
Nan Goldin.
He is her
tattoo artist,
and her "Saint."
She wrote this letter
for this dossier,
in April, 2011.

DEAR SCOTT,

You are always so gently giving me the best excuse to get out when all I want is to get in.

Finding you was one of the greatest lucks of my life. At a fashion shooting of Marc Jacobs there was a beautiful Asian girl covered in exquisite drawings. I asked her who did them and she told me, "Scott." But she said, "It will take you a very, very long time to get to see him. Everyone wants him." With you and me, I didn't have to wait. You got the word and we got together quick.

I want you to write my autobiography on my body. You're the one. I finally found my ghostwriter.

In 1975 I had a lover, the son of of Greek shipping magnate, and he was already tattooed. He had a phenomenal collection of folk art, which was only understood twenty-five years later. He inspired my life-long taste. On his bicep he tattooed my name, "n.g." - he told me that when we broke up it could stand for "no good." He introduced me to one of his many former girlfriends. He warned me that she was a genius. First I was too shy to talk to her so I photographed her winding a snake around a man's torso at a party. Her name was Ruth and she was one of the two first female tattoo artists in America. She had tattooed tribal symbols on her arms and hands. When I met her again in the late 80s she had all her tattoos removed by laser.

In 1976 I moved to P-town. I met Caroline, whose face was entirely tattooed. She was from New Zealand and had been lovers with Vali, a Witch, and they had matching tattoos.

Vali had been a muse of a famous photographer in Paris in the 60s who published a book about his longing for her called Love on the Left Bank. Next I saw her she was living in a cave in Positano. In those days tattooing above the neck was illegal in America.

I got my first tat in 1978. None of you were even born yet. You really missed out.

My tattooist was a close friend, Mark Mahoney. He is one of my best friends even though I never see him. A party part of my life. Once, he even let me give him a blowjob while I was asleep. He was a disciple of a great tattooist, Mark H. I photographed Mark tattooing Mark. A fresh dripping tiger in my kitchen. He inspired me to collect blood rags: the imprint left of a tattoo on a napkin. He's one of your heroes. He now has a tattoo parlor in L.A. across from the Viper Room on Sunset called Shamrock Studios.

He stayed in Elizabeth Street, where Bruce and Mary and David and Bruce's monkey and his dog Babe lived. The house lived at full chaos, in a state of future nostalgia, a structural, never quite fatal overdose. Once when B. was brought back from a particularly hot shot he said, "It's my party and I'll die if I want to." It could never be now.

He tattooed a bleeding heart on my ankle. It was my obsessive symbol at the time; I had a vast collection of every bleeding heart. The image surrounded me. It had nothing to

do with Jesus, it had nothing to do with oozing empathy - it was about the balance between toughness and tenderness and it symbolized the pain in love.

I took my more than my daily dose of Quaaludes and clenched a beer. I heard that tattooing below the ankle or the wrist were two of the most painful places on the body. I felt no pain. It was his early work. The heart with the flames, the barbed wires and the drops of blood. Years later a plebian tattooist in Brooklyn asked me, "Is that a tattoo or a skin disease?" It hadn't aged well with me. I had him fill in the red.

In 1979 my close friend and I had dots tattooed on our middle fingers in Paris so we could always find each other. Later when we became enemies we both wanted to cover that memory. I got a matching tattoo on my other middle finger.

In 1995 I had a beautiful friend in Tokyo who lived in and out of drag. He tattooed an arrow on me like his own with bamboo - in red ink, which was considered lucky. He then tattooed a lotus on the back of my neck.

Many years passed. I had lots of ideas. And then I met you. You came over one night to my apartment in Paris and worked on me until 4:00 am. I wanted "i'm sorry" because I was always saying that. It was your genius to make each letter in gorgeous saturated colors. It changes the meaning entirely. Since then I never seem to need to say it. Now I have endless lists of tattoos I am waiting for you to do:

Around my wrist, a script of a music score with a note spelling my sister's name, a Beethoven piece that she played all the time.

You're not kidding

Memory Lost

Dad

A path

Eyes like those of an ex-voto

A mouth open screaming in letters made of nails (but you will probably have a better idea)

A train

If my body shows up

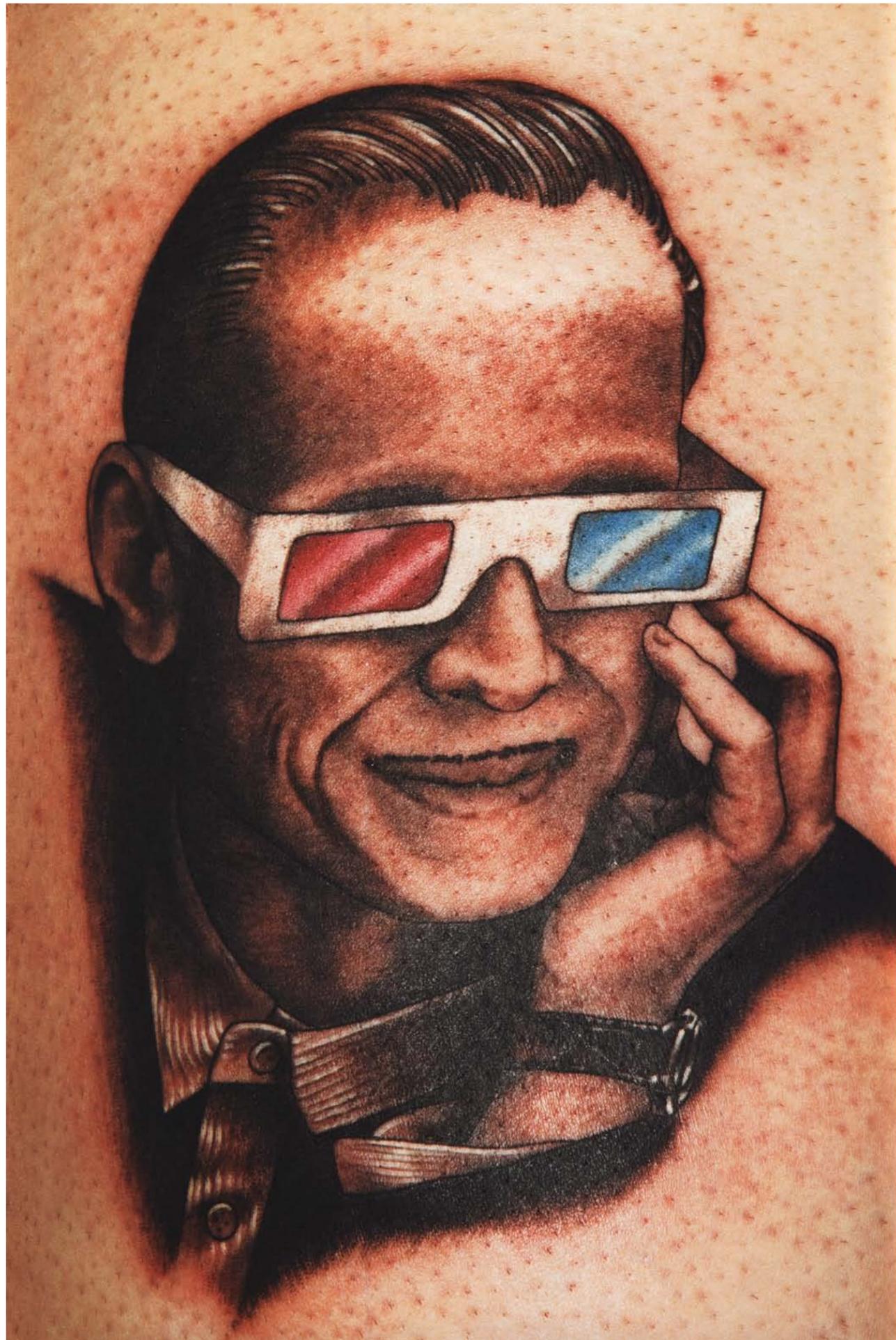
The name and symbol of every place I've lived - like the stickers on old steamer trunks - on my entire left inner arm covering burns.

Or maybe you will use the burn marks to design your own symbols.

I'm in your hands.

Lots of hugs,
Nan





DEATH

doesn't exist
there is only dissolution.
Beauty is relative to the state
of interest it creates.
LOVE is the adhesion to
all the ways and means in perfect
relations.

Passion is solely the
desire for strength without
foreign and objective influence.
We are not responsible for
what we do, for we only
see our actions once they
are carried out.

There is no ideal without passion and
passion is not an objective ideal.
Men are more imaginative
when killing themselves than when saving themselves.
Heredity is exclusively objective

OZENFANT is very shrewd?
THE PARIS CONGRESS
is fucked, Francis PICABIA is taking part

I would like someone to invent
for my own personal use
a pocket electric curling iron
and a phosphorescent pencil.

If I wasn't big,
I would be small and people
who like me now
would not like me.

Two poems from the Francis Picabia anthology,
I am a Beautiful Monster (MIT Press, 2007):
"Chi-lo-sa" (1950), a series of fragmented,
Nietzschian provocations and Picabia's last major work;
and "Death," an excerpt from *The Pine Cone*,
his 1922 anti-Dada double-sheet.

FORMYREPUTATION OF NOT BEING SERIOUS

Better to do nothing than anything.

NEW REALITY

Their pride only comes from what they don't have poor new reality

as if I give a damn a friend used to tell me as morality for his own instinct.

MEDICINE

You long for glory take my advice renounce time and freely renounce troubles.

Yes sometimes I paint it distracts me from the paintings of others.

INSTINCT

Morality is a way of living off others for others.

TO CHOOSE

I will never make a choice because I'm afraid of making a mistake.

A BIRD SINGS

Daylight comes after a sad night a millstone rests nothing happens a bird sings a desire urges me on but where to and then it's over again for today.

TAKING TRUTH SERIOUSLY MAKES ME LAUGH

This mountain makes the region charming if you climb this mountain you will be disillusioned it is the same for men you have to look at them from a certain distance.

PREJUDICE AGAINST IMBECILES

Ideals cannot survive without the insane.

HUMANITY

A man full of strength love tears laughter is probably that which men call humanity.

THE MOON

I'm going to sleep the moon told me she closed an eye and again said to me

you know it takes more than beautiful moonlight to surprise me.

I must eat my bread by the sweat of my brow but I'm never hungry when I'm sweating I'm thirsty.

THE SHADOW TURNS

The hours are short the shadow turns about a spire in the sky it took my hand.

SADNESS

The remedy for sadness is called sadness.

SUCCESS

The age in which we find ourselves is as agreeable as the one in which we don't find ourselves for causing trouble what uncertainty in success.

THE TOAD WITH THE YELLOW EYES

We were in the garden one afternoon Suzanne suddenly closed our book to listen to a musical tune that didn't exist and threw me a wide-eyed look through a curious vision that of a toad with yellow eyes.

AN ARTIST

An artist seems to me like an inadequate antiquity.

NEUILLY FAIR

I love this woman because she reminds me of merry-go-round horses.

Pity is the virtue of prostitutes

MY MEMORY

From your mouth falsehood ensues but your stupidity effaces its features now I have only to clean out my memory until the very last trace of it has disappeared.

I'M AFRAID OF FLOWERS

I care as little about being respected as of going to heaven but I can't see very well there is a screen between you and me perhaps the darkness which is all to your advantage.

ANNOYANCE

Everywhere I come across a moral standard I come across a function for others.

THE PRIEST

Calmness and fear without expression without ears without words without thought that's the parish priest for you.

DURATION OF THE DREAM

The sleepwalker must keep on sleeping in order not to dream and his lifeless face must have the irony of itself like a little will-o-the-wisp dreaming for the duration of his dream.

DISDAINFUL WOMAN

We went all the way to Aar and there we threw away your pants along with the book you had brought.

The only way of being the strongest is to fight on the side of one's adversaries.

Pain asks for reasons pleasure couldn't care less.

MONKEYING ABOUT

Farewells seem to come apart through the heart's tired fluctuations and want to nestle far from our innermost pains like monkeying about.

PETRIFIED LIFE

What a petrified life! But my intention is to not feel bad enough to feel bad.

SCENT OF ACACIA

She held her cheek against her hands her eyes were blurred with blue with green with purple she let her mouth her gloves and her handkerchief drop do you remember that scent of acacia.

YOUR EYES

I admire your eyes your name your voice your body come with me to your place you will be my aid for thinking about you.

Disgust among refined minds is a new concupiscence.

Do you want to go to where I'm coming from to look at the whores.

If You Don't
Belong
Then Don't
Be Long

LD

The FIFTEEN-DOLLAR EAGLE

Text SYLVIA PLATH

THERE are other tattoo shops in Madigan Square, but none of them a patch on Carmey's place. He's a real poet with the needle and dye, an artist with a heart. Kids, dock bums, the out-of-town couples in for a beer put on the brakes in front of Carmey's, nose-to-the-window, one and all. You got a dream, Carmey says, without saying a word, you got a rose on the heart, an eagle in the muscle, you got the sweet Jesus himself, so come in to me. Wear your heart on your skin in this life, I'm the man can give you a deal. Dogs, wolves, horses and lions for the animal lover. For the ladies, butterflies, birds of paradise, baby heads smiling or in tears, take your choice. Roses, all sorts, large, small, bud and full bloom, roses with name scrolls, roses with thorns, roses with dresden-doll heads sticking up in dead center, pink petal, green leaf, set off smart by a lead-black line. Snakes and dragons for Frankenstein. Not to mention cowgirls, hula girls, mermaids and movie queens, ruby-nippled and bare as you please. If you've got a back to spare, there's Christ on the cross, a thief at either elbow and angels overhead to right and left holding up a scroll with "Mount Calvary" on it in Old English script, close as yellow can get to gold.

Outside they point at the multi-colored pictures plastered on Carmey's three walls, ceiling to floor. They mutter like a mob scene, you can hear them through the glass:

"Honey, take a looka those peacocks!"

"That's crazy, paying for tattoos. I only paid for one I got, a panther on my arm."

"You want a heart, I'll tell him where."

I see Carmey in action for the first time courtesy of my steady man, Ned Bean. Lounging against a wall of hearts and flowers, waiting for business, Carmey is passing the time of day with a Mr. Tomolillo, an extremely small person wearing a wool jacket that drapes his nonexistent shoulders without any attempt at fit or reformation. The jacket is patterned with brown squares the size of cigarette packs, each square boldly outlined in black. You could play tick-tack-toe on it. A brown fedora hugs his head just above the eyebrows like the cap on a mushroom. He has the thin, rapt, triangular face of a praying mantis. As Ned introduces me, Mr. Tomolillo snaps over from the waist in a bow neat as the little moustache hairlining his upper lip. I can't help admiring this bow because the shop is so crowded there's barely room for the four of us to stand up without bumping elbows and knees at the slightest move.

Sylvia Plath's body of work is a common source of inspiration for literary tattoos. Her short story, *The Fifteen Dollar Eagle*, originally appeared in *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Oct-Dec, 1960).



NOT TODAY



The whole place smells of gunpowder and some fumey antiseptic. Ranged along the back wall from left to right are: Carmey's worktable, electric needles hooked to a rack over a Lazy Susan of dye pots, Carmey's swivel chair facing the show window, a straight customer's chair facing Carmey's chair, a waste bucket, and an orange crate covered with scraps of paper and pencil stubs. At the front of the shop, next to the glass door, there is another straight chair, with the big placard of Mount Calvary propped on it, and a cardboard file-drawer on a scuffed wooden table. Among the babies and daisies on the wall over Carmey's chair hang two faded sepia daguerreotypes of a boy from the waist up, one front view, one back. From the distance he seems to be wearing a long sleeved, skintight black lace shirt. A closer look shows he is stark naked, covered only with a creeping ivy of tattoos.

In a jaundiced clipping from some long-ago rotogravure, these Oriental men and women are sitting crosslegged on tasselled cushions, back to the camera and embroidered with seven-headed dragons, mountain ranges, cherry trees and waterfalls. "These people have not a stitch of clothing on," the blurb points out. "They belong to a society in which tattoos are required for membership. Sometimes a full job costs as much as \$300." Next to this, a photograph of a bald man's head with the tentacles of an octopus just rounding the top of the scalp from the rear.

"Those skins are valuable as many a painting, I imagine," says Mr. Tomolillo. "If you had them stretched on a board."

But the Tattooed Boy and those clubby Orientals have nothing on Carmey, who is himself a living advertisement of his art – a schooner in full sail over a rose-and-holly-leaf ocean on his right biceps, Gypsy Rose Lee flexing her muscled belly on the left, forearms jammed with hearts, stars and anchors, lucky numbers and namescrolls, indigo edges blurred so he reads like a comic strip left out in a Sunday rainstorm. A fan of the Wild West, Carmey is rumored to have a bronco reared from navel to collar bone, a thistle-stubborn cowboy stuck to its back. But that may be a mere fable inspired by his habit of wearing tooled leather cowboy boots, finely heeled, and a Bill Hickok belt studded with red stones to hold up his black chino slacks. Carmey's eyes are blue. A blue in no way inferior to the much-sung about skies of Texas.

I been at it sixteen years now," Carmey says, leaning back against his picturebook wall, "and you might say I'm still learning. My first job was in Maine, during the war. They heard I was a tattooist and called me out to this station of Wacs...."

"To tattoo them?" I ask.

"To tattoo their numbers on, nothing more or less."

"Weren't some of them scared?"

"Oh, sure, sure. But some of them came back. I got two Wacs in one day for a tattoo. Well they hemmed. And they hawed. 'Look,' I tell them, 'you came in the other day and you knew which one you wanted, what's the trouble?'"

"Well it's not what we want but where we want it,' one of them pipes up. 'Well if that's all it is you can trust me,' I say. 'I'm like a doctor, see? I handle so many women it means no thing.' 'Well I want three roses,' this one says: 'one on my stomach and one on each cheek of my butt.' So the other one gets up courage, you know how it is, and asks for one rose...."

"Little ones or big ones?" Mr. Tomolillo won't let a detail slip.

"About like that up there," Carmey points to a card of roses on the wall, each bloom the size of a Brussels sprout. "The biggest going. So I did the roses and

told them: "Ten dollars off the price if you come back and show them to me when the scab's gone."

"Did they come?" Ned wants to know.

"You bet they did." Carmey blows a smoke ring that hangs wavering in the air a foot from his nose, the blue, vaporous out line of a cabbage-rose.

"You wanta know," he says, "a crazy law? I could tattoo you anywhere," he looks me over with great care, "anywhere at all. Your back. Your rear." His eyelids droop, you'd think he was praying. "Your breasts. Anywhere at all but your face, hands and feet."

Mr. Tomolillo asks: "Is that a Federal law?"

Carmey nods. "A Federal law. I got a blind," he juts a thumb at the dusty-slatted Venetian blind drawn up in the display window. "I let that blind down, and I can do privately any part of the body. Except face, hands and feet."

"I bet it's because they show" I say.

"Sure. Take in the Army, at drill. The guys wouldn't look right. Their faces and hands would stand out, they couldn't cover up."

"However that may be," Mr. Tomolillo says, "I think it is a shocking law, a totalitarian law. There should be a freedom about personal adornment in any democracy. I mean, if a lady wants a rose on the back of her hand, I should think...."

"She should have it," Carmey finishes with heat. "People should have what they want, regardless. Why, I had a little lady in here the other day," Carmey levels the air with the flat of his hand not five feet from the floor. "So high. Wanted Calvary, the whole works, on her back, and I gave it to her. Eighteen hours it took."

I eye the thieves and angels on the poster of Mount Calvary with some doubt. "Didn't you have to shrink it down a bit?"

"Nope."

"Or leave off an angel?" Ned wonders. "Or a bit of the fore ground?"

"Not a bit of it. A thirty-five dollar job in full color, thieves, angels, Old English – the works. She went out of the shop proud as punch. It's not every little lady's got all Calvary in full color on her back. Oh, I copy photos people bring in, I copy movie stars. Anything they want, I do it. I've got some designs I wouldn't put up on the wall on account of offending some of the clients. I'll show you." Carmey opens the cardboard file-drawer on the table at the front of the shop. "The wife's got to clean this up," he says. "It's a terrible mess."

"Does your wife help you?" I ask with interest.

"Oh, Laura, she's in the shop most of the day." For some reason Carmey sounds all at once solemn as a monk on Sunday. I wonder, does he use her for a come-on: Laura, the Tattooed Lady, a living masterpiece, sixteen years in the making. Not a white patch on her, ladies and gentlemen – look all you want to. "You should drop by and keep her company, she likes talk." He is rummaging around in the drawer, not coming up with anything, when he in his tracks and stiffens like a pointer.

This big guy is standing in the doorway.

"What can I do for you?" Carmey steps forward, the maestro he is.

"I want that eagle you showed me."

Ned and Mr. Tomolillo and I flatten ourselves against the side walls to let the guy into the middle of the room. He'll be a sailor out of uniform in his pea jacket and plaid wool shirt. His diamond-shaped head, width all between the ears, tapers up to a narrow plateau of cropped black hair.



"The nine dollar or the fifteen?"

"The fifteen."

Mr. Tomolillo sighs in gentle admiration.

The sailor sits down in the chair facing Carmey's swivel, shrugs out of his pea jacket, unbuttons his left shirt cuff and begins slowly to roll up the sleeve.

"You come right in here," Carmey says to me in a low, promising voice, "where you can get a good look. You've never seen a tattooing before." I squinch up and settle on the crate of papers in the corner at the left of Carmey's chair, careful as a hen on eggs.

Carmey flicks through the cardboard file again and this time digs out a square piece of plastic. "Is this the one?"

The sailor looks at the eagle pricked out on the plastic. Then he says: "That's right," and hands it back to Carmey.

"Mmmm," Mr. Tomolillo murmurs in honor of the sailor's taste.

Ned says: "That's a fine eagle."

The sailor straightens with a certain pride. Carmey is dancing round him now, laying a dark-stained burlap cloth across his lap, arranging a sponge, a razor, various jars with smudged-out labels and a bowl of antiseptic on his worktable – finicky as a priest whetting his machete for the fatted calf. Everything has to be just so. Finally he sits down. The sailor holds out his right arm and Ned and Mr. Tomolillo close in behind his chair, Ned leaning over the sailor's right shoulder and Mr. Tomolillo over his left. At Carmey's elbow I have the best view of all.

With a close, quick swipe of the razor, Carmey clears the sailor's forearm of its black springing hair, wiping the hair off the blade's edge and onto the floor with his thumb. Then he anoints the area of bared flesh with vaseline from a small jar on top of his table. "You ever been tattooed before?"

"Yeah." The sailor is no gossip. "Once." Already his eyes are locked in a vision of something on the far side of Carmey's head, through the walls and away in the thin air beyond the four of us in the room.

Carmey is sprinkling a black powder on the face of the plastic square and rubbing the powder into the pricked holes. The outline of the eagle darkens. With one flip, Carmey presses the plastic square powder-side against the sailor's greased arm. When he peels the plastic off, easy as skin off an onion, the outline of an eagle, wings spread, claws hooked for action, frowns up from the sailor's arm.

"Ah! Mr. Tomolillo rocks back on his cork heels and casts a meaning look at Ned. Ned raises his eyebrows in approval. The sailor allows himself a little quirk of the lip. On him it is as good as a smile.

"Now," Carmey takes down one of the electric needles, pitching it rabbit-out-of-the-hat, "I am going to show you how we make a nine dollar eagle a fifteen dollar eagle."

He presses a button on the needle. Nothing happens.

"Well," he sighs, "it's not working."

Mr. Tomolillo groans. "Not again?"

Then something strikes Carmey and he laughs and flips a switch on the wall behind him. This time when he presses the needle it buzzes and sparks blue. "No connection, that's what it was."

"Thank heaven," says Mr. Tomolillo.

Carmey fills the needle from a pot of black dye on the Lazy Susan. "This same eagle," Carmey lowers the needle to the eagle's right wingtip, "for nine dollars is only black and red. For fifteen dollars you're going to see a blend of four colors." The needle steers along the lines laid by the powder. "Black, green, brown and red. We're out of blue at the moment or it'd be five colors." The needle skips and backtalks like a pneumatic drill but Carmey's hand is steady as a surgeon's. "How I love eagles!"

"I believe you *live* on Uncle Sam's eagles," says Mr. Tomolillo.

Black ink seeps over the curve of the sailor's arm and into the stiff, stained butcher's-apron canvas covering his lap, but the needle travels on, scalloping the wing feathers from tip to root. Bright beads of red are rising through the ink, heart's-blood bubbles smearing out into the black stream.

"The guys complain," Carmey singsongs. "Week after week I get the same complaining: What have you got new? We don't want the same type eagle, red and black. So I figure out this blend. You wait. A solid color eagle."

The eagle is losing itself in a spreading thundercloud of black ink. Carmey stops, sloshes his needle in the bowl of antiseptic, and a geyser of white blooms up to the surface from the bowl's bottom. Then Carmey dips a big, round cinnamon-colored sponge in the bowl and wipes away the ink from the sailor's arm. The eagle emerges from its hood of bloodied ink, a raised outline on the raw skin.

"Now you're gonna see something." Carmey twirls the Lazy Susan till the pot of green is under his thumb and picks another needle from the rack.

The sailor is gone from behind his eyes now, off somewhere in Tibet, Uganda or the Barbados, oceans and continents away from the blood drops jumping in the wake of the wide green swaths Carmey is drawing in the shadow of the eagle's wings.

About this time I notice an odd sensation. A powerful sweet perfume is rising from the sailor's arm. My eyes swerve from the mingling red and green and I find myself staring intently into the waste bucket by my left side. As I watch the calm rubble of colored candy wrappers, cigarette butts and old wads of muddily-stained kleenex, Carmey tosses a tissue soaked with fresh red onto the heap. Behind the silhouetted heads of Ned and Mr. Tomolillo the panthers, roses and red-nippled ladies wink and jitter. If I fall forward or to the right, I will jog Carmey's elbow and make him stab the sailor and ruin a perfectly good fifteen-dollar eagle not to mention disgracing my sex. The only alternative is a dive into the bucket of bloody papers.

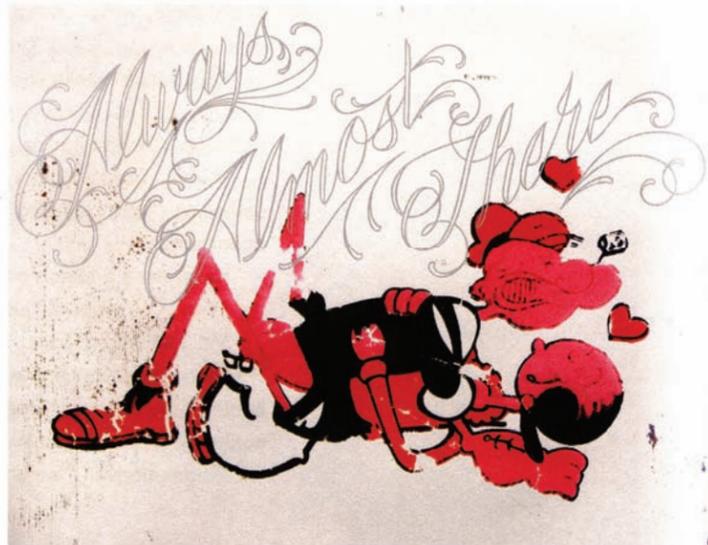
"I'm doing the brown now," Carmey sings out a mile away, and my eyes rivet again on the sailor's blood-sheened arm. "When the eagle heals, the colors will blend right into each other, like on a painting."

Ned's face is a scribble of black India ink on a seven-color crazy-quilt.

"I'm going...." I make my lips move, but no sound comes out. Ned starts toward me but before he gets there the room switches off like a light.

The next thing is, I am looking into Carmey's shop from a cloud with the X-ray eyes of an angel and hearing the tiny sound of a bee spitting blue fire.

"The blood get her?" It is Carmey's voice, small and far.



"She looks all white," says Mr. Tomolillo. "And her eyes are funny."

Carmey passes something to Mr. Tomolillo. "Have her sniff that." Mr. Tomolillo hands something to Ned. "But not too much."

Ned holds something to my nose.

I sniff, and I am sitting in the chair at the front of the shop with Mount Calvary as a backrest. I sniff again. Nobody looks angry so I have not bumped Carmey's needle. Ned is screwing the cap on a little flask of yellow liquid. Yardley's smelling salts.

"Ready to go back?" Mr. Tomolillo points kindly to the deserted orangecrate.

"Almost." I have a strong instinct to stall for time. I whisper in Mr. Tomolillo's ear which is very near to me, he is so short, "Do you have any tattoos?"

Under the mushroom-brim of his fedora Mr. Tomolillo's eyes roll heavenward. "My gracious no! I'm only here to see about the springs. The springs in Mr. Carmichael's machine have a way of breaking in the middle of a customer."

"How annoying."

"That's what I'm here for. We're testing out a new spring now, a much heavier spring. You know how distressing it is when you're in the dentist's chair and your mouth is full of what not...."

"Balls of cotton and little metal siphons....?"

"Precisely. And in the middle of this the dentist turns away," Mr. Tomolillo half-turns his back in illustration and makes an evil, secretive face, "and buzzes about in the corner for ten minutes with the machinery, you don't know what." Mr. Tomolillo's face smooths out like linen under a steam iron. "That's what I'm here to see about, a stronger spring. A spring that won't let the customer down."

By this time I am ready to go back to my seat of honor on the orange crate. Carmey has just finished with the brown and in my absence the inks have indeed blended into one another. Against the shaven skin, the lacerated eagle is swollen in tri colored claws curved as butcher's hooks.

"I think we could redden the eye a little?"

The sailor nods, and Carmey opens the lid on a pot of dye the color of tomato ketchup. As soon as he stops working with the needle, the sailor's skin sends up its blood beads, not just from the bird's black outline now, but from the whole rasped, rain bowed body.

"Red," Carmey says, "really picks things up."

"Do you save the blood?" Mr. Tomolillo asks suddenly.

"I should think," says Ned, "you might well have some arrangement with the Red Cross."

"With a blood bank!" The smelling salts have blown my head clear as a blue day on Monadnock. "Just put a little basin on the floor to catch the drippings."

Carmey is picking out a red eye on the eagle. "We vampires don't share our blood." The eagle's eye reddens but there is now no telling blood from ink. "You never heard of a vampire do that, did you?"

"Nooo...." Mr. Tomolillo admits.

Carmey floods the flesh behind the eagle with red and the finished eagle poises on a red sky, born and baptized in the blood of its owner.

The sailor drifts back from parts unknown.

"Nice?" With his sponge Carmey clears the eagle of the blood filming its colors the way a sidewalk artist might blow the pastel dust from a drawing of the White House, Liz Taylor or Lassie-Come-Home.

"I always say," the sailor remarks to nobody in particular, "when you get a tattoo, get a good one. Nothing but the best." He looks down at the eagle which

has begun in spite of Carmey's swabbing to bleed again. There is a little pause. Carmey is waiting for something and it isn't money. "How much to write Japan under that?"

Carmey breaks into a pleased smile. "One dollar."

"Write Japan, then."

Carmey marks out the letters on the sailor's arm, an extra flourish to the J's hook, the loop of the P, and the final N, a love letter to the eagle-conquered Orient. He fills the needle and starts on the J.

"I understand," Mr. Tomolillo observes in his clear, lecturer's voice, "Japan is a center of tattooing."

"Not when I was there," the sailor says. "It's banned."

"Banned!" Ned. "What for?"

"Oh, they think it's *barbarous* nowadays." Carmey doesn't lift his eyes from the second A, the needle responding like a broken-in bronc under his masterly thumb. "There are operators, of course. Sub rosa. There always are." He puts the final curl on the N and sponges off the wellings of blood which seem bent on obscuring his artful lines. "That what you wanted?"

"That's it."

Carmey folds a wad of kleenex into a rough bandage and lays it over the eagle and Japan. Spry as a shopgirl wrapping a gift package he tapes the tissue into place.

The sailor gets up and hitches into his peajacket. Several schoolboys, lanky, with pale, pimply faces, are crowding the door way, watching. Without a word the sailor takes out his wallet and peels sixteen dollar bills off a green roll. Carmey transfers the cash to his wallet. The schoolboys fall back to let the sailor pass into the street.

"I hope you didn't mind my getting dizzy."

Carmey grins. "Why do you think I've got those salts so close to hand? I have big guys passing out cold. They get egged in here by their buddies and don't know how to get out of it. I got people getting sick to their ears in that bucket."

"She's never got like that before," Ned says. "She's seen all sorts of blood. Babies born. Bull fights. Things like that."

"You was all worked up." Carmey offers me a cigarette, which I accept, takes one himself, and Ned takes one, and Mr. Tomolillo says no-thank-you. "You was all tensed, that's what did it."

"How much is a heart?"

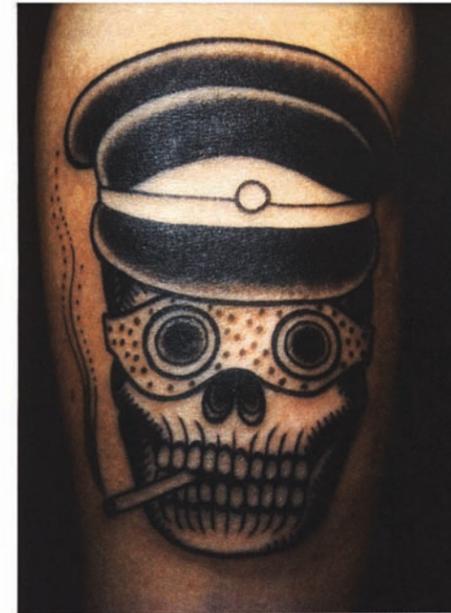
The voice comes from a kid in a black leather jacket in the front of the shop. His buddies nudge each other and let out harsh, puppy-barks of laughter. The boy grins and flushes all at once under his purple stipple of acne. "A heart with a scroll under it and a name on the scroll."

Carmey leans back in his swivel chair and digs his thumbs into his belt. The cigarette wobbles on his bottom lip. "Four dollars," he says without batting an eye.

"Four dollars?" The boy's voice swerves up and cracks in shrill disbelief. The three of them in the doorway mutter among themselves and shuffle back and forth.

"Nothing here in the heart line under three dollars." Carmey doesn't kowtow to the tight-fisted. You want a rose, you want a heart in this life you pay for it. Through the nose.

The boy wavers in front of the placards of hearts on the wall, pink, lush hearts, hearts with arrows through them, hearts in the center of buttercup wreaths.



"How much," he asks in a small, craven voice, "for just a name?"

"One dollar." Carmey's tone is strictly business.

The boy holds out his left hand. "I want Ruth." He draws an imaginary line across his left wrist. "Right here ... so I can cover it with a watch if I want to."

His two friends guffaw from the doorway.

Carmey points to the straight chair and lays his half-smoked cigarette on the Lazy Susan between two dye-pots. The boy sits down, schoolbooks balanced on his lap.

"What happens," Mr. Tomolillo asks of the world in general, "if you choose to change a name? Do you just cross it off and write the next above it?"

"You could," Ned suggests, "wear a watch over the old name so only the new name showed."

"And then another watch," I say, "over that, when there's a third name."

"Until your arm," Mr. Tomolillo nods, "is up to the shoulder with watches."

Carmey is shaving the thin scraggly growth of hairs from the boy's wrist. "You're taking a lot of ragging from somebody."

The boy stares at his wrist with a self-conscious and unsteady smile, a smile that is maybe only a public substitute for tears. With his right hand he clutches his schoolbooks to keep them from sliding off his knee.

Carmey finishes marking R-U-T-H on the boy's wrist and holds the needle poised. "She'll bawl you out when she sees this." But the boy nods him to go ahead.

"Why?" Ned asks. "Why should she bawl him out?"

"Gone and got yourself tattooed!" Carmey mimicks a mincing disgust. "And with just a name! Is *that* all you think of me? - She'll be wanting roses, birds, butterflies...." The needle ticks for a second and the boy flinches like a colt. "And if you do get all that stuff to her - roses...."

"Birds and butterflies," Mr. Tomolillo puts in.

"... she'll say, sure as rain at a ball game: What'd you want to go and spend all that money for?" Carmey whizzes the needle clean in the bowl of antiseptic. "You can't beat a woman." A few meagre blood drops stand up along the four letters - letters so black and plain you can hardly tell it's a tattoo and not just inked in with a pen. Carmey tapes a narrow bandage of kleenex over the name. The whole operation lasts less than ten minutes.

The boy fishes a crumpled dollar bill from his back pocket. His friends cuff him fondly on the shoulder and the three of them crowd out the door, all at the same time, nudging, pushing, tripping over their feet. Several faces, limpet-pale against the window, melt away as Carmey's eye lingers on them.

"No wonder he doesn't want a heart, that kid, he wouldn't know what to do with it. He'll be back next week asking for a Betty or a Dolly or some such, you wait." He sighs, and goes to the cardboard file and pulls out a stack of those photographs he wouldn't put on the wall and passes them around. "One picture I would like to get," Carmey leans back in the swivel chair and props his cowboy boots on a little carton. "The butterfly. I got pictures of the rabbit hunt. I got pictures of ladies with snakes winding up their legs and into them, but I could make a lot of sweet dough if I got a picture of the butterfly on a woman."

"Some queer kind of butterfly nobody wants?" Ned peers in the general direction of my stomach as at some highgrade salable parchment.



"It's not what, it's where. One wing on the front of each thigh. You know how butterflies on a flower make their wings flutter, ever so little? Well, any move a woman makes, these wings look to be going in and out, in and out. I'd like a photograph of that so much I'd do a for free."

I toy, for a second, with the thought of a New Guinea Golden, wings extending from hipbone to kneecap, ten times life-size, but drop it fast. A fine thing if I got tired of my own skin sooner than last sack.

"Plenty of women ask for butterflies in that particular spot," Carmey goes on, "but you know what, not one of them will let a photograph be taken after the job's done. Not even from the waist down. Don't imagine I haven't asked. You'd think every body over the whole United States would recognize them from the way they carry on when it's even mentioned."

"Couldn't," Mr. Tomolillo ventures shyly, "the wife oblige? Make it a little family affair?"

Carmey's face skews up in a pained way. "Naw," he shakes his head, his voice weighted with an old wonder and regret. "Naw, Laura won't hear of the needle. I used to think the idea of it'd grow on her after a bit, but nothing doing. She makes me feel, sometimes, what do I see in it all. Laura's white as the day she was born. Why, she *hates* tattoos."

Up to this moment I have been projecting, fatuously, intimate visits with Laura at Carmey's place. I have been imagining a lithe, supple Laura, a butterfly poised for flight on each breast, roses blooming on her buttocks, a gold-guarding dragon on her back and Sinbad the Sailor in six colors on her belly, a woman with Experience written all over her, a woman to learn from in this life. I should have known better.

The four of us are slumped there in a smog of cigarette smoke, not saying a word, when a round, muscular woman comes into the shop, followed closely by a greasy-haired man with a dark, challenging expression. The woman is wrapped to the chin in a woolly electric-blue coat; a fuchsia kerchief covers all but the pompadour of her glinting blond hair. She sits down in the chair in front of the window regardless of Mount Calvary and proceeds to stare fixedly at Carmey. The man stations himself next to her and keeps a severe eye on Carmey too, as if expecting him to bolt without warning.

There is a moment of potent silence.

"Why," Carmey says pleasantly, but with small heart, "here's the Wife now."

I take a second look at the woman and rise from my comfortable seat on the crate at Carmey's elbow. Judging from his watchdog stance, I gather the strange man is either Laura's brother or her bodyguard or a low-class private detective in her employ. Mr. Tomolillo and Ned are moving with one accord toward the door.

"We must be running along," I murmur, since nobody else seems inclined to speak.

"Say hello to the people, Laura," Carmey begs, back to the wall I can't help but feel sorry for him, even a little ashamed. The starch is gone out of Carmey now, and the gay talk.

Laura doesn't say a word. She is waiting with the large calm of a cow for the three of us to clear out. I imagine her body, death-lily-white and totally bare—the body of a woman immune as a nun to the eagle's anger, the desire of the rose. From Carmey's wall the world's menagerie howls and ogles at her alone.

