

Queer

William S. Burroughs, adapted by Erling Wold and John Morace

Lee	main character; tenor.
Eugene Allerton	young man; Lee's love interest; speaking part.
Mary	young woman friend of Allerton.
Moor, Tom Williams, Joe Guidry, Sawyer, the Major, Gale, Burns	Lee's circle of acquaintances.
The Doctor	
Doctor Cotter	
several young boys	dancers

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1. Carl Steinberg

Lee alone.

LEE

The first time he saw Carl, Lee thought: 'I could use that, if the family jewels weren't in pawn to Uncle Junk.' The boy was blond, his face thin and sharp with a few freckles, always a little pink around the ears and nose as though he had just washed. Lee had never known anyone who looked as clean as Carl. With his small round brown eyes and fuzzy blond hair, he reminded Lee of a young bird.

Lee looked for some contact with him. The boy listened politely and seemed to understand what Lee was saying. After some initial balking, he accepted the fact of Lee's sexual interest in his person. He told Lee, 'Since I can't change my mind about you, I will have to change my mind about other things.' Lee soon found he could make no progress. So he's not queer. People can be obliging. What is the obstacle? Lee finally guessed the answer. What makes it impossible is that his mother wouldn't like it.

One afternoon Lee was walking with Carl by the Amsterdam Avenue park. Suddenly Carl bowed slightly and shook Lee's hand. 'Best of luck,' he said, and ran for a streetcar.

Lee stood looking after him, then walked over into the park and sat down on a concrete bench that was molded to resemble wood. Blue flowers from a blossoming tree had fallen on the bench and on the walk in front of it. Lee sat there watching the flowers move along the path in a warm spring wind. The sky was clouding up for an afternoon shower. Lee felt lonely and defeated. He was very tired.

He saw a shadowy line of boys. As each boy came to the front of the line, he said 'Best of luck,' and ran for a streetcar.

2. K.C. Steak House

A dark wood Mexican steak house, wooden benches, darkly lit, and shabby. Moor and Tom Williams, a missionary Mormon from Salt Lake City are sitting at a table, Moor is plying Tom with cocktails.

Enter LEE.

LEE

Lee thought, "He brought along a chaperone."

MOOR

. . . I like the guy, Tom, but I can't stand to be alone with him. He keeps trying to go to bed with me. That's what I don't like about queers. You can't keep it on a basis of friendship. . .

LEE

Yes, Lee could hear that conversation.

(Lee sits at table)

During dinner Moor and Williams talked about a boat that they planned to build at Zihuatenejo. Lee thought this was a silly project.

To Tom & Moor: Boat building is a job for a professional, isn't it?

To house: Moor pretended not to hear.

The three walk from the Steak house, on the streets past vendors and hookers, dealers and to a quite side street with a single lamppost in front of the door to Moor's rooming house.

LEE

"Would you gentlemen care for a drink? I'll get a bottle. . ." He looked from one to the other.

TOM

Well, no. You see we want to work on the plans for this boat we are going to build.

LEE

Oh. Well, I'll see you tomorrow. How about meeting me for a drink in the Rathskeller? Say around five."

TOM

Well, I expect I'll be busy tomorrow.

LEE

Yes, but you have to eat and drink.

TOM

Well, you see, this boat is more important to me than anything right now. It will take up all my time.

LEE

Suit yourself.

Lee walks away.

MOOR

Thanks for running interference, Tom. Well, I hope he got the idea. Of course Lee is an interesting guy and all that. . . but this queer situation is just more than I can take.

LEE

With ironic detachment, looking at them: Tolerant, looking at both sides of the question, sympathetic up to a point, finally forced to draw a tactful but firm line.

To house: And he really believes that crap.

Out of time, in his own thoughts.

Actually Moor's brush-off was calculated to inflict the maximum hurt possible under the circumstances. It put Lee in a position of a detestably insistent queer, too stupid and too insensitive to realize that his attentions were not wanted, forcing Moor to the distasteful necessity of drawing a diagram.

3. Talking with Joe

Lee and Joe Guidry in a bar.

LEE

To himself. Everything made in this country falls apart. Wouldn't surprise me if I picked up a boy in the Alameda and his... Here comes honest Joe. *To Joe:* What do you know?

GUIDRY

Not much, Lee. Except someone stole my typewriter. And I know who took it. It was that Brazilian, or whatever he is. You know him. Maurice.

LEE

Maurice? Is that the one you had last week? The wrestler?

GUIDRY

You mean Louie, the gym instructor. No, this is another one. Maurice is as queer as I am. Belches. Excuse me. If not queerer. But he won't accept it. I think stealing my typewriter is a way he takes to demonstrate to me and to himself that he is just in it for all he can get. As a matter of fact, he's so queer I've lost interest in him. Not completely though. When I see the little bastard I'll most likely invite him back to my apartment, instead of beating the shit out of him like I should.

Music – focus changes to various things in the room – someone writing a letter, someone reading the newspaper – to calm, silence

Well, I have to be going.

He leaves. After a while, Lee gets up and leaves as well.

4. Lee meets Allerton

Lee walks down the street, sees a group of expatriates, including Allerton. Attracted, he nods to him and smiles. Allerton nods back, surprised. Allerton heads into the Ship Ahoy. Lee walks on down the street. After a bit, he turns back and goes into the bar as well. He walks to the bar, orders a drink and drinks it, orders a second, turns and sees Allerton, who nods. The action takes place as Lee describes it.

LEE

Lee tried to achieve a greeting at once both friendly and casual, designed to show interest without pushing their short acquaintance. As Lee stood aside to bow in his dignified old-world greeting, there emerged instead a leer of naked lust, wrenched in the pain and hate of his deprived body and, in simultaneous double exposure, a sweet child's smile of liking and trust, shockingly out of time and of place, mutilated and hopeless.

Allerton was appalled. 'Perhaps he has some sort of tic,' he thought. He decided to remove himself from contact with Lee before the man did something even more distasteful. Lee looks at him helplessly for a moment, then turns back to the bar, defeated and shaken. Lee finishes his second drink. When he looks around again, Allerton is playing chess with Mary, an American girl with dyed red hair and carefully applied makeup. "Why waste time here?" Lee thinks. He pays for the two drinks and walks out.

A young Mexican boy passes by Lee and looks at him. He motions to Lee and walks off. Lee follows.

5. Several days later

Lee is sitting in Lola's with Jim Cochan reading aloud from the newspaper.

LEE

Get a load of this... When his wife came home from the market, her husband, already drunk, was brandishing his .45. Why do they always have to brandish it? *pause* Jesus Christ, after he killed his wife and three children he takes a razor and puts on a suicide act. But resulted only in scratches that did not require medical attention. What a slobbish performance!

Reading the headlines. Here's a man was surprised in his taco stand with a dressed-down dog... a great long skinny hound dog at that. There's a picture of him posing in front of his taco stand with the dog...

He sees Allerton, who looks in the door and then walks on after a momentary pause. I was in the shadow; he couldn't see me from the door."

On an impulse, he rushes out the door and overtakes Allerton, who is slightly alarmed. I just wanted to tell you Mary was in Lola's a little while ago. She asked me to tell you she would be in the Ship Ahoy later on, around five.

ALLERTON

Relieved. Oh, thank you. Will you be around tonight?

LEE

Yes, I think so. He hurries away.

6. Later that afternoon

Allerton is sitting at the bar at the Ship Ahoy. Lee comes in and orders a drink and greets Allerton, who returns it. They sit together and talk for a bit. Mary comes in and Lee greets her with a tipsy old-world gallantry and excuses himself as they begin to play chess.

MARY

Who is he?

ALLERTON

I have no idea.

7. Later that evening

Lee walks into the Ship Ahoy. Allerton sees Lee, goes to the bar and comes back with two drinks.

ALLERTON

Let's sit down over here.

LEE

Allerton was telling a story about his experience in the Counter-Intelligence Corps in Germany.

ALLERTON

Starts before overlapping with Lee's singing below. An informant had been giving the department bum steers. Of course, we cross-checked all information with other informants and we had our own agents in the field. Most of our informants turned in some phony information, but this one character made all of it up. He had our agents out looking for a whole fictitious network of Russian spies. So finally the report comes back from Frankfurt – it is all a lot of crap. But instead of clearing out of town before the information could be checked, he came back with more.

At this point we'd really had enough of his bullshit. So we locked him up in a cellar. The room was pretty cold and uncomfortable, but that was all we could do. We had to handle prisoners very careful. He kept typing out confessions, enormous things...

LEE

To himself while Allerton talks. Allerton was drunk. His eyes were flushed a faint violet tinge, the pupils widely dilated. He was talking very fast, in a high, thin voice; the eerie, disembodied voice of a young child. Lee had never heard Allerton talk like this before. The effect was like the possession voice of a medium. The boy had an inhuman gaiety and innocence.

This story clearly delighted Allerton, and he kept laughing while he was telling it. Lee was impressed by his combination of intelligence and childlike charm.

They start to walk out together.

LEE

Hasn't been listening. What did he look like?

To himself while Allerton continues below. Lee watched the thin hands, the beautiful violet eyes, the flush of excitement on the boy's face. An imaginary hand projected with such force it seemed Allerton must feel the touch of ectoplasmic fingers caressing his ear, phantom thumbs smoothing his eyebrows, pushing the hair back from his face. Now Lee's hands were running down over the ribs, the stomach. Lee felt the aching pain of desire in his lungs.

ALLERTON

Look like? I don't remember especially. He was around eighteen. He looked like a clean-cut boy. We threw a bucket of cold water on him and left him on a cot downstairs. He began flopping around but he didn't say anything. We all decided that was an appropriate punishment. I think they took him to the hospital the next day.

LEE

Pneumonia?

ALLERTON

I don't know. Maybe we shouldn't have thrown water on him.

LEE

Stopping at the door to a building. You go in here?

ALLERTON

Yes, I have a sack here.

LEE

Good night.

ALLERTON

Good night.

8. Queer Hints

Back in the bar, Joe Guidry, Lee and Allerton are sitting together.

GUIDRY

The trouble with me is, I like the type that robs me.

LEE

Where you make your mistake is bringing them to your apartment. That's what hotels are for.

GUIDRY

You're right there. But half the time I don't have money for a hotel. Besides, I like someone around to cook breakfast and sweep the place out.

LEE

Clean the place out.

GUIDRY

I don't mind the watch and the radio, but it really hurt, losing those boots. They were a thing of beauty and a joy forever. I don't know whether I ought to say things like this in front of Junior here. No offense, kid.

ALLERTON

Go ahead.

GUIDRY

Did I tell you how I made the cop on the beat? Every time he sees the light on in my room, he comes in for a shot of rum. Well, about five nights ago he caught me when I was drunk and horny, and one thing led to another and I ended up showing him how the cow ate the cabbage...

So the night after I make him I was walking by the beer joint on the corner and he comes out *borracho* and says, 'Have a drink.' I said, 'I don't want a drink.' So he takes out his pistola and says, 'Have a drink.' I proceeded to take his pistola away from him, and he goes back into the beer joint to phone for reinforcements. So I had to go in and rip the phone off the wall. Now they're billing me for the phone. When I got back to my room, which is on the ground floor, he had written 'El Puto Gringo' on the window with soap. So, instead of wiping it off, I left it there. It pays to advertise.

Allerton gets up and goes to the WC. When he comes back, he goes to the bar and talks to John Dumé.

Looking at Al Hyman. Hyman's a queer, but he pretends he's not.

LEE

He's isn't really.

GUIDRY

He's queer and you aren't, Lee. You just go around pretending you're queer to get in on the act.

LEE

Who wants to get in on your tired old act? *Looks at Dumé and then, to himself.* Lee walked over to the bar and started talking to the bartender. He thought: "I hope Dumé tells Allerton about me." Lee felt uncomfortable in dramatic 'something-I-have-to-tell-you' routines and he knew, from unnerving experience, the difficulties of a casual come-on: "I'm queer, you know, by the way." Sometimes they don't hear right and yell, "What?" Or you toss in: "If you were as queer as I am." The other yawns and changes the subject, and you don't know whether he understood or not.

9. First Date

LEE

Walking with Allerton, but to himself: Lee and Allerton went to see Cocteau's *Orpheus*. In the dark theater, Lee could feel his body pull towards Allerton, an amoeboid protoplasmic projecting, straining with a blind worm hunger to breathe with his lungs, see with his eyes, learn the feel of his viscera. Allerton shifted in his seat. Lee felt a sharp twinge, a strain or dislocation of the spirit. His eyes ached.

He takes off his glasses and runs his hand over his closed eyes.

To Allerton: I need a drink. Points to a bar. There. They go in.

Downs his first drink. What did you think of the picture?

ALLERTON

Enjoyed parts of it.

LEE

Drinking the second. Yes, so did I. He always gets some innaresting effects. Laughs. The innaresting thing about Cocteau is his ability to bring the myth alive in modern terms.

ALLERTON

Ain't it the truth?

LEE

After a pause. So, how was your evening with Dumé?

ALLERTON

We went to several bars full of queers. One place a character asked me to dance and propositioned me.

LEE

Take him up?

ALLERTON

No.

LEE

Dumé is a nice fellow.

ALLERTON

Yes, but he is not a person I would confide too much in.

LEE

You refer to a specific indiscretion?

ALLERTON

Frankly, yes.

LEE

I see. Dumé never misses. *A boy runs in, offering lottery tickets for sale. Lee pays him and takes a ticket. Go buy yourself some marijuana, son. The boy smiles and turns to leave. Come back in five years and make an easy ten pesos. To himself:* Allerton smiled. "Thank god, I won't have to contend with middle-class morality." So Dumé told you about my, uh, proclivities?

ALLERTON

Yes.

LEE

A curse. Been in our family for generations. The Lees have always been perverts. I shall never forget the unspeakable horror that froze the lymph in my glands – the lymph glands that is, of course – when the baneful word seared my reeling brain: **I was a homosexual.** I thought of the painted, simpering female impersonators I had seen in a Baltimore nightclub. Could it be possible that I was one of those subhuman things? I walked the streets in a daze. I might well have destroyed myself. Nobler, I thought, to die a man than live on, a sex monster. It was a wise old queen – Bobo, we called her – who taught me that I had a duty to live and to bear my burden proudly for all to see, to conquer prejudice and ignorance and hate with knowledge and sincerity and love.

Poor Bobo came to a sticky end. He was riding in the Duc de Ventre's Hispano-Suiza when his falling piles blew out of the car and wrapped around the rear wheel. He was completely gutted, leaving an empty shell sitting there on the giraffe-skin upholstery. Even the eyes and the brain went, with a horrible shlupping sound. But Bobo's words came back to me from the tomb, the sibilants cracking gently. 'No one is ever really alone. You are part of everything alive.' What I mean is, Allerton, we are all parts of a tremendous whole. No use fighting it.

Don't these gay bars depress you? Of course, the queer bars here aren't to compare with Stateside queer joints.

ALLERTON

I wouldn't know. I've never been in any queer joints except those Dumé took me to. I guess there's kicks and kicks.

LEE

You haven't, really?

ALLERTON

No, never.

Lee pays and they leave.

LEE

Shall we go to my place for a drink? I have some Napoleon brandy.

ALLERTON

All right.

They walk to his place.

LEE

I'll fix you a drink. *He does it.*

ALLERTON

Takes a drink. Good Lord. Napoleon must have pissed in this one.

LEE

Drinks, coughs. It is god-awful. Still, it has a suggestion of cognac taste. Looks at Allerton. Can I show you over the house? Motions In here we have the bedroom. They go in. More brandy? Allerton nods, Lee fills his glass, touches his sweater. Sweet stuff, dearie. That wasn't made in Mexico. Let's get this off.

ALLERTON

O.K.

Allerton takes off the sweater, Lee takes off his own shoes & shirt, opens Allerton's shirt and runs his hand down Allerton's ribs and stomach.

LEE

God, you're skinny.

ALLERTON

I'm pretty small.

Lee lights a candle. Lee takes off Allerton's shoes and socks. He loosens Allerton's belt and unbuttons his trousers. Allerton arches his body and Lee pulls the trousers and drawers off. He drops his own trousers and shorts and lies down beside him. The lights slowly fade. They make love and Lee blows out the candle. In darkness:

LEE

Oh, by the way, you said you had a camera in pawn you were about to lose?

ALLERTON

Yes, in for four hundred pesos. The ticket runs out next Wednesday.

LEE

Well, let's go down tomorrow and get it out.

ALLERTON

O.K.

10. Pat's Steak House

LEE

I know telepathy to be a fact, since I have experienced it myself. I have no interest to prove it, or, in fact, to prove anything to anybody. What interests me is, how can I use it? In South America at the headwaters of the Amazon grows a plant called Yage that is supposed to increase telepathic sensitivity. Medicine men use it in their work. A Colombian scientist, whose name escapes me, isolated from Yage a drug he called Telepathine.

I saw an article – the Russians are using Yage in experiments on slave labor. It seems they want to induce states of automatic obedience and ultimately, of course, thought control. The basic con. No build-up, no spiel, no routine, just move in on someone's psyche and give orders.

By now the U.S. is experimenting with Yage, unless they are dumber even than I think. Yage may be a means to usable knowledge of telepathy. Anything that can be accomplished chemically can be accomplished in other ways. *Allerton is clearly not interested.*

How about the T-bone steak for two?

ALLERTON

That's fine.

LEE

Rare?

ALLERTON

Medium rare.

LEE

Got an idea for a new dish. Take a live pig and throw it into a very hot oven so the pig is roasted outside and when you cut into it, it's still alive and twitching inside. Or, if we run a dramatic joint, a screaming pig covered with burning brandy rushes out of the kitchen and dies right by your chair. You can reach down and pull off the crispy, crackly ears and eat them with your cocktails.

11. Walking

Leaving Pat's Steak House, Lee and Allerton are laughing and leaning against each other. A Mexican man walks by.

MAN

Muttering as he walks. Cabrones.

LEE

Calling after him. Chinga tu madre. Here I come to your little jerkwater country and spend my good American dollars and what happens? Insulted inna public street.

The Mexican man stops and turns, hesitating. Lee unbuttons his coat and brandishes a gun. The man walks on.

Someday they won't walk away

They walk. Lee puts his arm around Allerton's shoulder and turns to kiss him.

ALLERTON

Pausing, then yielding. Well, if you insist.

12. Pawn shop

LEE

Daytime. Lee with camera. Walking with Allerton into the Ship Ahoy. It took all day to get the camera. Allerton had lost the ticket. They went from one office to another. The officials shook their heads and drummed on the table, waiting. Lee put out two hundred pesos extra in bites. He finally paid the four hundred pesos, plus interest and various charges. He hands the camera to Allerton, who takes it without comment.

To Allerton. How about dinner tonight?

ALLERTON

No, I think I'll work tonight.

LEE

Like the Wallace administration, I subsidize non-production. I will pay you twenty pesos not to work tonight. Allerton looks at him coolly. Lee drops his head. After a pause, he looks up. How about a drink?

ALLERTON

No. Not now. Anyway, I have to go.

LEE

Well, I'll see you. I'll see you tomorrow.

ALLERTON

Yes. Good night. Allerton leaves. Lee starts to reach for him.

LEE

He left Lee standing there, trying to formulate a plan to keep Allerton from going, to make an appointment for the next day, to mitigate in some way the hurt he had received. Lee feels for the back of his chair and lowers himself into it. The bartender comes over and places a sandwich in front of him.

LEE

Huh? What's this?

BARTENDER

The sandwich you ordered.

LEE

Oh, yes. Takes a bite, drinks. To the bartender: On my bill, Joe.

Lee gets up and walks out slowly. He leans on a tree, looking at the ground, feels his stomach. Walks to his apartment, takes off his coat and shoes, sits on the bed, starts to sob convulsively. He lies on the bed, pulls his knees up and covers his face with his hands, his fists clenched. The sobs slow and stop.

13. Chess game

Allerton and the other male characters are in the Ship Ahoy. Lee comes in and sits next to him. Allerton moves to another table.

ALLERTON

To the bartender. Bring the tomato juice over here, will you Joe?

Lee moves the table next to him. Allerton gets up and looks through the papers. Mary comes in; they sit down together and start to play chess. Lee pulls a chair over.

LEE

Howdy. Don't mind if I kibitz? I was reading up on chess. Arabs invented it, and I'm not surprised. Nobody can sit like an Arab. The classical Arab chess game was simply a sitting contest. When both contestants starved to death it was a stalemate. Takes a long drink.

During the Baroque period of chess the practice of harrying your opponent with some annoying mannerism came into general use. Some players used dental floss; others cracked their joints or blew saliva bubbles. The method was constantly developed. In the 1917 match at Baghdad, the Arab Arachnid Khayam defeated the German master Kurt Schlemiel by humming 'I'll Be Around When You're Gone' forty thousand times, and each time reaching his hand toward the board as if he intended to make a move.

Did you ever have the good fortune to see the Italian master Tetrzzini perform? Lee lights Mary's cigarette. He had a corps of trained idiots who would rush in at a given signal and eat all the pieces. With defeat staring him in the face he would leap up yelling, 'You cheap bastard! I saw you palm that queen!' and ram a broken teacup in his opponent's face.

Mary looks at Allerton significantly, who gets up, cutting Lee off.

ALLERTON

I have to get a haircut and go to work.

Mary and Allerton leave together. Lee goes on. As he talks, the other people in the bar drift away until he is left alone.

LEE

The next time I saw Tetrzzini was in the Upper Ubangi. I was working as Aide-de-camp under General von Klutch. A hard man to satisfy. I gave up trying after the first week and hit the trail with Abdul, the local Adonis. Ten miles out of Tanhajaro, Abdul came down with the rinderpest and I had to leave him there to die. Hated to do it, but there was no other way. Lost his looks completely, you understand.

At the headwaters of the Zambesi, I ran into an old Dutch trader. After considerable haggling I gave him half a keg of paregoric for a boy, half Effendi and half Lulu. But the Lulu-Effendi was showing signs of wear even before I hit Timbuktu, and I decided to trade him in on a straight Bedouin model. The crossbreeds make a good appearance but they don't hold up. In Timbuktu I went to Corn Hole Gus's Used-Slave Lot to see what he could do for me on a trade-in.

Gus rushes out and goes into the spiel: 'Ah Sahib Lee. Allah has sent you! I have something right up your ass, I mean, alley. Just came in. One owner and he was a doctor. A once-over-lightly, twice-a-week-type citizen. It's young and tender...behold!'

'Look, Gussie, you are dealing with the oldest faggot in the Upper Ubangi, so come off the peg. Reach down into your grease pit and dredge out the best-looking punk you got in this moth-eaten bazaar.'

'All right Sahib Lee, you want quality, right? Follow me, please. Here it is. What can I say? Quality speaks for itself. Now, I get a lotta cheap-type customers in here wanna see quality and then scream at the price. But you know and I know that quality runs high. As a matter of fact, and this I swear by the Prophet's prick, I lose money on this quality merchandise.

'Uh huh. Got some hidden miles on him, but he'll do. How about a trial run?'

'Lee, for christ sake, I don't run a house. No consumption on premises. I could lose my license.'

'O.K., now, what can you give me on this Lulu-Effendi? Perfect condition. Just overhauled. He don't eat much and he don't say nothing.'

'Jesus, Lee! You know I'd cut off my right nut for you, but I swear by my mother's cunt, may I fall down and be paralyzed and my prick fall off if these mixed jobs ain't harder to move than a junky's bowels.'

'What am I going to do with it? Peddle it on the public street?'

'Might take it along as a spare.'

'Ha. What can you give me?'

'Well...now don't get mad...two hundred piasters.' Gus makes a skittish little run as if to escape my anger, and throws up a huge cloud of dust in the courtyard.

By this time, the bar is empty. Lee looks around, pays for his drinks and walks out into the night.

14. Mentioning the trip

Mary and Allerton are playing chess at the Ship Ahoy. Lee walks in.

LEE

Thursday Lee went to the races, on the recommendation of Tom Weston. Weston was an amateur astrologer, and he assured Lee the signs were right. Lee lost five races, and took

a taxi back to the Ship Ahoy. Allerton motions for him to come over. Where's that phony whore caster? Looks around.

ALLERTON

Tom give you a bum steer?

LEE

He did that. Drinking while they play. To Allerton: I figure to go down to South America soon. Why don't you come along? Won't cost you a cent.

ALLERTON

Perhaps not in money.

LEE

I'm not a difficult man to get along with. We could reach a satisfactory arrangement. What you got to lose?

ALLERTON

Independence.

LEE

So who's going to cut in on your independence? You can lay all the women in South America if you want to. All I ask is that you be nice to Papa, say twice a week. That isn't excessive, is it? Besides, I will buy you a round-trip ticket so you can leave at your discretion.

ALLERTON

I'll think it over. The job runs ten days more. I'll give you a definite answer when the job folds.

LEE

Your job... stops, then, to himself: Lee was about to say "I'll give you ten days' salary." Pauses, then to Allerton, with resignation. He said, "All right." Allerton's newspaper job was temporary, and he was too lazy to hold a job in any case. Consequently, his answer meant "No." Lee figured to talk him over in ten days. "Better not force the issue now."

Mary returns with drinks, hands one to Allerton and starts playing chess.

Lee downs another drink and washes down some Benzedrine tablets with his drink. The busboy walks in with a mouse by the tail.

LEE

Hold the son of a bitch out and I'll blast it.

Lee strikes a Napoleonic pose and pulls out his gun. The busboy ties a string to the mouse's tail and holds it out. Lee fires and the mouse is sent flying. Lights out.

15. Allerton agrees to go

Ship Ahoy.

LEE

Allerton came back from a trip to Morelia sullen and irritable. When Lee asked if he had a good trip, he muttered, "Oh, all right," and went in the other room to play chess with Mary. Lee felt a desperate need to maintain some special contact with Allerton.

He washes down some opium with black coffee, then, goes over to Allerton.

What about this trip to South America?

ALLERTON

Well, it's always nice to see places you haven't seen before.

LEE

Can you leave anytime?

ALLERTON

Anytime.

16. Starting the trip

Lee and Allerton are walking together. Lee is happy and excited.

LEE

Better buy some camping equipment here. We may have to trek back into the jungle to find the Yage. When we get where the Yage is, we'll dig a hip cat and ask him, "Where can we score for Yage?"

ALLERTON

How will you know where to look for the Yage?

LEE

I aim to find that out in Bogotá. A Colombian scientist who lives in Bogotá isolated Telepathine from Yage. We must find that scientist.

ALLERTON

Suppose he won't talk?

LEE

They all talk when Boris goes to work on them.

ALLERTON

You Boris?

LEE

Certainly not. We pick up Boris in Panama. He did excellent work with the Reds in Barcelona and the Gestapo in Poland. A talented man. All his work has the Boris touch. Light, but persuasive. A mild little fellow with spectacles. Looks like a bookkeeper. I met him in a Turkish bath in Budapest.

A blond Mexican boy goes by pushing a cart. Lee turns his head to follow him.

Jesus Christ! One of them blond-headed Mexicans! 'Tain't as if it was being queer, Allerton. After all, they's only Mexicans. Let's have a drink.

They walk together.

As an aside. They left by bus a few days later, and by the time they reached Panama City, Allerton was already complaining that Lee was too demanding in his desires. But, now that Lee could spend days and nights with the object of his attentions, he felt relieved of his gnawing emptiness and fear.

17. Quito

LEE

Walking out of a drugstore toward Allerton. They drove into Quito in a windy, cold twilight. The hotel looked a hundred years old. The room had a high ceiling with black beams and white plaster walls. Lee was a little junk sick. To Allerton: No paregoric without a script.

Describing the scene around them: A cold wind from the high mountains blew rubbish through the dirty streets. The people walked by in gloomy silence. Many had blankets wrapped around their faces. A row of hideous old hags, huddled in dirty blankets that look like old burlap sacks, were ranged along the walls of church.

To Allerton: Now, son, I want you to know I am different from the other citizens you might run into. Some people will give you the women-are-no-good routine. I'm not like that. You just pick yourself one of these señoritas and take her right back to the hotel with you.

ALLERTON

I think I will get laid tonight.

LEE

Sure. Go right ahead. They don't have much pulchritude in this dump, but that hadn't oughta deter you young fellers. Was it Frank Harris said he never saw an ugly woman til he was thirty? It was, as a matter of fact... Let's go back to the hotel and have a drink.

As they go back to the hotel room and get into their beds, and Allerton goes to sleep: That night Lee dreamed he was in a penal colony. All around were high, bare mountains. He lived in a boardinghouse that was never warm. He went out for a walk. As he stepped off a streetcorner onto a dirty cobblestone street, the cold mountain air hit him. He tightened the belt of his leather jacket and felt the chill of final despair.

Are you awake, Gene?

ALLERTON

Yes.

LEE

Cold?

ALLERTON

Yes.

LEE

Can I come over with you?

ALLERTON

Ahh, well all right. *Lee comes over. He is shaking with cold and sickness. You're twitching all over. Lee presses against him. Christ almighty, your hands are cold.*

LEE

When Allerton was asleep, he rolled over and threw his knee across Lee's body. Lee lay still so he wouldn't wake up and move away.

18. The doctor

LEE

The doctor lived in a yellow stucco villa on a quiet side street. He was Jewish, with a smooth, red face, and spoke good English. I put down a dysentery routine. *To the doctor:* The prescription that works best is paregoric with bismuth.

DOCTOR

Laughs. Tell the truth now. Are you addicted to opiates?

LEE

Yes.

DOCTOR

Ah ha. *He throws away the prescription.* How long has this lasted? Ach, you are a young person. You must stop this habit. So you lose your life. Better you should suffer now than continue this habit.

LEE

To himself. My god, what you have to put up with in this business. *To the doctor.* Of course, Doctor, and I want to stop. But I have to get some sleep. I am going to the coast tomorrow, to Manta.

DOCTOR

The doctor sits back in his chair and smiles. You must stop this habit. *Lee nods abstractedly. Finally, the doctor writes the prescription. Lee hands him money, doctor hands back Rx.*

19. Manta

Allerton and Lee are in The Hotel Continental in Manta. It is made of split bamboo and rough boards. Lee is plugging up knotholes in the wall of the room with paper.

LEE

To Allerton.

We don't want to get deported under a cloud. I'm a little junk sick, you know, and that makes me sooo sexy. The neighbors could witness some innaresting sights.

ALLERTON

I wish to register a complaint concerning breach of contract. You said twice a week.

LEE

So I did. Well, of course the contract is more or less elastic you might say. But you are right. Twice a week it is, sire. Of course, if you get hot pants between times, don't hesitate to let me know.

ALLERTON

I'll give you a buzz.

LEE

I am going into town to dig the local bodegas and buy a bottle of cognac.

He leaves for the town. It looks old, with limestone streets and dirty saloons crowded with sailors and dockworkers.

SHOESHINE BOY

Want "nice girl?"

LEE

Lee looked at the boy and said in English, "No, and I don't want you either."

Lee walks into a bar. Two middle-aged wiry little men are doing an obscene mambo routine opposite each other. Their faces are leathery and creased with toothless smiles.

Lee sits down on a short wood bench and signals for a cognac.

A boy comes in and acts this out while Lee sings.

LEE

A boy of sixteen or so came over and sat down with Lee and smiled an open, friendly smile. Lee smiled back.

Lee smiles at the boy.

LEE

A refresco for the boy.

The boy drops a hand on Lee's thigh and squeezes it in thanks for the drink.

The boy had uneven teeth, crowded one over the other, but he was a young boy. Lee looks at him speculatively. Lee couldn't figure out the score. Boys here walk around with their arms around each other's necks. Lee decided it play it cool. He finished his drink.

Lee exits bar and walks back to the hotel

LEE

Lee told Allerton about the boy. *To Allerton.* Let's go dig that bar after dinner.

ALLERTON

And get felt up by those young boys? I should say not.

LEE

Laughs, looks out the window for a moment.

I want to buy a boat and sail up and down the coast.

Allerton nods, then, after a while.

While we are in Ecuador we must score for Yage. Think of it: thought control. Take anyone apart and rebuild to your taste. I could think of a few changes I might make in

you, doll. You're nice now, of course, but you do have those irritating little peculiarities. I mean, you won't do exactly what I want you to do all the time.

20. Guayaquil

A group of young boys, aged twelve to fourteen play in a heap of rubbish on the waterfront, their clothes are torn. One of the boys urinates against a post and smiles at the other boys. Lee enters and sees the scene. The boys notice Lee. Their play becomes sexual, with an undercurrent of mockery. They whisper about Lee. Lee stares at them openly. It is a cold, hard stare of naked lust. He feels the tearing ache of limitless desire.

One of the boys is vibrating like a young animal. The boy-animal moves closer to Lee. The others follow. The music becomes more intense. The lights focus and dim. The boys make a sound that is a cross between a chant and animal sound, but neither. They surround Lee. The lights continue to dim. The boys take down their torn pants. Lee slips down his pants to his ankles. The group is wriggling on the bare ground together, a mass of flesh and teeth. The sounds the boys make become louder, the music is louder. Bodies are entwined, it is somehow primal, Lee is engulfed. Quickly, lights come up to full, like the scorching South American sun. Blackout.

Restore. Lee is fully clothed. The boys are gone.

LEE

What can I do? Take them back to my hotel? *Lee walks.*

They are willing enough. For a few Sucres... He felt a killing hate for the stupid, ordinary, disapproving people who kept him from doing what he wanted to do. "Someday I am going to have things just like I want.

And if any moralizing son of a bitch gives me any static, they will fish him out of the river.

Lee is at the river. It is a dirty yellow color, a half a mile wide. He sits on a bench. Sounds of cheap motorboats and chatter; great masses of water hyacinths float by. Lee stares at the river. Finally, he gets up and walks back to the hotel.

LEE

It's three o'clock, Gene. Time to get up. *Lee opens the shade.*

ALLERTON

What for?

LEE

You want to spend your life in bed? I saw some beautiful boys on the waterfront. The real uncut boy stuff. Such teeth, such smiles. Young boys vibrating with life.

ALLERTON

All right. Stop drooling.

LEE

What have they got that I want, Gene? Do you know?

ALLERTON

No.

LEE

They have maleness, of course. So have I. I want myself the same way I want others. I'm disembodied. I can't use my own body for some reason.

He puts out his hand and Allerton dodges away.

What's the matter?

ALLERTON

I thought you were going to run your hand down my ribs.

LEE

I wouldn't do that. Think I'm queer or something?

ALLERTON

Frankly, yes.

LEE

You do have nice ribs. Show me the broken one. Is that it there? *Lee runs his hand halfway down Allerton's ribs. Or is it further down?*

ALLERTON

Oh, go away.

LEE

But, Gene ... I am due, you know.

ALLERTON

Yes, I suppose you are.

LEE

Of course, if you'd rather wait until tonight. These tropical nights are so romantic. That we would could take twelve hours or so and do the thing right.

Lee runs his hands down Allerton's stomach. Allerton gets excited.

ALLERTON

Maybe it would be better now. You know I like to sleep alone.

LEE

Yes, I know. Too bad. If I had my way we'd sleep every night all wrapped around each other like hibernating rattlesnakes.

Lee closes the shade.

Lee takes off his clothes and lies beside Allerton.

They caress. Finally, Allerton squeezes Lee hard, intensely.

LEE

Lee smoothes Allerton's eyebrows with his thumbs.

Do you mind that?

ALLERTON

Not terribly.

LEE

But you do enjoy it sometimes? The whole deal, I mean.

ALLERTON

Oh, yes.

Lee lays on his back with one cheek against Allerton's shoulder, and goes to sleep.

21. Yage

LEE

Lee went to Quito to get information on the Yage. Allerton stayed in Salinas. Lee was back five days later.

To Allerton: in hotel

Yage is also known to the Indians as Ayahuasca. Scientific name is *Banisteria caapi*.

Lee spreads a map on the bed.

It grows in high jungle on the Amazon side of the Andes. We will go on to Puyo. That is the end of the road. We should be able to locate someone there who can deal with the Indians, and get the Yage.

22. To Puyo

Lee down, Allerton up, carrying two bags. Jungle sounds, it is tropical and wet, hot, steamy and green.

LEE

They took a river boat to Babahoya. Swinging in hammocks, sipping brandy, and watching the jungle slide by. Springs, moss, beautiful clear streams and trees up to two hundred feet high.

Allerton takes out an army surplus jacket from his bag and puts it on.

From Babahoya they took a bus over the Andes to Ambato, a cold, jolting fourteen-hour ride.

They stopped for a snack of chick-peas at a hut at the top of the mountain pass, far above the tree line. Several guinea pigs were squeaking and scurrying around on the dirt floor of the hut. They passed the snow-covered peak of Chimborazo, cold in the moonlight and the constant wind of the high Andes.

Lee joins Allerton up stage, and they huddle together under a blanket, drinking brandy. Allerton is almost completely hidden by the blanket, Allerton is insubstantial as a phantom. Lee looks right through him.

The floor they are huddled on becomes a bus, they sit up and are jolted as the bus moves along difficult terrain.

LEE

From Ambato to Puyo, along the edge of a gorge a thousand feet deep. Several times the bus stopped to remove large stones that had slid down onto the road.

Sawyer enters the bus, he is dressed in safari gear and hiking boots. Allerton sleeps.
Lee talked to a Dutchman named Sawyer who was farming near Puyo. Sawyer told him there was an American botanist living in the jungle, a few hours out of Puyo.

SAWYER

He is trying to develop some medicine. I forget the name. If he succeeds in concentrating this medicine, he says he will make a fortune.

LEE

I am interested in medicinal plants. I may pay him a visit.

SAWYER

He will be glad to see you. But take along some flour or tea or something. They have nothing out there.

Lee nods. They ride silently, the bus lurching from time to time.

23. In the Town of Puyo

They stand in the center of the town. Allerton is wearing his army surplus jacket and the blanket wrapped around his shoulders. Lee wears his army surplus jacket too. It is pouring rain. We can hear it come down.

LEE

A botanist! What a break. He is our man. We will go tomorrow.

ALLERTON

This booze is the heaviest item, and the bottle's got like sharp edges. Why don't we leave it here?

LEE

We'll have to loosen his tongue.

Lee takes the bottle puts it back into the sack. Pulls out a brand new machete and hands it to Allerton.

ALLERTON

We can hardly pretend we just happened by. How are you going to explain our visit?

LEE

I will think of something. Best tell him right out I want to score for Yage. I figure maybe there is a buck in it for both of us. According to what I hear, he is flat on his ass.

And, Gene, for the love of Christ, when we do overhaul this character, please don't say, 'Doctor Cotter, I presume.'

24. Cotter

Lee and Allerton hiking on the trail.

LEE

The trail was corduroy. The wood of the trail was covered with a film of mud. They stopped at several houses to ask where Cotter's place was. Everyone said they were headed right.

Enter man on trail, coming from other direction.

LEE

How far?

MAN

Two, three hours. Maybe more.

They walk Enter Man 2, he shifts his machete to shake hands.

MAN 2

You are looking for Cotter? He is in his house now.

LEE

How far?

The man looked at Lee and Allerton.

MAN 2

It will take you about three hours more.

Darkness descends. Sounds of evening jungle. Lee and Allerton continue to hike.

Cotter's place is a small thatched hut in a clearing. Cotter is a wiry little man in his middle fifties. They enter with out a word. The reception is a bit cool. Lee brings out the liquor and they all have a drink.

COTTER

How did you happen to come here? Where are you from? Who told you about me? Are you a tourist or traveling on business?

LEE

(drunk)

Lee was drunk.

Lee steps out of scene.

He began talking in junky lingo, explaining that he was looking for Yage, or Ayahuasca. He understood the Russians and the Americans were experimenting with this drug. Lee said he figured there might be a buck in the deal for both of them.

Cotter helps himself to some more of Lee's drink.

The more Lee talked, the cooler Cotter's manner became. The man was clearly suspicious, but why or of what, Lee could not decide.

Lee reenters the scene, as Cotter leads the way with a flashlight.

After dinner, Cotter led the way with a flashlight that developed power by pressing a lever.

A cot about thirty inches wide made of bamboo slats.

COTTER

I guess you can make out here.

LEE

Lee lay down on the cot next to the wall. Allerton lay on the outside, and Cotter adjusted a mosquito net.

Lee in scene.

"Mosquitos?"

COTTER

No, vampire bats.

Cotter leaves. Lee puts one arm across Allerton's chest, and snuggles close. He strokes Allerton's shoulder gently. Allerton moves away irritably, pushing Lee's arm away.

ALLERTON

Slack off, will you, and go to sleep.

LEE

Lee drew his arm back. His whole body contracted with the shock. Slowly he put his hand under his cheek. He felt a deep hurt, as though he were bleeding inside.

Lee wipes tears from his face.

Lee bends his head deeply, and then sits up right, erect, suddenly. Pause. The following spoken quickly.

He was standing in front of the Ship Ahoy. The place looked deserted. He could hear someone crying.

Slower now, perhaps sung.

He saw his little son, and knelt down and took the child in his arms. The sound of crying came closer, a wave of sadness, and now he was crying, his body shaking with sobs. He held little Willy close against his chest.

Music soft, long, low pitched sustained? Fade to silence?

No music. Spoken?

When Lee woke up, he still felt the deep sadness of his dream. He stretched out a hand towards Allerton, then pulled it back.

Lee does this as he says it and then turns away from Allerton.

25. Hunting

LEE

Next morning, Lee felt dry and irritable and empty of feeling. He borrowed Cotter's .22 rifle and set out with Allerton to have a look at the jungle.

ALLERTON

Cotter says the Indians have cleaned most of the game out of the area. They all have shotguns from the money they made working for Shell.

LEE

May God grant we kill some living creature. Gene, I hear something squawking over there. I'm going to try and shoot it.

ALLERTON

What is it?

LEE

How should I know? It's alive, isn't it?

He trips, gets tangled in the brush.

Gene! Help me! I've been seized by a man-eating plant. Gene, cut me free with the machete! *Pause, music.* They did not see a living animal in the jungle.

Ends with music, Allerton disappears, time passes.

26. Epilogue

Lee alone.

LEE

I flew up to Mexico city. I was nervous going through the airport; some cop or Immigration inspector might spot me. I checked into an eight-peso hotel near Sears, and walked over to Lola's, my stomach cold with excitement. The bar was in a different place, redecorated, with new furniture. But there was the same old bartender behind the bar, with his gold tooth and his moustache.

The Major walked in. A retired Army man, gray-haired, vigorous, stocky. I ran through the list crisply with the Major:

Johnny White, Russ Morton, Pete Crowley, Ike Scranton?

MAJOR

Los Angeles, Alaska, Idaho, don't know, still around. He's always around.

LEE

And oh, whatever happened to Allerton?

MAJOR

Allerton? Don't believe I know him.

LEE

See you.

MAJOR

'Night, Lee. Take it easy.

LEE

I walked over to Sears and looked through the magazines. In one called *Balls: For Real Men*, I was looking at a photo of a Negro hanging from a tree: "I Saw Them Swing Sonny

Goons." A hand fell on my shoulder. I turned, and there was Gale, another retired Army man. I ran through the list.

GALE

Most everybody is gone. I never see those guys anyway, never hang around Lola's anymore.

LEE

I asked about Allerton.

GALE

Allerton?

LEE

Tall skinny kid. Friend of Johnny White and Art Gonzalez.

GALE

He's gone too.

LEE

I put the magazine away slowly and walked outside and leaned on a post. Then I walked back to Lola's. Burns was sitting at a table, drinking a beer with his maimed hand.

BURNS

Hardly anybody around. Johnny White and Tex and Crosswheel are in Los Angeles.

LEE

I was looking at his hand.

BURNS

Did you hear about Allerton?

LEE

No.

BURNS

He left about five months ago as a guide to an Army colonel and his wife. They were going to sell a car in Guatemala. A '48 Cadillac. I felt there was something not quite right about the deal. But Allerton never told me anything definite. You know how he is.

LEE

Art seemed surprised I had not heard from Allerton.

BURNS

Nobody has heard anything from him since he left. It worries me.

Light up on Allerton in a chair.

A waltz.

That night I dreamed I finally found Allerton, hiding out in some Central American backwater. He seemed surprised to see me after all this time. In the dream I was a finder of missing persons.

"Mr. Allerton, I represent the Friendly Finance Company. Haven't you forgotten something, Gene? You're supposed to come and see us every third Tuesday. We've been lonely for you in the office. We don't like to say 'Pay up or else.' It's not a friendly thing to say. I wonder if you have ever read the contract **all the way through**? I have particular reference to Clause 6(x) which can only be deciphered with an electron microscope and a virus filter. I wonder if you know just what 'or else' means, Gene?

Aw, I know how it is with you young kids. You get chasing after some floozie and forget all about Friendly Finance, don't you? But Friendly Finance doesn't forget you.

The next four paragraphs are action - those things that don't come across are spoken.

The Skip Tracer's face went blank and dreamy. His mouth fell open, showing teeth hard and yellow as old ivory. Slowly his body slid down in the leather armchair until the back of the chair pushed his hat down over his eyes, which gleamed in the hat's shade, catching points of light like an opal.

The Skip Tracer was talking in a voice languid and intermittent, like music down a windy street. "You meet all kinds on this job, Kid. Every now and then some popcorn citizen walks in this office and tries to pay Friendly Finance with **this** shit."

He let one arm swing out, palm up, over the side of the chair. Slowly he opened a thin brown hand, with purple-blue fingertips, to reveal a roll of yellow thousand-dollar bills. The hand turned over, palm down, and fell back against the chair. His eyes closed.

Suddenly his head dropped to one side and his tongue fell out. The bills dropped from his hand, one after the other, and lay there crumpled on the red tile floor. A gust of warm spring wind blew dirty pink curtains into the room. The bills rustled across the room and settled at Allerton's feet.

"Keep that in case you're caught short, Kid. You know how it is in these spic hotels. You gotta carry your own paper."

The Skip Tracer leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. Suddenly, he was standing up, as if tilted out of the chair, and in the same upward movement he pushed his hat back from his eyes with one finger. He walked to the door and turned, with his right hand on the knob. He polished the nail of his left hand on the lapel of his worn glen plaid suit.

Quiet.

"Oh, uh ... about your, uh ... account. I'll be around soon. That is, within the next few ..." The Skip Tracer's voice was muffled.

The music picks up, then settles to a soft end.

"We'll come to **some** kind of an agreement." Now the voice was loud and clear. The door opened and wind blew through the room. The door closed and the curtains settled back, one curtain trailing over a sofa as though someone had taken it and tossed it there.