

Urban Thrills

For The Chillers

You only move down to an area like this if you are looking for action. I don't mean your cheap suburban thrills. Shit you see fleeting over a news blip. But the real cocaine drug induces get you lowdown kind of neighborhood. Saw signs the other day coming home that said, 'WE DON'T WANT ANY MORE DRUGS AND PROSTITUTION IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD.' Just a couple of blocks from my place. And have I seen some hookers and drugs flop about this place. It's the fucking hood and we're not dealing with Reno women or designer drugs. It's a bloody nose and a hooker that will make your cuticles hide from your nails. It's a Midwestern town. Good for a story.

Not sure exactly why I put myself in harms way, but it makes sense. I get more sense from the broken than from the well put together types. They scare me. Suburbia scares me. And tonight, I saw one of the top reasons why folks are in an urban sprawl. The list of reasons for why folks don't want to touch the city anymore. Why the guitar man has himself and the band has left town. Why the peanut butter is all alone on the bread looking for the jelly to come back home.

Just got off the phone with a good friend from Flagstaff, AZ when I heard a shit pot of commotion coming from the bathroom window. Looked out and saw a mid-20's black man leaning against a Ford Tempo while a portly mid-30's black man is pacing saying, "YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW MUCH I WOULD LIKE TO. YOU HAVE NO IDEA. NO IDEA." He continues repeating this over and over. Taunting as the kid leans against the car bumper with ease. Then, he had it. Couldn't hear about how this man wanted to lay it on him anymore. So, he shifted off the bumper and said, "I JUST WISH YOU WOULD. I WISH YOU WOULD." The big guy comes back, "THIS TIME I'M GONNA BUST YOUR FUCKING HEAD. I'M GONNA HURT YOU, NIGGA." At this, the kid in his 20's starts darting around like a prize fighter taunting the old chap. They go about like this for a couple of minutes and continue berating each other. From what I can tell, the young kid is getting kicked out of the older guy's pad and he's fed up with his shit. The epitome of a good urban tale gone bad.

Well, the taunting starts hitting a fever pitch. There's shoving and wide arm sweeps, but nothing is happening. The old man keeps telling the kid to take the first shot as he continues drinking his beer. Both are a bit goofed on the booze and the humid heat is hanging tight in the air. And what about that shit in the summer in the hood. Fuckers go out of their heads. It's like hunting season for the red necks. They know when to go out and fucking knock out fowl. In the hood, the heat signals a time for drug, booze, prostitution and fighting. The bell rings and the kids go. And these guys are no exception to the rule. They are eyeing each other down as though they are mortal enemies in a Superman comic and someone is going to lose. Built up with all the urban pomp and circumstance of something big getting ready to take place, I grab my digital camera as a good steward of action and come back to the window.

I'm snapping some 15-second videos as these guys taunt each other over and over. I'm about 30 feet away from this little parking lot area behind one of the shittiest apartment complexes in the neighborhood. Now, this row called 'Baltimore' is a historic district in the old Hyde Park area of town. There are some beautiful homes and a cluster of others

that hold their own. My place is a big Dr. Suess style house on the corner that has some nicks, but holds it's own quite well. I dig the joint. But, there are several apartment complexes around the house that are fucking eye sores. One is the Montclair across the street, and this complex behind me. There are others sprawling around their neighborhood around here. Most are slightly upscale holding bins for people truly getting back on their feet and new immigrants to the US. And this building is no exception. Beyond tonight, I hadn't see this much action from locals in quite some time. I was getting my tickets worth tonight.

So, the boys are hitting a fever pitch with their arguing and taunting. The sun is setting and I'm getting antsy because I'm ready to get out and ride my bike for a bit. Like I said, it's a hot night and the cumulonimbus clouds are pressing against our collective balls for a good nighttime storm. And that's exactly what's in store for everyone around here. Then BAM. There's a break in my thought, bathroom filming and the commotion. A white Cadillac comes pulling up and the young kids starts getting in the old man's face. It's getting centimeter by centimeter closer to full blown punches getting tossed. The word 'NIGGA' and 'BOY' are getting tossed about at fever pitches. Suddenly, the stronger and wiser old man throws a bottle at the young kid and the games get a bit closer to getting started. Then, the man from the Cadillac and someone in a blind spot of mine comes out and starts giving the young kid flat grief. It's apparent that this kids has pissed off the entire hornet's nest. He is clearly outnumbered by 4 to one.

The man in the Cadillac is the ring leader. It wasn't until he pulled forward that action started. So, he starts in on the kid .. "YOUR DONE WITH MY SISTER. GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE OR YOU ARE GOING TO GET HURT. FUCKING LEAVE." The kid comes back to the boss with some chaw and gets grabbed from behind. At this point, the old man tags him in the face and throws the bottle over his head. And the fight is on. The three guys collapse on this guy and start kicking the fuck out of him. They sprawl out of my eye range and I listen to a cacophony of urban terror. The kid is screaming bloody murder on the ground as he gets tore up by his three detractors. This whole time, I hear a woman from the back of the apartment building yelling that she is going to "CALL THE PO-LICE". This doesn't stop the boys. They continue plowing this kid over. Suddenly – FLASH – a big woman in a short blue bath robe comes out pleading with the boys to leave this kid alone. Shortly after some female interruption, they are done. The woman walks away triumphant and the kid leaps up still talking shit.

Now, they all take a deep breath and I'm expecting this kid to be good and fucked up. He has to be hiding it well. He's up, walking and talking shit. The Cadillac man and the old man warn him to leave or he's really going to get hurt. The kid yells some choice 'FUCK YOU'S' – 'BITCH ASS' – 'MOTHERFUCKER' before getting the clue. He saunters down the side alley saying that he's coming back to finish the game – SETTLE THE SCORE. The Cadillac man warns him not to ever come back as the rest of the boys go towards the back of the apartment building. I have my fill. A racing heart, free show and a setting sun on my riding. So, I leave and go off to wonder about all this urban drama around me. This summer urban drama around everyone. It's a free ticket. No one has to

see the movies much around her or watch movies – because this is the area of life that makes headlines and movies. These salty fucking angry folk make it.

Now, I work in this environment and come home to it everyday. Been doing this for some years now. Realized tonight that I had been in this location for exactly a year as of the other day. Been a good ride in the hood and this is the hood. I have lived on the line from time to time in the past, but this is indeed the hood. There's reason to be concerned at times in a neighborhood that rolls such as this. And with this melting pot of both urban environments around all the time .. I have some thoughts. As I looked on at these angry drunk men out back my shutter window, I wondered what happened to them in life. How was it that their fists became the negotiator. How can one man make three other big men so mad that they want to kill him? How about the small guy .. what would give him the nuts the size of New Mexico to fuck with such guys all at once. Blind rage, drunk, jitters or a king kong drug I couldn't imagine. And I see many of these cases on varying levels at work and home. It's more than an interesting tale.

There's so much broken love and shattered realities in the urban core, but there is also a blinding sun on the other side. I dig the hope that comes from people. That's all they have. With nothing more to dream about than a better life or to cash in on their talents, they put everything out on the line. They flop about with nothing to lose. Pride and stubbornness aside, these kids run with a humility that's hard to find in other spheres of life. This may be hard to believe, but I see it. The sad desperation of a child .. I saw it today in a kid by the name of Ronald. He's an angry young black youth. His face is usually twisted and contorted to let the world know he's fucking pissed at his deck of cards and no one should fuck with him. And most kids don't, yet they know the score. Well, I found out that Ronald was given up by his Mom as a baby. Strung out on the drug and mess, she gave the child to her mother. And his dad, uncle, aunt and cousins are all in jail. This kid is looking down the barrel of a gun for the same fate.

Last week, about 8 days into a summer youth program I help run, he pissed me off. I had thrown him out, talked to him, talked to his grandmother and nothing doing. One afternoon he pushed the Italian blood through my eye balls and I was hot. I got him in a back office and gave it to him. For nothing but a face of disrespect I have gotten from him for day. Well, I was immediately calmed down by a female co-worker and she told me to leave. I calmed, but I stuck around and watched this kid. I peered into his eyes and they were welling with tears when this strong black woman had her minute with him. He would cave in at the drop of a hat. He would build this tough guy act and breakdown like a child. And he is a child. And it hit me that he doesn't need another adult yelling at him.

After leaving the office for about 5 minutes, I came back and apologized to this kid. I told him that I would never rail him again. I would just give him the look if need be. It would be that unmistakable look that he fucked up and I was done with him. But, I promised I would never raise my voice at him ever again. He just doesn't need it anymore. It's one of the best favors I can afford a kid like this. Furthermore, I told him the last thing he needed was anymore anger, hurt or bullshit. The kid needed love and I told him that I would be as cool as possible to him. I would give him the opposite of what he expected.

In the day's following this, I have really studied this kid. And he has talent, desire, a shy bone and some fucking conviction. He hides behind the badge of being a tough guy because it's a defense mechanism. It's not a kid trait, it's a human trait. I know adult human beings that do fucking worse. And I love this kid. I'm pulling for him. Hoping that he'll find something about love that's never been presented his way. But, the point with Ronald is the hope this kid holds. With everything in his life in shambles, he finds strength in his animals. Some dogs, cats, hamsters and such. He fucking loves them all. A tough kid with a love for the animal. This is a kid after my heart. But there's a tenacity in this kid that's refreshing and I see his urban hopes flop like a champ. All odds against him to end up like his family .. society is going to have to step in for this kid. And in my book there's no guarantee in society. Shit isn't fair and pure human strength is at a rare premium these days.

So, I finish my bike ride and see a police car and ambulance in front of the apartment complex. The young kid didn't learn his bloody lesson. And the boys were there to show him how the world was going to work on this night. This one moment of ours alive on planet earth with all the forces at our fingertips. I missed the conclusion. But, I'm only going to be here long enough to see the beginning. And the beginning continues to begin every fucking moment.

Welcome to the city. Have a fucking grand urban stay and try not to advertise much – it's a secret we like to keep around here. Saves us the entertainment money we just don't have. Or, gives you ideas for entertainment. Went by one of the more dilapidated drug, prostitution high rises up the street from earlier on tonight and heard a man yell, 'I'LL LIFT YOUR HOOD FOR 3 DOLLARS.' So high and cranked on shit I couldn't imagine, I smiled as he stood there with his chewed up body with no shirt on. A true spectacle of the 'DON'T GIVE A FUCK. HAVEN'T GIVEN A FUCK. WON'T CONTINUE TO GIVE A FUCK.' Some guy with a mind that has made him the hero. Everyone around here is a hero. One of 'em will make it on the news tonight as the funeral home down the street turns their lights off for the night.