

IN SEARCH OF AMERICA – PART 3

A Reefer Trilogy in Seven Parts

La Conner was ...
Well, not La Conner exactly.
It was an art colony.
Peopled ...
with a few real people
Some of whom were artists,
a bunch of Indians,
Swinomish,
Some of whom were artists, too,
Ancient in their tradition,
And a peck of other folks,
Mostly wealthy,
Who may have been artists, some,
Artistes, some,
Real?
Hard to say ...
Word was they were all pretty fake,
But they didn't hang with our kind,
Whatever our kind is ... ah, was ... ah ...
Let's move on.

But near La Conner
Were these mustard fields.
Oh My God!
The colors ... mustard in bloom.
It'd put Van Gogh to shame.
Seriously.
And you had to drive these back roads,
Unpaved roads,
To get from the paved road
Which went into La Conner
- you know where the artists had colonized –
- some of whom came with Columbus, or at least looked like they had –
To the shacks and metal smelters,
Kilns
And encampments
Where the real artists
Were at work
Plying their trades
On a wing and prayer

Let me give you an example.
So we go back in there one afternoon
To a casting party.
That's where someone is going to cast something for the first time
And wants witnesses
Drunk or sober
Stoned or straight
Doesn't matter a jot
... in this case, as it turns out,
To save the poor guy from killing himself.
Ok, I exaggerate.
He would only have maimed himself.
Maybe crippled himself
Maybe for life
But his injuries
- if it hadn't been for some of us metal-slagging revelers –
Would have hurt like hell
made a god-awful mess of his fingers
and hands
could easily have been the last of his smelting days.

You see, he had been in the Navy.
And was really smart about all sorts of things.
Especially mechanical things.
And he'd turned to art,
Metal sculpting,
But didn't have a dime to his name.

So, he lived here – in this, ah, place ...
Dug a shallow pit out front
Gotten an old, used vacuum cleaner
And, using 3 x 5 cards as dampers,
Turned the vacuum cleaner into a stoker
which whipped the fire in the pit into a boiling frenzy
Hot enough to melt bronze
In this industrial-quality
Crucible
Which set amongst the flames
In this ... ah ... thing ...
which, itself ...
well,
I'm way outside my realm of expertise.
He had made molds
... all that
And bought some super-duty
Gloves for picking up hot stuff with

So he's passing around whiskey and reefer
- a good host -
Us waiting anxiously
For the bronze to melt
So he could pour
Us cheer
And that's basically what a casting party is ...
Or was
Back then
Somewhere near La Connor,
Washington,
USA.

Well, all goes according to plan.
The homemade blast furnace worked.
Took a while,
True,
But the bronze melted,
We got in cheering position,
Him too,
Unfortunately,
When it's time to pour,
He forgot his gloves,
Which would only have held off the flesh-y melt down a few seconds anyway
Reaches for the crucible,
Bare-handed,
When this guy,
One of the party-goers,
Who still had his wits about him,
Shrieked

And we all froze,
Like we'd been busted,
And he says,
using very ... ah, descriptive ... language,
Something along the lines of
You need tongs
Which he didn't have
But which, being both drunk and stoned,
And very mechanically-minded,
As I mentioned earlier,
He fashioned in no time
From something,
And,
With the help of the shrieking man,
Executed the pour

As we cheered
Wildly
And ...
And ...

That was it.

In my own estimation,
It wasn't much of a party.
But hey ...
The prawns at this greasy spoon in La Connor were awesome.
And the mustard in bloom ...

Oh, my god.