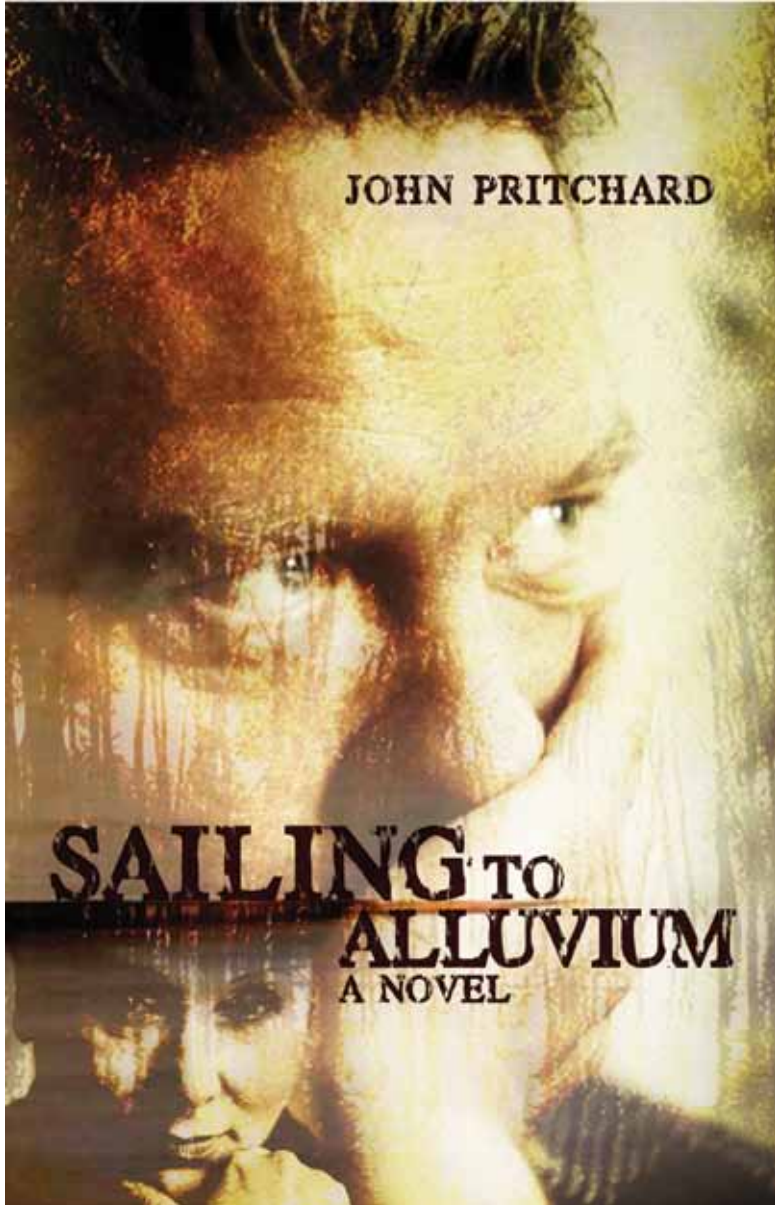


SELECTIONS FROM

Sailing to Alluvium BY JOHN PRITCHARD

A THIRD NOVEL IN THE JUNIOR RAY SAGA

FORTHCOMING FROM NEWSOUTH BOOKS IN FALL 2013



(front cover concept for STA jacket)

Praise for JUNIOR RAY

“Mississippi tourist officials won’t be handing this book out anytime soon, though they might be surprised by its effectiveness if they did . . . Not for the squeamish, but its irreverent humor will win over most.”

— *Publishers Weekly*

“For all Junior Ray’s ugly talk, the writing here is beautifully crafted. Providing counterpoint to Junior Ray’s perfectly calibrated invective, Pritchard sprinkles the narrative with Leland Shaw’s heartbreaking journal entries about being hunted by Nazis . . . while not for the squeamish, [Junior Ray] deserves shelf space beside the best southern literature—even if it makes its neighbors blush.” — BARNES & NOBLE

“Junior Ray is an unforgettable narrator: hilarious, rowdy, and stubbornly his own. In life you’d cross the street to avoid him; in Pritchard’s delightful fictional debut, you’ll turn the pages to see what that rascal does next.” — LOUISE REDD, *Hangover Soup*

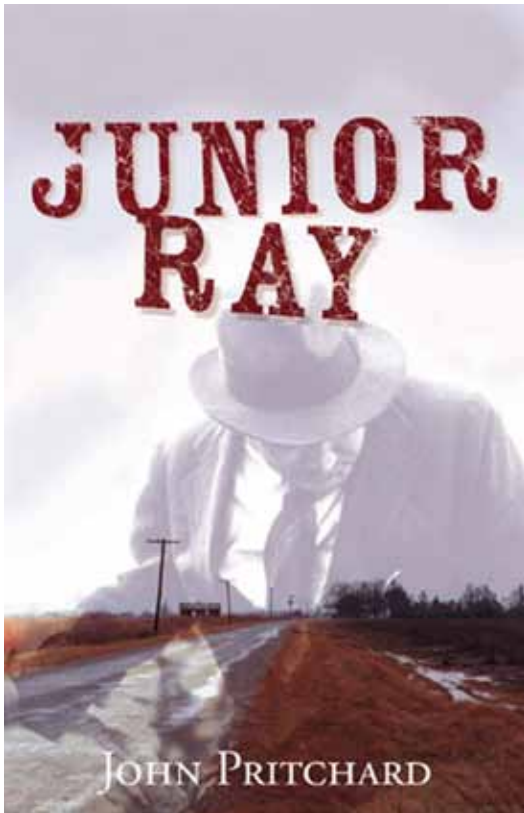
“Junior Ray Loveblood has taken profanity and made a new language of it, which he uses to tell the often hilarious, often scary, story of life as a poor white in the Mississippi Delta, down its lonely roads and through its dark forests. Not for the squeamish or pure at heart.”

— JOHN FERGUS RYAN, *White River Kid*

“A whizbang of a book—funny, eccentric in that great Southern tradition, pitch-perfect, and beautifully paced. Junior Ray’s voice, while repugnant, is also beguiling, sorrowful—though he doesn’t know it—and rich in cracker surrealism. The book drips with Delta air and brings alive its peculiar, specific population.”

— BURKE’S BOOKSTORE

“Mark Twain meets the Coen Brothers in this foul-mouthed farce. This short burst of a novel reads like a delicious white trash tirade, bound to offend but a whole lot of demented fun.” — SQUARE BOOKS



Junior Ray

NewSouth Books, 2005

160 pages, 5.5 x 8.5

Trade Cloth:

ISBN 978-1-58838-111-8

\$23.95

Trade Paper:

ISBN 978-1-58838-232-0

\$15.95

ebook:

ISBN 978-1-60306-122-3

\$9.95

Junior Ray (2005)

John Pritchard's acclaimed first novel takes the reader on a wild ride inside the mind of Junior Ray Loveblood, a Mississippi Delta deputy sheriff as bloodthirsty as he is misguidedly hilarious. Junior Ray narrates the story in his own profane, colloquial voice, telling why he hates just about everybody, and why he wants to shoot Leland Shaw, a shell-shocked World War II hero and poet who is hiding in a silo from what he believes are German patrols. Through a series of sleights of hand, misdirections, and near misses, Junior Ray and his sidekick Voyd give a dark tour of the Delta country as they chase their mysterious prey. Junior Ray's thoughts are peppered with excerpts from Shaw's notebooks—sometimes starkly different from Junior Ray's diatribe, sometimes eerily similar—and by the end of the story, it is up to the reader to sort out whose reality is more fantastic, Shaw's or Loveblood's, as the one stalks the other through the pages of this highly original and darkly comedic story.

Praise for THE YAZOO BLUES

“Pritchard again indulges the profanely backwoods, occasionally backwards, voice of Mississippi ‘good ol’ boy’ Junior Ray Loveblood. [Loveblood’s] account of a failed Union naval expedition at Yazoo Pass on the Mississippi River also includes the story of his research expedition, with his friend Mad Owens, to the Magic Pussy Cabaret & Club ‘up in Meffis.’ Each interwoven story is as surprising and strong as Junior Ray himself, who conjures a surreal scene of ironclads logjammed in a bayou as colorfully as he recounts a backroom lap dance from his best friend’s granddaughter Petunia. Between expletives and misanthropic digressions, Junior Ray reveals a lifetime of deep, unlikely friendships, even getting at an occasional truth in a humble manner that’s—as Junior Ray might put it—‘as soft as a quail’s fart.’” — *Publishers Weekly* STARRED REVIEW

“John Pritchard has given the Delta the kind of thorough and insightful historian it has needed for so long. If this book doesn’t make you laugh a lot and maybe think at least a little, I’m guessing you’re not from around here.”

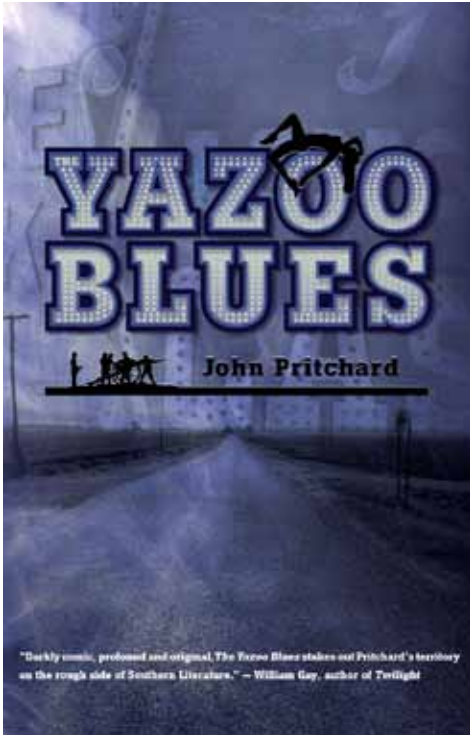
— JAMES C. COBB, *Away Down South:
A History of Southern Identity*

“This writer knows the country whereof he speaks, its dialect, its morés and folkways. But this is not sociology. It is primitive fiction of the sort one rarely sees. Underneath this violent language and narrative, there is a sweet truth. It deserves to be read.” — HARRY CREWS, *The Hawk Is Dying*

“Something of a miracle.” — *The Memphis Flyer*

“Like his protagonist, John Pritchard’s novella is outrageous and ribald, a revolt against the literary school of manners and a ride that takes southern gothic to new extremes.”

— CURTIS WILKIE, *Arkansas Mischief*



The Yazoo Blues

NewSouth Books, 2008

256 pages, 5.5 x 8.5

Trade Cloth:

ISBN 978-1-58838-217-7

\$24.95

ebook:

ISBN 978-1-60306-123-0

\$9.95

The Yazoo Blues (2008)

Junior Ray Loveblood, one of the most outrageous and original personalities to appear in American literature in many years, returns in *The Yazoo Blues*, the sequel to John Pritchard's *Junior Ray*. Now semi-retired, Loveblood works as a security guard in one of the floating casinos that have replaced cotton as the cash crop in the Mississippi Delta.

In his spare time, Junior Ray has become obsessed with the ill-fated Yazoo Pass expedition by a Union armada up the Mississippi River in 1863. He relates dual stories, both that of a soldier slowly driven mad by the haunting countryside, and of Loveblood's friend Mad Owens, whose search for existential love meets its greatest challenge in the arms of the stripper Money Scatters. Loveblood's conclusions are hilarious, absurd, and at times intensely revealing.

Equally profane and profound, the fictional narrator of Pritchard's novel illuminates the complex stew of evolving race relations, failed economies, and corrupt politics that define much of the post-civil rights rural Deep South.

SAILING TO ALLUVIUM

ISBN 978-1-58838-269-6

Fall 2013

Trade Cloth, 320 Pages, \$27.95

Advance Preview

This book was still being edited when this copy was printed. If you are quoting from this copy for purposes of a review or article, we will be glad to verify excerpts for you to make sure the wording has not changed.

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ABSTRACT

John Pritchard's critically acclaimed underground classic, *Junior Ray*, was praised by Harry Crews, dubbed "hilariously tasteless" by *Publishers Weekly*, and won a spot on the Barnes & Noble Top Ten Sensational Debut Novels list for 2005. Now, in the third installment, Junior Ray and his buddy, Voyd Mudd, become "diktectives" in order to solve a not-so-mysterious murder mystery. Previously, in the first book, eponymously entitled *Junior Ray*, the duo pursued an elusive psychotic with the aim of "shooting" him but failed to do so. In Pritchard's second book, *The Yazoo Blues*, Junior Ray had retired from his career as a deputy sheriff and was now a security guard at a Delta casino. He also fancied himself a "historian" and spent a great deal of time explaining an obscure Northern military fiasco on the Tallahatchie River, while simultaneously telling the reader about his new-found joys in "Meffis" at the Magic Pussy Cabaret & Club. John Pritchard's work fits well between the singing prose of James Agee and the rustic lampoon and

high humor of Erskine Caldwell. The reader is treated to a unique brand of dark funniness that closes the divide between burlesque and metaphysics, fuses the profane with the sublime, and explains the Deep South as no other writer has ever done before.

SUMMARY

In a land where the guards at Parchman state prison, located in the middle of the Mississippi Delta, were not hired white men but tall black prisoners—“trusties”—armed with lever-action .30-caliber rifles, and where Christmas furloughs for inmates were common, little is implausible.

Solutions to difficulties real or imagined were often resolved outside the courts as mere personal matters, especially in the case of “shootings.” And even when such events did enter the court system, the matters were often ultimately handled on a quiet but very powerful social basis. Whites were set free. Blacks were paroled back to their planter-class employers. All of this was true of the American South in general but much truer by far in that part of the South called by J. C. Cobb “the Most Southern Place on Earth” . . . the Mississippi Delta!

In their third adventure (following 2005’s *Junior Ray* and 2008’s *The Yazoo Blues*), Junior Ray and his sidekick Voyd Mudd have become “diktectives” to stop the murderous activities of a semi-secret, lethal organization of Southern women, the AUNTY BELLES, headed by Miss Attica Rummage.

Junior Ray and Voyd—with the indispensable help of the town’s black police chief, Secundus Shipp, and Secundus’s white half-brother, Judge Russell “Rusty” Justiss, Jr., along with “That Worthless Nigga Ezell,” plus “Crazy Baines” (who died on the job), and the mysterious Multiple U.S. Special Agent Eagle Swoop—solve it all . . . or enough for life in that part of the Delta to proceed normally once again within its usual illusion. Junior Ray is quite proud of himself for being an “R-thur.”

As “diktectives,” Junior Ray and Voyd’s mission is two-fold:

(1) to discover who is mailing death threats to young Mr. Brainsong when it becomes known that young Mr. Brainsong intends to publish the full-throated complete body of the “Notes” of Leland Shaw in book form, under the title of “Sailing to Alluvium: The Notes from the Ledgers of

Leland Shaw”; and

(2) to bring to justice whoever is responsible for killing Tombo Turnage, Froggy Waters, and Farley Trout. Junior Ray believes the perpetrator is most likely Miss Attica Rummage.

Miss Attica is apparently convinced that the publication of the writings of Leland Shaw and, in fact, the whole essence of Shaw himself would exemplify everything that is abhorrent to her and prove globally damaging to the image of the Southern male: i.e., a pusillanimous, unmanly behavior, mental instability (schizophrenia), weakness of character, and intellectualism, as well as perhaps even a certain degree of effeminacy!

Worst of all Miss Attica undoubtedly thinks that when the book is published it will go all over the country and then most certainly all over the world—which is what books eventually do—and she cannot allow that to happen. So, she does terrible things . . . she murders three men . . . by mistake.

In the end, she is caught.

Unaware that evidence has been gathered against her, Miss Attica is called into the office of Judge Russell “Rusty” Justiss Jr., who, after hearing her confession, declares that though Miss Attica is indeed responsible for the three murders, technically, none of it was intentional. Judge Rusty quickly emphasizes that there was no *mens rea*—no malice aforethought toward any of the three victims of mistaken identity—and he keenly observes that since young Mr. Brainsong II was Miss Attica’s intended target but is in fact still very much alive and happy to be so, then obviously no crime was committed. Judge Rusty wisely concludes that the whole thing was just a “hah’ble” accident. A tragedy, yes. A crime . . . no.

Judge Rusty gives Miss Attica a good talking to, considers a plan for reparations, and the reader knows that things will go back to whatever normal might be in the bizarre neurological biosphere of the Mississippi Delta.

Sailing to Alluvium is a book in two parts: The first part contains the farce described above plus much else besides, and each chapter ends with one of Junior Ray’s Famous Recipes. The second part, from which the whole novel gets its title, is called “Sailing to Alluvium: Selected Selections Among the Notes of Leland Shaw.” And there is a great deal of strange, necessary and

long-awaited wonderful stuff in that.

The core of it all is that Miss Attica Rummage is the Grand Dame of a lethal Southern sorority formed during Reconstruction with the avowed purpose of protecting the image of the remnants of Southern manhood. The sisters are semi-secret and known to be known as the Aunty Belles.

In killing three men by mistake, Miss Attica may well have been assisted by three of her sorority sisters: “Miss Nona May Drew, from down at Jonestown, Miss Decima Boyle, from Indianola, and Miss Morta Sue Gunnison, who lives out there from Friars Point on her family’s land in that old house that belonged to her grandmother.” (In the mythology of the Roman Fates, Nona spun the thread; Decima measured it, and Morta . . . cut it.)

Miss Attica Rummage’s unintended corpses are Farley Trout (stabbed with a silver Kirk repouse letter opener), Froggy Waters (gigged), and Tombo Turnage (shot with a .410 shotgun).

The Aunty Belles were organized in the aftermath of the Civil War as the auxiliary to the original Ku Klux Klan. That post-war Klan was disbanded, but the sorority was not. The sworn aim of the Aunty Belles was then, is now, and forever will be to protect the image of the Southern Man. Thus, when it became known that young Mr. Brainsong II was going to publish the book that would—I am certain Miss Attica feared—eclipse the work of Stark Young and even that of William Alexander Percy and that that book would be composed of virtually all the “notes” in the ledgers of Leland Shaw, Miss Attica’s task was clear.

It was not so much that young Mr. Brainsong II might in fact be a sodomite, it was that the absent Shaw exemplified and magnified in what he had written everything that was abhorrent to her—namely, pusillanimous, unmanly behavior; mental instability (schizophrenia); weakness of character; and intellectualism, as well as perhaps even a certain degree of effeminacy.

Readers would know that Shaw was . . . a Southern male. The thought of it was terrible.

“Sailing,” in either portion of the two-part novel, is an abstraction based on Leland Shaw’s firm hope that if the “high water” came he could find his way back home to the Delta. The title of Shaw’s “work” and of the novel is a play on W. B. Yeats’s poem “Sailing to Byzantium.” In *Sailing to Allu-*

vium, however, there is no actual sailing of any kind. What there is in this bumbling burlesque is an unforgettable cast of characters deeply rooted in the Mississippi Delta, a place both real and imaginary. The novel revolves around obsessions, underneath which lies the dark history of a class conflict that existed in the Deep South, not among black and white but between the white “haves” and the white “have-nots.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1938, John Pritchard grew up in the Mississippi Delta, a place so peculiar that it may have forced him to write. He lives in Memphis, Tennessee, where he has taught college English, written jingles, and worked in advertising and PR. In the 1960s, Pritchard worked as a copyboy and then as a news clerk for the *New York Times*. In the 1970s, he wrote lyrics on Music Row in Nashville, where his songs were recorded by some of the major labels: Warner Bros., RCA, and A&M. The author has also worked as a deputy sheriff. Barnes and Noble named his *Junior Ray* one of their Top Ten Sensational Debut Novels for 2005. It was followed in 2008 by a sequel, *The Yazoo Blues*, and now in 2013, by *Sailing to Alluvium*. A fourth installment, *The Quitman County Bathhouse*, is in progress.



SAILING TO ALLUVIUM



ALSO BY JOHN PRITCHARD

Junior Ray (2005)

The Yazoo Blues (2008)

Sailing to Alluvium

A Novel

JOHN PRITCHARD

NEWSOUTH BOOKS

Montgomery

NewSouth Books
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Preface

A Timely(-ass) Reminder from McKinney Lake

The Delta might appear plain to some, but it is dark and mysterious to those who know it. This low place of mostly legend and stage is not really a region at all; it is a psycho-topographic construct unlike anything else in the known world. And it is indeed a mystery—a mystery made of myth and of truth, so tightly interwoven that one is just as easily the other . . . and the people who “made” this enormous, deep Southern river-bottom complexity were in turn made by *it*.

The mystery is multi-dimensional. It can be *heard* in the genius of the incomparable Afro-Deltan single notes and chords of B. V. Roy’s heart-piercing guitar, and it can be *felt* in the exquisite clear-eyed craftsmanship and point-blank, polished, high-octane prose of Steven Yarville, as well as in the eloquent beauty and brilliant accuracy of Teoc Longshot’s essays.

The Delta can be *seen* rather perfectly in the magnetic, rich, unreachable distances of Bill Dunsipp’s graphic art and in the camera’s captured magic of Jane Rayner Borden’s golden metaphysical light. The photogeneity of the land is also locked in the eye’s profound understanding of place-as-meaning by the photographic work of Becky Washington. And one can see the shape of time itself—shot clean—through the fourth-dimensional, indelible veracity of Madeline Romana Clay’s black-and-white lens.

Even the Delta’s roads do not obey the ordinary laws of physics. My father, a man who dealt in epiphanies and from whom I got, if not the absolute truth, always something extraordinary and far better, told me the engineers had had to put curves every now and then in Highway 61 to keep it from leaving the earth, because without the curves it would be a *line-tangent* that would not follow the curvature of the planet’s surface and

would go straight out into space.

As I grew older I discovered that Highway 61 did leave the earth, curves and all. No road anywhere between Lake Cormorant and Eagle Bend is an ordinary road. They all rise above the surface of the expected.

An awful lot of the Delta is *inside* the Deltans, located, Dad believed, in special fiction glands; that kind of intimacy with a piece of the earth may be why much of the Delta's history is fiction and truth becomes elastic.

—MCKINNEY LAKE

Publisher's Note to Readers

Junior Ray has benefitted from the facilitational services of two people: In his first book, eponymously entitled *Junior Ray*, it was young Mr. Owen G. Brainsong II who “interviewed” the writer, or more accurately in Junior Ray’s case, the “talker.” In the second book, *The Yazoo Blues*, Junior Ray’s guide and editorial assistant was McKinney Lake, who has just spoken to the reader of *Sailing to Alluvium* in the preceding “Preface.”

As it turned out—and as will be explained by Junior Ray in the first chapter—McKinney Lake and young Mr. Brainsong II agreed to help him with this task. Thus, both will serve Junior Ray (Mr. Loveblood) and reader alike, as literary and historical guides and as expositors on many matters, while simultaneously, in the main and for the most part, supporting Junior Ray in their best capacity as that of just plain good friends and necessary “company”—for as Junior Ray tells the reader, “. . . I just figured I’d go at it all alone. . . . But I couldn’t do it. . . . So I went, hat in hand, to McKinney and also to Brainy and begged their ass to do what they did before, just one mo time, and they said Yes, they would, and now I am back . . . on the fukkin track!”

In the pages that follow, both Lake (“—ml”) and Brainsong (“—ogbii”) have inserted footnotes where necessary to clarify Junior Ray’s narrative.

Pro Log¹

JUNIOR RAY LOVEBLOOD

Forty years ago I'da said foodledoodle² to all of that *gabuffalo* McK-inney just told you about the Delta. But now I know—or at least I have been able to see—that what McKinney has wrote is the goddam truth. You may remember in my first book I said everything has changed down here except me, but the fact is that's not exactly so no more. It was then, of course. I don't know what happened. I didn't get no smarter nor no dumber. I guess I just got older. Crap.

Anyway, I do not always understand everything McKinney is talking about, but even if I don't, I am confi-DENT she's right just as a matter of principle. And I do have one or two muthafukkin principles even if you might not think so. The thing is if you're a *R-thur*, which is what I have become, and if you're older, which is also what I have become, you have to think a good bit more than you'd normally expect to have to.

Plus, I have come to see that a lot of the changes aint so bad. For instance, I don't really give a shit whether that Worthless Nigga Ezell can now vote, mainly, *one*, cause he don't never do it, and *two*, even if he did, him and me is mostly always for the same goddam candidate, even if the particular greedy, lyin, power-lustin politicking fukhed of the moment is black himself. I don't care. It's white people that ruint the world. And, I suppose the reason Ezell and me is in the same canebrake together is because I have come

1 After being informed of the proper spelling of “Prologue,” the author declared he “diddn want no yew-eeez on the end of [his] word 'cause it looked like something a queer might do.” No amount of explaining or urging, nor pointing out that there was no “q” in the word, was enough to change Mr. Junior Ray Loveblood's position, which has no more permanency than that of a sparrow.—ml

2 Junior Ray would most certainly not have said “foodledoodle.”—ml

to realize that me and him has more we agree on than what we don't—in other words I now see it crystal-ass clear that Ezell and me was in the same position all along when it come to this place and them Planters (Big Shot Muthafukkas!). And bygod still are.

You do need to know, though, that the title of this new book is really only the title of half of it. In fact it's rilly just the title of PART TWO, which is actually a semi-separate-ass book, itsef, a larger version of which—like the en-tire stick 'a the whole baloney!—was supposed to be published somehow or another by young Mr. Brainsong II, but so far he aint got around to it. So my PART TWO is “selections” from his Notes of Leland Shaw. And, if you remember, you saw some of that horsefluff in my first book.

So, here it is in a fukkin flea skin: You'll just find “selections” here; whereas down the line some time soon, I reg'n, Brainy is going to publish just about all of Shaw's “Notes.”

Anyway, to keep from bein confusin, if you just call the whole fukkin book *Sailing to Alluvium*, and you'll be in the right rabbit field. Aint no sense in getn too technical.

You may remember that those so-called “Notes” was the googah that Shaw wrote in all them *ledgers* I give to young Mr. Brainsong II when he came here some years ago to be my *interviewer*, and it was what I then told him that become my first book, which, as you know, they named after my ass. As you also know, young Mr. Brainsong II came to the Delta, and right here to St. Leo, wantn to take a look at—and to get hold of!—all that fukkin goopydoo of Shaw's that I happened to have kept, stored up in a closet at my house. Why I had even kept that stuff I just couldn say. But I did.

Anyway, they decided this time to include PART TWO—and by *they* I mean young Mr. Brainsong *the Second*, McKinney, and the publisher!—anyhow, *they* only did it because some fat old butt-wad four-eyed professor over at the university said he “strongly believed” Shaw's crapola was “highly relevant.” But I had to ast mysef: “What the fuk does that mean?”

I coulda told you everything you wanted to know and showed you a little piece or two of Shaw's crazy so-called “Notes” like I did in the first book, and that, to me, woulda been way more'n enough of Shaw to last my ass, and yours as well, for a hunnud years. But, oh hell no!—Every-fukkin-body

had to chime in and put *PART TWO* in MY goddam book. Sumbiches. And goddammit, McKinney went right along with it!

I s'pose you do realize this book, *number three*, more or less makes a *Delta Trio*; only there's gonna be a fourth one, so I expect we're lookin at a possible quartet. I like to think of my "talkin" books sorta like they was singers without no musical instruments or nothing, you know, kinda like them Church'a ChrEYEsters doin it *Acapulco*!³

But back to what I was tellin you: *Natchaly*, young Mr. Brainsong was all for it, too, because he has what he calls a "vested interest" in seeing his *editing-work* get spread around out there in the coksukkin world, mostly amongst a buncha beard-sportn, tea-sippin college muthafukkas setn around in skinny-ass chairs, holdin little flowery-ass tweety-tweet tea cups with their pinky fingers stuck out. Young Mr. Brainsong II says havin some of his new "publication" in my book will give him a kind of *pre-ass*-publication toward his forthcoming actual *publication* publication, if you know what I mean, and which, I do have to tell you, is what coulda got his ass finally killed.

If I'da had my way the title of the new book—MY fukkin book—*PART ONE*—*this one here*—woulda been something on the order of:

How Voyd and Me—With the Help of Our Stethoscopes and Po-Lice Chief Secundus J. Ship, Plus That Worthless Nigga Ezell, Along with Judge "Rusty" Justiss Jr., and a Favor from Multiple-Agent Eagle Swoop—Put an End to the Death Threats Young Mr. Brainsong Was Getn Through the U.S. Mail and Nailed Miss Attica Rummage for Killin Three Innocent Sumbiches on Purpose . . . by Mistake.

That run-down right there, woulda pretty much summed it up, and if you was interested you coulda read on to see how we done it. Plus, it woulda saved the Publisher some money because it would have filled up the whole cover of the book and there wouldn't been no need for no fancy artist.

I'D BE LYIN IF I said I diddn like the sound of my own voice. But who the fuk don't? The fact is most people aint inter-rested in but one thing, and that's their own *sevs*. I am not no different.

I have come to love being a *talkin'* book-writer. On the other hand,

3 Usage may be attributed to Ray Stevens and John Ragsdale.—ml

it is possible the world needs another *write'n*-writer like the city of Meffis needs another *crack-ho* . . . or a goddam bobbakew joint. Anyway, the point here is you're about to get a two-for-one deal, and I expect *women*—who, you and I know, can't never resist a bargain—especially a bargain with a buncha new “recipes”!—which they will find in this new book, in PART ONE—and then also they'll get to read Shaw's dumb-ass poetry in PART TWO, which, as you know, is sure to have em all *oooin* and *aahhin*—will be dyin to buy the book. So I guess I can't totally keep bad-mouthin Shaw. Anyway, my experience as a fukkin R-thur has led my ass to see that *women* will go for just about any kind of a book that has recipes. They'll fall in love with a fartn dog if the sumbich has recipes, or, ChrEYEst!—forget the dog and the book, women'll go for just for the recipes *a-gotdam-lone!*

Whereas most men . . . don't give a dynamite-shit about recipes, even if they're expert cooks, which a lot of em are. Plus, they would probably rather eat a cold paper plate of week-old boiled okra on a bed'a rock-hard grits than ever—and I mean *ever!*—read one single-ass page of poetry. But they'll love to hear about what happens in PART ONE when Voyd and me become diketectives.

There you have it.

I wouldna never thought for a minute nothing like what I'm about to pass on to you could ever have happened. On the other hand, I am not surprised by none of it. And when people ast me when all this I'mo tell you about went on . . . I just say it's all more like *up-around now* than it was, but it was *before* the time I talked my first book. In other words I had not yet become a R-thur.

Also, McKinney called my ass a “shaggy” redneck, and I said, “Fuk that, McKinney. I aint *shaggy* one goddam bit!” And she said, “Well, Junior Ray it's ‘figurative,’ and it's not all that bad a thing to be.” That lost my ass, but, if McKinney says I am one then bygod I “figure” I'm lucky, even if, as I have said, I aint especially bushy. I do shave and get my hair cut on a regular basis over at the Beauty Bin, which is a ladies' beauty salon, and that's because the City Barber Shop and the other one, McCain's, has been closed for a long-ass time now. So, anyway, I go to the coksukkin beauty parlor for a haircut, and Claudette, who does the snippin, calls it a fukkin

“style.” ChrEYEst! It aint a style, it’s a goddam haircut! . . . Day-um.

When I was a lot younger, I believed I was just fine the way I was, but that turned out not to be true, and I would like to say right now that I have goddam fukkinwell improved. And that is probably the single most reason that I, *one*, become a historian and, *two*, near ’bout become a philosopher, and, *three*, got myself involved with *litter-tour*—although McKinney believes if you’re a Mississippian that is not so unusual—and she pointed out that even though Mississippians may not read or think much, they sure as hell can write like a muthafukka and can start talkin the minute they’re born and keep it up till the goddam cows come home . . . from, I guess, wherever the fuk it is they’ve been to.

Anyhow, if all of what she says is true, I’m alive to tell the tale.

This whole story I am getting ready to th’ow on your ass has three killings; a possibly murderous old woman; a definitely murderous younger woman; Voyd and me; a buncha other, no-doubt lethal-ass, largely Delta women, some of which you won’t never see, called *The Aunty Belles*; Secundus Shipp; Judge Russell “Rusty” Justiss Jr.; plus a few other muthafukkas you don’t yet know about. It includes actual death threats wrote in handwriten which was wrote down, put in a en-velop, stamped, and sent to young Mr. Brainsong II—all because word got out he was aiming to publish some more of Leland Shaw’s *Notebooks*, which Shaw wrote on all them goddam commissary⁴ ledgers. And you’ll also get an explanation, which may have been provided by a goddam *bird*, on how that submarine I told you about in the first book was able to come up the Mississippi River to the place where me and Voyd found it. And, bygod, you’ll finally see some kind of a’ reason, possibly even a double one, why Leland Shaw’s footprints disappeared. Plus, you’ll probably believe it.

YOU RECALL IT WAS young Mr. Brainsong II who was my *interviewer* on the first book I ever *talked*. The crazy fukka had been living in *Lost Angeleez* where he was teaching at some big-ass college. Before that I think he *DID live* in Cinci-fukkin-nati, wherever that is, but I believe, like most people, he moved from there out West. Anyway, what you need to know is that,

4 Plantation office and store.—ml

from where he was hangin out—way out there in *Cala-diklikin-fornia*—he finally moved his ass right here to St. Leo!

It also turns out he, too—like, I guess, the whole fukkin rest of the goddam world—is a queer, just like his uncle, and has got hissef a boyfriend, but Voyd and me don't give a crap about none of that because it has further come to be we truly love and admire young Mr. Brainsong the Second and so, now, as you already know, we call his ass “Brainy”—which, I am certain you bygod have come to realize, he dam-sure is. Plus, I'mo tellya, anybody that tries to fuk over him or don't treat him right is gon have to deal with me and Voyd—well, mainly with me . . . cause I don't know if Voyd's up for a scrap.

Queers is like bird dogs and coon hounds. Coksukkin is just bred into em. And they can't help being queers no more'n a Blue Tick can stop chasin' coons or a pointer can keep hissef from pokin' his nose at a covey of quail. I finally just come to see all that *because* I couldn think of no other excuse for bein' a queer. So, I said, “That's got to be it. There ain't no other *sign'tific-ass* way they can be the way they are!”

I don't know. Sometimes it seems like a lotta sumbiches in this world who's got any sense or who does something unusual—and possibly great as well—is one way or another gon turn out to be some kind of a queer. But the way I see it, you got to pick your queers, namely the ones you like and who likes you, and, well, goddammit, fuk the rest.

Anyhow, just as in the first “book I talked,” I will let you look at a little bit of the other stuff Leland Shaw wrote down, and then in PART TWO of *this* book, you can see a lot more of it if you want to, especially if you're a woman, but even what's in the book ain't, by a longshot, all of what that crazy sumbich wrote. As I have told you, it is this and more of that pile of paper-ized bird farts that Brainy was going to get published and *for which*, it turns out, he was apt to have got his ass killed.

But, now—without “*whichin*” mysef to death—most all of that goofy Leland Shaw crap-oleum, as you know, I personally think is horse-shit. But, other people feel like it's *litter-tour* and think it's goddam *poetry*! Furthermore, they say Shaw, that sunnavabitch—who, truthfully, I really don't hate so much no more even though, as General Forrest mighta said, I do try *to*

keep up the scare—anyway, back to “they-say,” *there are those who claim* that googoohead Shaw is way-ass better at being a poet than *that other marshmella fellow* down in Greenville—the one that’s been dead quite a long time, you know, William-Ass *Peepeetweety*, or sumpm or other. I’m referring to the sumbich who wrote a famous book called *Lanterns or Your Levis* or some such double-clutchin possum-slobber as that.

But, hole-ass on! I need to remind you again that at the end of each and every chapter in PART ONE, you are going to see one of my famous recipes. I gave you a few of em in *The Yazoo Blues*. But, *Son!* You will *love* these other delicious-ass little *sukkumups*.

And you’ll love this, too. An eighteen-wheeler turned over at the Coldwater River bridge on Highway Number 6 at Marks, and two hippopotamuses *ekscaped* out of the trailer and loped off into the Coldwater. Voyd called me on the cellphone and told me about it and said he heard that all the state troopers, po-licemans, constables, sheriff’s deputies, volunteer firefighters, and every swingindik in the whole State of Miss’ssippi’s *Gay Men’s Fish Commission*⁵ has done come out to try to catch them sumbiches. I’ll find out what I can and get back to you. These days it just looks like if it aint one fukkin kinda *crisis*, it’s a goddam nuther. But that don’t necessarily bother me none.

5 What Junior Ray’s friend D. W. thought, as a child, the Game and Fish Commission was called. —ml

SAILING TO ALLUVIUM



PART ONE

Chapter One

Brainy (Young Mr. Brainsong II) Reappears—Death Threats—The Threeters Want to Protect an Image—Junior Ray Begins a New Masterpiece—A Sex Doll “Facilitator”—McKinney Returns—Part Two Is Mentioned—“Life Aint Got No Plot”—Recipe No. 1: Delta Catfish Deluxe!

It was the goddamdest thing. I hadn heard nothin from young Mr. Brainsong Number Two—or even nothin *about* him—for the longest time, when, one day, there he is. He knocks on my door, right here in St. Leo, and says, “Mr. Loveblood, I very much need to talk to you and get your advice.”

Holy Life-Ruinin Cut Worm! That knocked me back. Not many people ever wanted my *advice*, and I didn’t want none of theirs neither. Anyway, I said, “Hell, yeah, *Young Mister Brainsong*, get your ass on in here.” The po’ bastuhd looked like he hadn slep’ in a year. So, I told him I could see something was bothering him pretty bad, and I ast him what I could do to hep—and what the fuk was it? Plus, I said, “Call me Junior Ray.”

“Thank you,” he said, “and you can call me Brainy.”

Then, he come out with it: “I have received death threats . . . Junior Ray, three, to be exact.”

I said, “Jeezus ChrEYEest! What the fuk would a nice-ass sumbich like you be get’n death threats for?”

He said, “Apparently for letting it be known that I intend to publish

The Notebooks of Leland Shaw.”

He handed me one of the letters. It was already took out of the envelope and was unfolded. This is what it said—

*Hazardous Sodomite! And afterwards, we shall send you to the Maker
your very existence insults.*

Whoa! I have to say this was the first time I ever knowed young Mr. Brainsong II—I mean to say, Brainy!—had ever worked as a soda jerk. I could see, right then, there was some strange-ass doodywah already harnessed up and in the field. Then I kept on readn:

This is a travesty!¹ Our fair land has suffered enough! No more! There will be no more! This outrage you plan, which, I assure you, we have known about for some time, must be stopped. Yes! You cannot deny that you plan to publish the mentally disturbed scribblings of that embarrassing Leland Shaw whose public exposure in the book you helped to produce some years ago through your collaboration, if not in fact your “collusion,” with Mr. Junior Ray Loveblood was an assault on all of us who love our Southern Culture and have sworn to protect it—to protect it indeed, along with the image of our Southern men, from pseudo-literary discoverers, Northern liberal literati, intellectual opportunists, nest-feathering academics, and pusillanimous Ganymedes, all of which, my dear Mr. Brainsong Number Two, describes yourself. Therefore:

Whereas: We have suffered the shame of Mr. Erskine Caldwell;

Whereas: We have endured the horror of Mr. William Faulkner;

Whereas: We have quietly borne the pathetic mischaracterizations of Mr.

Walker Percy;

Whereas: All named above are traitors to our proud but defeated Southern Nation;

We here-in anonymously serve notice upon you once again—you abominable Antinoüs—that you shall not live to see your proposed work in print.

1 Some have declared that although the writer was apparently confusing the word “travesty” with “tragedy,” the events that unfold are exactly in that specific category of satire, i.e. “travesty.” I was of course terrified; yet, I tend to agree that “travesty” precisely names what took place.—ogbII

For what it may be worth, we can stomach Mr. Loveblood because no decent human being can take him seriously, but there is a danger—a monstrous danger when it comes to poetry!—which is the core of Mr. Shaw’s so-called “masterpiece”! And we who are ever vigilant realize that some who read it, though they be pure and entirely innocent, may be taken in unaware.

Why can’t you find within the shallows of your being the nobleness of heart to edit and seek the publishing of something written by our beloved Stark Young? Albeit he was from the Hills. Still . . .

Oh, no. You intend to foist upon a credulous and largely non-Southern and of course non-Deltan readership the works of a misleading mental defective, one who not only hallucinates but who embodies the very shape of weakness and instability; yet, worse, exhibits a shameful lack of true manliness.

Why can’t you promote something by Joyce Kilmer?

Oh, no. You are worse than that twisted Flannery O’Connor whose work has twisted the mere thought of the American South into one of disastrous grotesquerie. My Lord and Fathers! Where did she get those people!

Why can you not publish a delightful collection of Allen Tate?

Oh, no. You, sir, are beneath even the abysmal muck of that horrible Mr. Tennessee Williams! To think, he sat in our houses! He drank our Co’-Colas. He fanned himself with our fans! Surely he knew the Delta was not as it was made to seem in his plays and—it causes me to feel ill just to recall the shock of it all—in those motion pictures! Baby Doll did not live in Benoit. And her people were not like that! She would not have taken up with a foreigner. Or at least not that particular foreigner.

We were swindled by Mr. Williams, but we are on to you. You are worse than General Butler—I do mean “Beast” Butler—down in New Orleans. But you, young Mr. Brainsong II, are more harmful to our treasured image as the greatest example of civilization’s finest hour than even the perverse calumniations of Mr. Robert Penn Warren.

Why? Why!?! Do you not wish to announce the loveliness of our region, our fertile fields, our haunting swamps—especially those in our beloved Mississippi Delta—by showing the world once more the exquisite prose and poetry of William Alexander Percy? He did not feel it necessary, as did Mr. Shaw, to invent his own unintelligible language, nor did he believe he could converse

in the tongues of marsh hawks!

Oh, No, Sir. You are convinced it is somehow your duty to attack us en derriere by allowing the universe to view our men as babbling hallucinators who plop their psychotic drooling upon the pages of unused plantation commissary ledgers!

Why can't you publish the works of Sir Walter Scott?

Oh, No! Sirrah, you shame us ! We cannot permit it. And we intend to put an end to your ability to humiliate our countrymen. If General Nathan Bedford Forrest were alive today, he would thrash you and send you back whence you were spawned.

Alack a day! Time has taken the General, and he is no longer with us save in our hearts and history, thus it is we who will do his work for him and for the sake of who we are, what we stood for, and in the name of all we are taught to cherish about our illustrious heritage. We will do the General's work. But you, young Mr. Brainsong II, you shall not do yours.

Your most humble & obedient servant,

Anonymous

Holy nit spit. If this'd been on TV, this is where you'da heard the music go *DADA DA DUM!* Anyhow, I had to set there real still for a minute on that one before, natchaly, I ast him: "Why would any muthafukka on this goddam earth want to kill your ass for that!?" See, I was thinkin' if somebody was going to kill Mr. Brainsong's nephew—remember, Voyd and me calls him *Brainy* now—over what Leland Shaw wrote in them weird-ass notebooks, then he probably shoulda been dead two or three times before now for helpin' put out that first book on me!

And I was right. Brainy, setn there that day in my livin room, claimed the threaters wuddn too happy about that neither. Then he told me that all three of the letters had said just about the same thing: namely, that the sender, or senders—whoever he, she, or they was—is de-fukkin-terminated that no more "*works of so-called literature uncomplimentary to our way of life shall be published.*"

He futher told me that the theater or threaters is hell-bent on sandbaggin' and generally preventn anything that "*does not portray Mississippi and*

Mississippians as the brave, intelligent, cultured, and decent muthafukkas² they are from ever again being foisted on the American reading public."

I said, "I didn't know *there was one*." I really don't have much knowledge about the American reading public; mainly I meant that bein complimentary wuddn something I normally gave much thought to and that, personally I didn't give a shit what people said about Mississippi because as far as I was concerned whatever anybody said about Mississippi and the whole bunch of know-nothin pekkawoods, Planters, politicians, bootleggers, beauty queens, bankers, and cornholers was *all* true—and if it wuddn, it probably ought to be or was gon be. Plus, I didn't know what "foisted" was, but it sure as skeetshot did not sound like something I want to ever do. I figured it might be some kind of a word people in California come up with. Maybe they foisted a good bit. I don't know. Still, I didn't want anything to get by me. Fukkum.

But here's the thing that caught my attention. Brainy said the letters wuddn postmarked in California. They was *mailed from Clarksdale*, Mississippi! And I thought, damn, I'll be a red-headed *step*-sheep! Even Voyd wouldna been that fukkin dumb . . . to mail something like that from *Clarksdale*.

Anyway, it was still hard for me to understand why somebody'd want to kill Mr. Brainsong's nephew just for little or nothin such as what he told me about. On the other hand, I remembered my own need to shoot the shit out of Leland Shaw. That hept me to see the picture somewhat clearer, and that's when I realized I was getn ready to become a diketective . . . a *private* diketective.

And the first suspect I thought about was nonefukkinother than Miss Attica Rummage!

Sumpm else, though, was that the threatERS—and I am indicating that at the time we thought there mighta been more than one, because you need to bear in mind young Mr. Brainsong said whoever was write'n the letters always referred to themsevs as "*we*"—appeared to feel like the rest of the world would think all Mississippians was silly-headed, crazy-assed, and more or less totally outa their fukkin minds like Shaw was. But I told Brainy I

2 Junior Ray's word.—ml

figured the threaters was about a day late and seventy-five cents short and that *that* dog was already off the truck and chasin chickens.

NOW, ABOUT THIS BOOK: I may not can write worth a shit, but I sure-as-Shuqualak³—which is a town in Miss’ssippi but it AINT in the Delta—can talk. And as you know that is the way I write my books.

Anyway, when I began to go to work on this fukkin new masterpiece, I just didn’t feel I could ast McKinney to hep me with it, although, after a while, she did. Plus, since I am talking a good deal about young Mr. Brainsong—Brainy!—and his *problem* with the threaters, I guaran-dam-tee you he wuddn in no shape to be carryin’ on no interview nor no kind of facilitate’n with me, nor doin no kinda *extra* book work at all. I could see—and Voyd could, too—that them letters he had got was worryin the crap out of him and outright visibly-ass aging the sumbich.

Anyway, I just figured I’d go at it all alone, so I set in to try to do what I *been* doin: Namely, talking into a goddam *recordn* thing, and this time just that, plus, of course, getn Miss Minnie MacDonald to type it all up for me on a floppy. The publisher, NewSouth, said it was okay with them. So I went up to Meffis to the big *CheapCo store*—out there the other side of the city, half-ass way to Nashville—and bought me a fairly good little cassette recorder. I didn have one of my own and, durin the other two times, I had used Brainy’s and McKinney’s. Then I came on back home to St. Leo and went to work.

But, I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t get nothin done setn there in the house on my own. And I knew what it was. I had to have somebody *there*, like McKinney or Brainy—not just *anybody* but *somebody* nonethefukkinless—to look at and to talk my goddam book to.

Thinkin I could fool mysef, I bought another one of them blow-up sex dolls like the one Mad and me stuck up in the sand out in front of his tent flap when he was down there on Horn Island in the GuffaFukkinMexico, with his pet one-legged parrot, Gene LaFoote. But me and the new blowup doll didn last two minutes. Frankly I don’t know how ANY sumbich can stand to *look at* one nem things, much less poke his deeber up in one! That’s

3 shook’alak.—ml

way beyond my ass. ChrEYEst. Them things make a Holstein look like a moo-vie star. That's a joke, muthafukka. Anyway, you sure as hell can't talk to one nem wide-eyed sex balloons! And you definitely wouldn want anybody to know you tried. Uh-oh. I guess I just let *that* cat out of the crokersack.

So I went, hat in hand, to McKinney and also to Brainy and begged their ass to do what they did before, just one mo time, and they said Yes, they would, and now I am back . . . *on* the fukkin track!

Plus, as I have told you, and because I think it is important in connection with what all went on, I *am* going to give you a little teaspoon sip ever' now and then of some of that googah Leland Shaw wrote in his *Notebooks*. Then, in *PART TWO* of this book, you will be able to see a bunch more of it that Brainy was getting ready to have published by them coksukkas out in Califukkinifornia.

For one thing, when you see it, it'll help you keep in mind how fukkin crazy Leland Shaw was and how even more crazy them *threaters*—or that *threater*—was for wantn to kill anybody over it. Kiss *my leg!* I just can't feature it. Anyway, from time to time, I do promise to hand you some of Shaw's wild-ass stuff.

Funny thing, though, it's like *the threaters* didn much care if Shaw was nuts; they just wuddn in favor of *tellin* anybody about it. That right there told me it was most likely a woman or more than one of em. In addition, I guess that's why it has always looked to me like the up-standing people who were supposed to be in their right minds are, a lot of the time, crazier than a Sugar-Ditch lizard.

Now, one other thing, and this is super-ass important: Somebody—I ain' gon say who—said to me the other day, "*Junior Ray, you've got to make certain you craft a tight, flawless plot line in your next work.*" That's word for word what they said, and of course that person did have a point. That individual would be right on the fukkin money IF I was gon be write'n an actual *g'novel* with a made-up story and such. But, as some of you well know, that is not the case with what I "talk" about in my books, because, bygod, I aint makin none of this up. I'm just tellin you the honest-to-God, Gospel-ass truth about what happened, in the best way I can. And if it sounds like it's something that's been made-up, then I guess that's at least

part of the point of me tellin you about it. You wouldn't want to hear about something that was ordinary, and when you know that what I am tellin you is the swear-on-the-coksukkin-Bible, undiluted fingerfukkin *facts*, then, sumbich, you understand the place and all this they call the Mississippi Delta. That's mainly my objective.

So, fuk a tight-ass plot. Hell, anything with a *plot* IS made up! Life aint got no plot . . . though most of us end up in one.⁴

AW-ITE. IF YOU'RE LIKE me, and I reckon you might be, then you're always up for sumpm to eat, so check out *this* book's "first" of my famous recipes, which you can add to those you already have in your family-ass edition of *The Yazoo Blues*:

Junior Ray's Famous Mississippi Delta Catfish Delux!

You cook this up with a ground sirloin slab-ette, sawtayed in olive oil, garlic, & black pepper, topped with a real thin layer of pure white grits covered very lightly with grated, sharp-ass Vermont cheddar, over which your Mississippi Delta Catfish filet—likewise sawtayed but in canola oil, cayenne, & basil—is laid and topped with (1) mushrooms that's been sawtayin along with your ground sirloin slab-ette, and (2) a piece of fukkin parsley.

⁴ Attributed to H. R. Williams. —ml

Chapter Two

What Caused the Problem—The Notebooks of Leland Shaw—A “Twenty-Tweet” Excerpt—Letter to the Chickasaw—Poets Are Buttholes—Junior Ray Wrote a Poem, “Gollee Moses”—Dyna Flo’s Littlest Girl, MiniVan—Recipe No. 2: Junior Ray’s Famous Game Pie

Right here is a little sniff of what’s caused all the problem—and why young Mr. Brainsong was getn them death threats through the U.S. Mail. If you’re like me you won’t be able to figure out why anybody would want to kill a sumbich over the following, which is what Brainy’s got as a beginning to his forth-fukkin-coming “Sailing to Alluvium: The Notebooks of Leland Shaw.”

You’re about to read something that only a bunch of goddam tweety-tweet women, possibly up North, and prob’ly a few alcoholic-ass queers in prob’ly New Or-leans would ever even want to look at. And after you see it, I have some more things to tell you—stuff you might not want to believe could come out of a human head . . . cause frankly it was, and is, the goddamdest thing I ever saw or heard of. Anyway, here’s what I was talkin about:

Leland Shaw, from Ledger No. 2: Letter to the Chickasaw

Therefore, I feel I should write a letter, as a matter of courtesy, to the Chickasaw, which will allow me explain who I am and how I happen to be here. But that is a fatuous proposal. Though I know who I am, it is not entirely clear how I got where I am. Even so, I seem to be compelled to constantly imagine I have to explain it all, and all of it is funnier still when I realize I am writing to myself and not at all to the Chickasaw who, frankly, would not now be interested in the subject. I am sure my great-great-grandparents would be amused. I know perfectly well there are no Chickasaw nearby, except in Volume “A” in the Chancery Clerk’s office and, lost but loosely adrift, in the blood of some of my fellow Celts.

Did you, O noble autochthonoids, know we came here expecting quite a lot? Yet, what did we find? There you were, having already met and admired the British, quite comfortably adapted to our ways, planting cotton and corn and listening to the slaves sing about Jesus, in Chickasaw of course.

Where was the mystery? Where was the exotic? There was more to life than cotton . . . somewhere else.

And so I am compelled to ask the question: Could you not have retained something of your ancient origins far beyond the Bering Strait? Were the caribou worth it after all? Were the giant sloths a claw, acreep, when first you found your foot in the Land of Colonel Reb? I think not. You were the new ones, and all those others ran off and disappeared with the waters, swift disease, mastodons, and the last glaciation. I always say, if the polar cap fits, wear it.

*Nevertheless,
I have discovered your timeless ways
as they were before the taint of contact
with your unfellow man.
And now I know how to walk like thought
across the naps of popular girls—swift,
barely visible,
and indefinite.*

You could have been the communicator. We would have been the receivers. You could have called. We might have answered. I see it all so clearly now. Communicators like to say the words. Receivers love to hear them. The division is basic to our species. Normally, of course, I would rather speak than listen, but ancestrally I am certain the reverse would have been true, if only for a moment. And, as I am sure you know by now, moments are everything. They seem to be all I have. The question is where to spend them. “How” is not an issue. But “where” is of the utmost importance, which is why I am trying so hard to find my way home.

*It is only by night
that we see your darker bodies shining in the starlight*

*as night and stars and cold fall all around to cloak me as I move
in search—in search of searching I sometimes think,
though I call it by another name: the search for home,
where, desperate as I am to find it, I cannot say
what I shall do once I'm there . . .
seek to leave it, I suspect,
for the sake of more adventure.
Oh, like the sailor who longs for the shore,
once he's seen Spanish Marie,
he feels again
the hunger for the sea.*

This is what will happen to me; thus, I will stick with the quest for high water and the way home. I am a vibration of firm resolve. Energy matters. (ha ha)

There is one thing, however, of which, lately, I have become convinced. They do not make the skin of Chickasaws in rubber.

Conditions improve. The weather is exceptional. There are so many bright, cold, *cold*, clear days, so many stars by night, possibly a number of extremely distant galactic pinpoints and magellanic mist, and, I might add, planets by dawn and evening twilight. Indeed, were I not consumed with the matter and energy of escape and evasion, I might well be content to linger here for while behind the lines.

But that cannot be. I am among foreigners, and I do not mean the Chickasaw or, of course, the Choctaw of the lower Delta and, to some degree, of the greater part of the known Muskogean world. From any contact with these Amerind beings, one might well be up a Creek . . . the sure-enough Muskogee to the East along with the *Alabama* bound.

So much for anthropottery and shard habitat. My people were the latest of the Late Mississippians unless we say the title belongs to the Italians and the Lebanese. Oh, bury me not on the lone praline.

O Masters of Muskogee! How is it that our lives became so intertwined in these winter fields beneath the hawk? We, you and I, thought we were the panther but understand at last we are the mouse. And the killer bird is mostly

circumstance; it is the night that flies by day . . . and not a creature at all in the most important sense.

The enemy is not tangible; therefore we cannot grapple, cannot “come to grips” with its murderous mass. Indeed, its beak protrudes from our frontal lobes; its talons are hidden in the folds of our underpants. We carry the monster. Flea bite us. Goddee smite us.

*Now I find there are jungles in the memory,
jungles of deciduous trees and still water among the cypress.
Dark life moves unseen between the tupelo
and beneath the green softness of the duck moss.
Things are devoured, and things are born.*

*Bad enough there are hawks above and hawks
below that fly upward, fast, like feather rockets
to knock the stuffing from the goose.
And, then, there are the “thingamabobs”
beneath the surface of the slough.*

You Chickasaw are not here at this Barmecide feast in this preposterous Potemkin village, this improbable hallucination that my captors have presented to me as my home—which partly also was your historic home and the home as well of so many of your Okla Falaya, Potato Eating, and Six-Town Choctaw brothers . . . and sisters.⁵ So, except for the rubber skin worn by the enemy, I can say to you the emperor is naked.

I am never taken in by it—even though, I will admit, often I am tempted to think I may be wrong about everything, but then I breathe deeply two or three times and, ultimately, say to myself: “Leland, remember who you are,” and, immediately, I know, without any doubt at all, that whatever it is I am, I

5 The three Divisions of the Choctaw before the Removal were the *Okla Falaya* [Longtown People, i.e., long people/far people], the *Abe Apat Okla* [Potato Eating People], and the *Okla Hannali* [Six-Towns People]. The word *Okla* can be translated as *people*, *nation*, and also as the third-person-plural pronoun, *they*. Further, in Chickasaw *Okla* can mean town. Chickasaw and Choctaw are very close, rather like two dialects of the same language.—ogbII

am not whatever it is they are. And, so, in that way, I keep my perspective, my balance, and my hold on truth.

*With rubber skin they look
like those I've known before,
both white and black, but,
underneath,
I know they are Germans.*

And all the while I look for the land of *mingos*⁶ and Mandingos—although, ha! . . . I forgot. You rascals were insatiable slavers. So much for the Mandingos who, I am certain, just had to shuffle their feet and say *yassuh* or whatever the Chickasaw equivalent of that might be.

But that's okay with me. I know about time. However, when others find out what went on and what happened later with the Chickasaw Freedmen, I'm afraid there'll be skunk stew for Sunday brunch.

Mind you, I'm not down on *you* any more than I am down on *my ancestors*, and that is because the future perspective—along with the various forms of modern ignorance—was not there. They did not have the privilege that comes with retrospect. And, also, lest we—and ye—forget too much, the Mandingos had a hand in it as well—a two-hand grab in fact. When it comes to human history, no one is innocent.

The long and the short of it all is that you stood in the way of our wealth, and we had to frighten you. We had to cheat you. We did it all for ourselves! We had to believe you were not like us . . . my folks, the *true human beings* with golden souls, beloved by God, and endowed with the right of avarice and empowered by a license to take. You trusting Indigenes never stood a chance. Never had a prayer. We were enormous germs who came to attack you with our newly minted modernity. Indeed, that you survived is remarkable and certainly not part of our original plan. We do not like to feel bad about the wrong we do. Thus, your continued presence reminds us, reminds us of ourselves and of the wickedness we merely make into cookies.

We were—and are—a bad lot, O Mingos out of time. We have eaten you.

6 Chickasaw-Choctaw for chiefs.—ogbII

And still, somehow, you allow us to say grace. It is difficult for me to realize that the land I hold so dear is the world we ruined for you. But if your enemy is me and my kind, then, I must say, we are on the same side and share a common cause.

Sincerely,

Leland Shaw

THERE IT IS. AND it's just what you'd expect from a goddam town *sissy*. You know what I'm talkin about. You've seen em—those kind of tall, willowy, wafy-ass coksukkas people always says is “tho aR-tith-tic” and can “play the piano, oooooeenee!” Plus, they'll always make it a big fukkin point to mention: “And he was so good to his *mother!*”

Course, Shaw wuddn all that tall. He wuddn wafy neither. But he did live in the fukkin town. I cannot seem to ever get over hate'n his ass. That don't bother me, but I can see maybe it ought to.

The other thing about it is, people sometimes talk about how Shaw's write'n is so “*beautifully-ass* poetic.” Fuk that. Poets are buttholes. On the other hand, I wrote a poem one time, too, and even sent the sumbich up to Nashville cause I thought it would be a big hit as, not as a' actual song but, you know, like a “resuscitation,” on the Grand Ol' Opry. But I never did hear nothing after I mailed it up there. Fukkum. I coulda been world famous.

Anyway, the real reason I wrote what I'm gon show you is because, you remember my girlfriend, the one over near Sledge, Dyna Flo McKeever?—One of her daughters at that time was havin trouble learning her Bible stories in Sunday School, so I wrote a song—although, as I just said, it's not so much a song as it is sumpm you *say* instead of sing. Anyhow, I wrote it up in order to help the child get the hang of all that ratshit about Moses. Course, I do know that stuff even though I don't believe a goddam *word of none of it. And never did.*

Anyway, here's what I come up with for Dyna Flo's little-est girl, Mini-Van—I called it “Gollee Moses.” Later on I sorta thought I might re-name it “Holy Shit, Muthafukka,” so it would have more of a chance of bein a hit, but I guess I wanted little chirren to be able to hear it, and that's why I had to call it what I did, to make it be nice. And just so you know: I can

rhyme up a—that’s right, you guessed it—a goddam storm! It aint nothin to it. Anyhow, this is it:

GOLLEE MOSES

*It all got started back a long while
When Pharaoh’s daughter was swimmin in the Nile;
She looked in the bushes and saw a little chile
And said, “Gollee Moses!”*

*One day the Lord said Moses, you’re the man
To lead all the Chillun to the Promise’ Land.
Well, Moses struck out with Pharaoh at his heels,
Moses on foot, the Pharaoh on wheels.*

*When they got up to the Red Sea waters,
The chillun ast Moses, “What we gon do?”
And Moses told the Chillun, “Orders is orders,”
And the Chillun of Israel walked right through.
Well, Gollee Moses!*

*Weeeelll, the army of Pharaoh followed after Moses,
But just fo’ the waters covered up their noses,
The whole army said: Gollee Moses!
Moses on a mountain top thinkin very hard,
Long come a cloud, and out jumped God,
Well, Gollee Moses!
The Lord put the Law in Moses’ hand,
Said, Moses, tell the Chillun they better understand,
If they don’t do what these things say,
I’ll wipe out the world in half a day!”
Well, Gollee Moses!*

*Moses told the Lord, “It weren’t none a me,
Just a big epidemic of iniquity!”*

*I gave the Chillun your Ten Commandments,
And they come up with the First Ten Amendments!"*
Well, Gollee Moses!

*Moses come down bout an hour'n a half,
Found all the chillum round a golden calf;
He said, "Chillun, Chillun, what's goin on?"*
They said, "Laughin, dancin, singin a song!"
Well, Gollee Moses.

*Moses told the Chillun, "Y'all make me mad,
jumpin round and actin bad,
But I'mo tell y'all one thing now:
You gonna get rid of that golden cow!"*
Well, Gollee Moses!

*From then on down to this very day,
When folks don't know just what to say,
They open their mouth and bug their eyes,
They take a deep breath and say with surprise:
GOLLEE MOSES!*

It musta worked because when MiniVan got to be eighteen, she took off across the Miss'ssippi River and went to be in one-nem whatchacallit communes over in the Ozark Mountains, near *Your-Eeka* Springs, wherever the fuk that is. Arkansas, I reg'n, which is too far Out West for me. Anyway, the next thing we knew she was working with a bunch of long-haired sumbiches, makin cheese. They was all born-againers. But I have to hand it

7 I admit I have had my doubts about whether Junior Ray actually wrote the above. It is true he possesses a strange talent for rhyming and indeed for rhetorical timing. Without convincing proof to the contrary, I shall have to take his word. He did pop out with a few lines once, just after I had come back to St. Leo. They rather startled me, to wit: *Way back in the Garden of Eden, Adam had it easy, didn do no weedn, but it came to an end one fateful day, when he bit into the apple and heard himself say: Woman is a woodpecker, Man's a tree, I got a hunnud-pound woodpecker peckin on me.*—ml

to em—they worked hard and did pretty well, and their cheese company is called: *Wholly Goats Christian Cheese Company*. Plus, on ever' one of their labels it says *God Works in Mysterious Wheys*. I reckon God will forgive their spellin. ChrEYEest!

You can probably find some of MiniVan's company's cheese if you ever go to a health food store. It aint my kinda cheese, which mostly is bout what you'd expect, that country-store big old yellow hoop. But, MiniVan and the born-againers send their stuff all over everywhere. So you are apt to bump into it if you go anywhere at all, and I mostly don't.

Anyhow, I believe the girl is happy and lives in something called a yorp,⁸ or some such thing, in one big room with a lot of other Christian cheese makers. Plus, Dyna Flo is okay with it all. She always just says MiniVan is doing church work, and leaves it at that. I guess I would like to think it's possible my "song"—my "*resuscitation*"—mighta had something to do with MiniVan's spiritual development.

Dyna Flo's other two chillum—two boys—is in ever' kind of trouble you can think of, and it'd take more'n old Jesus and an extra-virgin Mary to get em out of it. I'm talkin about everything from killin deer outta season to tree rustling—and oh hell yeah!—to makin Crystal Meth on a party boat in Pompey Ditch. You can always figure on seein one or the other of them totally tattooed little shitheads cutn grass and pickin up trash on the side of the highway, in a pair of *aw-inge* coveralls. I don't have nothin to do with their asses! And one neez days somebody's gon shoot em.

Junior Ray's Famous Apple-Black Cherry-and-Grape-(All-at-the-Same-Fukkin-Time) Game Pie!

1. Go get your Browning Sweet Sixteen, and blast the crap out of the game: namely, quail, dove, duck, deer, tweety birds or whatever as long as it's in season and you're willing to eat it—and remember you can't just use one kind of anything: you've got to use at least THREE DIFFERENT wild meats—but that don't include fish. (You can use all

8 A yurt.—ml

the fish you want, some other time, in my *Junior Ray's 9-Step Fukkin Fish Soup*, which you can easily find all laid out in my second book, *The Yazoo Blues*, which, sumbich, if you don't already own a copy, you need to get you one, at a *real* bookstore.)

2. Parboil it all—then pull off the best and most tenderest little pieces and th'ow em in a big bowl so you can take your hand and kind of mash all of it together against one another while you . . .

3. Pop it good with salt and pepper. And as you know I prefer cayenne.

4. Then add the fresh chopped (peeled) apples, sweet seedless green, if possible, Thompson grapes, and those frozen black pitted cherries you read about in the name of this dish, above, and continue to mix up the whole shootn match with your hand—or if you know you ought not to use your hand, get a big-ass spoon or sumpm.

5. And while you're mixin' all that, add a good dose of Mad-Dog 20-20 or M.D. 20-20—which is why down here it is sometimes called *Eye Doctor*—it's a right popular hip-pocket wine better known as Mogen David 20-20. But any half-ass-decent cream sherry will do. Plus, yes, you can use bourbon whiskey, or cognac; that just depends on you—hell, th'ow Co'-Cola in the sumbich if you want to. I don't give a fuk. But don't put in no goddam actual sugar that you can see!

6. When you've done everything I've told you to, above, or are just wo' out with foolin with it, dump ever' bit of it in one-nem ready-made pie crusts. Then set another ready-made pie crust on top of it for a top, and shove it all in the oven on the middle rack at 350 degrees for an hour or until the crust is brown and nice and the smell is ir-refukkin-zistable. You might have to check on it from time to time. Go by your nose.

Chapter Three

Tombo Is Dead as a Muthafukka—Shot with a .410—Turkey Season—The Evans Place—The Visitor’s Tree—Farley Trout Is Dead “as a Busted Balloon”—Steele “Froggy” Waters Swallows a Gig—Miss Attica Knew the Territory—Old Euster Draynum “Was Lazy as a Winter Turtle”—Miz Potts Is Eaten by Beagles—Merigold Is Suspected—The Letters Are Mailed from Clarksdale—Recipe No. 3: Junior Ray’s Famous Valentine Special

They found Tombo Turnage dead as a muthafukka, setn bolt-upright underneath the so-called Visitor’s Tree out there in the woods on the other side of the levee, out on the Cut-Off⁹ on the Evans place, the first day of turkey season.

He was shot just once, right smack in the middle of his chest, with a shotgun, which shouldna been strange but was, *because*, by the number of pellets they found in him—which was No. 7½ shot and sure as shit wuddn no turkey load!—and also by the small *size* of the goddam pattern the blast looked to have been from a .410¹⁰ three-inch shell, and *definitely* not from no .twelve-gauge, nor no .20 or .16!

Plus, whoever done it squeezed the trigger facin DI-rectly at him, right in front of his ass, and, by the look on Tombo’s face when they lifted up the mosquito net he was wearing—like every other sumbich out there in the woods that day—you didn have to be no Sam Spade to know that when ol Tombo seen the shooter it didn cause him no concern at all.

As for the turkeys, I’m confident that you know you hunt them ugly buzzard-headed fukkas in the spring, in April usually, so there’s always a lot of fukkin bugs to contend with. One other thing is that—if you was the murderin-ass shooter—you couldna told for certain if it was even Tombo or

9 An oxbow lake “cut off” from the Mississippi River in 1942 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and nowadays sometimes called Tunica Lake. —ml

10 .410, a small-gauge shogun, usually pronounced “four-ten.” —ml

murderin-ass shooter—you couldna told for certain if it was even Tombo or not you was shootn at. It's like the killer just walked up to him, said, "Good mawnin, Tombo," and blasted him in the chest point-blank, dead-center, kablam. Like I indicated, above, you don't have to be no *valefukkindiktorian* to figure *that* out.

Anyway, all this is mostly what got me to thinkin, because there wuddn nobody on this earth that woulda wanted to shoot Tombo Turnage. That's a fact I know for absolute certain. So, I figured the shooter musta thought Tombo was somebody else . . . such as young Mr. Brainsong II—Brainy!—*because*, see, the Evanses had invited Brainy's citified ass—while Brainy was still in Califukkinifornia—to come out and go turkey hunting after he got to the Delta. Only Brainy had to call em up at the last minute, really just as he was tryin to leave Lost Angeleez, and ast em for a raincheck because he had done caught the fukkin flu and probly wouldn get to St. Leo in time to go on the hunt. And it was the truth, too, because Brainy does not lie. So, a little later, the Evanses *then asked Tombo* did *he* want to come out, and Tombo took em up on it quick as a drive-in fuk.

THORNTON EVANS, THE SUMBICH Tombo had gone huntn with and who owned the land, found Tombo's dead ass right around eleven o'clock that morning, setn there in the woods, already surprisin'ly cold considerin how hot it was, propped up against the Visitor's Tree, about five hours after he heard what he thought was Tombo's shotgun go off. Thornton said sumpm about it give him a funny feeling because it seemed to him the shot was not as loud as he believed it ought to have sounded.

Anyway, when Thornton left the woods hissef, thinkin Tombo woulda hiked on back to headquarters with a turkey, Thornton got back to his commissary on the dry-side of the levee and seen Tombo's car still parked there. Something about that bothered him big time, so Thornton went back over cross the levee, drove as far as he could in his jeep, then walked the rest of the way to where he'd situated Tombo, down under that big white oak Visitor's Tree. Thornton had put Tombo there a good half-hour before daylight, in the hopes that his "visitor" might get hissef a gobler. But, as it turned out, Tombo was the one that got *got*. And there he

was, his gun layin' crosst his legs, the safety on, and hadn't fired a shot.

Miss Elsie Palmer told me a long time ago that Thornton was a Chickasaw, or at least his great-granddaddy was one. I believe it too, cause Thornton, that sumbich, is dark as I don't know what. Yet he don't never mention nothin about him bein a' *Inyan*. Hell, I would.

Anyway, it was April. There it was, hot as a "big-dog," and what air there *was* was already fulla mosquitos. So, natchaly, it was turkey season. And, as I am sure you know, that's the time in the whole fukkin Delta when every good ol' boy—and every goddam Planter, banker, and preacher, and even one or two niggas—drops ever' thing they're doin' just so they can spend mornins before sun-up and late afternoons sweatn their butts off deep in the woods, mostly across the levee in a swarm of wild-ass bugs whilst they set still as a toadstool, chirpin and squeakin and squawk-assin on them goofy little turkey callers, in a cross-eyed concen-fukkin-trated attempt to impersonate a red-hot-to-trot *turkey-ette*, out there in the wilderness, *putt-putt-puttn*-out artificial turkey phone-sex in the hope that *they*, them goddam fat-ass female-turkey impersonators in camouflage, might trick a fifty-pound, love-crazed, buzzard-lookin turkey gobbler—all fanned out and pant'n, with his eyeballs big as a couple of Frisbees, and his tongue hangin' out like a red necktie—into strut-assin toward em out of the bushes just so some sportsman-like *lethal potbellied drag-queen*, who's good at talkin turkey, can shoot the shit outta him. Then that hero—a local good ol' boy or maybe some Meffis businessman—will take the po' coksukka home to put him in the freezer, or to the taxidermist to put him on the wall.

That's the way it is. What usually happens is that the shooter and his family will somehow chomp around on that big-ass bird for three days and *simulfukkintaneously* have the taxidermist fix up the po' bird's head and his beard, which is extremely important in the turkey-huntn world, and of course the tail as well, into a kind of artistical combo on a plaque, so it can hang on the wall in the TV room, between the coyote's head and the singin big-mouth bass.

I never could see it. Like I said a while ago, in the face a turkey and a vulture looks just about the same—even though, of course, their personal hygiene is quite different and a turkey don't stink the way a buzzard does.

Anyhow, in the Delta, turkey season was a bigger deal than any of the other hunt seasons put together. Shorter, too. There wuddn a whole lot of time to realize your wildest turkey dreams. And maybe, in part due to the rush, people got shot fairly often, possibly as much or more than they do during deer season, because, see, there in that April thicket, some super-excited sportsman would be in the woods all camouflaged and hid, just a'callin away, often slunk down behind a log, and sounding just like a fukkin *turkey hen* sayin: "Hey, big boy, come gobble up some of this wild-ass turkey pussy!" Then, uhn-hunh, Mr. FieldandfukkinStream would stick his head up over the log to look around to see if any gobble-gobble loverboys was comin his way, and that's when some *other* sly hunter, hide'n right there in the woods real near the caller—shoot, the two fukheds mighta gone into the woods together! . . . plus, both of the muthafukkas woulda-shoulda knew at least generally where each of em was supposed to be setn—and STILL that other sumbich I'm talking about would—wo'-out with the bugs, the humidity, the heat, and with April as well, and happy as all get out to bag hissef a hen—aim straight at what looked like a fine fat female to him and shoot his turkey-callin buddy square in the goddam face, convinced when he done it he was finally gon bring home the wild-turkey version of Marilyn MONroe.

It was a datgum mass phenomenon. But you wouldna never caught me setn out there—if I wanted a goddam turkey, I sure as shootn wouldn BE one in the bargain. I'd go somewhere and buy me a live one, let the sumbich run around the yard on a line for a day or two then say, "Okay, muthafukka, I guess you're bout as wild as you're gon get." Then I'd chop off his head, pluck his ass, clean him, and stick him in the stove. Fuk setn in the woods. Especially in the goddam Delta. In April. ChrEYEst.

A FEW WEEKS AFTER they found Tombo, somebody come up on FarleyTrout, and him dead too as a busted balloon, slumped forwards over the steering wheel of his car, out in front of his antique store down in Shelby. It's called *The Antique Shop*. Which really was a pretty sensible name for it when you think about it. And I am glad he did change the goddam "The" to "Ye" and call it a goddam "Shoppe."

Anyway, there that sumbich was, cold as a French fork, dead in his car

which—and I'll say this just once—was the *same kinda car* as Brainy had . . . a 1996 Ford Camilla!

One nem little silver letter-openers was stickin out the back of Farley's neck, which the woman who helped him run the store told the police was a "rose-patterned Kirk *raypoosay*." And I said, "Kirk, my ass. It was a goddam dirk."

Then, about two weeks later, in May, there was "Froggy" Waters, face down and gone to Heaven in Beaver Dam Brake with his own gig stuck in his th'ot. He was out there with two or three of his buddies, and they're the ones that found him when they was on their way back to their vehicles.

His real name was Steele . . . Steele Waters. People called him *Froggy* on account of how much he loved to go frog giggin, even though he coulda got all he wanted to eat and and all he ever wanted to look at from India or goddam Japan, up at one or two of the fancy-ass grocery stores up in Meffis. But Froggy just had a thing about waden around giggin bullfrogs—even though they wuddn as plentiful, or maybe even as healthy for you to eat as they was a long-ass time ago . . . you know . . . before there was all them *chemicals* and such. But I rekn that didn matter too much to Froggy. It's a funny thing, but I have found that when people want to eat somethin, they don't let a lot of health concerns—like death—get in their way.

Anyway, the thing that turned your blood to Kool-Aid was the fact that Froggy *had invited Brainy* to go with him, and Brainy was pretty excited about it and was all ready to go and everything, and had talked about it for a week, especially out at the Boll & Bloom, which, if you ast me is the world's first fukkin internet. Whenever you want to spread some news, just whisper it once at the Boll & Bloom, and it'll dam near be on the Rock Lumbaugh Show and all over the goddam Meffis TV before you get your butt back home. So, in one sense, it wuddn like Miss Attica couldna knowed about him bein ast to go wade around in that big-ass swamp. Plus she knew exactly where they was gon be giggin because her and her husband, Euster Draynum, had been out there with Froggy and nem a buncha times before.

Let me just say this before I say anything else. Miss Attica's husband was ol' Euster Draynum because Miss Attica never did want to give up her family name, especially for the like of *Draynum*. She wuddn about to.

[End of Excerpt. For a UCP copy of the complete text, email harrison@newsouthbooks.com.]

10 TOP GODDAM REASONS WHY JUNIOR RAY WOULDN'T
GET PAST THE CBS CENSORS IF HE WAS TO BE INVITED
BY DAVID LETTER-FUKKIN-MAN

10. The Magic Pussy Cabaret & Club was like dope. . . . goin there gives him something ordinary daily life cannot provide . . . the feeling . . . that somehow there's a point to ever' thing—and of course that's pussy. (*The Yazoo Blues*, p. 175)
9. But you know how it is when you're young. Them college boys, ever fukkin one of em, was all sportn a full tank of that whatchacallit . . . detesterone! (*Sailing to Alluvium*, ms 138)
8. It's white people that ruind the world. (*Sailing to Alluvium*, ms 17)
7. One time a sumbich said to me that I was absolute proof that there wuddn no such thing as evolution. I took that as a compliment. (*Junior Ray* hardcover, p. 27)
6. History is an amazing thing. . . . I call it the natural flow of truth unfukked-up by facts. (*The Yazoo Blues*, p. 97)
5. Screwin' sheep was supposed to be against the law, but what was they gon' do—put one nem little wooly muthafukkas on the witness stand? It'd a been my word against hers anyhow. (*Junior Ray* paperback, p. 41)
4. This is one reason I decided not to become no philosopher. Thinkin can fuk a sumbich up real quick. And I am that sumbich. (*Sailing to Alluvium*, ms 277)
3. I couldn't stand the thought of being a deputy in a sleepy little old Delta town, carrying a gun . . . and not at least once't shootn the shit out of somebody. (*Junior Ray* hardcover, p. 27)
2. Now that Mississippi has become part of the United States, things ain't the same. (*Junior Ray* paperback, p. 90)
1. So Mr. Brainsong ast me one day, "Junior Ray, as a law enforcement professional, you've heard of LSD, haven't you?" . . . I said, "Is it anything like LSU?" (*The Yazoo Blues*, p. 62)