



ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES SPANFELLER

It was Tony's first time in love, and she was the first chick who wouldn't tell him no. He stole her out of a hearse.

**T**HE BAR HAD CLOSED and they still had to make the walk to the rooming house, and there it was — the hearse had driven up across the street where the Stomach Hospital was.

"I think this is THE night," said Tony. "I can feel it in my blood, I really can!"

"The night for what?" asked Bill. "Look," said Tony, "we know their operation well by now. Let's get one! What the fuck? You got the guts?"

"Whatsa matta? You think I'm a coward because that runty sailor whipped my ass?"

"I didn't say that, Bill."

"You're the coward! I can whip you, easy..."

"Yeh, I know. I'm not talking about that. I say, let's grab a stiff just for laughs."

"Shit! Let's grab TEN stiffs!"

"Wait. You're drunk now. Let's wait. We know the operation. We know how they operate. We been watching every night."

"And you're *not* drunk, eh? You wouldn't have the GUTS otherwise!"

"Quiet now! Watch! Here they come. They've got a stiff. Some poor guy. Look at that sheet pulled over his head. It's sad."

"I *am* looking. And it *is* sad..."

"Okay, we know the operation: if it's just one stiff, they toss him in, light their cigarettes and drive off.

But if it's two stiffs, they don't bother locking the hearse door twice. They're real cool boys.

It's just old stuff with them.

/turn to page 24

## THE COPULATING MERMAID OF VENICE, CALIFORNIA

BY CHARLES BUKOWSKI



## MERMAID OF VENICE, from page 7

If it's two stiffs, they just leave the guy on the roller there behind the hearse, go in and get the other stiff, then toss them in together. How many nights have we watched it?"

"I dunno," said Bill, "sixty, at least."

"Okay, now there's the one stiff. If they go back in for another—that stiff belongs to us. *You game for grahs if they go in for another stiff?*"

"I'm game! I got double your guts!"

"Okay, then, watch. We'll know in a minute... Oops, there they go! *They're going in for another stiff!*" said Tony. "You game?"

"Game," said Bill.

They sprinted across the street and grabbed the corpse by the head and feet. Tony had the head, that sad head wrapped so tight in the sheet, while Bill grabbed the feet.

Then they ran across the street, the pure white sheet of the corpse floating in the momentum—sometimes you could see an ankle, an elbow, a thigh of flesh, and then they ran it up the rooming house front steps, got to the door and Bill said, "Jesus Christ, who's got the key? Look, I'm scared!"

"We don't have much time! Those bastards are gonna be out soon with the other stiff! Throw him in the hammock! Quick! We gotta find a goddamned key!"

They tossed the stiff into the hammock. It rocked back and forth in the hammock under the moonlight.

"Can't we take the body back?" asked Bill. "Good God oh Mother o' Mighty, can't we take the body back?"

"No time! Too late! They'd see us. HEY! WAIT!" yelled Tony. "I found the key!"

"THANK JESUS!"

They unlocked the door, then grabbed the thing on the hammock and ran up the stairway with it. Tony's room was closest. Second floor. There was quite a bit of bumping with the corpse along the stairway wall and railing.

Then they had it outside Tony's door and stretched it out while Tony looked for his door key. They got the door open, plopped the stiff on the bed and then went to the refrigerator and got hold of Tony's cheap gallon of muscatel, had half a waterglass full each, then refilled, came back to the bedroom, sat down and looked at the stiff.

"Do you suppose anybody saw us?" asked Bill.

"If they had, I think the cops would be up here by now."

"Do you think they'll search the neighborhood?"

"How can they? How can they go knocking on doors at this time of the morning, asking, 'Do you have a dead body?'"

"Shit, I guess you're right."

"Sure, I'm right," said Tony, "still, I can't help wondering how those two guys felt when they came back and saw the body gone? It must have been kind of funny."

"Yeah," said Bill, "it musta been."

"Well, funny or not, we've got the stiff. There he is, right on the bed."

They looked at the thing under the sheet, had another drink.

"I wonder how long he's been dead?"

"Not very long. I don't think."

"I wonder when they begin to stiffen up? I wonder when they begin to stink?"

"That rigor mortis takes a bit of time, I think," said Tony. "But he'll probably begin to stink pretty soon. It's just like garbage left in the sink. I don't think they drain

the blood until they reach the mortuary."

So, two drunks, they went on drinking the muscatel; they even forgot at times about the body, and they spoke of those vague and important other things in their rather inarticulate way. Then it was back to the body again.

The body was still there.

"What we gonna do with it?" asked Bill.

"Stand it up in the closet after it stiffens up. It seemed pretty loose when we were carrying it. Probably died about a half an hour ago or so."

"So, okay, we stand it up in the closet. Then what do we do when it starts to stink?"

"I never thought about that part," said Tony.

"Think about it," said Bill, pouring a good one.

Tony tried to think about it. "You know, we might go to jail for this. If we get caught."

"Sure. So?"

"Well, I think we made a mistake, but it's too late."

"Too late," repeated Bill.

"So," said Tony, pouring a tall one, "if we are stuck with this stiff we might as well have a look at him."

"Look at him?"

"Yeah, look at him."

"You got the guts?" asked Bill.

"I dunno."

"You scared?"

"Sure. No training in this sort of thing," said Tony.

"All right. *You pull the sheet back.*" said Bill, "only fill my glass first. Fill my glass, then pull the sheet back."

"Okay," said Tony.

He filled Bill's glass. Then walked over.

"All right," said Tony, "here GOES!"

Tony pulled the sheet straight back over the body. He kept his eyes closed.

"Good GOD!" said Bill, "it's a woman! A young woman!"

Tony opened his eyes. "Yeah. *Was* young. Christ, look at that long blonde hair, goes way down past her asshole. But she's DEAD! Terribly and finally dead, forever. What a shame! I don't understand it."

"How old you figure she was?"

"She doesn't look dead to me," said Bill.

"She is."

"But look at those breasts! Those thighs! That pussy! That pussy: it still looks alive!"

"Yeah," said Tony, "the pussy, they say: it's the first thing to come and the last thing to go."

Tony walked over to the pussy, touched it. Then he lifted a breast, kissed the damned dead thing. "It's so sad, everything is so sad—that we live all our lives like idiots and then finally die."

"You shouldn't touch the body," said Bill.

"She's beautiful," said Tony, "even dead, she's beautiful."

"Yeah, but if she were alive she wouldn't even look at a bum like you twice. You know that, don't you?"

"Sure! And that's just the point! Now she can't say, 'NO!'"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I mean," said Tony, "that my cock is hard. VERY HARD!"

Tony walked over and poured a glassful from the jug. Drank it down.

Then he walked over to the bed, began kissing the breasts, running his hands through her long hair, and then

finally *kissing* that dead mouth in a kiss from the living to the dead. And then he mounted.

It was GOOD. Tony rammed and jammed. Never such a fuck as this in all his days! He came. Then rolled off, towed himself with the sheet.

Bill had watched the whole thing, lifting the gallon muscatel jug in the dim lamplight.

"Christ, Bill, it was beautiful, beautiful!"

"You're crazy! You just fucked a dead woman!"

"And you've been fucking dead women all your life—dead women with dead souls and dead pussies—only you didn't know it! I'm sorry, Bill, she was a beautiful fuck. I have no shame."

"Was she *that* good?" asked Bill.

"You'll never believe it."

Tony walked to the bathroom to take a piss.

When he got back, Bill had mounted the body. Bill was going good. Moaning and groaning a bit. Then he reached over, kissed that dead mouth, and came.

Bill rolled off, hit the edge of the sheet, wiped off.

"You're right. Best fuck I ever had!"

Then they both sat in their chairs and looked at her.

"Wonder what her name was?" asked Tony. "I'm in love."

Bill laughed. "Now I *know* you're drunk! Only a damn fool falls in love with a living woman; now you gotta get hooked on a dead one."

"Okay, I'm hooked," said Tony.

"All right, you're hooked," said Bill, "whatta we do now?"

"Get her the hell outa here!" answered Tony.

"How?"

"Same way we got her in—down the stairway."

"Then?"

"Then into your car. We drive her down to Venice Beach, throw her into the ocean."

"That's cold."

"She won't feel it any more than she felt your cock."

"And how about your cock?" asked Bill.

"She didn't feel that either," answered Tony.

There she was, double-fucked, dead-laid on the sheets.

"Let's make it, baby!" screamed Tony.

Tony grabbed the feet and waited. Bill grabbed the head. As they rushed out of Tony's room the doorway was still open. Tony kicked it shut with his left foot as they moved toward the top of the stairway, the sheet no longer wound about the body but, more or less, flopped over it. Like a wet dishrag over a kitchen faucet. And again, there was much bumping of her head and her thighs and her big ass against the stairway walls and stairway railings.

They threw her into the back seat of Bill's car.

"Wait, wait, baby!" screamed Tony.

"What for?"

"The muscatel jug, asshole!"

"Oh, sure."

Bill sat waiting with the dead cunt in the back seat.

Tony was a man of his word. He came running out with the jug of muski.

They got on the freeway, passing the jug back and forth, drinking good mouthfuls. It was a warm and beautiful night and the moon was full, of course. But it wasn't exactly night. By then it was 4:15 a.m. A good time anyhow.

They parked. Then had another drink of the good muscatel, got the body out and carried it that long sandy walk toward the sea. Then they got down to that part

of the sand where the sea reached now and then, that part of the sand that was wet, soaked, full of little sand crabs and air holes. They put the body down and drank from the jug. Now and then an excessive wave rolled a bit over all of them: Bill, Tony, the dead Cunt.

Bill had to get up to piss and having been taught nineteenth century morals he walked a bit up the shore to piss. As his friend did so, Tony pulled back the sheet and looked at the dead face in the seaweed twist and swirl, in the salty morning air. Tony looked at the face as Bill was pissing offshore. A lovely kind face, nose a little too sharp, but a very good mouth, and then with her body stiffening already, he leaned forward and kissed her very gently upon the mouth and said, "I love you, dead bitch."

Then he covered her with the sheet.

Bill finished pissing, came back. "I need another drink."

"Go ahead. I'll take one too."

Tony said, "I'm going to swim her out."

"Can you swim good?"

"Not too well."

"I'm a good swimmer. I'll swim her out."

"NO! NO!" screamed Tony.

"Goddamn it, stop yelling!"

"I'm going to swim her out!"

"All right! All right!"

Tony took another drink, pulled the sheet aside, picked her up and carried her step by step toward the breakers. He was drunker than he figured. Several times the big waves knocked them both down, knocked her out of his arms, and he had to get to his feet, run, swim, struggle to find the body. Then he'd see her—that long long hair. She was just like a mermaid. Maybe she was a mermaid. Finally Tony floated her out beyond the breakers. It was quiet. Halfway between moon and sunrise. He floated with her some moments. It was very quiet. A time within time and a time beyond time.

Finally, he gave the body a little shove. She floated off, half underwater, the strands of long hair whirling about the body. She was still beautiful, dead or whatever she was.

She began to float away from him, caught in some tide. The sea had her.

Then suddenly he turned from her, tried to swim back toward the shore. It seemed very far away. He made it in with the last stroke of his strength, rolling in with the force of the last breaker. He picked himself up, fell, got up, walked forward, sat down beside Bill.

"So, she's gone," said Bill.

"Yeah. Shark meat."

"Do you think we'll ever be caught?"

"No. Give me a drink."

"Go easy. We're getting close to the bottom."

"Yeah."

They got back to the car. Bill drove. They argued over the final drinks on the way home, then Tony thought about the mermaid. He put his head down and began to cry.

"You were always chickenshit," said Bill, "always chickenshit."

They made it back to the rooming house.

Bill went to his room, Tony to his. The sun was coming up. The world was awakening. Some were awakening with hangovers. Some were awakening with thoughts of church. Most were still asleep. A Sunday morning. And the mermaid, the mermaid with that dead sweet tail, she was well out to sea. While somewhere a pelican dove, came up with a glittering, guitar-shaped fish. ♡