Cheech suggested we burglar a house.

“We can stab the walls again,” he said. “Shit in the refrigerator.”

I had no idea what he was talking about. But our Marlboros had run out and the sun was beginning to make my teeth ache and all around us objects continued moving in ways they weren’t supposed to. The street especially, it was up in my face, and then down. Which isn’t the worst. The worst is like what happened in June when I’d been tripping for several days and then decided to do a bit of speed and hitchhike to the lake. Bearer said: Whoa man, you don’t look so good. Yet the way all of it had been going, for the first time I’d felt entirely scraped clean. Everything in town had sat boxed up close looking bright and plastic as if it had just been washed. A shutter kept clicking across my eyes. I saw Bearer right in front of me at about sixty frames per minute. She was small and beautiful and all strung out. For one profound moment secrets popped between
us in our blood and brain cells and then I woke up on a hospital room emergency cot. My hands had been tied to the railings. Some allergy pills from a back pocket were arrayed across my chest.

“How long have I been here,” I asked.

“You’ve had a seizure,” someone told me. “You’re doing fine . . . you talked all the way over here in the ambulance.”

“You’ve been sitting up,” they said.

The room had been filled with people I couldn’t even remember.

“I thought I was still hitching to the beach,” I informed them.

Today was different. Not necessarily better. I’d drunk some cough medicine to get the codeine. On Sunday. At first it was okay, we were at the bowling alleys, but then I kept getting higher. I sat down outside by myself for a while to see if it would stop. But it has ended with me unable to attend work for three days.

I mean, how can I?

At night I dream faces at my window. I sit up with my insides in my mouth from fear and see nothing and finally say, “Whew, it was just a dream.” Then, as soon as I relax, a face comes right back into the room saying my name and I’m up yelling, stuck inside a dream I’ve
already dreamt is over. It has become a problem to the point that whenever I lay down I begin to hallucinate. At least when I’m up and around I feel like a piece of shit but it is a feeling I can relate to.

Only, now, Cheech wanted to ask me such a question—

“Burgle,” I said to him. “Do I look like a person who would care to burgle a house?”

We’d come by this time to find ourselves in the front parking lot of the dry cleaning place. Cars kept driving in and out. There was a noise like the ocean ascendant inside my head and Cheech sat beside me during all of it as if he had an ability never to be fooled. “Check it out,” he explained, “this place—we don’t even have to break, we only just got to enter.”

The house belonged to a doctor. We drove a long way from the road to even see it back there in the trees. Cheech finally shut the car off next to a stone wall. Although he was smiling he’d done a lousy job. There were leaves in the windshield wipers and a willow branch from his having nodded off and run us into some bushes just as we’d left the main road.

Right before that the radio had been playing my favorite song.
"Hurry," I'd warned him already knowing it was too late, "wake up."

"I think I took the wrong turn," he said.

Where had he gotten such an idea? I wanted to point out that we'd already driven right across a stream. By the time it was over, besides a broken windshield and fenders left behind, the car had gotten part way up a fallen tree.

"You push," Cheech suggested. "I'll steer."

I had sat staring in amazement at the fact we were still alive.

"One, two; one, two," he'd called out.

Yet as soon as we were safely parked, Cheech seemed determined to forget this incident altogether. He pulled up next to the stone wall and climbed happily out of the car and pointed to the house.

"This is it," he said.

"Home sweet home," he proclaimed with an expansive flourish.

None of it felt that way. You only had to look across the unbruised lawn and neat checkerboard flagstone patio to the house itself, all great rising shingled sides of weathered wood and fine cut glass, to know that if anyone were to come along they would understand Cheech and myself right away to have been puked up in the exact wrong place. I didn't know what to say. A smell of
BIRD-SELF ACCUMULATED

flowers came up mixed into the heat of gasoline. It was all I could do to keep from gagging. Things didn’t seem all that much better out in the country.

“Oh shit,” I wanted to cry.

But Cheech was already standing inside the doctor’s foyer punching numbers to deactivate his alarm system.

I was astonished. He’d walked right in.

“Karin,” Cheech told me, meaning his girlfriend. “Guy used to be her stepfather.”

Behind him, further back into the hallway, the ex-stepfather’s paintings and jewelry and television sets were neatly stacked.

“We’ve been here about three times,” Cheech explained, “since the family went on vacation.”

The entire house was a mess. I wanted to check the bathroom cabinets but Cheech insisted on a tour to point out all the places he and Karin had been doing it. These places included beds and couches and end tables. They had done it in most every room and even the sink.

The thought of that, of Karin sweeping silverware and plates from the counter as Cheech hoisted her over its edge, left me dizzy. I remembered her from coming into the Hilltop one afternoon for a drink: she looked to be a person who could have you moaning two weeks into an icehouse.

People had actually stopped playing pool.
"My, my, my," some of the boys said when they saw how she was inside a pair of pants with a zipper running down the length of her hip. It was a zipper they’d wanted to believe themselves right then and there to have fumbled and cried over night after night.

Now I thought I sat down from the idea of her in a sink only it must have been the codeine because when I looked around I wasn’t sitting at all but standing instead in the cellar where there was a game area. Checch was gesturing all around. Then he turned and left. After a minute music came from the living room. There was no hurry is what it seemed he’d said. We could load the ex-stepfather doctor’s belongings into the car later. There was no hurry at all.

Only something had changed. A sudden shift in the geography of my high. I could no longer stand still. I walked to the second floor expecting lights and cymbals and the sound of God. Instead there was a room filled with rifles. They were beautiful. One of them looked to be the kind used by snipers. I took it down and found some bullets and went to a window.

All of this took place as if I were inside a dream.
The ocean still buzzed.
My legs were weak.
There was a fan which someone had broken and a
BIRD-SELF ACCUMULATED

night table by the window with a long silver mirror on it. I sat cradling the rifle in my arms. Through its scope, one mile away, toward the lake, everything appeared to be neatly and exactly framed like a toy. I watched for a while as salesmen, housewives, and visitors to our region drove their station wagons or sports cars down and around tiny, wooded hills. It was as if we had all climbed inside a diamond together. I could smell those people! Every hair plastered against their wet foreheads. The sweat as it dripped or ran down faces, dark, then pale—across shadows thrown into small, quick bursts of light.

My finger was right there on the trigger. It might have been exactly what I’d been waiting for, but I’m not sure. I remember taking a deep breath.

Nothing moved.

All the clouds sat above the grey sludge of our famous lake. The sun was a piss yellow ball. It sat there too.

Then, finally, downstairs the music went off. I heard Cheech snoring. Snoring! Who could guess, I’ve heard people say on many occasions, what the fuck that dude is even thinking. Once, just after he’d returned from Vietnam missing a kneecap and some other parts of his leg, Cheech tried to set an Italian on fire. It was at
a gas station. The Italian's girlfriend had that hot look about her with big hair and jewelry and so the Italian, who thought Cheech worked at the station, said, Hey gimp—how about it.

That was a wrong thing.

He did not understand Cheech's kneecap lost in a tunnel where it had been blown up while he crawled and crawled after the enemy. Can you imagine that, moving and moving into something about which you have no idea? Cheech could, and so he put the nozzle of the gas pump right inside the window of the Cadillac where the Italian and his girlfriend with big hair sat.

This all took place during a time when it seemed that every week on television you saw another Saigon monk burn themselves in protest. So when Cheech soaked him down the Italian still tried to look hard. “Hey,” he said, but he must have been thinking right then about those Buddhists. How they bent the air. And died folded inward like kerosene flowers. Because as soon as Cheech showed a book of matches the Italian was over his girlfriend and out the other window.

What is there to know in this life anyway?

That day we robbed the doctor turned out to be a good one. I went and woke Cheech and we put the jewelry and televisions out on the flagstone patio and
then loaded them into his car. By then my high was
finally running down and when we got back to town an
tedge seemed to be off everything and we’d made some
money so there were drinks and a few laughs together.
There always were with Cheech. I thought of him as a
person who knew me better than most.

But in 1975 he was to hold a pistol to my head and
make me show him where John the Chink and I had
hidden our crystal meth. The gun looked so amazing
there in his hand it made me cry.

“Shut up,” Cheech said.

At first he only slapped the barrel across my face
but then a fit of some kind seemed to take hold and the
gun went off four times.

“Don’t worry,” he insisted after the ringing had
stopped and I’d told him what he wanted to hear, “no-
body’s been shot.”

The idea seemed to disappoint him.

Although I haven’t seen Cheech since, I heard from
Karin that he might be down south. They’d been mar-
rried and when things began to go wrong and after he’d
robbed me and some other friends and disappeared, she
got an unsigned postcard from Key West, Florida. Karin
talked to me about all of this one night on Dexter Street.
She was drunk and played with her wedding ring a lot.
After a while she asked me to go home with her and I did, though it wasn't about revenge, and besides, by then I'd become a person who could barely stand the thought of someone else touching them, and none of it really mattered anyway.