

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
DOUGLAS BRINKLEY

JACK KEROUAC
WINDBLOWN WORLD

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VIKING



— Or some Negro tenorman:

“Hey daddy, what will happen when we die? What’s life for? Why don’t we all love one another? What’s the matter? What does it all mean?”

“Man,” says he, “don’t hang me up with them questions. I want my kicks and when I can’t get my kicks no more, then I’m *daid*. Okay poppa?” And he smiles.

Meanwhile I walk in the road at night, in utter darkness, and no one will help me but my own mad self.

And now it’s raining outdoors.

(Ah! — I just don’t want to be reduced to the kind of writing that makes fatality implicit without ever having to mention it outright.)

I’m serious about this. I want to talk about it. I want to communicate with Dostoevsky in heaven, and ask old Melville if he’s still discouraged, and Wolfe why he let himself die at 38.

I don’t want to give up.

I promise I shall never give up, and that I’ll die yelling and laughing. And that until then I’ll rush around this world I insist is holy and pull at everyone’s lapel and make them confess to me and to all.

This way I’ll really find out something in time.

— Time to write now, I guess.

Yet better than all this poor philosophizing was that night in Denver at the softball game, where, in a fever of sad understanding, I saw beyond mere “Whys” and questionings and ennuis such as these that occupy the last eighteen pages.

Even the details are dear here:

LE COEUR ET L'ARBRE

I had just seen Bob Giroux off on the airplane to N.Y., and walked & hitched back from the airport in a mammoth plains dusk, I, a speck on the surface of the sad red earth. At lilac evening I was arrived among the lights of 27th & Welton, the Denver Negrotown.

With Giroux at rather empty Central City I had seen that my being a published writer was going to be merely a sad affair — not that he intended to show me that. I only saw how sad he was, and therefore how the best & highest that the ‘world’ had to offer was in fact empty, spiritless; because after all he was, and is, a great New Yorker, a man of affair, a success at 35, a famous young editor. That was why I told him there were ‘no laurel wreaths,’ i.e., the poet did not find ecstasies in worldly success and fame, nor even in fortune & means, in anything like acclaim or regard, nothing. He quite sensibly told me the laurel wreath is only worn in the moment of writing. Of course.

But that night my dream of glory was turned gray fact, and I walked on Welton Street wishing I was a ‘nigger;’ because I saw that the best the ‘white world’ had to offer was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough *night*.

I remember: I stopped at a little shack-place where a man sold hot, red chili in paper containers. I bought some and ate it strolling in the dark mysterious streets. I also wished I was a Denver Mexican, or even a Jap, Toshio Mori! anything but a ‘white man’ disillusioned by the best of his own ‘white world.’ (And all my life I had had *white ambitions!*)

As I strolled I passed the dark porch steps of Mexican & Negro homes. Soft voices were there, and occasionally the dusky leg of some mysterious, sensual girl; and dark men who owned them; and little children who were growing up with the same idea — the idea of life-as-you-will. In fact a group of Negro women came by and one of the younger ones detached herself from mother-like elders to come to me and say — “Hello Eddy.”

As I said to Allen in a letter, I knew I was really Eddy. But this is untrue. I knew damn well I wasn’t so fortunate as to be Eddy — some white kid who dug the colored girls down there. I was merely myself.

So sad I was — in the violet dark, strolling — wishing I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-minded, ecstatic Negroes of America. Moreover all this reminded me of Neal and Louanne who knew this place so well and had been children here and nearby. How I wished I could find them! — I looked up and down the street! — How

I'd been cheated out of actual life! — How I yearned to be suddenly transformed into an Eddy, a Neal, a jazz musician, a nigger, anything hereabouts, a construction worker, a softball pitcher, anything in these wild, dark, mysterious, humming streets of the Denver night — anything but myself so pale & unhappy, so 'white-collar,' so dim.

So finally down at 23rd & Welton the great softball game was going on under floodlights which also partially illuminated the gas tank. What a cruel touch! — now it was the nostalgia of the Gas House Kids. And a great eager crowd roared at every play. The strange young heroes, of all kinds, white, colored, Mexican, Indian, were on the field performing with utter seriousness. Most awful of all: — They were just sandlot kids in uniform, while I, with my 'white ambitions,' had to go and be a professional-type athlete of the highest variety, in my college days.

I hated myself thinking of it. Never in my life had I ever been innocent enough to play ball this way before all the families & girls of the neighborhood, at night under lights, near the gas tank all the kids know — no, I had to go and be a college punk, playing before punks & coeds in stadiums, and join fraternities, and wear sports jackets instead of Levis and sweatshirts.

Some people are just made to wish they were other than what they are, only so they may wish and wish and wish. This is my star.

Oh the sadness of the lights that night! I sat on the bleachers and watched the game. The pitcher looked just like Neal. A blonde in the seats looked just like Louanne. It was the Denver night here in the streets of the real Denver, and all I did was die. What had I gone and done with my life, shutting off all the doors to real, boyish, human joy like this, what had gnawed in me to make me strive to be 'different' from all this.

Now it was too late.

Near me sat an old Negro who apparently watched the games every night. Next to him was an old white man, then a Mexican family, then some girls, some boys — all humanity, the lot. Across the street Negro families sat on their front steps talking and looking up at the starry night through the trees and just sitting in the softness and sometimes

watching the game. Many cars passed in the street meanwhile, and stopped at the corner when the light turned red.

There was excitement and the air was filled with the vibration of really joyous life that knows nothing of disappointment and 'white' sorrows, and all.

The old Negro man had a can of beer in his coat pocket, which he proceeded to open; and the old man enviously eyed the can & groped in his pocket to see if he could buy a can too.

How I died!

Down in Denver all I did was die, anyway — never saw anything like it.

I walked away from there to the dumb downtown streets of Denver, for the trolley at Colfax & Broadway; where is the big dumb Capitol building with its lit-up dome and swarded lawns. Later I walked the pitchblack roads up at Alameda and came to the house I'd spent my \$1000 on for nothing, where my sister and brother-in-law were sitting worrying about money and work and insurance and security and all that ... in the *white-tiled* kitchen.

It seems that I have an infinite capacity to be unhappy. How I can be so stupid as to waste my life away being unhappy like this! What am I going to do? When will I realize that I have a great life of my own?

Well, there's still time before it's too late ...

(And I don't understand it.)

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[From Aug. 30 to Sept. 5 I then went on a long session of drinking, music, & people in N.Y.C. Met Lee Nevels, a Negress; stayed at Bob's apt.]