

# YOU & I

PADGETT POWELL



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There's about 14 ounces of this left.

There's hair in it.

It's okay.

If you said "lard and hair sandwich" to her, my mother would gag.

Was that a Depression food?

I think it was a joke, but I'm not sure.

I've heard of butter and sugar sandwiches. But that would hardly be a Depression meal.

I have no idea what the Depression was, or what the war was, or the wars after that, or before – I don't know anything at all, you get right down to it.

So these codgers have something on us.

Yes they do. That is our cross to bear. Everyone knows shit but us.

Let's make the best of it.

Fuck these codgers.

They come over here with that shit, tell 'em to go eat a lard and hair sandwich.

I will.

I wish something would *move* out there.

Where?

Out there. On the broad plain of life.

I *thought* that's where you meant. Me too.

Be nice, some action.

Of some import.

We could say we did something...

With ourself.

Telling a codger who says quite properly we ain't doing shit to eat a lard and hair sandwich does not in the long term constitute a life.

No it does not.

Well if a war doesn't break out on you, and you don't stumble into making money, and you can't play ball, and women treat you wrong, or men, and you aren't a movie star, and you don't have any talent, and you aren't smart, etc., what are you, we, supposed to do, exactly?

Live until we die, without any more pondering than a dog, is my guess.

And that is a good guess, but it seems less a guess than the natural conclusion every hapless human being comes to on his witless own. It's a default position. It supports all dufus behavior.

Yes, it even supports "the pursuit of happiness."

Indeed it does.

Today we are becalmed, as we are daily becalmed.

Every day we are becalmed.

Becalmed is our middle name.

My uncle was named Jake Becalmed. His brother was Hansford Becalmed. Their brother was Cuthbert Becalmed.

No one is named Cuthbert Becalmed.

Wait. The fourth brother was Studio Becalmed.

No mother names a son Studio.

This one did.

Is it Italian?

What?

The name *Studio*.

We aren't Italian, is all I can say to that.

So this kid is called Studio, and what happens to him?

Well, he was killed in the war.

I mean what happened to him as a result of his name.

Nothing.

Nobody razzed his ass.

No.

He was Studio, end of chapter.

As far as I know.

Studio Becalmed.

No, their name was not really Becalmed.

That was a joke.

Of sorts.

We aren't very funny, when we joke.

No. Because we are becalmed.

Studio. I like him.

I do too.

Studio Becalmed had one great affair before his brief life was terminated, with the actress Jayne Mansfield.

Who herself was not long-lived.

Indeed not – beheaded on the Chef Menteur—

Yes, in the days when stars went overland in cars instead of in airplanes as they now do.

Anyway, when Studio frolicked with Jayne Mansfield he was like a tiny man lost in the Alps.

I suspect that that is a vulgar reference to her giant bosom?

It is if we let it be. On the other hand, what do we know of Studio and his inclinations? He may well have been spiritually lost, not in mountains of flesh as it were but in the blond glow of happiness, or something.

We are safer assuming ourselves vulgar, and maybe Studio too. After all, he was to die in WWII, and men wanting breasts then or otherwise desirous of flesh were not to be discredited as they are today.

Healthy desires today are all clotted up into Healthy Choice.

Yes, and the smart man chooses Not Wanting if he wants to be safe.

Studio, let us say, was the last healthy man.

Why not? I am certain that he was. He was healthy and then he was dead, and Jayne missed him, then died herself, as much of a broken heart as of decapitation.

It's a lovely conceit. Studio lay in the mud, Jayne in the untopped car, forever sundered, or forever together if you can participate in the large fiction of their frolicking together in the final Alps of heaven.

That is a wonderful phrase. I would propose we name us a dog that.

What? Alp?

No. Final Alps of Heaven. They use long names in registry, you know.

I knew that. What would we call the dog?

I think *Final* would be amusing. *Of* would be not bad. *Alp* is out.

Agreed. *Heaven* would require explanations unto the tedious.

We could say we inherited the dog from Studio Becalmed and Jayne Mansfield, that we are the god-fathers to their child.

Fifty years after the fact.

Yes.

This has promise. Tell these codgers, Don't pet Final Alps of Heaven, you asshole, that is the dog of Studio Becalmed and Jayne Mansfield, even you will recall the mountainous breasts she had, *hands off*!

When they look at us as they will, we say, Even if you were gay we would not let you pet that dog. If you were gay of course you would show some respect for that dog. We are having fresh basil pesto for dinner, will you stay?

I bet they won't.

Of course they won't.

Beanie weenies and let them cornhole the dog, they'd stay.



Oh don't be uncharitable. Beanie weenies and we let them play with the dog and they'd stay.

Yes, you are right.

I am always right.

True. Does it get tiring?

Be real. Of course not. Why would it?

It's supposed to.

Yes, and I respect you for playing the straight fool, but really, Constant Rectitude is one of the large peaks in the Final Alps of Heaven.

Let us get another dog and call him that, use his full registered name. Or you could even adapt the name for yourself. Con, Connie, Rex, Tude, Constant Rectitude!

Constant Rectitude, go to your room until your father gets here with his *belt*.

Constant Rectitude took another hiding today for his constant transgressions.

Constant Rectitude and Studio Becalmed have run away to join the circus, but they joined the Army instead in error and will die as patriots rather than as syphilitic roustabouts.

Failure is to success as water is to land.

This is the great secular truth.

I believe I will speak this great secular truth to the meddling cocksucking codgers when they come over

here telling us we are not shit, rather than get into what kind of sandwich they might eat.

The sandwich advice is too much of a mouthful all around. And *Don't pet the dog* may not convey the nuance and force we want.

We have failed, yessir, because water is pandemic. Is that too subtle?

Not for me, probably for them.

Fuck them. Are they not the party to whom I am speaking, whom I seek to impress with my meaning and get them off our back and stop begging us for sugary food and stop petting our inherited dog from a man dead fifty years who skied with his nose down the ramp of Mansfield's Alps – are they not whom I seek to have comprehend me and thereby desist in their presuming upon us? Well then, fuck them, I will not be clear merely because being clear is my object.

Well put. As well put as any failed man ever put it.

Thank you. Thank you, Constant Rectitude. I would be obliged were I to be henceforth known as Inherent Muddle. These are our new Indian names. I saw two arguably better ones in Poplar North Dakota just off the Fort Peck Reservation. They were Kills Twice and...

And?

I have forgotten the other name. Also Something

Twice, but it was something mundane, not killing, something even faintly ignoble, like Sleeps Twice. I can't recall it.

Failure is to success as water is to land.

I should have written down the names. I was sure I would remember them. They were likeable Indians, I presume those brothers, Kills and Forgets Twice or whoever they were.

If we had better *names*, we would be better men, is what we seem to have arrived at.

I'll not argue with that, nor do I know a sane man who would.

When the fucking codgers come over here, just ask them who the hell they are, and when they say their names, just snort!

Snort like a hog inhaling a new potato!

Snort like an armadillo reading a newspaper!

Snort like a man gasping for air in the Alps!

If that school bus goes by here any slower, I'd say it's prowling looking for houses to break in to.

Codger at the wheel?

Codger at every wheel on earth.

I forget where we are.

Me too. I too. What do you mean, exactly?

We are over here, I see that, and all that is over there, and this over hereness and that over thereeness is a small part of infinite other relations of hereness and thereeness, I see all this, but then I get a bit forgetty, and, just, don't have this particular-in-aggregate setup in my head, and I say something like "I forget where we are." Then I recover, regain my purchase on the system of thereenesses, and see the finite hereness of us, but of course by now I realize I have no idea where any of this is, where we are, what we are doing, what we are, in the large picture that makes an aggregate of all the particular systems—

Just shut up.

The driver of that school bus is prowling the streets looking for a stray child to molest. He has the perfect cover. Almost any child on earth will voluntarily enter that bus if the door opens and the monster sweetly proffers a ride.

What is your point?

Was there a time before this, say when Studio Becalmed went to the war, when a school bus itself did not represent the moral depravity of the world?

You had like the Lindbergh baby, did you not?

Isn't that different?