

THE NOSE JONES

by Stephen Shaiken (C) 1974, 2017 Jones: (slang) an addiction; a habit

Cooper felt the urge for a cigarette. It was a cold winter sundown in New York, with grey skies and biting wind. Cooper had been born and raised the City, yet at twenty-two he had still not learned to master her winters. His body shivered within his long heavy overcoat. Reaching into a deep pocket, his fingers felt the soft pocket of king size menthols he had purchased that morning. Beneath this packet, his fingers gently stroked the compact bundle held together by a worn rubber band. As he lit up the cigarette, Cooper thought of those thirty bags of dope sitting in his pocket. Earlier in the day, he had bought the lot from his Man, enough to fill up fifty of those see-through envelopes, considering Cooper's usual shorting and pinching.

"All part of the business," he had remarked to his Man. "I need twenty bags a day for my head, and that I can't cut down."

His man never cared. He didn't concern himself with what Cooper or the others did with their dope, as long as they paid for it in cash. There was a lot of money to be made, he would tell Cooper, but if Cooper chose to deal for his own habit, that was his business.

"I'm not going to make that kind of commitment to smack," Cooper would often say. "I'm not going to turn into a strung-out junkie." Cooper liked to assure himself that such would never be his fate. "I've never broken the law in my entire life," he frequently told himself. "I'd never sink into mugging or purse-snatching." Robbery particularly annoyed him. "All smackheads get a bad name when something like that happens!" he would shout at any junkie who would listen. "You've got to have some respect for private property. This is America!" he would cry. "A good American can be a good smackhead! Hell," he would continue, "some of the biggest patriots I know picked up their habits in Nam, killing

Commies while high on Burmese dope. You think any general is gonna break up a team like that? Not as long as they're good Americans."

He would go on and on.

"Now you start picking on some poor old storekeeper. Got his whole life wrapped up in his business. You point a gun at him, want something for nothing. What the hell is he gonna think about dope? If you're too lazy to work, don't get high. Dope is a pleasure, and you got to pay for your pleasure."

Cooper paid. He was trying to work for his old man, selling used cars at a lot not very far from the bottom of the elevated station where he now stood waiting for Andy. It was one of those older stations in the subway system, one where the train was actually lifted above the ground, screaming along over busy Roosevelt Avenue. It would sneak back into the earth before it entered Manhattan.

Cooper hated taking those trains. As long as he failed to show up for work regularly, he could not hope to own a car. Maybe someday he could get together a few hundred dollars and the old man would pull some heap off the lot and fix it up. Until then, Cooper had to take the dirty, noisy, crowded subways.

Today Cooper waited for his one and only sales contact, who was also forced to ride the subways. He better show up on time, thought Cooper, glancing at a storefront clock. Andy was one minute from being late. No sweat, thought Cooper. He usually shows up on the exact minute he's supposed to. I know he thinks I'm a weird one, Cooper reflected, the way I'm sniffing my goddam nose to pieces, as he puts it. But he knows I've got good dope, and I've got it all the time. He won't argue with that.

At that moment, a small dark fellow ran huffing and puffing down the elevated station steps, and Cooper spotted Andy walking towards the awning of the not too-impressive Italian restaurant under which he himself now stood. Cooper remembered this

restaurant for its stiff and starchy lasagna, but its awning was a good shelter to meet under. The two shook hands, and walked, as they had done countless times before, heading in the direction of a nearby coffee shop. On the way, Cooper whipped out a cigarette and asked for a light. Andy and he ducked between two buildings, as if to avoid the wind. Huddling a few feet from the sidewalk, Cooper reached into his pocket and pulled out the bundle of dope. At the same time, Andy produced a wad of bills. Pressing their packets into the other's hands, they concluded the deal. Cooper enjoyed the first puff, and slowly exhaled smoke into the bitter air of the early evening. Then they walked back towards the station entrance.

“This shit is pretty good,” Cooper said as they walked.

Andy nodded in approval. Haven't had any complaints, except about prices. You don't suppose you can come down a bit, do you?”

Cooper had been through this before.

“No, I'm afraid not,” he replied. “I'm already paying for this through the nose.”

They both laughed at that one.

“Listen,” Andy advised. “If you'd get off that sniffing kick, you wouldn't need so much dope to get high. You could cut down on your stash, and cut prices. Besides, it looks like somebody drove a corkscrew up your nostrils.”

Cooper winced at the mention of his strange deviation. A nose Jones was a rarity in the dope world; almost all junkies began by snorting, but few continued the nasal method once habituation was in sight. They all preferred to shoot.

“Well, you know how I hate needles,” Cooper replied. “They're dirty,” he sneered. “Look at the way you guys pass your works from arm to arm. I've never seen anything so disgusting in my life! Don't you know how unhealthy that is?”

Andy laughed. "Talking about health, Coop, you ought to take a good look in the mirror some time."

Cooper could not argue this point. He could no longer bear seeing old photographs of himself, the once proud nose peering out at the world, neither too fat or too thin, free from any disfiguring bumps, hooks, curves, or scars. How painful to be reminded of the scarred and desensitized nostrils which had once quivered in delight at the scent of a perfumed body, the curling smoke of a burning joint, the natural purity of a fresh-mowed lawn. Now the olfactory powers of these nostrils were nearly obliterated, buried beneath layers of junk-worn tissue. Cooper was not certain he could use the term nostril in the plural sense; years of hard huffing had broken away the center cartilage, eroding it till it dissolved completely, leaving a slab of pale grey skin hanging over one very red and misshapen nostril.

Andy snapped Cooper out of these thoughts.

"I've got to go and make some sales," he told Cooper. "I think you ought to listen to what I've been saying," he said. "You'll get a lot higher a lot faster and a lot cheaper if you quit fucking around with your nose. You can't appreciate good dope unless it's in your blood."

With that, the two parted, each heading for a different train.

Cooper knew that Andy was right about the shooting head. Snorting took twice as much, not only because of the needle's quick intake, but mainly because in shooting you got it all and you got it at once. The snorter had to write off a fair amount of dope as lost forever in the pores and hairs of the nose, much of it unwillingly blown back to the indifferent world outside, unable to be sucked in by even the most nimble nostrils.

Yet it was more for aversion to shooting than love of sniffing that kept Cooper's nose at work. To use a needle meant to be like all the others, the loafers, the thieves, the dirty,

mindless men who wrapped their lives around their habits and made it a disgrace to be a smackhead. After a while, the junkie did not care whether he lived or died; he lived for heroin, and if it killed him, it did not matter.

It mattered to Cooper. There were things he believed in, believed in more than dope, and he wanted to live for these things. The risk of hepatitis was for him a real risk, as was the air bubble which gets caught in your vein, strangling you from within. Most feared was the massive overdose which could kill you before you had the needle out of your arm.

It's never the same after you've seen your first o.d., Cooper said to himself. It's never the same after you've seen someone die that way, someone you knew, someone you got high with. Cooper knew of these things.

He had seen such a tragedy only a few months ago. A friendly little junkie named Harry the Horse had put some powerful new stuff in the cooker, heating the mixture in a spoon, readying the milky liquid for injection through an eyedropper with a soiled needle mounted on its end. Harry had caught the disapproving look on Cooper's face as he tightened a necktie around his arm.

"What's the matter, Coop?" he had called, resting himself in a comfortable armchair. "Scared of needles? How are you ever gonna travel anywhere? May need a smallpox shot, you know." Then, smiling broadly, he squeezed the opiate mixture into his punctured vein.

It was a smile which was to remain forever frozen on his face; the instant the Horse squeezed that mixture into his veins, his scoring days were over, his being as scattered as the powder he had craved.

The other junkies at the party did not seem overly traumatized. They had been through this too many times.

"It wasn't stepped on enough!" cried one burnt scarecrow of an addict, screaming more in anger over waste of drug than of life.

The party broke up quickly. It was doubtful many revelers would later recall the incident with any sorrow or pity; it was just another night when someone had died. But Cooper could not forget it. The memory of the Horse's features, taunt and grey, were permanently etched into his consciousness, disturbing him whenever he thought of the dread dangers of the o.d. So Cooper had opted for the softer, safer, sniff.

Yet snorting also took its toll. The one worn slab of skin that was Cooper's nose had become quite a nuisance. Occasionally, the suction of breathing would force the flap over the sore nasal cavity, where it would stubbornly adhere, making further breathing all but impossible. Cooper had learned to flick his left pinky deftly beneath the flap, letting in some air and clearing the nostrils. While riding on those damned subways, the dense, stifling air made the problem more severe; shielding his face with a newspaper, Cooper would quickly give the much needed ventilation to his overburdened respiratory system.

This disfigurement bothered Cooper. He did not want to call attention to his peculiar habit, for it was something no one would understand. He did not want to be held up for ridicule. He was a businessman, and a someday successful businessman, as well as a serious pleasure seeker, and he must maintain the respect of his community if he was to continue in his work. He considered plastic surgery, but that was too expensive, and besides, a few more months of hard huffing, and the new nose would be eaten away. How many times could a doctor rebuild a nose? It was necessary to have something to work on, and the way Cooper could wear out noses, there wouldn't be enough of a one to use as a base. Cooper had considered a good plastic nose, but thus far all he had seen were of the dime store variety, coming with funny moustache and lensless glasses. These would certainly not ward off the ridicule he feared.

Cooper saw his train approaching. It roared into the station, slowing down rapidly as it reached the platform. It groaned to a halt, the door opened, and the fearful thoughts left Cooper's mind.

Cooper walked through the hallway into the living room of his family's house. They lived on a tree-lined street just off a busy, traffic-laden boulevard. His mother caught sight of him as he headed quietly for his staircase leading to his room upstairs.

"Where have you been all day?" she inquired as he reached the very first step. "Your father called five times to see if you were on your way to work. Don't you remember you promised him you would show up this morning?"

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I had to go see the doctor. I just forgot to call Dad. I'll apologize when I speak to him." Silently, Cooper cursed the irresponsible junkies who had not kept their appointments. He had wasted half the day just sitting around.

"Been to the doctor again?" his mother asked with concern. "I suppose it's for that nose of yours. Oh, I've been so worried about you! You look so unhealthy. Can't you find a doctor who can do something?"

Cooper's parents had not failed to catch the deconstruction of his nose. At first he had dismissed it as a bad cold, but after a few weeks his mother had forced him to down so many aspirins that he had developed a slight ulcer.

"And you really ought to stop taking that snuff," his mother implored. "It's certainly not good for a nose like yours." She paused. "I hope your doctor made that quite clear."

Cooper had made the mistake of telling his parents that he had taken to using snuff, and that was why his nose was so inflamed. He assured them that once he adjusted to it,

everything would be fine. He now promised his mother that this practice would stop; though his father, in an attempt to bridge the growing distance between them, had presented him with a large tin of fine Danish snuff. Cooper had subsequently flushed it down the toilet.

Cooper's father was now asleep on the big couch, a cops-and-robbers show blaring from the color T.V. set. The remote control device lay on the couch arm by his head. A big, heavy set man with pale wrinkled jowls and thinning grey hair cut short, he was asleep in his usual casuals; a plain T-shirt and baggy black chinos. Cooper walked past him slowly, hoping not to wake him. He quietly bid his mother good night.

"I've got to make sure I get to work tomorrow," he informed her. "I think I'll just read a bit and fall asleep."

"Well, don't you think you should be eating some dinner?" she asked with concern. "I can get something together really quick," she added.

"Thanks, Mom," he replied, "but I grabbed a bite to eat on the way home. I was in a hurry. I think I'll just make this an early evening." Cooper valued the strong affection between he and his mother. She was a spry woman, and he admired her natural ability to remain fit. She's kept that tall, trim figure without trying, he reflected, and there's no gray in her hair. Cooper's mother gazed at her only child with tender passion, then headed back to the kitchen. She doesn't really understand me, Cooper thought, but she loves me. She knows I really want to succeed, and she thinks I'm on my way. She keeps saying I'm a slow starter, but now I've found direction. She's really excited about this working at the car lot. Good for the family.

Cooper made his way up the stairs to the bedroom he had occupied all his twenty-two years. The room was plain but functional: Nondescript dark wood dresser and desk, bed covered with a maroon imported quilt. The walls were spotted with pictures of Cooper's favorite rock stars.

Cooper locked the door behind him. Removing his coat at last, he hung it in the closet, at the same time reaching into his pants pocket for the head stash he had set aside that afternoon. Twenty bags. Ten for tonight and ten for the morning. A junkie could get by on half that amount, he thought.

Cooper put ten bags back in his pocket. He took the other ten, and, sitting down at his desk, he reached into the top left drawer and took out a paper bag. He removed from the bag a mirror the size of a paperback novel cover. He then tore open the ten bags carefully, dumping their content on the mirror with equal care.

He reached into the bag again and took out a sharp single-edged razor blade, and began to divide the mound of heroin into lines. He did not have to chop it any finer, but it was still a slow task. Craftsmanlike, he divided the mound into forty thin lines, each essentially the same as the other.

Cooper reached into his bag once more, withdrawing the snorter, a well used piece of plastic straw cut down to about one and three quarter inches. In emergencies, he relied on a rolled up dollar bill, but the straw allowed a better flow from mirror to nose, wasting less of precious powder.

He flipped away his reddened flap with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, and carefully grasped the straw with his right. When he released the piece of skin, it fell back on the flattened spot where his nose used to have shape, clamping the straw in place. He did not even have to hold the straw; he could place his head above a line and huff it, take a snort to clear out his nostrils, then go on to the next line.

Cooper plowed through ten lines without a pause, snorting powerfully as he felt the dope rush through the deadened inner passages of his ruined nose; with his hands free, he was able to adjust the stereo set perched on a shelf right above the desk. He set the receiver at FM and tuned in a rock station. As the music floated through the room, and the vacuumed drug floated inside his head, Cooper forgot, slowly at first, exactly what was going on. He felt no worn-out nose, recalled no bitter afternoons spent in fear, in taking one train after another.

The junkie may have gotten the final, ultimate high all at once, but Cooper did not mind the pleasant wait the snorter must expect. First his face would go dead, losing all sense of feeling, as the raw scratchy sensation in his nose subsided. Then there was a vague, dreamy sense of floating in a land without scenery, of passing time in a place where time did not exist. Yet even this did not satisfy Cooper. He wanted the end of all feeling, the death that has a beating heart and a drawing of breath; he sought the escape and isolation junkies of all types have always craved. For some junkies, it meant more sleep, more dark, more love, more hate; whatever it was that lifted them out of the world of the living while still alive and placed them in the land of the dead without death's pre-pain.

For this he needed more lines. He reinstalled his straw and held his drooping head over the mirror, the twenty lines of pleasure going up in time to the music. He stood up from the chair when he was done, wobbled to his bed, fell upon it, allowing the narcotic rush to envelope him. He was not thinking about tomorrow or today; he thought of nothing, felt nothing, knew nothing. He was a fleck of heroin in the world's nose, a weathered straw to suck up the drug. For half an hour this lasted, ten bags of the powder in his head, rushing through his body.

“To enjoy good dope,” Andy had advised, “you got to get it into your blood.”

Dope was surely in Cooper's blood, but he did not have to risk death. He had heard it said that taking drugs was to join the living dead. He had thought once, that if this was death, why would anyone bother to live? But this wasn't death, he knew, it was a part of life, the part of life one was entitled to when one has worked for it. He had worked for this right, and he wanted to live to enjoy it. The junkies earned nothing, lived for nothing, deserved nothing. For junkies, dope was a substitute, for death, a painless death they had not earned.

Such thoughts were far from Cooper's mind as he rolled the edge of consciousness. He was fully clothed, and the lamplight and radio were still on when he fell asleep for the night.

"I had a really weird dream last night," Cooper told Andy as they sat sipping coffee in an out of the way table tucked in the rear of a drab but bustling diner off Roosevelt Avenue.

Andy had heard Cooper's complaints day after day for several months, but Cooper felt Andy liked him; he always tries to make me feel at ease, Cooper thought.

"Dreaming about your habit?" Andy inquired.

"Yeah, my habit," Cooper replied.

"I was sniffing some really powerful Harlem dope, you see, a big five dollar bill under my nose." He paused for a moment. "No straw, no bill. I'm just sucking it up like a Hoover."

Andy became entranced by this revelation. Rarely did Cooper discuss his strange deviation. Cooper continued:

“I’m sucking in this good dope, and my head begins to ache. I mean like a really bad headache. It was really getting to me, ruining a nice head. So I snort up another bag. I figure it’ll kill the pain, like a doctor uses morphine. I was just being my own doctor. Anyways, the pain is getting worse, right up at the top of my head.” Cooper recalled how in the dream, the pain had wound its way up like a cyclone, to the top of his cranium, right where the hair starts to swirl. “The pain won’t go away. Only one thing to do. Another bag.” He stopped speaking for a brief moment, as he remembered that part of the dream. “That was all my weak skull could take,” he continued in excitement. “It went off like Old Faithful.”

He fearfully recalled the scene, his skull cracking, spewing out bits of bone and brain. By sheer instinct, the dream man had taken one more huff, and the whole head went off like a cherry bomb, sending junkies flying in all directions.

“And you know what you junkies did?” Cooper asked in anger. “You bastards picked me like you were a flock of buzzards! Soon as you saw I was dead, you peeled me like an onion!”

He spoke the truth. The junkies of his subconscious had regained their composure rather quickly. Realizing Cooper’s head had been atomized, they approached, cautiously at first, then, descending, stripping his body of anything of value, stuffing the naked cadaver in a nearby garbage can, his funeral dirge a symphony of “ain’t that a bitch” and “I’ve seen some powerful dope, but, mother, this is something else!”

“I dreamt it made the papers,” Cooper sadly confessed, “and the whole city was laughing at me.” Indeed, the next morning the dreamworld papers prepared the public for the shocking tale with the headline “FIND HEADLESS HORSEMAN”, and a picture of a dented garbage can, two feet sticking out from the top. It was not a very nice dream,” Cooper emphasized. “It could never really happen.”

Andy chuckled.

“You see, Coop,” he stated, “if you don’t want to mainline, you got other problems. So you’re not worrying about o.d.ing, you gotta have nightmares without huffing your brains out. Don’t you see, we can’t win, so we may as well fuck it all.”

Cooper became indignant at the way Andy lumped him with all the addicts.

“Don’t say we,” he curtly interjected. “I can win if I want. You junkies are losers because you don’t care about anything. I’m no loser!”

Andy laughed as the waitress brought the check. He plunked down a tip, picked up the bill, and left.

“Don’t look now,” he called to Cooper, “but your nose is falling into your face!”

Cooper closed his eyes and clenched his fists beneath the table, indignant that Andy would embarrass him in public. He’d teach that little junkie a thing or two about manners, he thought. It was too late. When he opened his eyes and unclenched his fists, Andy was gone.

A short while later, Cooper was rattling home on the hated subway. Tomorrow, he had a long day’s work ahead of him, and he needed his nightly pleasure to prepare for it.

Yet at times, when Cooper examined his life, he knew that like the junkies, he would have to give up his pleasure in order to partake of the finer aspects of the society around him. “Kick the habit or kick the bucket” was how Andy had described the ultimate law of dope.

It was only a matter of time. There was no way out. This was not the same path as the needle, but it would eventually kill him in its own way. He wanted to be alive to enjoy dope when America finally woke up and tolerated it. He figured that day to be no more than twenty years away.

The existing treatment apparatus had never faced a nose Jones, and did not know how to deal with it. Rather than face failure, they chose to ignore the problem. The therapeutic communities in New York had devised a simple, fool-proof test; every addict must show his track marks. Rule number one in every therapeutic community was “Check Track Marks.” No marks, no junkie. This had happened to Cooper only a few weeks ago when, acknowledging the need to take a break for the sake of his nose, he had applied for a preliminary interview at Out House, a community in the Bronx.

“Okay kid,” growled the fat sloppy doctor at the reception area. “Roll up those sleeves.”

Cooper had complied. When the medic saw the clear, unpunctured skin, he threw Cooper out of the office.

“Come back when you got some track marks,” he barked. “We don’t want no fakers.”

“But my nose....” Cooper had weakly interjected.

“Don’t give me any of that nose business,” the doctor snarled. “Just show me some track marks.”

The methadone clinics were just as bad. They had never treated a nose Jones, were loathe to attempt it, fearing a failure might instill more doubts in the minds of those who cried, “Methadone is just addition to another drug.” Medicated orange juice would be poured down the throats of perforated smack freaks, but a gaping hole in the middle of a man’s face meant nothing.

“Everyone knows you get addicted to heroin by shooting it through the veins of the arm!” shrieked the exasperated social worker at the city methadone clinic. “Or perhaps through the veins of the leg when those of the arm have collapsed,” she added, shuffling through her papers for some official statement. She showed Cooper the door.

So Cooper could receive no help because he was different.

“It’s those damn liberal intellectuals,” he thought, often out loud. “If you don’t fit into their computer programs, they don’t want to hear about you. If I was black, they’d be kissing my ass. If Goldwater hadda won, things would be different.”

Good fortune can cleanse the sores of the mind’s wounds. Cooper was quite content with the present reality as he placed the key in the ignition slot and twisted it, at the same time stepping on the gas. The engine let out a smooth roar. It was a five-year-old car, but his father had seen to it that the mechanics gave it a thorough overhaul before allowing Cooper to drive it off the lot. A powerful Olds convertible, red with a white top. Cooper’s father had let it go for five hundred dollars, half the book value.

“Now that you’re working for me, I don’t see why you shouldn’t be driving something you can be proud of,” the old man had remarked after Cooper had been working for a few weeks. “Especially since you’ve been working so hard.”

Cooper smiled as he toiled along the expressway, his hands clutching the wheel of his new pride and joy. Everything had been perfect all the way down the line; money and dope had exchanged hands, with no rip-offs, delays, or failures to put in an appearance.

“Coop,” his Man had said, “if you can move quantity, I can get it. Some of my contacts are into something really big.”

“Just let me see what I can do,” Cooper responded.

He sought out Andy.

“Andy, if you can move quantity, I can get it. Some of my contacts are into something really big.”

“Just let me see what I can do,” Andy replied.

They all saw what they could do, and it was worth doing. Within a week, Cooper had enough money to pay for a car. The Big Thing was no everyday deal, with indefinite timetables. It was worked out to take place the same time each day, and it did. It only took a few days to move all the dope his Man had supplied him. Andy could handle it all. After a week of the Big Thing, Cooper only needed to buy for his head. Cooper could work full time for his father. He was making good money at the lot, and he could always buy his own stash at cost from Andy or his Man. He no longer had to deal dope. There were no more trains to take. Cooper would drive to Roosevelt Avenue, meet Andy, and buy his fun for the night. Andy was making his moves in the dealing world now that Cooper was in semi-retirement. Andy had met Cooper's Man, and they had hit it off rather well.

"Glad to see the kid is getting somewhere," Cooper had remarked to his Man the last time they had done business. Cooper felt a debt of loyalty to his Man, and now that he himself had left the business, he felt relieved that he was able to offer a handpicked substitute who had learned it from the bottom, and was always eager to learn more. Besides, Cooper thought, Andy would always be a good supply. Cooper looked forward to life as a gentleman aficionado; maybe the next step would be a vacation from junk. Give that nose a rest and lower that massive tolerance. He would figure out a way.

Cooper's nose was about to disappear. He was working regularly, and the old man was afraid it might scare away the customers. The nose was in worse shape than ever. Little abscesses appeared in the red morass, like lava bubbling over. It hurt when he stuck the straw into this mush, but the pain would end as he sucked in his dope as if it were a creamy thick shake. Now even the needle-scarred degenerates laughed at him, but it didn't matter; he wasn't of their ilk.

Cooper was parking his car, preparing to meet Andy as usual, when it happened. The words “arrest” and “Mr. Big” stuck in his mind as they slapped the cuffs on him. What the hell was going on, he wondered. They put him in a crowded, filthy cell on Riker’s Island, a cell he shared with six other men awaiting either trial or sentencing. He didn’t understand why he was there, who had led the cops to him, why they would bust him now that he was retired. How did it happen?

That night, as he tried to sleep, kept awake by the queasy withdrawal feeling in his stomach and the convulsive twitching of his upper lip, he attempted to put it all together. Andy, he thought. He’s the only one who could have done it. My Man would never turn on me; it’s not his style, and besides, the cops always want the person above you. If anyone was gonna turn someone in, it would be me, but I’d never squeal on my Man. Loyalty is what counts, he thought, and my Man will know I’m loyal. When this whole thing gets straightened out, he’ll be glad to see me, pat me on the back, offer me some nice fat lines.

Yes, Cooper thought, my Man had nothing to gain by turning me in. We just don’t do things that way. But Andy, Cooper realized, was newer to the scene, never understood the honor system. He’d laugh about my nose right to my face, Cooper recalled. What an ass Andy was, thought Cooper, tossing on the cold, stone floor. (There weren’t enough mattresses to go around, the guard had said.) Andy probably tried getting high in the alleyway between two buildings, just like he used to do before I met him, Cooper theorized. He says he stopped that, but I don’t believe him. Why did I keep dealing with him, Cooper asked himself. Yeah, Cooper reasoned, Andy probably o.d.’d out on the streets, got picked up and saved by the cops, got himself busted. Andy knew he was caught dead to rights and ratted out Cooper, the guy who set him up with the Man. He’s a real junkie, Cooper thought; I don’t think he can survive the night without a fix. The cops must have seen that

right off and started putting the pressure on him. Cooper had heard other junkies tell how when the cops bust an addict, they pump him for names, using relief from withdrawal as a lure. So Andy must have given them me because he was sick and scared, Cooper concluded. I guess he figured I'd have an easier time than the Man. Who knows what he told them, he pondered. Well, he reminded himself, he did move all my dope. Still, you never squeal, no matter what.

And my damn car, Cooper thought. Andy never knew my last name. They would never have caught me in the old days when I took the trains. But it's not hard to check every red convertible Olds along Roosevelt Avenue, looking to see if the driver has a nose.

Cooper cursed Andy many times through that night.

Cooper had not called his parents when he was arrested because he needed time to think of how he was going to break the news to them. He knew that the first thing in their minds would be that it was all a mistake. In the morning, he was brought down to court and arraigned. His bail was set at ten thousand dollars. Cooper knew his father would come up with the money, but he wanted still more time.

Then he saw the papers, which were now real. "COPS NAB DOPE KING", cried *The New York Post*. "MR. BIG HAS NO NOSE", screamed *The Daily News*. Even the normally staid *Times* ran a page six article headlined "POLICE BELIEVE DEFORMED MAN IS HEROIN KING". This made Cooper quite a celebrity at Riker's Island, and most of the men believed he was getting a raw deal. Still, the embarrassing headlines didn't make it any easier for him to call his parents. I'm sure they're already trying to help me, he told himself, trying to get bail reduced, a few counts knocked off. Indeed, Cooper had been told by a guy supposedly linked to the prison grapevine, that some lawyer was already out working on Cooper's case. Cooper didn't know how much faith to place in these rumors, but it didn't sound unreasonable.

Even in prison there is dope, and where there is dope, there is Cooper. However, there was not nearly enough dope to allow snorting. It was either shoot or sicken.

Whenever Cooper saw his dirty Black and Latin cellmates getting off on a set of works cleaned with cold water in a filthy, clogged sink, he felt like vomiting. That first morning in jail, after arraignment, he actually did barf, right over the slop bucket. The sight of the bucket mad him barf even more. He spent a good part of the day twitching his nose and barfing. He never considered shooting. By tomorrow, my folks will have me out, he kept assuring himself.

The second night was a bad night for Cooper. His cellmates were snoozing away, high on dope smuggled in by a guard on the take. Cooper spent the night sleeping on the cold floor, occasionally crawling over to the slop bucket.

In the morning his cellmates saw him and laughed.

“Man,” said little Pedro, “you are a sick junkie. Let Pedro make you better.”

Cooper started to object, but he couldn’t. He began to cry, for he knew he had no choice. Pedro wound a strip of cloth, torn from someone’s shirt, around Cooper’s arm. As Pedro readied the works, Cooper bawled like an uncertain young girl about to give in to uncontrollable passion.

“Don’t cry, amigo,” Pedro whispered sympathetically, “soon you forget you in this sheethouse.”

“Yes,” Cooper sputtered, “but I’ll be in a worse shithouse. I’ll be a fucking junkie!”

The next thing Cooper knew, he was floating as if he had just snorted fifty bags at once. He did not mind being a junkie. It was being high that counted; why concern himself with how he got high? Then he stopped thinking.

He could see Harry the Horse laughing, waving at him in a forest where the trees were huge hypodermics, big bags of dope hanging from the boughs like lush apples. Harry

was dancing, singing. Cooper could not make out the song, but he heard the words ‘beautiful losers’. Harry danced in jerky movements, as if he were a marionette, but there were no strings visible. Cooper was frightened, yet his body had lost its ability to feel fright as it ought to he felt.

Pedro stared at the figure of Cooper, stiff and taut on the cold stone floor. He was scared, and his body knew how to feel this.

“I think maybe you shot him up with a little too much,” someone else in the cell meekly called to Pedro.

“Man, I just wanna help him. He seem really fucked up. I just wanna help him.” Pedro began to cry. “I just wanna help him,” he wept. “I just wanna help.”

Cooper was floating away from Harry. As he passed him, the Horse stuck a small needle into Cooper’s caved-in nose. It tickled. As Cooper floated along, he touched the spot where the needle had entered, pushing his hand through the snow-like powdery mist swirling up all around him. He felt a little bump forming. It grew bigger. His nose! His nose was growing back!

“Thank you Harry!” he sang out in the mist. “Thank you Pedro!”

“Thank you Pedro!” Pedro heard the muffled garble coming from inside Cooper’s chest, and he paused in his crying.

“He thank me, he thank me!” Pedro shouted. “He forgive me!”

THE END