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Untitled

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Untitled

JAMES BEEBE

Matty was a slanty type, never standing completely perpendicular to the plane of the Earth. Like a steadily moving train, though, he progressed through his work. I always wondered what went through the mind lying just behind those always down-turned eyes. A bit of an enigma he was, completely escaping my understanding. Blood colored his arms up to the elbows as he killed cow after cow all day every day, week after week, all year long.

Unlike most of the hangover victims, he was there on time every morning. He'd have four cows hanging on the rail before Eddy, the header, was even on the floor. Crazy Eddy would have to haul ass just to catch up by coffee break. Matty just kept chugging away. The number of the day's slaughter was determined by him and him alone. One after another he'd pop 'em, string 'em up, and release the red waterfall from the jugular. Many tried, but none could hit that elusive artery with the precision of our Matty. I tried many times and Curt would always yell at me. It seems that if you did it wrong, the blood would clot in the animal's shoulder, ruining that part of the meat. Matty definitely had a way with settin' the red free. After the first cut, his whole forearm would disappear up inside the throat. Then, like he was pulling a switch, his arm would twitch and out would pour the blood.

After I'd worked there for a little while, Matty and his friend Duffy decided I was ready to join them on their lunch time drive. As we were pulling out of the parking lot, Duffy caught my attention by shot gunnin' a warm beer. It was Matty though who really made the impression. From the time we left the slaughterhouse until we got back, he was continually smoking pot from that crazy cow horn pipe. Now

I was no rookie, but one hit of that kooky hick weed and I thought I was gonna die. But Matty just kept puffin'. He must've smoked a whole dime over that half-hour of dirt roads. When we returned I could barely function; that stuff got the better of me. Matty, on the other hand, was fine and seemed almost to race back inside. When I finally entered the kill floor, I heard the POP...POP of Matty's gun. I looked over just as he was emerging from the knock box. He had on one of those T-shirts from the 70's with the big yellow happy face on it. Full of rips and faded from ump-teen bleachings, I noticed a big splatter of blood and brains right down the middle of it. Feeling sorry for the smiley guy, I frowned back to my corner.

THC tricks made it a little hard to concentrate that afternoon. Gary the gut man was talking to me, "Yeah my wife bought this computer from the Home Shopping Network and I told her she was gonna..." His words drifted to the back burner and just as I stopped hearing them something horrible apprehended me. A gurgling "MOOO" crept into my ears and it sounded terribly close. You're not supposed to hear mooing on the kill floor, they're supposed to be dead before they reach us, Matty sees to that. Then again, the horrible bubbling, knocking at my ear, wanting in. I took a few steps and the scene at the blood pit came into view. There was a cow hanging there, Matty's hand in its throat, and it was still wiggling. I walked closer. This wasn't the 'nerve reaction' twitch often seen in the dead animals, this was life. Just as I realized what I was seeing, Matty's efforts to increase the flow from a trickle succeeded and red issued forth. I inched forward as the animal heaved and swayed. Then, as a cruel joke, that gashed windpipe, flooded with blood, bellowed once more like a water choked steam whistle. I looked at Matty in horror, in need of an answer.

There he stood, cool as ice, the picture of indifference, pride of the Stoics. Our Matty didn't even notice.....no..... he just didn't care. The terror in my pulse came to a rest in time with the writhing body of the victim. Eyes downturned and a little slanted to the plane of the Earth, It must've seemed I almost raced back to my corner. I had tripe to cut.