

The Skanky Soul of Jimmy Twist a short story by Bruce Bethke

It was late in the spring of 1977 when I returned, not by choice, to London. I'd been on the bum about the continent for some two years, busking for change and just generally enjoying life. The busking went well; I'm a good guitarist, a fair singer, and blessed with the sort of thin, blond, boyish good looks that appeal to the wallets of tourist women.

Unfortunately, the "enjoying life" bit climaxed in a brief but intense affair with Katrina, the pudgy daughter of a Hamburg banker. When she and I parted company that May there were no regrets, no accusations, no hard feelings -- and no words about the skin-headed young thug she was engaged to marry before she met me. I do wish she'd mentioned him.

For as it happens, he followed me to Amsterdam, bashed me silly, smashed my guitar, tossed the pieces in the Oude Schans Kanaal, tossed me in after it, and landed the both of us in the Jordaan clink. His family's solicitor arrived the next morning, of course, and took him back to Hamburg -- less a 50-guilder fine for dumping rubbish in the canal -- but I went before the dock for vagrancy. By noon they'd seized my passport and put me on the train to Vlissingen, thence to spend another cheery night in jail before catching the morning boat back to Mother England.

I really *do* wish she'd mentioned him.

Not that I felt bad for being deported; the Dutch don't have proper beds in their jails, just concrete slabs with a thin pretense of mattress. I didn't mind leaving.

Trouble was, I was going back to England with no money, no prospects, no choices, and above all, no guitar. I'd been quite attached to that guitar; it was a lovely old 1953 Gibson LGO that'd belonged to my Uncle Lewis, and now the dear thing was a clutter of kindling floating somewhere in the Zuider Zee.

Still, as Rasham was to later tell me through Jimmy Twist:

*The cold rain it must fall
to bring the bountifulness forth.*

*The dark pain you must feel
to love the gladful tidings more.*

I will admit that if he'd tried to tell me that just then, though, I would have broken his nose.

The next day was spent in wallowing across the Channel from Vlissingen to Sheerness. In the morning I parked myself in a cold metal chaise lounge on the foredeck and claimed I was making plans, but mostly I stared. Stared at the oily grey sky. Stared at the somewhat darker oily grey sea. Stared at the gull droppings and rust

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