The greatest bialy (not puffy, cracker crisp edges) heaped with the greatest egg salad (not yellow mud, a tenuous clinging of ingredients crumbling like a substance neither dust nor sand—nor clay nor rock)

whenever I got the shit beat out of me as a kid I responded by dragging myself to a record store and purchasing a blues album from one of the bins of "cut outs" or albums with a little niche sliced in one corner. My head pounded as I pondered the options. Lowell Fulson, Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Willie Dixon. The air conditioning was my bandage.

with the right fingers you could climb any wall—get the right fingers

TIMELINES OF OUR LIVES:

am passing historic home after midnight on my way home from home and I see there is a broken window on the first floor and a man with a sledgehammer inside who cries "I'm just a poet making a revision! Don't shoot!" Of course I don't shoot. I can't carry a gun. Wound never. Believe in gun control and tell him this and he calms right down and picks up a flashlight and shows me the hole in the wall and I look in and see what he's after—the time capsule buried there a year ago, containing literary works by local writers, he says, including his poem that has "flaws." "What flaws?" I ask. He won't say, other than to hint "Important little ones." At which point the caretaker asleep in the basement woke up and ran up and gave the poet and I a choice—either we repair the wall immediately or appear in a court of justice. And when the poet cried: "I'll pay any price to repair my poem! That's what's broken! My poem! Not the wall!" when he had gotten that much out I hit him over the head with an antique lamp and assured the caretaker I would fix the wall and did.
I have a levee mentality, not fortress mentality.

"I have a levee mentality, not fortress mentality."

"Without my permission, who turned on the tape recorder?"

"Who turned on the tape recorder?"

"Gris Christ."
Deacon Jawns agrees.

It's not the heat that gets you, but the cupidity.

I visit the bedside of the woman recovering from wounds she received because she is nice. I bring her beer and black-eyed susans. This is allowed because I started this hospital for all the strangers I have collected from the grinding pot of America. In the next room is the poor poet who is obsessed with changing a line in the poem of his that is forever buried in the whall of an historic house— as good as forever buried; the capsule won't be removed for a century, until long after he is dead and no longer able to correct types. The hospital is one hundred stories and crowded past the galls so I can't stay long with the nice woman, but she understands, being like me she too would want to spend at least ten seconds with each of the 5,000 patients each day.

"How are you doing?" I ask. And she says what she always says and what I never get tired of hearing, she says: 'I'm trying not to recover, because if I recovered, I'd be mean.' Ah.

searched / served

In his hut in the jungle, telling me that the best thing that ever happened to him was the barber shop, which was the best thing that ever happened to him, and that he was a steady stream of clients, all of them friendly.

Kurtz cuts my hair.

One potato, two potato.
I tell a friend who my barber is and doesn't believe that Kurtz is now running a nicie little shop in the jungle, so we go down the river together one day to get our hair cut—go down by marge—and when we get to the bend in the river labeled BARBER SHOP we jump into the warm water and swim ashore and get malaria and recover from malaria and then hire a native to guide us to the shop (been there a hundred times but I can never remember the way) and Kurtz is not all angry that we are three months late to the appointment. He is so easy-going now that he's found out what he is really meant to do in life. All the members of the local tribes come to him for haircuts. He's completely repaired his reputation. The bad old days are history. He's got a nice long mirror along one wall that reflects only your hair and nothing else. A local witch doctor made that for him. He's got nice chairs with seats not made of leather but something just like it. He's got literary journals for customers to read as so many are writers or professors. He's lost at least a hundred pounds since raising his self-esteem and he has reconnected his family back in England or wherever they are. My friend is agog at the difference between this Kurtz and the one in the short novel by Conrad. I say "You go first" and he gets in the chair and I pour myself a tropical drink from the pitcher that is always close by and Kurtz snips, and asks about New York City (the place fascinates him) and my friend tells about his new apartment on 81st and job working on the railroad and then a cockatu flies in and I chase it out and Kurtz thanks me and grabs a blow dryer, rooted content man.
As I sometimes do in this vast hospital that I run,
I introduce patients who I think would like each other,
in this case a woman gravely damaged by her nice-ness
and a poet who dreams of making a small revision to
a poem of his that has, sadly, already entered posterity
in a flawed form. I in my hospital have built a special
room for patients to meet each other and wheel both of
these sweethearts into it and watch the magic happen—
both very shy at first, but in no time at all exchanging
these lines, voices gentle and interested and patient.

POET: I
NICE WOMAN: YOU
POET: I have what might be called an elephant on my
back right now, and it's hard to focus on much—
but I must say you have the nicest eyes and the
nicest smile I have seen since my imaginings of
the way the Brownings looked at each other at
the breakfast table.

NICE WOMAN: You're too kind of course, but I'm glad
you are able to ignore the gaping wounds
that my nice-ness has earned me, and also
the fact that I am, well, like yourself
somewhat preoccupied with other issues,
and truly wondering if I will be able to
ever leave this place and re-enter a world
that seems to be fueled by four letter words
and other forces that are not nice, and ever

POST: Ungrateful? Is that the world you are searching for?
NICE WOMAN: Exactly. Not that I expect anyone to be all
that grateful for what I in particular have to
offer... but it seems to be... or seems tame—
that one little splash of water onto a shore—
that second of frghhh and foam and movement
is tailored like lace to fit that little bit
inside of us that can be content, if we let it.

POET: You are not just nice, you are rigid.

"Okay, you have our reservation, now one more thing:
please remain the same restaurant until we arrive."

When in doubt, lay 'em out.

Sing the praises of your mashed potatoes in the street.

Kurtz asks me how I'd like my hair cut—short as usual?

I tell him I'd like my hair cut—short as usual.

I tell him I'd like my hair cut—short as usual.