

Tom Waits, Putnam County

I guess things were always quiet
around Putnam County
kind of shy and sleepy as it clung to the skirts
of the 2-lane, that was stretched out like an
asphalt dance floor where all the oldtimers would
hunker down in bib jeans and store bought boots
lyin' about their lives and the places that they'd been
suckin' on Coca Colas and be spittin' Days Work
they's be suckin' on Coca Colas
and be spittin' Day's Work
until the moon was a stray dog on the ridge and
the taverns would be swollen until the naked eye
of 2am, and the Stratocaster guitars slung over
Burgermeister beer guts, and the swizzle stick legs
jackknifed over naugahyde stools and the
witch hazel spread out over the linoleum floors,
the pedal pushers stretched out over midriff bulge
and the coiffed brunette curls over Maybelline eyes
wearing Prince Machiavelli, Estee Lauder,
smells so sweet
I elbowed up at the counter with mixed feelings
over mixed drinks
and Bubba and the Roadmasters moaned in pool hall
concentration as they knit their brows to
cover the entire Hank Williams Song Book
and the old National register was singing to the
tune of \$57.57
until last call, one last game of 8 ball
and Berneice would be putting the chairs on the tables,
someone come in say "Hey man, anyone got
any Jumper Cables, is that a 6 or a 12 volt?"
and all the studs in town would toss 'em down
and claim to fame as they stomped their feet
boasting about being able to get more ass
than a toilet seat.
And the GMCs and the Straight 8 Fords
were coughing and wheezing and they
perculated as they tossed the gravel
underneath the fenders to weave home
a wet slick anaconda of a two lane
with tire irons and crowbars a rattlin'
with a tool box and a pony saddle
you're grinding gears, shifting into first
yea and that goddam tranny's just getting worse
with the melodies of "see ya later";
and screwdrivers on carburetors
talkin' shop about money to loan
and palominos and strawberry roans
See ya tomorrow, hello to the Mrs.
money to borrow and goodnight kisses
the radio spittin' out Charlie Rich
sure can sing that sonofabitch
and you weave home, weavin' home
leaving the little joint winking in the
dark warm narcotic American night
beneath a pin cushion sky and it's
home to toast and honey, start
up the Ford, your lunch money's there on the
draining board, toilet's runnin' shake the
handle, telephone's ringin' it's Mrs Randal
where the hell are my goddam sandals
and the porcelain poodles and the glass swans
staring down from the knick knack shelf
with the parent permission slips for the

kids' field trips
pair of Muckalucks scraping across
the shag carpet
and the impending squint of
first light, that lurked behind
a weeping marquee in downtown Putnam
and would be pullin' up any minute now
just like a bastard amber
Velveeta yellow cab on a rainy corner
and be blowin' its horn, in every window
in town.