

The Man Who Hypnotized Chickens

Bill Albert

I

Koster Fivel came out of nowhere. One minute he didn't exist the next minute it seemed he had always been there. When he finally vanished it seemed as if maybe we had imagined him. Could there really have been a Koster Fivel?

I think it must have been sometime in the April or May of '61, but I can't be sure. I do remember that it was one of those early spring days in Berkeley when the blond sorority girls looked particularly edible and out of reach, when the first gentle roar of homemade skateboards on the sidewalks could be heard, and when Ray Charles sang 'What I Say' from the windows of the Sigma Beta house next door. On the Sigma Beta lawn four or five members of the Cal football team were playing grab-ass. Showing off their golden bodies to each other and the Delta Tao girls across the road.

We sat on our front porch, beer cans held loosely against our knees, trying to look part of this all-American scene. But even though we all had the regulation short haircuts and wore the regulation uniforms - pressed chino pants, white socks, brown loafers and madras shirts - it wasn't enough to transform four lower-middle class Jewish kids into anything more interesting. Into the blue-eyed, straight-nosed, square jawed heroes we all not so secretly yearned to be.

We lived in Fraternity Row, but clearly were not part of it. It's not that the local Cossacks harassed us, they just ignored us. That is until Fivel turned up. It was impossible for anyone to ignore Fivel.

A particularly lovely springtime beauty was swinging by our house. Blond, tanned, blue eyed, firm chinned and long legged, high breasts jiggling ever so gently against her white cotton shirt. Cohen's eyes glazed over with desire. He dropped his beer can, moaned softly and grabbed his putz through the stiff fabric of his chinos.

'Please go away! Please come here! Please! Please!', he implored in a strangled voice, falling off his chair and rolling against the wall with a violent thud.

'For Christ's sake Cohen', said Martel disapprovingly, 'get hold of yourself!'

'Hold of myself!?', screamed the distraught Cohen, 'Hold of myself? I can't let go you stupid yits! I want! I want some! Oh, shit do I want some!'

'Someone get a bucket of water, quick', said Levine, 'before he tries to fuck the cat'.

'The cat! The cat! Get me the cat!', shouted Cohen rising to all fours and crawling rapidly toward the front door.

'Hey Cohen it's not kosher', I said, 'Goldberg is trayf'.

'Trayf, schmayf. I'm going to fuck her not eat her.' Cohen replied with Talmudic precision. 'Goldberg! Goldberg! Where are you kitty? Kitty. Kitty.'

It was Levine who probably saved Goldberg's furry ass.

'Hey guys,' he called out. 'Hey, will you look at this'.

We all rushed to the porch railing and looked down into the street. A bright metallic red '57 Olds had materialized in front of our house. It was a Main Street Dream. About three inches off the ground, shaved hood, chrome cut-outs and spinners. The windshield and the back window had been cut down as well, giving the car a dark sinister look. By the throaty plunk plunk

sound it made it had to be blown and carrying twin carbs and an overhead camb. Even the Sigma Beta's stopped to stare at this apparition more suited to cruising on a hard rock Fresno Saturday night than being parked on a bucolic afternoon in leafy Berkeley.

What was more amazing than the car was the figure that got out of it. He was a little guy, not more than 5'9" and scrawny. His Ricky Nelson Brylcreamed duck-tail didn't seem to fit the rest of him. Dark complexion, eyes too close together and a nose which even from 25 yards away screamed

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into that quiet Gentile afternoon. And the clothes! You wouldn't believe the clothes. Shiny black shoes, tight brown trousers, too short even for his small bandy legs, and a rumpled blue nylon shirt. The Late Pismo Beach look.

And what was this spectre doing? I'll tell you what he was doing. He was talking to Cohen's Bane, the lovely blond, breast juggler. Talking to her! We, the Four Shlumps, had lived here for two years and never, never had anyone of us even passed the time of day with one of these country club princesses. But no sooner had this short-assed ghetto bait bailed out of his Pachucomobile then he was in there. And she was laughing!! For real. She was actually laughing! The little guy flashed her a big white toothed grin, and touched her lightly on her brown arm.

Cohen had let go of himself, forgotten about Goldberg and was, like the rest of us, staring open mouthed at the scene below. We weren't the only one taking an interest, however. Over on the Sigma Beta lawn the football players had stopped leaping about and were also looking on, their minds working slowly on what it all might mean. Suspicious blue eyes followed him as he walked up to our house. All of a sudden we had been noticed. I could almost hear the sound of the hoof beats. Was there enough room on our lawn for a burning cross? Did four dead Jews make for a pogrom?

'How did, Ah, Ah, Oh Ah', stammered Cohen at the new arrival.

'Something wrong with him', asked Fivel.

'Nah', said Levine, 'he likes cats.'

'I see', replied Fivel, giving Cohen an understanding smile. 'I hear you fellas have a spare room here? Any objections to me having a look?'

And so Koster Fivel moved in with us and life was never the same again.

II

Koster Fivel never volunteered any information about himself. Where he was from, where he was going. For him it was always right now. This was delightfully subversive for four nice Jewish boys on the pre-med pre-law, pre-anything professional conveyer belt. Our education began almost immediately.

'Anyone got any rubbers', asked Fivel.

He had been with us about an hour and a half.

'Sure, I got one', said Levine, taking out his wallet with the slight oval indentation in it.

'One?', Fivel said. 'Only one? Hey, that won't do it, man.'

'I've got one as well', I offered, pulling out my wallet.

'What is this?', asked Fivel, 'the one-shot wallet brigade. Christ, you guys must be in real trouble.'

'Trouble?', replied Martel indignantly 'who needs rubbers you or us?'

'That's just my point', said Fivel

'You want the rubbers for that, Ah, Ah, Ah, that, Ah, Oh shit!'

'Jesus H. Christ, Cohen, will you calm down!', said an exasperated Martel.

Fivel held up to the light the rubber that Levine had given him. 'When's the last time you got laid Levine, 1945? This looks like a family heirloom.'

'I'm not forcing it on you', said the embarrassed Levine, snatching the rubber out of Fivel's hand.

'Yeah, yeah. No need to get pushed out of shape. It just seems to me that you guys aren't getting a lot of action is all.'

'We do ok', I said defensively.

'Yeah?', said Fivel. 'Well Mr. Stud when's the last time you dipped your wick? Come on, when?'

I looked around for some support.

'So things have been a little slow recently', said Levine with a shrug.

Fivel smiled.

'You guy's want to go get some Mexican', he said, with that sudden change of direction which always left you going the other way.

'Mexican what?', asked Martel suspiciously.

'Mexican what? Mexican food is what. I know a great place in downtown Oakland.'

'Downtown Oakland?', said Levine. 'On a Friday night? You gotta be kidding Fivel. You could get killed down there.'

'Trust me Levine', said Fivel soothingly. 'I'll get you there and back all in one piece. OK?'

In the end it was only Cohen who couldn't be persuaded. We had to forcibly carry him out of the house and stuff him in the back of Fivel's car. There was no way we were going to leave him alone with Goldberg.

III

I don't suppose any of us had ever been in a car like Fivel's. In high school they'd been driven by big tough looking guys with dark glasses, greasy hair and packs of Camels rolled up in the sleeves of their bicep-bulging tee shirts. The guys who always seemed to pull the neat looking girls. Girls that obviously did it. Did it a lot. These were the boys who sat in the back of the classroom and when the teacher asked them a question they laughed out of the corner of their mouths without dislodging their toothpicks. The real dummies. Jerks. Gentile nogoodniks, who our parents told us would end up as gas station attendants and garbage men. Christ how I'd envied them their girls and their cars and even their God-damned toothpicks!

As we glided on toward downtown Oakland I sat back on the red and white Tijuana tuck and roll upholstery closed my eyes and with the deep throb of the engine hitting me in the pit of the stomach I could almost feel the oil in my hair, the metal comb in my back pocket and the ironic sneer on my toothpicked lip. Levine's voice brought me rushing back.

'Jesus, will you look at this!'

We had arrived at Rosa's Mexican Cantina. Its large neon sign with a flashing red and yellow sombrero was the only light for blocks. All the other buildings were dark, boarded up or simply abandoned to the night and none of the streetlights were working. The flickering glow from the neon sombrero cast moving shadows across the parked cars. A faint hum came from Rosa's, but otherwise it was very quiet in the street.

'You sure about this Fivel?', asked an anxious Martel, as we clambered out of the Olds. 'It seems completely deserted around here.'

'I told you guys we'd have been better to go to La Vals or Blakes', whined Cohen, fear of the silent Oakland streets draining his confidence but restoring his coherence.

'You'll love the food', said Fivel. 'Come on. And there'll be no hassle about I.D.'s.'

We followed him into Rosa's. After the dark still street the noise and light inside was overpowering. It was an enormous barn of a place and it was packed. A mariachi band was blaring out "Guadalajara". Dark haired waitresses wearing gathered white peasant blouses and full skirts moved between the tables carrying big trays loaded with food and bottles of beer. Rather than the sleazy dive we had all feared in fact Rosa's turned out to be a friendly looking Mexican family restaurant. I could hear Cohen sigh with relief.

A very large Mexican with a Zapata moustache came over to us. He walked lightly for such a big man and looked as if he might have played defensive end for the 49ers.

'You boys want a table?', he asked. Then he noticed Fivel and his the ends of his moustache lifted in a big grin. 'Ojla pendejito! Como estás hombre?' He gave Fivel an enormous bear hug virtually burying the diminutive figure in his vast bulk while

patting him vigorously on the back. 'Where have you been, man? We haven't seen you around for a long time.'

'How ya doing Rosa?', replied Fivel, stepping back and showing all his teeth. 'I been trying to put something together up at the Lake. You know, working my way through school.'

The big man laughed and patted Fivel affectionately again.

'These your friends?'

'Yeah, just moved in with them today. Fellas, meet my old friend Rosa.'

We nodded our greeting and were led to a round table in the corner.

'Hey Fivel', said Levine after we sat down, 'how come this guy's named Rosa, he queer or something.'

'Schmuck!', hissed Fivel 'you want to get your balls cut off?'

Levine looked around in alarm, but luckily Rosa was over by the bar well out of earshot.

'He always wanted to have a place called Rosa's Cantina. So he's called Rosa. But I wouldn't get into with him, Levine. Jokes about fags don't go down very well with Mexicans. Especially real big Mexicans like Rosa.'

Rosa reappeared with a bottle and six small glasses.

'This tequila will make you cry like a baby,' said Rosa. 'A toast to my dear friend.'

He poured out the drinks and a waitress brought over a plate of cut lemons. He sprinkled some salt on the top of his hand between the thumb and forefinger, licked it off, took a hearty suck from a wedge of lemon and then raising the glass and crying 'Salud', he drained the tequila in one long gulp.

He was right about crying. The tequila burned all the way down and forced me to blink away tears. Except for Fivel, the others also seemed to be having trouble, especially Cohen, who had succeeded in getting both lemon and salt in his eye. Fivel then proposed a toast to Rosa and so it went on. By the time the food arrived, two bottles later, we all either had the four part tequila drinking move down pretty good or were too drunk to care.

The chicken enchiladas, tacos, chilli rellanos, refried beans, fideo, fresh tortillas and chilli verde were all fantastic. But hot. Jesus, was it hot. We must have worked our way through half a dozen beers each trying to stop the burning. As I got more booze down, things became increasingly indistinct. Loud, thumping mariachi music, Levine grinning with chilli sauce escaping from the side of his mouth, strong brown arms carrying trays, white teeth and red lips, Cohen crashed out, a half eaten taco in his limp hand, and then somehow we were outside again in the quiet street.

I came to leaning against Fivel's car. At first I couldn't see anyone else. Then I heard the unmistakable sound of puking coming from the other side of the car. It was poor Cohen. Martel and Levine, neither of them too steady on their feet, held him as he sprayed bits of enchilada and other less recognizable Mexican delicacies on the sidewalk. But where the hell was Fivel?

'Hey punk what you do'n with that car?'

I looked up and outlined against Rosa's neon sombrero were three figures. Big ones. I can remember thinking in an almost abstract way that their arms seemed much too long.

'Nothing. Just leaning is all', I answered, voice tight and knees fluttering under me.

'Leaning, Huh? Ha Ha Ha. Don't you know you might mess up the paintwork do'n that? Hey punk?'

I couldn't see his face but I was sure there was a toothpick moving up and down in it.

'I'm just waiting . . .'

Before I could finish Cohen puked loudly once more.

'Shit. It's a fucking punk convention', said another one of the three shadows moving across to the back of the car.

At this both Levine and Martel looked up in alarm and in doing so let go of Cohen, who with a soft splut fell face first into his recently released dinner.

'Hey Chico, check it out man, three lives ones and one roasted.'

'What you think we should do with 'em, man?'

'How about nothing?'

It was Fivel. Thank God for that, I thought. But, what was a little runt like Fivel going to do against these three gorillas. I waited.

'Hey, hey Kosterito!', shouted one of the them. 'How they hang'n man?'

'OK Enrico, how ya do'n?'

'OK man, OK. Hey, we thought these guys was fuck'n with you wheels. They friends?'

'Yeah, they're cool', said Fivel.' You wanna help me get this one back to Rosa's and cleaned up?'

'Sure thing, man. No sweat.'

'Fucking hell', said Levine after they had carried off Cohen, 'I thought we were dead for sure.'

'You're not home in bed yet Levine', said the ever optimistic Martel.

'Hey Fivel', I asked as we finally drove away from Rosa's, 'where did you know those three back there from?'

'Went to school with them', replied Fivel without further elaboration.

IV

The next morning I was sitting on the front porch nursing a hangover and trying to tell Cohen what had happened the night before. It was 8:00 and the street below was empty and still. In the distance the Bay sparkled in the early morning sun. It was clear enough just to make out the Gold Gate Bridge. It was going to be another lovely day.

Although delicate after the previous night's exertions, I felt that Rosa's Cantina had somehow been an important rite of passage for me. I didn't understand exactly why, but as I looked down on our quiet Berkeley street I felt more self confident, more knowing. However, as I was soon to find out, I still had a lot to learn.

Our conversation was interrupted by the shrill sound of a woman's laughter coming from an upstairs' bedroom. Koster's room. Cohen looked at me for some explanation.

'I've got no idea', I said.

'If it's that blond from yesterday, I'll plotz right here. I swear I will', said Cohen.

We both looked up as the sound of rhythmic thumping started on the loose wooden boards above our heads. Just then Levine emerged onto the porch holding an open wallet.

'Christ!', he said, 'I think Fivel has taken my fucking rubber while I was asleep.'

I grabbed my wallet from my back pocket. Although its imprint was still there my rubber too was gone.

'He's got mine as well', I said.

'One more and we'll have a rerun of Goldilocks and the three bears', said Cohen, laughing uneasily.

'Jesus! What's all the racket?', complained a bleary eyed Martel as he came out to join us.

Soon all four of us were looking up and listening intently. The thumping grew louder and the tempo increased. Bits of dust dislodged from the ceiling started to fall on our upturned faces. We didn't flinch. The unseen contest was totally absorbing. I wondered vaguely whose rubber he was using.

Then there was a god-almighty crash from inside the house followed by a horrible inhuman screech and Goldberg, ears back, tail straight up came rocketing out of the front door, down the front steps and into the bushes.

'You don't think . . .?', said Levine.

'Come on, be serious', retorted Martel.

We were all still sitting on the porch when we heard Fivel and the girl come down the stairs about an hour later. Out of concern for her reputation or perhaps because he didn't want to embarrass her or us, he took her out the back door. We never did see what she looked like, only a fleeting glimpse of short white socks, a firm white calf and a tartan skirt. It was a sure sign. He had scored with a local sorority girl.

'How does he do it?', asked Levine frustratedly, 'An ugly little squinty-eyed runt like that. How?'

'Beats the hell out of me', I replied. 'Maybe he uses Spanish fly.'

The mythical Spanish fly. That substance that everyone talked about and no one had ever seen. It was said that even if you looked like the Creature from the Black Lagoon one small drop of Spanish fly slipped into her drink would send a woman insane with lust.

'Why don't we just ask him when he gets back?', said Martel.

And we did.

'First of all', said Fivel, 'you gotta understand that they all want it as bad as you do, maybe worse. That's number one. Number two is that the better looking the girl the easier it is to get into her pants.'

'How do you figure that Fivel?', interrupted Levine.

'Because Levine, most guys are scared shitless of them. Think they must be getting offers all the time, which they don't. Or that because they're so good looking they don't want to fuck. Which is also crazy. Third, is that, contrary to popular belief, nice Jewish girls do it and if they're not Jewish then generally the size of the cross they wear is directly proportional to the amount of pussy you're going to get.'

'Hey Fivel, wait a minute, wait a minute, what about nuns?', asked Cohen, doubling up with laughter.

Fivel smiled broadly, 'OK Cohen. OK. Except nuns. How's that?'

I could see that Fivel had an important contribution to make to the armoury of anti-Semitism. The Thoughts of Koster Fivel

right next to The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.. Maybe they'd sell them as a boxed set.

'But most important', he continued, 'is you gotta have a bit of chutzpa.'

'Chutzpa? Chutzpa?', repeated an indignant Levine, 'what kind of cryptic bullshit is that Fivel?'

' Don't you know what chutzpa means, Levine?'

'Sure I know what it means. Like what the guy has who kills his mother and father and then throws himself on the mercy of the court because he's an orphan.'

'Right. Well with getting laid regular it's like this, I figured out that all you had to do was stand on a street corner and ask every girl that went by if they wanted to fuck. The law of averages is that eventually one of them is going to say yes.'

'Jesus, Fivel, who wants to spend that much time on street corners?', said Cohen.

'Can't you get arrested for that?', Martel asked.

'Shit', laughed Fivel, 'what a bunch of schmucks.'

V

Well, maybe Fivel had it right. About us being schmucks that is. But with him around all of us suddenly became much more confident with women. Cohen stopped stammering and was able to approach girls without making a complete fool of himself. I got up the courage to ask out one of the Delta Taos from across the road and Levine bought a whole box of rubbers. It wasn't as if we were fucking our brains out day and night, just

that with the level of sexual frustration under control the atmosphere in the house became reasonably normal. We had girls in for dinner. They sat out on the porch with us. We talked to them. Even Goldberg was able to relax.

All this had another interesting effect on us. Emulating the blond jocks next door became unimportant. I let my hair grow out, wore jeans and tennis shoes and stopped worrying about my nose. Martel gave away his madras shirts and came back from a weekend at home wearing a loud Hawaiian creation covered in palm trees and hula dancers. He looked a bit bizarre, but a lot happier. We were all a lot happier. But it was not to last.

While we had been four nonentities wearing protective coloration no one in the street had really noticed us. But now with Fivel's customized Old's sitting out in front of the our house and regular visits from our female neighbors, many of them from the oh-so-Gentile sorority across the way, we began to attract unwanted attention, especially from the Sigma Beta's next door.

The trouble began almost imperceptibly. I noticed that if there was anyone outside the Sigma Beta house as I passed on the way to or from the campus, all talking would stop. The silence was menacing. It was meant to be. I didn't turn to look but I could feel hostile stares burning into my back. The others felt it too. But, what the hell we thought, if they want to stare let them stare.

The next stage of the campaign was harder to ignore. I was coming home one day when I heard someone say, 'Hey Jew-boy.' At first I thought it must be my imagination giving voice to the sentiment behind the Sigma Beta's nasty looks, but then I heard it again. It was quite clear. 'I said, Hey Jew-boy.' So, what do you do? Turn around and answer? I kept walking. I was followed by laughter, real redneck laughter. The kind of laughter that makes you at the same time humiliated, angry and scared shitless. The kind of laughter blacks in the Deep South must have heard coming from the mobs in white sheets. But, this was not the Deep

South, this was the god-damned University of California and these are educated middle class boys, not some tobacco chewing shitkickers from Alabama. So much for the civilizing value of a liberal education.

'Levine, you getting any static from next door?', I asked as we sat watching television that night.

'Well, sort of', he said evasively.

'Sort of? What kind of sort of?'

'Ya know, the usual stuff'.

'Jesus, what's with you?', I exploded. 'What "usual stuff"? How about a straight fucking answer?'

'What's going on in here? What are you yelling about Kaplan', asked Martel, as he came into the room.

'I was just asking Levine whether the yoyos next door had been giving him any shit and he's playing dumb.'

'Up yours Kaplan, you prick!', shouted Levine, suddenly furious.

There were tears in his eyes.

'Christ Jerry', I said, thrown completely off balance, 'I'm sorry, what did I say?'

'No. No. It's not you', he said with a sigh, taking off his glasses and rubbing his eyes. 'It's those dumb motherfuckers. It's high school all over again. Shit!'

'Oh great!', said Martel, 'you too?'

'Yeah', said Levine. 'Today's version was 'Hey kike, how do you like that Gentile pussy?'

'You didn't tell them anything did you', I said, starting to giggle.

'I told them they should carry out their own surveys', Levine said laughing. 'Or, that's what I should have told them. What I actually said was sweet fuck all. I walked on by. Quickly.'

'Well, what else can we do?', asked Martel.

'I suppose we could do a Rabbi Löw and create a Golem', I offered.

'It wouldn't work', said Levine, 'They'd just think he was another member of their fraternity.'

'No they wouldn't', I said, 'His grade point average would be too high.'

Two days later things got a lot worse.

It was Saturday. I was on my way back from a morning in the library and had just passed the Sigma Beta house, thinking I had made it safely home, when suddenly I was hit by something and knocked flat on my back.

'Gee', said a voice, 'you gotta be more careful where you're walking boy.'

It was two of the animals from Sigma Beta. They stood looking down at me. I got up and started to back away slowly.

'Hey listen', I said, 'what is it with you guys?'

'You wanna make something of it, Jew-boy?'

'Why don't you guys grow up', I said continuing to move backwards, 'and just leave us alone. What the hell have we done to you anyway?'

'I think our kosher friend is just a little chicken shit, Al? What a you think, Huh?'

Al didn't look like thinking was a big number with him. He just grinned.

'We got some kind of problem here, Kaplan?'

It was Fivel. He emerged from behind his car where he must have been working. He was wiping his grease covered hands on a rag and looked unnaturally relaxed.

'Hey, its the hot-rod yid,' said the more eloquent of my tormentors.

'Come on Kaplan', said Fivel ignoring the comment and taking me by the arm.

'Wait just a minute you sawed-off greaseball', said the Sigma Beta as he went to grab Fivel by the front of his shirt.

Fivel stepped back quickly out of reach.

'Come on man', he said reasonably, putting his hands out palms up, 'we're all college boys now. This isn't the playground at PS 84.'

'You chicken shit too?', asked the Sigma Beta, who was obviously starting to run out of ideas as well as new insults.

'Sure, man. Sure', said Fivel, 'anything you like. Chicken shit it is.'

That didn't leave the Sigma Beta many options. He gave a triumphant smirk to his friend, but in fact they both look rather nonplussed by Fivel's reaction. As we moved off, I don't think they were really sure who had had the better of the exchange. It would take them some time to figure it out.

'What do we do now?', I asked Fivel later that day. We were sitting on the porch having a beer.

'Nothing to do', he replied.

'But there's about 40 of them in that house. They could kill us!'

'Yeah, will maybe', he said. 'But for now we'll just have to ride it out. These guys don't have a very long attention span. If we ignore them pretty soon they'll lose interest.'

Fivel was wrong.

I was woken the next morning by an agitated Martel shaking me violently by the shoulder.

'Kaplan! Kaplan! Get up for Christ's sake. Get up!

'Fuck it, Martel! Go easy will ya! What's the matter with you?

'It's the car', he replied, 'they've rat fucked Fivel's car!'

Out on the street I found Levine, Cohen and Fivel standing next to the vandalized Olds. They had broken the windows, slashed the Tijuana tuck and roll as well as the tires and across the side of the car on top of that wonderful metallic red surface someone had painted in big white letters, CHICKER SHIT YIDS.

'You'd think they could at least have spelled chicken correctly', observed Martel.

'Are you for real Martel?', said Levine. 'Here we are in the middle of a fucking race war, and you're worried about spelling?'

Fivel had completely ignored this exchange. He was looking at his violated car with a weary smile on his face.

'They want chicken shit', he said in far off voice. 'So, we'll give 'em chicken shit.'

It was as if busting up Fivel's car had satisfied their honor, for after that the Sigma Betas went back to ignoring us once more. We had been put in our place and that was that. There was simply no more to be gained by hassling a few humiliated Jew-boys.

And, they were right. We felt violated, defeated, powerless. Our recently won confidence crumbled. We had suffered a collective emasculation. We were impotent. We couldn't go back trying to pass for white, and our new found selves were now naked and ridiculous. Yids. Chicken Shit Yids.

Later that day Enrico and another one of the Oakland shadows appeared with a tow truck and together with Fivel they removed the Olds, now little more than an anti-Semitic billboard.

From the porch we watched it go. No one said a word. The sun shined, the skateboards rolled, Ray Charles sang and the girls bounced by below us in the springtime street, but even their firm young bodies couldn't ignite a flicker of interest from any of us. It was worse than before Fivel had arrived. Then at least we had had sexual frustration.

It was in this happy state of mind that Fivel found us a couple of hours later.

'What is it with you guys?', he asked. 'You sitting shivah or something?'

'Ah, fuck it Fivel!', I said. 'It was your car. What the fuck are you smiling about?'

'Chicken shit', he replied.

We all just looked at him.

'No shit', he laughed. 'Chicken shit. We're going to bury those motherfuckers in chicken shit.'

'Why?', asked Martel.

'How?', added Cohen.

'All right!!', shouted Fivel. 'At least you schmucks are still alive.'

He then laid out his plan for us.

'Oh come on Fivel!', said an incredulous Martel, after he had finished. 'That's just about the craziest fucking thing I've ever heard. Hypnotized chickens!? 80 hypnotized chickens!?'

'Yeah, 80 at the same time has probably never been done before', said Fivel thoughtfully.

'Fuck 80!', said Levine, 'I've never heard of a single chicken being hynotized.'

Cohen started to giggle.

'Think', he said,' the implications for chicken soup are fantastic.'

'Will you be serious for a minute, Cohen', said Fivel.

'Hey', retorted Cohen, barely able to talk he was laughing so hard, 'you're talking about hypnotizing 80 chickens and you're asking me to be serious.'

'Look', said Fivel in the completely reasonable voice of the truly loony, 'first I'll give you the how then the why. You grab the head and put the beak down so that both the chicken's eyes are parallel with the ground. Then you take your finger . . .

He stopped.

'Your finger!!', howled Cohen, almost paralytic by this time, 'You take your finger!!'.

'You take your finger', repeated Fivel, ignoring Cohen's mounting hysteria, ' and you draw it in a straight line away from the chicken's eyes. A couple of moves like that and zap, you got yourself one zonked bird. Only a sudden noise will wake it up. Now the why. We take these sleeping beauties and tuck them into the Sigma Beta's beds.'

'And of course', interrupted Martel, ' they're just going to let us walk in and do it. Right?'

By now Cohen was completely out of control, hammering the floor with his fists and making quiet mewling sounds, flicks of white foam at the corners of his mouth.

'I'll get to that in a minute', replied Fivel. 'Anyway, when these assholes get home and jump into bed they are going to wake up the chickens - suddenly. And when a chicken wakes up suddenly, especially in a strange bed, it panics. And when it panics it shits its brains out. So what we got ourselves are 80 time-bombed flying shit machines. Once it starts it will spread throughout the house like a chain reaction. There'll be chicken shit and feathers everywhere. It will be beautiful! '

'And, what's with the ladybugs', I asked.

'Ah', said Fivel, 'that is the coup de fucking grace, Kaplan. If the chicken's don't get them this will. We get ladybugs from the bio lab and put a quart in all the toilets. That should work out at about 2,000 in each. Then we simply close the lids. Lets just hope one of those shitbags sits down to take a dump without looking real close. '

'It's pure genius Fivel', said Martel, 'but it'll never work.'

'OK. OK' said Fivel. 'There are some things that need to be ironed out. But, what's the worst that could happen to us? Huh?'

'Slow, painful death?', ventured Levine.

'Shit, man, this will be the supreme rat fuck of all times. They'll be singing songs about it. We'll be legends.'

'Sure, Fivel', I said, 'In our own time I hope.'

'That's the spirit Kaplan, think positive.'

We argued about it for some time before we all finally agreed to go ahead. How could we resist Fivel's insane logic?

The first thing we needed was to find a time when the Sigma Beta house would be empty. Luckily, a sorority in the next street was giving a big joint party with the Sigma Beta's at their house the following Saturday. Fivel figured that would give us the three hours to do what we had to do.

And so, Operation Chicken Shit was launched.

VII

It was a dark moonless night as we prepared to make our big move against the Sigma Beta's. We watched from our porch as the upstairs lights next door went out one by one. The Sigma Beta's left their house in small groups. We waited.

Fivel had organized the raid like a full scale military exercise. He insisted that we all wear black and had passed out a tin of Shinola for us to blacken our faces with.

'I suppose', quipped Cohen, 'If we're caught, we can always say we're on our way to an Al Jolson look-a-like contest.'

'Gee', replied Levine, 'that makes me feel a whole lot better.'

'Come on you guys', said Commander Fivel, 'cut the bullshit, we've gotta move out.'

The chickens were in a 2 ton truck parked behind the Sigma Beta house. Enrico and his friends had come along to provide some muscle, our insurance in case a stray Sigma Beta wandered in before we were finished. All in all it promised to be an interesting evening.

We worked in three teams, hypnotizing the chickens in the back of the truck. One held the head while the other draw the imaginary line with his finger. Within half an hour we had 40 semi-conscious cross-eyed chickens lying in a neat row.

'Hey', said Levine, 'this isn't bad going for amateur chicken hypnotizers.'

He looked up and laughed, letting go of his chicken's head for a second. Just enough time for it to sink its beak into Cohen's nearby finger.

'Oh fuck it!', screamed Cohen, grabbing his bloody finger and falling over backwards out of the truck and into the street.

Startled Levine let go of the chicken, which in its terror, shat all over him and then made a dash for freedom, flying straight into Cohen, whose blackened face at that moment appeared above the tailgate of the truck.

'Get that fucking chicken!', shouted Martel, as the crazed bird shoot across the road and disappeared into some shrubbery.

'Jesus, will you keep it down Martel', said Fivel in an angry whisper, 'You want to let the whole neighborhood in on it.'

'But, we can't let the chicken go like that.'

'The hell we can't', replied Fivel, 'All we need right now is four assholes in blackface chasing a chicken down the road.'

Fortunately, our other feathered subjects slept through all this, so after helping Cohen back into the truck, we were able to resume our work.

Having finished the first stage of the operation, we began to carry the chickens, holding them by the feet, into the house. Martel and Levine did this outside work, while Fivel, Cohen and I distributed the birds in the house, two to a bed. It was slow work. Occasionally a chicken would wake up and have to be rehypnotized, but by in large everything went smoothly enough, all things considered. After almost two hours we were still hard at it.

'Hey, Kaplan', called Cohen, as he carefully tucked two comatose chickens into bed, their small heads hardly noticeable against the pillows. 'Is this weird or what? I mean this is anti-Semitism coming home to roost with a vengeance.'

'No shit, Cohen', I replied. 'Let's get these last few done and get our asses out of here, those guys will be coming back any time now.'

Just then Fivel came in carrying the cylindrical paper cartons full of ladybugs.

'Hey, I just had another idea. I'm going to put a few thousand of these babies in their forced air heating system?

'Come on Fivel', I said. 'Enough is enough. Let's just dump them and split.'

'OK. You guys go ahead', he said, 'I'll be along in a couple of minutes.'

Cohen and I left the darkened house and with the others went back to our porch to await developments. Enrico and his buddies drove off in their truck. Half an hour later Fivel still hadn't emerged.

'Oh shit !', said Martel, 'where the hell is he?'

'He said he'd be right behind us', I replied.

I felt that something was about to go horribly wrong. And it did. There was a bright flash in the sky, followed by a clap of thunder and rain started to fall in sheets. It was a bad omen.

Because of the heavy rain all the Sigma Beta's came back at once. They ran down the street, some bringing along their dates from the party. They laughed and joked with each other as they rushed to get out of the downpour and into the house. Still no Fivel.

It wasn't too long before the lights began to go on in the upstairs bedrooms.

At first we couldn't hear or see anything. But, as more of the chickens woke up and went into action we began to hear screams and yells above the sound of the driving rain. In the windows figures, some of them half naked, batted at the air with their arms or with brooms. A chicken shot out of a window, fluttered clumsily to the ground and scuttled off across the lawn and into the street. Some girls came running out of the house screaming. Unknowingly, they followed the liberated chicken down the street and into the night. A Sigma Beta clutching a struggling, squawking, chicken in his outstretched arms jumped through a first floor window shattering the glass. In every part of the house the battle raged, as the chickens screeched, flapped and shat, bounced off walls and people and crashed through windows. The pandemonium was virtually complete. It was a wonderful sight.

But where was Fivel? Had he made his escape? Was he trapped in the house?

Then it happened. Over the sounds of the chicken induced mayhem came a earthquake-like rumbling from deep inside the Sigma Beta house. This was followed almost immediately by a massive explosion which blew out the remaining windows, catapulting more chickens and Sigma Beta's into the rain. Smoke and dust bellowed from the windows followed by soot blackened

figures, coughing and spluttering. Sirens could be heard in the distance.

Fivel's revenge had been truly terrible. But had it destroyed Fivel himself? We never knew. The police said that everyone escaped unhurt from the house and no unexplained bodies were ever found in the wreckage. Fivel had simply vanished.

About a month later as we sat on the porch looking out over the Bay and watching the activity in the street below, Cohen voiced the question that had been niggling and ripening in all our minds since that wonderfully terrible night.

'Hey', he said, 'you guys think that there ever really was a Koster Fivel?'