

## ELEVEN

Did I wake up  
The next morning with a recriminatory  
Hangover? I certainly did.  
Oh, I managed to escape from El Gato Negro after four  
Free beers, before the evening crowd  
Embraced me  
As one of their own. I was too warmed up, though,  
To return home  
And write about Toshiro Mifune, and I wasn't  
Sure, after drinks in a gay bar,  
What I wanted to say about him, so I decided to make  
A night of it.  
I made the rounds of all the places I used to work, the places  
Paulie used to own,  
And if I didn't know the crowd, I still  
Knew most  
Of the bartenders.  
As I dragged myself around the corner  
At ten-thirty  
The next morning, to open the store a half-hour late,  
I recalled, with several  
Different  
Kinds of regret, how at closing time I very nearly  
Went home  
With this waitress I used to work with, one of my girlfriend's  
Old apartment-mates, in fact, and I hoped that my  
Last minute  
Sentimental defense  
Of long distance monogamy would find its way west  
To appreciative  
Ears. Paulie's Acura was parked  
In the loading zone and the boss himself  
Had already  
Opened the store.  
"Cool, you're here," he said. "Bobbie from Tommy's  
Said she saw you in Billy's

Last night. You must have been on a tear. You're the guy  
Who's never late."

"Always a first time," I said.

"Hey, it's cool," he said. "You're the best.  
I wrote the numbers  
For the P-Club on the Post-It."

I nodded and peeled  
The yellow note from my computer. Three grand Wednesday,  
Twenty-five fifty  
On Thursday, thirty-six hundred  
Today. "Looks good," I said. "Very plausible pattern.  
You could almost  
Do this without me. Wednesday  
Must be a big day  
For porn."

"Is it ever!" said Paulie, catching the keys  
He had tossed  
In the air. "So it's under control?"

"Under control," I said.

"Cool," said Paulie. "I'm on my way to the bank.  
Where do you keep  
Those extra deposit slips?"

"Bottom drawer," I said, as I tried  
To focus  
On the closing report from the night before.

"Hey, what'd the store do yesterday?"  
Called concerned  
Departing Paulie from the door.

"One hundred forty-two dollars and sixty-seven cents,"  
I said. "Before tax."

"Cool," said Paulie, "You're making your payroll."

Now I once had someone tell me  
That Omni Video  
Mystified him—that he couldn't figure out

How a business like that  
Ever made any money—he never saw  
Any customers. And calmly, with a straight face, I explained  
How they all came in surges, and how  
Making money  
In the video business was all a matter  
Of inventory management,  
Which shut the guy up. I don't know what he suspected,  
But, in fact, he was right:  
The store barely broke even, not counting  
My salary, and tied up  
A huge amount of capital, which Paulie didn't mind,  
Because, of course, like all his bars  
And restaurants  
Through the years, Omni Video  
Was a front.