

THREE

What if I had denied
Being me? What if I had gone downstairs,
Opened the door,
And flatly
Stated to Mr. Jheri Curls that I was not
The man
He was looking for? Could a process server have demanded
To see my I.D.? Asked me to prove
That I was someone else? Does he have the right
To do that? He's just
Some guy in plainclothes, in Jheri Curls, for god's sake—
That badge,
By the way, was bullshit—he works for an agency,
A step or two
Up from the security guard in the mall—now how
Could a guy like that
Get away
With following someone up the stairs and making him
Show positive proof
That he was anyone else
But me?

It would have been easy—I could have searched
My mind, found a distant
Casual
Acquaintance with myself: "Oh, *that* guy!
You want 1713,
Not 1731—
Same apartment number. I get mail for him
All the time. Or...
"I'll bet you want that guy who moved out. He's still
In the neighborhood,
I think, that old house, right there, across
The street—it's the attic flat—
You'll have to take
The fire escape..."

Or what if I
Had gotten angry, put on a show?

"What the hell is this man? You're the fourth
Faggot this week
Come looking for that punk. Where'd you meet him?
El Gato Negro? Get the fuck
Outta here.
You make me sick."

Now that one
Might have worked—if I was quick enough—
No hesitation—
Thrown him off, planted a confusing
Image in his mind...

But what would have happened
When Mr. Jheri Curls
Arrived? If I had sent him down the street—
Or around the block,
Or up the fire escape or to a tiny
Basement bar downtown? If I had been on my guard, primed
To deny myself, ready to display
Neighborly
Concern or irritation or fag-hating
Disgust—or, for that matter,
Grief, the dutiful
Reluctance
To notify: "Oh, man. You mean you don't know?
Look, I've got some
Bad news. Were you his friend?"

When Mr. Jheri Curls knocked or rang—
Would someone
Have opened the door or buzzed
The latch
Or greeted him at the bar, signed
The back of the subpoena and then produced
The appropriate
Papers—the I.D., or the death certificate, or the court
Order establishing
Power of attorney, and gone ahead
And assumed
This burden for me? Or would they themselves,
Just as ready
As I to deflect misfortune, have devised their own

Angry or innocuous
Forwarding addresses and sent
Smiling Mr. Jheri Curls and his subpoena
Whirling off into a cycle of rejection, an endless
Undeliverable
Circuit of my neighborhood?