



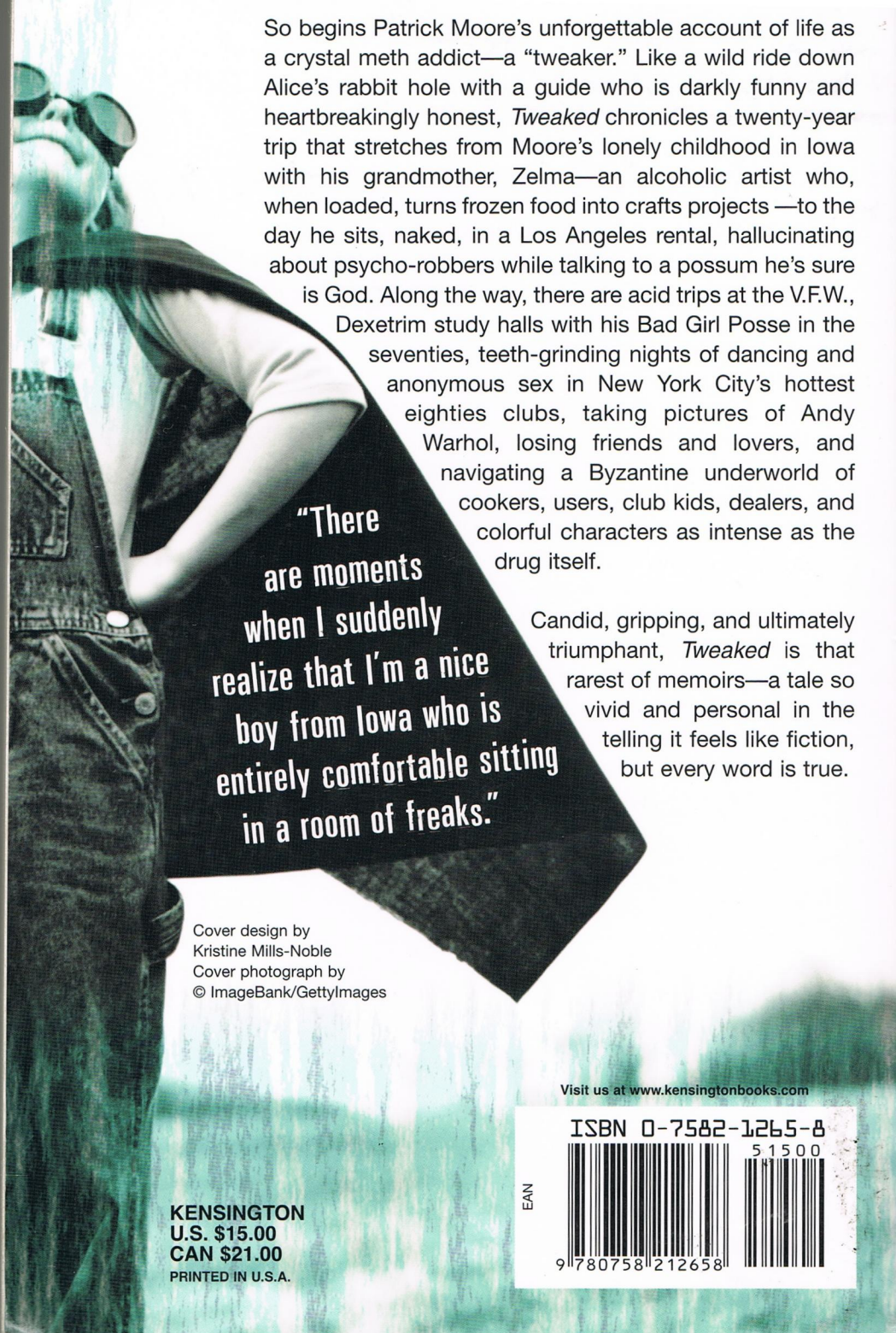
Tweaked

"Elegantly constructed, searingly honest, and impossible to put down."

—Andrew Solomon,
author of *The Noonday
Demon*, winner of the
National Book Award

a crystal meth memoir

PATRICK MOORE



So begins Patrick Moore's unforgettable account of life as a crystal meth addict—a "tweaker." Like a wild ride down Alice's rabbit hole with a guide who is darkly funny and heartbreakingly honest, *Tweaked* chronicles a twenty-year trip that stretches from Moore's lonely childhood in Iowa with his grandmother, Zelma—an alcoholic artist who, when loaded, turns frozen food into crafts projects—to the day he sits, naked, in a Los Angeles rental, hallucinating about psycho-robbers while talking to a possum he's sure is God. Along the way, there are acid trips at the V.F.W., Dexetrim study halls with his Bad Girl Posse in the seventies, teeth-grinding nights of dancing and anonymous sex in New York City's hottest eighties clubs, taking pictures of Andy Warhol, losing friends and lovers, and navigating a Byzantine underworld of cooks, users, club kids, dealers, and colorful characters as intense as the drug itself.

"There are moments when I suddenly realize that I'm a nice boy from Iowa who is entirely comfortable sitting in a room of freaks."

Candid, gripping, and ultimately triumphant, *Tweaked* is that rarest of memoirs—a tale so vivid and personal in the telling it feels like fiction, but every word is true.

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Chapter 6

TINA FOR TONY

It's still raining. The local news calls it a "rain event," and on television a somber looking weather lady paces before images of crumbling canyon walls, collapsing cliffside mansions, families clinging to ropes in flooded rivers, and freeways that are, as always, standing still. Most of these things happen regularly, it's just that this week the cause is rain. The whole city is trembling with a mix of excitement and dread at the thought of weather. Earthquakes, wildfires, and riots have their own particular thrills but they are violent and short-lived. The rain is cumulative and Los Angeles is unsure how to cope with disasters that build rather than explode. This morning the weather lady intoned gravely that the earth was already saturated, and though there was a chance of sun tomorrow, the water would continue to percolate deep in the earth, making hills that had been standing strong for decades deeply unstable. All the earth is liquefying beneath our feet.

I'm thinking of this instead of Pauline's discourse on the difficulties of being a transgendered woman. The residents are huddled deep into the tattered sofas, seeking warmth, as Group grinds on and on. A fire blazes in the hearth across the room

but I feel no discernible heat. Pauline, however, shows no sign of being cold, only manic. Though her shoes can't possibly be expensive, they look as if they could be Manalo Blahniks. She has quite shapely legs, covered by nude hose, and she shows them off with a skirt that barely grazes her knees as she sits with her ankles crossed in a ladylike pose. She often refers to her quest to "act like a lady" in the face of the slings and arrows of life as a trans.

I'm filled with superficial, judgmental thoughts as I evaluate her realness. Her lower half is quite successful and even her torso has its comely aspects. Because Pauline must be well into her fifties, the normal male fleshiness of that age mimics a feminine softness that is accentuated by the swelling of her implants. The problem, as always, is with the extremities. Pauline's hands are great fleshy pads that remain intractably male despite her long nails painted in a demure pinkish white. The face is always the ultimate problem for those trans people wishing to pass. Pauline's problems are typical: a forceful jaw, a jutting chin, and features that are generally thicker than those of a woman. Her hair is also problematic. The color of straw, it reaches desperately for her shoulders but, at its ends, grows thin and frayed.

I think of all this as Pauline continues her indictment of the world's wrongs against her. The other residents glance at me, desperate for me to interrupt her. I lean forward, preparing.

"Pauline, let me stop you."

"I'm just trying to be a lady, Patrick, and stop reacting to people but . . ."

"But it's hard and I understand that. But this isn't a transgender support group. You're here because you're an alcoholic and addict."

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She has a psych diagnosis but she seems fairly lucid. She recrosses her legs, "I never really liked to drink."

"So?"

"I'm just saying."

"Pauline, I asked you to read your snapshot."

"I don't know if I'm ready."

"How long have you been here?"

Pauline doesn't answer now but she's been here for two weeks and her snapshot was written days ago. Each resident is directed to write a snapshot of his or her last few days drinking and using. They are to transcribe the experience into the front cover of their *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, carrying it with them everywhere, so that they are able to refer to it every time they feel like using.

"Pauline, you've spent a half hour describing in general terms how hard it is to be trans. Why won't you take two minutes and tell us how hard it was to be a drug addict?"

"I'd be happy to and thank you for the opportunity," she murmurs and pushes her big coke bottle glasses up on her nose.

Pauline opens her *Twelve and Twelve* and begins to describe her last night using. As I assumed, Pauline was a tweaker, preferring to slam it straight into her veins if possible. Like many trannies, she worked as a prostitute to support herself and her habit. In this case, she was not only feeding her habit but also providing for her boyfriend/pimp, a paraplegic Vietnam vet in San Diego. Every evening, he would send Pauline out to trawl the streets bordering the naval base for soldiers looking for a good blowjob. With a certain pride, she carefully details the sheer blouse and micro-mini she wore that last night. She describes every feature of her extra tall white boots with the stiletto heels that she pulled on before leaving the house. ("They always gave my pinkie toe a big blister but they made

my legs look fierce.”) The ocean breeze must have been cold but she’d hit the meth pipe before she went out and was feeling fine. Within a block Pauline was picked up by an old guy who “gives me forty for a bj.” It’s a productive night and Pauline has a series of customers who are eager for her fellatio talents. A few also fuck her ass in the back seats of their cars or in cheap motels that rent rooms by the hour near the base.

Most of her earnings are later smoked at her dealer’s house, and at dawn she finds herself near the ocean, flashing her tits at men to try and get a few last takers. It’s not even that she wanted to make more money at that point. “I just needed a little more of . . . you know.”

“A little more what?” I ask her. “More crystal?”

“More of that . . . feeling.”

“What kind of feeling?”

Pauline’s face is blank behind a thick mask of makeup. “That feeling like . . . night.”

Although I know night is not an emotion, I can only nod in recognition. Pleased not to be challenged on something, Pauline launches back into her story. Finally, near seven in the morning, with the sun burning off the fog, she returned home to her paraplegic boyfriend with the last of the tweak and a few dollars. That morning, Pauline explains, passed like most others. She blew her boyfriend although neither one of them could get it up and then in the afternoon passed out until it was time to hit the streets again.

Pauline has recounted these experiences with all the passion of a grocery list. She blinks her eyes, looking to either side for reaction and then decides to just sit in the silence.

“How many years did that go on for?”

“Oh, Patrick, that was years and years. Ten at least.”

“OK. So, Pauline, that was pretty honest.”

Pauline's not falling for this easy compliment from me but feels compelled to say, "Thank you. I did my best."

"I don't think you did. You didn't say what you felt about all that. What do you feel?"

Her eyes are unfocused again and I think she almost uses her mental illness as a refuge. She doesn't come back so I ask again, "Pauline, you turned tricks every night to get more crystal. You let anybody fuck you for a few bucks. How does that feel?"

"I never charged less than forty, Patrick."

The other residents snicker but I don't want her to wiggle away. "OK, good for you. You were a highly paid prostitute. How does that make you feel?"

She draws herself up now and assumes a librarian attitude. "Well . . . I feel very sorry about that but now I'm here and trying to be a lady and take responsibility for my life."

"What? You feel sorry and now you're trying to be a lady?" This is the part that makes me uncomfortable. The part when I can see how easy it is to identify bullshit and it makes me wonder if most of what I say is bullshit too. Still, it's why I'm here so I continue. "This isn't a finishing school for young ladies. You're a burned-out, junkie whore who got too old to turn tricks and ended up in a recovery house. How does that make you feel?"

Pauline's sticking with her tactic and she just crosses her legs. "You know it's hard out there for a woman like me and I did what I had to do."

"Oh, so you're an addict because it's hard to be a transsexual?"

She's having a harder time sticking to her image of a proper lady now but she flips her hair back and collects herself. "I certainly never did these things before . . . the people out there . . ."

“You never drank and used before you changed genders?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“So what are you saying?”

“I’m saying . . .” She’s mad now but she won’t let loose with the stream of invective that is clearly building up in her. “I’m saying, Patrick, that it’s hard.”

“You know what, honey, it’s hard for all of us. We all had something happen to us that we used as an excuse to get loaded. And you know what the problem is, Pauline?” She’s picking at one of her chipped fingernails now. “The problem is that it’s still gonna be hard when you get out of here. People are still gonna be assholes to you. So if you don’t start dealing with the fact that you’re an addict, regardless of the trans thing, what are your options except to use again?”

Judy and I have a debriefing session everyday after Group. After I recount Pauline’s progress, or lack thereof, Judy sticks a pen in her mouth and has a good chew. She’s not looking at me and not looking away from me. She’s just mulling it over.

I begin to worry that I’m going to get Pauline kicked out of the House so I interrupt Judy’s prolonged silence, “It’s not like I think she can’t make progress. It’s just gonna take a while longer.”

Judy’s eyes fasten on to me and a little shiver runs through my body. She takes the well-worn pen from her mouth and sticks it behind her ear. “Oh, I’m not worried about Pauline. She’s right on schedule. Deluded and victimized.”

“So . . . what’re you thinkin’ about?”

Judy’s voice leaps an octave, which is usually an indicator that she knows exactly what’s going on. “You, honey. I’m a little concerned about you.”

"Me?"

"Remember we talked about how it can bring up stuff working here?"

"Yeah. And it has. Like with Ding-Dong."

"Mmm-hmm."

"And it's hard. Most days I leave I feel like a truck ran over me."

Judy's voice moves a few keys higher as she squeaks out, "When's the last time you went to a meeting?"

So now I'm busted and I've been around long enough to just admit it. "Few weeks ago."

Judy gives me a big smile. "A few weeks ago? You must be gettin' a little twitchy."

"Does it show?"

"Oh, yeah, honey."

"I'm here all day and then I feel like I've done my thing. Last thing I want at night is . . ."

"Not the same thing. This is work. You're focused on other people and their shit. At night, you need to focus on yours. Especially when you're doing this kind of work."

"I guess I know what I'm doin' tonight."

Judy's already out of her chair and onto her next task. Her voice pipes behind me. "Good."

My route home takes me along Santa Monica Boulevard and the quickly gentrifying warehouses of lower Hollywood. Though it's only late afternoon, a few boys walk the boulevard between La Brea and Highland. A few are impossibly beautiful, new to the street, freshness evident in every one of the calculatedly casual moves. John Rechy is one of my great heroes and I love what he says about prostituting himself, "Sometimes after a night of hustling and then moving to dark cruising

alleyways, I come home and literally think of nothing but suicide. Other times, when I'm caught in it, I think: 'Jesus, God, this is the most exciting thing in the world.'" And I can see both sides of it in these boys. The young, cute ones are jazzed on the power of it. They are amped up by the physical manifestations of desire: prices negotiated, bills passed, and drugs bought to keep it going.

Then there are the others. Pauline's right on one level. The trannies have it hard cause they're hated on both sides. Here comes a black "girl" with a pink leatherette mini, orange tube top, and nappy hair. She must be well over two hundred pounds. I can almost hear her snappin' as she walks and a few gay boys, not hustlers, cross the street, snickering and shaking their heads. A sexy Mexican guy pulls up next to her now and she waves to him with a little wiggle of her fingers, sashaying over to his car, and purposefully sticking her ass as far up in the air as possible when she leans into the passenger window. She'll probably suck him for a twenty. Afterward, he might give her a little small talk or, if he thinks too much about her tucked cock, beat the shit out of her. Some of the trannies can't get the money together to pay for real titties so they just have paraffin shot in that hardens and slips. Waking up with tits in their armpits, they just shove the hard lump back on top of their chests and hit the streets. What's a girl to do?

Just as sad are the burned-out, too-old gay boys. Boys in name only, these guys are hitting forty and still trying to make it work. This isn't an abstract thought; Lewis is standing on the next corner, trying to drape himself alluringly over a bench at the bus stop. If he seemed skeletal when I last saw him at the House, he seems dead now. Nothing moves except his eyes and occasionally, slowly, like a lizard, his tongue emerges to

run along his cracked lips. I turn the corner before he can see me.

I got to the meeting early tonight. I hate to be early because I don't know what to do with myself. So I hesitated at the door, thinking I might walk around the block or go for coffee. Then I saw Tony. Not only were his eyebrows completely gone, there were jagged scabs running across his brow where I suspected he had taken tweezers to his flesh, trying to extract the hairs before they surfaced. He was sitting in the corner, crying quietly. It was early and the room was empty except for his fleshy little body pushed against the wall. He looked up at me briefly and then seemed to fold up on himself.

Now I'm sitting with Tony and he's squeezing my hand like it's an exercise ball. I don't know him well and am, frankly, repulsed by his eyebrow thing. I'm not thrilled with the idea of touching his hand, which looks clean but feels slightly sticky. Tony is dressed all in white as if he has just been laundered. His hair looks as if it has been hacked at with dull scissors, with dull yellow hunks of it hanging across his face. But the strange thing is the absence of Angie, his constant companion.

I extricate my now soaking wet hand and ask, "Where's Angie, honey?"

A noise whistles out of Tony's throat that sounds like something from an exorcism. His face reddens as he stumbles to his feet, "Is she . . . that . . . I . . . I . . ."

I grab Tony's hand again and pull him back down to the seat. With the comfort of my hand in his, he settles back into the chair. "She's not here, sweetheart. I was just asking."

Tony looks at me with the saddest eyes I've ever seen. He points in no particular direction, whispers "Angie," and begins to cry again.

"What happened, Tony?"

For the next thirty minutes, as people slowly fill the seats in the meeting hall, Tony recounts for me his weekend in the desert. It seems that Angie had disappeared a few weeks ago and Tony had been frantically searching for her. Finally, he ran into a former drug buddy who said that Angie had resurfaced in her old trailer outside of Desert Hot Springs and was cooking again. Tony continued to call Angie's cell and, after another few days with no contact, got in his car.

I could imagine Tony, in his little wreck of a Honda Civic with no air-conditioning, hoping that it would make it up the long hills past Chino on the 10 freeway, past the car dealerships, and the Cabazon Outlet Mall. He must have held his breath until the car finally plunged down past the mountains and into the desert surrounding Palm Springs. Tony's voice is all wheezing breath punctuated by strange gulps and twitching eyes. He's not talking to me as much as spitting out his monologue and I know that I'm interchangeable with anyone else who would listen.

Tony must have known somewhere deep inside that he wasn't looking to help Angie but, rather, get high. After all, he knew she was cooking again but he went anyway and went alone. When he reached the wasted expanse of scrub outside Desert Hot Springs, I'm sure he was already grinding his teeth and probably felt like he needed to take a shit.

Everything Tony describes is vividly real to me because I've seen many pictures of meth labs on the net and I have to admit they fascinate me. They all have certain characteristics. Meth labs are never set up in solid houses and they are always isolated. By their nature, they are suited to disposable struc-

tures like trailers and prefab houses—places easily destroyed and abandoned. There can be nothing close because of the odor of chemicals. That's what Tony describes first: a sharp puff of ammonia odor as soon as he opened the car door in front of Angie's old trailer. He knew then what would happen and he could have turned but he was transfixed. I realize that Tony's story is triggering me but I stay here, leaning towards him, asking him questions, and prompting him to give details. This isn't for him, I realize, because I feel high listening to him and I like it.

Tony gives a long dissertation on the smell of the lab. It came not just from the trailer, with its windows closed tight and faded yellow shades drawn down. The smell, he said, came from everywhere. Angie must have been busy because there were some burn pits where she'd been getting rid of the by-products rather than having to take them to the town dump. The solids had been burned in shallow little graves and nearby were pools of red where she'd poured the liquids down into the sand. The earth had soaked up the gallons of sticky toxicity, pulling it down into the water supply. The whole desert must be toxic by now from cookers pouring their waste down into the aquifer that feeds the elegant pools and fountains of Palm Springs. Now, instead of water, meth waste percolates through the sand. All of the desert must be tweaked. There was an article in the *Los Angeles Times* the other day explaining that the cavernous aquifer under Palm Springs, providing what had once seemed like a limitless supply of water, had been emptied. Palm Springs and the surrounding towns now sit on a fragile crust of earth, sinkholes waiting to open.

Tony knew better than to simply open the front door of the trailer or even knock. Angie always kept a wide variety of shotguns in her lab when she was cooking because her hands were too shaky to depend on a handgun that required aim-

ing. The shotgun could just be sprayed in the general direction of an intruder. Tony had been with Angie on long runs and watched her booby trap the front doors and windows with shotguns hung high, focused down, cocked, and attached to a taut string waiting to trigger death. Potential invaders ranged from cops to angry dealers to other cooks who'd decided it was easier to steal than manufacture. Angie's caution was part tweaker paranoia and part common sense as the Hell's Angels had recently been hunting down "Beavis and Butthead shops" like Angie's and burning them to the ground or worse.

In any case, Angie knew Tony was there. He didn't need to knock or call. He just needed to wait her out. Tony had seen one of the shades move ever so slightly when he got out of the car. Knowing he wasn't going away, Angie must have been calculating the relative risks and benefits of letting him in. It was probably pretty lonely, even for a tweaker, out there in the desert. On the other hand, Angie knew Tony well enough to be aware that he was a vacuum that could easily snort up her profits and, God knows, he never had any money to actually buy. Tony was pretty much a losing proposition for her.

Tony couldn't go too close to the door in any case because Angie had acquired her usual pit bull, which was chained to a spike near the entrance to the trailer. The dog alternately lunged to the limit of its chain, snarling, and collapsed on the hot dusty yard exhausted. Angie didn't much bother to feed her dogs, preferring them hungry and mad, knowing that she could always get another if the current one finally succumbed to the beating desert sun.

Tony had no interest in describing his emotions or looking back at the decisions he made toward using. He was fascinated by the exterior facts of the scene as if they held some essential truth. This had always been true of Tony. He could

recount the most horrendous experiences, emotionless, as if he were reading a novel. While he couldn't describe his decision to sit on the ground and wait out Angie, he could describe the red phosphorous stains on the ground. He told me how the wind came up and the rest of the world seemed to disappear in the haze of dust. It was only Tony and Angie, sitting in the desert, waiting for each other as the pit bull howled mournfully.

Tony wasn't sure if it was ten minutes or more like an hour but, finally, the front door opened. The pit bull whimpered and cowered as Angie appeared, preceded by her usual hacking cough. She pulled on a pair of huge sunglasses and stared at Tony for a long while. Angie didn't invite him in, just muttered, "Can't smoke in here," before disappearing back into the trailer. She left the door open and Tony knew that was as much of an invitation as he was likely to get.

Tony crept past the pit bull that still cowered but growled deep in his throat as Tony put his foot on the first step. Angie's voice shot out of the trailer, "Ciera la boca o te parto la madre!" The dog whined and pulled both its ass and head toward the sand like a potato bug curling into itself for protection.

Although I've seen many photos of meth labs, it was the thought of Tony actually in one that made his descriptions of the lab horrifying and fascinating to me. In photos, the tangles of tubing running between glass jars and bowls remain abstractions, almost like some demented sculptural installation. But when I look at Tony and think of him standing in the midst of all that poison, it becomes real. Angie always ran a fairly clean shop but there's no way to have that much toxic shit in a trailer and not create chaos. She'd apparently stashed most of her equipment in a storage locker when she got clean the last time and so was able to reassemble a pretty high-end

lab. From the start, Angie'd never been interested in fucking around with some lab thrown together in the trunk of her car. Instead of jam jars and measuring cups, she'd gone to Kmart and invested in Visionware bowls that could take both high heat and cold. She'd also been smart enough to hook up with a Sudafed wholesaler, knowing that sooner or later, it would be restricted. When she decided to go back into business, Angie already had the basic ingredients of the trade, waiting and combustible, in the storage locker. She had everything but the pH strips to test acidity and she knew she could make those out of red cabbage if she had to.

Tony's voice lowers with awe as he recites the ingredients and process for cooking meth. I try to make him get to the point but instead he revels in the sick recipe for cooking Tina. Angie, like most cooks now, uses the Nazi method. It's not just a name or a myth but the actual process developed by the Nazis to produce the extraordinarily powerful crank that kept Hitler wired and crazy enough to kill millions. One of Tony's eyes twitches and pulses as he stammers out the alchemical process that takes poison and transforms it into evil magic.

There were empty boxes of Sudafed everywhere in the trailer. All day, all night, Angie would crush thousands of pills and soak them in denatured alcohol to make an acidic liquid that would be boiled on her tiny stove. The pseudoephedrine was filtered, frozen, and boiled again until she finally dried it using a hair dryer, revealing the basic ingredient for the tweak. Next came the iodine. She'd always found getting it was a pain in the ass so she'd knocked-off a farm supply store a couple of years ago and stashed away gallons of iodine tincture. Phosphorus was another story. Easier to come by and ostensibly legal, red phosphorous production was a perfect tweaker project involving lots of chemicals, time, and obsessive behavior.

The phosphorous production necessitated cutting the strike pads from hundreds and hundreds of matchbooks, soaking them in acetone, scraping the phosphorous from the pads, rinsing, drying and grinding it to produce the necessary red powder.

Tony recounts the full recipe by heart, obsessively listing each ingredient and strange step. He moves on to the chemicals that are more readily available and more likely to kill you. Sulfuric acid. Ammonia. Open bubbling beakers of the shit surrounded by the necessary flames of burners.

When we would go for coffee after meetings, Angie often talked about her days as a cooker. In the past, Angie had never put up with crazy tweaker shit lying everywhere in the lab because she knew it was easy to knock over a beaker of acid or ammonia and blow herself all the way to hell. But the days of caution had apparently passed. Tony tells me with disgust that the floor of her trailer was covered with little piles of obsessively sorted clothes, newspapers, and a selection of Narcotics Anonymous books. Tony took the books to be a hopeful sign of her continued willingness. As he suspected, there were also assorted shotguns positioned by every window and, of course, the front door. A laptop computer and cell phone sat incongruously amongst the trash—slick, shiny and new tools amidst the squalor.

When I ask Tony about Angie's health, he tells me that her hands and neck are now stained red from either the phosphorous or the coating on the Sudafeds. Angie had always been rail-thin and she'd gotten thinner during her time in the desert. Apparently, her fingernails had become as suspicious as her eyelashes because most of them were gone as well.

Angie hadn't offered Tony any tweak. Even in her state, she probably couldn't deal with the guilt of getting Tony high. But it was understood that it was his for the taking and he lasted no more than five minutes in the trailer before he had snorted



"Outside of a dog,
a book is man's best friend.
Inside of a dog,
it's too dark to read."

-Groucho Marx

enough Tina to keep him up for a week. The problem was that there was never enough Tina for Tony. He was like a dog in a room full of hamburger.

Angie made it clear that Tony was leaving in the morning. She might have felt guilty but she more likely understood that their friendship, so touching in sobriety, would interfere with her business and that could not happen. She knew that a fried queen like Tony was not going to be of any use to her, certainly not in cooking with his shaky hands. He couldn't even sell on the streets. Angie had been around long enough to know that, after a few days tweaked out, Tony would either be leading the cops or boys from one of the gangs back to her trailer. Still, there must have been some comfort in having him there because she told him that he could stay the night.

They spent that night watching TV. Tony kept one eye on the TV and another on the small mound of crystal that Angie had laid out, clearly indicating the amount she was willing to offer. All tweakers have their obsessive behaviors. For most gay men, it's sex. But Tony found that he was no longer much of a draw and his cock rarely worked anyway. He stopped his story, drew in a deep breath, and whispered, "Girl, I ain't cum in years." So instead he channeled his energy into plucking and watching reruns on *Nick-At-Nite*. Tony can, and will if allowed, recite the plots of every episode of *Bewitched*. He finds everything about it fascinating and can deliver a compelling thesis on why the generally creepy first Darrin was hotter than the second. Unfortunately, *Bewitched* is so powerful to Tony that it sends him off into a bit of psychosis as he tells me his story. Suddenly, Angie and the trailer disappear in the details of an episode in which Samantha's favorite tree, a weeping willow, is sick. A spell cast by Dr. Bombay to restore the tree's health instead has the effect of making Samantha "weep." And, in the telling, Tony begins to weep himself.

I let Tony cry for a bit, muttering about Samantha and her tree. He is shaking now, almost like he is in shock. I decide to try to pull him back in. "Tony . . . what happened to Angie? She still out there?"

Tony freezes for a moment and then begins to pick at the scab on his forehead that was formerly an eyebrow. A little blood begins to ooze from it and I grab his hand. "You're hurting yourself, Tony. Stop. What happened to Angie?"

Tony looks around the room and, realizing that it is now mostly filled, pulls his chair even closer to the wall. "She went out to check and that's when it happened."

"Check what?"

"That's when it happened."

"What happened?"

"She's real mad at me."

"What'd you do? You steal some tweak?"

Tony zooms into focus suddenly. This is the most disturbing part of crystal insanity. It's not continuous. Suddenly, Tony pulls himself up in the chair and leans toward me, entirely lucid. "I wanted to. You know . . . course I'd done what she laid out. I had some and I wanted some more and she went outside so I thought . . . fuck, I thought . . . she's cookin' in here, so how hard can it be to find some more."

"She catch you?"

Tony is still with me mentally but his body is starting to shake again. Violently. "Didn't find no more. I was looking around the . . . whatever it is . . . the tubes and shit. Moving some stuff and it was hot and . . . I touched that glass and . . . but no . . . no fire . . . just . . . I . . ."

Tony stops there. He closes his eyes, trying to either see or not see.

"Tony, you've been through this before. You know you're just gonna have to get through these first few days . . ."

A sound somewhere between groaning and humming rises out of Tony's throat as he rocks back and forth on the cheap plastic chair. It groans along with Tony, threatening to snap from the violent motion of his body.

He's shaking so badly that I think maybe I should get some help but I'm afraid he'll bolt. I stand up next to him and say, very softly, "Tony . . . honey, maybe we should walk a little bit."

I touch him on the shoulder and his arm shoots out, stiff and shaking, to hold me away. He is wearing a loose, long-sleeved T-shirt and it slides back on his out-stretched arm.

"Oh, my God." It's all I can say as I look at his arm. Tony opens his eyes slowly now and looks at his arm, calmly, curiously. He pulls the sleeve farther back to reveal his flesh. It has been burned, but not by fire. There is a kind of deep red swirl that wraps around the top of his forearm and then spreads down towards the wrist. His skin looks cauterized from what must have been one of Angie's acids.

"Oh shit, honey. We need to get you to the hospital."

Tony's body stops shaking. He stands suddenly and declaims in a loud voice, to no one in particular, "I'm speaking to Tina now. I'm talking to her directly. Tina, you lifted me up and then you let me down."

Several other guys from the meeting have walked over to us. Everyone is silent now. Just waiting.

"Tony, let's go. We need to . . ."

So quickly that I don't even see him move, Tony is out of the room. We all scramble after him but, when we get to the door, Tony is already halfway down the block, running as fast as he can. Just before he turns the corner, he flings his arm up into the air, as if he's waving, and disappears.