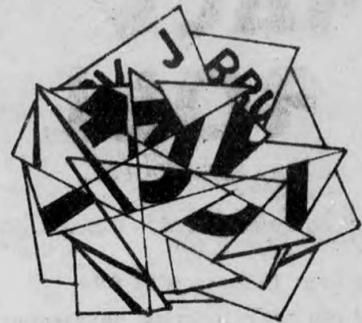


BRUNSTORY CIRCULAR BY JOHN McCANN



After three days of combing the bars on Yonge St. for a job as a waiter Leo was desperate for employment. The kind of job he wanted was one that made no demands on the mind and few on the body. He wanted just enough money to live and the freedom to devote his serious attention to writing. On Thursday night of the last paid up week in his room, Leo noticed an ad in the Star. It seemed perfect. Men were to report at 6:00 in the morning at a certain address for the distribution of handbills. The work was paid by the day, so that Leo would have the cash he needed to pay his rent at the end of the day.

Leo was up at 5:00 the next morning ready to walk down Yonge St. to King and then to take the King streetcar east. He didn't take the subway because he wasn't sure it was open that early and he didn't want any fou' ups to cause him to miss the job. When he arrived at the address in the newspaper he found a parking lot with three panel trucks in it next door to a shed. His watch said 5:30. No one was around. He walked past the lot to check if he had the right address. He did.

Just like sitting on the pot Leo thought impatiently, "nothing to do but wait." In ten minutes a car pulled into the lot and parked near the shed. A man got out, unlocked the door of the shed and went inside. Two more cars pulled into the lot. These had three or four people in each. They were laughing and horsing around as they drove next to the first car. The men, most of them younger than Leo, got out and stood around the door of the first man had entered. There was some laughing and Leo heard a couple of questions and jokes about who were going to get what truck today. One guy was holding a bottle of beer that he drank from and tucked inside his jacket between drinks. When Leo saw that he relaxed, sitting on the guard rail that ran around the parking lot.



Other people started to appear. A thin faced man with a bruise on the joint of his nose and a shambling wino's gait sidled up to one of the young truckers to pay his respects. He flashed the trucker a wide grin revealing broken discolored teeth and pulled one of his hands out of his pockets as if to grab the man. The long-haired trucker shoved him away, laughing at him. Then he shouted calling the wino an old buzzard and laughed again as the wino moved away smiling and looking around at the others watching him. He winked and nodded his head glad to be remembered by the rough young long-hair.

A thin kid with medium long hair and dirty yellow hands walked into the lot, smoking. When he saw the wino he danced up to him smiling with his cigarette held between his teeth and asked the old man if he had any hash. The dreamy face of the wino smiled again and looked around at the others to see what they thought. He must have thought they expected him to do something about the kid because he turned his head away again saying, "Awww, why don't you..."

He didn't finish what he was going to say, only pulled out a cigarette and asked the kid for a light, smiling again, because he couldn't afford to lose the good will, and besides, his look seemed to say, as he inhaled that first puff, watching Leo, "We're all friends here."



More people were showing up now and there was some activity over by the trucks as the drivers began to look around the lot, counting those like Leo, who were standing around waiting to be counted. Everybody started looking at everyone else and those who were buddies stood close together so they would be put on the same truck when the men were divided among the drivers. Some of the drivers talked to the men. They laughed and said they didn't want them in their trucks and the men laughed back, knowing that each driver had his favorite among them that he would always ride with him. Other old hands were talking to one another, speculating on where the trucks would be going that day. These ones were already standing near the trucks they knew they would be riding in. Leo stood alone watching the thin kid talk with the wino and smoking.

He heard someone shout "Okay." The truckers started to point at the men standing around. A couple of them had their crews picked in moments and were loading them into the trucks when a plumpish blonde-haired guy of about twenty-five looked at Leo, hesitated as their eyes met, and indicated that Leo was to get in his truck. The blonde guy wasn't the driver Leo would pick if the choice was his, but, since no one else had even looked in his direction, Leo was glad to be with 'Blondie'. Already in the truck were the kid and the wino, a couple of old timers and a sullen-faced young man with a clean shave and filthy nails. The truck stank like a wino's underclothes and one of the old timers pointed that out to the wino, laughingly of course. The wino told the old man to fuck off and started to shift around for a comfortable seat behind the driver. This was a signal for everyone to start shifting

around looking for comfortable seats on the folded satchels that were used to carry handbills. There was a lot of swearing as everyone looked for a spot. But no contests arose among them for supremacy, territorial or otherwise. "Old men, winos and kids don't have anything to prove to one another," Leo thought.

Two more younger men got in and what was comfortable became crowded. There were groans and swearing all around as everyone shifted to make room for the newcomers. Then the chubby blonde trucker got into his seat and looked behind him smiling. "Everybody happy?" he said, laughing to himself. Everybody swore or said something. The driver laughed, still looking at the men. "You happy, George?" The wino smiled with his cigarette in his mouth and said "Yup". The driver laughed at that, then turned and shouted to the man in the shed. The man said something and the trucks next to Leo's started to pull out. The blonde turned around again and said "Harold why don't you..." Old Harold was already moving. "... sit up here by me so the fellas will have more room back there?" When Harold was in place, 'Blondie' gave one more chuckle looking at the men and started the engine.



As the truck twisted and turned through the streets the old hands started to speculate on the day's work. Where they were going. What delivering. They were hoping by that ruse to elicit the real information from the driver who could overhear everything they said. Harold suggested that they would be finishing up the Aikenhead's, meaning the circulars for Aikenhead's Department Store. Someone else said he thought the Aikenheads were finished. The wino said, what did it matter, they all ended up in the same place anyway. Hearing that the driver shouted, "They'd better. And we know where that is don't we? On the doorstep, not in the garbage can at the corner." The wino shouted "Who said anything about garbage cans? I always deliver my circulars!" He smiled at the kid. "Sure you do," said the driver. "Just like the rest of them." Everybody chimed in that they delivered their circulars and then started laughing. The wino laughed at 'Blondie' and when 'Blondie' heard him, he started to laugh too. "Sure you do."

The truck turned sharply into a hole in the side of an old warehouse. Everyone held on to keep from falling over as the truck whipped around with a screech.

Inside, a group of faces stood around watching as they got out of the truck. 'Blondie' greeted a couple of the men standing and then asked another man, who came over with a slip of paper in his hand, what the man had for him today. The man didn't even look, only shouted to his men to put on 'fifty of these', pointing to a stack of bundled newspapers and 'fifty of those', pointing to a stack of different shaped and colored bundles. 'Blondie' turned to his men and told them, gruffly, to start loading 'these' and 'those' and then he took out a cigarette and said something about Aikenheads. Nobody paid any attention and he didn't say anything else. The two old fellows and the sullen man with the dirty fingernails started for one of the piles of bundles after a bit of hesitation. The kid and the wino followed them and Leo came next with the other two guys following him.

The two older men went to work with a will, talking to each other about how the bundles should go into the truck. The sullen guy also worked hard, which surprised Leo. The man was quiet and a hard worker. The kid and the wino did a lot of 'assing around' but they kept up with the others. Leo just made sure to take his turn, going no faster or slower than he knew he should. The other two guys, who were friends, did exactly as Leo did.

When they finished loading handbills there was even less room in the truck for people. Everybody perched between bundles of handbills and the ceiling of the truck. The inside of the truck was like a caved-in coal mine or a bombed-out building. The wide eyes of the wino shone in the dark, looking at everybody, while the kid quietly smoked. The old men swore softly, trying to get comfortable and the rest did nothing. All the while 'Blondie' was talking and laughing with some of the hands in the warehouse. Finally Leo heard the warehouse foreman shouting to his men about work to do and 'Blondie' laughing as he opened the truck's door to get into his place. He turned around to look at them, smiling and they all looked back like cats trapped up a tree. "Everybody happy?" he said with a laugh. "Fuck off and lets get going," said the wino. 'Blondie' laughed at that, crinkling around the eyes. Then he gunned the engine, screeching into the street.



As the truck whirled from traffic light to stop sign, dignified old Harold and 'Blondie' consulted a street map of the area they were supposed to cover. Leo heard them