

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Hunter S. Thompson



Better Than Sex

CONFESSIONS OF A POLITICAL JUNKIE

Hunter S. Thompson is to drug-addled, stream-of-consciousness, psycho-political black humor what Forrest Gump is to idiot savants."

—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

BETTER THAN SEX

CONFESSIONS OF A POLITICAL JUNKIE

Gonzo Papers Vol. 4

Hunter S. Thompson

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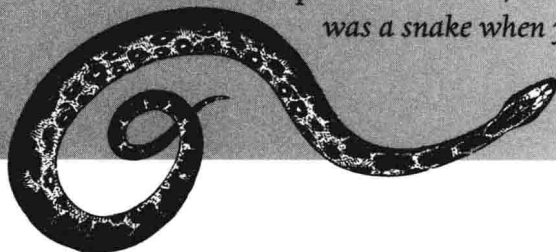
Influence peddling: Candidate Clinton bargains for the rock 'n' roll vote in the smoke-filled back room of Doe's Café, July 31, 1992

The Old Woman and the Snake

A PARABLE

An old woman was walking down the road when she saw a gang of thugs beating a poisonous snake. She rescued the snake and carried it back to her home, where she nursed it back to health. They became friends and lived together for many months. One day they were going into town, and the old woman picked him up and the snake bit her. Repeatedly. "O God," she screamed, "I am dying! Why? I was your friend. I saved your life! I trusted you! Why did you bite me?"

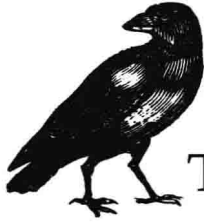
The snake looked up at her and said, "Lady, you knew I was a snake when you first picked me up."



Amendment III

TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.



The Raven

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—

.

“Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;

.

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

—EDGAR ALLAN POE, 1845

The Campaign Time Line beginning on page 40 is what it appears to be—a rolling calendar of real events, large and small, that tracked the 1992 presidential campaign. Life went on, and not much really changed in all those wretched little weeks. If there is no joy in Mudville tonight, the Campaign Time Line might help to explain why.

—HST

CONTENTS

<i>The Old Woman and the Snake</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Amendment IV to the U.S. Constitution</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>"The Raven"</i>	<i>xv</i>

PART ONE 1

CHAPTER 1: AUTHOR'S NOTE 3

Confessions of a shootist: Cruel humor on the campaign trail, from the murder of JFK to the crimes of the Marquis de Sade

CHAPTER 2: THE BOOK OF SCREEDS 15

The roots of addiction: The degradation of American politics in the final years of the American Century...Abandon all hope, ye who enter here...Welcome to Mr. Bill's Neighborhood: The tragic story of one man's struggle with the forces of evil and greed on the campaign trail, from Kennedy to Clinton... There is no such thing as an ex-junkie...

CHAPTER 3: SUMMER OF '91 27

Nightmare in Woody Creek...Invasion of the power-mongers...Armed standoff with George Bush, trapped in a dead-end valley with the prime minister of England...Airport seized by suicidal gunman, Secret Service paralyzed...Just how weird can you stand it, Bubba, before your love will crack?...

CHAPTER 4: 1992: THE HORROR, THE HORROR 45

Welcome to the year of the lizard...88 percent in the public-approval polls: Stand back! I am the president and you're not...The rise of the Man from Hope...

CHAPTER 5: JULY: THE NIGHTMARE OF ROSS PEROT 71

A pig will walk in the wilderness,
a pig will walk on the sea.
A pig will walk wherever he wants,
but no pig walks on me.

CHAPTER 6: THE DEATH OF FUN:

WELCOME TO LITTLE ROCK

85

The Four Stooges meet the next president...Memo from the National Affairs Desk, July 22...

CHAPTER 7: AUTUMN MADNESS

125

Whooping it up in London, Louisville and Paraguay...Secret vacation with the royal family...Haggling with Hillary, cruel warnings about Mr. Bill...Faxing frenzy with James and George and Jimmy and Big Ed on the need to destroy Ross Perot...

PART TWO 167

CHAPTER 8: HALLOWEEN IN LITTLE ROCK

169

Election night in the armpit of the Ozarks...Strange rumble with Carville, white slavery on the Gold Coast...Dead Cadillacs and dumb cocksuckers—it's all downhill from here...

CHAPTER 9: 1993: TROUBLE IN MR. BILL'S NEIGHBORHOOD

187

Stand back! Here comes Mr. Bill! And you better pay attention, Bubba—because the President is new at his job and he hates Germans—ho, ho...New humor from the White House and other dangerous jokes...

CHAPTER 10: DOOMED HOPE AND FAILED DREAMS

221

Winning the high ground, losing the low...Flogged for beauty, whipped for truth...Winning wrong, losing right, final notes on the failures of Bill Clinton: They called him "Suckee-Suckee"...

PART THREE 235

CHAPTER 666: THE DEATH OF RICHARD NIXON

237

The Honor Roll

249

PART ONE



CHAPTER 1

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Confessions of a shootist: Cruel humor on the campaign trail, from the murder of JFK to the crimes of the Marquis de Sade

Trace a line of goose pimples up the thin young arm. Slide the needle in and push the bulb watching the junk hit him all over. Move right in with the shit and suck junk through all the hungry young cells.

—William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*

JOHN F. KENNEDY, who seized the White House from Richard Nixon in a frenzied campaign that turned a whole generation of young Americans into political junkies, got shot in the head for his efforts, murdered in Dallas by some hapless geek named Oswald who worked for either Castro, the mob, Jimmy Hoffa, the CIA, his dominatrix landlady or the odious, degenerate FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover. The list is long and crazy—maybe Marilyn Monroe's first husband fired those shots from the Grassy Knoll. Who knows? A whole generation of American journalists is still embarrassed by their failure to answer that question.

JFK's ghost will haunt the corridors of power in America for as long as the grass is green and the rivers run to the sea....Take my word for it, Bubba. I have heard his footsteps for 30 years and

I still feel guilty about not being able to explain the biggest news story of my lifetime to my son.

AT ONE POINT, not long ago, I went to the desperate length of confessing to the murder myself. We were finishing breakfast in a patio restaurant on a bright Sunday morning in Boulder. It was a stylish place near the campus, where decent people could meet after pretending they had just come from church and get fashionably drunk on mimosas and white wine. The tables were separated by ferns and potted palms. Bright orange impatiens flowers drooped from hanging urns.

Even I can't explain why I said what I did. I had been up all night with my old friend Allen Ginsberg, the poet, and we had both slid into the abyss of whiskey madness and full-bore substance abuse. It was wonderful, but it left me a little giddy by the time noon rolled around.

"Son," I said, "I'm sorry to ruin your breakfast, but I think the time has finally come to tell you the truth about who killed John Kennedy."

He nodded but said nothing. I tried to keep my voice low, but emotion made it difficult.

"It was *me*," I said. "I am the one who shot Jack Kennedy."

"What?" he said, glancing quickly over his shoulder to see if others were listening. Which they were. The mention of Kennedy's name will always turn a few heads, anywhere in the world—and god only knows what a tenured Professor of American Political History might feel upon hearing some grizzled thug in a fern bar confess to his own son that he was the one who murdered John F. Kennedy. It is one of those lines that will not fall on deaf ears.

My son leaned forward and stared into my eyes as I explained the raw details and my reasons for killing the President in cold blood, many years ago. I spoke about ballistics and treachery and my "secret work for the government" in Brazil, when he thought I was in the Peace Corps in the sixties.

"I gave up killing about the time you were born," I said. "But I could never tell you about it, until now."

He nodded solemnly for a moment, then laughed at me and called for some tea. "Don't worry, Dad," he said.

"Good boy," I said. "Now we can finally be honest with each other. I feel naked and clean for the first time in 30 years."

"Not me," he said. "Now I'll have to turn you in."

"What?" I shouted. "You treacherous little bastard!" Many heads had turned to stare at us. It was a weird moment for them. The man who killed Kennedy had just confessed publicly to his son, and now they were cursing each other. Ye gods, what next?

What indeed? How warped can it be for a child born into the sixties to finally be told that his father was the hired shootist who killed Kennedy? Do you call 911? Call a priest? Or act like a cockroach and say nothing?

NO WONDER the poor bastards from Generation X have lost their sense of humor about politics. Some things are not funny to the doomed, especially when they've just elected a President with no sense of humor at all. The joke is over when even victory is a downhill run into hardship, disappointment and a queasy sense of betrayal. If you can laugh in the face of these things, you are probably ready for a staff job with a serious presidential candidate. The humor of the campaign trail is relentlessly cruel and brutal. If you think you like jokes, try hanging around the cooler after midnight with hired killers like James Carville or the late Lee Atwater, whose death by cancer in 1991 was a fatal loss to the Bush reelection effort. Atwater could say, without rancor, that he wanted to castrate Michael Dukakis and dump him on the Boston Common with his nuts stuffed down his throat. Atwater said a lot of things that made people cringe, but he usually smiled when he said them, and people tried to laugh.

It was Deep Background stuff, they figured; of *course* he didn't mean it. Hell, in some states you could go to *prison* for making treats like that. *Felony menacing*, two years minimum; *Conspiracy* to commit Murder and/or Felony Assault with Intent to commit Great Bodily Harm, minimum 50 years in Arkansas and Texas; also Kidnapping (death), Rape, Sodomy,

Malicious Disfigurement, Treason, Perjury, Gross Sexual Imposition and Aggravated Conspiracy to Commit all of the above (600 years, minimum).... And all of this without anybody ever *doing* anything. Ho, ho. How's that for the wheels of justice, Bubba? Six hundred fifty-two years, just for downing a few gin-bucks at lunch and trading jokes among warriors....

Richard Nixon was not a Crook. Ho, ho.

George Bush was innocent. Ho, ho.

Ed Rollins bribed every Negro preacher in New Jersey to hold down the black vote for the Governor in '93. Hee-haw.

James Carville set Hamilton Jordan's heart on fire and then refused to piss down his throat to save his life. Ho, ho.

That is the kind of humor that campaign junkies admire and will tell to their children—for the same perverse reasons that make me confess to my son, over breakfast, that I blew John Kennedy's head off in Dallas.

You have to be very mean to get a laugh on the campaign trail. There is no such thing as paranoia.

NOT EVERYBODY will get a belly laugh out of these things, but if you want to get elected, it is better to be Mean than to be Funny.

Cruel jokes are a big part of life in any environment where speed freaks, work addicts and obsessive-compulsive political junkies are ripped to the tits day and night for thirteen straight months on their own adrenaline and swollen more and more each day with the kind of hubris that comes when you try to cross Innocence and Ambition all at once and you start seeing yourself on the front page of the *New York Times* in a photo with the next president getting off a jet plane in Texas or Boston or Washington, surrounded by a gang of hard-eyed U.S. Secret Service agents escorting you through the cheering crowd....

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