

Michael McGuire "Mr. Bridges"

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MR. BRIDGES

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The first time I met Mr. Bridges he looked like a walking skeleton, eyes set deep; sunken cheeks; I bet he didn't weigh ninety pounds, he was an old world character; talked tough but you knew he was really tender, I was Mr. Bridges route man for about three years; every Friday I'd bring in his clean uniforms, it was what we call a house stop; just one man on the invoice and Mr. Bridges never kept a copy, I'd walk into the dirty garage that had piles of relics from engines now at rest, he'd always say something like do you have all my uniforms; you shorted me last week you little cocksucker, it always smelt like dog piss and in the winter it was dark and warm, and those big dogs he had chained up in there were mean as hell and wouldn't hardly let you get near him, he loved those dogs and they loved him they would roll around at his feet like puppies, and he would smile so childlike so oblivious and pet them and tell them what good boys they were, it was a c.o.d. account and Mr. Bridges would always pay me a little over and tell me to keep the change, he would always say; smiling widely I'm the only one that does that ain't I, I would always smile and say yes Mr. Bridges you are; you're the only one left who appreciates a good route man, he would often tell me he had started the service back in nineteen and fifty two, back when Joe Barnes started the company and was going door to door

himself selling shop rags, did you know Joe Barnes he would ask and I'd say no Mr. Bridges that was before my time, the guys name was actually Barr but I never corrected him, but now for some strange reason that I can't really put my finger on I wish I would have, there was one story he told me a few times about his first route man back years ago when even he was a young man, his name was Jerry Bell and he was a great guy Mr. Bridges said, they even had a beer or two on Christmas when he'd make his stop, but you can't do that these days and I would agree and say no they would fire my ass in a second, he said Jerry had some kind of problems with his marriage; he didn't know the details, but one weekend Jerry drove down into Alabama late at night and they found he had parked and shot himself in his car, he always said at the end of the story that he thought about that a lot and that it always hurt his heart, toward the end when I would come in he would say oh son I'm in a hell of a shape, he always either called me cocksucker or son I'm not sure if he even knew my name, he would say I'm bleeding inside and they can't stop it, I didn't know what to say when he would tell me this; it just seems embarrassing when someone tells you there dying, but I kept coming every Friday till one day he just wasn't there. His name was Hershel; Hershel Bridges but I always called him Mr. Bridges, I still drive down Wedgwood by that old garage behind his house every Friday, and that old brown truck he used to drive is still parked out in front of it, I can still see him sliding slowly into the front seat to go pick up some parts, I can still hear that pained and puzzled voice saying oh son I'm in a hell of a shape, I still think of that story he

told me about that other route driver and how that hurt
his heart, and
you know I believe it really did.

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