

**ON THE OPEN ROAD** by Steve Tesich

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Two men—ANGEL (in his twenties) and Al—join forces to make their way to the "Land of the Free." Al has a cartful of great works of art he's using to negotiate their way into freedom.

Using a pulley and rope, Angel lifts a beautiful statue into his cart. He explains how the Civil War began.

**SCENE:** Inside a large bombed-out museum.

**TIME:** The future, in a period of civil war.

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*Out of the darkness, a ray of light illuminates a large beautiful statue. The statue is still for a beat or so and then it begins to rise up. More light. We now see that we're inside a large bombed-out museum. A thick, nylon rope is attached to the statue. The rope is draped over a high steel beam overhead, exposed by the bombing. Using a pulley, ANGEL is lifting the statue off the ground. The cart is not far away. AL has taken off the tarp and is now taking out some paintings that we can't see. He is stacking them on the ground to make room for the statue. More light. We see little pyramids of dead bodies here and there. Corridors radiating in three directions. ANGEL grunts as he works. Despite the pulley, it's hard work lifting up the statue. When it's high enough, AL will position the cart to receive the statue and ANGEL will lower it. Once in the cart, AL will wedge in the paintings around it and ANGEL will disassemble the pulley and put the rope and the pulley in the cart and AL will then place the tarp over the whole thing and the cart will be ready to go. All this will take place during ANGEL's monologue.*

ANGEL: If I was God, I'd change some things in the Bible. About how you shouldn't make graven images of God. If I was God, I wouldn't give a shit if they made graven images of me. What do I care? I'm God. Can't hurt me to be graven. Nothing can hurt me. I'm God. But I would put in its place, in big letters: Thou shalt not make graven images of your fellow man.

*(He pauses to rest a bit.)*

The very first time I ever went to a museum was right before the Civil War broke out.

*(Continues to work.)*

It was one of those scum-of-the-earth days at the museum. If you're scum, you get in free. These social agencies rounded us up and took us there in school buses. About three hundred of us. Young scum. Old scum. Half-way house scum. No-house scum. A cross-section. It was in order to uplift us they took us there. I was delighted to be in that air-conditioned place. That by itself was uplifting enough for me.

*(The statue is now high enough. Al moves the cart under it. Angel lowers it slowly, as Al guides it.)*

But there was this exhibit there in the museum. These artworks of a contemporary nature. And every work of art showed some man or woman or kid who was having a real bad time of it. Street-type sufferers and the like. We're snickering among ourselves in that stupid scum-of-the-earth way of ours. What? We came all the way here to see more scum like us. But the others, the regular people, in chic lightweight summer suits and dresses with brochures in their hands, they're not snickering at all. And they're offended 'cause we are. They are seriously moved by what they see in the exhibit. They are telling each other how beautiful it all is, this exhibit of human suffering. I try to ignore them, but it was like the air-conditioning broke down or something, 'cause I start feeling hot. It's rubbing me all wrong to hear about the beauty of it all. Not that far from the museum, twenty blocks or so uptown where I lived, there was the same kind of exhibit. Same kind of suffering. Only it wasn't beautiful there. And there were no couples in chic lightweight summer clothes to be moved by it all. What was fucking scum-of-the-earth outside the museum was a fucking masterpiece inside. And then this thing starts crawling through my brain. This really painful idea that maybe there was something in me worth seeing, that nobody would ever see so long as these artworks were there. I know what I'm thinking, but I'm trying not to think it, 'cause it's no good thinking such thoughts. But then I hear it. It's like I hear the other scum-of-the-earth there thinking the same thing. And suddenly it's a much bigger thought. It's like ants. I read in this nature magazine once that ants don't have brains and that ants don't talk

unless there's enough of them that get together. Two ants got nothing to say to each other. They don't know what to do. But if a few hundred of them get together, a brain is born. Suddenly, we started trashing it all. Breaking up statues and tearing the paintings to shreds. There were these armed guards there and they shot a bunch of us, but we didn't care. Ants don't really care if a bunch gets killed. We set fire to the museum and ran out into the street.

*(The cart is loaded. The tarp is over the cart. The ladder now hangs from some pegs on its side.)*

[AL: And so another Civil War began.]

For once I was there at the start of something. It was very pleasant to realize you didn't really have to be highly qualified to make history.