



# CHESS BARBS



BY by Jude Acers, US Senior Master

## The Road - Part 9 Jude And Janis

To know her you must know about needles. You must press her skin tightly to help her find veins that are not riddled with holes and tape her arms to keep them from getting infected. Remember her green pump shoes. Yes, there she is, sitting in the bathroom with her head tilted to one side and shooting up heroin. Janis Joplin can whisper, "It's better than anything, baby!" And if you expect to know her, you'd just better keep your trap shut, because you're just a punk weirdo chessplaying kid from Louisiana, you hear? Shut up and go get her a dress with long sleeves, dummy.

Go ahead and try. Sit there on the bathroom floor as she begins to fly away and ask her mickey mouse questions like a Boy Scout. She'll tell you exactly what's coming down. "O.K. Go ahead and ask me, Jude."

"You're too straight to dig it. ...I'm gonna O.D. sometime. ...Oh, shut up, shithead! I've heard it all before, man, that crap. I've heard the bubble story. Is that what they tell y'all down there? A bubble pops from the needle and goes to your head and boom-booms your brain. Oh, come on, Jude, come on. ...Needles? Dirty needles? Oh, come on, baby, shut your face. You just wash 'em like you wash dishes, cups, bottles, you know. All you gotta do is be careful. It ain't gonna hurt and it feels so fine, so fine. It ain't gonna hurt, Jude."

You have to sit there and watch your lady friend, Janis Joplin, shoot up, because it is none of your business. You don't really know what is happening, and "freedom is the right to do exactly what you please, providing you don't shoot people." This is driven home by dozens of happenings in 1968, during the life of a good old Louisiana boy in the big city. Mind your own business. No lecture, daddy. San Francisco is freedom.

Besides this, you are very curious. The night before, hadn't L.A. Kavich and Carmen Holliday taken you backstage to the changing room of a Broadway strip joint and sat you down in the only chair? Hadn't you just sat there and put dozens of questions to giggling ladies, six in all, as they changed everything right in front of you, Jude? Life sure is fast and furious in the super-cool, super-hip big city. So you just sit there in your jeans, LSU sweatshirt and soak it all in. Besides, a man's life can often depend on a mere scrap of information, the man with no name has told us in "Fistful of Dollars."

The radio blasts out with a long lead intro, as Merrill Rush gets set to do it to us again with one of "the truly great top pop golden oldies of all time," as the D.J. says about it. It is "Angel of the Morning," the number one record in the nation as I was drifting hopelessly into Denver, Colorado for a chess tournament in 1968. I remember the Holiday Inn I lived in, charging everything to a Shell Oil Company credit card which had been sent to me by mistake. I am just going to have to pay them, because I am a good guy. Janis Joplin knows the words and prances about the house. In the Denver Holiday Inn I had turned it up full blast and danced, swayed. "Classical Gas" was on the air, everywhere, too.

She stops dramatically, spreads her arms to belt out in chorus, "Touch my cheek before you leave, baby. ...Just call me Angel of the morning."

"God, that's a great song," she blurts out. "I wish I could sing something like that."

The doorbell in Janis' grand-central-station home is never needed. The door just opens at the pusher. Three people just come right on in and they are just your old routine down home folks coming over with a whole bucket of Colonel Sander's fried chicken. One laughs. "All right, Janis, baby! Let's not have any bullshit. Where is your dope?" is the warm, affectionate greeting. They are glittery, flashy super-groupie type people before it is fashionable to be exactly that. While they are investigating Janis' lovely narcotics selection, Jude Acers is making a security check of the Kentucky Fried Chicken, of course. He thoroughly "examines" four choice pieces and pronounces it suitable for consumption. Nobody seems interested, so Jude decides on further tests, and one-half the bucket is doomed.

Sunshine, the delicious lady who works in the Coffee Gallery (and who has those two titanic front parts) is sitting there in the couch with a piece of rolling paper and, of course, Time magazine.

Johnny Ace comes on the radio and sings "Forever, My Darling." The Pledge of Love from a Texas boy. Janis Joplin is from Port Arthur, Texas. The first Port Arthur hippie, the first Port Arthur High School total reject, the dynamite lady singer in Austin who drifts along to find true happiness in Southern Comfort and switch three tremendous back-up bands three times. She will cram all this in during 28 years and die in L.A. because she could not tell that too much heroin before and after recording the vocal tracks of "Pearl" would simply kill her. Unless, of course, you accept another possibility mentioned by Janis, that "any pusher can kill you or make you God-damn sick by giving you too high grade smack." Janis Joplin's pusher man would not want to lose such a pleasant customer and her credit was good. I found money all over her house, just bumping around. Under a flowerplant. In the bathroom. The pusher man cometh and you gotta be ready, understand? Her "friends" did a lot of bumping in Janis' house. They found the goodies, too.

Janis Joplin grossed \$785,000 the year she died. Grossman says so. Rolling Stone says so. Columbia record says that's close. The Internal Revenue Service has collected the Christmas bombing fees on that amount as well. And Jude Acers believes every word, because he has seen Janis Joplin wipe out a dress shop, taking one of everything in her size and four pairs of shoes, "just to be sure I got something to wear for gigs." Jude helped the store's business, too, by purchasing two shoelaces.

Knowing that Janis Joplin grew up in Texas from ye olde Herb Caen's column in the Chronicle has its great

advantages. You can play clue with the most sensational female blues screamer in the world.

"Clue, Janis, clue. Texas. Who is that singing?" "Oh, that used to play all the time in Port Arthur. It was...uh...it was...uhh some dude...Isn't he the guy who killed himself with a gun?"

"Very true. Russian roulette back stage between sets. The show did not go on. His name was Johnny Ace."

"I was at a football game trying to find this girl when I heard over the radio that he killed himself," Janis recalls, blankly brushing the floor with her hair.

Janis put her head in both hands, stuck a pillow under her elbows and sat cross-legged on the floor. Eyeing me carefully, she had to probe down under the old place.

"What's happening down there in Louisiana? Do they play me, my records?"

"They still don't play your records in the South. They're scared of you. One guy at a radio station in Baton Rouge said that you were death. 'White nigger' programming he called it. Big groups down there are rare. The only million selling records from anybody in our area came from Dale and Grace (I'm leaving it all up to you) and a group from Texas called 'the five Americans.'"

"The Five Americans? Christ, who are they?"

"A bubblegum group, but they were dynamite. You remember...I see the light, 'Zip Code,' 'Western Union...'"

Janis does not remember. You tell her about somebody playing guitar and packing the Ivanhoe Lounge in New Orleans named Billy Winter or Eddie Winter or something. And there was our answer to the Rolling Stones in big B.R. - THE GREEK FOUNTAINS. Oh, heart throb!

She gives a nice smile and asks me whether it's safe to go back to "that house, that party-house place." It is where we first met, and the place was raided by police on Thanksgiving Day. Janis and I had gone up some hall stairs to the roof. We were the lucky ones, since we were able to make a Huck Finn getaway because we had our clothes on! It was a real McCoy Thanksgiving party with everyone bringing pumpkin pie, wine, turkey, corn, dope, etc. The great Burkett supplied the beer, William Bills, Dennis Fritzinger, Lady Mary and the weirdo Louisiana boy. Fearing exactly what happened, Max Burkett also left early.

"How...why was that party busted, man? I mean everything was going along so fine. I was having me such a gas, I was so high."

Jude Acers, the unstoned, sits there and lets it sink in carefully. Janis Joplin does not realize how Bills, veteran chess master and road creature, was hit by acid by a prankster. Bills has never had any drugs and completely freaked out on his explosive "coffee." He began to jump up and down, screaming insanely. His threats became alarming. He blasted us with "This whole gathering is clearly a top secret undercover communist conspiracy. I am going to report you to the police department. Yes, I am. I most certainly shall."

Nobody at the party realized how devastated by acid Bills really was. Some joke. Forgetting that he owned an automobile parked outside, Bills climbed a Muni bus and somehow wound up in Hunter's Point, the most dangerous part of the city. He was badly beaten up and robbed. Police found him unconscious in a doorway. The cops took him to the city drunk tank, thinking Bills was under the weather! Unbelievably, Bills was actually able to mumble out something which led police straight to a very nifty holiday party with sirens all around the building. The apartment owner and several people were arrested without cause or evidence. Cursing and threatening Bills with great bodily harm, they were led off to jail by apologetic police "for questioning" and released a day later, case dismissed. Wow! Bills laid low for weeks.

Janis listens carefully, laughing and shaking her head at my back pages. "Gawd," "Ha-ha," "Jesus" are interpolated with my clinker.

"It's obvious Bills was really hit, Janis. It had to be acid, don't you think? Do you realize that the police towed away his car while he was beaten up, put in jail and having his mind blown. He had to go get his car when he remembered he owned one a day later. I know. Burkett and I put up the money to get the blasted mother out."

Janis Joplin said, "Some people do not have fortune, a chance. But you can have fun no matter how badly things are. If you keep on truckin' it works out. He must have been unlucky, is all."

"Unlucky?" thought Jude. Yes, this great character was born under a bad sign, but persevered. It is August and September in 1968. William Bills, Subu "the stabber" Subrumaniam and Jude are on the road again all across the nation. They are not worried. They have no home, no women, no life. They drift like an angry storm in Bills' soon-to-be repossessed Plymouth and lived on Jude Acers' beloved Shell Oil Company credit card. All the cities flash before the car hood. We are in Galveston, Texas now. Do you see that hotel 12 stories high over there? The Great Bills, Subu and Jude sized up the scene. The Moody Blues play. The car rock-and-roll tapes play.

William Bills points to the tenth floor. "That is where my mother killed herself 25 years and four months ago. My father had died and she didn't really have anything to live for. She didn't like me. She jumped off the balcony. Only she didn't die right away. She fell onto a metal chair ten stories down. It took her nine hours to die. There was blood everywhere. I could only watch. She was all broken in pieces. I tried to understand."

Subu Subrumaniam practically vomited. I sat there absolutely creamed, shocked. (God, if Burkett or Ken Smith knew this they would flip their lids!) That's how

Subu and I got the message about Bills. He beat Bisguier, Addison and many other famous players in an endless odyssey, trying to forget.

He knew his time was not the right time. "Jude Acers, I can't go on studying chess anymore. You must get strong enough to beat all those grandmasters. You must, you certainly must." From that moment on Bills owned the hides of Subu "the stabber" and Jude. We mowed down several players to give Bills cash. We loved that man. And we'd analyze 14 straight hours on an adjourned game to give him a certain draw, probable win. It was the only time Bills had ever revealed himself to the people who played chess with him for 20 years.

Janis listened to all this. "I wanna go all at once, man. I ain't stickin' around to watch everybody I know disappear. Hell, no!"

"He was really great, Janis. People would applaud after some of his games. He beat a top Los Angeles chessmaster named Weinberger in nine hours. Subu and I went berserk when Weinberger resigned the game. We stomped, we shouted. He played such great games, Janis. People would applaud..."

"What did I look like at that party, I wonder?" Janis Joplin asks.

"You were alone at a table with turkey leg in hand, like a cave man. You wore a green, see-through net top, jeans without a belt and brown sandals."

"Jesus...Jesus...You must be a genius, man. How do you remember all that crap?" Janis screams in delight.

"Janis, I keep reminding you that I am indeed truly great. Besides, on this occasion I was looking kind of close. Mary, Fritzinger the poet, Max Burkett, Jim Schmidt, Sunshine were all there. You looked over at this guy from the Rincon Annex, the party host. You said, 'Awright, man, where are those guys that are going to fuck us?'"

Janis Joplin began screaming laughter. "That's right. Oh, man! How do you remember?...I remember now. He promised there was a party man coming, a party-pretty-boy."

She was silent for a moment, trying to remember more. "I have enough trouble tripping over to a party like that by myself. I almost never can find the address. A number is always wrong or something. I musta been lookin' for a party dude."

Jude piped up, "Why, miss Manis. I do declare. I was there. Why didn't you latch onto me?"

"Why, you don't count, Mr. Saint Chessplayer, you-you-you innocent virgin!" Janis screamed out with an ear-to-ear grin and three choice cackles.

Still, Jude thinks, it is strange that Janis cannot remember the remarkable Bills scene. How could anybody forget that? She is popping Southern Comfort slowly, without ice. Then the heavy of the night.

"What do I look like to you, Jude?" Janis asks very deliberately. She is actually serious. O.K., the truth.

"Not feminine, not masculine, neutral gear. You're my little sister. I don't drink and you do so as to make up for both of us."

Janis flips on that one. She is happy, but will she still love me tomorrow? My snap judgments are made now. They are utterly stupid, wrong, of course. (A.) Don't worry. Janis is taking heroin but her supply is ending and she can handle it. (B.) As long as she is singing at Bill Graham's places in San Francisco she'll get the affection she needs. As long as she keeps on lying when Ralph Gleason asks her if she's off smack she's gonna be all right.

Janis looks down. "I'm dying. I know it. I know it."

Silence. What can you say? If I can't take hold of me and keep manic-depressiveness from running rampant, how am I going to be able to give advice or comfort to the world's hottest lady rock singer? I don't even smoke cigarettes. Mom, get me out of here! What am I doin' here. Please, Mr. Custer, I don't want to go...

Later... "Janis, I have two boxes of old chess books and things. I've stored them at the Cafe Trieste. Can I store them with you until I get a place that's safe? The Swiss-American makes my liver quiver."

Janis tells me to just drop them off. Maybe she'll learn to play chess. Sure. Ha, ha, ha.

A week later I did just that. Janis wan't at her place in Marin, so I just tossed them in a drawer. I can actually remember Janis Joplin with a copy of The California Chess Reporter in her hands and saying, "What are all these little numbers?" She just sat there flipping through the pages. It was to be the last time I saw her alive. Her eyes were big circles, but, believe me, she looked O.K., able to cope.

To understand why Janis Joplin put me on the road as a professional chessmaster and changed my whole way of thinking about San Francisco, i.e., survival, it is only necessary to learn how I got the message.

I was sitting in Winterland and listening to Quick-silver Messenger Service, wondering why so few performing groups play non-stop. Is tuning up on stage necessary? Why can't groups be professional, like Creedence Clearwater? I mean it. The dead data, the analysis was running in my mind. I was drowsy, unprepared.

Bill Graham just walked out and said, "I hate to be the one to tell you this, but Janis Joplin died today in Los Angeles. We don't know yet what happened, but it's coming over KSN and we know of other reports as well."

I freaked. I just sat there wondering how in the world a big powerful horse that I had picked to win couldn't even get to the racetrack alive. What had gone wrong? The guy from Chicago that she loved had to be a plus, and, besides, for the first time in Janis' life someone else was paying the bar bills. Her last band, Full Tilt Boogie, was supposed to be all pro. Bob Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman, was watching over her very



# JANIS'S \$12,000 GAME

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well without choking her. I knew this from a first-hand experience. I honestly believed she was getting away with her two cartons of Southern Comfort and money stashed everywhere for the pusher man.

With this writing there is the realization that I had never known anybody my age to die, someone I had met hundreds of times.

She had taunted me strangely. "You don't do nothing but move them little men around, man. But you'll get the last laugh, probably. You'll be old, old, old and just remember me, baby. Ha, ha." Janis said this in the Coffee Gallery, where she once sang for free more than a year. It was there that "Big Brother and the Holding Company" found her. That weird, colorful band broke the Janis Joplin sound worldwide with a record called "Piece of My Heart," or something just as catchy. Big Brother used to meet there before rolling to every conceivable audience in meadows, stadiums, gyms, bars. It was there that Janis Joplin played her game with me.

The turnover of faces in her house was incredible. I do not remember even a fraction of the people in the house that Janis Joplin spent her last years in. The record people were faces, friendly faces as sales soared. They found her wild, a risky investment, and so did Grossman, who insured her life for \$200,000 after Jimmy Hendricks decided to check out of the hotel. As for the various Janis Joplin sex and drinking stories, as well as sundry Joplin biographies in circulation, I cannot bear witness one way or the other. She experimented wildly, lived like a torch. I saw nothing so wild as biographies tell us, but then I wasn't around Janis Joplin like many others every day either. She was the only woman I ever met who could successfully use filthy language for expression that seemed in character and quite nice. She was mad about several men and women in her entourage, and they were always touring upper Grant. If you knew Janis, you boogied seven days a week, that's for sure.

Never unwilling to seek expensive thrills, she tried a great many things. I was never able to tell if she was serious about anything. She was a wild, wild lady. And she could deliver the message...North Beach days...back...back...back.

Two recollections will illustrate, and they are precious memories indeed. I was in the Cafe Trieste and needed to change shirts in the men's room, as I had no place to live. After going to the legendary green dufflebag (which the kind Trieste proprietor, Franco, most graciously stored behind the soda fountain), I was off down the hall on my exciting new adventure.

I reached for the washroom door, and pop! It opened as if by itself. From behind the door came first two Hell's Angel type behemoths, then a third small figure, who looked like a 14-year-old-girl. She was followed by Janis Joplin and TWO MORE men followed her! I was absolutely astounded at the physical miracle I was witnessing. Six people had come out of that tiny men's room. Janis said, "Hello, Mr. Chessplayer," and flashed right on by.

I stood there with my mouth open. I just couldn't believe it. "How...How...could all those people?"

"Hell, man we left two men playing chess in there still, and watch out because they'll beat your donkey."

I turned around slowly and carefully, thinking it over. I didn't want to disturb a game in progress. Honestly, that was my first thought.

As I stood in the tiny room and raised my arms to remove my sweater, I realized how completely my frame filled the space. How could have six people fit in there? What were they doing in the little room? Janis, baby, how did you do it?

I tried to think of every evil possibility, but gave them all up. There wasn't room for six people to move in that place, much less be wicked! I never figured it out, either.

When you think about it... You're coming home from a hard day's work at the office and you go to put your coat in the closet. You open it and six people file out without a word, and Morphy is playing Steinitz inside. You close the door and call the police and tell them your story and...

Two biographies of hedonistic Janis have left little to be said about her experimentation, nervousness, fears. No side of her is left covered, the reader believes. Nothing ever published could have prepared me for Janis Joplin's game of the century in the Coffee Gallery. The only question left for me to answer is whether she planned the entire affair.

It was a Sunday morning in those golden years just before she died. Janis had always been getting a percentage of a band's appearance fee. Now she was a solo attraction, a superstar, booking at staggering fees arranged by Albert Grossman and his eager-beaver office crew in New York. I knew little or nothing of these goings on. Certainly, I did not understand that the manager of Bob Dylan and Ritchie Havens was deeply interested in her career. Her projected income was more than two million dollars in two years. This would seem strange to me, as she came off stage at Winterland and did not even receive an encore. She was sent home by the audience. "I know I wasn't good. So what, man, so what? Who cares?" she told me afterward in a candid confrontation outside. She got into a guy's little truck and puttered away. Is it possible to die before dying?

My world was where it happened. I was living like a rat and playing Slimey Burns at the rate of 25 cents per gruelling game. Slimey once played my a game that lasted nine hours by the clock. During the game a Slimey rooter dropped by and bought him a beer, went off to a basketball game, returned to see us and buy Slimey another beer, go home to dinner and bring his whole family to see the finale and buy Slimey another beer. After resigning, Slimey looked up and said, "Just one more, double or nothing!"

The second and (thank God) last game only went four hours. Slimey felt deeply about his quarters. He told me that when he was losing he would just sit there and the opponent would eventually forfeit the game and quarter, due to some trifle such as a film, dynamite lady, fire or working day. I hung in there like gang-busters to nip three pieces of silver in one session.

Oh, sweet victory! I took those quarters to the blood-curdling Swiss-American Hotel and taped them to the ceiling so that I could look at them as I awakened each day! It was that rewarding.

I was playing Slimey for the usual heavy stakes, when Janis Joplin began to "deliver the message" at 9 am. The phone above the jukebox actually was ringing. What on earth for? There was nobody in the place but Slimey, me and George the bartender. NOBODY called the Coffee Gallery at nine in the morning. Let it ring.

Janis popped into the bar and sat down on the bench next to yours truly, tapping my leg beneath the table in a highly suggestive manner, distracting me unfairly. I have never seen anyone wear less clothing in public. In addition, she was wearing for the first time some "come-hither-young-man" perfume and resting her arm atop my broad, powerful, masculine shoulder.

Janis, please, you're disturbing a very important game. My lunch money, my whole weekly allowance

is at stake. Please, please."

"Not bad for a neutral gear gal, huh?" said she.

The phone rang yet again. What to do, what to do.

"When are you gonna teach me to play this crazy game?" Janis whispered.

"Do you really want to learn?"

"It'd be a kick, a kick, moving all those men around."

I got up to get more coffee. George was asleep and Slimey was being boiled for lunch. Why is Janis here with me, the unplayboy? Must be because I am a hold-out for dope conversion. I'm a good guy.... Why me, why me? There goes the phone. I pick up the receiver and hear "Long distance calling for Miss Janis Joplin from Mr. Albert Grossman."

How on earth they knew the Coffee Gallery number or even dreamed they'd find Miss Janis there at that hour I'll never know. Maybe they just phoned every number they knew.

"Lady, you're getting up in the world. Mr. Grossman is calling." I yelled out to her while she was holding the knights in both hands and whispering. "You ain't gotta chance, Slimey. He's too good."

She shot out of the bench and raced to the phone. "He's my brand-new manager. Oh, he's so good! You wouldn't believe, Jude." And she snatched the receiver out of my hands.

I just went back to my quarter game, taking great care to eavesdrop on her every word, a conversation which did strike pangs of envy, to put the matter mildly.

The Grossman office was frantic. Janis Joplin was supposed to be in Miami tonight and, figuring the time zones, things were getting awfully scary.

Had she remembered tonight in Miami? No, she said. How much money was she getting?

"TWELVE THOUSAND -- JESUS CHRIST!" she screamed. "I never thought I would get that much. Man, you are the best manager, the best! I never got more than four ever, ever."

Then Janis was worried. "My clothes, I don't have nothing really good to wear. What am I gonna do? It will be too late to get some there." (It's Sunday, too, Jude is thinking.)

Janis Joplin is told that her measurements were taken the last time she visited New York. All sorts of goodies were already waiting in Miami for Miss Pearl to choose for the show.

Janis was still nervous. Her band? Where were they? They were already in Miami, of course.

Janis said she didn't have much change to get to the airport. "I forgot. I'm so stoned. I'm sorry," she moaned, putting her head over against the wall and hitting it with her hand.

Just about that time, Slimey Burns was realizing that another 25 cents was gone with the wind. So Jude looks to the side through the huge panel window at Grand Avenue. Behold, up the street was coming a black limousine, pulling up just outside the Gallery while Janis was still talking to Grossman in New York! Slimey's eyes bulged in disbelief. "They must have phoned it long distance. Jude, you'd better be nice to that woman from now on. Lookie there! Lookie there!"

I was doing all the looking I could as Janis flashed by us into the limousine and said, "Bye, Jude. Gotta go to the airport." (Grossman doesn't take chances. He takes out a \$200,000 insurance policy on you and sends a black limousine, just in case.)

Jude Acers looked out at the battleship fading out of view. "Slimey, now that's what I call managerial service!" We played on.

Not much that is pleasant to record happened that night. While I was hungry and listening to the radio in the Swiss-American Hotel, Janis was a sensation and was getting herself arrested for verbal discourtesy to officers of the Miami law. She was definitely in jail, the newscasts said, and nothing new was coming over the tube all night. Just great.

I went down to the Coffee Gallery at 9:30 am, as Slimey wanted revenge. It was an incredible repeat performance day, as the phone rang again. This time I fought for Slimey's cash with no conscience. George was asleep, as before. Same time, place, station, characters, 24 hours after. Eating came before Acers phone service. (Fischer always used to answer the Manhattan Chess Club telephone for years like a hotel operator! I mean it. You could just phone the place and Bobby the killer would put the blade to your eardrum.)

Slimey glared at the phone. Another quarter down the drain. "Our games should be played in a glass booth instead of a telephone company."

Suddenly, Janis Joplin darted through the Coffee Gallery doors with a huge smile on an exhausted face. How had she gotten out of jail so fast and gotten back here? Wow! I didn't dare ask for the details, because

lunch hour was approaching. Besides, I was speechless just to see her again.

The phone was ringing, ringing. Janis turned toward it, weighing the matter. "I'll get it. Watch my purse."

Jude held Janis's purse and played his knight deep into Slimey's beard and queen side, while the Coffee Gallery maid got the telephone.

Slimey took the knight in glee. "Shouldn't look at Janis, young man. It will hurt your game, young man. Hee! Hee! Hee!"

Whereupon Jude Acers ruthlessly checkmated Slimey with a very deep one-mover bomb. "There take that! Looking at her inspires me to new heights and encourages me to finish you off quickly, you knave. She helpeth my positional imagination, tactical planning, knave. Besides, I see everything. Don't you know the basic truth, that I am the best?"

Slimey could not believe his eyes and began half shoving chess pieces up for the next game, while Janis was saying, "You got the wrong number," and went down to the ladies' powder room.

I pushed Janis Joplin's purse out of my lap and felt paper. Slimey was playing pawn to e4, when, beneath the table, I looked quietly at \$12,000 in a strapped hemp purse with a "Made in India" label. My friend, it was the most enchanting sight I can recall in my lifetime. It was all green vegetables, so lovely, so choking, so demanding, so insanelly inviting. Greed ran rampant, the plague....Jude Acers could barely breathe, much less raise his arm and hand to make a move. Slimey Burns did not have the faintest idea what was happening, which was just fine with Jude. Happens every day: you play a chess game for 25 cents and you're left holding the bag with \$12,000.

Believe me, Jude took a long time to think about moving. At first, moving hastily seemed a tremendous idea. Janis took her own sweet time about returning from the powder room, which, of course, was completely blowing the mind of Jude Acers for the entire year to come.

Jude Acers did not know what to do. He just took the hemp purse and curled the top closed in his lap. Then he held it lovingly, carefully in his lap. And he stared at the purse in his lap. He was paralyzed with avarice, greed, crime, foreign travel thoughts.

Janis Joplin was beside him now, weary and unconcerned, on the bench. Slimey Burns did not know that the equivalent of 48,000 games of chess were sitting in Jude's lap. And Jude would have to win them all consecutively, or it would take another game or two besides. Jude could not move. His mind was gone down the road, long blown.....

Jude now had to make his move. Slowly, very slowly, and with great pain, Jude Acers edged Janis's purse across his centrally located pants zipper, right pants pocket, pants seam, right pants leg, and inch by inch along the bench, past a coffee cup, ash tray two-and-one-eighth point five one-hundredths inches to Janis Joplin's fingernail, attached to the index finger of Janis Joplin's left hand, which was conveniently shaped into what is commonly referred to as the eagle or bird sign. Through all this agony not one word was said by anyone.

It is now time to speak. Remember how to speak. Open your lips. Remember how to say words. Everything is all right.

Then Jude says to Janis Joplin, "How...how...did you know I wouldn't leave with your purse....It all.... How, Janis? You shouldn't do things like that, Janis. Never, Janis, never, never."

Janis sat still. Then she smiled slightly. "Baby, I have them chess books at my house. You're a chess crazy. You do anything to my purse, I would burn your chessbooks. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Slimey suddenly didn't feel like playing and left. I didn't dare tell him what had just come down as the three musketeers sat there. (Years later he refused to believe it as well.) Slimey left Jude, Janis and twelve grand to go sell blood for ten dollars.

It was flooding rain as Janis leaned her head against the Coffee Gallery window pane.

"They put me in jail."

"I know."

"They got me out fast."

Silence. Then.....

"How much money is in there, Janis?"

"All Twelve."

Oh.....oh. Jude Acers looked down at his right pants pocket, over which had passed \$12,000 three minutes ago. Then he saw the Mechanics' Chess Room scoresheet sticking out of the pocket.

I pulled it out gingerly, still foggy in the head. Janis looked at me. I looked at Janis.

"I want to read something to you that I copied from a letter by Jack London."

Janis didn't say anything, sat there expressionless, as I turned the chess sheet over and read the scribbly writing slowly, voice hoarse in a whisper.

"I would rather be a superb meteor with every atom of me in magnificent glow than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of a man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time."

I looked up and was astounded to see her in tears. "That's me...No, that's you....or...I don't know. I'm so

stupid, man!" She was badly shaken, seizing her purse with rigid, tense hands, and with a frantic movement headed toward the swinging doors of the Coffee Gallery. She dashed into the rain, crying, horribly drained, filled with smack of yesterday and stared for one moment at the chessplayer in the window, who stared out at her. He was mouthing a word through the window. She squinted at him, not understanding. He said the word again. She could not hear and ran.

Jude Acers watched her run with \$12,000. The stinky clothes, the tired, unshaven chess bum with no family, no one to love, and two of Slimey's quarters was dumped there on the bench in a helpless heap.

There was no future.

There was no one in the place except the sleeping bartender when Jude Acers said:

"Schlechter."