



questionstruck

William Walsh

a collection of
question-based
texts derived
from the books of
Calvin Trillin

CONTENTS

Questionings /	9
Questionstruck /	13
American Questions /	19
Enough Questions /	25
Questioning Local Specialties /	35
The Tepper Question: Isn't He Going Out? /	41
His Life as a Questionist /	51
Question: Is It Too Soon To Tell? /	59
American Fried Questions /	69
Further Questions of a Happy Eater /	73
Third Helping of Questions /	81
Question: Can't You Say Something Nice? /	87
Questions from My Father /	97
An Unbloomed Question /	101
Uncivil Questions /	105
Question Man /	117
Questioning Denny /	123
Questions with Alice /	127
A Question in Georgia /	131
Questioner /	135
U.S. Questions /	145
Questionably On He Sails /	151
Heckuva Question /	155
More Uncivil Questions /	157
Questions About Alice /	171

Questionings

from *Killings*, 1984

Why did you have to do that? Were they going to make a lot of money from the film? How many millions of viewers would see the pictures of poor Eastern Kentucky people? Had they refused to move? Had they taunted Ison by saying he was shooting blanks? Did the people who signed the release forms really know what they were signing? Does that make me crazy? Mahan, you remember Uncle Bob Woolford who used to work up at Evarts? Did you ever see Uncle Bob in the winter when he didn't have his socks pulled up over his pants legs to keep out the cold? Now, was Uncle Bob crazy? Or who has something on whom? Hey, you got any grass to sell? What are a few hundred dollars compared to the life of a man who risked everything in order to smash a flourishing drug ring in West Chester? Were you engaged in any *other* activities that made you valuable as a police officer? Why didn't Berry just lock the door if he had

been threatened? But then why would people spend a weekday afternoon at Lou's Place arguing about water dogs? What better time than midnight on New Year's Eve, and what better place than the small, tourist-packed resort area for Sergei Kourdakov to have an 'accident'? How many weapons do you own? How did the activity change places from over here to the sporting-goods store? Did they indicate what their grief was with the mayor? Does he not sell alcohol? Does he not abuse it by selling it to intoxicated persons who often end up in jail or in a morgue from overexposure? City Manager Paul McCollum, can you give us a report on the mayor's condition? Do you know at this time what the grievance is? Do you know why they released him? Was Larry Casuse Murdered? A disgruntled client? An ex-wife? One of the undesirables that people said St. Jean had as associates in his business ventures? A hit man from the mob? Just a thief that heard St. Jean often carried a lot of cash with him? How could you get involved with this creep? Hey, what's all the blood? You drove thirteen hundred miles to Boston in approximately twenty-four hours to meet your fiancée, and yet you picked up a hitchhiker with the intention of having a liaison with her at a motel? Would a man really commit premeditated murder for the rather indirect benefit of acquiring two hundred thousand dollars for a corporation he owned one-quarter of? Would a man murder to remove a ceiling of fifteen thousand dollars on his salary? How much more than fifteen thousand dollars could someone expect to be paid for managing a Cantonese-Polynesian restaurant in Marietta, Georgia? Was there something in the early rumors about gambling and the mob? Was someone else involved? Was Therrien rather than Wing Chin the partner John Oi suspected? What motive would be strong enough to explain murder? Mommy, can I go back out to your house? My Lord,

Ronnie, you crazy? Did he beat her up again? Was it the Ahumadas, one of whom had been so savagely beaten that his arm was partly paralyzed and his speech remained slurred? Or was it the Lozanos, two of whom served time in state prison because an Ahumada had broken the code that required Casa Blanca people to settle their arguments in Casa Blanca? Why doesn't she save her own sons? Why doesn't she save *their* souls? Do you know what you've done? Do you really know what you've done? If Stevens was not guilty of FaNee Cooper's death—found so by twelve of his peers—who was? Was there a way that Leo and JoAnn Cooper could have prevented FaNee from choosing the path she chose? Would she still be alive if Leo Cooper had not jumped into his car and driven to the end of the driveway to investigate? Did she in fact tell Charlie Stevens that her father would hurt them—or even that her father had a gun? Did she want to get away from her parents even at the risk of tearing around dark country roads in Charlie Steven's dismal Pinto? Or did she welcome the risk? Wouldn't you know it? Lynn Bergfalk had seen Theng Pao cry a couple of times, but why shouldn't a man in his situation cry? Why else would Lao visit Hmong? What would the Baptists have done differently if they had been experts in Hmong culture? Who would want to terrorize a simple purveyor of wheat germ and herbal tea? Had Walter Bopp been terrorized because of a dispute over a silver claim? Could he have discovered something in Arivaca that someone else wanted to know? Was it possible that he had found himself among the sort of cultists who beat up elderly vegetarians? What were Walter Bopp's tormentors after? Gold? Silver? Information? His store? What could have been secret or private enough to restrain Walter Bopp from helping police find the people who had left him bound and beaten on the floor of his storeroom? Who leans

on respectable businessmen? Did Walter Bopp have something the mob wanted? Were mobsters trying to persuade him to do something they wanted? But what? How can Bopp's silence be explained? Whose? What does that have to do with what happened to Walter Bopp? What had changed a family man and community leader of unassailable reputation? Was she beaten? If Hartman had planned the whole thing, the jurors may have surmised, wouldn't he have done a better job of tying up loose ends than that?

A Third Helping of Questions

from *Third Helpings*, 1983

When did it all begin to change? Why, I should have asked myself, do dinner-table conversations at our house so often turn to the perils of gluttony? Why had Alice continued to preach the benefits of limiting our family to three meals a day even after I presented incontrovertible scientific evidence that entire herds of cattle owe their health to steady grazing? Why, in planning a trip to Sicily, would Alice seem so insistent on staying in towns that have world-renowned ruins, whether those towns are known for their *pasta con sarde* or not? Why don't we just eat in the hotel? What better way to demonstrate one's seriousness than to start a campaign to change the national Thanksgiving dish from turkey to spaghetti carbonara? How about the hippies? Now can we see the hippies? Was Uncle Benny responsible for the First Word War just because he was already in St. Joe then? Is it really true that your grandparents got mixed up about American holidays when

they first got to Kansas City, and used to have a big turkey dinner on the Fourth of July and shoot fireworks off in Swope Park on Thanksgiving? Why in the world would anybody *do* such a thing? Medium? Where those dynamite chicken wings come from? You mean positive recognition? Has the snow melted yet? First with what? Was the Buffalo chicken wing invented when Teresa Bellissimo thought of splitting it in half and deep frying it and serving it with celery and blue-cheese dressing? Was it invented when John Young started using mambo sauce and thought of elevating wings into a specialty? How about the black people who have always eaten chicken wings? How is it that historians can fix the date of the Battle of Agincourt with such precision? How can they be so certain of its outcome? Two? Are you sure it doesn't say anything about Bloomingdales? What the bloody hell is that last character? Two? Will I really be able to read the wall signs in Chinatown? Why are so many fruit and vegetable stores that were once run by Italians and so many fruit-and-vegetable stores that previously didn't exist run by Koreans? Why have I never seen a black sanitation man? Why are conversations among vendors of hot dogs at the Central Park Zoo conducted in Greek? Had it been Dominic's? The Original Jack's? Rocky & Philly's? Tony's? Angelo's? Smokin' Joe's? Staten Island Frank's? Gizzo's? Lucy's? Did you think the food was any good at Dee Dee's? Who's watching Frank? But will they be able to do that sort of thing at a Didee's franchise in Alexandria or Shreveport? Are you afraid they'll take shortcuts with preparations and ingredients? Who the hell's got time to do that? But how about the duck? Doesn't that take a lot of care and experience—all that time in your grandfather's kitchen learning the secrets? How has somebody who couldn't seem to master a few wall signs in an American Chinatown going to figure out what the special of the day is in

Tokyo? What was to be found in Tokyo would presumably be even better, but how were we meant to find it? How am I going to get along in a place as foreign as Japan when even an Italian menu can cause me to bay in a public place? Where's your spirit of adventure? That's what I mean about mystery: why would anyone want to be anything but polite about noodles? Does that mean 'I ate too much' in Japanese? Did he think that I may have once suffered some slight at his hands which he had long ago forgotten and was now, as they say, inviting him to step outside? Had some recent article comparing Japanese and American crime statistics put him on his guard to the point where he suspected that going outside with me might give Alice a shot at the cash register? Could he possibly have mistaken me for some sort of exchange-program-public-health inspector who might object to noodles being made in the window? *Ou se trouve la plage*? You wanna buy a duck? What could the orange thing next to the fish possibly have been? You don't want any Swedish meatballs? Wouldn't a gentleman's club version of that event result in a lot of sand getting down into the leather armchairs? If talking Sarah into trying flounder required that much effort, what chance would I have with ocean pout? Aren't they any good? Are there any more clams over there, Estes? Wouldn't you say about a foot wide? Four bowls today, Bastow? Could there be a French-fries booth that includes both French fries from Arthur Bryant's Barbecue in Kansas City—cooked in pure lard, with some of the skin left on here and there—and the *pommes frites* served in a chic Santa Monica restaurant called Michael's? How about a booth that sells both the *haute cuisine* version of *calzone* turned out by Alice Waters at Chez Panisse in Berkeley and plain old lower-Manhattan-Italian-feast four-pound *calzone*? Would walking around a marketplace with food booths—a particularly

festive marketplace—be the equivalent of attending the sort of festival at which a stand-up sausage sandwich might be eaten? You do? Was it possible that the sun and wind of rural Kansas caused European characteristics to evaporate faster than they might in a crowded Northeastern city? Was it possible that I was witnessing the de-Balkanizing of Crawford County? Could it be that there were not such loyalties in southeast Kansas? If I was doing this all over? Guest-starred? But why? How did Italy manage to end up with no Caribbean islands at all? What if the Pope had allowed Henry VIII's divorce? What if Jefferson had decided that the price being asked for the Louisiana Purchase was ridiculous even considering inflation of North American real estate? What if the Italians, by trading some part of Ethiopia where it's not safe to eat the lettuce, had emerged from the colonial era with one small Caribbean island? You won't raid or why? Aren't they the only ones who are always going on about fair play? Why don't we go to Capri this spring? But Capri? Was I the sort of husband who would start humming 'Moon over Miami' simply because a no-frills fare to Florida might have gone back into effect? As Alice's birthday approached, was I going to search around for a revival of 'Wish You Were Here' just on the chance that she might be inspired by 'I'm Don Jose from Far Rockaway'? Did these folks eat pasta? You won't raid or why? What? How about Martinique? Who's writing the insurance? If He wanted to tell The Truth, why would He be so obvious to put it in the mouth of a Nobel Prize-winning Harvard biochemist and father of four? How ya doin', darlin'? You know what that means? Do you eat it yourself? Have you ever tasted it? What's it taste like? How could a television crew assigned to poke around in the eating habits of Natchitoches resist a cheery antithesis to the Pritikin thesis? Don't you mean China? Why him? We just

had Cantonese last night; why don't we go to a Peking place for lunch? Can't you see? What can the struggle of the two great forces for the domination of the world mean if the Reds are on Diners? What's Macau like? Even if it occurred to him to do it, what would he say? And what sort of spongy grey meat is good this time of year? Listen, Joe, as long as you're here, why don't you just sit yourself down on the floor over there and peel this pile of shrimp? What did that say about fish-brain soup? Did they get up there on one Himalaya or another, in that thin air, and decide that they could never return to a place where mountain climbing meant schlepping to foothills on the weekends? Did they just stay in Nepal, eking out a living as consultants to the jute marketing board? Would I lie to you about something as important to me as fried dumplings? Catfish? How did you happen to learn how to do all that? Ever hear of Hoover? Does it taste like chocolate?