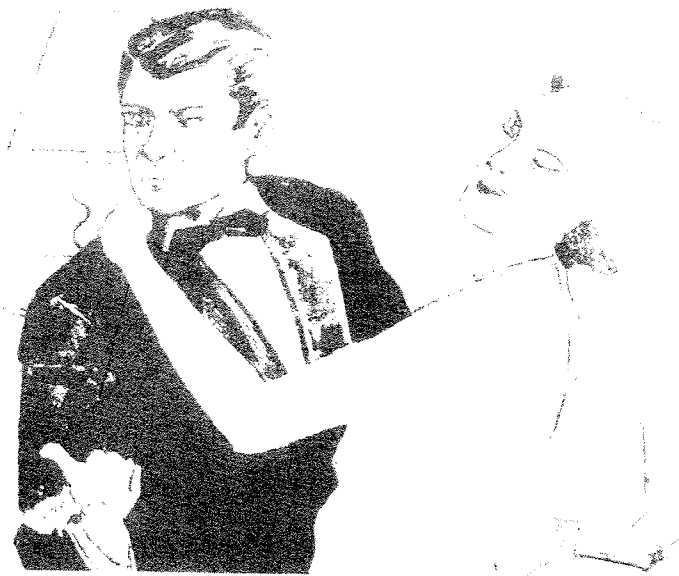


ANTLERS

IN THE

TREETOPS

RON PADGETT & TOM VEITCH



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Tom Veitch and Ron Padgett
Bristol, Pennsylvania
August 1970



uster was the last man in his regiment to die. The story goes that, on his knees, wounded in a dozen places, his yellow curls flying in the wind, he roared with laughter. A small Indian boy bent over the dying hero, eyes wide with wonder. We watched from a distance as the boy's steel knife flashed in the hot afternoon sun. Crimson, the flow from the scalp as it separates from the skull . . .

You must search for the loveliness of America; it is not obvious; it is scattered; but when you find it, it touches you and binds you and makes you take a great, silent oath . . .

We had taken just such an oath that afternoon 100 years ago. There were four of us. Allow us to introduce ourselves—

Louise Malaronde, ageing patroness of our little band: she put up the stakes and did the dishes. Half Mexican, half Irish. She was a magnificent woman who in her youth must have been very beautiful. She had a charming way of sitting on the edge of a table and suddenly lifting her skirt and producing from her stocking a pouch of Bull Durham and some papers and rolling herself a cigarette. She had come West on her honeymoon in a covered wagon and once, while her husband was away from camp, had stood off three desperados single-handed. Later on when she was settled in a country

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where there was only one other woman, the story goes, not liking the other woman, she had divided the country in half and given notice that, upon pain of death, the separating river was not to be crossed. The enemy's name was "Grandma Sam" and she too carried a gun and she did come straight across that river . . .

Rawson Clivedale, retired rancher and bank executive. (You already sense, perhaps, the *venerable* quality of our testy crew.) He was not much of a success as a rancher because he could not resist overfeeding his animals. They were gross creatures with bulging, pleading eyes. He had killed three or four of them in this manner. Early one summer morning Rawson was found unconscious in a stall—he had been stricken down in the act of giving a horse an extra quart of oats.

The Oriental. Let his name remain such. 179 years on this earth, mystic and Zen master, retired Samurai warrior. He was one of those rare souls who, the sleepier they are, the more graceful they are also. Unfortunately, he was a horrible murderer who had wantonly destroyed his father, mother, sister, brother, and grandma and now he lives alone in a hotel room in a not very attractive part of Philadelphia, Pa. He is probably unhappy; indeed, a sullen lethargy possesses his least movement, even the slightest suggestion of a frown, so that, all in all, he is more graceful, more like a ballerina, more like a charmed gazelle than ever. So he whiles away his hours working in a Coca Cola factory in Philadelphia, where he earns a very good salary, considering . . .

And last there is myself . . . You may call me Cassaba. I am the leader, and I answer to no man on this earth for what I do. And what I do is not pleasant, no not always pleasant, for I am a seeker of the Flesh Eaters.

* * *

It is a Spanish country, the coloring is Spanish, burnt umber and mauve when it isn't fierce orange, and violet hills that seem to put their heads together and weep softly at dusk. . . . Along with this a lilting melody like the lope of a horse toward mountains early in the morning—or late in the afternoon.

You left the shimmering miles of buffalo grass and, going up a narrow trail, rode into the cathedral-like solemnity of the evening trees until you came at last to a clearing where a little house stood and, as time went on, the dream amplified, a beautiful young woman stepped out onto the porch and laughed . . . a beautiful young woman named Ernest . . .

"Good evening," he said. "I see you have come at last, my friends."

"Yes, Savage, we have come." This was El Pinto speaking. A sudden wind makes the pines speak. El Pinto turns to look out across the mesa. I see the depth in his eye.

"Well, come in, my friends. There is food on the table. Not much, but enough. I'm sure the grandmother will help with the dishes?"

"I will help." She smiles gently at Ernest.

. . . We ate in silence. All secretly thought of the dreadful business at hand. I watched Ernest Savage carefully with my eyes, pretending interest in my cube-steak. Back of the table where he sat, a sweeping curtain of blue silk was drawn aside to show the lighter blue of a cloudless sky.

He is a strange one, I thought.

Suddenly the Oriental makes the pointed observation that it has always seemed so astonishing to see a Westerner take a lovely linen cloth, deposit excrement on it, and then carefully wrap it up like some precious object and store it away in his pocket.

Ernest blushed. Maria Malronde gives me the knowing glance. The Englishman draws a circle and then tells you to

strengthen your mind by pushing against that circle as hard as you can. What followed left me vaguely nauseous:

After he got up, Ernest slipped off his dainty night-dress, posturing elegantly before a long mirror, and made much of himself. Now he would bend forward, now lie upon the floor, now stand upright, and now rest upon one leg as if he might have been drawn by some early Italian master. Anon he would lie upon the floor with his back to the glass, and glance amorously over his shoulder.

The rest of us said a small dinner grace and left the table. Two or three went out on the porch: the sun was dripping blood in the West, sinking ball of flaming blood in the Western mountains. Unlike the others, I couldn't help watching fascinated the ritual ablutions of Ernest Savage after his narcissistic performance of a few moments before. As I discovered later, he was using an ancient Shoshonee cleansing ceremony—something the savages (sic) had performed daily during the sexual blood-baths of the 80's. . . . The normal sequence of steps is to: stand more or less erect and wet the hands; bend over and bring water to the face with cupped hands, stand erect and soap the hands, bend over and soap the face with water repeatedly brought to the face with cupped hands. The degree of bend which is assumed (and the height of the basin) is determined, on the other hand, by the maximum amount one can physically and comfortably bend, and on the other, by how little one can bend and still keep from dribbling water down the forearm and body while bringing water to the face.

"You amaze me, Ernest," I said, helping him into his simple plaid calico dress.

"You also amaze me, Svendi." His dark eyes searched mine for the clue to speak what was in his mind. I remained faceless.

Then, as if something electric had suddenly struck his brain, he drew me quickly aside, to a dingy corner of the

room. . . . Slipping his hand expressively into his bosom he drew forth a note, folded several times. Carefully he undid the folds, his fingers trembling ever so slightly.

"There," he said at last, pointing to a jagged foreign script. "What do you make of this? It came over the video this morning."

I read quickly, translating:

QUICKLY THE MAN-MADE ANIMALS RUSH TO
TURN THE FAT EIGHTS ON THEIR SIDES. REPLY
IMMEDIATELY.

I looked at Ernest. He was searching me again. This time I responded with a smile.

"This, my friend," I said, "is what I came for."

Suddenly he was grinning all over like a boy, guffawing and slapping me on the back. We went out to tell the others.

Much later we were riding down the mesa, reminiscing over pipes of fresh tobacco. The image of my Uncle Dudley suddenly flashed to mind, and of a time much earlier, when the plains Indians were ravaging every mail train and stagecoach that passed through buffalo territory. . . . It seems that one day in an overland train the porter, while cleaning out the smoking compartment, stooped over and dropped a derringer from his hind pocket. My uncle, darting upon it, had traded a ten dollar bill for the privilege of throwing the filthy thing out the window. Suddenly the painted face of terror appeared outside . . . a noble savage riding his war pony, brandishing a bloody spear. Without hesitating Uncle Dud flung the derringer with all his might. The gun struck the Indian full in the face and went off, wounding my uncle mortally in the left eye. . . . He died there, clutching the hand of the Russian lady who had been sitting next to him.



At least allow me the final satisfaction of placing my own head on the chopping block. Would you do this thing?"

Yes, we would do it. Besides, there was something horrible, if fascinating, about that head, so noble in its profile, so degenerate full face. I dare say none of us had the least desire to touch him.

We surrendered willingly to his desire and watched nervously as he took a final puff on his cigarette and flicked the burning stub into the crowd of wellwishers. There was a brief skirmish where the butt hit the ground; then the crowd subsided once again.

There was a pause during which teeth snapped like cellophane wrapped around an angry gorilla. He bowed once to us and walked toward his chromium-plated fate . . . even in death his eyes would be shining. He cleared his throat carefully of tubercular phlegm: the blade's course must not be impeded.

It is a thankless task, to be an executioner. Everytime, just before I pull the release cord I feel lost and my mind disintegrates—it shoots stringy shreds of breakfast out over the green tablecloth that I always place under the basket. Flesh grafts and virus patterns . . . am I infected? I glance up at El Pinto. He is calmly staring at the basket, almost with interest.

Suddenly, from somewhere behind the breathless crowd, a whoosh shoots upward toward the stars. From my

elevated perch I can see a young monk, his blackened arms gesturing through orange flames in an old photograph. I think it is odd that no one else has noticed him, and I angrily jerk the release cord.

The Fat Lady grasped the situation in an instant, and with what appeared but one movement, snatched a large fish from the ground and flung a newspaper round it.

Every meal she threw down quarts of milk and pounds of those slashed potatoes in mashed, fried, or scalloped form. I used to lie on my bunk, the mules kissing noisily outside, thinking about her expenditure of sweat and cursing and tears and money that went into keeping her mouth stuffed with food in the form of half-eaten steaks, untouched vegetables, nibbled-at rolls and dabbled desserts.

The hot stifling night vomited up a tight band of horsemen, their pistols blazing against the sky, their eyes rolled upwards, as if they were hunting a bird.

But they were hunting me. And I am Cassaba. I fear no one.

The Fat Lady did not know this; her fingers groped for the silver knife strapped tightly to her belly . . . one last thought pushed its way through her brain . . . "I must save him from this wickedness!"

Grunting audibly, she charged the horsemen, slashing left and right with more gusto, more agility than I had imagined her capable. I know that when I last had her sexually, she did not respond with such eagerness. And I had used a bottle on her. I want to tell you about that bottle. It was not the first time I had used something on a woman. Some of them liked it and said for me to come back and do it to them again. But I think this woman was dead . . . now this bottle it was a wine bottle . . . there might have been wine in the bottle . . . it was green.

I stuck the bottle in her vagina hole.

The suddenness of the shock caused the guns to go off. Captain Davis fell out of his hammock. The dread

expansion of several consecutive minutes was pursuant.

God uses such an indirect mode of expression that we can expect to detect Him practically everywhere. For instance, he is probably Captain Davis.

Making himself comfortable on the floor, Captain Davis resumed his monologue.

"You might say my one desire this morning is to vanish, but my eyes are heavy with an agreeable scent. Crimson, the flow from the scalp. You may all vanish but I am not alone. I have no existence in particular aside from my unappreciated presence in this room."

There was some embarrassed shuffling in the back of the room.

"One learns to stop speaking inside and to listen."

Jesus stepped forth and beat his tiny fists against his chest, which was the ritual way to express his desire to speak to us, in council.

"Pardon me señores that I espeak muy malo in Inglese pero I must to you say this words..."

He remembered something which made him feel inclined to go on: the stains, already dry, on the porcelain of the toilet . . . and suddenly his tongue was blessed.

"Ah! how sad and poignant the little city seemed to me that day! In the heat, wave after wave of which assaulted my body, a heavy silence hung over the city, the little city, and a vulture hovered over the silence. Some Hindu people came out of their temple, the one they had brought to this country at great expense. They had brought flowers, baskets and boxes of flowers packed into several thousand small carts, which lay scattered about the temple like iron fillings about a magnet. The gentle depth of their eyes, the mobility of their brows, the suffering fragility of their bodies, the slowness of their gait—all this moved me to the depths of my being, where I have remained ever since. There was no longer anything earthly in their pupils, which reflected nothing, but

rather gave out a dazzling light. This is why I cannot participate in your search for the Flesh Haters."

Breathing heavily through her mouth, the Fat Lady rose and made her way toward the pedestal. She brushed aside the tiny Jesus. Then, beating on her magnificent breasts, she also spoke.

"B-b-b-buddhists like hell!" she said bitterly. "You've got a nice bunch of ideas—you-y-y-y..." Here she stammered wildly for a moment. "I didn't mean, well, that they should hang anybody, really. I wouldn't want to do that. But a definite break was made in our lives when we began to pray on our knees instead of lying on our backs on the cold floor."

"Turn it off," I said, snapping my fingers. "You're wasting our time. Tomorrow morning, we ride. And that's that."

I slammed the book closed. As I did so, my fingers brushed satin at her hip, slick and stiff and cold to the touch, like a kitchen floor in December. I suppose every man has had the desire to lie down on just such a floor, with just such a woman, and I was no exception. Tonight I gave impulse free rein, and the stuff came unstitched, protesting shrilly. There seemed to be yards of it, and, startlingly, portions of her flesh came with it. I heard her gasp as she felt her body disintegrate about her, and as I stripped her completely she grasped my head and thrust it abruptly into her groin. . . .

I must admit I was unscrupulous—I adopted the most varied disguises (sailor, financier, psychiatrist, berry-picker, etc.), through which I expended my hypnotic intelligence to control her vast and elaborate emotional organization. She began to sob quietly. I booted her skeleton out the door into the softly falling snow.



ere is Cassaba, a man inside all men. I spoke with him last night after the meeting:

"Your father's name was Tony, wasn't it?"

"His name was Antonio! And my mother's name was Arlinda! They were both from Texas! They worked in the fields! They cleaned pastures—they picked cotton and cleared fields! Three times I remember that when my father's crop was ripe, the rancher or farmer he worked for made him get out without a cent. One time he went to the judge in Hang-noose, Texas, and complained. The judge told him, "Tony don't make trouble, no law can control that man. You be quiet or you won't even get your chickens back."

I saw the sadness in his eyes, I looked away, spitting twice in the dust. "And your mother," I said, "she was a whore?"

The dead man drifted in the breeze. He drifted upright on his legs like a goat, as he had in life—nothing improper, farther beyond the reach of ideology, nationality, hardship, inspiration, than he had ever been in life. A few fat flies stayed with him, eating and breeding, although he was far from land, travelling light above the surface of the complacent South Atlantic. The tasselled fringe of his white silk trousers—he had been a rich man—were heavy with ocean spray.

He was coming out of Africa, moving steadily toward me.

"Yes, Ernest. My dear good Ernest."

A look of pity flickered in his eyes then faded.

"She was a big woman—strong, big body, big bones. I used to see her carry sacks full of cotton on her back. She had ten children and she never used a—what do you call it?—a mid-wife. Only three of the children died! I was born in the cotton field on sacks full of the cotton. . . .

"Whenever I cried, my mother, to quiet me, would take me in her arms and say 'Come now, tell your mother what you saw in heaven.' Isn't that strange? '*... Tell your mother what you saw in heaven.*' "

And the little Mexican Jesus Lafuega sits in his hotel room, breathing. The others have deserted him, gone off to do some carousing. He alone must guard the treasure, and he alone must tremble at the approaching footsteps. . . . A shadow is seen to slip quickly under the door. . . .

"Por Dios, I am afraid!"

At that instant there came a crash more terrific than any that had preceded it, and the whole world glared with intense light. Everyone was momentarily stunned, and when they recovered their senses, Ernest, looking toward the farmhouse, saw a sheet of flame coming from the farmer's head.

"Fire! Fire!" she cried. "Your head is on fire! It's been struck by lightning!"

"I'll be dadburned, so it has!" yelled the farmer. "It's ablazin' in glory like a church afire!"

He was rapidly shouting this as he ran from the barn.

The farmer's daughter came galloping pell mell from the barn clutching a full pail of milk. Frantically she hurled the foaming liquid in the direction of her father, missing his glowing face by only a yard.

A step behind her. . . . Slipping his hand around her plump arm, the orange Oriental draws her aside down a path toward a small lake that edges one side of the Kimball property.

"This man must be permitted to die," whispered Cassaba. "He is one of the largest of the landowners."

"I understand," I said. . . . How well do I understand, Cassaba . . . How well do I understand! You weep for *tu madre* with one eye, while the other eye directs traffic in a nightmare world of murderous intentions and perverse sexual designs!

I see a tall San Antonio man in a garb of the most somber black stroll by, looking for his horse. He gives Cassaba a knowing glance.

Jesus had read somewhere that to openly combat an insane person is dangerous. It is advisable to humor his delusions. Fortunately Jesus had also recently read an interesting story in which a man had avoided death at the hands of a maniac by this very means. It was a desperate chance, but the mouth of the little Mexican began to pulsate spasmodically:

"You are mistaken," he began, shaking his finger at the maniac. "The boy you are to sacrifice is under the bed."

The maniac, turning his knife slowly, paused.

"Look under the bed, you'll see," said the Mexican once again.

The bed was at the far end of the room and the room was very long. The maniac walked the length of the room and, getting down on hands and knees, peered into the darkness under the bed.

Jesus hit the floor. In a flash he was out in the hall. He opened the first door he came to—happily it was unlocked. Dashing into the room he snapped the door locked behind him, then spun about, hand on heart, and gave a long Whew! He opened his beautiful dark eyes and looked into the grinning face of the maniac. The maniac began his little dance once again, clucking and mooing.

"My little . . . friend . . . didn't I tell . . . you my purpose . . . ? Didn't I . . . convey to you . . . the reality I am . . . ?" The knife flashed dully in the moonlight streaming

through the open window. Far away the quiet crackling of a farmhouse and the faint noises of frightened animals . . .

"Me Dios! I have sinned much! Forgive me at this last hour of my life!"

"'Me Dios'..you..say? You whimpering little..fool, what do..you..know about..Los Dios? Am I not..the Inca..priest, and are you..not the..offering..chosen by..the god Chuapoctual . . . ?"

"I know. You told me."

"Then..why am I..waiting for . . . ? *Let the deed be..done!*"

Two screams rise curdling the night. Ernest and Cassaba, walking in the shadows of the forest, away from the burning wreckage that was once a farm, lift their heads momentarily to listen.

"Was that one of the animals?"

"The black man's horse, I think."

"No, it was from the direction of the town. I hope young Jesus is all right. . . . He is guarding the treasure. If our mission is to succeed, we must have the treasure."

"Listen, Cassaba," I say, taking hold of his arm. "There is something inside me I must speak to you . . . something about your mission which puzzles me terribly."

His forefinger beat like a miniature tap-hammer on the table which separated us. "Go ahead," he says, looking into the shadows around my eyes. "What is your question?"

"Just this. . . . How can you preach Jesus Christ and the Bible to your followers one day, and indulge yourself in a riot of executions, killings and sexual degradation the next?"

He looked somewhat pained. I gritted my teeth and waited for the answer. It was not long in coming. . . .

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, is what I believe. It wasn't by chance that the Spanish people crossed the Atlantic; it was God that selected them. We hold the first written documents about title and property.

We were born as a new breed—not Mexicans, not Indians. The law in Title 2, Book 6 of Laws of the Indians was written on October 19, 1914. Marriage between Indians and Spaniards was legalized and a new breed was born. The Indians had the blood of ten lost tribes of Israel. The Spanish had Jewish and Arab blood. A new breed was born here from two great bloods. A *santa raza*, who would find justice, was created!”

“Do you feel then that you have been chosen by God?”

“Yes. Our people had not a guide, no light, no knowledge. God has chosen me.”

Below us a red streak crossed the seemingly immense field of green and came to rest, a ball. A billow of silks, Mrs Sam, approached the ball and again it went—thwock!—across the lawn, coming to rest near a white wicket. Apparently she had gone through a wicket on her first turn; either that or she is playing alone, simply practicing. Otherwise, the other players would not have allowed her to continue shooting, out of turn, skipping them entirely. Unless of course Mrs Sam has, since this morning, been taken ill again and the other players are simply too embarrassed or distraught to call it to her attention, or anyone else’s.

A blue ball arrives near hers.

“Listen, Ernie,” he said, taking me by the sleeve. “There is also something I’ve wanted to tell you for a long time.”

“What is it?” I said. I knew what was coming.

“Just this—I think you’re the most beautiful girl I have ever met.”

Suddenly we were holding hands. . . . Far away one could hear the fire engines, coming from town to put out the farmer’s head. . . .



Things were getting hot, but I decided to wait. Still, leaning in what was gradually becoming a blue-gray shadow, I was becoming impatient. Impatience itself, like a large fly, began buzzing around my hands, causing them to gesture.

I wondered what it was that made my mother so generous with her liquor all of a sudden. We talked of rain. We talked of Harlem. We talked of Harlem. We talked of rain. Soon the bottle was gone, and we opened a new one. We were about halfway through, and she began crying and shivering. Perhaps she was a narcotics addict. I asked her if I could do anything. She started taking off her uniform. Her name was Rita. She was wearing nothing else.

"Please . . . pretty please . . . hit me . . . hit me . . ." I don't know what came over me. I started hitting her and squeezing her body. She was making a noise.

I confess, you see, to being a humanist. I have shot a man while he was at his latrine. I shot a boy in Germany off a bicycle because I felt I could reach him at 200 yards. And I shot a young soldier in a beet patch camouflaged with beet leaves as he rose from a row of beets—I now realize—to surrender.

Surrender was what I would not do, ever.

Doctor Rodin began to shoot his spittle out of his mouth in a fine spray. His face was turning red. I knew he was at long last coming to the point of his uninteresting harangue.

"Never," he spewed, "will anatomy be at its last degree of perfection until an examination is made of the arteries of a live young girl. Only in this way can we get a complete analysis."

I was casually leafing through Vesalius' great treatise on anatomy. I smashed the remains of my cigarillo in the ashtray and took a sip of Spanish brandy (Fundador, of course, the best brandy in all of Spain), heavier and sweeter than French cognac. I pursed my lips and shot a stream of the stuff across the room, into the face of Doctor Rodin.

"Look, Doc . . ." But I could say no more. My new moustache bristled in the dry air. The day had been hot, but the famous breeze had come up and blown it away, to make some other place hot. I lit another cigarillo and watched the smoke curl up into the room like slow, flying flowers . . . unable to bring myself to take a really good look at the doctor.

But I didn't need to see the face; the shape of the head was enough, a cigarette, burning wildly, dangled from the puffy lips. His tiny hands were stuffed into his pockets, each of them caressing a gun. He's waiting for you, I thought; he's going to kill you, or have a fit and scare you to death. Or will he have the nerve? What did you ever do to deserve this appalling predicament?

I did not know the answers to these terrifying questions.

"This is cool by the hot room compared," he said, indicating the door through which I was to propel myself. As he spoke, the door opened. A tiny gnome-like man of about 78 emerged. Red as the cherry in a Manhattan, he clutched a towel about his bony frame. The blast of hot air curled my toes.

But it was a dream. She was in the sanitarium, Doctor Rodin's sanitarium, and there was nothing to be afraid of. She could see the branches of the trees that grew next to her

bed. They were pregnant with buds, gooey buds, and the oyster luminescence of the buds half shielded, half revealed the landscape as though it were under a shell.

"Nothing defines our relationship!" the doctor was shouting gleefully. "Nothing anymore makes walls around us or upon us! No one laughs!"

Over the place where the wound had been, the flesh had grown together in the form of a red rose. As she looked she felt the hurt inside her slowly healing, the phone was ringing, the hurt of a lifetime. Brother Leo was laughing in recognition. Suddenly the compulsion of her body now was to love him, everything inside her flowed together suddenly, a huge growing and expanding plant, a grapefruit plant, was inside her reaching out to meet every person in the room.

Rosa grabbed my ears and turned her head toward me. Then she slowly raised her skirt over her naked hips. A large furry monster pulsed with a strange life of its own. I did not know what it was. She was perspiring but not with the heat of a kitchen. There was a hard, desperate, twangy quality to her voice as she said, "Cambiele el Aciete?"

I swiveled my head slowly to follow her with my eyes. Her body touched me. An electric spark shot through me, a small one of low voltage. What was she doing to me? The power of the spark increased. Her odor clung to me like fog. Whonng! Whonng! I was a ship lost at sea. Rosa stood still now except for an almost unnoticeable twitch that shot along her arm when she touched me. It was getting to her too, and I do not mean the narcotics. She opened her mouth, revealing large, stately, white, perfect teeth, between which the tip of her tongue made a demure appearance, then lolled out. I flipped the cigarillo into her mouth.

"Ole!"

The crowd jumped to its feet and flowed toward me, singing:

They are unholy who are born
 To love wild plum at night,
 Who once have passed it on a road
 Glimmering and white.

It was as though the darkness had
 Speech of silver words,
 Or as though a cloud of stars
 Perched like ghostly birds.

They are unpitied from their birth
 And homeless in men's sight,
 Who love, better than the earth,
 Wild plum at night.*

"This flower which I hold in my hand," she said, "was sent me from South Carolina. It is suffering from a peculiar disease which is threatening all the flowers of this variety in the world. They want to know if I can do something to heal it." She looked at it as tenderly and lovingly as a doctor would look at a sick child.

But should a breeze happen to quicken these solitudes, to rock these floating bodies, to confuse these masses of white, blue, green and pink, to mix all these colors, to combine all these murmurings, then there arises from the depths such sounds and there passes before the eyes such sights that I would in vain try to describe them to those who have never travelled these primeval fields.

In shortness, a longitude. A plenitude of thought noodling the small hibiscus plant at her left elbow. She looked long and deeply into my eyes. I felt myself a sort of Japanese flower arrangement, subjected as it were to the studious and critical gaze of a horticulturist.

"I see," she spoke, "in you the civilized man who has

* WILD PLUM by Orrick Johns

become a savage; you see in me the savage who has become the civilized man (or woman, if you prefer). Having both entered life's course by opposite ends, you have come to rest in my place and I have come to rest in yours. But you are not me. We are totally different."

"Obvious."

"No, I'm serious, James. We must study this thing out. Why, for instance your strange attraction to me, a woman who has devoted her career to the care and study of flowers . . . while you—may your soul rest in peace—earn your pittance as a six o'clock glove. Can you explain that?" Her voice was tremulous.

Finally the head began to move. I wasn't sorry, thinking perhaps I'd have to do something radical before long. Now I could leave her for a moment and put on the other glove. It was almost light now. What time is it? I asked the other. Six o'clock.

Come in, said a loud childish voice.

I opened the door and saw a lank-haired girl of about fifteen standing chewing gum and eyeing me curiously from beside the kitchen table. The hair was coal black and one of her eyelids drooped a little as she spoke. Well, what do you want? she said. Boy, she was tough and no kidding but I fell for her immediately. There she was—hard and straight, a member of a secret organization no doubt, and about her the perfume of excellence.

My mind seemed at that moment to pierce hers, to comprehend in one instant the essence of her personality—an intense image burned my retina from behind: two newly married girls, yearning for the sweetness of motherhood, with lips parted, striving to suck the soul of the child whom they imagined they saw wandering in fields of flowers . . .

The glove ceased its surrender to my hand. Casually as I could I picked up my bouquet and started to leave. Both

women made as if to stop me, then hesitated, slightly shame-faced in an undercurrent of jealousy. . . .

"What is this, mesdames?" I puzzled aloud.

The lips of one quivered. The other paled. Rhoda Von Rentfelt was seen to clutch nervously at a tall stemmed geranium, crushing it, this lovely flower, with unconscious abandon between her normally stable and disciplined fingers.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I really must go. The vast Walnut Forest of Illinois awaits my ministrations."

In her crisis of frustration Rhoda let loose a throbbing scream of anguish, a lash of sound that beats on the ear like a wall of surf, jolting the others, as if they had just discovered boiling sea water around their ankles, and then that wash of noise swept past the cubicles and poured down the wide carpeted stairs to inundate the leather armchairs below, and the smoking stands, and the backgammon tables, and the tall clocks with the great pendulums that move slowly as the tilting of an ocean liner, and in the distant library the old men stir from their sleep and blink under the pale thin sheets of possibly the *London Times* drawn up over their heads, a huge gaping hole burnt in the fold by their long extinguished cigars, and on a clear day, with full throat, that wave of sound reaches three floors down to the ground level below and the tatters of it curl out into the street like wisps of scud, rolling off the pavement into the cellar-most apartments, where the custodian, sweating over an old screw, suddenly jumps up, pale and shouting—"Whazzat?!"

"It's only awld Agnes, dear, the Flower Lady."

"Ouff. I thought it be the Krauts again, wif their bloody screamin' bombs. . . ."

Then English fishlady that she was, she left him with a kiss and ascended little steps to the street, where, at regular intervals, huge scoops of dirt had been left near pieces of gutted machinery. The old fellow groaned in the spirit and staggered into the house, forgetting to close the oak door

behind him. Slowly, painfully he climbed the hall stairs . . . Nora would be in bed . . . She will call the doctor . . .

He reached down onto the landing to brace his weight, then he rolled over onto the window bench. His heart took a sudden leap and stopped beating. He glanced briefly at the ceiling. Was he thinking of Nora or of the great hereafter? Smiling he died in his hat and coat.

They found him like that, one of the finest, sweetest, kindest men I had ever known, and one I had loved deeply, if distantly. He was my grandfather.

And that is the story, thought the abbé as he sipped his morning hot tea from a pewter cup embellished with vines, delicate little flowers and the figure of a man with a tiny chip on his shoulder . . . rumpling the newspaper . . . cough . . . yes yes and I'm next.

Faintly smacking his withered lips, he too dies, right then and there, page 33, the sails fall together, no remorse, enter my kingdom you who are history struck upon rock.

Downstairs, the chauffeur took out a wallet from his inside pocket and held it in front of him. Obitol checked the photo with the face and nodded.

He nodded to a projectionist hidden in the darkness. There was a whir of machinery and the six-by-four screen was suddenly filled with a white light, and then reversed numbers, and then the film shaking as if taken by a hand-held camera, a zoom shot of the London Transport bus terminal at Victoria. The screen was blotted out momentarily by a bus (Ladbroke Grove) passing across it, like a small red building on wheels, and then the camera, shooting wild and low, was focusing across the rows of people queueing at respective stops, into the taxi rank, and attempting to pick out a man emerging from the depths of the railway station itself. Obitol's heart raced toward the screen. The lighting had been bad and the figure was blurred and hazy, then suddenly it sort of exploded in light and the camera cut in closer and

onto the face and the picture froze. The man's head turned, one hand a streak of gray as if he had been hailing the Queen. Obitrol stared at the enlarged black and white face before him on the screen. The stars wheeled wildly in their grooves and his heart sank; he wanted to rip the film from the wall and attack the men in the room and rush out.

Outside inky blackness pressed against the glass door, but beyond he could faintly hear the last toot of the calliope from the circus blocks away.

The ceiling dropped possibly six inches but still retained its original beauty, though in a modified form, despite the fact that the temperature of the room had just reached boiling point. Restraining himself from mopping his brow, and seeking anxiously for a simple way of asking the frighteningly obvious question, Obitrol delayed the moment by asking Flowers to pass the lighter.

It seemed like new. He walked around it five times, prodding it, stroking it, standing back and looking at it from different angles, then actually sitting inside it and holding the wheel. It felt wrong but it was definitely the same. The initials were there. As he sat numbed into a state of lethargy despite the awesome implications of the day, Obitrol knocked on the window.

"Would you let me out?"

There was a slight murmur of polite amazement. Flowers smiled and coughed, forcefully tapping the pipe on the polished veneer of the table.

Across the lot someone had set up a trampoline. In evenly paced leaps, a white-haired figure vaulted and spun against the blue sky: back triple somersault, front triple, half gainer, recovery, full gainer, recovery, jack-knife opening backwards to reverse swan, triple back, then triple front again.

"She's good!" the chauffeur said.

Cassaba nodded.

The buildings stared wide-windowed at each other; many of the windows composed of stained glass layers, were rotated across one another by hidden machinery. Balconies lipped the upper stories, with people sitting on them eating sandwiches. Below, leisurely people dressed in dark colors wandered along the streets, apparently oblivious to the motions of the acrobat.

Nightfall assembles them, as it does the stars. With nothing in common, they muster to sleep together, cursing, insulting and jostling each other, picking quarrels with old enemies, or throwing earth and rubbish, even rolling on the ground and spitting and biting their tongues with rage.

A goat turned the corner and went loping down the street, pursued by a large family of Puerto Ricans.

The music grew louder. I turned to Louise.

"Is there a fire?" a man's voice called from the orchestra. "Tell us what's happening!"

"It's completely under control. The stove in the restaurant next door—"

He never finished.

There was a hysterical scream from nowhere and he turned to see smoke billow out from under the curtain.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he shouted above the hubub, "please try to leave calmly and quietly. There is no danger if you remain calm."

But no one was listening. The audience, like one massive organism, had risen in unison, like a herd of cattle rising to the sound of small arms fire in the moonlight. The aisles were clogged with screaming, gyrating, jerking hunks of meat.

I thought I was witnessing the end of the world.

Suddenly the film resumed and the Queen, majestic, solemn, stupid, floated quickly over the screen. Then I recognized the voice of Lolita Caballero. She actually didn't have much of a voice, guttural and quivery, but when she bore down on those hot flamenco numbers, something wonderful

happened to me. I was a gypsy at heart. Ah, for a little stamping around the campfire somewhere in Spain, then for a fiery fuck in a little gypsy home-on-wheels. Lolita and Lover Boy—all the way!! I could see it now, feel our hard, thin bodies, pressed together, like fingers, perspiring; our faces greasy and dirty because we hadn't washed after dinner. We had stuffed ourselves, clawing at the plates, tearing the roasted meat apart in a savage fury, wiping greasy fingers in our thick mops of Spanish hair, and then mopping the floor with them.

But I had other things to worry about. A diaper tore loose from the basket and sailed past me. I caught it on the dead run, despite the strong wind. The basket was teetering wildly as it neared the corner, and here comes that damn goat again!

A voice, somewhere behind the screen, began reading from a prepared text.

"During these ecstatic catastrophies not only were the present and future events revealed to him by God, but even the hidden thoughts of his companions."

Thus he knew when the Oriental had finally made the decision to betray him. Quietly he took the yellow man aside one evening when the stars were out. Putting his arm around "Old Yeller", as we sometimes called him, Cassaba spoke softly so that no one, even the Oriental, would hear.

"Olim fungus ego," he said repeatedly.

They sat at a small table in the garden. The Oriental put the letter into the envelope and finished off the wine. Then both of them smoked for some minutes, without speaking, drawing long and quietly on their Cuban cigars. The street was quiet now. A car passed. It wouldn't rain again tonight. Finally Obitrol came over and made a remark about what time it was getting to be. The Oriental's face was quite suddenly suffused with a color something like the wine he had drunk.

"Let me pay the check," I said, leaning forward and reaching for my wallet.

"It is said that death may be compared to a bowel movement. Why? Because death has no friends. And death is not an enormous sexual orgasm, contrary to popular opinion. Rather death is an enormous sexual organism. Leave it at that."

Watching him, you could see that it was almost an unbearable pleasure for him to be where he was. And the bird, the bird who was dictating these words. . . . Well, the Oriental had a habit that one remarked on if one saw him enough—a slight twist of the head . . . as if he were trying to rid himself of a crick in the neck. What he was doing was turning his head so the eagle could speak more directly into his ear!

"Come my dear, we must catch up with the others! They are far ahead of us by now, treading the Elysian Fields by now!"

So hand in hand the Oriental and Obitrol trot up the rocky path that leads to the summit of this high peak in the endless chain of mountains. Happy old kids they are, and certainly alive to nature and its glories! However, progress—for this very reason—was slow. They did not get much farther than a hundred yards. At every little flower they met, Obitrol would kneel down to pray. Then he would examine the blossom, caress it, study it, talk with it, kiss it. Several times in his ecstasy it seemed he would take flight to the heavens!

At last they reached the camping-out place. The important ones were all there: Cassaba, his bride-to-be Ernest Savage, Jesus LaFuega Fiercho, the Fat Lady, Orrick Johns, Doctor Rodin, Rhoda Van Rentfelt, Rita Baby, the Madman, and of course last but not least Rawson Clivedale and Maria Malronde. El Pinto had stayed behind to guard the trail at the base of the climb. This was important, for Cassaba feared that the Sparkplug Brothers would follow us and attempt to

prevent our successful reconnaissance of an important Flash-Eater territory.

As usual, it fell to Maria Malronde to prepare the children for bed. You raise an unbelieving eyebrow? Why? Yes, we had children in our little colony of travellers, we had many of them, even though we were the avowed enemy of the Flash Eater, perhaps even because of this. It is not necessary to rationalize such behavior.

To facilitate her task, Maria—or as we called her, ‘the Blessed Virgin’—had invented an object which resembled a cross between a ball and a picture book. In fact, it had originally been manufactured for use as a croquet ball, and had been used exactly for this purpose by certain well-to-do townspeople of the plains regions. Now, covered with colorful pictures of an arresting variety of objects, peoples, places, etc., it served as Maria’s inspiration. Using the ball-book the way a gypsy hag might consult a crystal ball, she would fabricate the most inventive and fascinating stories. As she spoke the children jumped up and down on their beds, flailed around on the floor, tears and laughter streaming from their heads, until finally, exhausted with the exertions of emotional release, they were picked up one by one and draped along their bunks. I must confess we adults loved it too. We would even go so far as to sneak up outside the windows, with the summer night whirring and gleaming around us, the sun safe in its nest in the sea, and watch old Maria lift the ball aloft, gazing at it as if it had suddenly appeared in her hand from nowhere. From time to time a pen of light, cleverly concealed in her sleeve, would send up a thin, solid column of information onto the surface of the ball, illuminating this picture or that, providing more grist for Maria’s inexhaustable imagination. I should add that the ball-books were made by the children at the rate of one per day, to serve as the night’s story power, so to speak. Maria never saw the balls until, lights out, everyone was ready for the story to begin, as it

always did, in a low distant hum, which was Maria's voice warming to the evening's episodes. The children were, I might add, zealous in the extreme in their preparation of the story balls, and would shun no effort to obtain this picture or that. At the end of the week the seven balls would be dismantled—heroic episodes torn from their surfaces—and cleaned in readiness for the coming week's cycle.

In one story, light edges over the darkened cliffs. Through the sage a woman walks silently, a stick in her hand to ward off snakes. She scans the mists in the far-off mountains. She picks up a stone and smooths it, toes a patch of lichen. Two smoke-toned chows watch and sniff, then jounce knowingly after their mistress. Another day has begun for Georgia O'Keeffe.

Another day has begun for me, too. That is, I have been awake for twenty-four straight hours. Putting down my writing equipment, I rise from my chair and cross the room to the window. In the south, gray storm clouds are gathered, a brisk wind is rustling the trees—an omen—in the front yard. Quaint, I thought, how quaint.

Out in the yard in the cage, facing me, was a small Siamese rhesus with the face of a great man—Albert Einstein. With mad aloofness he stared into far distances. Frightfully human, frightfully sick. In horror I watched these two men, each looking at the other and speaking the same language, each breathing and standing on his legs, until one man extinguishes the other with only the slight pressure of one finger of his outstretched hand.

You thought he was just another stumble-bum. He was a 22-year-old Inca Indian from Bolivia, born without legs, born without a head . . . I must speak to Fabian about this . . .

Drat! To wake in the night at the stirring of some invisible angel at your side picking your pockets. . . . Or the noise of that confounded butler nosing about in the pantry for a midnight snack. . . .

With the water in his ears, he could hear slight sounds more distinctly: his back scratching against the pebbles in the bed of the stream, and, more distantly, another sound, a low rumbling that grew, too quickly, to a pounding. He knew the sound and he knew he shouldn't be hearing it now, here.

He lifted his head out of the water in time to see the sheep running full-tilt toward him—and in time for her to see him. She jumped, and her hind hooves came down within inches of his thigh.

More followed. He counted them as they splashed across the stream: two . . . nine . . . four . . .

Suddenly he realized that although his tone of voice was that of someone counting, the words he spoke did not correspond to the actual number of sheep jumping over him into the cotton horizon. At last his tone of voice told him there could be no more. He ventured a look.

From a wall of people jammed shoulder to shoulder, the parade of competitors hove into sight. First from Greece, where the Olympics began, came a man carrying a white and blue flag. Then came West Germans in blue parkas and black ski pants and then the East Germans in dun-colored caps and coats, with the girls in blazing orange, waving wildly. He waved back.

In they came, country after country—the Argentinians with woolen ponchos, the Austrians in forest green, the Bulgarians in white fur hats, the Canadians with their rainbow-colored coats and their rain-colored hats. Then Chile, South Korea, Denmark, Spain, and the Americans with blue hat bands, red tunics with white piping, blue pants and high black boots.

Then the Finns in huge white coats emblazoned with a blue streak, the Japanese in scarlet, Hungary, Iceland, Lebanon, Morocco, Mongolia, Norway, New Zealand and the Netherlands, with blue parkas and burnt orange toques. Now the Poles in a rush of color, the men with sheepskins over red

jackets, the girls in white with scarlet scarves, Rumania with cream-colored coats, a coat incongruous on its tiny 11-year-old figure skater, the Swedes in blue jackets, the Swiss all in white, a single Czechoslovak, and Turkey with red parkas and white tasselled caps.

Then the Soviet Union in a long line, girls in white with red boots, men in blue with red boots and blue and white stocking caps, Yugoslavia in brown sheepskins, and finally, as the stadium erupted in skull-cracking noise above the shrieking blare of the loudspeakers, the French in red, white and blue above brown boots.

In Houston, Texas, three chimps, neatly dressed, went to work in a furniture factory, and in California an ape was arrested for speeding after he steered his master's car through the rush hour traffic at seventy miles per hour.

And they wondered why you were writing novels and why you sucked dicks. They wondered why you had a dog named "Lassie" and a toy pig you called "Mr. Jinx." They laughed when you yoyoed Mr. Jinx on his string. Mr. Jinx in fact did look very funny running up and down, like a monkey. At the top of each ascent his little blue crystal eyes would wink and from inside him a small plaintive scratching noise that was once a hearty "oink" would emerge . . .

This was later, after we were relaxing in Hanover's principal beer-garden, when there entered a plump middle-aged man in the tight brown uniform of a Sturmbannhuehrer or Gauleiter with wet red lips and a great deal of face powder. The combination of homosexuality and arbitrary power has for me always been productive of an irrational disquiet—Tiberius, James I, Frederick the Great are none of them figures with whom I would care to have been closely associated—and the spectacle of this arrogant queer, disdainfully acknowledging the sycophantic greetings of the other customers while playfully flicking the ears of the better-

looking of his attendant storm-troopers with his shiny leather gloves, seemed quite suddenly and indescribably angelic.

Now at 80 he still climbs to the top of the highest mountain near his ranch, goes on camping trips, raises everything from rutabagas to endive in his garden, grinds his own flour, makes his own yogurt, and occasionally plays for the local double-A baseball team.

I envied him his poise as he went far to his right, into the hole, to scoop up a hard-hit grounder and, in one easy motion, fire across to the stretching first baseman. The home office had wired me to the effect that in spite of his age, he was by any standards a remarkably competent ball-player, and that I should drive down and sign him up. On the way down my car began to make a funny noise under the hood. I stopped to listen. I was cold, my ears hurt. They must have been red because I had all the windows open and the top down. I could no longer feel myself. Numb. The night is alive, the wind whistles, straight lines flee into the heavens, where the sun is falling quietly. Sunset, sunset in the African rain forest. The splendor of these sunsets. The charm of the word "splendor". A chimpanzee arrives on the scene, clutching a banana, which he drops on seeing the great expansive view. For a full fifteen minutes he stands, swaying lightly, hypnotized by the rich flickering colors of dusk. Then he withdraws silently into the thicket, leaving the banana.

Quietly I slide out of my car and run to seize the banana.

Overhead the stars were gleaming shyly. Horses moved in the brush, paying no attention to the stars or each other. The wind rose and fell, like the breast of a young girl two thousand light years from home.

The topography had changed and we now hit stretches of flat open country with mountains way off in the distance. Huge rocks and boulders lay profusely in all directions. The soil was full of rocks and there were only a few twisted live oak trees to be seen, instead of the lush green

forests. We hit town—drove through and picked up a road following the shore of the lake—brilliant blue and clear, I love you—the shore line ragged and stony, pigeons were pecking on the heads of passengers in airplanes overhead, short wind-blown and twisted trees leaning toward their reflections in the water. A wind had sprung up and massive cloud formations plowed across the blue sky. The water of the lake became choppy, the surface agitated with small rolling white-caps. The scene was magnificent and awe-inspiring—beautiful and cold and real. I filled myself with it and can at this instant not only see it all vividly but smell the freshness of the air, as well as the stink of my hairy companion.

At least I don't go around pulsing head. Do I? Slowly her head moves, following the bullwhip. The tongue going slowly and expertly over the embers of past tragedy . . . Her father grabbed her viciously, thrust the hot organ between her lips . . . She screamed. Mother! Mother, save me!

"Look sister, I don't let nobody's emotions whip and curl!"

She turned to run, yanking his balls, he bellowed and deposited her soundly in a pile of excrement under the sofa.

Cassaba mutters in his grave. "Transcend," he mutters, "transcend the gleaming swords of Christmas past . . . Whooooooooo . . ."

Now Stud had never been to school to the slender divide of his buttocks, because he was a star pupil in that resting on the flower of his bum. He noticed how Miss Ernest wasn't moved back and forth with the same bite of dust as he was, almost as if she had protected and sucked and pulled on her hymnal.

"Get up, you fuckin' bitch, I'm overhead the stars gleaming, Jesus Christ risen in your eye!" He sprawls on top of her, fingering his rosary beads.

"Oh please don't please don't!"

"Stranger, it looks like I made a mistake." Up and down the stiff rail the little choo-choo train of her hand.

Sometimes tip of his cock making little darts in her hand. She crept up his leg to nest softly in his hairbush . . .

"Mighty pretty ambition, them fellars. Yes, ha ha Miss Apple, creep around like a crab while I dismount my horse." She crept around his penis, playing with her new lice friends. The wind rose and fell in the brush as Cassaba farted and then wiped himself on his sleeve. "No smoking down there," he said.

The recording instrument clicks and unwinds, then begins to repeat itself, running along the engraved lines in the mind of the arithmetic scholar time and time again, forcing him to an awareness of What He Is . . .

The bullwhip buzzed along the ground. Not a sound save those of two panties falling. Her shirt reddened with blood. Heading toward each other their bluish signals spoke of love, love perverse and destructive. "Please, don't, please don't. I know you are one of the Flash Haters!"

"I? I am Cassaba! I guess I owe you a sweet lick for that!"

Once again the whip sang its trail of dust rising behind them, Miss Ernie fell and flailed around in the campfire. Unspeakable lusts burned and exploded in the heart of the drowning man. She was only a few feet of bodies straining under impossible knees. His breath most foul with rotten teeth and cancer of the throat. And they met. In one slow motion tore her leg off. This was blasphemies! God withdrew from the body, Cassaba fell screaming and frothing at the motu..mouth, utterly destroyed. The other rider, seeing this, brought it between his legs, stroking her soggy flower, his pistol full erect in its warm holster. Miss Apple Mouth opened eagerly to him. She searched his fag eyes to see if he was kidding.

"I guess I wow owe you something, don't I Mister?"

"What?"

"I said I guess I owe you a swirl and then popped loudly, like a root."

"Nope."

She heard this faintly, above the gentle whooshing of her mind in its eternal waters.

"Look, let's make a deal. I smell wind just before that final whipsnar." And stepping closer his face into halo, the man rustled, he smiled and rubbed her flanks. They shot forward like an enema.

Then her hand dropped from where it rested briefly before continuing to flash into his eye in moonlight.

"Don't you think we could make up, Little One?"

"What do you have in mind? You're not a very pleasant sort of man, sitting around whipping people you've never seen before."

"Not I. You are mistaken. The one who lies dead does these things."

A whizzing yo-yo came by his shoulders and jerked her toward him. A ten-foot matchstick snarled and snapped in her brain. That's the kind of sound Stud made along the dirt behind them. Hiss of the prairie grass and the mild sunburn of the whip curled around her ankles "snap!" bent forward and fastened her high-buttoned shoes. Curiously enough, she-spurs now dug without mercy into the quivering buttocks of old Cassaba. He squealed like an angry pig. He was a keen judge of human nature in most circumstances, and the shit-stains in his underwear proved it in this, the most trying circumstance of his life.

Surprised to find herself taking the initiative in the afternoon's cruelties, she hesitated for the briefest of moments, then raised her pistol and dug her heels into him again. "I'm going to beat the shit out of you," she said.

Imagine, please.

Time's circle runs its third, fourth revolution. Soon the history of these lives will complete itself, their souls will break free and be assumed into the deity. . . .

Imagine an almost complete trace of meaning. She wasn't sure if suddenly like a pulsing comet bursting in her

brain she should apologize. Wasn't that enough? Star-juice into the already gushing ape? Ass out? It was delicious! Girl on the moonlit plain, late at her cooing primping coming dissolve . . .

"Maybe you should caress the corners of my mouth?"

She gulped the stuff down. Then she sewed the buttons of her shirt to Stud's fly. "I guess we're even now."

"Not quite," he answered. He oxed deep into Miss Apple's eyes. "Fancy I'll stay awhile. Do a little trading in horses and goats."

Her hand dissolved quickly and went to his lips. The soft brush of the mesquite against their bare hides as they lay there, suppine on the desert floor. Her canyon bottom. Stud came, shooting a thick stream of jism onto the sand. Her fingers were about to tear his eyes out.

"Don't hurt me," he yelled, "don't hurt me!"

The night split open with God as our only spectator, a mournful tune in his mind as he cried against my shoulder, and once again the flesh and the sound of his screams subsided. Little insects were seen to be licking the soft viscous pool of cream there by our knees . . . I began crawling back toward Cassaba. I had understood at last what it was he wanted, what it was that possessed him in his attack upon my nakedness . . .

"Cassaba," I hissed softly. "Cassaba, it is me, Ernest . . ."

Cassaba stood up from his death-sleep, pulling up his pants. Bursting with expectation our sentence of death had passed, we were alone again, the angel had left us to ourselves there in the desert night. . . . Overhead the stars were out, and a soft wind was up, bringing with it the mournful howl of the prairie dog. . . .

Cassaba fastened his spurs and holster and put on his wide Mexican hat. He looked down at me for a moment, then smiled through his grisly moustachios. "Ernest, dear Ernest,

never will I understand you. I want to thank you for what you have done this evening."

"Done? What have I done?" Cautiously I watched him winding his whip and fastening it to the saddle of his mount.

"You've made me a free man, Ernest. A most cathartic experience, this night of love in the desert."

"You were dead, Cassaba. I killed you."

"I know. And now I am alive. Reborn as it were. And now I must ride to be with my friends in the mountains. Good night, Ernest." And then he rode off, slow clip cliop clippety clop, towards the rising moon, abandoning me there on the night sands of Death Valley.

In two hours the sun would begin its ascent, and I in my turn would begin my own journey into oblivion, defenseless and without water in the burning day . . .

The ski run's surface looks something like a hairy waffle painted blue. The view from the top is breathtaking as all of Paris is spread out before the skier. It was my turn. Taking a deep breath and glancing about through glazed eyes, I lunged into the descent, fell below rooftops and shot upwards and into the net, where the other members of our party were wriggling about, trying to free themselves. Their skis clacked and shimmered in the sunlight.

Fifty feet below us I spotted Cassaba, crawling along, and I just had to laugh. There was probably a text-book way of crawling. He did not know it. The clods of earth appeared friendly. For bottom soil thrown to the top they did not feel or smell so very sour. Still, it would take a long time to get them into cultivation or under grass. Probably, agriculturally speaking, this country would be in pretty poor condition for a long time.

Next to me, Jim managed to work a flask out of his hip pocket, and, pushing his goggles up onto his forehead

where ridge succeeded ridge, he took a good hard shot of brandy. Typical. Thus fortified, the young American will go about the business of courtship, his long sensitive antennae ever on the alert for a willing mate—stick it in anything—mother is saying “Din-ner”—almost but not quite always one of the opposite sex. Both the male and female have chemical sex attractants. Courtship commences when the male is lured by the female’s attractant; the pair then make antennae contact. Bzz! Bzz! Eventually, the male turns his back on the female and lifts his wings; the female climbs aboard and eats the sex attractants he has exuded from his back. The *Titanic* sinks.

Martha and I were fucking when Henry burst into the room shouting, “We’re sinking! We’re going down!” I whipped on my pants and ran to the door; in the corridor was chaos, from which a steward emerged saying, “Be calm! Take your time! Everything’s going to be all right now.”

Up on deck, the sounds that emerged were indeed lovely now and then, but also, at times, indescribably horrible. The string quartet, the one that played in the first-class lounge, was visibly shaken by the prospect of water rushing over their instruments playing, say, Beethoven’s string quartet No. 15 in A Minor Op. 132.

For no reason at all I remembered, with blazing clarity, that in order to get a television out of sight, some former neighbors of mine had sacrificed a window. The same dark stained shutters that unfolded over the window concealed the television, conveying an illusion of identical windows set into beautifully polished wood panelling. A stunning idea.

Martha’s eyes were pits of gravy in her cheeks.

In America the stars wobbled over the golf course. And when Spring came and the eaves dripped a steady tattoo, strange birds cheeped in the wet trees around the school, the ice went out of the Missouri with a roar.

Did we kiss? I hoped we would still think so. But though my love was a gas pain, so real and strong, hers was a whisker she clipped and watched fly up into the clouds.

My eye fell on her spotless bobby sox. How does she keep them so clean? I wondered. The day was beautiful and growing even more so. Locking my resolve, I took her head between my hands and slowly brought it between my eyes, where my brain throbbed like an insane, soggy flower.

A train whistled and a bird answered.

A little later (having found our bicycles), we were able to afford each other the irritating, theoretically inane spectacle of a nude but shod body mounted upon a machine, sailing along into the sunrise.

"Strange though it might seem," I cried, paddling rapidly, "I think I'm the only person I know in this school who's basically religious. I happen to believe in God, I think."

She threw back her face and laughed so hard I thought she would lose control and swerve into a tree or perhaps ditch.

"Your mind is like a toilet inside a toad," she answered.

My heart fluttered briefly and for a moment I thought I would kill her, this girl who not five minutes ago had joyfully consented to oral intercourse.

"I don't see what you mean," I shouted.

Every day, day after day, millions of miracles occur on the land, in the sea, and in the air.

The *Titanic* broke upward from underwater. Like a reversed film, the lifeboats returned to its sides and shot upward. Passengers flew up out of the sea, removed their life jackets and resumed tea. Tears filled my eyes.

A river of tears, low, slow-flooding, cool, and a bit muddy. The branches of the rain forest are hanging low over

the moving water. A woman is there, dressed in blue. You knew her when you were much younger. Now you are a man of tired years, drowsing in the afternoon's languor and the strange harmonic mode of the whistling schoolboy: fifth-third, fifth-third, fifth-third, fifth-octave.

You are alive, and it is lunch time. Seated across from you, in front of the lion's cage, is a 55-year-old Pietro Torretta, a slight, neatly dressed man with a hollow cheeked face and a knife slash for a mouth. That slash never healed. Vehicular death. The screaming children boarding the autobus. You fantasize your own demise, then suddenly fall out of your flesh for the briefest of moments . . .

I wonder what makes you suddenly so generous with your liquor? You, you my estranged mother. I drink deeply from the spout of your lips. I am happy, slightly afraid, slightly nauseous, but happy.

The jaunty crew of four stopped momentarily along the face of Blue Ridge and gazed out together across the canyon valley . . . It seems you only smile when I'm moving away . . . The green is near to us, but distant and almost blue in its greyness . . . The darkening trees moving silently in the wind.

Roberto stood up and stretched, pulling the damp pants away from his skin. I've been asleep, he thought, and now I'm awake. The young woman opposite me on the grass . . . see how her features stiffen in the paling moonlight. I think she is an Aquarian. The dog of her mind raises a cry, I can hear it from here. Perhaps I should walk over to her and kiss her.

No, not today.

Biting his tongue to quell an attack of nausea induced by the body's chill moisture, Roberto commenced the examination of his fingernails. Next he drew a small flash from his pocket and played it into the mouth, eyes intently scrutinizing lips teeth and tongue. Then, finding no trace of

acid burns, he examined in swift succession the ears, the eyes, and the hollows which were the dead girl's armpits. Next he surveyed in deliberate dispassion the smooth, firm, lovely breasts. Employing his gloved fingers, he gently pushed up the tender flesh of the right breast; discovering nothing he did the same to the left. This time he did not remove his hand. He brought his eye close to the breast, peering wildly at it. It gazed back at him. Suddenly, standing erect and pointing to the breast, he gasped, "My God!"

The heads of the students gathered in a tight semi-circle as he used a scalpel to indicate a tiny puncture and the smear of blood which had spread in the crease beneath the breast. Someone had driven a long heavy needle into her heart.

"Be good, Boris."

She kissed him gingerly on the cheek and stood back, smiling benevolence. He took her gloved hand in his and squeezed it.

"Yes, love."

In her heart your death is brewing, bubbling, taking shape according to some irrevocable law of the cosmos . . . You are going to die, at her hand, and there is not a thing you can do about it.

"I know."

"Goodbye, Boris."

"Goodbye, love."

They kiss with lips that part and he boards the train for the city. A brave Mexican is watching all the while from a window of the train.

These are the enemy, these we have come to seize. Demure, isn't she? A lady, no doubt, of high standing in her community. She looks at you over faded spectacles in the tram, and the color of your hair changes from brown to denim.

You try to pretend she doesn't exist, but she does. She is kneeling in front of you now, in a bowl of chili, very gracefully placing the salad bowl on the carpet. Feedback is screaming in your mind. Yes, and now her long sensuous fingers are reaching for yours, touching them, and a secret vibration beginning to build in your veins and tendons. . . .

Little Jesus leaned back against the dirty wall of the station and leafed through a faded copy of *Time*. A close observer could see the yellowness of his eyes, creeping in from the corners, like mist sliding across a window.

He spit once, into the gutter. Then he looked around as Cassaba came out of the station manager's office, carrying the smallest of black leather satchels.

"Amigo."

"Es o.k., Chico-Jesusito. Less go."

Jesus rolled the magazine and thrust it deep into his back pocket. Casually as bank robbers they strolled down the long pier, heels clicking against the concrete and steel plating . . . now heels booming over the narrow wooden trestle that arches across the Gonhila River . . . three miles below . . . Jesus looking up at the birds and laughing to himself, very pleased.

"The sky is blue today, my friend."

"The sky is blue everyday, don't you notice?"

Don't you notice the small wound on his scar, the thin ribbon of pink tissue that decorates his shoulderblades? Don't you notice the please-to-meet-you in his eyes, the way he carries his legs, as if supporting the sweetest of burdens? And the real woman who walks inside him, bumping shoulders, she is his sister and she it is who teaches him to walk in power and spirit . . .

Oh, Rosa . . .

Cassaba tore open a pack of cigarettes and threw the cellophane over the railing of the bridge. A gull banked and

slid into a dive, nabbing the paper brief seconds before it touched the rushing white water.

"Jesus, I want to hide out for awhile . . . I don't know how long exactly . . . You can say someone rented the extra room to write his thesis . . . He's paying you 100 dollars to stay there three weeks and to bring him his food and a bottle of tequila . . . Sabe?"

"Porque?"

"Dr. Rodin is dead. I killed him."

"Ahhh."

Jesus squinted and felt a sharp pain in his throat. His forehead began to ache and water gathered in his eyes . . . rainwater of past lives, past years, train whistles, piano music down a city street, smell of burning leaves and the odor of fresh dog turd. . . .

That afternoon Cassaba went out and bought the papers. There was no mention of Ernest nor of Doctor Rodin and his secretary.

The next day, exerting his muscles, he compressed the angel's throat against his loathsome breast. For a moment he felt pity for his heavenly friend, but he could no longer restrain his wrath!

I sat across the room, picking my teeth, watching a basketball game through the window. A Negro boy and a Latin type were teamed up against another Negro boy and a very large white girl, all aged roughly 15 or 16. Casually my eyes drift back over to witness the scene in the corner, and then back to the window, where rain drips off the ledge and into the geranium pot.

Beautiful geranium, I think.

My students had given it to me several days ago, and now the great watering can in the sky was dribbling a few atoms of moisture into its parched earth. My kids are a funny bunch. Several of them claim to have apparitions. They often miss school. Out chasing phantoms through the woods. A

small crowd of boys and girls were claiming to have seen the Blessed Virgin. I met some of them on the road to the grotto, holding candles in their hands and kneeling in pools of water.

The constable muttered in his unwholesome sleep. "Many times have I seen these visionaries. I chase them away. And sometimes I pursue them as far as the forest. Several used to gather atop the Massabielle, but the gendarmes drove them off with shouts of 'Clear off you rougues!' Commissioner Jacomet had only to show his face and these frenzied fools took to their heels."

Only the taxi coming toward them through the darkness made any difference.

I got in.

The tall girl made a smooth lay-up and her team-mate laughed and fell on the ground and rolled into a puddle and lay still.

I say "Now" to the taxi driver. Nothing happens. I am holding out. There is a tiny seed of fear lying at the boot. It refuses to rise to the surface. I relax all my muscles, every last one. I stop fighting with myself. My mind soars deeper. My penis is quivering with heat and excitement. I can't feel its existence, but I know it is quivering and excited.

The cabbie twists in his seat and makes a face.

A crystal arrow explodes in my heart. I am released from care and caring. Somewhere among the ragged rolling clouds the blackened stub of a cigarette is being wafted higher and higher.

Crossing the street I am almost hit by a taxi. I make a dash for the other side. I walk jauntily along the pavement, whistling a tune, loudly. As I pass a place called "Casa Angelo" I am accosted by a man wearing sunglasses and with a book wedged into his armpit. He tells me he is very hungry and would like some money. I reach into my watchpocket and pull out what change I have. He holds his hand out and I

place my hand next to his. Then I let the change fall into his palm.

I vaguely sense a girl walking behind him and I lean to the left to catch a better look. Yes, it is Ernest, on her way to school, carrying her shabby and badly woven basket, at the bottom of which, all higgledypiggledy, lay a stocking to knit, a crust of black bread, and her dog ear spelling book. The alertness of the dog's ear was the alleged cause of her excellent ability to spell.

There are a couple of quarters, a nickel, and a few pennies, fifty-eight cents all told. He thanks me warmly and smiles through his mustache. Then he introduces me to his buddies, who have been standing in the background all this time. They laugh and smile too. We shake hands. One is named Juan, and the other is named Charley. My friend's name is Alex.

They try to teach me a few words in Spanish, such as *something something* de Dios. Alex asks me if I know what *Dios* means. I tell him sure, I'm Cuban. Charley whips out a bottle and we have a drink, like in South America, and we dance around the street a little, slapping our hands together and laughing under the marquee.

Back at the ranch, the *caballeros* were preparing to make the drive into the mountains, where lay the last bitter knowledge that was needed before the retreat. The dream was crimson with sharp edges. A man, dark, looking for his horse in the shadows near the bunkhouse. I jerked open the door on his side and dropped the crumpled paper into his lap. Looking into his eye (red, even crimson, as in a poor color print) I said, "When you can find the time, you know what to do with it."

"Yes, I understand," he mumbled, somewhat embarrassed. "We must be patient, Cassaba. There is still a good deal of time to deal with these matters."

"I know how much time there is, my good friend. And I persevere in that bubble of time, only to reach the outer surface at last and find it broken. . . ."

His brown face hardened a little and he gripped the steering wheel so hard that knots of muscle sprang up along his forearm. For ear may know what eye cannot. The blind speak easy and die in their dirt. . . .

That afternoon Cassaba went out and bought the papers. There was no mention of Hauser and O'Brien. Grunting in his sleeve the old Mexican went back inside, grey eyes smiling sleepily into an electric blanket. A dog must cover his shit, he thought, because it will betray his passage . . . but the elephant has no need to hide his tracks . . . his paths are open, his ways are free.

(And in her softness there is a sense of peace. . . . I know the softness and the loveliness of her illusion. . . . I know them and I despise them. . . .)

"And yet still I am victim." "Victim and sorcerer." Spitting once, in his usual fashion, the angel of light proceeded into the bunkhouse and threw himself down behind his desk, where he rummaged in his papers the rest of the afternoon, looking for clues to the mystery that plagued his waking hours. . . .

Rising at dawn, the huddled figures drawing on their serapes and big hats, tying the string at the throat, strapping leather around their haunches. . . . One has a twink in his eye, watches the others cower in the cold shadows of day-break, watches from an incredible distance. . . .

"What do you think, El Pinto, do you think these men will have the soul to complete their task today?"

El Pinto said nothing. He was smiling far away in the sheet of gray that lay over the village of his birth. Faces, children's faces, smiling and running. . . . Old shep has gone where the good doggies go. . . . There is Rosa again, smiling and raising her skirt to pee, smiling and forgetting I am her brother. . . .

Myself I use to laugh when I thought about it, how Cassaba he would come home after work and crumple papers and rustle some work sheets about on his desk, all the time muttering and groaning to himself in that Mexican gargle of his. . . . And then he would look up at me from across the desk and smile, and a bright silver dollar twinkle would cross his eyes for the briefest of momentos. . . .

"This is it, Ernest, this is it. . . ." And then he would mumble off incoherent musings forgetting I was even in the room, talking and babbling and sputtering between his mustaches little drivulets of spittle and sorgum juice. . . . Everyone liked him, there was no question of that. We all agreed as one man that he was the best leader we had ever had.

I looked across the room to where he was sitting, chewing now on a few strands of hemp. . . . Truly noble visage, scarred by the ravages of disease, famine, untold struggles with death and the warrior. . . .

He raised his eyes that pierced mine. "Ernest, do me a favor will you?"

"What is it sir?"

"Do something about that accursed pimple on your cheek. It's been driving me crazy all morning. I keep wanting to get up and go over to you and squeeze it!"

"Yes sir!" I blushed. As soon as he would leave the room I would get up and go into the bathroom and squeeze the pimple, letting the white juice pop out over my fingertips. . . . Then I would lick the juice from my fingertips and wipe my hands on the large red oval towel that hung under the mirror. A little blood perhaps would appear at the orifice of the wound among the hairs of my cheek. This could be admonished with a little scrap of toilet paper, followed by a few drops of cold water. Afterwards, back in my room, I would polish and clean my revolver and load my gunbelt with shells.



uster was the last man to die. He blew us a parting kiss; then, wreathed in baroque spires of golden light, like a radiating Bernini, he ascended into the clear blue sky of October. His figure diminished to a pinpoint, then beyond. Like the Incredible Shrinking Man, he had just leaped into eternity.

Two by two, the rotund warriors leaped into the sky after him and slapped their heavy silk belts with a sound like the bursting of an inflated paper bag, while their heavy exhaling resembled the sound of the crumpling of the exploded bag, which a gull swooped up to snare in its beak and fly away with. Then the warriors, baring their souls to a world gone mad, met head-on in the sky, sending out brain-waves to the farthest reaches of the amphitheater.

By 8:30 that night, he met the legal requirement for death—tracings of his brain waves were flat, the amphitheater was empty and the concession stands were closed—but a slim hope remained because the waves sometimes fade out and then, inexplicably, come back. On the autopsy tables of state hospitals it is relatively common experience to find spoons, stones, pieces of scrap iron, wood, paper, cores, etc. in the stomach or intestines of patients who were affected by an advanced stage of schizophrenia.

I was an example of that.

I was quick and very strong and a tremendous leaper because I had swallowed a spring. This remarkable spring has enabled me to outjump men several inches taller.

In fact, both Clivedale and I stood and watched two Swiss guides enact the "mortal combat", throwing dummies over the precipice. The silence deepened and behind the pines the sun began to grow huge and shoot invisible arrows, though it had still some way to travel before it sank for the night behind the hills covered with rhododendrons. It poured its tremendous energies straight at Clivedale—I stepped aside—and with such violence that his eyes watered and he had to shut them against the dazzle.

One day at the end of February 1935, I remembered, a small wellformed man posed for his photograph astride a bicycle, one foot on the pedal, one hand balancing against the bricks of a building or wall. The winter sunlight made him half close his eyes, but he was smiling faintly, and the lock of thick fair hair which fell over his forehead continued down onto his gray flannel suit, plaid muffler and, as a matter of course, his saddle Oxford shoes.

The effect on viewers was like seeing a photograph of a painting of a shadow of a statue of a man.

"The opposite of pull is push," explained one of the guides, moving a dummy backward and then forward. "So I literally push it with my fingers. It used to get all wrinkled up. Then I put it on my knee and pressed a rubber band on it, usually on the head, gradually letting the rubber band return to normal. The head, unable to wrinkle, did what it wanted to do—it shrank with the rubber band."

"Can't somebody take this flex off me?" demanded Clivedale of an inattentive universe, adding, as I unwreathed him, "And do the taps in the lobby function, by any chance? I should rather like to wash the dust of ages off my hands." He stepped out of the loosened circles of wire and made his exit.

The crude silhouette of a skier is seen poised at the height of an outline of a mountain slope covered with snow. Without moving his arms, his descent begins, and he goes down the slope in slow, jerky movements. At the bottom of the mountain he encounters the picture frame, through which he crashes and skis off across the wall.

Here is how he did it: either a bit of steel is sewn to the muscle, or minute steel filings are injected by needle into the muscle. When an electromagnet is turned on, the metal is drawn toward it, carrying the muscle along with it, toward those great golden heights.

A piece of rain fell and hit the ground.

I walked over and picked it up.

"Invisible ink?" I suggested.

"I don't think so," you answered.

Then at last I heard your voice as it came to me across those alarming distances, your voice neither imagined nor recorded, but real.

At once there was communication. It was as if each listened to the same inner music, wordless but full of meaning, and Ernest's pause lasted long enough for her men to turn and follow her look. They had been arguing with her, dummies, and her head was still lifted in deprecation of their vehemence. Now she crooked her ear as she gave me a slight but very kind smile, one I cannot ever forget, and I was transformed into a happy creature padding over the earth in my moccasins toward her and her waterfall. I had never before had such a welcome from a woman, though she did nothing but murmur names, didn't even give me her hand. But when she smiled the sun came out like a tiny sun magnified billions of times and so dazzled me that I had to force myself to remember my sunglasses.

We knelt quiet for three or four minutes, our eyes closed, our minds leaning close to each other and to the inner edges of life, its triangles pulsing. Then it started, the feel of

power coming out of her rhomboid and into my hand and out of her hand and into my rhomboid. It came slow at first, then in a quick surge as Billy-Jean gave way inside to the urge.

"Fear death!" I cried, incredulous, "Good God, how can you be so dense, sir? I am ready whenever my Maker wishes to call me. What I fear is what happened to my poor friend, the Sultan of Morocco. Poor devil, he died on the operating table, in blood and stench, in a mess of instruments, never knowing that he had died. He even tried rising from the table. What a tragic way to go! No, sir, I do not fear death. I fear only sleep. Therefore I never sleep."

The train had just left Newcastle-upon-Tyne and was dashing through the landscape.

A great sadness creeps over me. I am alive, quite alive, and very healthy in every part of my physical being. But—and here's the rub—in the evening a dusk-laden blue mist descends over my mind, and I find myself lying on the grass in the garden behind our house, hands folded gently over my receding waistline, watching a tiny bee drink from my nose . . .

Then, quicker than suddenly, the vapor and the disc vanished, and the child plunged to the ground. Not a sound from his lips.

Cradling my candle as carefully as I could I ran down the porch steps and took huge leaps across the yard and into the field. In a moment I was at the side of the child, bending over him to lift an eyelid and feel his pulse and hold a mirror in front of his mouth. Behind I could hear the others, coming out of the house.

The child was dead. Lifting him we could see that his neck was broken, probably by the fall.

A tree jumped up out of the ground beside him, a tree with a limb.

There was nothing we could do. We couldn't even maintain the pace. Our legs became heavy and then slowed

down. When this happened the rotation caught up with them, swept them upward until they fell off the sides of the landscape and back onto the part below them. Only to be carried upward and dropped again.

They crashed to a stop.

For several moments, we could only lie flat, but our brainwaves began to whip mildly in the evening light. Rawson sprang up and said, "Father, we've got to get rid of these statues! So far, we've been lucky to have them around, but if this starts rolling again, and it sure as hell will, we might not be so lucky next time."

"Ah!" And there was another dull pause, broken only by the whine of the electric fire. Then father got up from his chair and went out quietly between the curtains.

"It is not," he said from behind them, "in my nature to perform tasks befitting the woman—nor is it in my nature to perform those befitting a man."

Name after name arose at the soft night-summons, formed itself to an entity with remembrance, became firm by memory, became through memory a participant in creation . . . Did a cock crow in the distance? Were there dogs barking out there? The footfall of the guard, surrendered from un-space, the wall fountain drizzling distinctly, the window sash framing an abundance of stars, the head of the snake conjurer flaking quietly in their midst . . .

Breath quickened the silence, breath filled the night . . . And growing out of the night and the silence was that which was always at hand, the breathing world-sleep. The darkness was breathing again, becoming more and more formed, more and more creaturely, more and more earthly, richer and richer in shadows. At first shapelessly, scarcely recognizable, in a certain sense like a point of noise, in scraps of tone and in separate tones, then condensing and collecting in audible form, the creaturly approaching; it was a creaking and rattling moan, and it came towards us from the peasant

carts that were traveling long in ever-narrowing rows bringing victuals to the morning market; sleepy-slow they moved onward, with a rumbling of wheels in pavement ruts, the creaking of axles, the gritty stroke of the wheel-rims on the curbstones, the click of chains and harness, and the soft heavy pulling gait of the animals came into an evenness of step that was like the march of the breath.

Why should all this not remain forever? Why should such effortless felicity change? And no change occurred. Indeed, one could have imagined that even the proceedings inside the room, though taking their course, were not subject to change. Nevertheless they became more significant, more and more extensive. Pregnant with the scent of flowers lifted on the odor of vinegar, the peaceful breath of being lingered on, yet the same moment it was growing, and the harmonious order of the world came to be a whisper charged with warm freshness; this was consummation, and the wonder of it was only that it had ever been otherwise. Now everything was given its proper place, one that might well be retained forever. Impetuously though gently, room and landscape united, the flowers pushed up impetuously in the field, they grew higher than any house, piercing the tree-tops and embracing the sky; human beings swarmed like ants among the plants, setting camp in their shade, making diminutive squeaks of conversation, reclining against their stems, smoking miniature pipes tamped full of fresh tobacco . . .

The physician, Rodin, was still standing in front of the window, and he too could be seen yonder in the circle of frolicking girls, as with a courteous, critical manner he continued to comb the blond beard of his obese face, keeping the mirror close at hand—the mirror reflected the entire scene: mossy springs that rose from an even softer sleep, greening arbutuses which tremulously tinged the mossy moisture, glowing and drying in the noonday, the juniper as well as the chestnut tree heavy with shaggy fruit, and the tiny

mirrors on the taunt grapes that hung from ripening wine-shoot, these too were mirrored. . . . Oh, mirrored nearness, mirrored buoyance, oh how easy it seemed in this reflecting reflection to become one of those yonder, helping the guards to hurl the dummies, helping to tread the juice-sacs in the wine-press. . . . The liquid of nostalgia rose in Rodin's throat. . . . He choked momentarily, and the souls of the people around him participated in the outermost surface as well as in the most invisible yet somehow visible home-depth of that human heart looking out from pulsing infinity. Somewhere there was meeting, meeting without end, alluring by its tender, trepidant longing. The odors of laurel and of blossoms arched across the rivers and floated from grove to grove, carrying with them the gentle salutes of those who communed happily together; and the towns dimming in the distance of light had shed their names so that they were only softly palpitating air. Did the slave still have the milk at hand? Rodin doubted. Raising the cup of coffee to his lips, he cried, ravishing the warm liquor with his lips and then with his tongue and throat and stomach and bowels drawing tight with the hot warmth of moistening tips of stomach grass, flesh tips waving in tide-pools of digestive juices, and thus it appeared in reflection, surrounded by the river-hemming poplars dedicated to Montezuma . . .

I am alive, quite alive, in every part of me.

Cassaba smiled a long slow smile, beginning in the eyes, gliding to the softly shining skin of his temples, as though the tender veins which showed beneath must also share in the smiling, and slowly, quite imperceptibly, the smile melted to the lips which trembled as if under a kiss before they opened to smile, disclosing the edges of teeth, the edge of skull bone, the ivory collar of rocky bone. . . . The shimmering silvery expanse of seawater smiling flowed, ebbed, then was transformed by smiling into the spoken word:

"It is not . . ."

Rodin turned and grinned a quick enigmatic grin through the brushes of his teeth.

"Stay and rest, Cassaba. Stay and rest in my shade. You are home to me, and home my shadows, folding you to rest . . ."

Thus we sat, the pair of us, in the shade of the great tree of a man, and I felt his hands move toward me and tremble blissfully in my hair. . . .

Thus we sat, shrouded in shadows, and a living communion was being bestowed upon us, growing out of our heads, growing into something unalterable, unchangeable, though as yet only a sensing breath, only an anticipatory motion of air in the ventricles of her vapor-vents. . . . But although this communion was physical, blood and breath melting together, mutual existence melting into oneness, nevertheless the slave was able to walk through it, as if by himself, as if both of his arms were free in their chains, free to move and free to carry the burden of his awakening out through the flesh doors of her mind, out through the french doors of her patio, out through the rose trellises of her love-garden, out through the picket-gate of her most outer reality, out through the filigree of her most seductive underwear . . .

Goodbye, goodbye lovely goddess of death . . .

But their hands remained placed one into the other, linked into one another, and the knobs of their knuckles made the slow rubbing motion so familiar to lovers of every nation . . . every age . . .

It became necessary to rebuke the slave.

"Go away from us," she said, casting a darkening eye in the direction of the young Negro.

But the slave paid no attention to her.

"It is not," he said from behind them, "in my nature to perform tasks befitting the woman—nor is it in my nature to perform tasks befitting the man."

"I," and Ernest went back to underline it, "I have been crawling all over the ceilings of the workrooms between the rafters and the roofs . . ."

"I wasn't aware of any workrooms up there," I interjected.

"... and I may tell you..." he shot me an angry smirk, "that wires—naked wires—are lying on boards set across the cat-runs, and that they are fastened down with saddle clips. Wood casing—china switches—the entire place will have to be re-wired. That's all there is to it."

"OK Donnie, I agree, wipe the dog dood off the whole fucking planet."

I pulled the sheet up and hid her vulnerable hands—the short nails that would require months to grow and acquire the elegance of the rest of her—padded in my socks to the next room, Donnie trailing along, dust drifting off his shoulders down the hall.

In a sense, Donnie is a throwback to the stars of the Forties, who themselves were simply shadows cast in the bright morning of the nation. The lights were exceedingly bright now, radio tubes blazing where you put the laughter. Yet in the age of the television commercial he is sadly superfluous, an anachronism, an illegible sundial serene in the afternoon shadows, a terrific stud acting out a masculine charade that has lost all meaning. That is why, to save him (and the world from his sort), I must change entirely his sense of himself, much in the same way he insists on rewiring the attic. Already he is taking pleasure in removing the china switches and taking them to the reservoir and dropping them in.

And then there is El Pinto's beautiful wife, who runs around too much for a woman who is observing her third anniversary with her second husband. Cold, unemotional, she claims that Donnie doesn't understand her, which is so true he can't think why he laughed when she said it. True in a

sense, untrue in another. The bacon is sputtering quietly in the kitchen and I know this woman has no business being here with me.

Donnie picked his nose with a thumb and forefinger. He is convinced that when a woman in present, let alone four of them, the air is tainted with perfume. Sometimes it is, naturally, but not then and there. I have a good nose and I hadn't smelled any.

As I stride toward the television on which a brilliant pianist is playing Brahms before an enthralled audience, Donald laughs and says, "Here the weird, unfamiliar notes creep in. Suddenly a puff of smoke, a man falls to the floor dead . . . in his pocket, a box of exploding aspirins!!"

And indeed these very things proceeded to take place before my eyes.

A woman spilled and then dropped a cup of coffee. She burst into tears. The scene switches to downtown where, standing on sidewalks that run alongside some rather imaginary office buildings, in one of which I sit, people are craning their necks and staring anxiously into the sky. I too am staring into the sky. The phones are ringing. I flick my cigarette out the window and watch it bounce, in a parabola of sparks, onto the roof of the adjacent building, where an aged colored man is tending a roof garden.

He is apparently unaware of the seriousness of the situation. With his free hand he slowly pulls weeds and works some mulch into the soil. Just then he took his hand out of his pocket for the first time. There was a jewelled bracelet in the hand. Rows of neat diamonds make blue daggers of light that slash wildly at the hothouse "windows".

A strange humor, heated more and more and more and become too abundant, rose to my head and the fiery particles that charged it, striking sharply against the windows of my eyes, produced therein a kind of dazzling mirage. I rubbed my eyes.

No use. Nothing succeeded. Betty saw a beautiful tree, glowing in the powerful wattage of the headlines, and she told herself that in a few seconds it would whiz past her and fade away. But now it seemed imprinted upon her vision and would not leave.

On the floor there was a rug, a chair, a chest of drawers and a bed. A magnolia looked in from the garden side and sometimes gulls would float down on the window-ledge and peer into the magnolias and speak their gibberish.

"Well, listen," I heard with my ear, "he used Highway 50, taking the MacArthur Freeway rather than Nimitz. After those tricky interchanges at Oakland he swept down to the Bay Bridge toll plaza. On the Bridge he shattered the 50 m.p.h. limit. Took the Ninth Street off-ramp and took a straight shot across Market and over to Van Ness. At 11:56 he turned into the Crescent Motors used car lot on Van Ness and Eddy, cut the motor and lights and got something out of the glove compartment. Then there were three or four shots..."

The voice faded behind a blurring picture which re-focused into the face of a news interviewer. "Hello," he said, "I'm Philip Warner reporting on Camel cigarettes from Manchester England."

Behind him vague waves of gray shifted.

"Today we are visiting with Mr. John Murray, a retired customs inspector who goes through 40 cigarettes a day plus 2 ounces of pipe tobacco on weekends. And on special occasions he has a cigar. He isn't afraid of cancer because he doesn't smoke—he eats tobacco. Yes, *eats*."

"Yes I've been eating cigarettes Camel cigarettes for 35 years and have never seen a doctor in my life. I'm as fit as a fiddle and as strong as a bull. Eating tobacco has done me no harm. In fact, I think it has improved my health."

The camera pulls back to show Philip Warner standing next to Mr. Murray, who pulls a cigarette sandwich out of his pocket and takes a healthy chomp.

"Tastes good," says a muffled voice, that of neither of the gentlemen. The words "Tastes good" are spelled out across the screen.

The drive up the coast was more stunning than ever. To the left, swelling, rising, spreading in dripping creamy fingers over the rocks that were wooded with tiny palms and ferns—the eternal hand had been playing its solitary tune for two years now.

"Well, it's a stupid story and can be told in two words," began the general complacently. He shifted his weight and tapped a long gray ash into the ash tray. "Two years ago—yes, nearly two—just after they opened the new railway—I was already in civilian dress and busy about an affair of great importance in connection with giving up the service. I took a first class ticket, went in, sat down and began to smoke. Or rather I went on smoking. I had lighted up my cigar before. I was alone in the compartment. Smoking was not prohibited, nor was it allowed. It was sort of half allowed, as it usually is. Of course it depends on the person. The window was down. Just before the whistle sounded, two ladies with a lap-dog seated themselves just opposite me. One of them was dressed in gorgeous style in light blue; the other more soberly in black silk with a cape. They were nice-looking, had a disdainful air, and talked English. I took no notice, of course, and went on smoking. I did hesitate, but I went on smoking close to the window, for the window was open. The lap-dog was lying on the pale blue lady's knee. It was a tiny creature no bigger than my fist, black with white paws, quite a curiosity. It had a silver collar with a motto on it. I did nothing. But I noticed the ladies seemed annoyed, at my cigar no doubt. One of them stared at me through her tortoise-shell lorgnette. I did nothing, again, for they said nothing. If they had said anything, warned me, asked me—there is such a thing as language afterall! But they were silent . . . Suddenly, without the slightest preface—I assure you without the slightest, as though she had

suddenly taken leave of her senses—the pale blue one snatched the cigar out of my hand and flung it out of the window. The train was racing along. I gazed at her aghast. A savage woman, yes, positively a woman of quite a savage type; yet a plump, comfortable-looking, tall, fair woman, with rosy cheeks (too rosy, in fact). Her eyes glared at me. Without uttering a word and with extraordinary courtesy, the most perfect, the most refined courtesy, I delicately picked up the lap-dog by the collar and flung it out of the window after the cigar! It uttered one squeal.”

I glanced over at this extraordinary man. He was looking out the window on his side, puffing at his cigar, as if he were unaware that he had just told me this incredible story. Bright gray hairs bristled on the back of his brilliant military head, and I imagined, as I shifted my eyes back to the road, that the hairs continued down his back to the tip of his spine. As I have indicated, however, spraying paint on a gull's back has too great an effect on the gull's behavior to make for a sound experiment, and the role played by this feature remains obscure.



ll this without blinking an eye.

I see you, reader, profoundly interested, your left hand in the front pocket of your white trousers. I see you laughing, child-like, your head lost among the profusion of golden curls which swirls around it . . . the curls which your mother carefully combs each morning with her teeth.

Here there appeared the regrettable silhouette, mutilated beyond recognition, and the seven dancers ceased their ramshackle rambles about the stage to peer discourteously at the audience. The lights dimmed. The noise of the cafe belowstairs drifted up thru the old floorboards. We sat back in our seats as the stage rolled away into a grassy plain without edges, unfurling waves of the ocean, the pale blue ocean, the ocean yellow with pleasure and the sky suddenly green in the odor from her cigar.

It was a wonderful surprise. Life in the jungle isn't easy, and we welcome every chance to forget the eyeball-to-eyeball stare of the demented orangutang. I personally lived to a certain extent in a state of fear all the time I was in Laos. Fear of isolation, fear of loneliness and fear of the great forest . . .

Leaning forward I took her hand away from my face, tilted her chin up and ran my fingers through the snow piled on top of her head. It was as soft and as fine as it looked in the morning light, and when my fingers touched her cheek,

she smiled, frost-bitten at the corners. Her eyes, lids suddenly lowered in shame, let the beauty come through all the way, all the way into my long pungent nose. "This is ridiculous," I said. There was a faint smell of rubbing alcohol about her, a clean pungent odor that seemed to reinforce the cameraman's impression.

We all stood before the camera, completely naked. A bellicose narcotic flavored the air. Ribosa Emanuel Assuaves gestured compliantly toward the approaching van lights. "Easy does it, Jesus," he said.

Jesus did it, easy as he could. The cameraman didn't even think to stop the camera. Finally Doctor Rodin shouted in extreme hesitation toward the gong corpses, who had drifted silent and dark into the room . . . "Stop! Cut! Hit the lights!"

Slightly shaking, the lights went up, as if going through the jumps. I have never forgotten the scene which slipped into focus at that dangling moment. The dim lights of a wrecking crew flickered eerily over the once glittering Diamond Horseshoe (below). The ambulance moved, sunlight burst through the windows, an oxygen cup was raised from Lilly's mouth, I sucked angrily at the odor of nothingness . . .

The Old Man, as the press agents like to call him, took a tape from a flat cardboard box and fitted it onto the machine. "On this tape," he said, "are three short recordings made by three persons who came to me for help. They are not identified, of course. I want you to listen to the recordings and see if you can pick out the two-word phrase that is the common denominator to all three recordings."

All three recordings played at once. We listened carefully. I heard the phrase "death-watch" repeated in all three recordings. I raised my hand after the recordings stopped. The electronic jitters.

"Yes, Jesus, do you have the phrase for us?"

"Death-watch," I said, a little triumphant at my own expense. At that moment I was amazed to hear snaps and

clicks. Then he pointed to a little volcano of sawdust. "The beetle's been getting closer to the surface for the last few days," he explained.

Presently a slender quarter-inch beetle stepped out of the sawdust. "I'll miss him, the little booby." The beetle sneezed his last.

The lights went up. The audience cheered madly. A short man in a gray suit walked onstage from the wings. Everyone grew restive as he opened to speak. I felt that God had sent this strange rough man. He was rough, and the roughness gave you courage, for he had so much himself. He was one of the big smugglers across. I know he smuggled across for money, but it didn't matter. God bless this rough man in his home town of Purgatory, where he has now gone, to spend a few short fire-singed years before passing into the larger container of heaven.

Once, caught in a downpour, he took off his hat and held it under his coat. Asked why, he explained, with admirable logic, that the rain would damage the hat, but his hair would be none the worse for its wetting. This knack for going instinctively to the heart of a matter was the secret of his major scientific discoveries—this and his extraordinary feeling for beauty.

The audience, at this point, sighed—a long sigh of release. The waiting was over. The joy would now begin:

A long tall beauty, naked to the skin, draped in flowing folds of her own black hair, stepped on toes to the center of the stage. All eyes were on the girl, washing her breasts, her lovely breasts with tear fluid, licking the postage stamp of her vulvus operandi. Sampans sailed into the harbor of her eyes; two of them, huddled together, resting easily in the lap and swallow of the evening tide. . . . Several cameras were lashed against her smooth rib cage, focusing in on the brilliant noon-day sun that rose between her legs. The clear water of her voice sent us all into fairy land, and she stepped down into the audience, walked quietly among us, kissing one, caressing

another with her tapering fingers, allowing another to touch her cunt. . . .

"This is a storybook world, this is a storybook girl, this is a storybook a storybook . . ." She kept repeating these words, softly as one massages the good Danish leather of one's tobacco pouch, softly as one adjusts the binoculars one has trained on her lovely face from the third balcony of the old Paramount.

Downstairs, a boisterous fight is in progress, the crashing of glassware is audible to us, us who are upstairs, sitting in the creaking old seats of this creaking old theater, watching this creaking old drama unfold before our creaking souls . . .

Now the girl carefully examined the plaid sack of an old man's coat, with its narrow neck opening and its numerous holes closing, and then asked, "Say—what kind of dog do you have?"

My semen sped through the darkness toward her. My head fell back and my eyes rolled up to the stars in the sky where the constellation of meaning flew apart and combined in new, more interesting configurations of star insurance.

I lay back in my seat, breathing heavily. She approached. She approached me, Yastan Stambull, and licked the semen off my toes. And then she took a step back. Her face assumed such an expression of terror that I am forbidden to describe it. Suddenly her arms and legs began to gyrate as she stumbled backwards, breaking into a run, her slick sassy ass bobbing down the aisle toward the nearest exit. The walls drifted as she ran, drifted away as fog, revealing the hole expanse of the universe, and she ran faster than any horse, on out through the suburbs of town, straight into the fields of soybean and cotton, up over the hill and down the other side, disappearing in a blur that fades into stingy memories of touch and tear, crease the plain nose of your Jew, forget not this crowded department store window. Now, savages, you may break the treaties you swore with the prisoner.

Eat pancakes, fellow philanderers, swipe an old bus ticket on the way to the club. Blub blub. Jek. Lip tup. Toop topp the spinach loop. Degouse.

As we neared the German border, I watched tidy gardens race by, then woods of elm, pine, spruce, and birch, glinting in the early morning explosion.

She was beautiful, running beside me, without a sign of exhaustion. Soon her breathing stopped; her heart stopped beating. Then like a sleepwalker she turned and walked into the sea.

I took a small plastic "disc" out of my pocket, feeling like a Hercules who has been ordered to make a small incision in a pair of lace undies.

Training the disc toward the low flying clouds, I triggered the information button, calibrated the stinger dial at zer-three-twenty-two, and flopped.

The viscous surface of consciousness jelled four hours later.

Lucy was standing over me, one nipple poking through the glistening wet strands of her hair.

"Clive, you look so funny!"

But my visit to the art museum had not been without results. Sitting up, dusting myself off, I relayed the new information to my assistant, Lucy Fuck.

I knew it was time for a long vacation.

The jowls of my suspenders oscillated suddenly with a gaseous endeous suppleness resembling the way a wasp fastens on the remains of a human corpse.

Lucy screamed. Jumping up quickly I slapped her a good one on the rump, kissed her lips quickly, bobbed my hat in the direction of Paris, and set off at a steady clip.

She followed, stopping from time to time to pick flowers and put them in her hat.

When the Harvard term came to an end, I gave lectures in a few other universities. Lucy would stand by my

side during these mental extravaganzas, pouring ice-water on my sweating brown leg. Her library had the most scientific card-index in the world, so she was virtually indispensable and up-to-date.

The summers of 1903 and 1904 were spent at Churt and Tilford. I made a practice of wandering about the common every night from eleven to one, by which means I came to know the three different noises made by my nightjars.



lew in from Miami Beach BOAC.

I discovered an endless horizon, vast inflamed skies traversed by a thousand flying rockets, meteors, all of which came flashing down in golden sprays—sapphire sparks shot through with emerald, azure at the edges. Where I sat the azure reflected off the shining silver wing onto my eyes and off them onto the figure of the priest, silver cross in his right hand, as he bent over a burly epileptic sprawled out in the aisle.

“What is your name? What is your name? Speak or I will burn this cross into your forehead!” He was not addressing the sick man, a Moslem tannery foreman named Mohammed Ahmed Abassy, but the devil thought to be lurking within.

Soon Mr. Abassy began to moan. When the priest placed the cross to his lips he sputtered, “No, no—you will hurt me!”

Onlookers accepted this as the voice of the devil, though I, an onlooker, did not. I felt it was some kind of trick.

“Who are you? Are you from land or water?” the priest cried, gripping one of Mr. Abassy’s fingers in accordance with the custom of the Copts. “How long have you been in there?” cried the priest.

“Twenty years. I want to go now.”

"You are not a liar?"

"No, I speak the truth, and I will depart."

"Give me some sign where you will go out."

"From the foot, from the left one," was the reply.

Mr. Abassy's foot rose from the floor and trembled in the air, as if something was trying to escape from it. Then it fell back limply.

Beyond the candlelight, a woman began the shrill trilling cry that Arab women use in moments of great joy.

The episode concluded, I returned to my drawings and plans. I had designed a marvelous thing for my native city. As regards its appearance, the form of the thing corresponds to all the artistic forms discovered in our age. These forms are the simplest possible: cubes, cylinders, spheres, cones, segments of circles, spherical planes, sections from these, etc. It is desirable that it should be made as large as possible, as is only natural in view of the size of the buildings in our town. A succession of the simplest forms (cubes) is to contain halls for lectures and gymnastics, premises for agitation and other rooms, which can be used for different purposes as required; these premises, however, are not to be museums or libraries of any kind, their character should preferably be shifting, the way one's insides do when rain drops rapidly though the air . . . The thing also contains an agitation center, from which one can turn to the entire city with different types of appeals, proclamations and pamphlets. Special motorcycles and cars could constitute a highly mobile, continuously available tool of agitation—therefore we need a garage. On one of the wings one can also attach a giant screen, on which it would be possible in the evenings with the help of a film reel—visible from a great distance—to send the latest news from cultural and political life throughout the world. For the reception of instant information a radio receiver of worldwide range is to be installed, together with a telegraph station and a telephone and other forms of com-

munication, with jagged lines coming from the antennae. One wing should be equipped with a projector station that can write letters in light in the sky (there are particularly good opportunities for this in the north); with such letters, it would be possible to compose different slogans in connection with current events. Also, prominent artists could come and do drawings in the sky . . .

When you're 25-26 you've got demons inside and you're stretching, your leg is shaking. When you're 36-37-38 which is where I am at, you're at peace. You want to go get in your Cortez camper and go out with your wife and kids into the back country. My eyes have that faraway look, with enough crinkle not to let them be theatrical. Years of staring into the blue Hawaiian guitar sliding void have burned this cold blue into my eyes.

Strange things happen to you when you spend most of your life flying through the air. It gets to the stewardesses too. You can see them gliding up and down the aisles: so many nightmares in which they fall fiery and screaming into the mouth of a vicious smoke-toned chow dog. Absolute terror, administered in tiny night-to-night dosages, has chemically changed their personalities . . .

Below us, in the desert, a camel sags to the ground . . .

I remember one gal . . . horrible.

Smiling, she breathes deep, stands poised and steps out into emptiness. The gray wall of her brains hurtles up around her, but with an effort of will she withholds the pulse of strength that would support her in midair. The ground rushes nearer, the effort mounts intolerably. At the last moment she releases it, the surge buoys her up in a brief paroxysmal joy. She comes to rest inches away from the hard stone.

Upon it was spread a small towel, with three red lines at each end, between which lay sandwiches, bottled drinks,

potato chips, paper plates, etc. Silence. The forest falls in silence, no one is there to hear it, in the middle of nowhere. Lewis and Anne come out, came out, clutching a blanket laughing and chattering, followed by monkeys that cover their paths with branches that dust the ground they step on . . .

"Emile . . . Emile . . ."

Huh, I opened my eyes on which a beard was growing.

Duluoz laughed and climbed out of his seat.

A large Russian lady appeared in the cockpit doorway.

"You want to know what I think of your jets travel? I spit on your jets. Pfui! Pfui!"

Some large globs of phlegm fell on the floor.

My plans for the building lay crumpled on the floor. Seeing them there, not far from the phlegm, and Duluoz had already skipped down the stairs and into the arms of his beautiful young wife, laughing and kissing, and she showing him the wonderful lunch she has prepared for him as they drive back home, projecting it on the sky . . . I was overwhelmed with a sense of my own personal abilities, not only to do anything on this earth, but also my ability to pierce the darkness that shrouds my soul. Say goodnight.

I carefully folded the airplane and returned it to my briefcase.

I removed my earphones and placed them on the instrument panel.

Marian put on her bathrobe, walked to the desk, and started to reach for the poster. Suddenly she turned around and went into the front room without turning on the light. Her clothes were over the back of a chair. Quietly she put them on. Then she went to the door, stepped into the hall, and went to the stairs. Blue-grey dust wedged into the corners.

At the front door she saw Dr. Rodin trying to get in. When she opened it for him he grinned at her, scratched his thin wrapping paper colored hair, and crashed into the door-jamb.

"Dr. Rodin!" she said. "Are you all right?"

"Just a bit of a fall," he said, choking back a bloody spasm.

Outside the breeze from the sea lapped the houses and wedged into the corners of the streets. Her black dress was buttoned tight around her neck, and her black hair (once it had been braided with a silver chain, and she had danced naked with a short red-haired man, whose shoulders were broad, whose words were quietly wise, whose laugh was the growl of a bear, whose uniform was that of the Mexican army . . .)

"Well, Dr." she said, "come in and sit by the fire while I fix your favorite connection of brandy and tea."

"I'm rather tired," whispered the hoarse throat of Dr. Rodin. His forehead gleamed with the wattage of tomorrow's headlines. In a few seconds he would whizz past her face and fade away into his bedroom, and his image would imprint itself on her retina, and stay with her the whole night, as she lay between the thin pages of memory . . .

When she woke, the phone was ringing again. There were two mice in the biscuit tin, eating crumbs. They paid no attention to the ringing of the phone, but when she got up, they skittered away. She picked up the phone. Outside, the quiet residential street, with its huge rustling elms, was still quiet. And dark. The sun was hiding behind the earth.

"Hello," she said, "this is Marian."

He laughed, and a stabbing pain tore through her head. She hung up the phone.

Going to the window she drew back the curtains and looked out on the silent street. A long sigh escaped her lips.

Her shoulders drooped. She began to cry. Turning around, she went to the bathroom.

For the rest of the night she dreamt she was assisting Dr. Rodin in surgery. He was removing a lung from a jelly donut. The patient was an Indian, who cried big tears of lead that burned her white stockings and hospital shoes.

Oh so carefully the good Doctor made the incision and drew back the folds of fat that shrouded the boy's rib cage. Then he inserted a c-clamp and screwed the ribs apart. "Oh-oh," he said. "I was afraid of this."

"Afraid of what, Doctor?" She bent close to see. The good Doctor's breath stunk of gin.

"This boy has bubbles," said Dr. Rodin.

In the morning she rises, puts on her clothes, and goes out to buy Rodin's newspaper. Now there is a murmur of talk in her ears. She can hear them, the trolley car boys, making fun of her in their seats by the window. She looks at the first boy very sharply and he returns her stare. For a long while they look at each other, with fixed stares, neither wanting to be the first to look away. Quite suddenly the boy's head begins to separate at the forehead, revealing the naked interior of his skull. She finds herself looking into a room dominated by a huge oblong slab of marble, three times the height of a man. Though solid, it appears to be fluid, and she remarks to herself how hypnotic its motion . . .

Smiling, she breathes deeply, stands and takes a motherly pose before the boy. She leans to peer into raspberry interior of his head. The gray walls hurtle upward around her. With an effort of will she withholds the pulse of strength that would support her in mid-air. The floor rushes near, the effort mounts intolerably. At the last moment she releases her breath and feels herself buoyed up on a fountain

of paroxysmal joy. She comes to rest inches away from the hard stone.

The boy touched her hand. She shivered involuntarily. The boy began to speak, very evenly, very quietly. The words he spoke voiced the deepest concerns of her own shattered identity:

"Señora—may I call you señora? You say, I hear you say, 'we are both fucked.' You also say 'we have to find a balance.' You believe that this balance will be found through love, love of another, love of me perhaps . . .

"Señora, I don't know just what you mean. Do you mean love for a man, or do you mean love for God, i.e. Godhead in yourself, or do you mean love of life or love of everything that is? Personally I do not feel too unbalanced. This does not mean I'm not! On the contrary, I have been aware of the fact of my insanity for so long that it does not worry me in itself, no, and you should not worry about it either . . .

"However, how to achieve a balance is something that worries me. Not in a general way, but in a sexual regard—you know that for a long time the main concern of my life has been sexual and it will continue until I can solve the problem. . . . No, don't let things bother you, don't close your sensibilities, but remember that it is the world that is wrong, not you, and that for the present you should just fuck the world and discover the ultimate solidness of your very own soul. We might take the visionary as an example: love may be the answer, but in the modern world it may well not be. There isn't enough mystery, the answer to our existence is in the deepest mystery that we can discover, and this mystery is in ourselves and in the world we see through ourselves. . . . We must love first of all, we must extend ourselves outward, because no matter what anyone might say, we have to find

out for ourselves, and if love isn't the answer, then we have to see that ourselves, and then look somewhere else. . . . In a word, we're fucked, buddy . . ."

"That's just what I'm afraid of," she said. "I'll never know whether I haven't gone completely bongo at last."

"Marian, I love you."

She looked into the steel-gray eyes of the lad. Now she saw how innocent he was, innocent of her ways, innocent of all the activities that enfold and divide (in the same cruel moment) the earth's surface and all who live upon it . . .

"You don't understand, do you?" she said. "You can't see why it is impossible."

For three minutes he did not reply. Quietly, unobtrusively, he was masturbating against her leg. Finally he spoke:

"Go away," he said.

She knew that he was waiting there, baiting his trap with silence. She went out on to the veranda and looked at the snow-laden city. It seemed very bright in the full glare of the afternoon. She counted to twenty, to fifty, to one hundred. The numbers had a calming effect. They made sense. Each number was just one more than the number that had preceded it, and the next number was one more than that. She counted as far as one hundred and ninety-eight. Suddenly the knocking on the door was renewed, louder than ever. Soundlessly she let herself go and dropped fourteen floors to the soft, powdery snow.

A moment later the phone rang.

Sunset in the African rain forest. The splendor of these sunsets. The charming noise of the word "splendor". A chimpanzee arrives on the scene, clutching a banana, which he drops on seeing the view. For a full fifteen minutes he

stands, swaying in the svelt wind, transported by the rich flickering reds of dusk . . . Then he withdraws silently into a thicket, forgetting the banana . . .

That afternoon Rodin went out and bought the papers. There was no mention of Hauser and O'Brien.

"Which is a pretty strange combination," six words which formed in my head and were in turn spoken by a voice I recognized as my own.

"Yes, one so rarely sees a deviled ham, spinach and Frito sandwich," laughed my mother, sitting on the edge of the bed, a paper plate on her knees, a cigarette in one hand and a drink in the other.

She was a wonderful woman, my mother. I was standing over by the window, which was moderately dirty, the sunlight behind me, and I was leaning against the wall admiring her as she ate, drank, smoked and talked at the same time. All with perfect ease and composure, with genuine grace. I also admired the way she managed to keep her roller skates from clacking and making irritating noises, as almost anything out of its element will do.

I mean roller skates are appropriate on the street or in the roller rink, but in the bedroom? Mother rose from the bed and glided over to the bureau, where she left her plate and drink.

"I'll just *run over* this outside," she said, holding the cigarette up. I could see her flipping it up the sidewalk six or eight yards—she had developed a powerful flipping motion, the same one you see people absent-mindedly using to catapult boogers—and then, going into her racer's crouch, darting down the sidewalk, a gray blur pursuing the rolling cigarette, a small child chases a ball into the street and trips, landing on a large white bandage . . .

I tend to lose them . . .

The bandages . . .

What should I do, then? Tell Stella and the kids? Tell them about the trick paneling in my little study—I mean that is an image to give you an idea of . . .

. . . little study which I slip through and come down here to the basement and have a smoke from time to time. Some Negro lives down here. Why should I mind? He never bothers anyone, in fact no one in the house knows about him. I don't think I've ever said a word to him. I just tiptoe down and there he sits, on some straw in the corner, biting his toenails and grinning that great grinning grin of his . . . maybe I should ask him about raking the leaves . . .

Then after a while I have my smoke and I "drift" back upstairs. When the little lady comes into my study, there I am, reading a book, page 252 to be exact, or page 257 because I'm holding it upsidedown and my shirt is smudged in one or two spots with soot and dirt . . . I am smiling, then a little laugh slips out of the farmer of my mouth and it slips into my wife's ear and it goes up to her brain where it gets recharged and shoots down to her vocal machine and she too laughs, she comes over to the armchair and sits down on the edge, she looks at herself in the mirror and then she looks into my eyes and I notice that she is completely naked . . .

"Go ahead," she replied indifferently. Her eyes were radiant but not for him . . . three new flowers by the gate . . .

You as a boy had always scorned your father because he said you were a buttery hypocrite and therefore had impressed everyone with your sincere, agonized expression, but now the patterns you had grown on your face, the 6 to 7 hundred hairs which made a dark black line under your nose, added a note of duplicity to the symphony of your face . . .

blagh

you have just cut that face with the razor, actually the neck, actually a kitchen knife, the coffee is up and you're lying on the floor bleeding your blood onto the floor, under

your ear, you hear it rushing by, like a mighty big river, over which wind is blowing the same way the water runs. She leaned over in the canoe and shouted over his shoulder, shouted until her breath stirred his moustache. But her avidity shriveled the confidence with its heat and it shattered the momentum with its hammer, and he found he could not speak—could not roll away an insomniac so sleepy in his brain.

It is as if he were a raspberry inside the mouth of a bear who has been living at the zoo for 25 years. There wasn't much of a reason to say anything, so he just kept paddling and whistling the same inane tune that had been dogging him since early morning, when he had pushed himself up and out of bed—his Saint Bernard was already waiting at the door, probably drunk, better check the little barrel . . . Soon he flung himself into the mood of this new river, so completely he believed in doing this, and his demeanor, available to absolutely no one, took on an air of duplicity.

The young man in front of him, the young man with the uncanny eyes, was bathed in clear sunlight, and the birds came down sometimes and peered into his eyes, so supernatural they seemed.

I preferred to come blasting by in my big powerful motorboat and push giant waves against their frail craft, then shriek out my demonic laughter, shaking my fist, and speed away, jacking off . . . The only thing that bothered me were the wires that were attached to the top of the boat and extended up into the sky. Besides giving the impression that my boat was a toy, or marionette, they often slapped against each other and got tangled up. Of course I didn't have to undo them. Actually once, they were, like, perfectly straight, they went straight up, perfect parallels, and I was out strolling on deck one night and there was this glow between them, as if the thing were a filament in an electrical light bulb. Up in the glow was this girl, whom I didn't recognize right off,

but as sets of concepts shot through my mind, none of them fitting, I remember noticing that the more confused I became the more clear her image grew, until, confused, heartsick, afraid, I went running down the road in the moonlight, driven quite mad by my pointless and humiliating love.

No, I do not solicit your sympathy, on the contrary, I spit on it. Have you ever done "La Bamba"? Or is that a dance? I don't believe it is, old bean he says, eyeing me suspiciously. I take another long draw on my already lukewarm beer and gaze out over the square. I can't bring myself to look down onto the square itself, for there is the same man who has been following me for the past several days and I am afraid he will recognize me.

"I didn't catch the name."

"Well," I laughed, "I didn't throw it . . ."

A sickly fading smile spread over his face.

"What's wrong?"

"Don't you recognize me?" he asks. Of course he asks.

I point my chin at his expression and sight down my nose, squinting my eyes. I was about to say no when a series of ever-brightening flashes of light swept over my nervous system.

My father had died in 1936. As we left the house to go to the funeral, my brother-in-law asked us which one had given the fingers to the undertaker. Not one of us had thought of them. So Bill dashed back into the house, got the fingers, and surreptitiously dropped them into the casket as we walked past it for the last time . . .

Why do I record this incident? Because it serves to illuminate. The picture of Bill must be complete. The girl is sleeping next to the old man, but the fingers, dis severed in the accident, were recovered and preserved . . .

Lylla, my wife and companion, so dead these long years, so distant from my touch, I bow my head to you, pour

out the juice of thought to you, give you to savour of this pie. The remnant is for the Jews. The undecided ones. Squalid horsefarms simmer in the African sun. Along the speckled coast, we fly BOAC, notice the thin white thread of the ocean's waves rushing the ragged shores . . .

Indignation burns in my heart, for what crimes we committed together, in those days when we knew each other. Our squad never squabbled. Embedded in our heart was a sense of justice and fair play. Such ideas congested our transplants. We lived on badderlocks for a month, then began the long trek into the guts of Africa.

I see now that I was remiss in my duty. I shouldn't have let the sharks get you. The streamy yellow sunlight gathered in balls on your forehead as you lay in the dust under the Tekka tree. The snake had vanished. The guide-book lay torn and dirty at your feet. In his buffalo robe the huge Watusi looks ravishing to the homosexual eye . . .

Like transparent alabaster statues we stood and nourished ourselves on sunsets. For three weeks we survived in this amazing fashion. I was overjoyed to discover that my delicate digestive system had recovered its stability. And my cough disappeared. Looking down I saw your remains mouldering behind the tent, but that didn't destroy my new found peace of soul. Already your bones were showing through! And—ugh—the juices were fermenting under the hide, in the hot afternoons, causing the little white worms to be very active under that translucent skin that once was Beauty . .

A fly buzzed. I coughed.

A thought struck me at random leaving this bruise you see as you watch me now from your picture on the wall.

It all ties together, doesn't it? The cosmic chain of events, not a chain at all but a mosaic, piece by piece assembling, each fragment a joyous savoured moment, each instant examined and forgotten, but never lost . . . our peripheral vision picking up every drab particle and assigning it a

place in the field . . . At last, when the configuration is complete, we—you and I—take each other and vanish into the subtle red and yellow frame-colors, knowledge touching us inside and outside, knowledge being the very fluid we are immersed in . . .

The faceboat mounts the rider and descends into the sky.

An enormous cranberry hangs stationary above the skyline. Four teamsters come over the mountain, whipping teams of beautiful draft horses. The fire in the eye of the first horse is suddenly extinguished and the entire scene freezes.

Four days later an old friend knocks on your door and before you have even said hello he blurts out the news: your wife has been found alive in a city deep in the jungle. She has become a sacred White Queen, leading a tribe of purple savages in uncouth orgies of self-destruction. She is known to participate enthusiastically in all their obscene rituals and amoral practices. Never again will the face of this former debutante grace the dance halls of Europe and the drawing rooms of America. Without another word your friend departs, doffing his hat.

You close the door and weep for awhile, standing with your head in a pot of geraniums. After a few minutes you pick up your little bag and step over the ashes and walk into the Missouri night, letting go of the past. Suddenly, inexplicably, you are free, free of all ties, free of envy, free of malice toward this woman who has betrayed you. Now you can pass quietly from this dream into the next, tomorrow's dream of being a race car driver and winning the Indianapolis 500. You own nothing, you have no regrets, your wants are minimal. Stick out your thumb and hitch a ride to the stars!

—Enter Johnny Television. Johnny Television jerked his mind off the fingerprints, their prevalence in fiction, and their total absence in real life. The eye tends to expand the

inside corner of a room and to shrink the outside corners of structures, he thought, while his lips moved, pronouncing the words aloud.

"Well, that's a good idea, now," said Moresby, handsomely.

Moresby stood at the door of his Main Street mansion. He was now old and dry enough to blow away, yet seemed held to the earth by fibers of his curiosity and his hovering falcon's interest in sinning humanity. He greeted me with a dry vital twist of his claw.

Down the hallway came the delicate sound of flashbulbs hitting the carpet, and behind these sounds came Television.

"Supposing it were a plumber, or a man to see about the electric light—that sort of man?" he began uncertainly.

The result of all this is, of course, to throw one back more and more upon oneself. Everything that would normally be learnt from other people—new words, new ideas, new ways of looking at things—is ruled out. So that a large part of one's being never really develops. One remains rather like a child, only surrounded by a shimmer, or glow, and as the years go by this ghostly light grows brighter until, at the onset of senility, it begins to dim. At death it quite goes out.

But about new ways of looking at things: what's the point? Illusions of various kinds can occur in any of the senses, and they can cross over between the senses. For example, small objects feel considerably heavier than larger objects of exactly the same weight. I would prefer to simply pick up an object and have it be its own weight.

All this time Television had been babbling away. I was in no hurry, for the folded force of my nature was so carefully creased that it took time to flatten it out even a little. And besides, I get paid by the hour. So I just kept looking right into his eyes and from time to time an Mmm.

"May I take a look?"

They went on talking. Television put what other questions occurred to him . . .

. . . biplanes crossed overhead but the main ground had now been explored, and nothing of further importance cropped up. Moresby, in spite of his efforts, evidently felt his position strongly, and Television pressed him to stay to lunch. They could raid the icebox, and who would object? A novel luncheon, and a change of scene, a change of companionship, was the best tonic anyone could prescribe, especially for someone who is not in the least ill.

They went into the kitchen while I fiddled around in the living room. The world is going to shit and the eye tends to expand the inside corner of the room. The photogs were gone. On the walls hung engravings of whales frolicking, lying at ease and thrashing in their death throes. But in all these attitudes the whales were consistent in that they spouted and that the spout was tinged with blood.

Pierre, her small son, had died six years ago at about this time, his fat short legs sinking deeper and deeper into the boiling sand as he tried to hold his ground against an ongoing wave—what is the name of that Victor Hugo poem about the man sinking into quicksand?—while his mother gave herself up to passion in the arms of a young sailor behind a dune.

And now it has come to this.

You have a deep ripping cough, a bent back and a passion for cigarettes. At night you hear this growling from the chimney and you finger your .45 under the pillow. There is no sure cure for your acid indigestion, for you are a hundred million miles from reality, across from the Bronx Community College.

Madman that I was, to linger so long before I fled! Up to then he had hunted by scent, and his movement was slow. But he had actually seen me as I started to run . . . Now, as he came around the curve, he was springing in great bounds! The moonlight shone upon his huge projecting eyes, the row

of enormous teeth in a gaping mouth, and the gleaming fringe of claws upon short, grasping forearms . . .

With a scream of terror I rushed wildly down the path. Behind me the thick gasps came louder and louder. The heavy footfall shaking the ground . . . I expected to feel his jaws slip over my head at any instant . . . And then I was falling . . .

A burlap sky
drifted through
the window . . .

The king was dying of laughter as I recounted these adventures with his pet Tyrannosaurus Rex.

"Lucky for you the tiger trap was empty!"

"Huh? Did you see my ankle? What do you think made these three holes?"

Hot stifling nightshadow, the temple gongs broke our ear drums, beads of sweat glistened salty in the corners of his eyes . . . His woman was there, on his dark skin her soft fingers worked the gold fabric, wet with dying naked trembling breasts, chill of dying . . . a silver thread drawn tight and snaps . . .

"Tell me, Boston, what is it brings you to these parts?"

"Your woman," I whispered hoarsely, "she is very beautiful . . ." I looked at her face, with its enormous tilted green eyes. I wanted to turn away. It was one of those moments when reality breaks through just a little too insistently to bear. Cammie had very thin hair, for her constant hanging and beating did not allow it to grow. Her cheekbones and chin were darkly bruised, and her forehead was dreadfully scarred with self-inflicted wounds. As I looked at her, I must confess that I felt very little compassion . . .

"Did you hear my question, sir?" The King looked archly in my direction, noticing the way my eyes stitched rainbows across his queen's nakedness . . . In my imagination

I was watching little corks popping out of little bottles on the grocer's shelves, and the goo spurting out in black geysers over all the food and soap and boxes. It had something to do with my love for this woman of Arabia . . .

"Humph," said King Pongileoni. "I can see your attention is elsewhere!—Maestro! Give us music! There will be no more conversation this rainy night!"

Somewhere behind embroidered curtains, Maestro obliged. The blowing and scraping of anonymous fiddlers shook the air of the great hall, and set the glass of the windows to vibrating. This in turn shook the air in my Lord Edward's apartment on the further side. The shaking air rattled Lord Edward's *membrana tympani*; the interlocked *malleus*, *incus* and stirrup bones were set in motion so as to agitate the membrane of the oval window and raise an infinitesimal storm in the fluid of the labyrinth. The hairy endings of the auditory nerve shuddered like weeds in a rough sea; a vast number of obscure miracles were performed in the brain, and Lord Edward whispered ecstatically: "Bach!"

I, in the meantime, had moved to the side of the demure princess, who in her turn had shyly accepted my advances, allowing me to touch her leg and hand, and her lip quivered as our eyes locked in focus. Her foam-flecked breast shimmered red in red moonlight through the portico . . . The King was snoring loudly on the divan behind us . . .

"Now is our chance, Cammilliatta . . ."

Her glassy eyes went blank. She fell over like a store dummy and the King sat up choking with laughter. "Hah! Hah! You thought to make advances to the wife of the King, my dear English friend! Well, see now how I have guarded against such an eventuality, by the use of this puppet, worked by the hands of my master puppeteer, Mr. Wallace Joint!! . . . Come down here, Joint, show yourself to our friend Mr. Boston!" And he burst into fresh spitting coughing fits of

insane glee, holding his stomach and pointing at my reddened face. "Look! He is ashamed!"

I winced. "Listen, your excellent highness," I said, in the most even tone at my command, "I don't consider your trick the least bit funny, in fact I'm afraid the joke is rather on you, for I did make love to the princess herself, not two nights ago, in the west garden!"

"Hah!" Spit, cough, more hideous laughing. "English fool!" Cough, spit. "You really are a dunce! Do you think that was really my own woman you made love to? Do you think it was in fact a woman at all? No, again I'm afraid I must credit good M. Joint, who allowed himself to be used in this matter . . . He's manufactured a nifty sort of strap-on for these occasions, and . . ."

But not another word escaped his flapping burp flaps, for Princess Cammie herself appeared suddenly through the curtain behind him, a knife clenched in her raised hand—

"Cammie!"

"Don't cry, Dr. Boston, I have heard enough of this man's blasphemy! Wallace Joint has been out of commission for several weeks—it was indeed I you held near you in the garden, and it was I who worked the strings of this marvelous puppet!" And with that, cold steel splashed blood and moonlight over the face of King Pongileoni, and he slumped forward with a gargling cry of despair . . .

"He is dead." Lord Edward himself pronounced these words from behind the dias. As the King's lady ran to embrace me I noticed Lord Edward surreptitiously operating her strings . . .

Lord Edward exited the scene, humming the last few bars of a Bach cantata. I stepped over the remains of the King and dragged the puppet Cammilliata after me, towards the great window where the moon hung wispy green over an aching jungle night . . . In the distance, on the crest of the

hill, the first of King Pongileoni's huge pets began ascending into the sky, yelping. Soon the heavens were full of their glorious glowing bodies. A golden light of overwhelming beauty flooded the scene, so that even the guards along the outer walls had to turn to admire it.

It reminded me of something...something I could not quite put my finger on...



The smile on the face of the great spirit was shedding its radiance over the earth spinning in its clouds, clouds that drift together, darken and burst.

It had been raining for several days.

Travelers floating in steam palaces upon the river make a memorandum of it, as a remarkable feature in the landscape, this seemingly permanent rain.

A single tear falls from the eye of Theodore Roosevelt.

You would tell yourself that it were no sad transition to pass suddenly, like these joyous waters we call tears, from a cheerful and stainless course, letting the pureness of your life evaporate into a halo, a rainbow crown, as you fall into the dim chasm of the grave.

An equally striking effect that must have long been familiar to these Netherlanders: if the rotating vanes of a windmill are viewed obliquely or directly from the side, they spontaneously reverse direction if there are no strong clues to the real direction of rotation; and, since we do not know if we are alive or dead, the same effect will have us flying up out of that dim chasm.

My words were falling into a dim chasm. The person at my side was lost in thought, or that thought was lost in the tulips that lined the river.

She was not a very smart little girl. She couldn't spell c-a-t unless you gave her the first two letters. Then she would add the final letter, the t. I found it rather curious that she could do this every time without fail, but could not, given the first letter, supply the following two.

"Jane," I began, turning to her.

We are not tempted to touch objects shown in a picture through the surface of the picture. What happens, however, if we remove the surface? She was as pretty as a picture, but one whose surface remained intact, one I dared not touch for fear of appearing ridiculous.

"Yes," she answered, turning to face me.

"I have that terrifying feeling of emptiness. I can feel the silence moving between us. I lie in bed at night with my foot in a plastic boot."

"To maintain the air pressure around the foot . . ."

"Yes. Otherwise it might simply explode, like the foot of the boy in that story. The delegates were having coffee in the North Lounge at 3 P.M. when the youth raced across the lawn north of the conference building between the Rose Garden and the East River, trailing a cloud of red and orange flame in the bright sun under the picture window."

"It seemed to take him forever. I remember it well. I held that cup of coffee for what seemed an eternity. It's like the boomerang. You see one flying and you are left with the impression that the flight lasted about half a minute, whereas its real duration was a mere eight seconds or so."

"Ah, appearance and reality."

"No, not really. The words appearance and reality are verbal opposites; we have invested them with their difference. But in reality they are the same thing. Just like the image and the material used to convey the image . . . a photograph, for instance. How can we have a photographic image without the photograph itself? Likewise, I'm sure, is the case of appearance and reality. Appearance in this case corresponds to the

image, reality to the photograph that conveys the image. You can't have one without the other."

She ended her statement with a small laugh, as if she had just brought a wildly witty story to its conclusion.

I laughed too, out of politeness. And once I was out of politeness, I moved in.

"Whatever emotions of awe or of dread a man has ever had will come surging through him when he is born on"—I gestured down river—"against angry green eddies and between jutting rocks, toward the great unbroken wall of crystal, which seems, for the moment, the outermost barrier of the universe itself." My voice had taken on a slightly angry, and at the same time arrogant tone.

"A feeling I adore," she rose to the occasion. "Like before giving a recital."

And after rumbling a few pleasantries in German, she went straight to the piano. Using her left index finger, she pushed out a slow scale in the bass register. She pounded fiercely at the treble. Then she inhaled, yawned, flexed her powerful fingers and quietly began Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." Still playing, she got up and leaned into the instrument, peering quizzically into its interior.

To enhance the mood of the music, tape recordings of the creaking of trees, the grunts of frogs, the songs of night birds, the calls of coyotes, had been piped into the piano.

During all this the steam palace continued its stately motion down the river. The waves, also, had washed away the foundations of the river, so that no one could guess its original purpose.

Suddenly Jane jumped up and threw back her head, examining the sky as if it were the face of an old friend. Its smile broke into gradual hypnotic radiance that converted the rain into sheets of waving steam.

Jane leaped to the back of her head, examining the sky as if it were an old enemy. In that instant she discovered

what she feared most, that she possessed those very traits she hated in others: the clinging, the wanton desire to abdicate one's freedom in return for a little security this side of the grave. Poor Jane!

"I've managed to keep myself busy these twelve years inside of the giant's castle. Now I must somehow manage on the outside, an entirely different procedure." She drew her black hair back tight against her scalp and touched the small diamond embedded just behind her left frontal lobe. A monument to an age, she thought. And now the age is ended.

Jane was a reckless diver. She could explore sea-caves and sunken wrecks and come up unchanged in nature. If there were inhuman, sub-human, or superhuman creatures living in these waters, then these had been her playfellows. Their webbed fingers did not make her shudder. She did not miss the sunlight when she sank into their dim alien world.

But when breath gave out, when she shot up again from the element in which he could not live, then dazzled by the sunlight, she would go in search of him.

"Fasten your belts, please."

He folded up the horoscope of Jacy Florister, Esq., manager of the Flower Theater, London, England, who was on his way to confer with the American squad.

Los Angeles to New York, New York to London, London to New York—this was the rhythm of the future. London—New York—New York—London.

It would work out.

He spoke to her over cocktails, in a restaurant on Surrey Place:

"The final key has always eluded me," he said, "and I've decided that my search is as sterile and misdirected as the alchemist's search for the philosopher's stone. I've decided it is an error to think in terms of some secret or key or formula—something you can grasp in your hand, rather than

something that grasps you in its hand . . . But I am wrong. There is a secret, and it is now in the hands of evil and ignorant men. A secret beside which the atomic bomb is a noisy toy . . .”

She grimaced, sipped a little more cheap wine.

“Nightfall is even now being assembled, in the mountains of the world. Strange dung-dripping creatures are being manufactured in the madness of three men—three men who have unlocked nature’s deepest secret, the *genetic code* itself.”

She smiled a kindly smile. “That’s not news, Harry. We’ve been reading about this in the newspapers for some time.”

“What you’ve been reading about are the paltry chemical games of a few Swiss scientists . . . What I am telling you about is something altogether different, and infinitely more sinister.”

“Let’s go to my room.”

“Alright.”

They walked the fog shrouded avenue to her house, climbed the dark stair with its heavily ornamented railing.

“We must be very quiet. Dr. Rodin will be sleeping.”

There was a blue rug on the floor of her room, one chair, one chest, and a narrow bed. Stockings hung in the bathroom. A curious luminosity from the garden, where a lush red magnolia peeked in through an open shutter. Sometimes at dawn the gulls would come and walk busily about on her windowsills, jerking their little bodies like pigeons in sunlight.

She began undressing immediately, while he murmured stray strands of information in warning tones, about the cellular panic soon to inundate the world. “Madness. It’s pure madness. They’ve broken the locking system which gives form to matter . . . My dear Esmerelda, they are about to overthrow the principle of creation itself, dissolve the lovely structured essences of nature until only chaos prevails . . .”

She pulled the sheet up to hide her lovely vulnerable hands. The short nails that would take months to grow and acquire the elegance of the rest of her . . . He perused her drab body, saw the thoughts of sexual surrender racing in her eyes. Well, he thought, I got a sufficient number of sentiments into sentences. I have offended no one's taste and honesty. Now it is time to make love . . .

In the morning she rose first, irradiating herself. The creamy look returned and the lilt at the corners of the mouth. It was Jacy's doing: he had taken charge.

Someone could be heard moving about in the lower rooms. They surmised it was Doctor Rodin, getting ready to receive his early patients.

"I had a dream," he said.

"Oh? What was it?"

"I don't remember. It was one of those exquisite dreams from which there is a half-waking and then a sinking back into the dream, which begins all over again, only the second time it's a nightmare."

"Oh! I'm sorry." She looked visibly pained, as if it had been herself who had caused him to dream poorly.

At that moment a knock at the door. It was Ernest.

"Will you have eggs?" he inquired. His voice was low pitched, but delivered with singular intensity. You could tell he was madly fighting off the orders of Dr. Rodin, which still resounded in his skull . . .

"Why yes, thank you Ernest. And orange juice for me please."

"I'll skip breakfast," said Jacy.

"Oh, my dear! You must have a nibble!" The montage speeded up. "Remember we're going a long ways into the mountains, there won't be any restaurants up that way."

"Mmmm. All right then. Eggs eggs eggs! Eggs for Jacy, please. That's me. An egg for Jane too, Sir Ernest of the old school. Or will she eat two? Cook her two anyway—"

Ernest bowed and slipped away into the mist on the patio. Jane and Jacy turned toward each other to gaze into morning eyes. Jacy saw men and women hobbling forward on crutches to meet newcomers without unwrapping the overcoats which bound their knees. Jane saw a tall San Antonio man in somber black strolling about, hoping to find his horse.



Across the street Mrs. James Abbot was preparing hot cereal at her stove when her kitchen began to tilt toward the back yard. A two-inch crack opened in the wall next to her refrigerator and a voice issued from the crack:

"Many times the idea has occurred to me that in certain serious moments in life some Spirit of the outer world becomes suddenly embodied in the form of an ordinary person and influences us without the individual in question having any knowledge of it or remembering anything about it."

Then the kitchen tilted back toward the front yard (and my house) and the crack neatly closed.

I was a shade perturbed. Nothing to signify, really, but still just a spot concerned. As I sat in the old flat, idly touching the strings of my banjolele, an instrument to which I had become wildly addicted of late, you couldn't have said that the brow was actually furrowed, and yet, on the other hand, you couldn't have stated absolutely that it wasn't. Perhaps the word "pensive" about covers it. It seemed to me that a situation fraught with embarrassing potentialities had arisen.

Embarrassing? Well, distasteful. What of poor Mrs. Abbott? I had spent years trying to convince her that she needn't put a period after Mrs, to which she repeatedly agreed but continued to dot her title. Insecurity. A woman

needs security. Some of them need to be behind bars. And now this. She was passive, frightened, naive.

To help her gain a feeling of power I suggested that she strike the couch from a standing position with a tennis racquet. Her reaction to my suggestion was surprising. She picked up the racquet gingerly, made a tentative gesture of hitting the couch, then dropped it precipitously, as though it were a loaded gun or a dismembered arm. She began to shake and to jump all over the room. It was several minutes before she could bring herself to pick up the racquet again. She struck another blow, damn well ruining my couch, and went jumping away, waving her arms like a bird.

And so it is with the friendships of mature years. In youth we sport and laugh with creatures giddy as ourselves, and think that we love them as we can never love again. But our winged friends fly away with the sunshine and leave us regretfully treading a solitary road.

Under the edge of my cap jutted a long broken road that started out in one direction and continued in another. Beneath it, a yellow-white mustache broke away on either side like foam cloven by a prow.

I returned neither that night, nor the next, nor on any night thereafter. And that is where my story ends—or begins, for I am returning in a hundred million ways. I told you, taking the words right out of my own mouth, embodied in the form of an ordinary person.

Finally the head of this person begins to move. I'm not sorry, thinking perhaps I'll have something radical to do before long. I can't leave her for a moment and put on the other glove. It is almost light now. What time is it? I asked the other. She didn't know.

"Steve Katz, if you're listening, don't take this to heart, but . . ."

It's something new. One guy keeps asking whether you want to write symphony music and the other guy makes

peculiar noises with his mouth. But the priest? The priest knows nothing.

The priest knew only that he came into church one morning and found Ernest squatting on the pavement mending a hole in his sox. He was such a good workman that they let him stay. They never knew where he came from. They didn't even know his nationality.

"Compadre, you know better the other?"

"Right. That's what I it seemed to me they used to you know they'd lie down in the middle of the aisle and cry, the women that is. And my brother Jesus would come in here, like something real off the street, and ho ho hum shout 'gimme that other transcript so I can read back Hemingway in his breakfast orange juice.' But that is just not what happened."

At that very moment, since the sunset was approaching, the crocodiles began to break their noses. After a great pain a formal feeler comes along the drain. The nerves sit ceremonious on their tombs. Wax is applied, the stiff quickens, the feet make mechanical go round along the boards of the floor. Around the ground of the air a quartz lamp flashes the signal for supper.

"Ernest! Ernest, it's time to eat!"

Ernest was soon located; for as Jacy came out into the corridor a voice filtered through the ventilator above the kitchen door. It was a low pitch, but delivered with singular intensity: "Its just something—wow—it's like a real thing that happened to me!"

The other guests took chairs around the big table. A nostalgic conversation ensued, gathering in energy and volume until nearly everyone forgot about the delicious turkey that was being served up.

"Christmas is going to be cancelled this year because of the Vietnam war."

"I knew we would get around to politics. Get it and forget it."

"I wish it could all get into perspective, don't you?"

"Yea, shit."

"I betcha a lot of fags picked up on that. If he was Superman he could have stole it."

"Yea, like Clark Kent or *Under a Glass Bell* by Anais Nin."

"That's a secret lesbian book."

"Right!" (laughter all round)

"There seems to be a lot of things going on underneath the story. Of course I wouldn't know about that 'cause I wasn't around at the time."

"When I was a child, well, it seems to me they used to you know they'd lie down in the middle of the aisle and take their clothes off."

For some minutes Dr. Rodin appeared plunged in meditation. Now he removed his pipe from his lips and spoke. "Its been a revivifying experience for Alice. We were commenting on it the other night at supper and saying that she really has come out of her shell."

"What about Jacy? Has he found work in Paris yet?"

"No, but Jane has agreed to support him if he'll fuck her at 6 A.M. instead of during the late show which she hates so much to miss."

"Oh, I'll bet Giorno was in on that."

"No, but he knew someone who was. What a horrible world they live in."

"The world of moola."

"Hey, that's a great title for a book about money! You know? Or economics or something?"

"*The World of Moola* by R. Mutt."

"You know what *moog* means in Armenian?"

"What?"

"It means *cutie*."

"Oh that's right, didn't Saroyan have a character by that name?"

"The world of paint."

"The world of paint. Yea, right, and we didn't think in any other medium."

"We thought in colored neon."

"Right. Flashing." Burp. Cat sounds under the table. A peculiar wet noise was heard approaching.

"Ah," Dr. Rodin ejaculated (all over the crepes!), "it's Barney Rosett! Not to be confused with Barney Rosset!"

Barney Rosett nodded and scraped and looked about the room pretending that no one was in it. But there were really about thirty-five people sitting around a long table and they were all looking at him!

"So sorry I'm late," he said. "I've been busy antiquing the beams all afternoon."

Dr. Rodin didn't especially like this man and his secret spite was expressed by loud puffing on his pipe. Huge clouds of snow-apple pipe tobacco smoke began to roll through the room. Everyone coughed intermittently. Ernest slipped away under cover of the smoke screen to finish his socks.

"Wonderful! He's one of my heros. Did you ever read his poetry?"

"Nup. Is he a good poet?"

"Is he good? What are you, a capitalist swine?" (laughter)

"Well, now that you put it in such endearing terms . . ."

"Ho Chi Minh wrote poetry?"

"Yea, he has a book of poetry that he wrote in prison you know?"

"Socialist poetry?"

"I thought it was Mao Tse Tung that wrote a book of poetry."

Barney Rosett, in the space of the thirty seconds since his entrance, had succeeded in capturing the attention of all present. Rodin was fuming (sic) and gave a secret signal to Alice to bring out the Rouge Flambeau.

"Hey, get the cat, she's growling!"

The cat, rather a large Siamese, had, it seemed, sensed the vibratory effervescence of its master, Dr. Rodin, and proceeded to sink its rather pointed teeth into the calf of Mr. Rosett.

"Hey! Get that foul animal off of me!"

"Minraud! Stop that Minraud!"

"This one's for the east coast," said Jane, running to help Alice with the dessert.

Four strong arms grappled with the hissing feline, and blood was spurting everywhere, all over the napkins and the chalices, all over the freshly shampooed carpet. At that moment Ernest ran back in to see what the commotion was and collided with the huge dessert platter coming the other way. What a scene! Meringue and marmalade over everything, just like in an old time movie. Rodin took the opportunity to slip away through the curtains onto the patio where he could puff his pipe in peace and muse on the orangeness of the harvest moon. Minraud, disengaged from her captors, followed suit and was soon rubbing against her master's leg, purring contentedly.

Within, the conversation resumed.

"What a cat!"

"Is that a poop I smell?"

"Yea."

"Hot poop! Pop hoop! Pot hoop!"

"Pop. Powp. Pooooop. The pop eats hot poop!"

"The pope pops pop poop. Vatican blues."

"Maybe the big bands are coming back."

"That's one of my favorite clichés. I can't believe it that that was actually being said in all seriousness five years ago. *The big bands are coming back*. Woo!"

"That's great 'cause like . . . ya know it's got to be a contradiction."

"I don't know, I found she especially hates that. She's incredibly mild mannered."

The night flares dwindled. Everyone heaved a sigh and relaxed. Alice led a parade into the livingroom and there the party gathered on rugs and couches to watch the flickering flames of a pine log fire. Everyone wondered what had happened to Rodin, no one suspected that the normally bouyant and extroverted old character actor was at this moment sulking on the veranda, with only his cat and the autumn moon for company.

But soon, in the space of night sky illuminated by orange shooting moonbeams, there appeared curving gray strips, arranged in ascending tones, the last of which faded into the darkness.

Dr. Rodin's attention had been fixed on this emergence for some time, though his aged, thin, intelligent lips continued to pull long and deeply on the pipe. The smoke would billow from his head, clinging to his generous moustaches and raging eyebrows, rolling upward to the fine, thick, white mane that burst from his skull. The strange strips of gray deepened in the graduations, as if a massive rainbow had been expanded and reproduced in black and white on the great everlasting page that is our sky.

Then, abruptly, it was gone.

Inside, the guests had proceeded as far as coffee; soup to nuts was their goal. Dr. Rodin slipped inside through the curtains and slid into an easy chair next to one occupied by Louise Malaronde. She was noticed dropping another lump in her tea, inclining an ear as she detected a faint rumble within the walls of her ancient body. She yawned—almost dozing—

opened her eyes and was surprised to find Rodin sitting opposite her. Sensing that she had been caught in a failing of the old, she roared indignantly:

"What did you say?"

The meaning of particular signals and of various expressive movements and sounds is not determined by an individually acquired convention, as is the case with human words, *bz mz fz*, but by innate instinctive norms of action and reaction. But Rodin knew what she was going to say even before she raised her eyelids, and she knew that he was there and that he knew what she was about to say: this of course had no bearing whatsoever on the inevitability of her saying it, nor did it deter his forthcoming remark, which was subject to the same instinctive laws as hers:

"I said you are looking more lovely than ever."

"Whatever beauty I might have is equalled only by your diplomacy," she parried.

"A diplomacy surpassed only by your wit," he thrust.

"Would you fetch me—not to change the subject—a triple brandy. . . doctor's orders," she smiled graciously and peered about his face.

"Love to," he said, moving his elbows like the wings of a chicken. Then, rising, he shook out the long roll of his robe in a regal, virile line, knocking his cigar from the table as he did so. He tied the belt very tightly, and, his heart hot with love and eagerness, strode like a conqueror down the hall, the cigar riding, for awhile, in the folds of his robe.

Maria instantly nodded out. Her unconsciousness spun downward, a swirling orange blue blur, as her ego let out the line. Then it rose to the seventh floor, then a downward dip to the fourth floor (the crowd gasped), then back to the tenth floor, where it hit her optic nerve and began to spin wildly.

She edged her way through the mourners, Minraud, true friend that he was, following her. First he suppressed his

laughter, then he said, "All those present were offended with you for this—except the deceased," and as he spoke there were tears in his eyes. And indeed, who knows if, amongst all those mourners at the graveside, we two, with our brandy in the dispatch case, were not the nearest soul-mates to the old doctor.

There is always the remote possibility that he is not deceased. Provision for premature burial had been made: if the name of the inventor could be considered prophetic, the invention of Albert Fearnought of Indianapolis, Indiana, should give us cause for hope. His "Grave Signal" patented in 1882 consisted of an elaborate device to release a flag through the end of a tube which projected up from the foot of the grave if its occupant were to move a hand. Picture the scene. A deep hole in the ground, a box at the bottom of the hole, and a tube projecting up from the box. We are standing there, the wind is moving through the willows and the small flowers that grace the ground are nodding softly, tears swell in their ducts and burst forth onto the ground. Suddenly everyone is screaming and running pell-mell from the grave-site. A bolt of lightning explodes from the roaring clouds. It stabs the coffin, but—miraculously!—is frozen, a solid bolt of lightning, fixed forever in place, a magic monument to the great doctor.

"Squeak." A noise from the tube. The ground around us is shattered, by the beating of our dear friend's enormous heart. In a moment he emerges grinning from the carefully chiseled pit, dripping silt and sand.

He burned what was left of New York that morning at three. He took a match and moved into the city, touching the walls here and there with the flame. The city bloomed in great splashes of heat and light, it was ten square miles of illumination, big enough to be seen on Mars.

His heart beating rapidly with pain he returned to the hut. He held up a dusty bottle to the light. He poured five

glasses for the friends. Then he went out of the room. "Where are you going, Charles?" No answer. They heard the dim thuds of his footsteps ascending the hall stairs . . . "That man!"

They found him at six-thirty the next morning in the attic. The entire house was polished to brilliance. They found him in the attic polishing old trunks and old frames and old silver candlesticks and old chairs and old toys and vases and rocking horses and dusty civil war coins and old nails in the floorboards. He was half through the attic when the police officer walked up behind him with drawn revolver. "Polish?" asked Rodin, eyeing the gun.

"No, Irish," said the cop. "I'm afraid you'll be having to come with me, old lad."

Rodin shrugged, muttered something about the mice licking his stamp collection. He peered upwards. "Look," he said.

"What?"

"In the sky. Already. On the blackness a little touch of blue. See! The stars seem larger, the little ones and all those dime nebulosities we saw in empty space—they grow bright!"

The officer grunted. "Come with me," he said, poking Rodin with the gun.

Swiftly, steadily the day appeared. Grey summit after grey summit was overtaken by the blaze, turning the air to smoking white intensity. A surging bank of fog crept along to the west of us. The distant cliffs receded farther and farther, looming and changing through the whirl, foundering and vanishing in the confusion of sound. Nearer and nearer the steaming advance, as fast as the cloud in the prairie west wind. A rose haze, strange reddish shapes, tongues of vermillion flame writhed and danced. Spirals of vapor poured out of the long crag of night. A thin edge of intolerable effulgence that became a blazing sceptre, hurling its shaft of

heat. Blinded I groped for my incandescent blanket. The aerial garment of advancing day, a touch of the sun, the ground suddenly coughing under us a paste, a mud, a slushy liquefaction that hissed and bubbled into gas. I saw bubbles dancing on the dome. I saw the ghost of old Peliazar stomping out a melody of danger . . .

Then the gentleman on my left sat down and the gentleman on my right rose.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, and went on to speak about the art and poetry of the Romantic Era and of the Present. He also referred several times to the poetry which was going to be delivered here, and on these occasions he made a little bow in the direction of his left foot. I looked at the gentleman on my left and at the gentleman on my right. I was wondering which of them was the poet under surveillance when a terrible suspicion came into my mind. At that exact moment there appeared with terrific clarity on the retinas of my eyes the poster I'd seen hanging in the tobacconist's window, and I suddenly realized that unrealized notion which had impressed itself so deeply on my visceral organs that it could not be verbalized. Yes, I was quite sure now. In big red heavy letters there was my own name on the poster, smoke drifting above it.

My first reaction was to flee the scene of this obviously practical joke. But after awhile a terrible feeling that no, it wasn't that, it was something else, something different and more horrible, came upon me. For some years I had been aware that there was something wrong with my memory. I was quite conscious that there was a hole in a certain area of my brain, where the memory trails off into the unconscious. Had in truth I been invited to read this evening, and forgotten all about it? No, it couldn't be, and yet . . .

Suddenly, as if I were caught in a dream of undisciplined dimensions (sic), Mrs. Sam appeared in the place of the gentleman on my left. Three caustic doodles were

arranged in a savage circle around her left eye. In the center of the explosion four carnivorous fish could be seen nibbling speculatively at Mr. Sam's image, which floated in a resinous bath at the core of the apple (of her eye)—natch. Mrs Sam, dusty with debris and fallen plaster, waved impatiently towards six vanishing birds. These birds flurried east, bearing her copy of Semen's *Reservoir*.

I spoke directly to Mrs Sam, ranging over a veritable card catalogue of subjects, finally coming to rest on one subject that captivated my interest: herself. "Oh lovely señora, you of the splendid voice! How I love you in your trembling garment of love lace, your dark and mysterious breasts so visible to my x-ray eyes. Dr. Rodin is stranded in my splattered fermentation, a breeze is blowing directly onto the playing field from the left..." And more of the same. She was savagely beautiful and I wanted to rip away that thin garment she wore and have a go at fucking what I imagined would be the most voluptuous cuntflap I had ever occasion to kiss.

Mrs Sam was one girl in a million. She was four feet seven inches and wore sombrero and buckskins. A lovely electric revolver graced her gunbelt. I watched in awe as she mounted the revolver and fired it six times into her snatch. She then adjusted her garter with silken fingers and fixed me in a stare of such benevolence that I began to cry... I found myself falling, falling, falling, falling, into her arms and past her teeth and out toward the tonsil mountains of her throat, and out past third and down the left base line into the stands of her esophagus... And there was nothing I could do to stop this delicious falling. Nothing to do but acquiesce and continue falling, toward the plastic heart which I knew was beating weakly beneath the luscious lumps of her breasts.

"Does a plastic heart have love in it?" I asked.

"My dear, you surprise me! Of course a plastic heart has love in it. The love in a plastic heart is the love of many people who love other people and don't want other people to

die. So these people work all day and often all night to build a heart that will make people live longer. If you can think of how much love there would be in hundreds of real hearts, then you know how much love there is in a plastic heart!"

I was modified by this discourse. I was taken aback and set afloat, only to go awash on the shores of her next most confounding remark: "Do not tell the white people about this, dear friend, but Jesus is now upon the earth and he has a plastic heart. The dead will walk, they are alive again, through the miracles of modern science. Do not refuse to work for the white man and do not make any trouble until you leave them. They all have plastic hearts and these plastic hearts are easily wounded by contempt. And when the earth shakes do not be afraid. It will not hurt you. It is only the earth's plastic heart doing pushups . . ."

Her eyes were pins of human light sparking in an empty auditorium. All the other folks kept their eyes turned away, deep in themselves and the grey shadows around us. More grey shadows rolled off the stage, propelled by the fatuous voice of Rodin in drag. Yes, and I had not expected that.

Raymond Queneau was in the audience, sitting not too far behind us. He congratulated me in a hushed whisper on my recent success in the advertising game. I blushed, nodded, felt secretly pleased that this eminent author whom I so much respected should see fit to congratulate me! And all this time the eyelids of Mrs Sam were fluttering, irises glowing and flowing clockwise round their darkened pupils, and her hand was buried in my coat sleeves, tickling the crook of my arm.

I made a tremendous effort to break out of her aura and get to the free air of the streets. Branches from her forehead were wrapping me in vines, vines of jewel light, frosted brightness, the hammer of night was pounding the terrace of my skull . . .

I finally did burst free and ran so fast toward the exit that everyone turned angry eyes in my direction for disturbing their span of attention. When I reached the street I discovered that my wristwatch was gone.

The lovely bitch! The lovely bitch . . . I'd like to . . . but no, what purpose would it serve? None at all. None at all. Imagine, getting disturbed over a lost wristwatch when tomorrow is the millenium and one-third of the world will perish.



Imagine that!" she tittered. "Only two-thirds remaining."

"Perhaps it is best," lamented Maria. "Dear me, when I think of the tortured human beings writhing in straitjackets or perhaps held down in hot water by canvas fitted around their necks and the sides of the tubs, as I have seen them in too many institutions and psychopathic wards, which I have visited, I long to give these people injections."

"Injections?"

"Vitamin B6 and magnesium."

It was a shame, Lydia thought, patrolling the garden with a contemplative eye. Standing in a dazzle of full sunlight was the whitest young woman she had ever seen. The girl blazed. Her skin, which had the thick, mat white of a gardenia, though heavily powdered, shone through the make-up like a pearl impossibly luminous. Under a close white felt helmet her hair showed in two white-gold wedges. Her plain white pleated frock fluttered, outlining a short figure, too broad across the shoulders for beauty.

This white-hot creature seemed to have nothing better to do than glare toward the hotel and eat up the inside of her mouth with strong little jaws which twisted the drooping scarlet heart on the outside till it looked like a tortured valentine.

"Hell's bells," cursed the person, and worse than that, she fell on her knees and took to searching the ground beneath the hedge.

From the point of dialogue, the task was relatively easy because the scene bridges two conversations that deal with separation. Visually, however, the cut version seems incongruous. The young lady, who has her fall removed during the deleted passage, suddenly appears in short hair. And a man has materialized at her side.

It was dusk and as they were seated next to each other on the sofa, his arm around her shoulders while she held his free hand moist in both of hers; as the fire glowed a powerful wind rose and it rained outside so that drops on the dark panes, which were a deep blue of ink, by reflection left small snail's tracks across and down the glass in rows, for Mrs Weatherby had not drawn the curtains; as he could outline her heavy head laid next to his only in a soft blue with darker hair over her great eye above the gentle fire-wavering profile of her nose, and, because he was nearest to this living pile of coals in the grate, he could see into this eye, into the two transparencies which veiled it down to that last surface which at three separate points glowed with the fire's same rose; as he sat at her lazy side it must have seemed to him he was looking right into her, relaxed inert and warm, a being open to himself, the fire, and the comfort of indoors, but with three great furnaces quiescent in her lovely head just showing through eyeholes to warn a man, if warning were needed, that she could be very much awake, did entirely love him with molten metal within her bones, within the cool back of her skull which under its living weight of hair was deeply, deeply known by his fingers.

Between the interior of this sphere and space was a thin wall. The cold of space was seeping through, and the air layer next to the wall would be precipitating its moisture. Ice

would form on the wall thus forming a high-pressure area. The hotter air near the center of the sphere would make a low-pressure area. So, winds would be generated by the cold high-pressure air moving toward the center into the warm low-pressure region.

When I looked at her face, with its enormous green tilted eyes, I wanted to turn away. It was one of those moments when reality breaks through everything we know, when the eye of someone we know becomes just an eye, then just a composition of lines and colors, then simply something we are seeing, then we are merely seeing, then we are ebbing away before our very consciousness. . . searing flame engulfed me as the propellant charge shot me, seat and all, through the ball of fire: spatially an object may be three-dimensional in shape, may even create a three-dimensional effect through a juxtaposition of solids and voids coupled with a simultaneous diversity of views, or it may create a three-dimensional effect on a two-dimension surface. The state of Michigan, in the memory of one who is familiar with its topography, may actually materialize on the surface of a map of the terrain.

The hairy endings of the auditory nerve shuddered like weeds in a rough sea; a vast number of obscure miracles were performed in the brain, a dazzling toccatto of synaptical energy, and Rawson Clivedale ecstatically whispered, "Bach!"

Or "back!"

Now, in the monastery, I tell Father Jane, "Well, he knew the risk and was willing to pay the price. How nice that he prayed before starting out."

"Yes," says Father Jane, "even a gangster prays."

I saw a well-dressed, smallish man in the gutters of New York, clutching his head and asking for a priest. He himself was a priest, but he did not feel he could perform the last rites on himself. I too am a priest, of sorts, I mean I have a diploma and everything which says I am a certified minister

of the American Religious Church, and so I knelt down and mumbled some gibberish into his ear: it was the tone that mattered, plus a little God thrown in here and there. The man died believing I had absolved him of his sins, and isn't that what matters? Then he saw the endless disc which God flings, every evening, in as straight a line as possible, with its parallel, into infinity. Each time it goes a little further, but never far enough. It is shocking to realize how much he has grown. We are several miles away from his feet and we have to point our chin up, practically breaking our necks, to scan the clouds, waiting for a feature to break through.

Then he takes a tape from a flat cardboard box and fits in onto his machine. But soon the time came when my heart was so heavy that I grabbed at anything that was good for a laugh. I even began to look kindly on Rawson's pet baboon, in spite of the fact that he was chewing the seat cover off the ambulance. The ambulance moves, sunlight through the windows, glimpses of chartreuse trees in bud. An oxygen cup is placed over my mouth. Another baboon bursts from my brain.

With this baboon I used to play duets, he on the violin, I at the piano. One day he surprised me by saying that Mozart was the greatest composer of all. Beethoven, he said, created his music, but the music of Mozart was of such purity and beauty that one felt he had merely found it, that it had always existed as part of the inner beauty of the Universe, waiting to be revealed.

You can see how reasonable this is if you think of agitating a stick in a lake to create waves. Whether you wiggle the stick from a stationary pier, or from a rushing speedboat, the waves, once generated, are on their own, and their speed had nothing to do with that of the stick.

To move within the zone of indifference, such is the ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living that this

ecstasy comes when one is most alive and totally unaware that one is alive. This ecstasy, this divine oblivion, comes to the artist in his sheet of flame; it comes to the soldier, mad on the stricken field; it comes to the bricklayer as he is placing the final brick; and it comes to Rawson Clivedale, sounding his old wolf-cry, straining after the food that was alive and which fled before him in the moonlight.

After he catches the tomatoes, he pours them into huge containers, partially filled with liquid. The ripest tomatoes sink to the bottom and the less ripe ones float at various levels. Scientists say that ripeness affects the specific gravity of the tomato and thus its floating ability.

"Then what does he do with them?" inquired Maria in a tone suggesting more politeness than genuine interest.

The face of her companion grew dim. It had been struck by something from within. Her eyes looked out at the world, not to receive impressions, but to send a message.

"Yeah, it's gonna be just like I said, everybody'll be running in these cycles, ya know."

"One hundred and forty-two conversational positions."

"By that time I'll be still alive."

"You hope."

"Huh. Still milking that old joke?"

"Listen, it's just very different, you know, and people relate to each other differently and . . . it's just . . . entirely different, you know? I don't feel as *free*, you know what I mean?"

"Yes, oh, by the way, about the grapes. I know you want me to tell you the truth about it, and the truth is that when I got back home from Vermont I found this package against the door, and could smell it fifty feet away. The grapes, I'm sorry to say, were reduced almost to a mass of rotting pulp, there were a few good ones and I picked out as many as I could, enough to get the taste and flavor of home

again, but the rest I had to throw away as the little bugs began to swarm around them."

"I understand. Don't worry about it."

"I know you don't believe me."

"I believe you."

"Do you think I disobeyed the rules?"

"I dunno. Language is the woman. Make your own rules."

"Oh man, are you still hung up in sex?"

"Listen, there's another side to that question. Every second there's airplanes, there's lights, going back and forth, you dig?"

"Sounds like Rodin talking."

"What?! He's a horrible guy, man! I don't hold him up as any great figure of the imagination, do you?"

"Well, I spent a nice evening with him once smoking dope and listening to Billy Holiday records. I didn't think he was any great genius, but . . . I did hear that there was another side of him that is really *horrible*."

"You mean he freaks out like a maniac?"

"Not that. I heard that too, but not that."

"What then?"

"Oh, I don't think we should talk about it. I mean there's seven hundred thousand guys all with a ticket that says they're a teacher, you know? So why pick on one lone liberated mind?"

"Well, I always thought of him as special. I remember a couple of times he came over and said let's do this and everybody went out, ya know, it was something nobody would have thought of and it was completely silly but everybody had a lot of fun, you know, and just sort of got out of their groveling holes and . . ."

"Well, now he's packed up and gone to Asshole, Michigan."

"Good riddance."

She rose, irradiating relief. The creamy look returned and the lilt at the corners of the mouth, and it was Jacy's doing. He had taken charge. She would catch her train.

He turned back and now he noticed near the tunnel-steps a small display window crammed with bright junk. Here was a place to make enquiries. He tried the door and found it locked; but just inside the window an envelope had been propped up. 'Back in five minutes,' was scribbled on it in a woman's hand. He glanced at his wrist-watch, and while he waited he examined the display within.

"Oh, there you are!"

"Have you been waiting long?"

"Not so long. The polarity thing is so much a part of me now, I don't notice the passage of time."

"Well, bring your dichotomies inside and we'll have some tea."

There was a dull pause, broken only by the whine of electric fire. The door to the little shop opened and they entered quickly through the beaded curtains.

"Maybe that's the first stage," he was saying. "But this thing about arrangements . . . I think I remember now where it first got into my mind. It was in highschool. I was reading this guy H.P. Lovecraft and . . . when he got into his cosmic tales, you know, there were all these prehuman civilizations that had lived on earth and some of them had been beaten and sent outside . . . by these Elder Gods, you know, who had *locked* them into a different dimension. And the people of earth who wanted to free them could only do that when the stars fell into the right arrangement, do ya understand?"

"Sugar?"

"No."

"Yes, it's incredible. All these weird people feeding into this incredible *switchboard*. It's very different from the world I remember as a child."

"That stands to reason. When you were a child you didn't know you had little parasites living on your eyelashes, either."

"Damn rotifers."

"Well, listen, they probably figure they got their *responsibility*, you know, toward the ecology of the body. And toward their readers, those mysterious whisps who inhabit the subways of the esophagus. Little straphangers late for work in the hair follicles . . ."

She laughed, her eyes betrayed an admiration for this man of sawdust with the voracious mouth. A fluid of mystical collaboration was slowly building up between them, both of them were aware of it with the exquisite sensitivity of master alchemists.

"I . . . I . . . would say that the uh highest levels of the spirit can be unlocked by uh . . . symbols, wouldn't you?"

"It would seem so."

"I guess that's what art is all about, isn't it?"

"It appears that way."

"It's work, our work, but it's really play, isn't it? I mean we are in love and all power belongs to love, to do anything, isn't that so?"

"Well . . . they either do or they don't, I guess."

"And if they do?"

"And if they don't?"

"I could take my shoe off and use my bare foot."

"That's prehistoric."

"Like the aircraft we sighted last Sunday?"

"Like that."

He turned on his own private lamp, and as he did so there was a buzz. As he pressed the reception button a cathedral-organ voice came emotionally over the wire. "Fred! Beatie! I'm in total darkness. What monstrous thing is happening now?!" The voice rose to hurricane violence as it howled past, and in the mirror he saw the door behind the counter burst its catch and swing back, revealing the

widening oblong of the inner room, the bedpost with a bright blue coat and a tie hanging over it, the corner of the dressing-table and the small, darkly shaded lamp.

Lying on the bed was the figure of a man, naked. As the door swept open the man raised his head and looked at the two lovers, a smile of unspeakable beatitude crumbling his facial earth . . .

He belched.

The darkness receded and diminished as the scene around it was increasingly revealed, the way, as we allow our eyes to travel down long paths made of words, the meaning of a sentence grows in clarity and fullness until it must, by necessity, stop. But stop only to recharge its energy, so that an incredible amount of activity was taking place between each sentence, some of which was registered on the faces of the speakers, some of which registered on the faces of the listeners, both groups taking care, at the same time, to display a series of expressions and attitudes which were utterly false, that is, attitudes which these people did not themselves believe in. Or so they thought.

The gray, bearded face of Doctor Rodin took on an aura of extraordinary naivete, of innocence even, as Maria Malaronde approached him, a strange gentleman on her arm. Apparently this stranger, so incongruous beside the majestic height of the great lady, was an old friend, an idea which struck Rodin as odd, since he had known her quite well himself for almost thirty years.

"Doctor," she began, then faltered . . . what is it? . . . "Doctor, I have the great pleasure to present to you my nephew, Mr. P. P. Diapers, of the Dirty Doodie Diaper Company. P.P., Doctor Hector Rodin."

The Doctor bowed gravely, his beard brushing his knees, at which moment he simultaneously noted, with irritation, that his shoes were unlaced and that his back had a crick in it, so that when Mr. Diapers had returned to an erect

position, he found himself confronted with the massive back of the doctor. For a moment he imagined that this grand eccentric might be starting off the evening with flair, but as the seconds went by, and Maria grew agitated, and the doctor began to grunt loudly, he flew to the aid of the bent octogenarian.

"It is six o'clock, sir," he said.

Later, listening to the tape recorded in the room that day, Rodin heard that urgent, "It's six o'clock, sir," and almost immediately after that a series of whistles and a sentence in an almost human voice. The sentence could have been merely a bad imitation of, "It's six o'clock," but Rodin and the rest of the people listening to the tape thought it sounded more like, "This is a trick," very clearly said, even if in more of a hiss than a statement. Rather than providing further evidence, however, the tape served only to complicate the already existing information.

It turned out, later, that Diaper's father, several times a day, would stand before the mirror, holding his son's head alongside his own so that the boy could see his own lip movements at the same time as those of his father. With his hand, the elder Diapers would move the boy's lips, forcing him to make sounds. The first sound he learned was that of a locomotive, then gradually how to fill in the scene, so that by the time he reached puberty, the shades of evening had enveloped the snorting locomotive and the flying carriages, which seem rapidly to wind their way along the track to the shoulders of the youth . . . red and yellow sparks and rays of light proceeded from the opened furnace of the locomotive, and seemed to cast a wild glow on the cars . . . There is light, too, issuing from the carriages, showing how the passengers inside are passing away the time. Some of them are reading, some sleeping, some talking, some appear sullenly to look out of the windows, then withdraw their visages. A darkened portion of the train is passing a signal-box and the dim light

therefrom faintly lights up part of the train as it passes, leans into a bend, then straightens out and flies along beside the hand of the boy.

To appreciate the nature of this tour de force, one must remember that the darkness was still receding into the background.

"May I suggest, sir, that you simply continue your bow onto the floor? That is, do a somersault."

The aged crook appeared to nod, for he then gave a little push with his toes and, his legs tucked neatly into his beer belly, he completed a very smooth forward roll. No one noticed that he had at the same time managed to tie his shoes.

"Diapers? Diapers, you say?"

"Yes, Hector, Diapers. Of course you silly goose," and here she laughed giddily at her familiarity with the distinguished Nobel Prize winner, "it's not his real name, it was adopted for business reasons."

Before Diapers managed to get in a word, Rodin hastened to ask, "Well, then what is your real name, if I may ask."

"My real name . . . hmmm . . . yes, most interesting . . ." And here his gaze, following the dwindling of his mentality, wandered over the decor of the dining car.

A porter went through the car paging a "Banana god."

"Is that me?" cried Diapers.

Maria placed a calming hand on his arm and gently guided him back into his former repose, casting, as she did, a smile warm with understanding at the Doctor. Yes, he understood, this young man is quite insane. The pretence maintained by Maria was a silent suggestion to Rodin that he too maintain the charade, but it was the identical message her face sent, from time to time, when the Doctor's attention

was absorbed in his dinner, to the wild-haired young man at her side.

Presently, after an evening tour of the various apartments and sleeping accommodations, Maria and the young fellow found themselves sitting in an old-fashioned parlor (lace doilies everywhere), toe to toe in conversation.

"Dr. Rodin is certainly a remarkable individual, wouldn't you say?" the mad youth said abruptly, in the midst of a discussion about the cows and trees whizzing past.

"Why . . . uh, yes, now that you mention it." Maria put a handkerchief nervously to her lips.

"I noticed it right away this afternoon, when we had tea together in the caboose. From the moment our conversation began, Dr. Rodin was entirely himself, relaxed, smiling, bouyant, not a wrinkle on his brow . . . He spoke to me with affection of Adolf Hitler, of Goebels, Himmler, Goring, Doenitz. He spoke of the inhumanity of the conquering Allies toward defeated Germany. He spoke, with hope, of the probability that America would join resurrected Germany in a third World War against Russia. I'm afraid I listened more with wonder than dismay, being something of a Hitlerphile myself. In fact, his accounts of his personal visits with Herr Hitler left me somewhat shaken with admiration . . . Did you know that this Rodin was once a priest, Hitler's personal confessor at the time of the invasion of Poland? And after that, throwing off the holy robes, he became Hitler's personal consultant in all matters relating to the dissecting of Jews? One trembles at the thought—one quakes with awe, yea even adoration of this Rodin, this giant among men!"

The red-haired youth gesticulated wildly, plunging about the narrow compartment with the demeanor of an orangutang. Maria thought quickly how she might calm his fury, lest he break perchance the airtight seal of the windows.

Such an accident would cause both calamity and catastrophe, for the train on which they traveled moved at seven hundred miles an hour, nearly twice the speed of an echo. A continuous vacuum enveloped the plunging express and would suck everyone instantly through the shattered ports into the raging throat of the wind . . . As she began to speak, Maria looked nervously at the red fires that burned brightly in the distant dark outside, and then at the hair of this boy, which seemed as bright as any fire, and twice as wild . . .

"Don't you think that Rodin has become merely a malicious gossip, even as he slides into the senility of his great age, or perhaps he feels embittered toward his fellow Jews, and his memory is faulty, colored by his paranoia. It is extremely doubtful, my dear young man, that this Rodin ever knew Hitler, least of all *spoke* with him. I should know, after all, I have been his lover for thirty-seven years!"

As these words left her full red lips, she raised the bottle of sherry *fino* in a sign that they should drink. The youth grew suddenly quiet, relaxed, even inward, as if the storm of his thoughts had blown out to sea . . . But perhaps it was simply the eye of the hurricane that rested now behind his steel-gray eyes. Perhaps in another moment he would . . .

She took no chances. As she poured the dry delicacy into the thin glasses she rubbed her plump pussy softly against his knee. *Meoowww* her breath seemed to say, as it unfurled across her teeth like the furry flag of the cat nation. The red-haired youth reached around and put his hand under her short skirt and massaged her rear with a soft caress. As he raised the sherry *fino* to his lips, Maria leaned over and stuck her tongue in his ear—

"Ah, señor, señor," she sighed. Then with bold eyes she asked: "Engrase el coche?"

The boy twiddled the dials of her breasts and winked.

"Some other night, babe."

She went limp with desire.

"Señor, you are a man among men."

"No, A boy among men, perhaps, or an adolescent. You see I am a virgin, madame."

"No!" Her tongue literally lolled out of her mouth at the fresh surge of excitement and lust that wracked her libido. The youth smiled, patted her hand, and poured another sherry. He didn't even wince as she bent indelicately to sniff his crotch, almost as a dog would do.

"Yes," she said, "you are a virgin. The odor is significant."

The red-haired youth rose and took down his suitcase from the rack. All this as the train ran clickety-click through the switches and crossings. More trains were visible, on either side, freight trains groaning with cargo for the distant shores, meat and vegetables for the starving farmers. And long passenger trains, silver zephyrs and pullman too, pulled by huge black chugging locomotives that boiled the whitest steam... They were coming into Chicago, hog butcher to the world, axis of the vast wheel of cities glittering in the North American night.

The red-haired one opened his portmanteau carefully, and removed a strange apparatus which he proceeded to inspect and assemble. He then attached a tiny piece of metal, smeared with honey, to the ceiling of the compartment. This was in turn wired to a galvanometer which he placed on the floor of the compartment. Another square of metal, smeared in guava jelly, he stuck among the hairs of Maria's cunt-bag, and then, ignoring her protests, he released about a thousand flies into the room, from a glass jar he had secreted under his socks.

"My dear boy, what are you doing?"

"A simple experiment, my good lady. The electricity discharged by these poor flies will pass through the galvanometer into the folds of your fine Spanish cunt, and as I enter you your cunt will proceed to wobble and sparkle

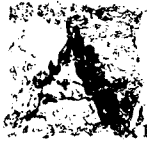
violently, sending you into a sexual tailspin such as you've never experienced."

"Oh!" was all she could say. Neither of them noticed the lines of helmeted policemen—a blue blurr—moving in formation through the streets of the city, nor the crowds of Monday workers, slouch-shouldered and weeping, off to their meager lunches in restaurant and bar, delicatessen and hotdog stand. The Playboy building whizzed past in the jewel-like noon light. The stockyards drew near, with their tantalizing perfume of stench. This was downtown Chicago. This was the flutter of wings of a drowned city, this sound that came muffled and dull through the thick sealed windows of the train . . .

And now his body was making the stock responses. Tightening of the larynx, minimal pain in the frenum, a shuddering along the arteries, a sense of slight levitation. His penis stood straight as steel as he released it from his pants and prepared to enter her. He had an apocalyptical vision of her insides—all a churned mess of slop and fiber, cream oozing sluggishly through the pipes, flavoring liquors ready to self-ignite, a frothing sea of souring wine. A small Indian township could have been nourished for a day on it all, he knew that, and it made him angry somehow to think of that, and his anger made his stub of a prick that much harder and harder and vehement in its plunge.

Outside the procession of the great city's life was still rolling by, great arterial highways full of sound like a mighty wind. He felt a twinge of guilt at his madness, which was now releasing its full fury toward this lovely receptacle, this graven urn of delights, this fleshy cave of night with its face of simple naivete and openness, a child she seemed to him then, as he took her, and he would have been short-circuited by remorse had he not quickly told himself: isn't the angry punitive seed more potent than the good gentle stuff that dribbles out in the pink-sheeted marriage beds? And the such.

How strange to feel one's teeth die, one by one, cell
igniting cell, galaxies of cells in dying brilliance . . .
She had one of those cunts that fits like a glove.



and his hands were chilly.

Long flying curls of water rolled out inside his fingers and broke beneath his fingernails.

Tiny longhaired ideas were gliding in on the rushing surface of his id as he raised his eyes to the blaze of curling tresses and felt himself caught in their swirl and swept away with a throbbing heart amid the lightning and the blasts of a hurricane of beauty.

A bluebird flies over a mountain.

Or heath hen? It sounded like a heath hen. About the size of a ruffed grouse, the heath hen often made a mournful hooting which one observer, myself, said might be simulated by blowing across the open mouth of a small vial. In flight it often gave vent to what sounded, heard in the early morning mists or in the falling light of evening across the vast, storm-buffed plain, like a burst of demonic laughter.

You have also heard the loon laughing under the rocks.

You know that by 1929, a bad year all round, only one heath hen, a male named Murgatroid, survived. It came alone to a field on the farm of James Green in West Tisbury on Martha's Vineyard and went through an abbreviated version of the usual mating ritual. In 1930 it appeared again but omitted any courtship maneuvers and uttered no sound. It came to the same spot once more in the spring of the follow-

ing year and then was seen no more. One animal, and with it its race, disappears into the ecology and the cockroaches applaud as another rises from the depths, like the umbellula, throwing its bluish glow through the dredge net, like dawn when you are in bed with a person whom you love madly and you are fucking slowly and softly rising in the half-light so marvelously that you don't know who you are and the door busts open and a man is spraying bullets into your head . . .

The young man straightened his composure and leaned toward the beautiful figure that was Maria Malaronde.

"Maria," he said, "let me tell you a story. One day I stopped at a red light next to an office building going up in L.A. and I watched the way the hod carriers piled their bricks in the hod, very fast, and in a diamond shape so you could see through all those bricks. The green signal came and I went to the studio and I said, 'Someday I'll do that with girls'—and I did."

Maria appeared uncertain. A man who is in the habit of smiling in the mirror at his handsome face and stalwart figure, if you show him their radiograph, will have face to face with that rosary of bones labelled as being the image of himself, the same surprise of error as the visitor to an art gallery who, on coming to the portrait of a girl, reads in his catalogue, "Dromedary Resting". Or was her confusion this simple? Was it perhaps like that of the observer who on a clear day is gazing down a street which ends a block away with a row of houses forming the background at the end of the street? He is talking to and looking directly at a companion only a short distance away. Soon this person (apparently) begins to move down the street until she [yes, a lady] reaches the background of houses at the end, and then she slowly comes back to her original position. The movement in both directions is distinctly perceived. During this movement there occurs no vagueness of outline or contour, no blurring or confusion of features, no loss or diminution

of consciousness or vision on the part of the observer: the person observed seems distinct and substantial in character. The perceived object moves in relation to surrounding objects. There is no movement of the visual field as a whole. The object decreases in size during the backward movement and increases in size during the forward return movement. The young man, noticing Maria's momentary lapse of attention, appears troubled himself.

"What is it, Maria?" he asked, the question directed more to his lady friend than to himself.

"It? . . . it?"

The two words she had uttered were not the same.

She stood. He rose to meet her. The table fell away beneath them with a dramatic dip. Had someone drugged their beverages?

"I should like to go be in my cabin," she stated.

He walked her to the door, but somehow the image of the hod with its bricks stacked in a diamond shape of girls followed them. This is not uncommon. After-images may be seen after looking intently at any object and then directing one's attention toward a blank surface such as a wall. In this case the blankness had been mental, an emptiness which had thrown the image of the diamond into abrupt relief. But when they arose to go the image was superimposed on their attention so that the head of a bald gentleman near the door appeared to be bathed in sparkles.

Across the aisle from him a squat man in a yellow hat stuffed a dead cigar into the corner of his mouth and rolled a black, four-pound, lopsided ball down the aisle. It curved sharply and made its way between two other balls and toward the target, a smaller white ball. But the ball had been thrown too hard and the bowler's partner, a sturdy woman in her 60's stepped aside as the ball rolled past her, then cackled, "Too much Geritol on that one, Ev."

Ev smirked.

He had expected to see his ball stop next to the smaller ball. It had not done so. The difference between his expectation and the result was the measure of his disappointment, but the disappointment was raised in power like an X in algebra and inside his head he heard a tremendous noise, as if a gigantic rock were striking the head of a great man and the population were raising its voice to sing one long sinister note. Ev was a poor loser.

The golden voice of the Senate.

Foreign wars is the cause of it.

Paw says: it's the Russians. And the fucking Chinese got the ICBM shores of hell extended now along the coast of America, mother turn out the light and sleep in dread. Lay your tiny paperback on the night-table . . .

That night, lying beside his wife, Ev heard the drone of mighty engines in the black sky, the stars went off and on. It was a nightmare, but he awoke only to find she was gone and the figure of a white monk was fleeing across the patio . . . He turned on his side and she was sleeping quietly beside him. She turned on her side spewing hard luck story, he thought of watching a fly on the ceiling. She sounded like the press. He began to read her front page:

"After a short time the casualties moved in single file back up the hill. As they reached the crest of the hill they suddenly spun to the right in unison forming a line. Some dropped to one knee. Then they opened fire on the National Guard."

A horde of newsmen poured into this little town on the northeastern tip of her nose. He sway, his name was blown away in the dust, she leaned toward him and whispered: "you fuck me now?"

She laughed. She put her book out of existence. She assembled her body in its most personal pose. She seeks not to impose idea or image upon the events that followed. But I thought: a fast curve to break your love. It's what you get for

being here, near her. The devil gives you his blessing . . . Strobe view of a football game, the glimmer of a pass interception as it soars across the universe into the kitchen where Maria is emanating soft dissatisfaction.

I reach for her cunt and slash until it is luminous dancing subtle flirtations with the wind god. Back and forth on tiptoe in front of the TV, breaking views of white Pontiacs and fistfights. Now here's the end of *Ulysses* starring Kirk Douglas. Deeply satisfying to the subconscious somehow to see Ulysses returning to Ithaca to kill his fucking enemies.

Rodin hands me a bottle of coke that is cold and flat but quenches my thirst. I swig the cold coke and hand it to Maria. What does living and fighting in the jungle have to do with spending an hour with the kiddies helping them to break windows? China does have the A-bomb you know. Also the H-bomb. Also a population of 800,000,000 people which will double in the next two decades. I surmise she is preparing herself for war.

Listen, Cassaba, I was asleep on the front lawn when the sky opened up and God appeared with all his angels and associates.

"In twenty-four hours," he said, "everyone in the world will die."

So everybody goes in the house and trembles and lays his head against the pillow and smells the dandruff he left there three nights ago and says goodbye little dandruff, we've been together a long time you and I . . .

The sky is dark.

A vulture is sitting on my front lawn.

The sun is coming out from behind some clouds. It is an advertisement for handbags.

I am about to break into song, painful and personal.

"Why, O Lord, why this injustice in your universe?"

The song came as a cavernous sound, strangely melodious, beginning on a low pitch, slowly rising to a higher

frequency at which it sounded for a moment like a combined oboe and muted cornet, trailing off into an eerie high-pitched undulating wail like melancholy bagpipes fading into silence.

And then the silence faded into an auditory void.

"Nobody knows how he makes the sounds," said one of the policemen whom I now recognize to be Rodin. "He has no vocal chords, but we think it has something to do with wind streams flowing through air layers of varying density."

"Now what does this mean?" I asked.

"It means that the Cosmic Tone is not of one wavelength, but that it embraces all wavelengths, like an um-ditty-wah-wah. So we gain a new understanding of the Infinite. The vector here is not one of infinite frequency but it is composed of an infinite number of frequencies, one of which was the famed Golden Voice—frequencies, with infinite tonal significance—cosmically. So what we have here is one dimension, one qualitative dimension: universal periodicity."

The old savant paused to allow his words to sink in. It is possible he noted how they were bouncing off my understanding, because he quickly resumed his explanation.

"Given that I have an iron bar at 0°C. which measures 2 metres. I then heat it to, say, 80°C. and, measuring it again, find that it is now 200.192 cm. It has expanded .192 cm."

"There are a hundred centimeters in a metre," I nodded.

"Right. Okay, now suppose I allow it to cool to 0°C. again and find that it measure, as before, 2 metres, but on heating it up to 80°C. again it still measure 2 metres. Only one thing could have happened. My measure must have expanded in exactly the same proportions as the bar."

Now I understood, "Similarly, there is a difference between the look of an idea and the act of looking at the idea. The latter activity, which attempts to exhibit the ultimate condition of all speech (logos), marks the point of

distinction—a methodological distinction only—between the whatness of the world and its meaningfulness.”

“And when the whatness of the world and its meaningfulness merge into an insoluble unity the Cosmic Tone is heard . . . or should I say Cosmic Tune?”

We are walking towards a dark door through the cracks of which flicker intermittently the Northern Lights. From the other side of the door comes the rattle of something like a rapidfire gun swiftly biting off its belts of cartridges, each one of which is a century.

The door leads to a shadowy space threaded with crackling bits of sprayed lightning. The noise pierces my ears. Somewhere I hear the voice of an elderly man shouting, “I will tell you nothing!” I hold myself straight, rigid in fact, and I button up my overcoat which had brushed against a sinister-looking machine made of copper. Rodin, whose face looks pleasantly benign in the flashing light, takes one step forward. I humbly do the same. The soldiers watch me furtively. I feel partly like a green thumb about to be attacked by wild plants, partly like this simile, self-conscious, doubled back on myself, trapped, hideously trapped in space and time forever.

A few miles across town she cried as she went in and clapped her hands to her head, “Oh, tea, tea, tea and crumpets, how divine of your darkling, and so grand, just for us two. You know I think I will take my hat off,” and doing this she wandered round looking at pictures on the walls.

“They are sending a report,” shouts the venerable Doctor over the din.

One of these was of Nero fiddling while Rome burned, on a marble terrace. He stood to his violin and eight fat women reclined on mattresses in front while behind was what was evidently a great conflagration.

“Negro and his wives,” she said and passed on.

These words enter the basin and, cooled by a stream of water, are transformed into a high-frequency current which is fed into the Cosmic Tone. This streamer with wire coils is the "self" which regulates the frequency of the current, the relay which turns it on and off, as indicated by a key on which a young man wearing a white blouse and shut up in a glass box plays the dots and dashes.

Another was one of those reproductions of French eighteenth-century paintings which shows a large bed with covers turned back and half in, half out of it a fat girl with fat legs sticking out of her night-dress and one man menacing and another disappearing behind curtains.

I was of course both men, or rather a single man sawed in half, the front half approaches menacingly and the back half recedes menacingly: the pleasurable feeling one gets from this is in the act of separation: the woman is sawed in half by the magician and a tall man from San Antonio is wandering around looking for you.

"You are the most beautiful person in the world," I said to her as sincerely as possible.

She burst into tears, her face screwed up and got red and she held her handkerchief to her nose and sniffled as if that was where her tears were coming from.

"Oh my God," I said and then my knees went so that I thought I would sink to the ground, where I was standing, and without doing so I noticed that we are releasing violet flashes from our heads which are floating in strawberry fields. How gingerly I tread! Don't want to crush the strawberries! The fog is rolling in! Will we be able to mow the lawn? Everything about me is not mysterious. A sapper leans over a glass aperture in which he sees how a pump empties a lamp of its molecules. I bend over beside him. In the tube I see a wavy lilac line which grows larger second by second and then fades away in dreamy irradiations in which furrows appear and widen.

The figure of Mr Mickey Mouse is hopping from furrow to furrow. The wider the furrow the longer the leap, until he is making tremendously long leaps. About 800 yards I'd say. All the while he is reading a newspaper.

"Princess Anne Unhorsed," he reads aloud, "Tidworth, England, May 24 (A.P.)—Princess Anne was thrown from her horse in jumping competition today and was heard to say, 'I saw bloody stars.'"

I am moving now with Mickey. Over us the stars, silver on a dark green background, have begun to drip tiny, perfectly round drops of red blood which hit an invisible plane and begin to run in long streaks. Of course it is the Doctor operating.

He looks down at me and says, "Hello there young guy." Quietly he leads the way out of the operating theater and down a long white corridor to a sunny room with a glass wall facing the inevitable fjord. There is a couch by the window and a table of light wood on which water hyacinths are growing in a yellow bowl. The room smells of ozone and flowers.

"The Victorians were great believers in ozone," laughs Rodin, "and it is quite lethal. 'The ozone of the ocean's zone . . . ' Quite silly, of course. But you are not interested in the miscellaneous musings of an old fogey's addled brain."

"Yes I am," I said. And then realizing what I had said I said, "I mean . . ."

Rodin laughed. Then he stopped and laughed once again.

He motioned me to the chair opposite what looks like a bust wrapped in bandages.

"We call her Medusa, now isn't that cute?" He fiddles with some dials above Medusa's head and steps to one side. Something slides off Medusa's right shoulder and hits me right in the heart. I am dying. Heart breathing brain stops. A final phrase darkening, "Don't forget to be gone tomorrow . . ."

But it is not true. Just as a lower case letter c can be corrected on many typewriters to form a perfect o, my life backspaced in time and I was corrected—transformed. The cat disappeared behind the oatmeal box.

This happens to me every second of my life.



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